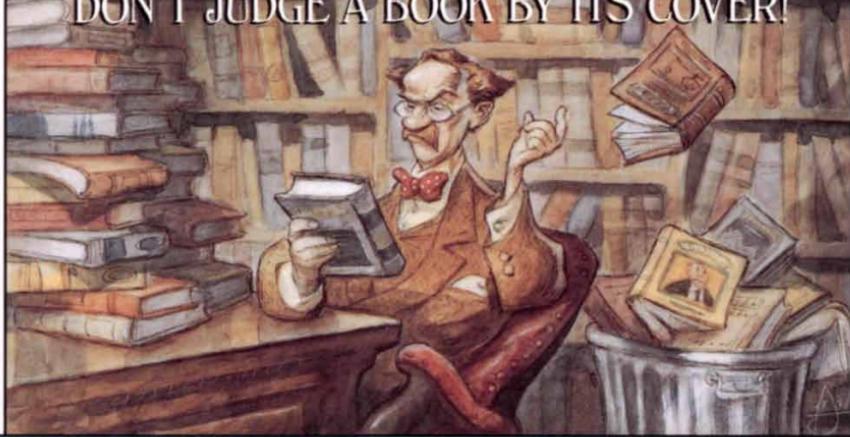


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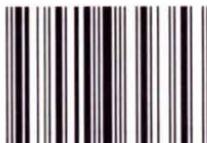
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# TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF METAPHORS

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## 1. WHO WAS THE ORIGINAL "REAL MCCOY"?

1890.

An American boxer who became world welterweight champion in



## 2. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN "A DARK HORSE" AND "A TROJAN HORSE"?

about the fall of Troy).

A dark horse is a person with unsuspected talents; a Trojan horse is a trick (it refers to the large gift horse full of soldiers used to bring



## 3. WHY IS "A WHITE ELEPHANT" SOMETHING TO AVOID?

ruined their recipients with the expense of their upkeep.

These gifts of sacred pacchydromes from the King of Siam often



## 4. WHAT DOES IT MEAN "TO PLAY DUCKS AND DRAKES"?

To not take a matter seriously.



## 5. WHERE WAS "THE CAT LET OUT OF THE BAG"?

Piglets.

At public fairs, where cats wrapped in sacks were passed off as



## 6. WHAT IS "A MILCH COW"? (HINT: THIS BOOK IS ONE!)

An easy and plentiful source of some desired benefit.

---

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*To all the people who think that they  
never use any metaphors*



# **Foreword**

---

In a time when the visual image is such a powerful influence on our attitude and thoughts, it is well to be reminded of the miracle of language. How and when was it invented? How do we explain its richness and variety? By what extraordinary transformation did words which have quite literal and specific meanings take on metaphysical significance? Which expression conveys the most vivid meaning, "the top dog," or its definition, "the person in the most powerful position?"

The metaphor wins every time.

For metaphor is the spice of language. It also activates the reader's or listener's inner eye to produce images which are just as vivid as visual ones. Without its color, wit and concreteness would disappear.

Here is a dictionary and thesaurus of metaphors which is both a practical guide to meaning and a stimulus to enquiry. Only a person in love with words could have compiled it; and there are surprises in it for even the most knowledgeable student of language. Mr. Renton achieves the aim that Sir Philip Sidney saw as the central principle of poetry—to teach by delighting.

**Leonie Kramer**



# **Every Man And His Dog Use Metaphors**

---

Metaphors which have the community's seal of approval roll off the tongue so readily that by any yardstick they are invariably thick on the ground. A person in the pink who plays his cards right and who takes up the cudgels for the cause will without going overboard or changing tack find an avalanche of metaphors under his very nose. Unless he puts a foot wrong or goes off half-cocked he will regard them all as useful tools and as grist to his mill. He will already be in the picture and will not need to engage in a witch-hunt or rely on the grapevine in order to put his finger on them.

Without matters getting out of hand or losing any momentum it stands out a mile that metaphors are in the blood of every Tom, Dick and Harry worth his salt and willing to show the flag. Many expressions have been gathering dust for donkey's years and are so much a hallmark of our society that their down to earth use at the drop of a hat does not ring a bell or cause any eyebrows to be raised.



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# **PART I**



# 1

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## INTRODUCTION

*It is one of the maxims of the civil law that definitions are hazardous.*  
**Samuel Johnson (The Rambler)**

*I am a Bear of Very Little Brain and long words bother me*  
**A.A. Milne (Winnie-the-Pooh)**

### BACKGROUND

A cynic once defined a metaphor as “a simile with the words of comparison left out.” Less frivolously, the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* puts it as the “application of name or descriptive term to an object to which it is not literally applicable.” The word is derived from two Greek roots—*meta* with and *phero* bear—which in combination denote “transfer” (of meaning).

The modern English language—as employed in ordinary conversation, as used on radio and television, as seen in newspaper and magazine articles and headlines, and as found in more serious literature—is remarkably full of metaphors. Some of these have been in currency for a hundred years or more, giving rise to the description “fossil poetry.”

Many metaphors involve colorful analogies. Every day one talks of “missing the bus,” of “being in the same boat” as someone else, of “getting down to brass tacks” or of “not having a crystal ball.” People are always “getting a feather in their cap,” “earning brownie points,” “building bridges,” “grasping at straws,” “muddying the waters,” “cutting the Gordian Knot” and “missing something by a whisker.”

For the most part such *figures of speech* involve combinations of words sounding very familiar to their audience and their use is quite subconscious. In practice very few metaphors are written inside quotation marks. Such a tell-tale sign is generally absent, thus clearly indicating that the writers were not focusing on the aspect that their words did not represent the literal truth. Fowler in *Modern English Usage* characterizes such phrases as “dead metaphors.”

A metaphor is often used because it can convey a particular shade of

meaning much more succinctly than other words. This work demonstrates that metaphors serve to enrich both speech and writing, although at the price of making communication in English much more difficult both for foreigners and for computers used on translation tasks.

## OBJECTIVES

This book includes, as self-contained listings, a dictionary, a thematic section and a thesaurus. It is intended as a handy reference tool for both general readers and educational institutions in all English-speaking countries.

The book is designed to serve a number of assorted purposes, including the following:

1. To set out in an easily-read and popular style the meanings of the various metaphors
2. To help persons for whom English is a second language
3. To assist writers and public speakers to become more articulate
4. To provide resource material for teachers of English wishing to design imaginative courses
5. To give an overall perspective of the subject
6. To show students and lovers of words the richness and diversity of the living English language
7. To refresh memories of half-remembered phrases
8. To provide some amusement from the patterns presented by the different categorizations
9. To illustrate that some particular words and concepts are especially prevalent in figurative use
10. To provide raw material for party games, advertising copy, church sermons, crossword puzzles and other specialist applications.

The book takes into account the fact that English can rightly be described as "the language of buried metaphors" and that this feature, while no doubt fascinating to word-buffs, must be very frustrating to non-native speakers. Even secondary students for whom English is their first language tend to see things very literally.

Each metaphor has been given a separate entry, thus avoiding the practice in many dictionaries of jumbling up related material, which saves space but causes inconvenience to users. The form of presentation in this book also allows similar-sounding figurative formations to be compared and contrasted with each other very easily.

While from the nature of the subject matter this work inevitably involves some overlap with other books on idioms or picturesque expressions, it is original in terms of the selection of the phrases included, of

their presentation and analysis, and of the simplicity of the definitions given.

### COVERAGE

This short word-book, despite its specialized nature, makes no pretense as to completeness—that would be an impossible task, particularly as people with an eye out for resemblances are free to coin their own metaphorical expressions at will. However, the book contains some 14,000 dictionary-style alphabetical entries listing over 3,800 different metaphors commonly found in current usage, selected from the wide range available on the basis of the criteria described above. Many of these could be described as “classical” expressions, but the book also includes some other metaphors of special interest because of their origins in fields such as history, mythology, religion, commerce, science or classical literature or because they are illustrative of typical modern innovations.

Minor instances of figurative phrases based on local customs and circulating only in some communities can be found. However, most of the tabulated metaphors will be readily understood throughout the entire English-speaking world. This is, no doubt, due to the common origins of the language in the case of metaphors of long standing and to their use in films and television in the case of the more recent formations.

There is some overlap between metaphors, cliches, idioms, colloquialisms and even pithy sayings and proverbs. No attempt has been made to draw very fine distinctions, although similes, jargon and euphemisms have for the most part been deliberately excluded. Many outright slang terms have also been ignored, although a few borderline cases have been admitted. Some common picturesque expressions which may not strictly speaking be metaphors have been included where it seemed likely that this would be of convenience to users of this book.

Phrases such as “the chair upheld the point of order,” “he has a good pen” or “the land belonged to the crown” are examples of the figure of speech known as *metonymy* and are also outside the scope of this book. In the same vein, expressions such as “I want a *word* with you” (in reference to a desired lengthy discussion), a subdivision of the figure of speech called *synecdoche* (see Chapter 7), have been disregarded.

Prepositions used metaphorically have also been excluded: “to be *in* difficulties,” “to be *within* one’s rights,” “to be *beyond* help,” and so on.

The main criterion for listing an expression was that in normal contexts its words are not used in their true or literal sense. However, in each case the user’s intention would have been to convey a message which was meant to be readily understood by his particular public and which expressed a specific idea in a picturesque or emphatic way.

To enable the book to remain at a reasonable length, obscure phrases occasionally found in textbooks but which are not actually in current circulation have for the most part been excluded.

The richness of the English language can be demonstrated and put in perspective by comparing the number of metaphors mentioned above as included in this book even on this limited basis—namely, over 3,800—with the number of words in “Basic English”—a mere 850.

## ARRANGEMENT

The bulk of this book is in three separate parts. First of all there is a main list in Part I which sets out each metaphor dealt with and which gives a deliberately brief yet concise explanation of its import. Occasionally where appropriate some further background information is added. This is followed in Part II by subsidiary lists showing the relevant metaphors occurring in each of a number of readily identifiable categories. Part III is a special section, not normally found in dictionaries. It is designed more for writers than for readers, although it is hoped that the latter will still find it of interest. It contains lists showing metaphors classified according to the broad subject areas in which they express ideas or concepts. These lists will also be of particular relevance to public speakers when preparing their material.

In addition, some general comments relating to metaphors at large and dealing with historical and other interesting aspects of the subject are made in Chapter 2 and the succeeding chapters. Some of these comments are based on a computer analysis made while researching this project. In particular, the categories relevant to Part II are discussed further in Chapter 4. They have regard to the *literal* or original meaning of the words—not to their *figurative* or borrowed usage. The basis of the thesaurus in Part III is explained in Chapter 5. A number of miscellaneous case studies are presented in Chapter 6. Some aspects of grammar and punctuation are dealt with in Chapter 7.

Of course, short definitions—while no doubt convenient to most users—do suffer from one disadvantage, in that they cannot readily cover exhaustively all the various shades of meaning being attributed to some phrases in actual practice.

The main list is in alphabetical order of the “keyword” of the phrase, usually the noun or the verb but on occasions where appropriate an adjective or an adverb. Simple verbs occurring frequently—*be, get, give, have, let, put, take*, etc.—have, however, been ignored. For the convenience of readers many metaphors and their explanations have been set out in the alphabetical sequence under more than one keyword. This eliminates the need for a separate index or extensive cross references. This presentation thus overcomes a weakness and an annoying feature of the

few other books in this area. (Nouns are shown in the singular, except where only the plural form is relevant. Similarly, adjectives and adverbs are normally shown in the positive degree and verbs in the active voice and in the infinitive. Transitive verbs are shown with an appropriate object, such as "someone" or "something.") With minor exceptions—for special reasons—pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions and interjections are not listed.

It should be recognized that because English is a living language most metaphors can occur in numerous variations depending on the taste or the mood of the writer or speaker. For instance, words of qualification or alternatively of emphasis can be added or omitted. Many subjects can also be approached from more than one angle—for example, the expressions "something *coming* to light" and "someone *bringing* something to light" were both regarded as involving the same figurative concept and only the latter version was included in the list. Similarly, "to *run* for cover" and "to *duck* for cover" were treated as really being the one metaphor despite the use of a different verb in the two versions.

In some instances a pair of opposite metaphors exists—for example:

- "to run off the rails" and "to be back on the rails"
- "to give a thumbs up" and "to give a thumbs down"
- "to be on the right track" and "to be on the wrong track"
- "cold-hearted" and "warm-hearted"
- "to be the first cab off the rank" and "to be the last" (or "latest")  
    "cab off the rank"
- "to give someone the green light" and "to give someone the red light"

and so on.

In other instances two related words exist—for example, "crusade" and "crusader," or the same word is used as two different parts of speech—for example, "to snowball" and "the snowball effect."

For space reasons some editorial selection has had to be made in many such cases. Thus if a phrase is not found at the first attempt a different keyword should be tried (such as a synonym or an antonym, a derivative or related term, or a word from a different part of the phrase). (In a few selected cases two alternative versions of a particular keyword or a particular phrase have been included for ease of reference.)

Hyphenated and unhyphenated compound words which are not tabulated as such will be found shown under their components. In practice the words "one," "someone," etc., used for convenience in the listings can be replaced by other appropriate words—nouns or pronouns, etc.

The subsidiary lists in the thematic section (Part II) are each in alphabetical order of the keyword relevant to the category concerned. This approach should assist readers wishing to locate metaphors momen-

tarily forgotten. Where appropriate, a phrase is included in more than one category or even more than once in the same category. The lists themselves are in alphabetical order of category.

The subsidiary lists in the thesaurus (Part III) are each in alphabetical order of the full metaphor in the form in which it appears in Part I. The lists themselves are in alphabetical order of subject area.

This book is essentially a practical work, more concerned with examples of metaphors actually encountered in daily use than with the obscure theories of metaphor devised by some academic commentators. Writers, whether using existing metaphors or coining new ones, and whether setting out to do so deliberately or acting subconsciously, are not really assisted by theoretical considerations. Nor is such theory of much interest to readers coming across metaphors, whether or not they understand the underlying message.

## BORDERLINE CASES

A number of phrases such as "to jump at the opportunity," "to swallow one's pride," "to sift the evidence" and "to have a sweet tooth" contain some words used literally as well as other words employed figuratively. Other examples are "to be bankrupt of ideas," "to shoulder the blame," "to sing someone's praises," "not to mince words" and "a passport to success." In such cases only the figurative components have usually been treated as giving rise to tabulated keywords, although for ease of reference some exceptions to this principle were made.

One of the difficulties faced by compilers of dictionaries such as this one is how to draw a clear-cut and unambiguous dividing line between words having more than one literal meaning and words used figuratively. For example, while the verb "to stand" has a primary literal meaning of "to have or take up an upright position" it also has over 20 secondary meanings, found in expressions such as "to stand on one's dignity," "to stand up for one's rights," "to stand a case over," "to stand firm," "to stand for tax reform," "to stand on ceremony," "to stand one's ground" and so on. Most expressions of this type have been regarded as being literal, in contradistinction to expressions which can convey a mental picture of an erect person, such as "to stand up and be counted," "to stand out from the crowd" and "to stand on one's own two feet."

## COMMON KEYWORDS

Appendix 1 shows—purely as a curiosity—the tabulated keywords occurring most often, set out in order of their frequency. (For this purpose a

compound word listed as such has been treated as being a different word from its components.)

Words representing important parts of the human body score particularly well—"head," "hand," "eye," "heart," etc. Some of these words are, of course, also used in other contexts—for example, "head" in "head of steam," "head of the pack," the "head of a nail," "heads and tails" on coins, heads of animals, etc. The word "hand" is also used in three different senses—a part of the body; an employee or worker; and the cards dealt to a player in a game of cards.

The most common noun among the tabulated metaphors which is not related to the human body is "water" and the animal referred to most often is the dog.

Phrases containing these very common keywords may in some cases be found more easily if the search is based on one of the secondary keywords.

## SOURCES OF METAPHORS

*The greatest thing by far is to have a command of metaphors*  
**Aristotle** (*The Poetics*)

*Much matter decocted into a few words*

**Thomas Fuller** (definition of a proverb in  
*The Worthies of England*)

### METAPHORS FROM LITERATURE

Metaphors abound in poetry, but such a specialized usage is dealt with by many other analysts and is outside the scope of this book.

Somewhat surprisingly, comparatively few metaphors in contemporary use by the general public have their origins in the major literary works.

William Shakespeare was responsible, *inter alia*, for "something is rotten in the State of Denmark" (in *Hamlet*), "the devil can cite scripture for his purpose" and "to want one's pound of flesh" (both in *The Merchant of Venice*).

Of course, other Shakespearean passages, such as "all the world's a stage," are sometimes quoted by people, but these have not really passed into the modern language as living metaphors.

Cervantes contributed "to tilt at windmills" and "neither fish, flesh nor good red herring" (both from *Don Quixote*).

Hans Christian Andersen wrote a story entitled "the Ugly Duckling," while the expression "curate's egg" dates back to a *Punch* cartoon first published last century which featured a curate's response to his bishop, a response to the effect the parts of his breakfast egg were excellent!

Sir Walter Scott wrote "O, what a tangled web we weave" (in a line continuing "When first we practice to deceive!"))

"To do a Jekyll and Hyde" refers to a book by Robert Louis Stevenson. *Catch 22* and *The Last of the Mohicans* are the titles of novels by

Joseph Heller and James Fenimore Cooper, respectively. *Box and Cox* is the name of a play.

The concept of somebody being a real Scrooge refers to a character in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*.

Virgil, who died in 19 B.C. probably originated the modern expressions involving the Trojan horse and the Greeks bearing gifts.

Many well-known quotations are, of course, literally true and thus do not rank as metaphors—for example, John Donne's famous “no man is an island.”

The works of Shakespeare also lend themselves to the coming of brand new expressions. For instance, a writer recently mentioned the “Macbeth Principle,” in reference to the view that if something unpleasant needed to be done, then it should be done without delay (or, as the immortal bard himself put it, “if it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly”).

## METAPHORS FROM POLITICS

While politicians no doubt invent numerous metaphors in the course of their daily speech making, few of these seem to survive.

Oliver Cromwell's famous direction to Sir Peter Lely to paint his portrait “warts and all” has, however, become a contemporary idiom.

Benjamin Disraeli once told a conference that he was “on the side of the angels.”

Sir Winston Churchill invented the term “the iron curtain,” but the Churchillian ring to some of his other sayings has probably militated against their use in ordinary situations.

Churchill is also credited with describing his successor, Clement Attlee, as a “sheep in sheep's clothing.”

In America at the turn of the century President Theodore Roosevelt coined the oft-quoted expression “speak softly and carry a big stick.”

Two phrases attributed to another United States president—this time Harry S. Truman—are “if one can't stand the heat one should stay out of the kitchen” and “the buck stops here.” The latter expression built up on a much earlier metaphor, “to pass the buck,” which in turn referred to the buckhorn knife passed around the table during certain card games in order to indicate who the dealer was.

A well-chosen political metaphor can be remarkably powerful in its psychological effect—consider, for example, the expression “the cold war.”

Clever politicians can also use existing classical metaphors to good advantage—for instance, British prime minister Harold Macmillan once said of an opponent: “If Harold Wilson ever went to school without any boots, it was merely because he was too big for them.”

## METAPHORS FROM RELIGIOUS SOURCES

The ancient non-Christian European religions gave rise to a number of current expression, such as "to be in the lap of the gods" and "Delphic."

Primitive tribes in Africa originated the term "mumbo jumbo," while Australian Aboriginal culture was the source of the expression "to point the bone at someone."

Both the Old and the New Testaments of the Bible contribute a number of phrases which are used by both believers and non-believers in circumstances far removed from those of their origin. Some of these phrases sound distinctly biblical, but many others do not.

For example, the Old Testament uses the oft-quoted "to hold out an olive branch," "the writing is on the wall," "to cast one's bread upon the waters" and "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." Somewhat surprisingly, the very modern term "to be in an ivory tower" also comes from this source.

Other Old Testament passages which give rise to currently-used expressions involve forbidden fruit, David and Goliath, the walls of Jericho, a fly in the ointment, the tower of Babel, the road to Damascus, the mark of Cain, feet of clay, manna from Heaven, the flesh pots of Egypt and the wisdom of Solomon. "To sell one's birthright for a mess of pottage" (in other words, for a mere portion of soup) is another contemporary expression, although one which admittedly sounds rather quaint because of its archaic language.

The famous test word *shibboleth* has also passed into the language as the term for an out-dated political principle. (It is actually a Hebrew word meaning "stream in flood." Its significance in biblical times was that the way in which it was pronounced made it possible to tell an Ephraimite from a member of another tribe, because of his inability to pronounce the initial "sh" sound in some words correctly.)

The New Testament uses the popular "by their fruits ye shall know them" and refers to a wolf in sheep's clothing, the salt of the earth, putting one's hand to the plow, turning the other cheek, killing the fatted calf, being a doubting Thomas, separating the sheep from the goats, being a good Samaritan and seeing the mote in another person's eye.

For metaphors which are derived from the Bible the chapter and verse citations pertaining to them are set out following the definitions given in this book. Such metaphors are also shown in Appendix 4, arranged for ease of reference in alphabetical order of both the keyword and the relevant book of the Bible.

A special classification called "Religion and Biblical" is included in

Part II. However, this approaches the subject from a completely different perspective from that just presented, focusing more on words such as *angel*, *devil*, *saint*, *soul*, *heaven* and *hell*, rather than on actual religious origins.

Actually the use of such terms raises an interesting philosophical point which is best illustrated by an example. Consider the expression “to send someone to Coventry.” This can clearly be used literally in relation to the English city of that name, and those employing the expression would obviously believe that such a place existed. However, the same expression can also be used figuratively in the sense of “to ostentatiously and collectively ignore a person by way of punishment.” In contrast, whether heaven and hell really exist is a question of faith rather than a matter of fact. In these circumstances, can phrases such as “manna from heaven” (unexpected benefits) or “on a cold day in hell” (never) be truly regarded as metaphors by those who do not in the first instance ascribe any literal meaning to the words “heaven” or “hell”?

## METAPHORS FROM HERALDRY

Metaphors derived from heraldry are comparatively rare and those which exist are not without their controversy.

For instance, the phrase “blue ribbon” (of superb quality) probably refers to the insignia of the Order of the Garter, the highest of the ancient British Orders of Chivalry. However, many heraldry experts feel that the expression really refers to the ribbons used in agricultural shows or at race meetings rather than to the blue ribbons worn by knights on ceremonial occasions.

The “blot on the escutcheon” (a blemish on a person’s character, in reference to one of nine possible marks of disgrace placed on a shield in earlier days) is better known in heraldry as an “abatement of honor.” The expression actually refers to the charges (that is, to the designs, figures or symbols) placed on coats of arms in order to show that the bearer has been guilty of some unknightly conduct or dishonorable action. Few examples were encountered in practice, because, understandably enough, men would rather not display arms at all than show their disgrace to the world. Blots were in any case regarded as only temporary, as they could be erased by some compensating deed of honor.

The term “bar sinister” in reference to illegitimacy has not been regarded as a true metaphor, but in any case the expression is heraldic nonsense, as bars (horizontal stripes on a coat of arms) can from their very nature be neither “dexter” nor “sinister.” Furthermore, the various symbols used for denoting bastardy in heraldry include the bend, the baton and the border, but never the bar.

## THE ROLE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Although not widely realized, some ordinary English words originate from the metaphorical use of certain Latin terms—"companions," from *cum panis*, people who eat bread together; "colleagues," from *cum* and *legere*, persons who are chosen with each other; "to conspire," from *cum* and *spirare*, to breathe together; and so on.

In a few instances, English has actually borrowed current metaphors from a foreign language. The following eleven French phrases are examples of this:

- "*danse macabre*"
- "*bete noire*"
- "*creme de la creme*"
- "*volte face*"
- "*tour de force*"
- "*faux pas*"
- "*coup de grace*"
- "*enfant terrible*"
- "*esprit de corps*"
- "*touche*" and
- "*carte blanche*,"

as is the Italian "*prima donna*."

In a slightly different class is the Swedish word "*smorgasbord*," which is used both literally of food and figuratively of other things.

Similar remarks also apply to the Latin phrase "*postmortem*," which is used both literally as a medical term and figuratively in other contexts.

## THE METAPHOR IN DAILY USE

*The sole aim of the metaphor is to call up a visual image*  
**Aristotle**

*The intolerable wrestle with words and meanings*  
**T.S. Eliot ("Burnt Norton")**

### THE PREVALENCE OF METAPHORS

Metaphors are so prevalent that if one were to specifically look out for them it would completely spoil one's reading and listening and thus detract from the author's purpose.

There are only a few areas of writing in which metaphors are deliberately carefully avoided. Two examples would be material prepared specifically for non-native speakers and material intended for translation into foreign languages.

Another example would be legislation and legal documents generally, where precision is essential and where beauty of expression is an unaffordable luxury. Even the modern trend toward "Plain English" drafting would not make metaphors acceptable in such contexts.

Metaphors are, of course, less likely to be used in technical material such as car or computer manuals than in, say, either ordinary conversation or literary works, whether prose or poetry.

Figurative expressions have on occasion had their opponents—in 1670 one Samuel Parker went so far as to seriously advocate an Act of Parliament actually forbidding the use of "fulsome and luscious" metaphors in England!

### THE GRAPHIC NATURE OF LONGER METAPHORS

The standard metaphors listed in this book range from single words to longer phrases and on rare occasions even to complete sentences (see also Chapter 7).

Many idiomatic expressions depend for their effect on the ideas represented by the *combination* of words rather than by the words individually—consider, for example, the metaphors “to pour oil on troubled waters,” “a storm in a teacup” and “to shut the stable door after the horse has bolted.”

Writers can, of course, create graphic messages by incorporating metaphorical ideas into longer passages. For example, the plain “a chink of light” can be built up into “a welcome ray of light piercing the gloom.” Again, one can draw attention to the ravages of inflation by sentences such as: “Money saved for a rainy day now buys a much smaller umbrella than it used to.”

Similarly, ever-increasing government regulation with its many anomalies can be criticized by pointing out that the “level playing field is getting more bumpy all the time.”

A lawyer discussing the nature of certain evidence once made his point to the court very neatly in the following terms:

*If there is a large elephant on your front doorstep, then it is not a bad idea to take notice of it, even if you cannot weigh it exactly.*

Taking particular care can be described as “checking whether every *i* has been dotted and making sure that every *t* is crossed.”

Original metaphors drawing on contemporary practices can also be very effective. For example, something particularly large or unusual can be described as “justifying an entry in the *Guinness Book of Records*. ”

## MIXED METAPHORS

An anonymous author once wrote “never mix your drinks or your metaphors” and this accords with the traditional advice on this subject given to young writers. However, mixed metaphors frequently arise in practice without any intention on the part of their creators and without their absurdity necessarily distracting readers.

For example, a government official investigating a fraud case was recently reported as saying:

*When the music stops the house of cards collapses and the emperor is found to be wearing no clothes.*

Again, a politician has criticized his opponents for “orchestrating the emasculation” of a particular law.

The most frequently quoted mixed metaphor comes from a speech by Sir Boyle Roche to the Irish Parliament some 200 years ago:

*Mr Speaker, I smell a rat; I see him forming in the air and darkening the sky; but I'll nip him in the bud.*

One further example: “While the iron is hot, stay on your toes, keep the ball rolling and don't throw a spanner in the works.”

Of course, even a single metaphor can sound absurd—for example, a reference to the Yiddish Art Theater as a “Mecca for Jewish theater-goers.”

It is also possible to create amusing results by twisting and parodying commonly-used metaphors, as in “Mr. Smith is all *tip* and no *iceberg*. He always has his head buried under the desk.”

The lists in this book will provide raw material for party games—see Appendix 3—and also for script-writers seeking to achieve comic effects by stringing together chains of unrelated or inconsistent metaphors, as in the following two illustrative passages:

*Keep your back to the wall, your shoulder to the wheel, your ear to the ground, your nose to the grindstone, your eye out for trouble, your chin up, your head down and your feet firmly on the ground.*

*Our staff get exercise by jumping to conclusions, flying off the handle, carrying things too far, dodging responsibility and pushing their luck.*

## METAPHORS IN TRANSITION

Sometimes expressions which originally started off in figurative usage later on make a complete transition and over time virtually become “regular” words—for instance:

- “to be petrified”
- “to unmask” someone
- “to be in the limelight”
- “to have overtones”
- “to set up a smokescreen”
- “to be in the pipeline”
- “a watchdog role”
- “a snowball effect”

as well as both components in “a pastor and his flock.”

Possible further examples of this trend would include the nouns:

- “a backlash”
- “a catalyst”
- “a pipedream”
- “a whitewash”
- “a framework”
- “an avalanche”
- “a loop-hole”
- “a crusade”
- “a sounding board”
- “a nightmare”

“a yardstick”  
“a stalemate”  
“a blueprint”  
“a bottleneck”  
“a watershed”  
“a scenario”  
“a stumbling block”  
“a footing”  
“a scapegoat”  
“a breadwinner”  
“a windfall”  
“a nosedive”  
“a deadline”  
“a figurehead”  
“heresy”  
“fanfare”  
“pecking order”  
“chicken feed”  
“spectrum” and  
“imprimatur;”

the adjectives:

“pedestrian”  
“fruitless”  
“apocryphal”  
“half-baked” and  
“short-sighted;”

and the verbs:

“to encapsulate”  
“to backfire”  
“to crystallize”  
“to polarize”  
“to choreograph”  
“to highlight”  
“to undermine a person”  
“to ferret something out”  
“to hand pick”  
“to paralyze a city”  
“to pontificate”  
“to backpedal”  
“to crucify a person” and  
“to pre-empt something.”

Other such verbs are mentioned later in the section headed "Metaphors involving a Change to the Part of Speech" in Chapter 7.

It seems likely that many of the other terms in this book, particularly those lacking short synonyms, are heading in the same direction and will become "regular" words in due course.

## METAPHORS IN VARIOUS CATEGORIES

*Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind*  
**Rudyard Kipling**

*That's nothing to what I could say if I chose*

**Lewis Carroll** (the Duchess in  
*Alice in Wonderland*)

### THE THEMATIC SECTION

The 37 different sets of tabulations in the Thematic Section (Part II) reflect the attempt at classification referred to in Chapter 1. They are included mainly as a matter of general interest, but also because in some cases the category gives a shorthand indication as to the origin of the metaphor concerned.

Of necessity the categorization process involved the making of a number of arbitrary decisions. There is, for example, some overlap between certain animals and plants viewed as such or alternatively regarded as food or alternatively again as a product of farming. Some words were accordingly allocated to the *nearest* available category. However, despite this roughness the counts go some way toward demonstrating the unevenness of the literal subject matter which gives rise to the phrases listed.

The comments below will serve as a brief general introduction to this aspect, but the detailed listings really speak for themselves.

### SPORT

Understandably, analogies based on sport are fairly common: "to be given riding instructions," "to be slow off the mark," "to be right behind the eight ball," "to play by the book," "to throw in the towel," "to give a blow by blow description," "to hit someone below the belt,"

"to jump the gun", "saved by the bell," "hook, line and sinker," "a master stroke" and "track record"—to name just a few.

Cricket terms are particularly prevalent in the countries favoring that game: "it's not cricket," "to have the runs on the board," "to have had a good inning," "to be on a sticky wicket," "until stumps are drawn," and so on.

## THE HUMAN BODY

However, the most frequent references involve parts of the human body: "to scratch one's head," "to twist someone's arm," "to burn one's fingers," "to have broad shoulders," "to have one's ear to the ground," "to step on someone's toes," and so on. Some people get "itchy feet" while others merely get "cold feet."

Nearly a quarter of all entries relate to just this one important category.

## ANIMALS

The next most popular category is the one based on animals: "to let sleeping dogs lie," "to throw a cat among the pigeons," "to take the bull by the horns," "to be an ostrich," "to stir up a hornets' nest" and "to buy a pig in a poke"—not to mention "black sheep," "red herrings," "dark horses," "underdogs," "sacred cows," "guinea pigs," "sacrificial lambs," "flies in the ointment," "can of worms" and the well-known "dog in the manger."

The range of animals found in metaphors is quite uneven—some less common species, such as giraffes, platypuses and zebras, are not represented at all.

The term "animal" has been used in its correct sense, including birds, fish, insects and so on, and not merely mammals.

In some cases it is not clear whether a particular expression refers to human beings or to animals. For example, the analogy in "to put flesh and bone on something" could have either in mind.

## THE WORLD OF SAIL

The era of sailing ships has left its legacy in phrases such as "to learn the ropes," "to trim one's sails," "to change tack," "to be plain sailing," "to nail one's colors to the mast," "to sail close to the wind," "to take the wind out of someone's sails," "I like the cut of his jib" and "the calm before the storm." There is also the pair of opposites, "to sail under false colors" and "to show one's true colors."

One of the expressions mentioned above, "to be plain sailing" (to be quite straight forward and very easy), is actually a corruption of "plane sailing," in reference to navigation by means of a "plane chart" on which meridians and parallels of latitude are represented by equidistant straight lines, an approximate method which ignores the curvature of the earth and which is therefore simpler for short distances.

Sailing expressions are shown in the "Nautical" category.

## **MUSIC**

Music is another rich source. Examples include "to change one's tune," "to sing for one's supper," "to hit a sour note," "to have another string to one's bow," "to softpedal," "to be a one-man band" and "to face the music." There are also the rather similar in meaning "to beat one's drum" and "to blow one's own trumpet"—presumably in contrast to the position of the person who "plays second fiddle" to somebody else.

The listings include three similar examples based on the verb "to strike" and the adjective "right," namely, "to strike the right chord" (to appeal successfully to someone's emotions), "to strike the right key" (to find the appropriate solution) and "to strike the right note" (to make a good impression). While these definitions have been given to demonstrate the shades of meaning which are possible, the phrases may well be being used more or less interchangeably in practice.

Other variations to this theme are "to strike a responsive chord" (to get a favorable reaction to a proposal) and the plain "to strike a chord" (to sound familiar or to recall something to mind). The last-mentioned idea can also be rendered as "to ring a bell."

## **COMMERCE**

Expressions such as "A1 at Lloyd's," "to give someone a blank check," "the other side of the coin," "to show dividends" and "to be below par," together with the concept of something "not adding up," have all come into wider usage from the world of commerce.

The terms "to burn one's fingers" and "to fly a kite"—the latter in the sense of issuing uncovered checks in the hope of covering them before clearance—have moved in the reverse direction, although this particular phrase is also used in a different way in politics (the testing of public reaction to contemplated legislation by leaking broad details of it to the media).

## **AMUSEMENTS GENERALLY**

Apart from sport and music, as discussed above, many other forms of popular amusement are understandably enough also noteworthy sources of metaphors—for instance, art, theater, circuses, gambling and various indoor games such as cards and chess.

The origins of some of the expressions relating to cards which are in popular use today may not be obvious on the surface. For example, a “showdown” occurs in poker games when the players put their cards down on the table face up in order to show the strength of their hands, while “level pegging” refers to the marking of the score with pegs in cribbage.

Two other cards phrases, “passing the buck” and “the buck stops here,” have already been mentioned in Chapter 2.

## **STATISTICS OF USAGE**

Appendix 2 summarizes the main categories adopted. It also shows their relative frequencies and the number of items in each. Apart from anything else, the statistics provide an interesting sociological commentary on the activities which most readily spring to mind when writers and speakers wish to make a point by using an analogy. In most cases the association will be readily understood by readers and listeners with a twentieth-century English-speaking cultural background.

About 13 per cent of the listed metaphors did not conveniently fit into any of these categories, while some of the defined categories such as “Sex” and “Heraldry” produced astonishingly low scores.

## METAPHORS EXPRESSING IDEAS IN CERTAIN SUBJECT AREAS

*Let thy speech be short, comprehending much in few words*  
**Ecclesiasticus 32:8**

*Be not the slave of words*

**Thomas Carlyle (Sartor Resartus)**

### THE THESAURUS

The Thesaurus (Part III) is to some extent the reverse of the Dictionary (Part I). Instead of starting with metaphors and then presenting their meanings, it starts with base words summarizing the meanings and then sets out the various metaphors relevant to the broad subject area concerned. (Sometimes for convenience several different subject areas are shown together, where the base word has more than one meaning.)

To illustrate, "taking a risk" is an area in which many metaphorical expressions abound, although they all have slightly different connotations:

- "to go out on a limb"
- "to stick one's neck out"
- "to rush in where angels fear to tread"
- "to take the plunge"
- "to play with dynamite"
- "to go through fire and water"
- "to chance one's arm"
- "to jump in feet first"
- "to play Russian roulette"
- "to take a punt"
- "to be sitting on a volcano."

The opposite of this concept is "to play it safe." These and various other such phrases are shown under "Risk" in Part III.

Of course, the main alphabetical list in Part I also contains some entries which deal with subject concepts—for instance, phrases relating to

“newness” can be obtained by looking up “new” and “old” in Part I, while some phrases implying completeness will be found under “all” and “every.”

In some cases, the listings contain both positive and negative usages—thus entries actually relating to “Lack of Enthusiasm” will be found under the general heading “Enthusiasm,” and so on.

The subject areas chosen for tabulation are set out alphabetically in the table of contents. As there is some overlap between them, users interested in a particular subject area may need to consult more than one list, depending on the shade of meaning desired—for example, it might be appropriate to look at the two lists headed “Risk” and “Danger”; or alternatively at the two lists headed “Risk” and “Chance.”

Once again, the unevenness of metaphorical usage causes some surprise—for instance, why should there be three times as many expressions for the *end* of various activities (namely, 110) than for the *start* of something (namely, 39)?

## “DIFFICULTY” AS A CONCEPT

To take a further example, the concept of “difficulty” gives rise to a great many figurative expressions. On the first encounter with a difficulty one “runs into a roadblock,” “strikes a snag” or “runs into heavy weather.” In fact, one “has a job in front of one” and may need “to put one’s thinking cap on” in order to solve the problem.

If the difficulty is shared with other people then they are all “in the same boat.” As one prepares to overcome the difficulty, one decides that “the show must go on” and alternatively “sharpens one’s ax” or “battens down the hatches.”

The actual attempt to overcome the difficulty involves “grasping the nettle,” “taking the bull by the horns,” “grabbing the devil by the tail” or “biting the bullet.” After that one “jumps the hurdle,” “ironed out” the problem or “makes a good fist” at trying to fix it. If one fails, one “sinks deeper into the mire” (or “into the mud”). If one succeeds, one has “fallen on one’s feet.” One is then “out of the woods” and can “heave a sigh of relief.”

To take unfair advantage of someone already in difficulty is “to kick a man when he is down.” To desert a person who is in difficulty is “to leave him in the lurch.” A period fraught with difficulties is “a sticky patch.” Something very difficult is said to be “sheer murder.”

There are well over a dozen different expressions for actually “being in difficulty.” Some involve shades of additional meaning—

from (a): just being agitated because one is in a slight muddle,  
through (b): being stuck in a delicate situation or experiencing bad  
luck,  
to (c): facing near despair because some task is beyond one's  
capabilities.

In rough order of severity (least to most) these expressions are as follows:

- “to be in a pickle”
- “to be in a stew”
- “to be in a jam”
- “to be in a hole”
- “to be out of one's depth”
- “to have a hard row to hoe”
- “to be pushing uphill” (or “fighting an uphill battle”)
- “to be on a sticky wicket”
- “to have the cards” (or “the odds”) “stacked against one”
- “to be in a quagmire”
- “to be in deep water” (or “in hot water”) and
- “to be in the soup.”

A difficult query is a “sixty-four thousand dollar question.” If, on the other hand, one encounters no difficulties at all, then one is said to be having a “dream run.”

The above 42 illustrations do not, of course, exhaust all the possibilities.

## **MONEY MATTERS**

Financial journals use ordinary metaphors all the time—for example, share prices either “skyrocket” or “go into a tailspin,” takeovers are made “with much fanfare” and new chief executives “take the helm.” Special metaphors with technical meanings also exist—for example, securities held by investors can be said to be “above the water” (above cost price).

Political allusions to spending taxpayers' funds occur in expressions such as “to pork barrel” and “to engage in pump priming.” For a humorous effect, large sums of money can be referred to as “telephone numbers.”

The actual word “money” used in its literal sense is found in the partly-figurative phrases “money for jam,” “to see the color of someone's money,” “to have money burning a hole in one's pocket,” “putting one's money where one's mouth is,” “money down the drain” and “the money is rolling in.”

When a purely figurative expression for “money” is desired, words such as “pocket,” “purse” or “penny” are often used, as in:

- “to have deep pockets”
- “to line one’s pocket”
- “to button up one’s purse” and
- “to cost a pretty penny.”

However, not all terms fall into this pattern. People can be “in the black.” They can also “feather their nest” or they may “burn their fingers.”

Strange things happen when a country’s sterling currency is decimalized. Phrases such as “in for a penny, in for a pound,” “the penny dropped,” “a ha’porth of tar,” “penny-pinching” and the ungrammatical “he doesn’t have two pennies to rub together” remain unchanged. On the other hand, “to throw in one’s six pennies’ worth” (sometimes rendered as “...one’s two bobs’ worth”) becomes “to throw in one’s two cents’ worth,” while “to have two bob each way” is converted to the version “to have fifty cents each way”—hardly close decimal equivalents.

Similarly, expressions involving imperial distances or weights do not always get metricated—for example, “to drain every ounce out of something,” “to go the extra mile,” “a yardstick,” “a milestone,” “not to give an inch,” “to stand out a mile,” “to get mileage out of some matter” and “to inch forward.”

Of course, everyone with even 28.3 grams of common sense realizes that *exact* conversions would not be appropriate in all circumstances.

## METAPHORS USED EUPHEMISTICALLY

Metaphors can be used as a device for being tactful or to soften a harsh message. For example, instead of saying to a person “you are an unmitigated liar” one can put it more gently—but just as effectively—in the form of “that is just a cock and bull story.”

Similarly one can say “a cobbler should stick to his last,” rather than “you are a fool for trying this”; “your friend is a slippery customer,” rather than “your friend tried to cheat me”; and “it was under your very nose,” rather than “you are an idiot for not spotting the obvious.”

Again, in a business context a short reference to a “new broom” can sound more positive than a formal utterance about “changed management practices.”

Whether this tactic really works and the words sound less hard may, of course, depend on other factors, such as accompanying the message by suitable body language, by a smile or by a twinkle in the eye of the speaker.

Other euphemisms will be found in Part III under headings such as:

## **METAPHORS EXPRESSING IDEAS IN CERTAIN SUBJECT AREAS**

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“Mistake”—“to put the cart before the horse,” etc.

“Naivete”—“to be babes in the wood,” etc.

“Slowness”—“to drag one’s heels,” etc.

“Stupidity”—“to put forward a cock-eyed proposal,” etc. and

“Unrealistic Ideas”—“to have one’s head in the clouds,” etc.

## SELECTED CASE STUDIES

*Proper words in proper places make the true definition of style*

**Jonathan Swift** ("Letter to a Young Clergyman")

"*When I use a word,*" Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, "*it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.*"

**Lewis Carroll** (*Through the Looking Glass*)

### THE LIVING ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The origins of most of the figurative expressions currently in circulation are lost in antiquity and their authors are unknown.

However, the heterogeneous nature of English metaphors and the power which they add to the language can best be demonstrated by examining some actual cases. The following illustrations are taken more or less at random from the vast collection used to compile this book.

It is, for example, intriguing to note that often words which when taken literally are quite inoffensive acquire not only color but also pejorative overtones when engaged as figures of speech—for example, "to split hairs."

On another tack (!), interesting effects can also be obtained by deliberately misquoting well-known expressions, producing renditions such as "every silver cloud has a dark lining."

The word "metaphor" itself can be used in a non-literal way. For example, a film on "home entertainments and theater" was given the subtitle "metaphors of decadence and blurred reality," while one writer coined the phrase "metaphors of evil" in connection with "contemporary German literature and the shadow of Nazism."

It will be interesting to see whether the new computer technology inspires any additional metaphors for the wider community. As regards the reverse situation, many computer terms—such as "bit," "memory," "hardware," "window" and "word"—are ordinary English words given special meanings, rather than figures of speech. The word "software"

(meaning a computer program) is an artificially-coined term, based on the long-established word "hardware" (meaning building materials, tools, etc., in ordinary usage—but also adopted by the computer industry to mean the physical components of a computer, as distinct from the programs). Perhaps the term "garbage" is a true metaphor—"garbage in, garbage out" (if there are errors in the input data then there will inevitably be errors in the output data).

## DUPLICATIONS

On occasions a whole series of commonly-used metaphors is evolved in order to express just one simple idea—such as "to be within a bull's roar of something," "to be within a hair's breadth of something" and "to be within an ace of something"—or when speakers refer to only a postage stamp (or alternatively a cigarette paper or alternatively again a wafer or a tissue) separating either two objects or two close contestants in a race.

Again, wishful thinking has inspired several different phrases—those referring to the impossibility of turning the clock back, of unscrambling an omelette, or of putting the genie back in the bottle.

Some further examples of this pattern are "to miss the boat," "to miss the bus" and "to miss the train"—three transport phrases which all mean much the same thing—and "to hold a winning hand," "to hold all the aces" and "to hold the trump cards"—three phrases from the world of cards which once again have an identical meaning.

One can also be in something "up to one's shoulder," "up to one's neck," "up to one's elbow," "up to one's freckles" or even "up to one's eyeballs."

There are also many pairs of duplicates. To name just a few:

"to give a hand" and "to lend a hand"

"to escape by the skin of one's teeth" and "to escape by the skin of one's nose"

"to bore someone to tears" and "to bore someone to death"

"a thorn in one's side" and "a thorn in one's flesh"

"a drop in the ocean" and "a drop in the bucket."

"To be on the wrong tack" (another sailing term) parallels "to be on the wrong track" and "to be on the wrong tram" (from onshore activities).

## PLAYS ON WORDS

Although similes in general are outside the scope of this book, special mention should be made of those which amount to a play on words rather than a true comparison—for example, "to charge like a wounded bull"

(to impose excessive prices) and "to be flat out like a lizard" (to be hard at work).

## **EMPHASIS**

Particular attention is drawn to a series of phrases which contain some words used quite literally in combination with figurative fancy expressions and elaborations inserted purely for the purpose of greater emphasis. Some examples of this pattern are as follows:

- "to vanish into thin air"
- "at a break-neck pace"
- "crystal clear"
- "every man and his dog"
- "to be the end of the road"
- "to get away with murder"
- "to confront something head on"
- "to refuse point blank"
- "to save a bundle"
- "a long time between drinks"
- "why in the world?"
- "No way!"
- "in every nook and cranny"
- "short and sweet"
- "enough to sink a battleship"
- "alive and kicking"
- "the last of the Mohicans"
- "to go post haste" and
- "to cost an arm and a leg."

Again, it is sometimes said that prices are "going through the roof" or that some innovation is "the hottest thing since sliced bread."

In a slightly different class is the picturesque insult in which a person is described as being "lower than a snake's belly!"

Some metaphors used by way of elaboration really add little of substance—for example, "for my sins."

## **THE NEED FOR PRECISION**

In many metaphors the precise words do not matter and synonyms or other variations according to the speaker's preferences can readily be used. In other cases, however, the exact word is essential. For example,

the two words "street" and "road" are not interchangeable in either direction in:

- "to be streets ahead"
- "not to be in the same street as someone"
- "to be on the right road"
- "to be at the crossroads."

Similarly, something can be "up one's street" or more commonly "up one's alley," but never "up one's road."

Again, a person can "pull himself up" either "by his bootstraps" or "by his own shoelaces." But a person is "British to his bootstraps" without such an alternative.

## OVERLAP

Is a "shot in the dark" really different from a "stab in the dark?" There are, no doubt, differences in the shades of meaning which may make one term or the other better in some particular circumstances. In the listings the former has been defined as an "intelligent or lucky guess" and the latter as a "sheer guess." However, in the context of a living language spoken by millions of people it should not be assumed that such clear-cut distinctions are made every time people use these expressions. These remarks apply not only to the specific illustration just given but also in the general case.

Again, some rather similar combinations of words occur in two or more really quite distinct metaphors. Thus, "that is a fine kettle of fish" (that is a terrible muddle) can be distinguished from "that is a very different kettle of fish" (that is something very dissimilar).

Again, "to undermine a person" (to injure his reputation) has only a small overlap with "to undermine a proposal" (to sabotage it).

"That is all water under the bridge" (that no longer matters) is not quite the same as "a lot of water has passed under the bridge since he came" (much has happened since he came).

"To give someone a hand" (to assist a person) is significantly different from "to give someone a free hand" (to authorize a person to act as he sees fit).

"To rekindle an old flame" (to inspire the reinstatement of a former loving relationship) might even refer to "an old flame" (a former lover).

"An activity on the horizon" (one expected, but not immediately) differs both from "a cloud on the horizon" (a faint indication of possible future trouble) and from the worse still "black clouds on the horizon" (anticipated bad news).

A person can either "see the light" (understand the real situation) or

“see the light at the end of the tunnel” (be close to finalizing a long exercise), while a document can “see the light of day” (be made public). Again, a matter can be “brought to light” (drawn to general attention) so that those responsible can “shed light on it” (give explanations about it).

A person can “keep his own eyes open for something” (be on the lookout for useful information) or he can “open someone else’s eyes to something” (alert another person to the truth of some matter). He can also receive a real “eye opener” (surprise) or he can go into something “with his eyes wide open” (fully conscious of the ramifications).

The expression “to put one’s feet up” (to relax) can be contrasted with the expression “to put one’s foot down” (to exert one’s authority and insist on something).

In the area of near slang, “to have a shot at someone” (to tease a person) is very different from “to have a shot at something” (to make an attempt at achieving some goal).

## **NEGATIVE EXPRESSIONS**

A great number of rather colloquial expressions seem to work only in the negative—for instance:

- “it is not the end of the world”
- “don’t hold your breath for the outcome”
- “he is not Robinson Crusoe”
- “you’re not here to win prizes”
- “don’t let the grass grow under your feet”
- “that is not cricket”
- “don’t bust your boiler”
- “it does not matter a row of beans”
- “she didn’t give an inch”
- “that is not my cup of tea”
- “I would not touch that with a ten-foot pole”
- “that cuts no ice with me”
- “he didn’t miss a beat”
- “he held a gun with no bullets”
- “he is not the only pebble on the beach”
- “it’s not over till the fat lady sings”
- “he did not turn a hair”
- “nothing is sacred”
- “she did not bat an eyelash”
- “don’t lose any sleep over this”
- “I would not know him from Adam”
- “not for love or money”
- “he didn’t have a dog’s chance”

“it was no picnic”  
“he did not put a foot wrong”  
“she didn’t pull any punches”  
“I cannot for the life of me . . . ”  
“to make no bones about it . . . ” and  
“you haven’t a leg to stand on.”

The corresponding affirmative phrases would just not be idiomatic.

On a slightly different tack, the expression “he is no angel” is not at all the opposite of “he is an angel.”

## **NONSENSE EXPRESSIONS**

Then there are also some “nonsense” metaphors, such as:

“since the year dot”  
“to increase exponentially”  
“to the nth degree” and  
“to move at a rate of knots.”

These are all expressions which when taken literally are actually quite meaningless.

“To fly in the face of my specific orders” contains not one but rather two quite absurd terms.

There is also the expression “with 20/20 hindsight,” which sounds more impressive and plausible than is really justified.

## **COLLOQUIALISMS**

Some phrases can be used orally although they would be regarded as unacceptable in literary pieces—for instance:

“stiff cheese”  
“fair crack of the whip”  
“shoot!” (in the sense of “speak”)  
“buzz off”  
“I’ll nail him”  
“I have to fly”  
“he can get lost”  
“if I’ve told you once I’ve told you a thousand times”  
“between you and me and the gatepost”  
“you can go and jump in the lake”  
“you can eat your heart out”

“that is on your head”  
“that is your funeral”  
“keep your shirt on!” and  
“more power to your elbow.”

Another “negative only” expression, “no dice,” is also in the same category.

A rather different example is “if he were alive today he would turn in his grave.”

## **SEXIST LANGUAGE**

Many metaphors involve sexist language, having been coined long before attention was paid to such matters. Examples include “the man in the street,” “a mansize job,” “soul brother,” “to separate the men from the boys,” “as every schoolboy knows” and “he is your man.”

Of course, not every reference to males paints that sex in a good light—consider, for example, the expression “a man of straw.” However, the relatively few references in metaphors to females tend to be unflattering—for instance, “witchhunt” and “it’s not over till the fat lady sings.”

## **DOUBLE METAPHORS**

The expression “a backseat driver” is a rare example of a *double metaphor*. Clearly, the word “driver” is not being used literally even when the phrase is employed in the context of monitoring. When it is used with the figurative meaning of “a person seeking to exercise control” then the whole phrase becomes yet a further metaphor.

A more modern example is the radio term “feedback.” Originally it referred to the interaction between amplifiers and speakers, which must have suggested to its early users some analogy to food. The secondary concept in turn gave rise to the contemporary meaning of the phrase (a response from a target audience to those trying to influence it), an analogy based on an analogy.

## **POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS**

Some metaphors in colloquial use are based on a misunderstanding as to the correct meaning of the literal words. Six examples of this are as follows:

“A leading question” (a very pertinent question): This involves the

misuse of a legal term used in relation to cross-examinations—a term which actually means a question so framed as to suggest the answer.

“Opening gambit” (the first in a series of strategic moves): This is a tautological expression, which also involves a misunderstanding of a technical chess term concerned with the making of a sacrifice.

“To decimate” (to greatly reduce in size): This expression is often used in the sense of “to reduce *to* one tenth,” although its original meaning was “to reduce *by* one tenth,” in reference to executing every tenth soldier as punishment for mutiny or cowardice.

“To create a Frankenstein” (to create something wicked and out of control): This is a reference to the fictional *creator* of “Frankenstein’s monster” in a story by Mary Shelley, in mistake for a reference to the monster itself.

“At the eleventh hour” (at the last moment): As a day has 24 hours and half a day has 12 hours, this phrase is doubly wrong; “at the twenty-fourth hour” would be much more logical. (The phrase actually refers to the twelve hours between sunrise and sunset, the “day” in biblical times.)

“To compound the felony” (having already acted improperly to make matters worse): This also involves the misuse of a legal term. Compounding a felony is the crime of agreeing for money not to prosecute a person for felony. In reality it is therefore an offense by a different person—not a second and worse offense by the original culprit.

As indicated under the heading “Hyperbole” in Chapter 7, the expression “light years” is often used incorrectly to mean “a long time.” It is actually a term used in astronomy. A “light year” is the *distance* travelled by light in a 12-month period.

Another common practice is to use the phrase “to come full circle”—which obviously implies returning to one’s original starting point—in mistake for another metaphor, “to turn around 180 degrees”—which means reversing one’s previous stance and now going in the opposite direction.

Again, the mathematical term “lowest common denominator” is often used when speaking of the *highest* level of taste, etc., found among all the members of some target audience.

Some metaphors periodically get misquoted—for example, “to have a hard *row to hoe*” is sometimes rendered as the meaningless “to have a hard *road to hoe*. ”

Sometimes the popular meaning of a phrase acquires a different emphasis from that intended by the classical author. For example, “to be an albatross around someone’s neck,” from Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, now usually means “to be a great burden

from which one cannot easily escape." The original overtones of doom and the earlier meaning of the phrase, "a source of bad luck," rarely apply nowadays.

## WORDS ARE FUN!

Technically speaking, the phrase "a rose by any other name would smell as sweet"—actually, another quotation from Shakespeare, this time from *Romeo and Juliet*—is not a metaphor. Clearly, the statement is literally true. However, speakers using it would not be referring to roses, or to smelling, or to sweetness. The phrase taken as a whole is clearly much more powerful than its separate components might suggest.

Finally, another curiosity. Sometimes an interesting reversal of the normal pattern occurs. A humorous effect can be achieved by actually employing a commonly-used figurative expression in its literal sense, as in the caption to an amusing press photograph published recently. This showed two policemen exchanging their official headgear with two pretty female party-goers wearing Mickey Mouse hats. The imaginative caption was "If the cap fits . . ."

Words are fascinating and their study can be fun. Metaphors can almost be regarded as an art form. Readers who may never have become aware of the multitude of metaphorical usages even in their own speech will find, it is hoped, the analysis and examples in this book both entertaining and instructive.

## SOME GRAMMATICAL ASPECTS

*Terminological inexactitude*

**Winston Churchill**

*And torture one poor word ten thousand ways*

**John Dryden (Mac Flicknoe)**

### GRAMMATICAL FORM OF THE METAPHOR

Metaphors can take a great variety of different grammatical forms, including nouns by themselves—for example, “a figurehead,” “a honeymoon”; nouns qualified by adjectives—“a round robin,” “a lame dog”; adjectives by themselves—“apocryphal,” “ham-fisted”; and adjectival phrases—“off the cuff,” “for the long haul.”

Nouns qualified by adjectival phrases with or without other adjectives are relatively common—“an ocean full of fish,” “the other side of the coin,” “a knight in shining armor,” “a share of the cake,” “a trap for young players,” and so on.

A few metaphors are adverbial phrases—“with a heavy heart,” “with a flourish of trumpets”; or adverbial clauses—“when the chips are down,” “when it comes to the crunch,” “when one’s ship comes in.”

Some metaphors are mini-sentences—“his name is mud,” “there is no such animal”; exclamations—“chalk it up!,” “tell it to the marines!”; or even questions—“just what is his game?,” “were your ears burning?”

Some sentences start with the indefinite pronoun “it”—“it takes two to tango,” “it will all come out in the wash.”

A number of metaphors are direct conditional statements—“if the cap fits, then wear it,” “if the mountain will not go to Mahomet, then Mahomet will go to the mountain.” Others merely imply conditions—“first in, best dressed,” “love me, love my dog.”

About 70 per cent of all the expressions listed commence with a verb, although it can be argued in some cases that only the words following the

infinitive comprise the real metaphor. Metaphors can involve a verb by itself—"to ruminate," "to pan out"; a verb with a noun or an adjective as a complement—"to be a tonic," "to be kosher"; a verb with an object—"to throw a long shadow," "to trump a person," "to beard the lion in his den"; a verb modified by an adverb or an adverbial phrase—"to ebb away," "to be in hand"; and so on.

Sometimes only the passive voice gives an idiomatic expression—for example, "to be cheesed off."

The phrase "to give the devil his due" is different again. It exists only in the infinitive and can be used only in parenthesis, as in: "To give the devil his due, John was always loyal."

There are really no limits to the grammatical forms which a metaphor can take. Furthermore, no logical rules govern this aspect.

### PRINCIPLES USED IN THE LISTINGS

Where the infinitive is shown in the listings, all forms of the verb concerned are normally usable except where specifically stated otherwise—for example, "to rest on one's laurels" extends to "he rested on his laurels," "are you just going to rest on your laurels?," and so on. On occasions, however, an expression involving a verb exists in a more restricted way, such as "I could eat a horse," which is used mainly in the first person, or the near slang "join the club!," which is found only in the imperative mood. In such cases the listings show the commonly-used form of the metaphor.

Nouns shown with either the definite or the indefinite article in the listings are usually encountered only in that form.

No attempt has been made to correct the language of ungrammatical or inelegant expressions in popular use—for example, "fast and furious" (when used as an adverb) or "this is nothing to write home about."

### METAPHORS INVOLVING A CHANGE TO THE PART OF SPEECH

Some expressions are based on nouns when used literally but on verbs when used figuratively, as in "a white ant" and "to white ant someone" respectively.

Other examples of this phenomenon include the following:

- "to snowball"
- "to pinpoint"
- "to cave in"

“to earmark”  
“to rubber stamp”  
“to grandstand”  
“to mushroom”  
“to spearhead” and  
“to mothball.”

Some examples of phrases which moved in the reverse direction, namely, verbs when used literally and nouns when used figuratively, are as follows:

“a breakthrough”  
“a standstill” and  
“a walkover.”

### VERBS REQUIRING SPECIAL SUBJECTS

Some verbs used as metaphors can be combined with only a narrow range of nouns as their subjects in their figurative applications. For example:

only a *price* or a *value* can “skyrocket”  
only a *telephone* or some similar piece of equipment can “run hot”  
only *alleged facts* can be “taken at face value”  
only an *unpleasant incident* can “come back to haunt a person”  
only a *joke* or a *funny story* can “fall flat”  
only an *argument* can be “shot to ribbons” and  
only *information* can be brought “out into the open.”

Again, only the participants in some contest such as an election can be said to be “running neck and neck.”

### THE USE OF QUOTATION MARKS

The metaphors listed in this book can, generally speaking, be regarded as perfectly respectable. As mentioned in Chapter 1, they are therefore not usually written inside quotation marks. Such punctuation would not really be appropriate, as it would indicate to readers either that the author felt guilty and apologetic about the use of the expression (in the case of slang) or that he was feeling particularly proud of himself for having invented something brilliant and wanted to draw special attention to it.

### IDIOMS

Outside the scope of this book are a large number of colorful idioms which represent the literal truth—picturesque expressions such as “this is not the end of the world” (you will get over this setback), “he does not wear horns” (he is much more like you than you expect), “you should practice what you preach” (you should do yourself what you tell others to do) and “you got it in one” (your first hypothesis, as just enunciated, is correct).

### SYNECDOCHE

In some metaphors the abstract is treated as though it were the concrete, as when a proposal is “thrown out of the window” or “swept under the carpet” or “taken with a grain of salt.” Again, one can “pour cold water” on an idea or “knock it on the head.”

A person can “come to grips” with a problem, “bare” his soul, “unveil” a plan, “eat” his words or know something “inside out.”

Such phrases are further examples of the figure of speech called *synecdoche*.

### PERSONIFICATION

Other metaphors involve *personification*, for instance, “to break the back” of a task, a “glaring error” and “the kiss of death.”

Again, the solution to a problem can “stare someone in the face.”

### HYPERBOLE

The expression “light years” is both a metaphor and a *hyperbole*. It can legitimately be used to mean “a great distance.” However, it is also frequently used—quite incorrectly, as it happens—in the sense of “a long time.”

On the other hand, “breathing space,” despite appearances, does refer to an interval of time.

The expression “if I’ve told you once I’ve told you a thousand times” also involves a hyperbole.

Some metaphors comprise deliberate oversimplifications or understatements, as “to dot the i’s and cross the t’s” and “to turn an honest penny.”

## IRONY

Some metaphors involve elements of *irony*—for example, “deafening silence” and “people stayed away in droves.”

It is also possible to invent metaphors in order to be ironical. For instance, a copper coin tendered in mistake for a silver coin can be described as being “rather sunburnt.”

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## **PART II**



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# DICTIONARY

## A

**A from a to z**  
from start to finish

**A1 to be A1 at Lloyd's**  
to be in perfect order (refers to the classification of ships in Lloyd's register in London)

**ABANDON to abandon ship**  
to abrogate one's responsibilities or to abandon a project

**ABOUT to do an about-face**  
to reverse a previously enunciated policy

**ABYSS to be close to the abyss**  
to face imminent total destruction

**ACE to be within an ace of something**  
to be extremely close to something

**ACE to have an ace up one's sleeve**  
to hold an impressive counter-argument in reserve

**ACE to hold all the aces**  
to be in an unbeatable position to defeat others

**ACHE heartache**  
sadness

**ACHILLES to be someone's Achilles' heel**

to represent a weakness in an otherwise strong position (refers to the Greek warrior who was the hero of Homer's *ILIAD*)

**ACID to be the acid test**  
to establish something beyond doubt

**ACID to put the acid on someone**  
to make demands on a person

**ACORN tall oaks from little acorns grow**  
even major enterprises have to have small beginnings (from "Lines written for a School Declamation" by David Everett)

**ACT to act out a charade**  
ostentatiously to pretend to be doing something in an ethical fashion

**ACT to be a hard act to follow**  
to be an impressive performance, not easily matched by the next person

**ACT to clean up one's act**  
to fix up the deficiencies in one's affairs

**ACT to get in on the act**  
to participate in some activity started by others

**ACT to get one's act together**  
to organize one's activities so as to make them efficient

**ACT to read the Riot Act**

to reprimand persons who are excessively noisy (refers to the police reading out to a rowdy crowd extracts from a law requiring its dispersement)

**ACTION to have a piece of the action**

to be one of several parties to a project

**ADAM not to know someone from Adam**

to be unable to recognize a person

**ADAM since Adam was a boy**

for a very long time

**ADD it adds up**

it makes sense

**ADD that takes on added color**

there are now further facts which alter the appearance of a matter

**ADD to add apples to oranges**

to quite illogically lump unconnected things together

**ADD to add fuel to the fire**

to make a bad situation worse

**ADRIFT to come adrift**

(of a plan) not to work out as intended

**ADVOCATE to act as a devil's advocate**

to put a point of view which one does not hold in order to draw out the best arguments regarding a proposition (refers to a church official vetting a candidate for sainthood)

**AFLOAT to stay afloat**

to remain solvent

**AGAINST to swim against the tide**

to take up a minority position

**AHEAD full bore ahead!**

proceed forward!

**AHEAD full steam ahead!**

get going as fast as possible!

**AHEAD to be ahead of the field**

to be better than one's competitors

**AID a band aid**

help which is superficial or ephemeral rather than substantial or permanent

**AIR a castle in the air**

an impracticable proposition

**AIR a feeling in the air**

a premonition held by many people

**AIR to be a breath of fresh air**

to be a pleasant change from the past

**AIR to be full of hot air**

to have an exaggerated opinion of one's own importance and to boast about it

**AIR to clear the air**

to remove any possible misunderstandings

**AIR to have too many balls in the air**

to attempt to do more than can be coped with

**AIR to leave something up in the air**

to continue with an unresolved problem

**AIR to pluck figures out of the air**

to just make figures up arbitrarily

**AIR to produce something out of thin air**

to get hold of something in circumstances where this seemed impossible

**AIR to put on airs and graces**

to act in an affected manner

**AIR to throw one's cap into the air**

to celebrate some achievement

**AIR to throw one's hat into the air**

to express joy

**AIR to vanish into thin air**

unexpectedly to disappear

**AIR to walk on air**

to be joyful

**AISLE** to have an audience rolling in the aisles  
to amuse an audience

**ALADDIN** an Aladdin's cave  
a place full of unexpected treasure

**ALARM** the alarm bells are ringing  
It is unwise to proceed

**ALARM** to sound alarm bells  
to give warning

**ALBATROSS** to be an albatross around someone's neck  
to be a great burden (popularized by Coleridge's ANCIENT MARINER)

**ALEC** to be a smart Alec  
to give witty but cheeky responses to one's superiors or customers

**ALIVE** to be alive and kicking  
to be in good form

**ALIVE** to eat someone alive  
to soundly defeat a person

**ALL I would not do so-and-so for all the tea in China**  
I will never do so-and-so

**ALL a Jack of all trades**  
an amateur who can turn his hand to anything

**ALL all hands on deck**  
everybody is requested to help out

**ALL all hands to the pumps**  
everybody is requested to help out

**ALL all hell broke loose**  
great confusion erupted

**ALL all his Christmases came at once**  
he was overjoyed

**ALL all roads lead to Rome**  
all alternatives will have the same outcome

**ALL all that glitters is not gold**  
things are not always what they seem

**ALL all the dogs are barking**  
this news is being widely disseminated

**ALL it is all grist to the mill**  
this is useful but unexciting additional material

**ALL it will all come out in the wash**  
the facts will emerge as work proceeds

**ALL not to be all beer and skittles**  
not to be all pleasant and easy

**ALL not to put all one's eggs in one basket**  
to spread one's risks

**ALL someone's fingers are all thumbs**  
a person is clumsy with his hands

**ALL to all sing from the same hymnal**  
to act consistently with each other

**ALL to be all ears**  
to be very attentive

**ALL to be all eyes**  
to observe very closely

**ALL to be all over but the shouting**  
to be virtually finished

**ALL to be all systems "go"**  
to go ahead as fast as possible

**ALL to be all that it is cracked up to be**  
to be as good as the claims made for something

**ALL to be all washed out**  
to feel feeble

**ALL to compete on all fours with someone**  
to strive on equal terms

**ALL to get the worst of all worlds**  
to get a series of disadvantages without achieving any corresponding advantages

**ALL to hold all the aces**  
to be in an unbeatable position to defeat others

**ALL to hold all the cards**  
to be assured of victory

**ALL** to laugh all the way to the bank  
to appreciate one's good fortune

**ALL** to let it all hang out  
to unburden oneself

**ALL** to pull out all stops  
to make maximum effort

**ALL** to spark on all cylinders  
to work extremely well

**ALL** to walk all over someone  
to act in a way which completely  
disregards another person's sensibility

**ALL** to want to jump all one's fences  
at once  
to be unrealistic

**ALL** warts and all  
with the unfavorable features as well  
as the favorable ones (Oliver Cromwell's direction to an artist painting  
his portrait)

**ALLEY** to be up one's alley  
to be right within a person's expertise  
or area of interest

**ALLEY** to rush into a blind alley  
to make a precipitate move which  
does not lead one anywhere

**ALLIANCE** an unholy alliance  
a working relationship for a nefarious  
purpose between unlikely partners

**ALPHA** from alpha to omega  
from start to finish (refers to the first  
and last letters of the Greek alphabet)

**ALTAR** to sacrifice something on  
the altar of some belief  
to give up some benefit as a matter of  
principle

**AMENDMENT** to plead the Fifth  
Amendment  
to refuse to answer an unwelcome  
question (refers to the Fifth Amendment  
of the United States Constitution,  
which provides protection  
against self-incrimination)

**AMMUNITION** ammunition  
arguments helpful to a case

**ANCHOR** the sheet anchor  
the source of one's confidence

**ANCHOR** to anchor  
to fix firmly

**ANCHOR** to weigh anchor  
to move to another address

**AND neck and neck**  
(of contestants) with little between them

**ANGEL** a fallen angel  
a previously trusted person who has  
transgressed

**ANGEL** fools rush in where angels  
fear to tread

unsophisticated persons take unwise  
risks in circumstances where more  
knowledgeable persons would exercise  
caution

**ANGEL** someone's guardian angel  
someone's friend, watching over him  
and advancing his interests

**ANGEL** to be an angel  
to be very helpful

**ANGEL** to be no angel  
to have a great many serious faults

**ANGEL** to be on the side of the  
angels  
to be on the side of righteousness  
(from a speech by Benjamin Disraeli)

**ANIMAL** there is no such animal  
that does not exist

**ANIMAL** to be a political animal  
to want to be in politics

**ANOINT** the anointed one  
the desired successor

**ANSWER** the answer to a maiden's  
prayer  
an unexpected but very welcome  
happening

**ANT** to white ant someone  
to surreptitiously seek to destroy a  
person

**ANTEDELUVIAN** *antediluvian*  
very outmoded (lit., "before the Flood")

**APART** *to be miles apart*  
to have great philosophical differences

**APART** *to be poles apart*  
to have ideas which are very different

**APART** *to drift apart*  
to lose contact or to change feelings once held in common

**APART** *to tear someone apart*  
to ruthlessly destroy another person's case

**APOCRYPHAL** *apocryphal*  
fictitious but resembling truth and illustrating a point (refers to certain Old Testament books included in only some versions of the Bible)

**APOLOGY** *to be an apology for something*  
to be a poor substitute for something

**APPETITE** *to whet one's appetite*  
to arouse one's curiosity or interest

**APPLE** *a rotten apple*  
an isolated dishonest person in an otherwise honest group

**APPLE** *in apple pie order*  
in perfect order and condition

**APPLE** *to add apples to oranges*  
to quite illogically lump unconnected things together

**APPLE** *to be the apple of someone's eye*  
to be a person of whom another person is proud

**APPLECART** *to upset the applecart*  
to engage in conduct disturbing a peaceful state of affairs and thereby cause discomfort

**APPLY** *to apply the blowtorch to something*  
to totally destroy something

**APRON** *to be tied to someone's apron strings*  
to be excessively influenced by a female

**ARCHITECT** *to be the architect of something*  
to be the person devising something innovative

**AREA** *to be a gray area*  
to be in an undefined position straddling two or more possibilities

**ARM** *I would give my right arm for something*  
I am very keen to acquire something

**ARM** *a shot in the arm*  
something to revive a person's enthusiasm

**ARM** *at arm's length*  
between parties who are strangers bearing no special duty to each other and who have no financial or other relationship with each other (a legal term)

**ARM** *to be armed to the teeth*  
to carry many weapons

**ARM** *to chance one's arm*  
to take a great risk (refers to the stripes on the uniforms of non-commissioned officers)

**ARM** *to cost an arm and a leg*  
to be excessively expensive

**ARM** *to have a long arm*  
to have far-reaching power

**ARM** *to lose one's right arm*  
to lose some highly-valued assistance

**ARM** *to twist someone's arm*  
to coerce another person to do something against his will or better judgement

**ARM** *with open arms*  
enthusiastically

**ARMCHAIR** *to get an armchair ride*  
to be given a particularly easy time

**ARMOR** *a chink in someone's armor*

an opportunity to take advantage of a weakness

**ARMOR** *a knight in shining armor*  
a very helpful person, who is also gallant and idealized

**ARMPIT** *to be in something up to one's armpits*

to be very deeply involved in something

**ARMS** *to be up in arms against something*

to express violent opposition to a proposal

**AROUND** *to get around some difficulty*

to use an approach which overcomes some difficulty

**AROUND** *to get around someone*  
to induce a person to do as one wishes

**ARROW** *another arrow in one's quiver*

an additional reason

**ART** *to raise something to a fine art form*

to become very clever at doing something

**ARTHUR** *I don't know whether I'm Arthur or Martha*

I haven't time to think

**ARTICLE** *an article of faith*

a fundamental belief on which certain behavior is based

**ASCERTAIN** *to ascertain the lay of the land*

to establish the pertinent facts and opinions

**ASHES** *to rise from the ashes like a Phoenix*

to be the replacement for something destroyed in some disaster (refers to a mythical bird which was supposed to rise from the ashes of its funeral pyre with renewed youth)

**ASHES** *to wear sackcloth and ashes humbly to demonstrate repentance*

**ASK** *someone asked for it*  
a person deserves his fate

**ASS** *to make an ass of oneself*  
to act stupidly in public

**ATMOSPHERE** *atmosphere*  
psychological environment

**ATMOSPHERE** *in a rarefied atmosphere*

in ignorance of the real world

**ATTACH** *to have strings attached*  
to be subject to conditions

**AUNT** *an Aunt Sally*

a person who can readily be singled out and criticized as the proxy for a group

**AVALANCHE** *avalanche*

a great volume manifesting itself in a short time

**AVENUE** *avenue*

method of approach

**AWASH** *to be awash with something*  
to have plenty of something

**AWAY** *to be carried away*

to be excited by something imaginative

**AWAY** *to be unable to keep people away with a big stick*

to be faced with a large crowd or much demand

**AWAY** *when the cat is away the mice will play*

in the absence of supervision discipline will be lax

**AX** *an old battle-ax*

a formidable, quarrelsome and hostile woman

**AX** *the ax has fallen*

it is now too late

**AX** *to ax*

to cancel

**AX to have an ax to grind**  
to have a vested interest; to bear a resentment or a grudge

**AX to sharpen one's ax**  
to get ready for a difficult task

**AX where the ax falls**  
who gets terminated

## B

**BABE out of the mouths of babes**  
(as indiscreetly revealed) the truth

**BABE to be babes in the wood**  
to be excessively naive and inexperienced and thus ripe for exploitation

**BABEL a tower of Babel**  
a noisy and confused assembly (Genesis 11)

**BABY to be left holding the baby**  
to be tricked into accepting responsibility for someone else's problems

**BABY to be one's baby**  
to be one's area of responsibility

**BABY to throw out the baby with the bathwater**  
to discard a major benefit in the course of obtaining a comparatively minor advantage

**BACK a backseat driver**  
a person seeking to exercise control

**BACK a thought in the back of one's mind**  
an undeveloped idea

**BACK as soon as someone's back was turned**  
at the moment it became possible to do something without a person's knowledge

**BACK back-breaking**  
overburdening

**BACK behind someone's back**  
in a way which deliberately conceals an activity from a person

**BACK feedback**  
response from a target audience to those seeking to influence it

**BACK it fell off the back of a truck**  
(of goods) they were stolen; (of a politically sensitive document) it was leaked to me

**BACK on the back of something**  
by virtue of something

**BACK put your back into it!**  
work energetically!

**BACK so-and-so would give one the shirt off his back**  
so-and-so is very generous

**BACK something is on the back burner**  
consideration is postponed pending further research

**BACK the straw which broke the camel's back**  
the latest step, which, when added to a large number of seemingly harmless previous steps, sets off a disaster resulting from the cumulative effect

**BACK through the back door**  
unofficially or surreptitiously

**BACK to backpedal**  
to reverse to some extent previously applied policies

**BACK to back someone into a corner**  
to drive a person into a position from which escape is difficult

**BACK to back the wrong horse**  
to have faith in, give support to and/or invest in a project which proves to be unsuccessful

**BACK to be able to do something with one hand behind one's back**  
to be able to do something very easily

**BACK to be back on deck**  
to have returned after an absence

**BACK** to be back to scratch  
to have to start all over again

**BACK** to be fed up to the back teeth  
to be disgusted

**BACK** to be like water off a duck's back  
(of advice or criticism) to be completely rejected

**BACK** to break the back of a task  
to complete the bulk of the work

**BACK** to bring someone back to the pack  
to make a person conform

**BACK** to cover one's back  
to take precautions

**BACK** to engage in back biting  
to criticize in an unfriendly manner

**BACK** to get back on one's feet  
to recover from an illness or some other setback

**BACK** to get off someone's back  
to leave a person alone to carry on without constant criticism

**BACK** to get one's own back on someone  
to extract revenge

**BACK** to get someone's back up  
to annoy or antagonize a person

**BACK** to go back to square one  
to start all over again

**BACK** to have eyes at the back of one's head  
to know more of what is going on than is generally realized

**BACK** to have one's back to the wall  
to be hard-pressed by creditors or opponents

**BACK** to make a rod for one's own back  
to act in disregard of likely disadvantages for oneself

**BACK** to need to watch one's back  
to find it necessary to take care in case others act against one's interests

**BACK** to pat oneself on the back  
immodestly to congratulate oneself

**BACK** to pat someone on the back  
to congratulate a person or to reassure a person

**BACK** to put one's back into something  
to work hard at achieving some goal

**BACK** to put someone back in his box  
to make it clear to a person that his views are not welcome

**BACK** to put someone back in his place  
to make it clear to a person that he should not continue to act as though he had greater seniority than he really has

**BACK** to put someone on the back foot  
to cause a person to adopt a lower profile

**BACK** to put something back on its feet  
to repair something

**BACK** to ride on the back of someone  
without effort to benefit from the prior efforts of others

**BACK** to scratch one another's backs  
to help each other

**BACK** to see the back of someone  
to know that a person is no longer involved in something

**BACK** to stab someone in the back  
to deliberately and surreptitiously harm a person who regarded one as a friend

**BACK** to take a backseat  
not to actively involve oneself

**BACK** to tie someone's hands behind his back  
to make it impossible for a person to act at all

**BACK** to turn back the clock  
to have another opportunity to do something which should have been done already or to undo something which cannot be undone

**BACK** to turn one's back on someone  
to decline to further assist or deal with a person

**BACKBONE** backbone  
chief strength or character

**BACKFIRE** to backfire  
to be counterproductive

**BACKGROUND** background information

supplementary information relating to some matter which enables the main information to be seen in context and understood better

**BACKGROUND** one's background  
the environment in which one grew up

**BACKHANDED** a backhanded compliment  
a polite expression seemingly of praise but really intended as an insult

**BACKLASH** a backlash  
adverse reaction to some move

**BACKROOM** a backroom boy  
an expert unable to communicate effectively with the lay public

**BACKWARD** to bend over  
backward to do something  
to go to great trouble to accommodate another person's wishes

**BACKWARD** to take a step backward  
to move farther away from one's goal

**BACKWASH** backwash  
consequence

**BACKWATER** a backwater  
a place of little activity

**BACKYARD** in one's own backyard  
in one's own domain

**BACON** to bring home the bacon  
to be successful

**BACON** to save one's bacon  
to escape harm

**BAD** to give a dog a bad name  
to malign a person

**BAD** to make bad blood between two parties  
to cause ill feeling between two parties

**BAD** to throw good money after bad  
to waste further money in a vain attempt to recover money already lost

**BAG** a mixed bag  
some advantages and some disadvantages

**BAG** a whole bag of tricks  
a series of articles or a series of artificial devices

**BAG** it is in the bag  
the enterprise has succeeded

**BAG** to let the cat out of the bag  
to reveal an embarrassing secret (refers to the exposure of cheats at fairs, attempting to pass a cat wrapped in a sack off as a piglet)

**BAG** to pack one's bags  
to signal one's intention to depart

**BAG** yes sir—yes sir—three bags full!  
(in servile response to some request)  
yes, very willingly!

**BAIL** to bail someone out  
to render assistance to someone unable to help himself

**BAIL** to bail out of something  
to abandon an enterprise in anticipation of disaster

**BAILIWICK** to be in someone's bailiwick  
to be some other person's responsibility

**BAIT** to swallow the bait  
to succumb to a temptation deliberately put in one's way

**BAKE** *half-baked*  
not well thought out

**BALANCE** *to balance the books*  
to get one's own back

**BALANCE** *to balance the picture*  
to put the other side of the story or  
to quote facts in contradiction

**BALANCE** *to tip the balance*  
to provide further information or argument  
which results in an issue,  
which could have been decided either way,  
being determined in a particular way

**BALANCE** *to weigh two alternative propositions in the balance*  
to assess the relative significance of  
two alternative propositions

**BALL** *a crystal ball*  
accurate knowledge of the future

**BALL** *the ball is in someone's court*  
it is some other person's responsibility

**BALL** *to be a new ball game*  
to be subject to completely revised  
rules or very different conditions

**BALL** *to be in the right ballpark*  
to be approximately correct

**BALL** *to be line ball*  
to be equal

**BALL** *to be on the ball*  
to be fully informed

**BALL** *to be right behind the eight ball*  
to be in a position of extreme disadvantage

**BALL** *to blackball someone*  
to reject a person as unsuitable

**BALL** *to have a ball*  
to have an enjoyable time

**BALL** *to have the ball at one's feet*  
to have unlimited opportunity

**BALL** *to have too many balls in the air*  
to attempt to do more than can be coped with

**BALL** *to keep an eye on the ball*  
to monitor a fast-changing situation

**BALL** *to keep the ball rolling*  
to take advantage of the existing momentum  
or to participate actively

**BALL** *to keep up with the ball*  
to stay on top of the situation

**BALL** *to pass the ball along*  
to cooperate with others

**BALL** *to play ball*  
to cooperate

**BALL** *to run with the ball*  
to make the most of the opportunity

**BALL** *to start the ball rolling*  
to commence and enthusiastically advance  
an activity involving people

**BALL** *to take one's bat and ball home*

as a gesture of spite to remove an essential ingredient which one has contributed to a joint enterprise

**BALLOON** *to go down like a lead balloon*

to receive a very cool reception

**BALLOON** *when the balloon goes up*  
when the adverse facts come to light

**BANANA** *a banana republic*  
a country with a poor economy

**BAND** *a band aid*

help which is superficial or ephemeral rather than substantial or permanent

**BAND** *a one-man band*

a person performing many different roles single-handedly

**BANDWAGON** *to hop onto the bandwagon*

to join the majority (the antonym of "bandwagon effect" is "underdog effect")

**BANDY** *to bandy something about*  
to discuss something in a light-hearted manner

**BANG** *a big bang*  
a sudden major change in the environment

**BANG** *to bang one's head up against a brick wall*  
to fight an unwinnable case

**BANG** *to finish with a bang*  
to conclude something in grand style

**BANK** *to laugh all the way to the bank*  
to appreciate one's good fortune

**BANKRUPT** *to be bankrupt of ideas*  
to be bereft of ideas

**BAPTISM** *a baptism of fire*  
the commencement of an operation which presented great difficulty

**BAR** *no holds barred*  
without any limitation

**BAR** *not to have a bar of something*  
to be totally opposed to something

**BARE** *the bare bones*  
(of a story) nothing but the essential elements

**BARE** *the cupboard is bare*  
the wished-for resources are just not available

**BARE** *to bare one's soul*  
talkatively to give a revealing insight into oneself

**BARE** *to bare one's teeth*  
to imply threats

**BAREFACED** *barefaced*  
shameless

**BARGAIN** *bargaining chips*  
benefits which can be conceded in negotiations in order to obtain some advantage

**BARGAIN** *to be more than one bargained for*  
to be more than one expected

**BARK** *all the dogs are barking*  
this news is being widely disseminated

**BARK** *someone's bark is worse than his bite*  
the harsh words belie the reality of mild action

**BARK** *to bark up the wrong tree*  
to reach an incorrect conclusion

**BARK** *why keep a dog and bark oneself?*  
it is silly to pay for assistance and then do things personally

**BARN** *to barnstorm*  
to visit accompanied by a show of force

**BARREL** *a barrelful of something*  
many of something

**BARREL** *lock, stock and barrel*  
entirely

**BARREL** *to have someone over a barrel*  
to take advantage of someone's weakened position in relation to oneself

**BARREL** *to look down the barrel of a gun*  
to be given little choice in a matter

**BARREL** *to pork barrel*  
to spend taxpayers' money in one area in order to attract political support

**BARREL** *to really scrape the bottom of the barrel*  
to lower one's standards because one is short of important or relevant issues

**BARREL** *with both barrels blazing*  
with great intensity

**BARRICADE** *to go to the barricades for something*  
to very strongly believe in something

**BARRIER** *to break down the barriers*  
to do away with the prejudice preventing something

**BARROW** *to push a barrow*  
to promote a particular cause

**BASE** *to get to first base*  
to succeed in getting others to start comprehending a problem

**BASH** *a bible basher*  
a person who makes unwelcome attempts to force his religious beliefs on others

**BASKET** *a basket case*  
a poorly-performing enterprise

**BASKET** *not to put all one's eggs in one basket*  
to spread one's risks

**BASKET** *to put something into the "too hard" basket*  
to defer consideration of a difficult issue

**BASTARD** *a bastard*  
an unpleasant person

**BASTION** *the last bastion*  
the only remaining defensive measure

**BAT** *not to bat an eyelid*  
to fail to express any surprise

**BAT off one's own bat**  
on a person's own initiative and without outside help

**BAT to go to bat for someone**  
to carry out a task on another person's behalf

**BAT to have bats in the belfry**  
to be mad

**BAT to maintain a straight bat**  
to be efficient

**BAT to open the batting**  
to be the first in a series of persons speaking or doing something

**BAT to take one's bat and ball home**  
as a gesture of spite to remove an essential ingredient which one has contributed to a joint enterprise

**BATED** *to wait with bated breath*  
to be excited in anticipation of some event

**BATH** *a bloodbath*  
catastrophic losses

**BATH** *to give someone a bath*  
to dramatically defeat a person

**BATHWATER** *to throw out the baby with the bathwater*  
to discard a major benefit in the course of obtaining a comparatively minor advantage

**BATON** *to have a field marshal's baton in one's kit*  
to be ambitious

**BATTEN** *to batten down the hatches*  
to get ready for expected difficulties

**BATTERY** *to recharge one's batteries*  
to have a recuperative break

**BATTLE** *a battle royal*  
a fight or argument with many simultaneous participants

**BATTLE** *an old battle-ax*  
a formidable, quarrelsome and hostile woman

**BATTLE** *to fight an uphill battle*  
to face difficulties or to have formidable opposition

**BATTLESHIP** *enough to sink a battleship*  
more than sufficient

**BAY** *to hold someone at bay*  
to successfully resist an attacker

**BAY** *to keep the jackals at bay*  
to pay one's creditors just sufficient to avoid repercussions

**BAY** *to set the hounds baying*  
to excite the gossips by providing material which they can use

**BE** *to be kosher*  
to fulfill all requirements (refers to food complying with all aspects of Jewish religious law)

**BEACH** *not to be the only pebble on the beach*  
not to be the only available person

**BEADLEDOM** *beadledom*  
stupid officiousness

**BEADY** *to have one's beady eyes on something*  
to await the chance to acquire something to which one is not properly entitled

**BEAK** *to be a sticky beak*  
to show excessive curiosity into matters not of one's concern

**BEAM** *to be off beam*  
to be mistaken

**BEAN** *not to have a bean*  
to have no money

**BEAN** *not to matter a row of beans*  
to be utterly unimportant

**BEAN** *to be full of beans*  
to be very cheerful

**BEAN** *to know how many beans make five*  
to have common sense

**BEAN** *to spill the beans*  
to indiscreetly reveal sensitive information

**BEAR** *I fear the Greeks even when they bear gifts*  
I am suspicious of generous behavior from traditional opponents (from Virgil's AENEID, in reference to the Trojan horse)

**BEAR** *not to have been born yesterday*  
not to be naive

**BEAR** *to be a cross which one has to bear*  
to be a difficulty which one has to endure

**BEAR** *to be born on the wrong side of the blanket*  
to be illegitimate

**BEAR** *to be born with a silver spoon in one's mouth*  
to be brought up by wealthy parents

**BEAR** *to bear fruit to result in success*

**BEAR** *to grin and bear it*  
to suffer adversity cheerfully

**BEARD** *to beard the lion in his den*  
to visit someone important at his headquarters

**BEARER** *a standard bearer*  
a highly visible activist for a cause

**BEAST** *the nature of the beast*  
the reality of the situation

**BEAT** *any stick to beat a dog*  
any excuse will do if it serves one's purpose

**BEAT** *not to miss a beat*  
to carry on without the slightest interruption

**BEAT** *one can't beat City Hall*  
the ordinary citizen is powerless against bureaucracy

**BEAT** *to beat a drum for someone*  
to propagate another person's cause

**BEAT** *to beat a retreat*  
to abandon some project

**BEAT** *to beat about the bush*  
to hide the unpleasant truth

**BEAT** *to beat by a long shot*  
to defeat very convincingly

**BEAT** *to beat each other over the head*  
to be always fighting

**BEAT** *to beat one's breast*  
to express sorrow

**BEAT** *to beat one's drum*  
to immodestly publicize one's own attributes

**BEAT** *to beat someone at his own game*  
to outwit a person in his own specialization

**BEAT** *to beat someone to the punch*  
to get to some objective ahead of some keen rival

**BEAT** *to beat the odds*

to do better than could reasonably have been expected

**BEATEN** *to be off the beaten track*

to do unconventional things

**BEAUTY** *beauty is in the eye of the beholder*

some things are matters for subjective judgments

**BEAVER** *an eager beaver*

a person with great drive and enthusiasm even if this causes annoyance to others

**BEAVER** *to beaver away*

to work diligently at some task

**BED** *a hotbed of crime*

a place where crime flourishes

**BED** *one has made one's bed and one will now have to lie on it*

one has to bear the consequences of one's actions

**BED** *to be no bed of roses*

to be difficult or uncomfortable

**BED** *to be on one's death bed*

(of an organization or a piece of equipment) to be about to cease functioning

**BED** *to bed something down*

to find a taker for something

**BED** *to get out of bed on the wrong side*

to be grumpy

**BED** *to jump into bed with someone*

to enter into a joint enterprise with another person

**BED** *to put something to bed*

to finally dispose of

**BEDDING** *feather bedding*

(in industrial relations) creating unnecessary jobs solely to increase employment; (in economics) assisting an inefficient industry by government grants or excessive tariff protection

**BEDLAM** *bedlam*

a scene of uproar (refers to the Hospital of St. Mary of Bethlehem, which was used as a lunatic asylum from 1547 onward)

**BEDROCK** *bedrock price*

lowest possible price

**BEE** *to be a busy bee*

to work with great diligence

**BEE** *to have a bee in one's bonnet*

to have an obsession

**BEELINE** *to make a beeline for something*

to go straight to something with great enthusiasm or to head for some goal by the most direct route

**BEER** *not to be all beer and skittles*

not to be all pleasant and easy

**BEER** *to be small beer*

to be quite unimportant

**BEER** *to cry in one's beer*

to show remorse

**BEG** *to beg on bended knees*

to request in great earnestness

**BEGIN** *charity begins at home*

a person's first responsibility should be to his family

**BEHIND** *behind someone's back*

in a way which deliberately conceals an activity from a person

**BEHIND** *to start from behind scratch*

to be faced with a handicap

**BEHOLDER** *beauty is in the eye of the beholder*

some things are matters for subjective judgments

**BELFRY** *to have bats in the belfry*

to be mad

**BELL** *bell-wether*

first indication

**BELL** *bells and whistles*

imaginative variations

**BELL** right on the bell  
at the last possible moment

**BELL** saved by the bell  
rescued before disaster strikes

**BELL** the alarm bells are ringing  
it is unwise to proceed

**BELL** to be a warning bell  
to be a warning

**BELL** to bell the cat  
to do some dangerous but highly useful mission (refers to a fable in which none of the mice was willing to put a warning bell on a cat)

**BELL** to ring a bell  
to sound familiar or recall something to mind

**BELL** to sound alarm bells  
to give warning

**BELLY** I've had a belly full  
I have had enough of this

**BELLY** a fire in someone's belly  
great enthusiasm

**BELOW** below the salt  
in a subordinate position (refers to the seating order at ancient Roman dining tables)

**BELOW** to be below par  
to be less than the desired standard

**BELT** to belt someone over the head  
to override someone's views or arguments

**BELT** to get something under one's belt  
to achieve something

**BELT** to hit someone below the belt  
to act unfairly toward another person

**BELT** to tighten one's belt  
to lower one's rate of spending

**BENCHMARK** a benchmark  
a standard by which something is measured

**BEND** to be hell bent on something  
to be very determined to achieve something, regardless of the adverse consequences

**BEND** to be round the bend  
to be crazy

**BEND** to beg on bended knees  
to request in great earnestness

**BEND** to bend over backward to do something  
to go to great trouble to accommodate another person's wishes

**BEND** to bend the rules  
to overlook minor infractions of the rules

**BERTH** to give someone a wide berth  
to go out of one's way to avoid contact with a person

**BESIDE** to be beside oneself  
to be very agitated

**BEST** first in best dressed  
persons acting early will do better than latecomers

**BEST** to claim that something is the best thing since sliced bread  
to have an exaggerated opinion of the importance or novelty of an invention or practice

**BEST** to put one's best foot forward  
to make a special effort

**BEST** to want the best of both worlds  
to unreasonably desire to get some advantage without incurring a corresponding disadvantage

**BET** a good bet  
a good proposition

**BET** to hedge one's bets  
to take action involving a cost but which is designed to reduce the possible adverse consequences of some activity

**BET** you bet!  
definitely!

**BET** you can bet your life on something  
something is certain to happen

**BETE** to be someone's *bete noire*  
to be a person whose ideas and actions cause upset and loathing in another person (French, "black beast")

**BETTER** to be better than a *poke in the eye with a burnt stick*  
to be particularly welcome

**BIBLE** a *bible basher*  
a person who makes unwelcome attempts to force his religious beliefs on others

**BIBLE** to be the *bible*  
to be the authority

**BIG** a *big bang*  
a sudden major change in the environment

**BIG** a *big wheel*  
an important person

**BIG** someone's eyes are bigger than his stomach  
a person is unrealistic

**BIG** speak softly and carry a big stick  
be polite to your potential enemies but maintain an active and visible defense capability (from a speech by Theodore Roosevelt in 1901)

**BIG** the big smoke  
the big city

**BIG** to be a big fish in a little pond  
to be a person holding an important office but in an unimportant organization

**BIG** to be too big for one's boots  
to have an unwarranted belief as to one's capabilities or status

**BIG** to be too big for one's breeches  
to have an exaggerated idea of one's own importance

**BIG** to be unable to keep people away with a *big stick*  
to be faced with a large crowd or much demand

**BIG** to stand over someone with a *big stick*  
to intimidate a person in order to get him to act in a particular way

**BIG** to wield a *big stick*  
to exert power

**BILL** to fit the *bill*  
to meet all the requirements

**BILL** to get a *clean bill of health*  
after proper investigation to be found not wanting

**BIND** *spellbinding*  
fascinating to an audience

**BIND** to bind someone hand and foot  
to completely limit a person's freedom to act

**BIND** to catch someone in a bind  
to find a person in a difficulty from which he cannot readily extricate himself

**BIRD** a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush  
a benefit currently available is more valuable than a seemingly much larger benefit which may or may not be achieved in the future

**BIRD** a bird's-eye view  
a general overview or summary of a subject, emphasizing the major features

**BIRD** a little bird told me  
I heard from an unnamable informant (Ecclesiastes 10:20)

**BIRD** birds of a feather flock together  
persons of like interests gather in the same place

**BIRD** that is strictly for the birds  
that is blatant and naive nonsense

**BIRD** *the bird has flown*  
the person sought is no longer about

**BIRD** *the early bird gets the worm*  
a person who acts ahead of others  
gets an advantage over them

**BIRD** *to be a rare bird*  
to be an unusual type of individual

**BIRD** *to have a bird brain*  
to be stupid

**BIRD** *to kill two birds with one stone*  
to achieve a second objective in the  
course of achieving the first objective

**BIRTH** *to give birth to something*  
to create or invent something

**BIRTHRIGHT** *to sell one's birthright for a mess of pottage*  
through foolishness to exchange something of substance for something of little value (Genesis 25)

**BIT** *to champ at the bit*  
to be impatient

**BIT** *to take the bit between one's teeth*  
to face up to a problem

**BITE** *I could have bitten my tongue off*  
I wish that I had not made such a hurtful remark

**BITE** *hard-bitten*  
toughened by experience

**BITE** *someone's bark is worse than his bite*  
the harsh words belie the reality of mild action

**BITE** *to be bitten*  
to be swindled

**BITE** *to be bitten with something*  
to become very enthusiastic over something

**BITE** *to bite*  
to respond predictively to a remark designed to provoke

**BITE** *to bite off more than one can chew*  
to be overly ambitious and thus unrealistic as to one's capabilities

**BITE** *to bite one's fingernails*  
to anxiously await a decision

**BITE** *to bite one's lip*  
to control one's anger

**BITE** *to bite someone's head off*  
to rudely express displeasure at some person

**BITE** *to bite someone's nose off*  
to speak to a person aggressively

**BITE** *to bite the bullet*  
to face up to the difficulties of a situation

**BITE** *to bite the dust*  
to die

**BITE** *to bite the hand that feeds one*  
to show ingratitude

**BITE** *to engage in back biting*  
to criticize in an unfriendly manner

**BITE** *to get only one bite at the cherry*  
to receive no further opportunity

**BITE** *to have a hair of the dog that bit one*  
to drink more in an attempt to overcome the effects of alcohol already consumed

**BITE** *to start to bite*  
to start to be effective

**BITTER** *to be a bitter pill to swallow*  
to be a great humiliation and disappointment which have to be endured

**BLACK** *a black hole*  
an intermediate range of values producing anomalous results or a particularly obnoxious prison cell

**BLACK** *a black sheep*  
a disreputable member of an otherwise reputable group

<b>BLACK</b> <i>in black and white</i>	in writing, spelling out all the details
<b>BLACK</b> <i>the pot calling the kettle black</i>	a person criticizing another person without realizing his own even greater shortcomings
<b>BLACK</b> <i>there are black clouds on the horizon</i>	bad news is expected
<b>BLACK</b> <i>things look black</i>	there is little hope of success or prosperity or a favorable outcome
<b>BLACK</b> <i>to be a black and white issue</i>	to involve very clear distinctions
<b>BLACK</b> <i>to be in someone's black books</i>	to be out of favor with a person
<b>BLACK</b> <i>to be in the black</i>	to have money
<b>BLACK</b> <i>to blackball someone</i>	to reject a person as unsuitable
<b>BLACK</b> <i>to give someone a black look</i>	to indicate one's displeasure with a person
<b>BLACK</b> <i>to have a black mark against one's name</i>	to have a tarnished reputation
<b>BLACK</b> <i>to paint a black picture</i>	to state a set of unfavorable factors
<b>BLACK</b> <i>to paint someone black</i>	to ruin a person's reputation
<b>BLANCHE</b> <i>carte blanche</i>	freedom to use one's discretion on behalf of another person (French, "white card")
<b>BLANK</b> <i>to draw a blank</i>	to be unsuccessful
<b>BLANK</b> <i>to give someone a blank check</i>	to give another person unlimited delegated authority

<b>BLANK</b> <i>to have a blank canvas</i>	to be bereft of ideas
<b>BLANK</b> <i>to refuse point blank</i>	to refuse outright
<b>BLANK</b> <i>to start with a blank sheet of paper</i>	to commence an exercise without being bound by any established practices
<b>BLANKET</b> <i>to be a wet blanket</i>	to be a spoilsport
<b>BLANKET</b> <i>to be born on the wrong side of the blanket</i>	to be illegitimate
<b>BLANKET</b> <i>to throw a blanket over a proposal</i>	to refuse to proceed with a proposal
<b>BLAZE</b> <i>to blaze a trail</i>	to be the first person to do something
<b>BLAZE</b> <i>with both barrels blazing</i>	with great intensity
<b>BLEED</b> <i>one's heart bleeds for someone</i>	one feels truly sad for a person's fate
<b>BLEED</b> <i>to slowly bleed to death</i>	to be heading in gradual steps toward total ruin
<b>BLEEDING</b> <i>to stem the hemorrhage</i>	to put a stop to the financial losses of a project
<b>BLESSING</b> <i>a blessing in disguise</i>	an unwelcome but salutary experience
<b>BLESSING</b> <i>to be a mixed blessing</i>	to be an outcome with some desirable and some undesirable features
<b>BLESSING</b> <i>to give one's blessing to something</i>	to indicate one's approval of something
<b>BLIND</b> <i>a nod is the same as a wink to a blind horse</i>	fine distinctions are not appropriate here

**BLIND** blind Freddy could see that something is such-and-such  
it is very obvious that something is such-and-such

**BLIND** the blind leading the blind  
persons without the necessary skills for a task purporting to impart those skills to others

**BLIND** to be blind to something  
to be unaware of some matter and its significance

**BLIND** to have a blind spot about something  
to fail to recognize the adverse aspects of something

**BLIND** to rush into a blind alley  
to make a precipitate move which does not lead one anywhere

**BLIND** to turn a blind eye to something  
to pretend something obvious does not exist (refers to action by Nelson when disregarding Admiralty signals)

**BLINDER** to take one's blinders off to face reality

**BLINDLY** to follow someone blindly  
to follow a person unquestioningly

**BLOCK** roadblocks  
difficulties

**BLOCK** someone's head is on the block.  
a person is in danger of having his appointment terminated

**BLOCK** stumbling block  
an impediment or difficulty preventing the easy completion of some project or a dilemma involving a moral issue

**BLOCK** the cheering could be heard a block away  
there was great rejoicing

**BLOCK** to be a chip off the old block  
to resemble one's father

**BLOCK** to block someone's path  
to interfere with a person's opportunity to advance himself

**BLOCK** to put one's head on the block  
to have the courage of one's convictions

**BLOOD** a blueblood  
a person of high birth (refers to the appearance of veins on the skin of members of some royal families)

**BLOOD** bad blood  
animosity

**BLOOD** blood, sweat and tears  
hard work and much effort

**BLOOD** bloodshed  
retribution

**BLOOD** fresh blood  
newly joined members of some organization

**BLOOD** full-blooded  
vigorous

**BLOOD** hot-blooded  
very passionate

**BLOOD** one's own flesh and blood  
one's offspring

**BLOOD** the lifeblood  
the main or essential ingredient; or the person or factor instilling enthusiasm

**BLOOD** there is blood in the streets  
much damage has been done to a cause

**BLOOD** there is blood in the water  
something is likely to cause a person to go into a frenzy

**BLOOD** there is blood on the floor  
this has caused great anguish

**BLOOD** to be after someone's blood  
to be keen to make a person the victim of an angry confrontation

**BLOOD** to be in someone's blood  
to be something about which a person is very knowledgeable or keen

**BLOOD** *to curdle one's blood*  
to be horrific

**BLOOD** *to do something in cold blood*

to be cruel without feeling any emotion about it

**BLOOD** *to draw blood from a stone*  
to do the impossible

**BLOOD** *to draw first blood*  
to get an advantage

**BLOOD** *to give something a blood transfusion*  
to give something new enthusiasm

**BLOOD** *to have blood on one's hands*  
to be the person responsible for someone else's predicament

**BLOOD** *to introduce new blood*  
to recruit new members to some organization

**BLOOD** *to let blood*  
to allow some harm as the price for achieving some greater benefit

**BLOOD** *to make bad blood between two parties*  
to cause ill feeling between two parties

**BLOOD** *to make someone's blood boil*  
to make a person very angry

**BLOOD** *to see blood*  
to be very angry

**BLOOD** *to smell blood*  
to divine imminent victory

**BLOOD** *to thirst for blood*  
to be eager for revenge

**BLOODBATH** *a bloodbath*  
catastrophic losses

**BLOODLETTING** *bloodletting*  
planned reductions

**BLOODY** *to get a bloody nose*  
to suffer an undignified rebuff

**BLOSSOM** *to blossom*  
(of a person's attributes) to develop

**BLOT** *to be a blot on someone's escutcheon*

to be a blemish on a person's character

**BLOT** *to blot one's copybook*  
to spoil one's previously good reputation or record

**BLOW** *a blow-by-blow description*  
a description overburdened by unimportant or irrelevant detail

**BLOW** *a body blow*  
a very damaging event

**BLOW** *death blow*  
incident which results in the destruction of something

**BLOW** *the affair blew up*  
certain unwelcome facts have become publicly available

**BLOW** *to be a severe blow*  
to be a great disappointment

**BLOW** *to blow hot and cold*  
to vacillate

**BLOW** *to blow one's own trumpet*  
to immodestly publicize one's own attributes

**BLOW** *to blow one's top*  
to show anger (refers to a volcano)

**BLOW** *to blow something*  
unintentionally to destroy some opportunity

**BLOW** *to blow something out of the water*  
to destroy something

**BLOW** *to blow the cobwebs away*  
to revive an old issue

**BLOW** *to blow the lid off something*  
to expose something no matter how embarrassing this might be

**BLOW** *to blow the whistle on someone*

to report a person's improper behavior to the authorities or to publicize it

**BLOW** to blow up  
(of a person) to express rage

**BLOW** to blow up in someone's face  
to rebound on a person

**BLOW** to get one's head blown off  
to be very soundly abused

**BLOW** to see which way the wind  
is blowing  
to establish the factors relevant to a  
situation

**BLOW** to soften the blow  
to take action to reduce the trauma of  
bad news

**BLOW** to strike a blow  
to resume work

**BLOW** to strike a blow for some  
principle  
to work toward the attainment of  
some principle

**BLOWTORCH** to apply the  
blowtorch to something  
to totally destroy something

**BLUE** a blueblood  
a person of high birth (refers to the  
appearance of veins on the skin of  
members of some royal families)

**BLUE** between the devil and the  
deep blue sea  
to be faced with two equally unpalat-  
able alternatives which cannot both  
be avoided

**BLUE** blue ribbon  
of superb quality (refers to the insig-  
nia of the Order of the Garter)

**BLUE** blue sky  
supremely optimistic

**BLUE** blue-eyed boy  
person shown unjustified favoritism

**BLUE** once in a blue moon  
very rarely (refers to the volcanic  
eruption at Krakatoa in 1883 when  
volcanic dust caused the moon to  
appear blue)

**BLUE** to be a blue-chip stock  
to be of excellent quality

**BLUE** to be a bolt from the blue  
to be a totally unexpected event

**BLUE** to be in a blue funk  
to be terrified

**BLUE** to come out of the blue  
to be totally unexpected

**BLUE** to feel blue  
to feel depressed

**BLUE** to go on till one is blue in  
the face  
to argue for a long time

**BLUE** to have a blue fit  
to be very agitated

**BLUE** to scream blue murder  
to make serious allegations

**BLUE** true blue  
superbly loyal

**BLUEPRINT** blueprint  
a master plan for some activity or a  
model which others can copy

**BLUSH** at first blush  
prima facie

**BOARD** a springboard  
a situation from which one intends to  
make a rapid advance

**BOARD** across the board  
over the whole range of activity

**BOARD** back to the drawing board  
the details need to be reconsidered

**BOARD** to act as a sounding board  
to give, on request, constructive criti-  
cisms of ideas tentatively held

**BOARD** to be above board  
to be quite legitimate

**BOARD** to be on the drawing board  
to be in the process of being planned  
in detail

**BOARD** to go overboard  
to act foolishly and in an excessive  
way

**BOARD** to have the runs on the board

to have a demonstratable record of achievement

**BOARD** to pipe someone on board

to welcome a person

**BOARD** to take something on board

to offer to give further consideration to a matter

**BOARDER** to repel boarders

to keep out unwanted persons

**BOAT** to be in the same boat

to share a common set of difficulties

**BOAT** to get off the boat

to disassociate oneself from some project

**BOAT** to miss the boat

to fail to exploit an opportunity

**BOAT** to rock the boat

to disturb the comfortable status quo

**BOB** Bob's your uncle

that solves the problem

**BOB** to have two bob each way

to equivocate

**BODY** a body blow

a very damaging event

**BODY** over my dead body

never

**BODY** to keep body and soul

together

to keep alive

**BOGGLE** the mind boggles

this is astonishing

**BOIL** hard-boiled

toughened by experience

**BOIL** it boils down to this

the essential features are as follows

**BOIL** to bring something to the boil

to bring something to a climax

**BOIL** to come off the boil

to no longer require urgent attention

**BOIL** to keep the pot boiling

to ensure that an issue stays current

**BOIL** to make someone's blood boil

to make a person very angry

**BOIL** to reach boiling point

to reach a climax

**BOILER** not to bust one's boiler

not to exert oneself unduly

**BOLT** nuts and bolts

basic ingredients

**BOLT** to be a bolt from the blue

to be a totally unexpected event

**BOLT** to shoot one's bolt

to lose one's temper

**BOLT** to shut the stable door after

the horse has bolted

to take preventive action only after the relevant event

**BOMB** a bombshell

an unpleasant surprise

**BOMB** a time bomb

a source of serious problems which are certain to surface later on

**BOMB** to be a bomb

to be grossly defective

**BOMB** to put a bomb under someone

to induce a person to take some action

**BOMBARD** to bombard someone

with something

to overwhelm a person with material or to persistently assail a person with words of argument or abuse

**BONE** a bone of contention

the subject matter of violent disagreement

**BONE** backbone

chief strength or character

**BONE** the bare bones

(of a story) nothing but the essential elements

**BONE** to cut costs to the bone

to economize

**BONE** to feel something in one's bones

to suspect something without having any real evidence for it

**BONE** to get close to the bone

to cause discomfort by being accurate

**BONE** to gnaw one's fingers to the bone

to fret

**BONE** to have a bone to pick

to have a grievance which requires discussion

**BONE** to make no bones about it

to be brutally frank

**BONE** to point the bone at someone

to accuse a person (actually, an Australian Aboriginal method of applying a curse)

**BONE** to put flesh and bone on something

to supply details of a proposal previously revealed only in outline

**BONE** to throw someone a bone

to fob a person off with a symbolic but unimportant gesture

**BONE** to work one's fingers to the bone

to work very hard

**BONEHEADED** boneheaded

stupid

**BONNET** to have a bee in one's bonnet

to have an obsession

**BOO** to be too frightened to say

"boo" to a goose

to be excessively shy

**BOOBY** to win the booby prize

to do worse than all others

**BOOK** to balance the books

to get one's own back

**BOOK** to be a closed book

to be a secret

**BOOK** to be a turn up for the books  
to be a surprising development

**BOOK** to be in someone's black books

to be out of favor with a person

**BOOK** to be in someone's good books

to be well regarded by another person

**BOOK** to close the book on something

to terminate an activity

**BOOK** to cook the books

fraudulently to maintain false records of financial transactions

**BOOK** to judge a book by its cover

foolishly to go only by superficial appearances

**BOOK** to play by the book

to apply the rules strictly

**BOOK** to take a leaf out of someone's book

to model oneself on another person

**BOOK** to talk one's book

to present arguments which, while plausible, are really designed to foster one's vested interest

**BOOK** to throw the book at someone

to prosecute a person with all the vigor allowed by law

**BOOK** to use every trick in the book

to try very hard and use every conceivable argument

**BOOKWORM** a bookworm

a person who likes reading and study

**BOOM** to lower the boom

to terminate an activity

**BOOT** the boot is on the other foot

the real facts are the other way round

**BOOT** to be too big for one's boots

to have an unwarranted belief as to one's capabilities or status

**BOOT** to give someone the boot

to terminate a person's appointment

<b>BOOT</b> to go in boots and all to do something very roughly	<b>BORROW</b> to live on borrowed time to live longer than expected
<b>BOOT</b> to hang up one's boots to retire	<b>BOTTLE</b> a bottleneck a factor obstructing an even flow
<b>BOOT</b> to have one's heart in one's boots to be terrified	<b>BOTTLE</b> to be a full bottle on something to be very knowledgeable
<b>BOOT</b> to lick someone's boots to show humility	<b>BOTTLE</b> to bottle up some feeling to keep some feeling entirely to oneself
<b>BOOT</b> to put the boot in to reprimand a person	<b>BOTTLE</b> to let the genie out of the bottle to cause something irreversible to take place
<b>BOOT</b> to quake in one's boots to be afraid	<b>BOTTLE</b> to put the genie back in the bottle to undo something which cannot be undone
<b>BOOTSTRAP</b> to be British to one's bootstraps to be very demonstrative about one's Britishness	<b>BOTTOM</b> from the bottom of one's heart very sincerely
<b>BOOTSTRAP</b> to pull oneself up by one's bootstraps to make a praiseworthy effort to better oneself unaided	<b>BOTTOM</b> rock bottom very low
<b>BORE</b> full bore ahead! proceed forward!	<b>BOTTOM</b> the bottom line the conclusion which matters or the net effect of a series of developments
<b>BORE</b> to bore someone to death to greatly weary a person by dull and uninteresting conversation or by lack of action	<b>BOTTOM</b> to be at the bottom of the ladder to be in the most junior position in some hierarchy
<b>BORE</b> to bore someone to tears to greatly weary a person by dull and uninteresting conversation or by lack of action	<b>BOTTOM</b> to be at the bottom of the totem pole to be in the most junior position in some hierarchy
<b>BORE</b> to bore the pants off someone to weary a person by dull and uninteresting conversation	<b>BOTTOM</b> to really scrape the bottom of the barrel to lower one's standards because one is short of important or relevant issues
<b>BORN</b> not to have been born yesterday not to be naive	<b>BOUNCE</b> to bounce back to resume a cheerful existence after some setback
<b>BORN</b> to be born on the wrong side of the blanket to be illegitimate	<b>BOUND</b> by leaps and bounds with surprisingly fast progress
<b>BORN</b> to be born with a silver spoon in one's mouth to be brought up by wealthy parents	

**BOW** *shots across the bow*  
warnings

**BOW** *to bow down*  
to succumb to pressure

**BOW** *to bow out*  
to retire from some activity

**BOW** *to draw a long bow*  
to state a conclusion which while possible is unlikely on the known facts

**BOW** *to have a second string to one's bow*  
to have an additional qualification appropriate to the task

**BOW** *to take a bow*  
to receive recognition

**BOWL** *to be in a goldfish bowl*  
to be very open to view

**BOX** *Box and Cox*  
two persons who are never around at the same time (from the name of a play)

**BOX** *the whole box and dice*  
all relevant components

**BOX** *to be in the box seat*  
to be in a very powerful position to control activity

**BOX** *to be on one's soap box*  
to hold forth on an issue about which one feels keenly

**BOX** *to be one out of the box*  
to be unexpectedly superb

**BOX** *to open up a Pandora's box*  
to do something which produces all sorts of undesired and unexpected side-effects (refers to the woman in Greek mythology who brought misery to mankind; the box contained human ills)

**BOX** *to put someone back in his box*  
to make it clear to a person that his views are not welcome

**BOX** *to shadow box*  
to go through the motions without achieving or intending to achieve anything

**BOY** *a backroom boy*  
an expert unable to communicate effectively with the lay public

**BOY** *a whipping boy*  
a person made to suffer for the faults of others

**BOY** *as every schoolboy knows*  
as is recognized by everyone

**BOY** *blue-eyed boy*  
person shown unjustified favoritism

**BOY** *since Adam was a boy*  
for a very long time

**BOY** *to be a good boy*  
to be cooperative

**BOY** *to separate the men from the boys*  
to distinguish between those with and without certain skills

**BRACE** *to splice the main brace*  
to serve an extra ration of rum

**BRAIN** *anyone with even half a brain*  
everyone

**BRAIN** *hare-brained*  
wildly stupid

**BRAIN** *someone's brain needs washing*  
a person is very silly

**BRAIN** *to have a bird brain*  
to be stupid

**BRAIN** *to have something on one's brain*  
to be obsessed with some notion

**BRAIN** *to pick someone's brain*  
to get the benefit of another person's knowledge and experience

**BRAINCHILD** *brainchild*  
inspired original idea

**BRAINSTORM** *to brainstorm*

to pool thoughts in the course of a session designed to generate fresh ideas and especially to build upon the ideas of others

**BRAINWAVE** *a brainwave*

a suddenly occurring bright idea

**BRAKE** *to put the brake on someone*

to stop a person

**BRANCH** *to hold out an olive branch*

to make peace overtures (Genesis 8:11)

**BRASS** *not to have a brass razoo*

to be very poor

**BRASS** *to get down to brass tacks*

to discuss the aspects which really matter

**BRAVE** *to brave the water*

to enter a venture with courage and determination

**BRAVE** *to put a brave face on it*

to face adversity cheerfully

**BREACH** *once more unto the breach*

let us get on with the task (from Shakespeare's 'Henry V')

**BREACH** *to stand in the breach*

to bear the brunt of criticisms

**BREAD** *a bread and butter issue*

a basic issue which is of importance to many people

**BREAD** *a breadwinner*

a person earning by personal exertion the income of a household

**BREAD** *to be someone's bread and butter*

to be a person's livelihood or to be a person's everyday experience

**BREAD** *to cast one's bread upon the waters*

not to expect gratitude or recognition for one's good works (Ecclesiastes 11:1)

**BREAD** *to claim that something is the best thing since sliced bread*  
to have an exaggerated opinion of the importance or novelty of an invention or practice

**BREAD** *to know on which side one's bread is buttered*

to be aware of the important considerations

**BREAD** *to put jam on someone's bread*

to make a good situation even better

**BREADTH** *to be within a hair's breadth of something*

to be extremely close to something

**BREAK** *all hell broke loose*

great confusion erupted

**BREAK** *at a break-neck pace*

very fast

**BREAK** *back-breaking*

overburdening

**BREAK** *heartbreak*

despair

**BREAK** *not to break someone's door down*

to be quite unenthusiastic about someone's goods or services

**BREAK** *one cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs*

the desired end dictates the means even if they cause harm to others

**BREAK** *the straw which broke the camel's back*

the latest step, which, when added to a large number of seemingly harmless previous steps, sets off a disaster resulting from the cumulative effect

**BREAK** *to be a broken reed*

to be a weak and unreliable person

**BREAK** *to break a drought*

to resume supplies after an interval

**BREAK** *to break down the barriers*  
to do away with the prejudice preventing something

**BREAK** to break new ground  
to do something for which there is no precedent

**BREAK** to break one's duck  
to end a spell without results

**BREAK** to break one's neck to do something  
to be particularly keen

**BREAK** to break ranks  
to identify oneself as having separate interests or views from the rest of a group

**BREAK** to break the back of a task  
to complete the bulk of the work

**BREAK** to break the ice  
to take the initiative in starting discussions

**BREAK** to break the spell  
to spoil the effect

**BREAK** to make or break someone  
to be a factor leading either to a person's success or to his failure, with no intermediate position

**BREAKFAST** to be a dog's breakfast  
to be a very messy arrangement

**BREAKFAST** to be able to eat someone for breakfast  
to be able to outwit a person very easily

**BREAKTHROUGH** a breakthrough  
success in overcoming resistance to a proposal

**BREAST** to beat one's breast  
to express sorrow or anger

**BREAST** to make a clean breast of something  
to confess

**BREATH** not to hold one's breath for something  
to give up all expectation

**BREATH** to be a breath of fresh air  
to be a pleasant change from the past

**BREATH** to draw a deep breath  
to get ready for exertion or for emotional news

**BREATH** to take one's breath away  
to greatly surprise or astonish

**BREATH** to wait with bated breath  
to be excited in anticipation of some event

**BREATH** to waste one's breath  
to talk or request something without achieving anything

**BREATHE** to breathe down someone's neck

to cause annoyance to another person by remaining in his vicinity or by supervising him too closely; or to be narrowly behind another person in some competitive situation

**BREATHE** to breathe easy  
(following some crisis) to relax

**BREATHE** to breathe life into a corpse

to revive something moribund

**BREATHE** to get some breathing space

to get more time in which to accomplish something

**BREECHES** to be too big for one's breeches

to have an exaggerated idea of one's own importance

**BREEZE** it's a breeze  
it is easy

**BRICK** it is London to a brick  
it is virtually certain

**BRICK** one can't make bricks without straw

one cannot achieve results in the absence of adequate resources

**BRICK** to bang one's head up against a brick wall

to fight an unwinnable case

**BRICK** to be up against a brick wall  
to be unable to achieve anything because of intractable opposition or apathy

<b>BRICK</b> to drop a brick to make a sudden shattering and unexpected announcement	<b>BRING</b> to bring someone to heel to make a person conform
<b>BRICKBATS</b> to throw brickbats at someone to express displeasure with a person	<b>BRING</b> to bring something to the boil to bring something to a climax
<b>BRIDGE</b> a lot of water has flowed under the bridge since then much has happened since then	<b>BRING</b> to bring the house down to greatly amuse an audience
<b>BRIDGE</b> to be water under the bridge to matter no longer	<b>BRINK</b> to push someone over the brink by a small action to cause the absolute ruin (financially or emotionally) of someone already in peril
<b>BRIDGE</b> to bridge a gap to fill a need or make up a shortfall	<b>BRITISH</b> the very best of British luck you will have a hard time of it, but you carry my best wishes
<b>BRIDGE</b> to bridge a gulf to overcome a wide divergence in views	<b>BRITISH</b> to be British to one's bootstraps to be very demonstrative about one's Britishness
<b>BRIDGE</b> to build bridges to work at improving relationships	<b>BROAD</b> a broad brush approach rough justice
<b>BRIDGE</b> to burn one's bridges to do something irreversible	<b>BROAD</b> it is as broad as it is long it does not really matter
<b>BRIDGE</b> to cross a bridge only when one comes to it to await the crystallization of a situation before sorting it out	<b>BROAD</b> to have broad shoulders to be able to cope well with responsibility
<b>BRIDGEHEAD</b> a bridgehead an advance post set up to facilitate further access to some new market, etc.	<b>BROADEN</b> to broaden someone's mind to expose a person to a greater variety of experiences and interests than he had previously
<b>BRIGHT</b> bright-eyed and bushy-tailed naive but enthusiastic	<b>BROADSIDE</b> a broadside a short verbal attack
<b>BRIGHT</b> the bright side the favorable aspects	<b>BRONZE</b> to be cast in bronze to be virtually unalterable
<b>BRIGHT</b> the one bright spot on the horizon the only hopeful aspect	<b>BROOM</b> a new broom a changed regime which is likely to alter the status quo
<b>BRING</b> to bring a plate to take food to a party	<b>BROTH</b> too many cooks spoil the broth one leader is all that is required
<b>BRING</b> to bring someone down to earth to disillusion a person	<b>BROTHER</b> a soul brother a person of similar ideals

**BROW** *highbrow*  
intellectual or cultural

**BROW** *to knit one's brows*  
to indicate one's displeasure

**BROWN** *to be browned off*  
to be fed-up

**BROWNIE** *to get brownie points*  
to do a person a favor with the likely  
result that the recipient will do a  
favor in return in due course

**BRUISE** *to nurse one's bruises*  
to face up to the consequences of  
defeat

**BRUSH** *a broad brush approach*  
rough justice

**BRUSH** *to be tarred with the same  
brush*

to be damned merely because of  
one's association with another person

**BRUSH** *to brush someone aside*  
to pass over and ostentatiously ignore  
a person

**BRUSH** *to give someone the  
brush-off*

to make it clear that one does not want  
dealings or conversation with a person

**BRUSH** *to have a touch of the  
tarbrush*

to be not quite a full-blood Caucasian

**BUBBLE** *a South Sea bubble*  
an unrealistic financial venture which  
is bound to result in total loss

**BUBBLE** *the bubble has burst*  
the inevitable has occurred or the  
scheme has come to ruination

**BUCK** *the buck stops here*  
I accept full responsibility (sign on  
the desk of Harry S. Truman when  
president of the United States)

**BUCK** *to pass the buck*  
in an uncooperative spirit to decline  
responsibility for a matter on the  
grounds that someone else more pro-  
perly has responsibility for it

**BUCKET** *to be only a drop in the  
bucket*

to be quite insignificant in the total  
scene

**BUCKET** *to kick the bucket*  
to die

**BUCKET** *to tip a bucket on someone*  
to point out in a humiliating way  
another person's faults

**BUD** *to nip something in the bud*  
to stop some activity in its early  
stages when stopping it is still rela-  
tively easy

**BUGGY** *the horse and buggy days*  
long ago

**BUILD** *to build bridges*  
to work at improving relationships

**BUILD** *to engage in empire building*  
to set out to expand the size of the  
business or bureaucratic unit for  
which one is responsible, especially  
as a means of increasing one's own  
importance

**BULL** *a bull in a china shop*  
a careless person likely to cause great  
damage

**BULL** *a cock and bull story*  
an explanation which is completely  
unbelievable and unacceptable

**BULL** *to be a red rag to a bull*  
to be something which makes a per-  
son very angry and very excited (re-  
fers to the erroneous belief that the  
color red, rather than the motion of  
waving, excites a bull)

**BULL** *to be within a bull's roar of  
something*  
to be very close to something

**BULL** *to charge like a wounded bull*  
to impose excessive prices (a play on  
words; not a simile)

**BULL** *to hit the bull's eye*  
to make the correct decision

**BULL** *to take the bull by the horns*  
to come to grips with the realities of a difficult problem

**BULLDOZE** *to bulldoze some proposal through*  
to ensure the passage of some measure in complete disregard of criticism or opposition

**BULLET** *a gun with no bullets*  
something incomplete and therefore useless for the desired purpose

**BULLET** *a magic bullet*  
a guaranteed remedy

**BULLET** *to bite the bullet*  
to face up to the difficulties of a situation

**BULLET** *to have a bullet which can be fired*  
to have available an effective response which can be used at will

**BUMP** *to bump into someone*  
to meet a person accidentally

**BUN** *a bunfight*  
a minor and relatively friendly skirmish

**BUNDLE** *to drop one's bundle*  
to become despondent

**BUNDLE** *to save a bundle*  
to save much money

**BURDEN** *to put a burden on someone's shoulders*  
to impose responsibilities on a person

**BURN** *burning question*  
a much discussed question

**BURN** *heartburn*  
regret at some non-achievement

**BURN** *to be better than a poke in the eye with a burnt stick*  
to be particularly welcome

**BURN** *to burn one's bridges*  
to do something irreversible

**BURN** *to burn one's fingers*  
to lose money through foolishness

**BURN** *to burn oneself out*  
to overexert oneself

**BURN** *to burn the candle at both ends*  
to work excessively long hours

**BURN** *to burn the midnight oil*  
to work late into the night

**BURN** *to fiddle while Rome burns*  
to neglect important considerations while concentrating on trivial side-issues

**BURN** *to have money burning a hole in one's pocket*  
to be impatient to spend or invest available funds

**BURN** *to keep the home fires burning*  
to maintain normal domestic activity during the temporary absence of the breadwinner

**BURN** *were your ears burning?*  
we were discussing you

**BURNER** *something is on the back burner*  
consideration is postponed pending further research

**BURST** *the bubble has burst*  
the inevitable has occurred or the scheme has come to ruination

**BURST** *the dam burst*  
the cumulative effect of many things caused a disaster

**BURST** *to be bursting at the seams*  
to be very crowded

**BURY** *dead and buried*  
(of some issue) definitely concluded, especially so long ago as to be nearly forgotten

**BURY** *to bury one's head in the sand*  
to refuse to face up to an unpleasant truth (refers to the reputed habit of ostriches in danger)

**BURY** *to bury the hatchet*  
to abandon hostilities

**BUS** *the wheels are back under the bus*  
normal activity has been resumed

**BUS** *to jump on the bus*  
to join an activity already well under way

**BUS** *to miss the bus*  
to fail to exploit an opportunity

**BUSH** *a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush*

a benefit currently available is more valuable than a seemingly much larger benefit which may or may not be achieved in the future

**BUSH** *to beat about the bush*  
to hide the unpleasant truth

**BUSHEL** *to hide one's light under a bushel*

to keep others in ignorance of one's skills and experience

**BUSHFIRE** *to fight bushfires*  
to deal with crises as they arise rather than take preventive action

**BUSHY** *bright-eyed and bushy-tailed*  
naive but enthusiastic

**BUSINESS** *monkey business*  
mischievous or underhand activity

**BUSINESS** *to mean business*  
to demonstrate a serious intent to do something

**BUSMAN** *a busman's holiday*  
leisure time spent in a way not significantly different from one's normal business activities

**BUST** *not to bust one's boiler*  
not to exert oneself unduly

**BUTT** *to butt in*  
to involve oneself uninvited in someone else's conversation

**BUTT** *to get up off one's butt*  
to cease being apathetic

**BUTTER** *a bread and butter issue*  
a basic issue which is of importance to many people

**BUTTER** *a butter fingers*  
a person unable to catch and/or hold on to an object

**BUTTER** *someone looks as if butter would not melt in his mouth*  
a person looks sweet and innocent

**BUTTER** *to be someone's bread and butter*

to be a person's livelihood or to be a person's everyday experience

**BUTTER** *to know on which side one's bread is buttered*

to be aware of the important considerations

**BUTTERFLY** *to have a butterfly mind*

not to concentrate on the matter on hand

**BUTTERFLY** *to have butterflies in one's stomach*

a feeling of anxiety

**BUTTON** *to button up one's purse*  
to refuse to spend money

**BUTTON** *to hit the panic button*  
to act hastily and irrationally

**BUTTON** *to press a button*  
to make something happen

**BUY** *I buy that*  
I accept that idea

**BUY** *to buy a pig in a poke*  
to buy goods of unknown quality

**BUY** *to buy into some argument*  
to seek to participate in some discussion

**BUY** *to buy something for a song*  
to buy something very cheaply

**BUY** *to buy straw hats in winter*  
to buy in a depressed market when most other people are sellers

**BUZZ** *to buzz off*  
to go away

**C**

**CAB** to be the first cab off the rank  
to start ahead of all others

**CABBAGE** to be on someone's  
cabbage patch

to engage in a competitive activity in  
a territory regarded by someone al-  
ready there as rightfully belonging  
exclusively to him

**CAIN** the mark of Cain  
disgrace (Genesis 4:15)

**CAIN** to raise Cain

to create a disturbance (Genesis 4:5)

**CAKE** a share of the cake

a portion of the total available for  
distribution

**CAKE** that takes the cake

that is quite absurd or outrageous or  
excessively cheeky

**CAKE** to be a piece of cake

to be very easy or greatly to one's  
liking

**CAKE** to be icing on top of the cake

to be an additional benefit in an al-  
ready satisfactory scenario

**CAKE** to want to have one's cake

and eat it too

to want two mutually exclusive alter-  
natives

**CALF** to kill the fatted calf

to demonstrate welcome and forgive-  
ness on a person's return (Luke  
15:23)

**CALL** he who pays the piper calls  
the tune

a person contributing money or re-  
sources to a project is entitled to a  
say in its control

**CALL** the pot calling the kettle black  
a person criticizing another person  
without realizing his own even great-  
er shortcomings

**CALL** to call a spade a spade  
not to mince words

**CALL** to call it a day  
to cease involvement with some activ-  
ity

**CALL** to call off the dogs  
to abandon an audit or other inquiry

**CALL** to call the shots

to have the direction over a project

**CALL** the calm before the storm  
the quiet period before an expected or  
inevitable crisis

**CAMEL** the straw which broke the  
camel's back

the latest step, which, when added to  
a large number of seemingly harm-  
less previous steps, sets off a disaster  
resulting from the cumulative effect

**CAMP** in our camp

in the group representing our vested  
interest

**CAMP** to have one's feet in both  
camps

to have good relations with two  
opponents

**CAN** a can of worms

a heterogeneous collection of unex-  
pected problems

**CAN** to carry the can for someone

to accept the blame for another per-  
son's actions or inactions

**CANCER** a cancer

an evil which is likely to spread

**CANDLE** not fit to hold a candle to  
someone

greatly inferior to another person

**CANDLE** not to be worth the candle

to be too expensive in relation to the  
true value

**CANDLE** to burn the candle at both  
ends

to work excessively long hours

**CANE** to take a caning

to suffer the adverse consequences of  
one's acts or omissions

**CANNON** *a loose cannon on the deck*  
a mistake likely to cause trouble

**CANOE** *to paddle one's own canoe*  
to do something unaided and in one's own way

**CANTER** *to win the prize in a canter*  
to win very easily

**CANVAS** *to get off the canvas*  
to recover after near defeat

**CANVAS** *to have a blank canvas*  
to be bereft of ideas

**CAP** *a feather in one's cap*  
a meritorious personal achievement

**CAP** *cap*  
upper permitted limit

**CAP** *if the cap fits then wear it*  
if your circumstances correspond with those described then you must endure the consequences

**CAP** *to cap a story*  
to tell an even funnier story than the one just told

**CAP** *to earn a dunce's cap*  
to do something stupid

**CAP** *to go cap in hand*  
to show humility while soliciting a favor

**CAP** *to put one's thinking cap on*  
to concentrate on finding a solution to a difficult problem

**CAP** *to set one's cap at someone*  
(of females) to try to attract a person as a marriage partner

**CAP** *to throw one's cap into the air*  
to celebrate some achievement

**CARAVAN** *the caravan will roll on*  
the activity will continue

**CARD** *a house of cards*  
an organization which gives a misleading impression of solidity

**CARD** *a three card trick*  
a ruse used by a dishonest person in order to induce his victims to hand over some of their assets

**CARD** *a wild card*  
an unexpected development

**CARD** *drawcard*  
feature expected to attract a crowd

**CARD** *let the cards fall where they may*  
irrespective of what happens

**CARD** *to be on the cards*  
to be likely

**CARD** *to have a card up one's sleeve*  
to secretly have information relevant to a transaction

**CARD** *to have the cards stacked against one*  
to be faced with many difficulties frustrating a project

**CARD** *to hold all the cards*  
to be assured of victory

**CARD** *to hold one's cards close to one's chest*  
to keep one's plans and strategies secret

**CARD** *to hold the trump card*  
to be in an unbeatable position to defeat others

**CARD** *to lay one's cards on the table*  
to be utterly frank and open or to honestly disclose one's position

**CARD** *to play every card in the pack*  
to try very hard and use every conceivable argument

**CARD** *to play one's cards right*  
to approach a matter sensibly

**CARD** *to play the cards as they fall*  
to deal with problems as they arise

**CARD** *to play the last card in the pack*  
to lower one's standards in a final desperate effort

**CARD** to play the trump card  
to make a final move, thereby defeating one's opponents

**CARD** without any cards to play  
without the means to achieve something

**CARE** a devil-may-care attitude  
a reckless attitude

**CARE** not to care a pin for something  
not to have the slightest interest in something

**CARPET** the red-carpet treatment  
courtesies extended to a person to make him feel important and welcome

**CARPET** to be on the carpet  
to be lectured in regard to one's alleged misdeeds

**CARPET** to get a magic carpet ride to something  
to be very fortunate in achieving some objective

**CARPET** to sweep something under the carpet  
to pretend that some blemish does not exist

**CARROT** sticks and carrots  
disincentives and incentives in combination (refers to the handling of donkeys)

**CARRY** speak softly and carry a big stick  
be polite to your potential enemies but maintain an active and visible defense capability (from a speech by Theodore Roosevelt in 1901)

**CARRY** to be carried away  
to be excited by something imaginative

**CARRY** to carry a spare tire  
to be fat

**CARRY** to carry a torch for someone  
to act as an enthusiastic advocate of another person's cause

**CARRY** to carry coals to Newcastle  
to do something ridiculously unnecessary

**CARRY** to carry the can for someone  
to accept the blame for another person's actions or inactions

**CARRY** to carry the world on one's shoulders  
to resent being left to perform a huge task single-handedly (refers to Atlas, who was condemned to bear the heavens on his shoulders for leading the Titans against the gods)

**CARRY** to carry weight  
to be influential

**CART** to put the cart before the horse  
to do things in the wrong order

**CART** to upset the applecart  
to engage in conduct disturbing a peaceful state of affairs and thereby cause discomfort

**CARTE** carte blanche  
freedom to use one's discretion on behalf of another person (French, "white card")

**CARVE** to be carved in marble  
to be virtually unalterable

**CARVE** to carve out a niche for oneself  
to deliberately create an opportunity to use one's talents effectively

**CASE** a basket case  
a poorly-performing enterprise

**CASE** to be an open and shut case  
to be an unarguable proposition (a phrase popular in detective novels and probably a play on the two meanings of the word "case")

**CASE** to have a cast-iron case  
to be absolutely assured of victory in legal proceedings

**CASE** to make a Federal case out of something

to attach far too much significance to a trivial issue

**CAST** the die is cast

the course of action in train is irreversible

**CAST** to be cast in bronze

to be virtually unalterable

**CAST** to be cast in someone's mold

to take after another person

**CAST** to cast a chill over something

to be a depressing influence over something

**CAST** to cast a cloud over something

to spoil the pleasure of an occasion

**CAST** to cast a shadow over something

to introduce a note of warning or sadness in regard to some matter

**CAST** to cast an eye over something

to look at something critically

**CAST** to cast one's bread upon the waters

not to expect gratitude or recognition for one's good works (Ecclesiastes 11:1)

**CAST** to cast prudence to the winds

to cease being prudent

**CAST** to cast sheep's eyes at someone

to look at a person amorously

**CAST** to give a cast-iron guarantee

to give a very secure undertaking to do something

**CAST** to have a cast-iron case

to be absolutely assured of victory in legal proceedings

**CASTLE** a castle in Spain

an impracticable proposition

**CASTLE** a castle in the air

an impracticable proposition

**CAT** a cat and dog existence  
a life full of frequent squabbles

**CAT** a cat may look at a king  
don't give yourself airs!

**CAT** a copycat

a person who imitates another person's ideas

**CAT** a game of cat and mouse

negotiations between two parties of unequal bargaining power during which the stronger makes some temporary concessions to the weaker without, however, affecting the latter's eventual total defeat

**CAT** there is more than one way to skin a cat

this can be achieved in a variety of acceptable ways

**CAT** there is no room to swing a cat

this place is very small (actually refers to a cat-o'-nine-tails)

**CAT** to be a cat's paw

to be a person who is being used as a tool by others

**CAT** to be the cat's pajamas

to have an exaggerated idea of one's own importance

**CAT** to bell the cat

to do some dangerous but highly useful mission (refers to a fable in which none of the mice was willing to put a warning bell on a cat)

**CAT** to kick the cat

to take out one's anger on some innocent party

**CAT** to let the cat out of the bag

to reveal an embarrassing secret (refers to the exposure of cheats at fairs, attempting to pass a cat wrapped in a sack off as a piglet)

**CAT** to rain cats and dogs

to rain heavily

**CAT** to see which way the cat jumps

to await developments

**CAT** to throw a cat among the pigeons  
to cause consternation by revealing an unpleasant and unexpected fact

**CAT** when the cat is away the mice will play  
in the absence of supervision, discipline will be lax

**CAT** wildcat  
(of a strike) unofficial; (of an oil well) drilled as a pure prospect; (of a financial scheme) very hazardous

**CATALYST** a catalyst  
a factor causing something to happen

**CATAPULT** to catapult  
(of sales, etc.) to increase rapidly

**CATAPULT** to catapult to fame  
to achieve fame unexpectedly quickly

**CATCH** I wouldn't be caught dead without some object

I regard some object as very important

**CATCH** catch-22  
a situation made impossible because it requires as a prior fulfillment something which does not exist until that condition is satisfied (title of a novel by Joseph Heller)

**CATCH** first catch your hare  
do things in logical order and after proper preparation (advice on how to cook a hare in Mrs. Beeton's celebrated COOK BOOK)

**CATCH** to be caught by the tide  
to be dealt with by something inevitable

**CATCH** to catch someone flat-footed  
to embarrass a person in the course of his making mistakes or being unprepared

**CATCH** to catch someone in a bind  
to find a person in a difficulty from which he cannot readily extricate himself

**CATCH** to catch someone in the net  
to unexpectedly involve a particular person in the course of activity designed to involve many others

**CATCH** to catch someone off guard  
to surprise a person (a fencing term)

**CATCH** to catch someone on the hop  
to take a person by surprise

**CATCH** to catch someone red-handed  
to apprehend a person in the course of committing a crime

**CATCH** to catch someone with his pants down  
to act when another person least expects it

**CATCH** to catch someone with his trousers down  
to act when another person least expects it

**CATCH** to catch someone's eye  
to attract the attention of another person or to seek permission to address that person

**CATCH** to throw a sprat to catch a mackerel  
to risk a little in the hope of gaining much

**CAVE** an Aladdin's cave  
a place full of unexpected treasure

**CAVE** to cave in  
to yield to pressure

**CEILING** ceiling  
upper permitted limit

**CEMENT** to cement a relationship  
to do something in an endeavor to make a relationship permanent

**CENT** to have fifty cents each way  
to equivocate

**CENT** to throw in one's two cents' worth  
to modestly supply one's own facts or views

**CENTER** *the center of gravity*  
the place most convenient to the greatest number

**CENTER** *to be center stage*  
to have everyone's attention

**CENTER** *to be the center of the spider's web*  
to control an operation which involves numerous and/or complex ingredients

**CENTERPIECE** *the centerpiece*  
(of a proposal) the highlight or the main ingredient

**CHAFF** *to separate the wheat from the chaff*  
to distinguish between important and unimportant ingredients

**CHAIN** *the weakest link in the chain*  
the least efficient component in a project the overall efficiency of which is governed by the efficiency of the least efficient component

**CHAIN** *to drag the chain*  
to perform unduly slowly

**CHAIR** *to get an arm-chair ride*  
to be given a particularly easy time

**CHAIR** *to play musical chairs*  
to be a part of a general reshuffling of duties or functions which is not necessarily to everyone's liking

**CHALK** *chalk it up!*  
the success was unexpected

**CHALK** *to win by a long chalk*  
to win very conclusively

**CHAMELEON** *a chameleon*  
a person without character who changes his stance all the time to reflect the current circumstances

**CHAMP** *to champ at the bit*  
to be impatient

**CHANCE** *a fat chance*  
little hope

**CHANCE** *not a dog's chance*  
no hope at all

**CHANCE** *not the ghost of a chance*  
no hope at all

**CHANCE** *to chance one's arm*  
to take a great risk (refers to the stripes on the uniforms of non-commissioned officers)

**CHANCE** *to have a snowflake's chance in hell*  
to have no hope or possibility at all

**CHANGE** *a leopard cannot change his spots*  
each person is born with certain unalterable characteristics

**CHANGE** *the cold wind of change*  
the unpleasant realities of new circumstances

**CHANGE** *to be shortchanged*  
to be given less than is due to one

**CHANGE** *to change one's mind*  
to alter the views which one had previously formed

**CHANGE** *to change one's tune*  
to alter one's publicly-expressed views

**CHANGE** *to change the whole picture*  
to alter the major assumptions on which some assessment was based

**CHANGE** *to have a change of heart*  
to form a new view in place of a strongly-held previous view

**CHANGE** *to ring the changes*  
to exhaust the number of different ways of doing something (refers to the permutations used for ringing peals of church bells)

**CHANGE** *to swap horses in midstream*  
to change direction during the course of a project

**CHAPTER** *to quote chapter and verse*  
to authenticate the information

**CHARADE** *to act out a charade*  
ostentatiously to pretend to be doing something in an ethical fashion

**CHARGE** *to charge like a wounded bull*

to impose excessive prices (a play on words; not a simile)

**CHARGE** *to recharge one's batteries*

to have a recuperative break

**CHARITY** *charity begins at home*  
a person's first responsibility should be to his family

**CHARLIE** *tailend Charlie*

a person who habitually comes last

**CHARM** *to charm the pants off someone*

to delight a person

**CHARYBDIS** *to be between Scylla and Charybdis*

to be faced with two equally unpalatable alternatives which cannot both be avoided (refers to the voyage of Ulysses)

**CHASE** *a wild goose chase*

a foolish search for something which does not exist

**CHASE** *to chase a corpse*

to harp on something long ago resolved or a lost cause

**CHASE** *to chase every hare*

to be easily sidetracked

**CHASE** *to chase rainbows*

to be quite unrealistic

**CHECK** *to give someone a blank check*

to give another person unlimited delegated authority

**CHECKMATE** *checkmate*

defeat

**CHEEK** *cheek by jowl*

close to each other

**CHEEK** *to turn the other cheek*  
to show that one has not been intimidated (Matthew 5:39)

**CHEEK** *tongue in cheek*  
full of irony

**CHEER** *the cheering could be heard a block away*

there was great rejoicing

**CHEESE** *cheese paring*  
stingy

**CHEESE** *stiff cheese!*

circumstances which may be unwelcome but which will not be altered and in respect of which no great sympathy is felt

**CHEESE** *to be cheesed off*  
to be disgusted

**CHEMISTRY** *good chemistry*

a good ability to work closely together

**CHERRY** *to get only one bite at the cherry*

to receive no further opportunity

**CHESS** *to be a chess game*

to be a complex exercise, requiring great skill

**CHESSMASTER** *a chessmaster*  
a clever strategist

**CHEST** *to get something off one's chest*

to confess

**CHEST** *to hold one's cards close to one's chest*

to keep one's plans and strategies secret

**CHEST** *to lock something up in the old oak chest*

to put in a safe place and out of mind

**CHESTNUT** *to pull someone's chestnuts out of the fire*

to retrieve a situation

**CHEW** *to bite off more than one can chew*

to be overly ambitious and thus unrealistic as to one's capabilities

**CHEW** to chew fat  
to eat and talk together

**CHEW** to chew someone's ear  
to force one's conversation on an unwilling listener

**CHEW** to chew the cud  
to reflect on something

**CHEW** to have something to chew on  
to have firm facts on which to base a decision

**CHICKEN** chicken and egg  
two factors each of which results in the other

**CHICKEN** chicken-hearted  
showing little courage

**CHICKEN** the chickens are coming home to roost  
the consequences of past actions are becoming obvious

**CHICKEN** to be chicken feed  
to be small and unimportant

**CHICKEN** to count one's chickens before they are hatched  
to treat as fact the expected results of a future proposal

**CHIEF** more chiefs than Indians  
a disproportionately large number of supervisors

**CHILD** a problem child  
a source of unnecessary difficulty

**CHILD** brainchild  
inspired original idea

**CHILD** to be child's play  
to be easy or to require only elementary skills and knowledge

**CHILD** to take food out of the mouths of children  
cruelly to deprive the needy

**CHILDHOOD** second childhood  
dotage

**CHILL** to cast a chill over something  
to be a depressing influence over something

**CHILL** to send a chill down someone's spine  
to be worrying news

**CHIN** to keep one's chin up  
to maintain one's morale

**CHIN** to lead with one's chin  
by one's brash behavior to virtually invite one's opponents to take action against one

**CHIN** to rub one's chin  
to muse

**CHIN** to take it on the chin  
to cheerfully accept a misfortune

**CHINA** I would not do so-and-so for all the tea in China  
I will never do so-and-so

**CHINA** a bull in a china shop  
a careless person likely to cause great damage

**CHINESE** a Chinese puzzle  
a perplexing enigma

**CHINESE** Chinese walls  
a system to ensure that different parts of some organization do not gain access to each other's confidential information

**CHINK** a chink in someone's armor  
an opportunity to do something which otherwise could not be done

**CHINK** a chink in the wall  
an opportunity to do something which otherwise could not be done

**CHINK** a chink of light  
a small hope of a solution or breakthrough

**CHIP** bargaining chips  
benefits which can be conceded in negotiations in order to obtain some advantage

**CHIP** that is the way the chips fall  
that is the actual situation

**CHIP** to be a blue chip stock  
to be of excellent quality

**CHIP** to be a chip off the old block  
to resemble one's father

**CHIP** to chip in  
to contribute financially

**CHIP** to have a chip on one's shoulder  
to unreasonably resent something

**CHIP** to have had one's chips  
to have received all that is going to be forthcoming

**CHIP** to turn one's chips in  
to convert one's assets or entitlements into cash

**CHIP** when the chips are down  
when all facts are known and taken into consideration

**CHISEL** to chisel away at something  
to reduce the size of something in a series of small stages

**CHOICE** Hobson's choice  
no right at all to select (refers to Thomas Hobson, a horsekeeper in Cambridge, England, who offered customers seeking a change of horses a single beast on a "take it or leave it" basis)

**CHOP** to chop someone off at the socks  
to stop someone's proposals prematurely

**CHOP** to lick one's chops  
to look forward to something with pleasurable anticipation

**CHORD** to strike a chord  
to sound familiar or recall something to mind

**CHORD** to strike a responsive chord  
to get a favorable reaction to a proposal

**CHORD** to strike the right chord  
to appeal successfully to someone's emotions

**CHOREOGRAPH** to choreograph something  
to organize the detail of who does what and when in a project

**CHRISTMAS** all his Christmases came at once  
he was overjoyed

**CHUM** a green chum  
an inexperienced person

**CIGARETTE** only a cigarette paper between them  
virtually equal or close together

**CIRCLE** the wheel has turned the complete circle  
things are now back to where they were before

**CIRCLE** to do a full circle  
to be back to where one was before or (in error) to go in the opposite direction

**CIRCLE** to run around in circles  
to engage in excited but useless activity

**CIRCLE** to try to square the circle  
to attempt the impossible (refers to a classical problem in geometry, namely, to construct with a compass a square of the same area as a given circle)

**CIRCUIT** to short-circuit something  
to do something, eliminating various intermediate steps

**CIRCUS** to be a real circus  
to be a highly disorganized affair

**CITE** the devil can cite scripture for his purpose  
a person can quote a respectable or hostile authority while advocating a disreputable cause of his own (from Shakespeare's MERCHANT OF VENICE)

**CITIZEN** a second-class citizen  
a person not treated as an equal

**CITY** one can't beat City Hall  
the ordinary citizen is powerless against bureaucracy

**CIVIL** to keep a civil tongue in one's head  
to be polite, especially under provocation

**CLAIM** to stake a claim  
to indicate one's desire to obtain something

**CLANGER** to drop a clanger  
to do something indiscreet or which offends social conventions

**CLAP** to clap eyes on something  
to catch sight of something

**CLASP** to clasp at straws  
to have a hopeless case but show unjustified optimism on noting minor positive features

**CLASS** a second-class citizen  
a person not treated as an equal

**CLASS** to be first class  
to be very satisfactory

**CLAY** to have feet of clay  
to be vulnerable (Daniel 2:33)

**CLEAN** a Herculean cleaning of the stables  
a thorough revision of operating procedure (refers to Hercules, a mythical Greek hero who cleaned the stables of Augeas)

**CLEAN** a clean sweep  
the complete removal in an election of all sitting members

**CLEAN** a cleanskin  
a person without a criminal record

**CLEAN** a spring cleaning  
a thorough review occurring a long time after the previous one

**CLEAN** to clean up a mess  
to sort out mistakes or neglect

**CLEAN** to clean up one's act  
to fix up the deficiencies in one's affairs

**CLEAN** to come clean  
to confess

**CLEAN** to get a clean bill of health  
after proper investigation to be found not wanting

**CLEAN** to have clean hands  
to be innocent or to act ethically

**CLEAN** to keep one's nose clean  
to act with circumspection and honesty despite temptation to do otherwise

**CLEAN** to make a clean breast of something  
to confess

**CLEAN** to wipe the slate clean  
to forgive past indiscretions

**CLEANER** to take someone to the cleaners  
to cheat a person financially

**CLEAR** clear cut  
not borderline

**CLEAR** the coast is clear  
there are no observers to one's activity around

**CLEAR** to be crystal clear  
to have a very obvious meaning

**CLEAR** to be in the clear  
to be exonerated or free from suspicion

**CLEAR** to clear the air  
to remove any possible misunderstandings

**CLEAR** to clear the decks  
to get ready for action

**CLEAR** to clear the ground  
to dispose of the preliminaries

**CLEAR** to come through loud and clear  
to be well understood

**CLEAR** to have a clear picture of something  
to have a good understanding of something

**CLEAR** to jump a hurdle  
to overcome a problem or difficulty

**CLEAR** when the smoke clears  
when sufficient time has passed

**CLEFT** to be in a cleft stick  
to be in a dilemma

**CLIFF** to be a cliff-hanger  
to be very exciting

**CLIMATE** climate  
commercial environment

**CLING** to cling on by one's  
fingertips  
to have only a slender hold

**CLIP** to clip someone's wings  
to reduce another person's freedom to  
act as he thinks fit

**CLOAK** cloak and dagger activity  
secret activity

**CLOAK** to cloak something  
to disguise the true nature of something

**CLOCK** to turn back the clock  
to have another opportunity to do  
something which should have been  
done already or to undo something  
which cannot be undone

**CLOSE** to be a close shave  
to be a narrow escape

**CLOSE** to be a closed book  
to be a secret

**CLOSE** to be close to one's heart  
to be a project on which one is very  
keen

**CLOSE** to be close to the abyss  
to face imminent total destruction

**CLOSE** to be too close to home  
to be too near the truth to be welcome

**CLOSE** to close ranks  
to sink minor differences in order to  
present a unified front to a common  
enemy

**CLOSE** to close the book on  
something  
to terminate an activity

**CLOSE** to close the gate  
to deny an opportunity which was  
previously available

**CLOSE** to draw the nets closer  
to intensify one's efforts

**CLOSE** to get close to the bone  
to cause discomfort by being accurate

**CLOSE** to sail close to the wind  
to act in a very dangerous manner

**CLOSET** to come out of the closet  
to publicly admit one's homosexuality

**CLOTH** to cut one's coat according  
to the cloth  
to accommodate oneself to limitations  
beyond one's control and to do the  
best in the circumstances

**CLOTHES** to steal someone's clothes  
to plagiarize another person's ideas

**CLOTHING** to be a wolf in sheep's  
clothing  
to be a hypocrite or to be dangerous  
although masquerading as something  
harmless (Matthew 7:15)

**CLOUD** every cloud has a silver  
lining  
there are benefits even in seemingly  
adverse situations

**CLOUD** there are black clouds on  
the horizon  
bad news is expected

**CLOUD** to be in cloud cuckoo land  
to be mad or to have unrealistic  
expectations

**CLOUD** to be on cloud nine  
to be very happy

**CLOUD** to be under a cloud  
to be under suspicion or to be out of  
favor

**CLOUD** to cast a cloud over  
something  
to spoil the pleasure of an occasion

**CLOUD** to cloud one's mind  
to allow irrelevant or extraneous factors  
to affect one's impartiality or judgment

**CLOUD** *to have a cloud hanging over one's head*  
there is doubt as to one's future

**CLOUD** *to have one's head in the clouds*  
to be unrealistic

**CLOVER** *to be in clover*  
to enjoy a life of ease and luxury

**CLUB** *join the club!*  
you are only one of many people with similar problems

**COACH** *an opening wide enough to drive a coach and four through*  
an excellent opportunity

**COACH** *to drive a coach and horses through something*  
to demonstrate major errors in something

**COAL** *to be at the coal face*  
to be in the place where the real work is done

**COAL** *to carry coals to Newcastle*  
to do something ridiculously unnecessary

**COAL** *to haul someone over the coals*  
to reprimand a person

**COAST** *the coast is clear*  
there are no observers to one's activity around

**COASTER** *a roller coaster ride*  
a series of successes followed by failures

**COAT** *to cut one's coat according to the cloth*  
to accommodate oneself to limitations beyond one's control and to do the best in the circumstances

**COAT** *to hang onto someone's coat-tails*  
to excessively rely on another person's initiatives

**COAT** *to trail one's coat-tails*  
to invite a quarrel

**COBBLER** *a cobbler should stick to his last*  
every person should confine himself to activities for which he has been trained

**COBWEB** *to blow the cobwebs away*  
to revive an old issue

**COCK** *a cock and bull story*  
an explanation which is completely unbelievable and unacceptable

**COCK** *cock-eyed*  
stupid

**COCK** *to cock one's eye at someone*  
to glance knowingly at a person

**COCK** *to go off half-cocked*  
to act without adequate thought or preparation (refers to a gun at the half-ready)

**COCKED** *to knock something into a cocked hat*  
to twist something so that its original form is hardly recognizable

**COCKLE** *to warm the cockles of someone's heart*  
to delight a person

**COCOON** *in a cocoon*  
in a safe and isolated environment

**COFFIN** *to be another nail in someone's coffin*  
to represent a further step toward someone's downfall

**COG** *to be a small cog in a large wheel*  
to be a relatively unimportant person in a large organization

**COIN** *the other side of the coin*  
the arguments for the opposite point of view

**COIN** *to pay someone back in his own coin*  
to retaliate in kind

**COLD** *a cold day in hell*  
never

**COLD** *cold-hearted*  
cruel or mean or unmoved

**COLD** *cold turkey*  
the sudden cessation of drugs to an addict

**COLD** *in the cold light of day*  
in an unemotional atmosphere at a later stage

**COLD** *that is cold comfort*  
that appears on the surface to be reassurance and consolation but really it is not

**COLD** *the cold war*  
the unfriendly relations between the communist nations and the rest of the world

**COLD** *the cold wind of change*  
the unpleasant realities of new circumstances

**COLD** *to be a cold fish*  
to be an unemotional person

**COLD** *to be in a cold sweat*  
to be afraid

**COLD** *to blow hot and cold*  
to vacillate

**COLD** *to come in out of the cold*  
to be welcomed into a group

**COLD** *to do something in cold blood*  
to be cruel without feeling any emotion about it

**COLD** *to get cold feet*  
to become scared

**COLD** *to give someone the cold shoulder*  
to ostentatiously ignore a person

**COLD** *to leave someone cold*  
to fail to impress a person

**COLD** *to leave someone out in the cold*  
to deny a desired objective to a person

**COLD** *to pour cold water on some idea*  
to be unenthusiastic about some proposal or scornful of its apparent weaknesses

**COLD** *to put something into cold storage*  
to put something aside for dealing with at some indeterminate future time

**COLD** *to send a cold shiver down someone's spine*  
to horrify a person

**COLLAR** *to be hot under the collar*  
to be very agitated

**COLLISION** *to be on a collision course*  
to be headed for a clash with an opponent

**COLOR** *that is a horse of a very different color*  
that is a much more acceptable proposition

**COLOR** *that takes on added color*  
there are now further facts which alter the appearance of a matter

**COLOR** *to nail one's colors to the mast*  
to publicly declare one's position and to maintain it in the face of criticism

**COLOR** *to pass with flying colors*  
to be very successful

**COLOR** *to sail under false colors*  
to pretend that one's real character or beliefs are different from what they really are

**COLOR** *to see the color of someone's eyes*  
to see how a person matches expectations or requirements

**COLOR** *to see the color of someone's money*  
to get evidence of the sincerity of a person's proposal

**COLOR** to show one's true colors  
to disclose one's real character or beliefs

**COLUMNIST** a fifth columnist  
a person using his position of trust to work for a rival cause

**COMB** to go through something with a fine-tooth comb  
to conduct an extremely thorough investigation

**COME** all his Christmases came at once  
he was overjoyed

**COME** the chickens are coming home to roost  
the consequences of past actions are becoming obvious

**COME** to argue till the cows come home  
to argue for ever

**COME** to come adrift  
(of a plan) not to work out as intended

**COME** to come apart at the seams  
(of an arrangement) to break down

**COME** to come back to haunt someone  
(of an unpleasant incident) to be a constant reminder to a person

**COME** to come down with a thud  
to be suddenly disillusioned

**COME** to come in out of the cold  
to be welcomed into a group

**COME** to come in thick and fast  
to arrive quickly and in great volume

**COME** to come out into the open  
to start being frank

**COME** to come out of one's ears  
to be plentiful

**COME** to come out of the blue  
to be totally unexpected

**COME** to come out of the closet  
to publicly admit one's homosexuality

**COME** to come through loud and clear  
to be well understood

**COME** to come to a full stop  
to completely cease activity

**COME** to come to a head  
to reach culmination

**COME** to come to grips with some problem  
to be on the way to solving a problem

**COME** to come to someone's ears  
to come to someone's attention

**COME** to come to the party  
to agree to someone's terms

**COME** to come up smelling like a rose  
not to have a stain on one's character

**COME** to cross a bridge only when one comes to it  
to await the crystallization of a situation before sorting it out

**COME** to jump that hurdle when one comes to it  
to deal with a particular problem only when it becomes necessary to do so

**COME** when one's ship comes in  
when one's business venture is successfully completed or when luck arrives

**COME** when the crunch comes  
when the inevitable conclusion is reached

**COMEDY** a comedy of errors  
a series of separate mistakes in relation to some matter (name of a Shakespeare play)

**COMFORT** that is cold comfort  
that appears on the surface to be reassurance and consolation but really it is not

**COMMAND** to be in a commanding position  
to have a strategic advantage

**COMMAND** *to be in command*  
to be on top of a situation

**COMMANDMENT** *eleventh commandment*  
unwritten rule

**COMPANY** *to have shares in a paper company*  
to institute unnecessary clerical procedures

**COMPARE** *to compare notes*  
to exchange information about some subject of mutual interest

**COMPETE** *to compete on all fours with someone*  
to strive on equal terms

**COMPLETE** *the wheel has turned the complete circle*  
things are now back to where they were before

**COMPLETE** *to turn a complete somersault*  
to reverse one's established policy

**COMPLIMENT** *a left-handed compliment*  
a thinly-disguised insult

**COMPLIMENT** *to return the compliment*  
to reciprocate or to extract revenge

**COMPOUND** *to compound the felony*  
having already acted improperly to make matters worse (the misuse of a legal term: compounding a felony is the crime of agreeing for money not to prosecute a person for felony; in reality it is therefore an offense by a different person—not a second and worse offense by the original culprit)

**CONCERT** *to be up to concert pitch*  
to be ready

**CONCRETE** *to set something in concrete*  
to make something virtually unalterable

**CONFRONT** *to confront someone head on*  
to confront a person

**CONJURE** *to conjure up a picture*  
to use words to convey a vivid impression

**CONJURE** *to conjure up something*  
to produce something in circumstances where this seemed impossible

**CONTEMPLATE** *to contemplate one's navel*  
to be introspective

**CONVERT** *to preach to the converted*  
to say something to those who already believe in it

**COOK** *a Cook's tour*  
a guided tour of inspection (refers to Thomas Cook, the travel company)

**COOK** *there are many ways to cook eggs*  
there are many ways to achieve an objective

**COOK** *to be cooking with gas*  
to be fully operational

**COOK** *to cook one's goose*  
to do something which backfires on one

**COOK** *to cook the books*  
fraudulently to maintain false records of financial transactions

**COOK** *too many cooks spoil the broth*  
one leader is all that is required

**COOKIE** *that is the way the cookie crumbles*  
that is the actual situation

**COOL** *cool it!*  
calm down!

**COOL** *to cool one's heels*  
to be kept waiting

**COOL** *to keep a cool head*  
to stay calm and rational in a crisis

<b>COOL</b> to play it cool to take a low-key and rational approach	<b>CORNER</b> to see something out of the corner of one's eye to only just see something
<b>COOP</b> to fly the coop to grow up and become independent	<b>CORNER</b> to turn the corner to commence being successful after initial failures
<b>COP</b> to cop it in the neck to suffer a severe disaster	<b>CORPS</b> esprit de corps a feeling of camaraderie and concern for the good name of some organization of which one is a member (French, "vital breath of a body")
<b>COPYBOOK</b> to blot one's copybook to spoil one's previously good reputation or record	<b>CORPSE</b> to breathe life into a corpse to revive something moribund
<b>COPYCAT</b> a copycat a person who imitates another person's ideas	<b>CORPSE</b> to chase a corpse to harp on something long ago resolved or a lost cause
<b>CORD</b> to cut the cord to sever a connection (refers to the umbilical cord)	<b>COTTON</b> to be out of one's cotton-picking mind to act irrationally
<b>CORE</b> rotten to the core completely corrupt	<b>COTTON</b> to keep one's cotton-picking fingers off something not to interfere in something
<b>CORE</b> to be the hard core to be the central and most difficult problem	<b>COTTON</b> to wrap someone in cotton wool to be overprotective toward a person
<b>CORN</b> to tread on someone's corns to upset another person by interfering in his area of responsibility	<b>COUNT</b> the final countdown the last stages of something (refers to the launch of space vehicles)
<b>CORNER</b> cornerstone key ingredient	<b>COUNT</b> to count one's chickens before they are hatched to treat as fact the expected results of a future proposal
<b>CORNER</b> from the four corners of the globe from everywhere	<b>COUNT</b> to stand up and be counted to publicly announce one's position on some issue
<b>CORNER</b> to back someone into a corner to drive a person into a position from which escape is difficult	<b>COUNTRY</b> one looks for elephants in elephant country one needs to search in the right place
<b>CORNER</b> to be around the corner to be imminent	<b>COUP</b> to receive the coup de grace to be finished off by an opponent (French, "mercy stroke")
<b>CORNER</b> to be in a tight corner to experience a crisis	<b>COURSE</b> in the course of a day's march while carrying out one's normal activities
<b>CORNER</b> to cut corners to lower one's standards in order to complete something more quickly	
<b>CORNER</b> to paint oneself into a corner to foolishly put oneself into a position from which escape is impossible	

**COURSE** *it is horses for courses*  
some combinations work particularly well

**COURSE** *to be on a collision course*  
to be headed for a clash with an opponent

**COURSE** *to be on course*  
to be progressing satisfactorily toward one's goal

**COURSE** *to be par for the course*  
to be normal

**COURSE** *to plot a safe course through troubled waters*  
to make a plan which overcomes certain difficulties

**COURSE** *to run its course*  
to come to a natural end

**COURT** *the ball is in someone's court*  
it is some other person's responsibility

**COURT** *to have a friend at court*  
a person with influence who is willing to use it on one's behalf

**COURT** *to laugh something out of court*  
to ridicule a proposition as having no basis whatsoever

**COURT** *to put oneself out of court*  
to disqualify oneself from being considered for something

**CONVENTRY** *to send someone to Coventry*  
to ostentatiously and collectively ignore a person by way of punishment

**COVER** *to cover one's back*  
to take precautions

**COVER** *to cover one's hide*  
to provide excuses or take other evasive action in an attempt to avoid the adverse consequences of one's actions

**COVER** *to cover one's tracks*  
to hide the evidence of one's involvement

**COVER** *to cover oneself*  
to create evidence so that if one is criticized or accused later on one can clear one's name

**COVER** *to cover the field*  
to be comprehensive

**COVER** *to duck for cover*  
to seek to avoid blame

**COVER** *to judge a book by its cover*  
foolishly to go only by superficial appearances

**COW** *a cash cow*  
a source of ready money

**COW** *a milch cow*  
an easy and plentiful source of some desired benefit

**COW** *a sacred cow*  
an institution so well established that it is virtually unalterable

**COW** *to argue till the cows come home*  
to argue forever

**COX** *Box and Cox*  
two persons who are never around at the same time (from the name of a play)

**CRACK** *someone is a hard nut to crack*  
it is very difficult to persuade a person to do something

**CRACK** *the crack of dawn*  
at the exact moment of sunrise

**CRACK** *to be a crack in the wall*  
to represent a small unintended opportunity which can be exploited

**CRACK** *to be a fair crack of the whip*  
to be just

**CRACK** *to be all that it is cracked up to be*  
to be as good as the claims made for something

**CRACK** *to crack*  
to have a mental break-down

**CRACK** to crack down on something  
to seek to eradicate something

**CRACK** to crack the whip  
to exert one's authority

**CRACK** to have a crack at  
something  
to attempt something

**CRACK** to paper over the cracks  
to institute extremely superficial and  
basically ineffective remedies

**CRACK** to use a sledgehammer to  
crack a nut  
to devote vastly more resources to a  
project than is warranted by all the  
circumstances

**CRADLE** to be the cradle of  
something  
to be the place where some idea was  
first nurtured

**CRANNY** in every nook and cranny  
everywhere

**CRASH** to gatecrash a gathering  
to attend a gathering without any right  
to be there

**CRAWL** to crawl out of the woodwork  
to turn up unexpectedly and in large  
numbers

**CREAM** to be cream on top of the  
milk  
to be an additional benefit in an al-  
ready satisfactory scenario

**CREATE** to create a Frankenstein  
to create something wicked and out  
of control (a reference to the fictional  
creator of a monster, in mistake for a  
reference to the monster itself)

**CREATE** to create a storm  
to kick up a fuss

**CREEK** to be up the creek  
to be completely mistaken; to be in  
trouble

**CREEP** to make someone's flesh  
creep  
to frighten a person with something  
horrific

**CREME** creme de la creme  
something quite superlative (French,  
“the cream of the cream”)

**CREST** to be on the crest of a wave  
to enjoy success which may not last

**CRESTFALLEN** crestfallen  
dejected

**CRICKET** a cricket team  
eleven people

**CRICKET** not to be cricket  
to be unfair

**CROCODILE** to shed crocodile  
tears  
to be a hypocrite

**CROOK** by hook or by crook  
by fair means or foul

**CROSS** to be a cross which one  
has to bear  
to be a difficulty which one has to  
endure

**CROSS** to be at the crossroads  
to need to choose between several  
mutually exclusive alternatives

**CROSS** to cross a bridge only  
when one comes to it  
to await the crystallization of a situa-  
tion before sorting it out

**CROSS** to cross one's mind  
to occur to one

**CROSS** to cross someone's path  
to meet another person by chance

**CROSS** to cross swords with  
someone  
to have a disagreement with another  
person

**CROSS** to cross the Rubicon  
to make an irreversible decision in  
regard to some commitment

**CROSS** to dot the i's and cross  
the t's  
to be meticulous in completing the  
documentation for a transaction

**CROSS** to have one's wires crossed  
to be mistaken about key facts

**CROSS** to keep one's fingers crossed  
to hope for a good outcome

**CROW** as the crow flies  
by the shortest distance

**CROW** to eat crow  
to accept a humiliating defeat

**CROWD** to stand out from the crowd  
to be noticeably better than one's  
competitors

**CROWN** the crowning point  
the height of a person's achievement

**CROWN** the jewel in someone's crown  
the most significant component

**CROWN** to wear one's crown of  
thorns  
to have one's own difficulties (John  
19:5)

**CROWN** uneasy lies the head that  
wears a crown  
responsibility involves some risks and  
some burdens (from Shakespeare's  
*HENRY IV*)

**CRUCIFY** to crucify someone  
to unfairly do severe damage to a  
person's reputation or credibility

**CRUEL** to cruel someone's pitch  
to spoil a person's chances

**CRUMB** to throw someone a few  
crumbs  
to fob a person off with a few sym-  
bolic but unimportant concessions

**CRUMBLE** that is the way the  
cookie crumbles  
that is the actual situation

**CRUNCH** when it comes to the  
crunch  
when the matter comes up for decision

**CRUNCH** when the crunch comes  
when the inevitable conclusion is  
reached

**CRUSADE** a crusade  
an aggressive campaign to achieve  
some political or social objective

**CRUSOE** not to be Robinson Crusoe  
to be one of a large number of people  
with a common problem (from Daniel  
Defoe's *ROBINSON CRUSOE*)

**CRUTCH** a crutch  
an artificial non-permanent support

**CRY** a cry for help  
a subconscious or indirect indication  
that a person is in need of psycholog-  
ical counselling

**CRY** a shoulder to cry on  
sympathy

**CRY** it is no use crying over spilt  
milk  
lamenting over a disaster achieves  
nothing

**CRY** to be a far cry from something  
to be a long way from something

**CRY** to cry "wolf"  
to repeatedly raise an unjustified con-  
cern with the result that one will be  
ignored when the circumstances change

**CRY** to cry in one's beer  
to show remorse

**CRY** to cry one's eyes out  
to express great sadness at a situation

**CRY** to laugh all the way to the bank  
to appreciate one's good fortune

**CRYSTAL** a crystal ball  
accurate knowledge of the future

**CRYSTAL** to be crystal clear  
to have a very obvious meaning

**CRYSTALLIZE** to crystallize  
to emerge in its final form

**CUCKOO** to be a cuckoo in the nest  
to purport to be a member of a group  
of people although having no such right

**CUCKOO** to be in cloud cuckoo  
land  
to be mad or to have unrealistic  
expectations

**CUD** to chew the cud  
to reflect on something

**CUDGEL** to take up the cudgels  
for someone  
to defend a person

**CUFF** off the cuff  
impromptu

**CUP** a storm in a teacup  
a controversy about a minor matter  
but one which looms large in the  
minds of the parties

**CUP** not to be someone's cup of tea  
to be outside a person's expertise or  
area of interest

**CUPBOARD** a skeleton in the  
cupboard  
an unpleasant truth the knowledge of  
which has been deliberately suppressed

**CUPBOARD** the cupboard is bare  
the wished-for resources are just not  
available

**CURATE** to be a curate's egg  
to be good only in parts (refers to an  
1895 cartoon in PUNCH)

**CURDLE** to curdle one's blood  
to be horrific

**CURE** the cure is worse than the  
disease  
the remedy involves more disadvan-  
tages than if it were not applied

**CURL** to make someone's hair curl  
(of news) to give someone a shock

**CURLY** to get someone by the short  
and curly hairs  
to have domination over a person

**CURRENT** an undercurrent  
a barely noticeable feeling of dissent  
in the community which is not being  
vocalized

**CURSE** not worth a tinker's curse  
worthless

**CURTAIN** curtain raiser  
introduction

**CURTAIN** it's curtains!  
this is the end!

**CURTAIN** the curtain rises on  
something  
something is about to start

**CURTAIN** the iron curtain  
the border between the communist  
nations and the rest of the world  
(from a speech by Sir Winston Churchill in 1946)

**CURTAIN** to ring down the curtain  
on something  
to treat something as concluded

**CUSTOMER** a slippery customer  
a shifty person

**CUT** clear cut  
not borderline

**CUT** cut it out!  
stop doing that!

**CUT** cut-throat  
highly competitive

**CUT** one could have cut the  
atmosphere with a knife  
those present were very tense

**CUT** the cut of someone's jib  
someone's personal appearance

**CUT** to be a cut above the rest  
to be plainly superior

**CUT** to be at the cutting edge of  
something  
to be in a position where important  
decisions need to be made

**CUT** to be cut and dried  
to be well settled or long established

**CUT** to be cut off at the knees  
to have a pet project aborted

**CUT** to be cut to pieces  
to be very upset

**CUT** to be cut up  
to be distressed

**CUT** to cut both ways  
to involve both advantages and disadvantages of similar significance

**CUT to cut corners**

to lower one's standards in order to complete something more quickly

**CUT to cut no ice with someone**

to have little effect on a person

**CUT to cut one's coat according to the cloth**

to accommodate oneself to limitations beyond one's control and to do the best in the circumstances

**CUT to cut one's nose off to spite one's face**

to act in pique in a way which harms only oneself

**CUT to cut one's own throat**

to act in a way which damages one's own interests

**CUT to cut one's teeth on something**

to get one's first experience by doing something

**CUT to cut someone dead**

to snub a person

**CUT to cut tall poppies down to size**

to humiliate haughty persons

**CUT to cut the Gordian knot**

to solve, especially by force, a virtually insoluble problem (refers to a complicated knot tied by Gordius and eventually cut by Alexander the Great)

**CUT to cut the cord**

to sever a connection (refers to the umbilical cord)

**CUT to cut the ground from under someone's feet**

to unexpectedly withdraw support and in the process cause embarrassment or to demolish a person's case

**CUT to cut the painter**

to become separated

**CUT to have one's work cut out to do something**

it will be difficult to achieve something

**CUT to take shortcuts**

to do something by a faster but less thorough method

**CYLINDER to spark on all cylinders**

to work extremely well

**D****DADDY the daddy of them all**

the progenitor

**DAGGER cloak and dagger activity**

secret activity

**DAGGER to look daggers at someone**

to look at a person in a way which indicates great animosity

**DAM the dam burst**

the cumulative effect of many things caused a disaster

**DAMASCUS to be on the road to Damascus**

to see the error of one's ways (Acts 9:3)

**DAMOCLES to have a sword of Damocles hanging over one**

to be in imminent danger despite normal activity going on all around one

**DAMP a damp squib**

disappointingly ineffective action (refers to fireworks which fail to go off)

**DANCE nothing to make a song or dance about**

unexciting or unimportant

**DANCE to lead someone a merry dance**

to mislead a person

**DANCE to make a song and dance about something**

to create a fuss

**DANSE danse macabre**

gruesome final step (French, "ghastly dance")

**DARK a dark horse**

a person with unsuspected talents

**DARK a leap into the dark**

a rash move

**DARK a shot in the dark**

an intelligent or lucky guess

**DARK** *a stab in the dark*  
a sheer guess

**DARK** *to be in the dark*  
to be uninformed

**DARK** *to keep someone in the dark*  
to deliberately keep a person uninformed

**DARK** *to keep something dark*  
to keep something secret

**DARK** *to look on the dark side*  
to be pessimistic

**DARK** *to whistle in the dark*  
to feign greater confidence than one really has

**DARKEN** *never darken my door again*  
do not ever return

**DAWN** *a false dawn*  
an incident giving rise to unjustified hope

**DAWN** *light dawns*  
the point is grasped

**DAWN** *the crack of dawn*  
at the exact moment of sunrise

**DAWN** *to be the dawn of a new day*  
to be the start of a different regime

**DAY** *a cold day in hell*  
never

**DAY** *a field day*  
a very enjoyable and successful occasion

**DAY** *a nine-day wonder*  
an exciting event, but one which will cease to arouse interest when the novelty has worn off

**DAY** *a red-letter day*  
an important occasion (refers to the color used to print saints' days on some calendars)

**DAY** *at the end of the day*  
in due course or at the conclusion of a project

**DAY** *every dog has his day*  
good luck comes sooner or later

**DAY** *he would not give one the time of day*  
he is unwilling to help anybody

**DAY** *in Halcyon days*  
in past happier times (refers to the 14 days about the winter solstice when winds were calm and to the mythical bird said to breed in a floating nest at that time)

**DAY** *in the cold light of day*  
in an unemotional atmosphere at a later stage

**DAY** *in the course of a day's march*  
while carrying out one's normal activities

**DAY** *late in the day*  
only when a project is well advanced

**DAY** *one's days are numbered*  
one is about to be abolished

**DAY** *the order of the day*  
the customary behavior

**DAY** *to be the dawn of a new day*  
to be the start of a different regime

**DAY** *to call it a day*  
to cease involvement with some activity

**DAY** *to keep something for a rainy day*  
to keep something in reserve

**DAY** *to see the light of day*  
to be made public

**DAYLIGHT** *daylight robbery*  
the charging of grossly excessive prices

**DAYLIGHT** *to see daylight*  
to get the right answer

**DEAD** *I wouldn't be caught dead without some object*  
I regard some object as very important

**DEAD** *a dead-end position*  
a job with no prospects of advancement

**DEAD** *a dead letter*

a rule still in existence but no longer observed in practice

**DEAD** *dead and buried*

(of some issue) definitely concluded, especially so long ago as to be nearly forgotten

**DEAD** *drop dead!*

go away, I want no dealings with you

**DEAD** *over my dead body*

never

**DEAD** *to be a dead duck*

to have failed

**DEAD** *to cut someone dead*

to snub a person

**DEAD** *to get rid of the dead wood*

to terminate the services of unsatisfactory personnel

**DEAD** *to kill some proposal stone dead*

to abandon some proposal completely

**DEAD** *to leave others for dead*

to be vastly superior

**DEAD** *to make noise enough to wake the dead*

to be excessively noisy

**DEAD** *to run into a dead end*

to get nowhere in an investigation

**DEADLINE** *deadline*

time by which something must be completed

**DEAF** *to fall on deaf ears*

to be totally disregarded

**DEAFENING** *deafening silence*

great apathy and lack of enthusiasm

**DEAL** *a raw deal*

unfair treatment

**DEAL** *a sweetheart deal*

an agreement negotiated in private without full regard to the interests of those affected

**DEAL** *to deal the final hand*

to take steps which conclude a matter

**DEAL** *to wheel and deal*

to energetically enter into commercial transactions of dubious propriety

**DEALER** *sharp dealer*

person engaging in barely honest or mildly unethical practices

**DEATH** *a death wish*

the contemplation of action so foolish that it is likely to lead to utter disaster

**DEATH** *death blow*

incident which results in the destruction of something

**DEATH** *sudden death*

instantaneously or without phasing in

**DEATH** *to be in at the death*

to be present at the conclusion of something

**DEATH** *to be on one's death bed*

(of an organization or a piece of equipment) to be about to cease functioning

**DEATH** *to be the kiss of death*

to be something intended to be helpful but resulting in total destruction

**DEATH** *to bore someone to death*

to greatly weary a person by dull and uninteresting conversation or by lack of action

**DEATH** *to die a natural death*

by virtue of changed circumstances or the effluxion of time to be no longer relevant

**DEATH** *to sign one's own death warrant*

to foolishly do something which is inevitably bound to lead to utter disaster

**DEATH** *to slowly bleed to death*

to be heading in gradual steps toward total ruin

**DEATH** *to sound the death knell of something*

to indicate the impending end of something

**DEATHKNOCK** *on the deathknock*

at the last possible moment

**DECIMATE** *to decimate*

to greatly reduce in size (often used in the sense of "to reduce to one tenth," although the original meaning was "to reduce by one tenth")

**DECIPHER** *to decipher something*

to understand the significance of something

**DECK** *a loose cannon on the deck*

a mistake likely to cause trouble

**DECK** *all hands on deck*

everybody is requested to help out

**DECK** *to be back on deck*

to have returned after an absence

**DECK** *to clear the decks*

to get ready for action

**DECKCHAIR** *to rearrange the deckchairs on the Titanic*

to take some initiative which is quite useless because it does not take much greater change into account

**DEEP** *deep-rooted*

strongly felt

**DEEP** *still waters run deep*

a person with a quiet manner may have a surprisingly great knowledge of a subject

**DEEP** *to be in deep water*

to be in great difficulty

**DEEP** *to go off the deep end*

to lose one's temper

**DEEP** *to have deep pockets*

to have large financial resources

**DEEP** *to jump straight in at the deep end*

to do something without a proper lead-in

**DEEP** *to play a deep game*

to show cunning

**DEEP** *to sink deeper into the mire*

to get into further difficulties

**DEEP** *to sink deeper into the mud*

to get into even greater difficulty

**DEFLOWER** *to deflower*

to deprive of virginity

**DEFY** *to defy gravity*

to go up when the expectation is to go down

**DEGREE** *to give someone the third degree*

to apply pressure while questioning closely a person under suspicion

**DEGREE** *to the nth degree*

with great precision

**DEGREE** *to turn around 180 degrees*

to completely reverse a stance

**DELIVER** *to deliver the goods*

to achieve the objective

**DELPHIC** *Delphic*

deliberately obscure (refers to the oracle at Delphi)

**DEN** *to beard the lion in his den*

to visit someone important at his headquarters

**DENMARK** *something is rotten in the state of Denmark*

the situation is not correct (from Shakespeare's HAMLET)

**DENOMINATOR** *the lowest common denominator*

the highest level of taste found among all the members of some target audience

**DEPTH** *to be out of one's depth*

to find that some issue is too complicated or too difficult

**DERRAIL** *to derail some strategy*

to cause a strategy to fail

**DES POND** *a slough of despond*

a feeling of hopelessness

**DESTROY** *soul-destroying*

extremely boring and demotivating

**DEVASTATE** *to be devastated*

to be extremely disappointed

**DEVELOP** to develop a head of steam  
to gain momentum

**DEVIL** a devil-may-care attitude  
a reckless attitude

**DEVIL** be a devil!  
take a chance!

**DEVIL** between the devil and the  
deep blue sea

to be faced with two equally unpalatable alternatives which cannot both be avoided

**DEVIL** he must have a long spoon  
that sups with the devil  
great care is needed when negotiating deals with disreputable parties

**DEVIL** poor devil  
person to be pitied

**DEVIL** talk of the devil  
here is the person we were just discussing

**DEVIL** the devil can cite scripture  
for his purpose

a person can quote a respectable or hostile authority while advocating a disreputable cause of his own (from Shakespeare's MERCHANT OF VENICE)

**DEVIL** the devil one knows is better  
than the devil one does not know  
the status quo is more comfortable than change

**DEVIL** to act as a devil's advocate  
to put a point of view which one does not hold in order to draw out the best arguments regarding a proposition (refers to a church official vetting a candidate for sainthood)

**DEVIL** to give the devil his due  
to be fair (a phrase used in parenthesis, and only in the infinitive)

**DEVIL** to grab the devil by the tail  
to face up to difficulties

**DIAMOND** to be a rough diamond  
to have many attributes but a gruff manner

**DICK** every Tom, Dick and Harry  
just about everybody

**DICTIONARY** someone has swallowed a dictionary  
a person uses excessively long words

**DIE** no dice  
the proposal is totally unacceptable

**DIE** the die is cast  
the course of action in train is irreversible

**DIE** the whole box and dice  
all relevant components

**DIE** to be dying to do something  
to be extremely keen to do something

**DIE** to be the throw of a loaded die  
to be an act of deceit

**DIE** to die a natural death  
by virtue of changed circumstances or the effluxion of time to be no longer relevant

**DIE** to die hard  
not to give up easily

**DIFFERENT** that is a horse of a very different color  
that is a much more acceptable proposition

**DIFFERENT** to march to a different drum  
to show an independent approach

**DIG** to dig one's heels in  
to become even more stubborn than at first

**DIG** to dig one's own grave  
to take action which results in an unintended disaster for oneself

**DIG** to dig one's toes in  
to become even more stubborn than at first

**DIM** to take a dim view of something  
not to regard something favorably

**DINNER** to be done like a dinner  
to be defeated and humiliated

**DINOSAUR** *a dinosaur*

a person with incredibly outmoded ideas

**DIP** *to dip one's toes in the water*

to gently explore an opportunity

**DIRE** *in dire straits*

in great need

**DIRECTION** *a step in the right direction*

the first in a series of measures designed to correct some problem

**DIRECTION** *it is pointing in the right direction*

success looks likely

**DIRECTION** *to head someone in the right direction*

to assist a person to achieve something

**DIRT** *to strike pay dirt*

to become successful

**DIRTY** *dirty*

unfair

**DIRTY** *to do someone's dirty work*

to do something unethical on behalf of another person

**DIRTY** *to get one's hands dirty*

to do the necessary but unpleasant or menial parts of a task

**DIRTY** *to wash one's dirty linen in public*

to expose one's domestic differences to the world at large

**DISASTER** *a pit of disaster*

great and unexpected misfortune

**DISCLOSE** *to disclose one's hand*

to give away information regarding one's intention

**DISEASE** *the cure is worse than the disease*

the remedy involves more disadvantages than if it were not applied

**DISGUISE** *a blessing in disguise*

an unwelcome but salutary experience

**DISPATCH** *to be mentioned in dispatches*

to be favorably mentioned (refers to military recognition for bravery)

**DISSEMINATE** *to disseminate ideas*

to spread ideas to a wide audience (lit., "to scatter seeds in various places")

**DISTANCE** *to keep one's distance*

to avoid familiarity

**DISTANT** *distant fields look greener*

activities of which one has no experience seem much easier than is really the case

**DITCH** *to make a last-ditch stand*

to make a brave effort to stave off final defeat

**DIVE** *to take a nosedive*

to suddenly and unexpectedly fall steeply

**DIVIDENDS** *to show dividends*

to be successful

**DO** *the left hand does not know*

*what the right hand is doing*

one section of a large bureaucracy does not realize that another section is simultaneously doing something inconsistent

**DOCK** *to be in the dock*

to need to defend one's stance

**DOCTOR** *just what the doctor ordered*

exactly right

**DOG** *a cat and dog existence*

a life full of frequent squabbles

**DOG** *a dogfight*

a small side-skirmish, especially between airplanes

**DOG** *a lame dog*

a person under some disadvantage needing attention and assistance

**DOG** *a shaggy-dog story*

an amusing anecdote with an unexpected ending, often involving talking animals given certain human skills

<b>DOG</b> <i>a sly dog</i> a person who is discreet about his weaknesses	<b>DOG</b> <i>to be in the doghouse</i> to be in disgrace
<b>DOG</b> <i>a watchdog</i> a person or organization monitoring behavior	<b>DOG</b> <i>to call off the dogs</i> to abandon an audit or other inquiry
<b>DOG</b> <i>all the dogs are barking</i> this news is being widely disseminated	<b>DOG</b> <i>to give a dog a bad name</i> to malign a person
<b>DOG</b> <i>any stick to beat a dog</i> any excuse will do if it serves one's purpose	<b>DOG</b> <i>to go to the dogs</i> to be ruined
<b>DOG</b> <i>dog-eared</i> (of pages) well-thumbed	<b>DOG</b> <i>to have a hair of the dog that bit one</i> to drink more in an attempt to overcome the effects of alcohol already consumed
<b>DOG</b> <i>dog-tired</i> tired out	<b>DOG</b> <i>to lead a dog's life</i> to be ill-treated
<b>DOG</b> <i>every dog has his day</i> good luck comes sooner or later	<b>DOG</b> <i>to let sleeping dogs lie</i> to refrain from raising an issue which is not obviously requiring attention
<b>DOG</b> <i>every man and his dog</i> everybody	<b>DOG</b> <i>to rain cats and dogs</i> to rain heavily
<b>DOG</b> <i>love me—love my dog</i> if you accept me then you must also accept my associates	<b>DOG</b> <i>to throw something to the dogs</i> to sacrifice something
<b>DOG</b> <i>not a dog's chance</i> no hope at all	<b>DOG</b> <i>two men and a dog</i> very few people
<b>DOG</b> <i>one cannot teach an old dog new tricks</i> people get irreversibly set in their ways	<b>DOG</b> <i>underdog</i> object of sympathy (the antonym of “underdog effect” is “bandwagon effect”)
<b>DOG</b> <i>the tail wagging the dog</i> a minor aspect with disproportionate effect on a major aspect	<b>DOG</b> <i>why keep a dog and bark oneself?</i> it is silly to pay for assistance and then do things personally
<b>DOG</b> <i>the top dog</i> the person in the most powerful position	<b>DOLDRUMS</b> <i>to be in the doldrums</i> to be depressed or to show no activity (refers to a region of little wind near the equator, becalming sailing ships)
<b>DOG</b> <i>to be a dog in the manger</i> to spitefully deny something to others, notwithstanding its uselessness to oneself	<b>DOLLAR</b> <i>a sixty-four thousand dollar question</i> a pertinent but very difficult question (refers to a television quiz show in which an initial prize doubles with the successful answering of progressively more difficult questions)
<b>DOG</b> <i>to be a dog's breakfast</i> to be a very messy arrangement	
<b>DOG</b> <i>to be a gay dog</i> to lead an idle life while flaunting the symbols of wealth	

**DOMINO** *a domino effect*

a series of disasters each of which after the first is precipitated by the one before

**DONKEY** *donkey work*

necessary but uninspiring routine work

**DONKEY** *for donkey's years*

for a long time

**DONKEY** *to talk the hind leg off a donkey*

to talk excessively

**DONNA** *a prima donna*

a person with an exaggerated opinion of his own importance which makes relations with others needlessly difficult (Italian, "first lady")

**DOOR** *a foot in the door*

the opportunity to do business

**DOOR** *never darken my door again*

do not ever return

**DOOR** *not to break someone's door down*

to be quite unenthusiastic about someone's goods or services

**DOOR** *one's door is always open*

people can take their problems to one at any time

**DOOR** *through the back door*

unofficially or surreptitiously

**DOOR** *to be out the door*

to have one's position terminated

**DOOR** *to beat a path to someone's door*

to seek a person out in great numbers

**DOOR** *to keep the wolf from the door*

to avoid imminent trouble

**DOOR** *to knock on doors*

to seek out opportunities to do business

**DOOR** *to leave the door open*

to issue a standing invitation for the resumption of some negotiations

**DOOR** *to open up doors*

to create opportunities

**DOOR** *to put something at someone's door*

to blame a person

**DOOR** *to show someone the door*

to ask a person to leave

**DOOR** *to shut the door on someone*

to deny another person a desired opportunity

**DOOR** *to shut the stable door after the horse has bolted*

to take preventive action only after the relevant event

**DOOR** *to slam the door in someone's face*

ostentatiously to refuse to have any dealings with a person

**DOORSTEP** *on one's own doorstep*

in one's own domain

**DOT** *from the year dot*

from time immemorial

**DOT** *to arrive on the dot*

to turn up at the exact scheduled time

**DOT** *to dot the i's and cross the t's*

to be meticulous in completing the documentation for a transaction

**DOT** *to sign on the dotted line*

to confirm one's agreement

**DOUBT** *a doubting Thomas*

a person who refuses to believe claims in the absence of proof (John 20:25)

**DOUGHNUT** *watch the doughnut—not the hole*

look for the positive aspects

**DOWN** *a down-to-earth solution*

a realistic solution

**DOWN** *low-down*

confidential information relevant to something

**DOWN** *that is money down the drain*

money has been wastefully lost on a failed project

**DOWN** to be down in the mouth  
to be depressed

**DOWN** to be down the track  
to be making progress

**DOWN** to be further down the line  
to have a low priority

**DOWN** to be on the downgrade  
to be of deteriorating quality

**DOWN** to catch someone with his  
trousers down  
to act when another person least expects it

**DOWN** to keep one's head down  
to work very diligently

**DOWN** to kick a man when he is  
down  
to take unfair advantage of a person  
already in difficulty

**DOWN** to put one's foot down  
to exert one's authority and insist on  
something

**DOWNFALL** downfall  
ruination

**DOWNHILL** to go downhill  
to deteriorate

**DOZEN** it is six of one and half a  
dozen of the other  
it does not matter

**DOZEN** to talk nineteen to the dozen  
to engage in much idle chatter

**DRAFT** to feel the draft  
to experience unfavorable conditions

**DRAG** to drag one's feet  
to perform unduly slowly

**DRAG** to drag one's heels  
to perform unduly slowly

**DRAG** to drag someone by the head  
and ears  
to force a person to reveal the true  
facts

**DRAG** to drag the chain  
to perform unduly slowly

**DRAIN** that is money down the drain  
money has been wastefully lost on a  
failed project

**DRAIN** to drain every ounce out of  
something  
to get the maximum use or pleasure  
out of something

**DRAKE** to play ducks and drakes  
not to treat the matter seriously

**DRAW** back to the drawing board  
the details need to be reconsidered

**DRAW** to be on the drawing board  
to be being planned in detail

**DRAW** to be quick on the draw  
to act precipitately

**DRAW** to be the luck of the draw  
to be a chance result

**DRAW** to draw a blank  
to be unsuccessful

**DRAW** to draw a deep breath  
to get ready for exertion or for emotional  
news

**DRAW** to draw a long bow  
to state a conclusion which while  
possible is unlikely on the known  
facts

**DRAW** to draw a veil over something  
pointedly to avoid discussing something

**DRAW** to draw blood from a stone  
to do the impossible

**DRAW** to draw fire  
to encounter criticism

**DRAW** to draw first blood  
to get an advantage

**DRAW** to draw the line at that  
to refuse to go any further

**DRAW** to draw the nets closer  
to intensify one's efforts

**DRAW** to draw the short straw  
to be the one appointed to do something

**DRAW** until stumps are drawn  
until the project ends (refers to cricket)

**DRAWBRIDGE** *to pull up the drawbridge*

to refuse to cooperate

**DRAWCARD** *drawcard*

feature expected to attract a crowd

**DRAWER** *to tuck something away in a drawer*

to put something aside for the time being

**DRAWER** *top drawer*

first class

**DREAM** *a pipedream*

a fanciful notion, wished for but unlikely

**DREAM** *to be successful beyond one's wildest dreams*

to be far more successful than one could have expected

**DREAM** *to dream up some story*

to concoct a false story naively or maliciously

**DREAM** *to have a dream run*

to encounter no difficulties

**DRESS** *dress rehearsal*

preliminary skirmish

**DRESS** *first in best dressed*

persons acting early will do better than latecomers

**DRESS** *to be dressed up to the nines*

to be attired in excessively elaborate garments

**DRESS** *to dress someone down*

to scold a person

**DRESS** *to engage in window dressing*

to present figures in an artificially favorable light

**DRIFT** *to drift apart*

to lose contact or to change feelings once held in common

**DRINK** *it is a long time between drinks*

activity is occurring only very spasmodically

**DRINK** *to be meat and drink*  
to be very pleasurable

**DRIVE** *an opening wide enough to drive a coach and four through*  
an excellent opportunity

**DRIVE** *to almost drive someone to tears*

to present information designed to make another person express sympathy not warranted by the facts

**DRIVE** *to drive a coach and horses through something*

to demonstrate major errors in something

**DRIVE** *to drive a wedge between two persons*

to set out to cause two persons to confront each other

**DRIVE** *to drive someone from pillar to post*

to send a person to a series of places in a vain attempt to achieve something

**DRIVE** *to drive someone out of his mind*

to cause great worry to a person

**DRIVE** *to drive someone to the wall*  
to ruin a person

**DRIVE** *to drive someone up the wall*  
to annoy another person by one's actions

**DRIVE** *to drive the lesson home*  
to take certain action which is unpleasant but which has the effect of registering a message

**DRIVER** *a backseat driver*

a person seeking to exercise control

**DRIVER** *to be in the driver's seat*  
to be in charge

**DRONE** *a drone*

an idle person

**DROP** *at the drop of a hat*  
very readily

**DROP** *drop dead!*

go away, I want no dealings with you

**DROP** *someone's jaw dropped*  
someone registered obvious disappointment, incredulity or shock

**DROP** *the penny dropped*  
a person has just realized a fact which should have been obvious (refers to old-fashioned pay toilets)

**DROP** *to be only a drop in the bucket*  
to be quite insignificant in the total scene

**DROP** *to be only a drop in the ocean*  
to be quite insignificant in the total scene

**DROP** *to drop a brick*  
to make a sudden shattering and unexpected announcement

**DROP** *to drop a clanger*  
to do something indiscreet or which offends social conventions

**DROP** *to drop into one's lap*  
to turn up fortuitously

**DROP** *to drop names*  
to slip names of celebrities allegedly known to the speaker into a conversation in an attempt to impress

**DROP** *to drop one's bundle*  
to become despondent

**DROP** *to squeeze the last drop out of something*  
to get the maximum advantage out of some favorable situation

**DROP** *to wait for the other shoe to drop*  
to await the seemingly imminent and inevitable (refers to a man undressing, disturbing a neighbor by dropping one shoe, then frustrating his expectation by putting the other shoe down gently)

**DROUGHT** *to break a drought*  
to resume supplies after an interval

**DROVE** *people stayed away in droves*  
few people came

**DROWN** *to drown one's sorrows*  
to drink by way of solace and in an attempt to forget some misfortune

**DRUG** *to be a drug on the market*  
to be in overplentiful supply

**DRUM** *to beat a drum for someone*  
to propagate another person's cause

**DRUM** *to beat one's drum*  
to immodestly publicize one's own attributes

**DRUM** *to drum someone out of some organization*

to terminate in ignominy a person's employment or membership (refers to the ceremonial cashing in the army to the beating of parade drums)

**DRUM** *to drum up support*  
to actively seek out support

**DRUM** *to march to a different drum*  
to show an independent approach

**DRUNK** *to be punch drunk*  
to be stupefied by some news

**DRY** *a dry hole*  
an exercise which after much effort proves fruitless

**DRY** *a dry run*  
a trial exercise

**DRY** *the ink is hardly dry*  
something intended to last a long time is to be changed shortly after its establishment

**DRY** *to be cut and dried*  
to be well settled or long established

**DRY** *to dry up*  
to cease

**DRY** *to keep one's powder dry*  
to retain key arguments or resources in reserve for use later

**DRY** *to leave someone high and dry*  
to withdraw all support from a person or to isolate a person from a desired involvement

**DRY to suck the lemon dry**  
to get the maximum advantage out of some favorable situation

**DUCK a lame duck**  
a person unable to fend for himself (a lame duck president - a president still in office but without influence because the commencement of his successor's term is imminent)

**DUCK in two shakes of a duck's tail**  
in an instant

**DUCK to be a dead duck**  
to have failed

**DUCK to be a sitting duck**  
to be readily exploited

**DUCK to be like water off a duck's back**  
(of advice or criticism) to be completely rejected

**DUCK to break one's duck**  
to end a spell without results (refers to cricket)

**DUCK to duck for cover**  
to seek to avoid blame

**DUCK to play ducks and drakes**  
not to treat the matter seriously

**DUCKLING an ugly duckling**  
a person initially thought unintelligent who develops and becomes brilliant (refers to a cygnet in a brood of ducks in a children's story of that name by Hans Christian Andersen)

**DUE to give the devil his due**  
to be fair (a phrase used in parenthesis, and only in the infinitive)

**DUMP to be in the dumps**  
to feel depressed

**DUMP to dump something in someone's lap**  
to impose some responsibility on another person

**DUNCE to earn a dunce's cap**  
to do something stupid

**DUST to bite the dust**  
to die

**DUST to dust some idea off**  
to revive some proposal

**DUST to gather dust**  
not to be acted upon without being formally rejected

**DUST to throw dust into someone's eyes**  
to deceive a person by presenting inaccurate or misleading information

**DUST when the dust settles**  
when sufficient time has passed

**DYED dyed in the wool**  
very loyal and partisan

**DYNAMITE to be dynamite**  
to cause outrage

**DYNAMITE to play with dynamite**  
to invite trouble by virtue of one's risky conduct

## E

**EAGER an eager beaver**  
a person with great drive and enthusiasm even if this causes annoyance to others

**EAGLE to have an eagle eye**  
to be able to notice small mistakes very readily

**EAR a word in someone's ear**  
a confidential discussion

**EAR dog-eared**  
(of pages) well-thumbed

**EAR little pitchers have long ears**  
children have a tendency to overhear things

**EAR one can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear**  
it is impossible to manufacture something of a high standard without appropriate raw materials

**EAR to be all ears**  
to be very attentive

**EAR** to be music to one's ears  
to be comments which one is very pleased to hear

**EAR** to be out on one's ear  
to have one's services abruptly terminated

**EAR** to be up to one's ears in something  
to be very deeply involved in something

**EAR** to be wet behind the ears  
to be excessively naive and inexperienced

**EAR** to chew someone's ear  
to force one's conversation on an unwilling listener

**EAR** to come out of one's ears  
to be plentiful

**EAR** to come to someone's ears  
to come to someone's attention

**EAR** to drag someone by the head and ears  
to force a person to reveal the true facts

**EAR** to fall around one's ears  
to collapse utterly

**EAR** to fall on deaf ears  
to be totally disregarded

**EAR** to get the wrong sow by the ear  
to reach an incorrect conclusion

**EAR** to go in one ear and out the other  
to leave no impression

**EAR** to have money flowing out of one's ears  
to be very rich

**EAR** to have someone's ear  
to have a person's attention

**EAR** to keep an ear to the ground  
to be well informed as to current developments

**EAR** to keep one's ears open  
to be on the lookout for useful information

**EAR** to lend someone an ear  
to pay attention to a person

**EAR** to play it by ear  
to develop one's strategy to always fit in with circumstances as they change from time to time

**EAR** to prick up one's ears  
to suddenly start paying attention to a conversation in progress as a result of a half-heard phrase

**EAR** to send someone away with a flea in his ear  
to give a person frank but unwelcome facts (refers to fleas trapped in the armor of ancient knights)

**EAR** to turn something on its ear  
to reverse something

**EAR walls have ears**  
someone may be overhearing (words on wartime posters, reminding people of the existence of spies; may also refer to certain rooms in the Louvre, constructed so that conversations could be heard in other rooms)

**EAR** were your ears burning?  
we were discussing you

**EAR** with one's ears pinned back  
chastened

**EARLY** the early bird gets the worm  
a person who acts ahead of others gets an advantage over them

**EARMARK** to earmark  
to allocate to a specific purpose

**EARN** to earn a dunce's cap  
to do something stupid

**EARN** to earn one's stripes  
to deserve promotion

**EARN** to earn peanuts  
to get a reward which is far too small in relation to the value of the services rendered

**EARTH** a down-to-earth solution  
a realistic solution

**EARTH** *earth-shattering*  
very significant

**EARTH** *how on earth?*  
just how?

**EARTH** *to be the salt of the earth*  
to be a person whose ordinary efforts  
benefit the community (Matthew 5:13)

**EARTH** *to bring someone down to earth*  
to disillusion a person

**EARTH** *to charge the earth*  
to impose very high prices

**EARTH** *to move heaven and earth*  
to do everything possible

**EARTH** *to promise the earth*  
to give extravagant assurances

**EARTH** *to run someone to earth*  
to locate a person

**EASY** *to be easy meat*  
to be an opponent who is readily  
outwitted

**EASY** *to be easy on the eye*  
to be visually attractive

**EASY** *to breathe easy*  
(following some crisis) to relax

**EAT I'll eat my hat if so-and-so happens**  
I do not believe that so-and-so will  
happen

**EAT moth-eaten**  
(of ideas, etc.) antiquated

**EAT the proof of the pudding is in the eating**  
the success of a venture will be measured  
by its results

**EAT to be able to eat someone for breakfast**  
to be able to outwit a person very easily

**EAT to eat crow**  
to accept a humiliating defeat

**EAT to eat humble pie**  
to apologize

**EAT to eat one's heart out**  
to suffer bitterly

**EAT to eat one's words**  
to retract

**EAT to eat out of someone's hands**  
to be unduly compliant

**EAT to eat someone alive**  
to soundly defeat a person

**EAT to eat someone out of house and home**  
to ruin a person by eating all he has

**EAT to want to have one's cake and eat it too**  
to want two mutually exclusive alternatives

**EAT you can eat your heart out**  
you are entitled to feel sad or jealous

**EAVESDROP to eavesdrop**  
to deliberately listen to conversations  
to which one is not a party

**EBB ebb and flow**  
fluctuations

**EBB to ebb away**  
to decline gradually

**ECHO to echo someone's words**  
to repeat another person's views as  
though they were one's own

**ECLIPSE to eclipse someone**  
to outshine a person

**EDGE gilt-edged**  
very safe

**EDGE to be a two-edged sword**  
to involve both advantages and disadvantages  
of similar significance

**EDGE to be at the cutting edge of something**  
to be in a position where important decisions  
need to be made

**EDGE to be on a knife edge**  
to be in danger

**EDGE to be on edge**  
to be nervous

**EDGE to be on the edge of one's seat**  
to be very excited at what is currently  
happening

**EDGE** to be on the razor's edge  
to be in great danger

**EDGE** to become frayed at the edges  
no longer to be quite appropriate

**EDGE** to fiddle at the edges  
to do some relatively minor things  
which do not deal with the substance  
of a problem

**EDGE** to give someone the edge  
to give a person an advantage over  
others

**EDGE** to have a leading edge  
to have an advantage

**EDGE** to push someone over the  
brink  
by a small action to cause the absolute  
ruin (financially or emotionally)  
of someone already in peril

**EDGE** to set someone's teeth on  
edge  
to cause a person to feel unhappy at a  
situation

**EDGE** to take the edge off something  
to weaken the force or impact of  
something

**EDGE** to tinker at the edges  
to make minor or cosmetic changes  
without affecting the substance

**EDGE** to tip someone over the edge  
to cause a person to become mentally  
ill

**EDGEWAYS** to get words in  
edgeways  
to manage to interrupt a conversation  
in order to put a separate point of  
view

**EGG** a nest egg  
life savings

**EGG** as sure as eggs are eggs  
with great certainty

**EGG** chicken and egg  
two factors each of which results in  
the other

**EGG** not to put all one's eggs in  
one basket

to spread one's risks

**EGG** one cannot make an omelette  
without breaking eggs  
the desired end dictates the means  
even if they cause harm to others

**EGG** there are many ways to cook  
eggs  
there are many ways to achieve an  
objective

**EGG** to be a bad egg  
to engage in dishonest behavior

**EGG** to be a curate's egg  
to be good only in parts (refers to an  
1895 cartoon in PUNCH)

**EGG** to have egg on one's face  
to be embarrassed by the results of  
one's own stupidity

**EGG** to kill the goose that lays the  
golden eggs  
through excessive greed to destroy a  
very profitable enterprise

**EGG** to teach one's grandmother  
how to suck eggs  
to try to tell a much more experienced  
person something very obvious  
to him

**EIGHT** to be right behind the eight  
ball  
to be in a position of extreme disadvantage

**ELBOW** elbow grease  
hard manual work

**ELBOW** more power to your elbow  
may your praiseworthy efforts lead to  
success

**ELBOW** to be up to one's elbow in  
something  
to be deeply involved in something

**ELBOW** to elbow someone out  
to force a person out of some office  
and oneself into it

**ELEMENT** *to be in one's element*  
to be very comfortable in familiar surroundings or in an environment in which one can cope very readily

**ELEPHANT** *a rogue elephant*  
a person of vicious temper who acts in an undisciplined way

**ELEPHANT** *a white elephant*  
an expensive and useless luxury (refers to gifts of sacred elephants by the King of Siam to persons then ruined by the expense of their upkeep)

**ELEPHANT** *one looks for elephants in elephant country*  
one needs to search in the right place

**ELEVEN** *at the eleventh hour*  
at the last moment (actually "at the twenty-fourth hour" would be more logical) (Matthew 20:9)

**ELEVEN** *the second eleven*  
persons performing an important function but one which is less important than that performed by others (refers to cricket)

**ELEVENTH** *eleventh commandment*  
unwritten rule

**EMASCULATE** *to emasculate something*  
to delete the essential features of something

**EMOLlient** *to be an emollient*  
to be a measure designed to make people more favorably disposed to one's wishes

**EMPIRE** *to engage in empire building*  
to set out to expand the size of the business or bureaucratic unit for which one is responsible, especially as a means of increasing one's own importance

**ENCAPSULATE** *to encapsulate some idea*  
to reduce the essential points of a complicated proposal to a small number of words

**END** *a dead-end position*  
a job with no prospects of advancement

**END** *at the end of the day*  
in due course or at the conclusion of a project

**END** *the tail end of something*  
the very end of something

**END** *this is the end of the road for someone*  
a person will have no further opportunity to do something

**END** *to be at the end of one's tether*  
to be frustrated by a lack of knowledge, authority or patience

**END** *to be on the losing end of the stick*  
to be worse off while the other party to a transaction becomes correspondingly better off

**END** *to be the thin end of the wedge*  
by conceding a small point to create an undesirable precedent for much larger issues

**END** *to burn the candle at both ends*  
to work excessively long hours

**END** *to go off the deep end*  
to lose one's temper

**END** *to have hold of the wrong end of the pineapple*  
to be utterly mistaken

**END** *to hold the wrong end of the stick*  
to be completely mistaken about something

**END** *to jump straight in at the deep end*  
to do something without a proper lead-in

**END** *to make ends meet*  
to live within one's income

**END** to run into a dead end  
to get nowhere in an investigation

**END** to see the light at the end of the tunnel  
to be close to finalizing a long exercise

**END** to seek the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow  
to have naive expectations

**END** to tie up the loose ends  
to complete the minor outstanding items of some substantially finished project

**ENFANT** an enfant terrible  
a person who raises pertinent but unpalatable issues (French, "terrible child," "a little terror")

**ENOUGH** enough to sink a battleship  
more than sufficient

**ENSHRINE** to enshrine  
to incorporate as an important part of something

**ENTER** to enter the home stretch  
to commence the last stage

**ESCAPE** to escape by the skin of one's nose  
to only just avoid some disaster

**ESCAPE** to escape by the skin of one's teeth  
to only just avoid some disaster

**ESCUTCHEON** to be a blot on someone's escutcheon  
to be a blemish on a person's character

**ESPIRIT** esprit de corps  
a feeling of camaraderie and concern for the good name of some organization of which one is a member (French, "vital breath of a body")

**ESTATE** the fourth estate  
the press

**EVE** to be on the eve of something  
to occur just before some event

**EVEN** to even the score  
to get one's own back for some past action

**EVEN** to keep something on an even keel  
to ensure that something is not harmed

**EVERY** as every schoolboy knows  
as is recognized by everyone

**EVERY** every Pancake Tuesday  
only on rare occasions (refers to Shrove Tuesday, when pancakes are traditionally eaten)

**EVERY** every Tom, Dick and Harry  
just about everybody

**EVERY** every cloud has a silver lining  
there are benefits even in seemingly adverse situations

**EVERY** every dog has his day  
good luck comes sooner or later

**EVERY** every man and his dog  
everybody

**EVERY** in every nook and cranny  
everywhere

**EVERY** to chase every hare  
to be easily sidetracked

**EVERY** to drain every ounce out of something  
to get the maximum use or pleasure out of something

**EVERY** to play every card in the pack  
to try very hard and use every conceivable argument

**EVERY** to resist something every inch of the way  
to utterly resist something

**EVERY** to use every trick in the book  
to try very hard and use every conceivable argument

**EVERYTHING** everything but the kitchen sink  
a lot of things

**EVERYTHING** *everything under the sun*  
everything

**EVERYTHING** *to do everything by halves*  
to do everything imperfectly or incompletely

**EXHAUST** *to exhaust the field*  
to use up all the possibilities

**EXHIBITION** *to make an exhibition of oneself*  
to behave in a way which invites ridicule

**EXISTENCE** *a cat and dog existence*

a life full of frequent squabbles

**EXPEDITION** *a fishing expedition*  
an exercise designed to get information to which one is not strictly entitled

**EXPLODE** *to explode*

(of a person) to express rage

**EXPOSE** *to expose one's flank*  
to allow others to take advantage of one

**EXTRA** *to go the extra mile*  
to work beyond the call of duty

**EYE** *a bird's-eye view*

a general overview or summary of a subject, emphasizing the major features

**EYE** *a mote in someone's eye*

a fault in another person which is trifling in comparison to an unrecognizable major fault in oneself (Matthew 7:3)

**EYE** *a smack in the eye*

a rebuff

**EYE** *all eyes are on something*  
everyone's attention is focused on something

**EYE** *an eye for an eye*

retaliation (Exodus 21:24)

**EYE** *beauty is in the eye of the beholder*

some things are matters for subjective judgments

**EYE** *blue-eyed boy*  
person shown unjustified favoritism

**EYE** *bright-eyed and bushy-tailed*  
naive but enthusiastic

**EYE** *cock-eyed*  
stupid

**EYE** *in one's mind's eye*  
using a vivid imagination

**EYE** *in someone's eyes*  
in a person's judgment

**EYE** *lynx-eyed*  
having acute vision

**EYE** *one would give one's eye teeth for something*

a person would very much like to achieve some objective

**EYE** *one-eyed*  
biased

**EYE** *someone's eyes are bigger than his stomach*

a person is unrealistic

**EYE** *someone's eyes popped*  
a person expressed great surprise

**EYE** *to be a sight for sore eyes*  
to be something welcome

**EYE** *to be all eyes*  
to observe very closely

**EYE** *to be an eye opener*  
to be a surprise

**EYE** *to be better than a poke in the eye with a burnt stick*  
to be particularly welcome

**EYE** *to be easy on the eye*  
to be visually attractive

**EYE** *to be eye wash*  
to be nonsense

**EYE** *to be in the eye of the storm*  
to be at the center of a controversy

**EYE** *to be in the public eye*  
to have one's every action subject to scrutiny by the community

**EYE to be one in the eye for someone**  
to represent an unexpected and unwelcome defeat

**EYE to be only a gleam in someone's eyes**  
to be a long way from final achievement

**EYE to be the apple of someone's eye**  
to be a person of whom another person is proud.

**EYE to cast an eye over something**  
to look at something critically

**EYE to cast sheep's eyes at someone**  
to look at a person amorously

**EYE to catch someone's eye**  
to attract the attention of another person or to seek permission to address that person

**EYE to clap eyes on something**  
to catch sight of something

**EYE to cock one's eye at someone**  
to glance knowingly at a person

**EYE to cry one's eyes out**  
to express great sadness at a situation

**EYE to do someone in the eye**  
to cheat a person

**EYE to have an eagle eye**  
to be able to notice small mistakes very readily

**EYE to have an eye for something**  
to appreciate the appearance of something

**EYE to have eyes at the back of one's head**  
to know more of what is going on than is generally realized

**EYE to have one's beady eyes on something**  
to await the chance to acquire something to which one is not properly entitled

**EYE to have one's eyes glued to something**

to concentrate on looking at something to the exclusion of other competing calls for attention

**EYE to have stars in one's eyes**  
(for emotional rather than rational reasons) to be ecstatic

**EYE to hit someone right between the eyes**  
to be brutally frank

**EYE to hit the bull's eye**  
to make the correct decision

**EYE to keep a weather eye out for something**  
to look out with particular care

**EYE to keep an eye on the ball**  
to monitor a fast-changing situation

**EYE to keep one's eye on someone**  
to supervise a person or to monitor a person's activities and behavior

**EYE to keep one's eye on something**  
to monitor a situation

**EYE to keep one's eyes open**  
to be on the lookout for useful information

**EYE to keep one's eyes open for something**  
to be on the lookout for an opportunity to do something

**EYE to keep one's eyes peeled for something**  
to be on the constant lookout for something

**EYE to make eyes at someone**  
to look at a person amorously

**EYE to open someone's eyes to something**  
to alert another person to the truth of something

**EYE to pick the eyes out of something**  
to choose the most valuable items from among a large number

**EYE** to pull the wool over someone's eyes  
to deceive or deliberately mislead another person

**EYE** to rub one's eyes  
to express astonishment

**EYE** to see eye to eye with someone  
to agree

**EYE** to see something with half an eye  
to sum up a matter instantly

**EYE** to see the color of someone's eyes  
to see how a person matches expectations or requirements

**EYE** to shut one's eyes to something  
to deliberately take no notice of something, especially in dereliction of one's duty

**EYE** to throw dust into someone's eyes  
to deceive a person by presenting inaccurate or misleading information

**EYE** to turn a blind eye to something  
to pretend something obvious does not exist (refers to action by Nelson when disregarding Admiralty signals)

**EYE** with an eye toward doing something  
with the intention that something particular be done

**EYE** with one's eyes wide open  
fully conscious of the ramifications

**EYEBALL** eyeball to eyeball  
confronting each other and taking account of each other's reactions

**EYEBALL** to be up to the eyeballs in something  
to be very deeply involved in something

**EYEBROW** to raise one's eyebrows  
to express one's utter astonishment

**EYEFUL** to get an eyeful of something  
to see something impressive

**EYELASH** not to bat an eyelash  
to fail to express any surprise

**EYELID** to hang on by the eyelids  
to have only a slender hold

**EYESORE** eyesore  
extremely ugly object

## F

**FACE** a poker face  
a facial expression which does not reveal one's thoughts during negotiations

**FACE** a slap in the face  
a calculated insult or action amounting to a rebuke

**FACE** a straight face  
a facial expression which does not reveal one's thoughts in a humorous situation

**FACE** someone's face fell  
someone registered obvious disappointment

**FACE** to be at the coal face  
to be in the place where the real work is done

**FACE** to be left red-faced  
to be embarrassed

**FACE** to blow up in someone's face  
to rebound on a person

**FACE** to cut one's nose off to spite one's face  
to act in pique in a way which harms only oneself

**FACE** to do an about-face  
to reverse a previously enunciated policy

**FACE** to face a rocky road ahead  
to be likely to encounter difficulties

**FACE** to face the music  
to accept responsibility when confronted by one's critics

**FACE** to fall flat on one's face  
to make a bad error of judgment

**FACE** to fly in the face of some rule  
to blatantly disregard some rule

**FACE** to go on till one is blue in  
the face  
to argue for a long time

**FACE** to have a long face  
to look miserable

**FACE** to have egg on one's face  
to be embarrassed by the results of  
one's own stupidity

**FACE** to hurl something in  
someone's face  
to reproach a person in regard to  
something

**FACE** to lose face  
to endure embarrassment by virtue of  
being defeated or having one's errors  
found out

**FACE** to present a happy face to the  
world  
bravely to gloss over one's problems

**FACE** to put a brave face on it  
to face adversity cheerfully

**FACE** to put a new face on  
something  
to alter the way something should be  
regarded

**FACE** to put one's best face on  
something  
to focus on the positive features sur-  
rounding a basically disastrous situation

**FACE** to save face  
to be allowed to keep one's dignity  
despite having suffered a defeat or  
made an error

**FACE** to set one's face against  
something  
to oppose some matter

**FACE** to show one's face  
to put in an appearance

**FACE** to slam the door in someone's  
face  
ostentatiously to refuse to have any  
dealings with a person

**FACE** to stare someone in the face  
(of a solution, etc.) to become obvious

**FACE** to take something at face  
value  
(of alleged facts) to accept something  
without question or challenge

**FACE** to wipe the smile off  
someone's face  
to destroy a person's complacency

**FACE** two-faced  
insincere

**FACE** volte face  
a reversal of previously-held beliefs  
(French, "a turning around")

**FACE** wipe that smile off your face!  
treat this matter more seriously!

**FACE** you will laugh on the other  
side of your face  
you will regret this

**FAILURE** heart failure  
a shock

**FAIR** a fair-weather friend  
a person purporting to be a friend  
who offers no support in difficult times

**FAIR** to be a fair crack of the whip  
to be just

**FAIR** to be fair game  
to be someone who can legitimately  
be attacked

**FAIRY** a fairy godmother  
a person showing great kindness

**FAIRY** to believe in the tooth fairy  
to be particularly gullible

**FAITH** an article of faith  
a fundamental belief on which certain  
behavior is based

**FAITHFUL** the old faithful  
a greatly loved article

**FALL** a fallen angel  
a previously trusted person who has  
transgressed

**FALL** crestfallen  
dejected

**FALL** downfall  
ruination

**FALL** it fell off the back of a truck  
(of goods) they were stolen; (of a politically sensitive document) it was leaked to me

**FALL** let the cards fall where they may  
irrespective of what happens

**FALL** someone's face fell  
someone registered obvious disappointment

**FALL** that is the way the chips fall  
that is the actual situation

**FALL** the ax has fallen  
it is now too late

**FALL** the roof has fallen in  
an enterprise has collapsed

**FALL** the sky fell in  
a very serious problem arose

**FALL** the wheels fell off  
the plan failed

**FALL** they fell over themselves to  
do something  
they showed great keenness while doing  
something

**FALL** to be riding for a fall  
to act in a reckless manner

**FALL** to fall around one's ears  
to collapse utterly

**FALL** to fall between two stools  
not to fit neatly into either of two available alternatives and waver between them

**FALL** to fall by the wayside  
to abandon and not complete what one set out to do

**FALL** to fall flat  
(of a joke) to be unappreciated by the audience

**FALL** to fall flat on one's face  
to make a bad error of judgment

**FALL** to fall head over heels in love  
to fall very much in love

**FALL** to fall in a heap  
(of a proposal) to collapse utterly

**FALL** to fall into line  
to conform with others

**FALL** to fall on deaf ears  
to be totally disregarded

**FALL** to fall on one's feet  
surprisingly to succeed despite difficulties

**FALL** to fall over one's own feet  
to be very clumsy

**FALL** to fall through  
not to eventuate as expected

**FALL** to fall to pieces  
(of a plan) to collapse

**FALL** to fall to the ground  
to fail

**FALL** to play the cards as they fall  
to deal with problems as they arise

**FALL** where the ax falls  
who gets terminated

**FALL** windfall  
unexpected good fortune

**FALSE** a false dawn  
an incident giving rise to unjustified hope

**FALSE** to sail under false colors  
to pretend that one's real character or beliefs are different from what they really are

**FAMILY** to sell off the family silver  
to sell off one's prized possessions

**FAMINE** to be either feast or famine  
to go from one extreme to the other

**FAN** to fan the flames  
to increase unrest

**FANCYFREE** footloose and  
fancyfree  
unmarried and without any romantic attachments

**FANFARE** with much fanfare  
with great enthusiasm and public acclaim

**FAR** to be a far cry from something  
to be a long way from something

**FAST** fast and furious  
in an exciting way, in quick succession

**FAST** life in the fast lane  
existence full of exciting but worthless activity

**FAST** to come in thick and fast  
to arrive quickly and in great volume

**FAST** to play fast and loose  
to disregard one's obligations

**FAST** to pull a fast one  
to engage in a dirty trick

**FAT** a fat chance  
little hope

**FAT** it's not over till the fat lady sings  
it is not finished yet

**FAT** the fat is in the fire  
action with certain unstoppable consequences has now been initiated

**FAT** to chew fat  
to eat and talk together

**FAT** to trim the fat  
to increase efficiency by reducing outlays

**FATAL** to be fatal  
to be sufficient to destroy some proposal

**FATE** to seal someone's fate  
to cause a certain outcome adversely affecting a person

**FATHER** father knows best  
as an expert I know better than you do just what is most suitable for you

**FATTEN** to kill the fatted calf  
to demonstrate welcome and forgiveness on a person's return (Luke 15:23)

**FAUX** faux pas  
something indiscreet or offending social conventions (French, "false step")

**FAVORITE** favorite son  
person preferred by many people for some office

**FEAR** I fear the Greeks even when they bear gifts

I am suspicious of generous behavior from traditional opponents (from Virgil's AENEID, in reference to the Trojan horse)

**FEAR** fools rush in where angels fear to tread  
unsophisticated persons take unwise risks in circumstances where more knowledgeable persons would exercise caution

**FEAR** in fear and trembling  
in a state of apprehension

**FEAST** a movable feast  
an event not customarily held on a set date

**FEAST** to be either feast or famine  
to go from one extreme to the other

**FEATHER** a feather in one's cap  
a meritorious personal achievement

**FEATHER** birds of a feather flock together  
persons of like interests gather in the same place

**FEATHER** feather bedding  
(in industrial relations) creating unnecessary jobs solely to increase employment; (in economics) assisting an inefficient industry by government grants or excessive tariff protection

**FEATHER** to feather one's own nest  
to improperly arrange a transaction on behalf of others to one's own financial advantage

**FEATHER** to make feathers fly  
to cause trouble to those misbehaving

**FEATHER** to ruffle someone's feathers  
to engage in behavior which irritates another person

**FEATHER** to show the white feather to indicate cowardice (refers to cross-bred birds, not regarded as useful in cock fighting)

**FEATHER** to thrash with a feather to award only a minor punishment for a very serious offense

**FEDERAL** to make a Federal case out of something

to attach far too much significance to a trivial issue

**FEED** to be chicken feed

to be small and unimportant

**FEED** to be fed up to the back teeth to be disgusted

**FEED** to bite the hand that feeds one to show ingratitude

**FEED** to feed the fire

to exacerbate a situation

**FEEDBACK** feedback

response from a target audience to those seeking to influence it

**FEEL** a gut feeling

a belief based purely on intuition and unsupported by facts or evidence

**FEEL** to feel one's oats

to display self-importance

**FEEL** to feel the draft

to experience unfavorable conditions

**FEEL** to feel the pinch

to be adversely affected by financial stringency

**FEEL** to feel the rough side of someone's tongue

to be verbally abused by a person

**FELL** in one fell swoop

all at the same time

**FELONY** to compound the felony

having already acted improperly to make matters worse (the misuse of a legal term: compounding a felony is the crime of agreeing for money not to prosecute a person for felony; in reality it is therefore an offense by a different person—not a second and worse offense by the original culprit)

**FENCE** on our side of the fence in the group representing our vested interest

**FENCE** to be on the other side of the fence

to have an opposing point of view or position

**FENCE** to be over the fence to be unreasonable

**FENCE** to mend fences to achieve a reconciliation

**FENCE** to rush one's fences to act precipitately

**FENCE** to sit on the fence

to refuse to choose between two alternatives

**FENCE** to want to jump all one's fences at once

to be unrealistic

**FERRET** to ferret something out by diligent research to discover some secret

**FESTER** to open up a festering sore to upset a person by drawing attention to a long-standing grievance

**FETTER** to fetter someone

to stop a person acting on his own initiative

**FEVER** to be at fever pitch

to be in a state of excited activity

**FIDDLE** to fiddle at the edges

to do some relatively minor things which do not deal with the substance of a problem

**FIDDLE** to fiddle while Rome burns

to neglect important considerations while concentrating on trivial side-issues

**FIDDLE** to play second fiddle

to fulfill a subordinate role

**FIELD** a field day

a very enjoyable and successful occasion

**FIELD** *a level playing field*  
competition on equal terms

**FIELD** *distant fields look greener*  
activities of which one has no experience seem much easier than is really the case

**FIELD** *to be ahead of the field*  
to be better than one's competitors

**FIELD** *to cover the field*  
to be comprehensive

**FIELD** *to exhaust the field*  
to use up all the possibilities

**FIELD** *to have a field marshal's baton in one's kit*  
to be ambitious

**FIFTH** *a fifth columnist*  
a person using his position of trust to work for a rival cause

**FIFTH** *to be a fifth wheel*  
to be superfluous

**FIFTH** *to plead the Fifth Amendment*  
to refuse to answer an unwelcome question (refers to the Fifth Amendment of the United States Constitution, which provides protection against self-incrimination)

**FIFTY** *to have fifty cents each way*  
to equivocate

**FIG** *one would not give a fig for something*  
one regards something as worthless

**FIGHT** *a bunfight*  
a minor and relatively friendly skirmish

**FIGHT** *a dogfight*  
a small side-skirmish, especially between airplanes

**FIGHT** *to fight an uphill battle*  
to face difficulties or to have formidable opposition

**FIGHT** *to fight bushfires*  
to deal with crises as they arise rather than take preventive action

**FIGHT** *to fight fire with fire*  
to counter a dangerous situation by making an equally dangerous move

**FIGHT** *to fight tooth and nail*  
to strive very hard to win

**FIGHT** *to have a fight on one's hands*  
to encounter resistance or opposition to a proposal

**FIGUREHEAD** *a figurehead*  
the ceremonial chief officer of some organization without any real power (refers to the carving at the front of a ship)

**FILL** *to fill a vacuum*  
to take advantage of an opportunity not acted on by others

**FILL** *to fill in the fine print*  
to provide the precise details in respect of something presently existing in broad outline only

**FILL** *to fill someone's shoes*  
to be a good successor

**FILTER** *to filter through to someone*  
(of information) to eventually reach a person

**FINAL** *the final straw*  
the latest step, which, when added to a large number of seemingly harmless previous steps, sets off a disaster resulting from the cumulative effect

**FINAL** *to deal the final hand*  
to take steps which conclude a matter

**FIND** *the river found its mark*  
equilibrium between two pressures has been achieved

**FIND** *to find one's feet*  
to develop one's skills

**FIND** *to find out the state of play*  
to ascertain the current position of some project

**FIND** water will find its own level  
people will reach an appropriate position relative to others

**FINE** not to put too fine a point on it  
speaking bluntly

**FINE** to fill in the fine print  
to provide the precise details in respect of something presently existing in broad outline only

**FINE** to fine-tune something  
to adjust something in order to bring it to perfection or to make it fit the circumstances in a much more appropriate fashion

**FINE** to go through something with a fine-tooth comb  
to conduct an extremely thorough investigation

**FINE** to raise something to a fine art form  
to become very clever at doing something

**FINE** to tread a fine line  
cautiously to take action in circumstances where either too much or too little will cause difficulties

**FINGER** light-fingered  
good at stealing

**FINGER** not to lay a finger on someone  
to refrain from hurting a person

**FINGER** not to lift a finger to help someone  
to refuse to assist

**FINGER** someone's fingers are all thumbs  
a person is clumsy with his hands

**FINGER** to burn one's fingers  
to lose money through foolishness

**FINGER** to gnaw one's fingers to the bone  
to fret

**FINGER** to have a finger in something  
to be involved in something

**FINGER** to have a finger in the pie  
to have an interest in a project

**FINGER** to have green fingers  
to be good at gardening

**FINGER** to have itchy fingers  
to be impatient

**FINGER** to have one's fingers in many different pies  
to be engaged in a variety of separate activities

**FINGER** to have one's fingers in the till  
to steal from one's employer

**FINGER** to have one's fingers on the pulse  
to know what is going on

**FINGER** to have sticky fingers  
to be dishonest

**FINGER** to keep one's cotton-picking fingers off something  
not to interfere in something

**FINGER** to keep one's fingers crossed  
to hope for a good outcome

**FINGER** to let something slip through one's fingers  
to allow something to escape from one's ownership or control

**FINGER** to point the finger at someone  
to accuse a person or allege some indiscretion on his part

**FINGER** to pull one's fingers out  
to get on with a job with alacrity

**FINGER** to put one's finger on something  
to identify the essential features of something

**FINGER** to stir a finger  
to make some minimum effort

**FINGER** to twist someone around one's little finger  
by charm to get one's way

**FINGER** *to wave a finger at someone*  
 to indicate mild displeasure at another person's actions

**FINGER** *to work one's fingers to the bone*  
 to work very hard

**FINGERNAIL** *to bite one's fingernails*  
 to anxiously await a decision

**FINGERNAIL** *to hang on by one's fingernails*  
 to have only a slender hold

**FINGERTIP** *to cling on by one's fingertips*  
 to have only a slender hold

**FINGERTIP** *to have some subject at one's fingertips*  
 to be very familiar with a subject

**FINISH** *a photo finish*  
 a close result in a contest

**FIRE** *a baptism of fire*  
 the commencement of an operation which presented great difficulty

**FIRE** *a fire in someone's belly*  
 great enthusiasm

**FIRE** *fire sale*  
 a forced sale, realizing bargain prices

**FIRE** *out of the frying pan into the fire*  
 from one bad situation to an even worse one

**FIRE** *sure-fire*  
 guaranteed

**FIRE** *the fat is in the fire*  
 action with certain unstoppable consequences has now been initiated

**FIRE** *to add fuel to the fire*  
 to make a bad situation worse

**FIRE** *to be in the firing line*  
 to be among the first to be under attack

**FIRE** *to draw fire*  
 to encounter criticism

**FIRE** *to feed the fire*  
 to exacerbate a situation

**FIRE** *to fight fire with fire*  
 to counter a dangerous situation by making an equally dangerous move

**FIRE** *to fire a parting shot*  
 to make a defiant gesture on leaving

**FIRE** *to fire a salvo at someone*  
 to present a series of criticisms to a person

**FIRE** *to fire a volley at someone*  
 to send a series of angry messages to someone

**FIRE** *to go through fire and water*  
 to undertake all attendant risks

**FIRE** *to hang fire*  
 to take no immediate action

**FIRE** *to have a bullet which can be fired*  
 to have available an effective response which can be used at will

**FIRE** *to have other irons in the fire*  
 to have the opportunity to do something else as an alternative

**FIRE** *to hold fire*  
 to defer criticizing

**FIRE** *to hold one's fire*  
 to delay proposed action

**FIRE** *to keep the home fires burning*  
 to maintain normal domestic activity during the temporary absence of the breadwinner

**FIRE** *to play with fire*  
 to invite trouble through one's foolish conduct

**FIRE** *to pull someone's chestnuts out of the fire*  
 to retrieve a situation

**FIRE** *to pull something out of the fire*  
 to salvage something in a seemingly hopeless situation

**FIRE** to set the Thames on fire  
to do something noteworthy

**FIRE** to set the world on fire  
to do something particularly brilliant

**FIRE** to stoke the fires  
to provoke a violent reaction

**FIRE** where there is smoke there is fire  
if there is a hint of trouble, then it is highly likely that there really is trouble

**FIREMAN** a visiting fireman  
an important person calling on business to whom certain courtesies need to be paid

**FIRESTORM** to run into a firestorm  
to be faced with many protests

**FIREWORKS** fireworks  
aggressive behavior because of anger

**FIRST** at first blush  
prima facie

**FIRST** at first hand  
personally

**FIRST** first catch your hare  
do things in logical order and after proper preparation (advice on how to cook a hare in Mrs. Beeton's celebrated COOK BOOK)

**FIRST** first in best dressed  
persons acting early will do better than latecomers

**FIRST** head first  
precipitately

**FIRST** to be first class  
to be very satisfactory

**FIRST** to be first off the mark  
to start ahead of all others

**FIRST** to be the first cab off the rank  
to start ahead of all others

**FIRST** to draw first blood  
to get an advantage

**FIRST** to get to first base  
to succeed in getting others to start comprehending a problem

**FIRST** to jump in feet first  
to take a calculated risk

**FISH** a fishing expedition  
an exercise designed to get information to which one is not strictly entitled

**FISH** a queer fish  
an unusual type of person

**FISH** an ocean full of fish  
plenty of opportunity

**FISH** neither fish, flesh nor good red herring  
unclassifiable by virtue of being neither one thing nor another (from Cervantes' *Don Quixote*)

**FISH** that has nothing to do with the price of fish  
that is quite irrelevant

**FISH** to be a big fish in a little pond  
to be a person holding an important office but in an unimportant organization

**FISH** to be a cold fish  
to be an unemotional person

**FISH** to be a different kettle of fish  
to be something very dissimilar

**FISH** to be a fine kettle of fish  
to be a terrible muddle

**FISH** to be a fish out of water  
to be in difficulty by virtue of being in a strange environment

**FISH** to be in a goldfish bowl  
to be very open to view

**FISH** to fish for compliments  
to drop hints in the hope that one will receive praise or recognition

**FISH** to fish in troubled waters  
to profit from a disturbed situation

**FISH** to have more important fish to fry  
to have more important things to do

**FISHY** to be fishy  
to be suspicious

**FIST** *ham-fisted*  
undiplomatic and clumsy

**FIST** *hand over fist*  
rapidly overtaking each other during progress toward a common goal

**FIST** *hard-fisted*  
stingy

**FIST** *tight-fisted*  
stingy

**FIST** *to lose money hand over fist*  
to lose money very fast and convincingly

**FIST** *to make a good fist of something*  
to be successful in a difficult task

**FISTFUL** *to hold out a fistful of dollars*  
to keep strict discipline

**FISTFUL** *to hold out a fistful of dollars*  
to offer by way of inducement

**FIT** *if the cap fits then wear it*  
if your circumstances correspond with those described then you must endure the consequences

**FIT** *not fit to hold a candle to someone*  
greatly inferior to another person

**FIT** *not to get along with someone in a fit*  
not to get along with a person

**FIT** *to fit the bill*  
to meet all the requirements

**FIT** *to have a blue fit*  
to be very agitated

**FIT** *to have a fit*  
to be in a state of great agitation

**FIT** *to have a fit of the vapors*  
to be horrified

**FIVE** *to know how many beans make five*  
to have common sense

**FLAG** *to rally to the flag*  
to show support for a cause

**FLAG** *to show the flag*  
to visit a place in order to boost morale there

**FLAG** *to wave a flag for someone*  
to promote a person's cause

**FLAGSHIP** *flagship*  
most important member of a group of related entities

**FLAK** *to attract flak*  
to attract criticism

**FLAME** *an old flame*  
a former lover

**FLAME** *keepers of the flame*  
persons keen to maintain old traditions

**FLAME** *to fan the flames*  
to increase unrest

**FLAME** *to inflame a situation*  
to aggravate a situation

**FLAME** *to pour gasoline on the flames*  
to make a bad situation worse

**FLAME** *to rekindle an old flame*  
to inspire the reinstatement of a former loving relationship

**FLAME** *to shoot someone down in flames*  
to utterly destroy another person's arguments

**FLANK** *to expose one's flank*  
to allow others to take advantage of one

**FLASH** *a flash in the pan*  
something which begins promisingly but does not last (refers to the priming of old guns)

**FLASH** *in a flash*  
in an instant

**FLASH** *to see red lights flashing*  
to be conscious of the danger

**FLAT** *flat out like a lizard*  
to be hard at work (a play on words, not a simile)

**FLAT** *to be in a flat spin*  
to be in a state of high excitement

**FLAT** to catch someone flat-footed  
to embarrass a person in the course of  
his making mistakes or being unprepared

**FLAT** to fall flat

(of a joke) to be unappreciated by the audience

**FLAT** to fall flat on one's face  
to make a bad error of judgment

**FLAVOR** to be the flavor of the month

to be a commodity temporarily popular without a logical reason

**FLEA** to send someone away with a flea in his ear

to give a person frank but unwelcome facts (refers to fleas trapped in the armor of ancient knights)

**FLEECE** to fleece someone

to cheat a person out of some asset

**FLESH** neither fish flesh nor good red herring

unclassifiable by virtue of being neither one thing nor another (from Cervantes' DON QUIXOTE)

**FLESH** one's own flesh and blood  
one's offspring

**FLESH** one's pound of flesh

that which is due to one (from Shakespeare's MERCHANT OF VENICE)

**FLESH** the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak

the body is not up to the demands made on it

**FLESH** to be a thorn in someone's flesh

to be a person whose persistent presence and righteous views annoy

**FLESH** to be more than flesh can stand

to be more than a person can reasonably be expected to endure

**FLESH** to flesh out the skeleton

to supply the missing pertinent details

**FLESH** to go the way of all flesh to die

**FLESH** to make someone's flesh creep to frighten a person with something horrific

**FLESH** to put flesh and bone on something

to supply details of a proposal previously revealed only in outline

**FLESH** to see someone in the flesh to see someone in person

**FLESHPOT** fleshpots

sumptuous living (Exodus 16:3)

**FLEX** to flex one's muscles

to exert one's personality or powers

**FLOCK** birds of a feather flock together

persons of like interests gather in the same place

**FLOCK** flock

congregation in the charge of a religious official

**FLOG** to flog a dead horse

to misguidedly do something patently useless

**FLOODGATE** to open up the floodgates

to take action which will have massive consequences

**FLOOR** there is blood on the floor

this has caused great anguish

**FLOOR** to get in on the ground floor to invest on very favorable terms

**FLOOR** to hold the floor

to dominate a conversation

**FLOOR** to wipe the floor with someone

to inflict a humiliating defeat on a person

**FLOTSAM** flotsam and jetsam

derelict persons, without a fixed abode or stable life (refers to goods found floating and to goods thrown overboard deliberately, respectively)

**FLOURISH** with a flourish of trumpets  
triumphantly

**FLOW** a lot of water has flowed under the bridge since then  
much has happened since then

**FLOW** ebb and flow  
fluctuations

**FLOW** to have money flowing out of one's ears  
to be very rich

**FLUSH** to flush out the facts  
to ascertain, after some effort, the truth of some matter

**FLUX** to be in a state of flux  
to be subject to continuous change

**FLY** I would love to be a fly on the wall

I would love to hear what goes on

**FLY** a fly in the ointment  
a flaw (refers to dead flies turning perfumes rancid) (Ecclesiastes 10:1)

**FLY** a fly-by-night operator  
a confidence trickster

**FLY** a highflyer  
an ambitious and/or successful person

**FLY** as the crow flies  
by the shortest distance

**FLY** someone can't hurt a fly  
someone is very gentle and kindhearted

**FLY** the bird has flown  
the person sought is no longer about

**FLY** there are no flies on someone  
a person is alert

**FLY** time flies  
time passes very quickly, but if wasted can never be recovered (from Virgil's GEORGICS)

**FLY** to fly a kite  
to issue uncovered checks in the hope that they will be covered before clearance or to test public reaction to legislation in contemplation by leaking broad details of it to the media

**FLY** to fly by the seat of one's pants  
to act unprofessionally

**FLY** to fly high  
to be ambitious

**FLY** to fly in the face of some rule  
to blatantly disregard some rule

**FLY** to fly off the handle  
to show irrational anger

**FLY** to fly out the window  
to be lost

**FLY** to fly the coop  
to grow up and become independent

**FLY** to have to fly  
to need to leave in order to reach the next destination quickly

**FLY** to let fly at someone  
to attack a person with strong words

**FLY** to make feathers fly  
to cause trouble to those misbehaving

**FLY** to make sparks fly  
to cause rapid activity to take place

**FLY** to make the fur fly  
to create a disturbance

**FLY** to achieve a flying start  
to get operational very quickly

**FLYING** to pass with flying colors  
to be very successful

**FOAM** to foam at the mouth  
to show anger

**FOCUS** to bring something into focus  
to put some matter into its proper content and explain its true significance

**FOCUS** to focus on something  
to concentrate attention on something

**FOG** to be in a fog  
to be in a state of confusion

**FOGGY** not to have the foggiest notion  
to know nothing at all about the subject

**FOLD** *the fold*

the body of believers (refers to an enclosure for sheep)

**FOLD** *to quietly fold up one's tent*

to surreptitiously abandon a previously-cherished stance

**FOLLOW** *to be a hard act to follow*

to be an impressive performance, not easily matched by the next person

**FOLLOW** *to follow in someone's footsteps*

to do as another person did

**FOLLOW** *to follow one's nose*

to act intuitively

**FOLLOW** *to follow the herd*

to do what most other people are doing

**FOOD** *food for thought*

material for examination in one's mind

**FOOD** *to take food out of the mouths of children*

cruelly to deprive the needy

**FOOL** *fools rush in where angels fear to tread*

unsophisticated persons take unwise risks in circumstances where more knowledgeable persons would exercise caution

**FOOL** *to live in a fool's paradise*

to delude oneself

**FOOT** *a foot in the door*

the opportunity to do business

**FOOT** *itchy feet*

a desire to travel

**FOOT** *nimble-footed*

quick to change the direction of one's activities when circumstances warrant

**FOOT** *not to let grass grow under one's feet*

not to let inertia or delay spoil something

**FOOT** *not to put a foot wrong*

to behave impeccably

**FOOT** *the boot is on the other foot*

the real facts are the other way round

**FOOT** *to be at one's feet*

to be in the immediate vicinity

**FOOT** *to be quick on one's feet*

to cleverly take advantage of a situation

**FOOT** *to be rushed off one's feet*

to be rushed

**FOOT** *to be six feet under*

to be dead

**FOOT** *to bind someone hand and foot*

to completely limit a person's freedom to act

**FOOT** *to catch someone flat-footed*

to embarrass a person in the course of his making mistakes or being unprepared

**FOOT** *to cut the ground from under someone's feet*

to unexpectedly withdraw support and in the process cause embarrassment or to demolish a person's case

**FOOT** *to drag one's feet*

to perform unduly slowly

**FOOT** *to fall on one's feet*

surprisingly to succeed despite difficulties

**FOOT** *to fall over one's feet*

to be very clumsy

**FOOT** *to find one's feet*

to develop one's skills

**FOOT** *to get back on one's feet*

to recover from an illness or some other setback

**FOOT** *to get cold feet*

to become scared

**FOOT** *to get off on the wrong foot with someone*

to make an unfavorable initial impression on a person

**FOOT** *to get one's feet wet*

to do the necessary but unpleasant or menial parts of a task

<b>FOOT</b> to go hot foot to do something fast	<b>FOOT</b> to shoot oneself in the foot to act in a foolish way and thus harm one's own cause
<b>FOOT</b> to have feet of clay to be vulnerable (Daniel 2:33)	<b>FOOT</b> to stand on one's own two feet not to require the help of others
<b>FOOT</b> to have one foot in the grave to be dying	<b>FOOT</b> to start off on the right foot to commence an operation with great care to do it correctly
<b>FOOT</b> to have one's feet firmly on the ground to know what one is doing	<b>FOOT</b> to sweep someone off her feet to cause a person to lose all discernment
<b>FOOT</b> to have one's feet in both camps to have good relations with two opponents	<b>FOOT</b> to tread someone under foot to oppress a person
<b>FOOT</b> to have one's foot on something to be about to acquire something or to be able to acquire something	<b>FOOT</b> to vote with one's feet to show one's displeasure by terminating an association
<b>FOOT</b> to have the ball at one's feet to have unlimited opportunity	<b>FOOT</b> to wait hand and foot on someone to accommodate a person's every real or imagined whim
<b>FOOT</b> to have two left feet to be clumsy	<b>FOOTBALL</b> a political football a political issue which is not being debated on its merits
<b>FOOT</b> to jump in feet first to take a calculated risk	<b>FOOTHOLD</b> to gain a foothold to achieve a position from which further advances can readily be made
<b>FOOT</b> to put one's best foot forward to make a special effort	<b>FOOTLOOSE</b> footloose and fancyfree unmarried and without any romantic attachments
<b>FOOT</b> to put one's feet up to relax	<b>FOOTNOTE</b> a footnote a passing comment by way of elaboration
<b>FOOT</b> to put one's foot down to exert one's authority and insist on something	<b>FOOTPRINT</b> without leaving any footprints without making any impression
<b>FOOT</b> to put one's foot in it to make a foolish mistake	<b>FOOTSTEP</b> to follow in someone's footsteps to do as another person did
<b>FOOT</b> to put one's foot in one's mouth to say something foolish	<b>FOR</b> a tooth for a tooth retaliation (Exodus 21:24)
<b>FOOT</b> to put someone on the back foot to cause a person to adopt a lower profile	<b>FOR</b> an eye for an eye retaliation (Exodus 21:24)
<b>FOOT</b> to put something back on its feet to repair something	
<b>FOOT</b> to run someone off his feet to keep a person very busy on some physical task	

**FORBID** *forbidden fruit*  
something particularly desired just because it is not allowed (Genesis 2:17)

**FORCE** *to force someone onto his knees*  
to inflict a humiliating defeat on a person

**FORCE** *to force someone's hand*  
to take action causing another person to react

**FORCE** *to join forces*  
to cooperate with one another in order to achieve a common objective

**FORCE** *tour de force*  
feat of skill or strength (French, "feat of strength")

**FORGIVE** *anyone could be forgiven for believing that*  
it is understandable that people would believe that

**FORK** *fork in the road*  
turning point for decisions

**FORKED** *to speak with forked tongues*  
to utter half-truths with the intention of misleading the listener

**FORM** *not to do something in any way, shape or form*  
not to do something

**FORM** *to raise something to a fine art form*  
to become very clever at doing something

**FORT** *to hold the fort*  
to be in charge during the temporary absence of a superior

**FORWARD** *to give something a nudge forward*  
to give modest encouragement to something

**FORWARD** *to inch forward*  
to make slow but steady progress

**FORWARD** *to put one's best foot forward*  
to make a special effort

**FORWARD** *to take a giant step forward*  
to make a significant advance

**FOUL** *foul play*  
treachery or murder

**FOUL** *to foul one's own nest*  
to disparage one's home or workplace

**FOUNDER** *to founder on the shoals of something*  
to come to grief because of unexpected dangers

**FOUNTAINHEAD** *fountainhead*  
source of all wisdom

**FOUR** *an opening wide enough to drive a coach and four through*  
an excellent opportunity

**FOUR** *four square*  
honest and reliable

**FOUR** *from the four corners of the globe*  
from everywhere

**FOUR** *to compete on all fours with someone*  
to strive on equal terms

**FOURTH** *the fourth estate*  
the press

**FOX** *a fox hole*  
space which is really too small for a person's needs or comfort

**FRAMEWORK** *framework*  
outline of a proposal, on which further details can be developed

**FRANKENSTEIN** *to create a Frankenstein*  
to create something wicked and out of control (a reference to the fictional creator of a monster, in mistake for a reference to the monster itself)

**FRAY** *to become frayed at the edges*  
no longer to be quite appropriate

**FREDDY** *blind Freddy could see that something is such-and-such*  
it is very obvious that something is such-and-such

**FREE** to get off scot free  
to go unpunished (refers to an exemption from tax)

**FREE** to give someone a free hand  
to authorize a person to act as he sees fit

**FREE** to give someone free rein  
to confer complete direction on another person

**FREEZE** to freeze someone out  
to deliberately exclude a person

**FRESH** fresh blood  
newly joined members of some organization

**FRESH** to be a breath of fresh air  
to be a pleasant change from the past

**FRIEND** to have a friend at court  
a person with influence who is willing to use it on one's behalf

**FRIGHTEN** to frighten hell out of someone  
to alarm a person

**FRIGHTEN** to frighten the horses  
to scare people off by one's ill-considered tactics

**FROG** to have a frog in one's throat  
to be hoarse

**FROG** to leap frog something  
to overtake something, with the likelihood of in turn being overtaken (refers to a game in which participants jump over each other in turn)

**FRONT** to have a job in front of one  
to face difficulties

**FROWN** to frown on something  
to disapprove of some matter

**FRUIT** by their fruits ye shall know them  
their reputation will be based on their results (Matthew 7:20)

**FRUIT** forbidden fruit  
something particularly desired just because it is not allowed (Genesis 2:17)

**FRUIT** to bear fruit  
to result in success

**FRUITLESS** fruitless  
yielding no benefit

**FRY** out of the frying pan into the fire  
from one bad situation to an even worse one

**FRY** to have more important fish to fry  
to have more important things to do

**FUEL** to add fuel to the fire  
to make a bad situation worse

**FULL** I've had a belly full  
I have had enough of this

**FULL** an ocean full of fish  
plenty of opportunity

**FULL** full-blooded  
vigorous

**FULL** full bore ahead!  
proceed forward!

**FULL** full steam ahead!  
get going as fast as possible!

**FULL** to be a full bottle on something  
to be very knowledgeable

**FULL** to be full of beans  
to be very cheerful

**FULL** to be full of hot air  
to have an exaggerated opinion of one's own importance and to boast about it

**FULL** to be in full swing  
to be very active

**FULL** to come to a full stop  
to completely cease activity

**FULL** to get full marks for something  
to deserve praise for something

**FULL** to have one's hands full  
to be fully occupied

**FULL yes sir—yes sir—three bags full!**

(in servile response to some request) yes, very willingly!

**FUN fun and games**

amusement derived in the course of a serious activity

**FUN to be no fun**

to be difficult

**FUNERAL that is your funeral!**

that is the fate which you will have to suffer

**FUNK to be in a blue funk**

to be terrified

**FUR to make the fur fly**

to create a disturbance

**FURIOUS fast and furious**

in an exciting way, in quick succession

**FURNITURE to be part of the furniture**

to be so familiar that one's presence goes completely unnoticed

**FURTHER to be further down the line**

to have a low priority

**FUSE to have a short fuse**

to lose one's temper very readily

**FUSE to light a fuse**

to cause serious reactions

## G

**GAIN to gain a foothold**

to achieve a position from which further advances can readily be made

**GAIN to gain ground**

to advance one's position relative to others

**GAIN to gain the upper hand**

to attain, after some effort, an advantage over another person

**GAIN what one loses on the swings one gains on the roundabouts**

there are advantages and disadvantages which offset each other

**GALL gall**

impudence

**GALLERY to play to the gallery**

to do something which appeals to the general public rather than something which is right

**GALVANIZE to galvanize someone into action**

to enthuse a person into doing something

**GAMBIT a gambit**

an opening move in a competitive situation which involves short-term losses in the expectation of long-term gains

**GAMBIT opening gambit**

the first in a series of strategic moves (a tautological expression which also involves a misunderstanding of a technical chess term)

**GAME I'll soon stop his little game**

his activities are not tolerated and I will ensure that they cease

**GAME a game of cat and mouse**

negotiations between two parties of unequal bargaining power during which the stronger makes some temporary concessions to the weaker without, however, affecting the latter's eventual total defeat

**GAME a game of poker**

negotiations in which the parties try to bluff each other

**GAME a game of snakes and ladders**

a series of ups and downs

**GAME a mug's game**

activity which wise persons would eschew

**GAME don't play games with me!**

do not insult my intelligence by that line of conduct

**GAME fun and games**

amusement derived in the course of a serious activity

**GAME** *game, set and match*  
completion

**GAME** *it is just a game to someone*  
it is an exercise which a person does  
not take seriously

**GAME** *so-and-so is the name of*  
*the game*  
so-and-so is the essential element of  
the exercise

**GAME** *the game is up*  
escape is now impossible

**GAME** *the only game in town*  
the only event worthy of attention

**GAME** *to be a chess game*  
to be a complex exercise, requiring  
great skill

**GAME** *to be a new ball game*  
to be subject to completely revised  
rules or very different conditions

**GAME** *to be fair game*  
to be someone who can legitimately  
be attacked

**GAME** *to beat someone at his own*  
*game*  
to outwit a person in his own special-  
ization

**GAME** *to give the game away*  
to cease involvement with some activity

**GAME** *to lift one's game*  
to raise the standard of one's perfor-  
mance

**GAME** *to play a deep game*  
to show cunning

**GAME** *to play the game*  
to observe the letter and the spirit of  
the rules or to act honorably

**GAME** *to stick to one's game*  
to confine oneself to activities in areas  
in which one has knowledge and  
expertise

**GAME** *two can play at that game*  
it is possible to retaliate

**GAME** *what is his game?*  
what is the significance of his actions?

**GAMUT** *the whole gamut*  
the whole range of some activity

**GANDER** *what is sauce for the*  
*goose is sauce for the gander*  
arguments which apply in one case  
also apply in another

**GAP** *to bridge a gap*  
to fill a need or make up a shortfall

**GARAGE** *garage sale*  
sale of miscellaneous assets at cheap  
prices

**GARDEN** *everything in the garden*  
*is lovely*  
everything is fine

**GARDEN** *to lead someone up the*  
*garden path*  
to mislead a person by deliberately  
fallacious arguments

**GARTER** *I will have his guts for*  
*garters*  
I am extremely angry and dissatisfied  
with him

**GAS** *to be cooking with gas*  
to be fully operational

**GASOLINE** *to pour gasoline on the*  
*flames*  
to make a bad situation worse

**GASOLINE** *to put a match to gasoline*  
to make a bad situation worse

**GATE** *to close the gate*  
to deny an opportunity which was  
previously available

**GATE** *to gatecrash a gathering*  
to attend a gathering without any right  
to be there

**GATEPOST** *between you and me*  
*and the gatepost*  
confidentially

**GATEWAY** *gateway to something*  
method of achieving something

**GATHER** *to gather dust*  
not to be acted upon without being  
formally rejected

**GAUNTLET** to run the gauntlet  
to be subjected to criticism (from the Spanish word for "passage," in reference to punishment inflicted on delinquents made to run between two files of soldiers)

**GAUNTLET** to throw down the gauntlet

to issue a challenge (refers to the glove worn by a knight)

**GAY** to be a gay dog

to lead an idle life while flaunting the symbols of wealth

**GEAR** to be geared up to do something  
to have equipment, labor and know-how in place adequate for some task

**GEAR** to be in top gear

to be making excellent progress

**GEL** to gel

to make sense

**GENIE** to let the genie out of the bottle  
to cause something irreversible to take place

**GENIE** to put the genie back in the bottle

to undo something which cannot be undone

**GET** it is getting to me

it is affecting me psychologically

**GHOST** not the ghost of a chance  
no hope at all

**GHOST** to give up the ghost

to die

**GIANT** a giant

a person whose ability and achievements exceed that of most other people

**GIANT** to take a giant step forward  
to make a significant advance

**GIDDY** to play the giddy goat

to act the fool

**GIFT** I fear the Greeks even when they bear gifts

I am suspicious of generous behavior from traditional opponents (from Virgil's AENEID, in reference to the Trojan horse)

**GIFT** to look a gift horse in the mouth

to be suspicious about a benefit which has been volunteered

**GILD** to gild the lily

(actually: to gild refined gold, to paint the lily) to do something patently unnecessary

**GILT** gilt-edged

very safe

**GIRD** to gird up one's loins

to get ready for action

**GLARE** glaring error

patently obvious mistake

**GLASS** people in glass houses

should not throw stones

those who are less than perfect are foolish to criticize others

**GLASSES** to see something through rose-colored spectacles

to appreciate only the advantages and to completely disregard the disadvantages

**GLEAM** to be only a gleam in someone's eyes

to be a long way from final achievement

**GLEE** to rub one's hands with glee  
to express great satisfaction

**GLITTER** all that glitters is not gold

things are not always what they seem

**GLOBE** from the four corners of the globe

from everywhere

**GLOVE** the gloves are off

the challenge has been accepted

**GLOVE** to take off the gloves

to fight mercilessly or to debate with great ferocity

**GLOVE** to treat someone with kid gloves

to handle a person with great discretion

**GLOVE** to work hand in glove with someone

to work in close cooperation with a person or to be in collusion with a person to the detriment of others

**GLOVE** with an iron hand in a velvet glove

with a hard attitude made to seem soft

**GLOW** a warm inner glow

satisfaction at some achievement

**GLUE** to have one's eyes glued to something

to concentrate on looking at something to the exclusion of other competing calls for attention

**GLUTTON** to be a glutton for punishment

to act irresponsibly in the face of inevitable retribution

**GNASH** to gnash one's teeth

to express frustration

**GNAT** to strain at a gnat

to be scrupulous about trifles

**GNAW** to gnaw one's fingers to the bone

to fret

**GO** from go to whoa

from start to finish (refers to the command given to horses)

**GO** from the word "go"

from the beginning

**GO** it was touch and go

there were considerable risks—the objective was achieved, but only just

**GO** to be all systems "go"

to go ahead as fast as possible

**GOAL** to score a goal

to achieve an objective

**GOAL** to score an own goal

to blow oneself up

**GOAT** a scapegoat

a person unfairly blamed for something not his fault

**GOAT** to play the giddy goat to act the fool

**GOAT** to separate the sheep from the goats

to distinguish between those with and without certain attributes (Matthew 25:32)

**GOD** a little tin god  
a petty tyrant

**GOD** the mills of God grind slowly  
retribution may be delayed but is inevitable

**GOD** to be in the lap of the gods  
to be a matter of pure chance (refers to wax tablets inscribed with requests and placed on the knees of statues of Greek gods)

**GODFORSAKEN** godforsaken  
dismal and without any redeeming feature

**GODMOTHER** a fairy godmother  
a person showing great kindness

**GOLD** a golden handshake  
a large payment in connection with or as an inducement to retirement

**GOLD** a golden opportunity  
an unparalleled opportunity

**GOLD** a pot of gold  
wealth

**GOLD** all that glitters is not gold  
things are not always what they seem

**GOLD** golden parachute  
generous provisions in a remuneration package which come into play in certain circumstances

**GOLD** golden shackles  
financial arrangements designed to discourage employees changing employers

**GOLD** silence is golden  
it is better not to incriminate anyone

**GOLD** to be a river of gold  
to be a source of ongoing great profitability

<b>GOLD</b> <i>to be worth one's weight in gold</i>	<b>GOOD</b> <i>to have a good nose for business</i>
to be very desirable	to be able to identify profitable business situations
<b>GOLD</b> <i>to go for the gold</i>	<b>GOOD</b> <i>to see someone in a good light</i>
to aim for victory (refers to Olympic medals)	to regard a person favorably
<b>GOLD</b> <i>to have a heart of gold</i>	<b>GOOD</b> <i>to throw good money after bad</i>
to have a generous disposition	to waste further money in a vain attempt to recover money already lost
<b>GOLD</b> <i>to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs</i>	<b>GOODS</b> <i>to deliver the goods</i>
through excessive greed to destroy a very profitable enterprise	to achieve the objective
<b>GOLD</b> <i>to seek the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow</i>	<b>GOOSE</b> <i>a wild goose chase</i>
to have naive expectations	a foolish search for something which does not exist
<b>GOLD</b> <i>to strike gold</i>	<b>GOOSE</b> <i>to be too frightened to say "boo" to a goose</i>
to have one's efforts suddenly rewarded by great success	to be excessively shy
<b>GOLDFISH</b> <i>to be in a goldfish bowl</i>	<b>GOOSE</b> <i>to cook one's goose</i>
to be very open to view	to do something which backfires on one
<b>GOLDFISH</b> <i>what is this—a bunch of grapes or a bowl of goldfish?</i>	<b>GOOSE</b> <i>to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs</i>
surely you know what this is!	through excessive greed to destroy a very profitable enterprise
<b>GOLDMINE</b> <i>a goldmine</i>	<b>GOOSE</b> <i>what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander</i>
a source of much wealth or of many facts	arguments which apply in one case also apply in another
<b>GOLIATH</b> <i>a Goliath</i>	<b>GOOSEBERRY</b> <i>to play gooseberry</i>
a giant or a person whose ability and achievements exceed those of most other people (1 Samuel 17)	to act as an unwelcome chaperon
<b>GOMORRAH</b> <i>a Sodom and Gomorrah</i>	<b>GORDIAN</b> <i>to cut the Gordian knot</i>
a place of vice (Genesis 18:20)	to solve, especially by force, a virtually insoluble problem (refers to a complicated knot tied by Gordius and eventually cut by Alexander the Great)
<b>GOOD</b> <i>this does my heart good</i>	<b>GOSPEL</b> <i>to take something as gospel</i>
I rejoice at this	to believe that something is true
<b>GOOD</b> <i>to be a good boy</i>	<b>GRAB</b> <i>to be up for grabs</i>
to be cooperative	to be available virtually for the asking
<b>GOOD</b> <i>to be in good heart</i>	<b>GRAB</b> <i>to grab the devil by the tail</i>
to be cheerful, especially in adversity	to face up to difficulties
<b>GOOD</b> <i>to be in someone's good books</i>	
to be well regarded by another person	
<b>GOOD</b> <i>to be of good heart</i>	
to be brave in adversity	

**GRACE** to put on airs and graces  
to act in an affected manner

**GRADE** to be on the downgrade  
to be of deteriorating quality

**GRADE** to make the grade  
to succeed

**GRAIL** search for the Holy Grail  
work toward a difficult goal (refers to a vessel supposedly used by Christ at the last supper and featuring in the Arthurian legends)

**GRAIN** something goes against the grain  
something is completely and frustratingly against a people's inclination

**GRANDMOTHER** to teach one's grandmother how to suck eggs  
to try to tell a much more experienced person something very obvious to him

**GRANDSTAND** to grandstand  
to boost oneself

**GRANITE** to be carved in marble  
to be virtually unalterable

**GRAPE** that is just sour grapes  
those are disparaging remarks made only because he is peeved and resentful at someone else's better fortune

**GRAPE** to hear on the grapevine  
to learn unofficially

**GRAPE** what is this—a bunch of grapes or a bowl of goldfish?  
surely you know what this is!

**GRASP** to grasp at straws  
to have a hopeless case but show unjustified optimism on noting minor positive features

**GRASP** to grasp the nettle  
to deal with a neglected difficulty

**GRASS** a snake in the grass  
a person of low character

**GRASS** grass roots  
at the lowest level

**GRASS** not to let grass grow under one's feet  
not to let inertia or delay spoil something

**GRASSHOPPER** since he was knee high to a grasshopper  
since he was a very young child

**GRAVE** he would turn in his grave  
he would have been very surprised or displeased if he had known while still alive

**GRAVE** to dig one's own grave  
to take action which results in an unintended disaster for oneself

**GRAVE** to have one foot in the grave  
to be dying

**GRAVITY** the center of gravity  
the place most convenient to the greatest number

**GRAVITY** to defy gravity  
to go up when the expectation is to go down

**GRAVY** to get on a gravy train  
to take steps to become a recipient of benefits which are available but undeserved

**GRAY** to be a gray area  
to be in an undefined position straddling two or more possibilities

**GREASE** elbow grease  
hard manual work

**GREASE** to grease someone's palms  
to bribe a person

**GREAT** to be going great guns  
to be making very successful progress

**GREAT** to be great guns at something  
to be very skilled at something

**GREEK** I fear the Greeks even when they bear gifts  
I am suspicious of generous behavior from traditional opponents (from Virgil's AENEID, in reference to the Trojan horse)

**GREEK** something is all Greek to someone  
something is incomprehensible to a person

**GREEN** a green chum  
an inexperienced person

**GREEN** distant fields look greener  
activities of which one has no experience seem much easier than is really the case

**GREEN** to be green  
to be naive

**GREEN** to give the green light  
to grant permission

**GREEN** to have a green thumb  
to be good at gardening

**GREEN** to move on to greener pastures  
to commence a new, better career

**GREEN** to turn green  
to become very envious

**GREYHOUND** move over and let the greyhound see the rabbit  
move over

**GRIN** to grin and bear it  
to suffer adversity cheerfully

**GRIND** the mills of God grind slowly  
retribution may be delayed but is inevitable

**GRIND** to grind to a halt  
to cease some activity despite expectations that it would continue

**GRIND** to have an ax to grind  
to have a vested interest

**GRINDSTONE** to keep one's nose to the grindstone  
to work with particular diligence

**GRIP** to come to grips with some problem  
to be on the way to solving a problem

**GRIP** to have something in an iron grip  
to hold something very securely

**GRIST** it is all grist to the mill  
this is useful but unexciting additional material

**GRIT** to grit one's teeth  
to get ready to suffer pain

**GROAN** the table groaned  
the food was plentiful

**GROUND** ground rules  
basic principles

**GROUND** to be on shaky ground  
not to have strong arguments

**GROUND** to be thin on the ground  
to be scarce

**GROUND** to break new ground  
to do something for which there is no precedent

**GROUND** to clear the ground  
to dispose of the preliminaries

**GROUND** to cut the ground from under someone's feet  
to unexpectedly withdraw support and in the process cause embarrassment or to demolish a person's case

**GROUND** to fall to the ground  
to fail

**GROUND** to gain ground  
to advance one's position relative to others

**GROUND** to get in on the ground floor  
to invest on very favorable terms

**GROUND** to get something off the ground  
to take a project beyond its initial stages and make it operational

**GROUND** to give ground  
to make some concessions or to retreat or to concede some arguments

**GROUND** to go to ground  
to become unavailable to those seeking a person

**GROUND** to have one's feet firmly on the ground  
to know what one is doing

**GROUND** to have the high ground  
to have an advantage in moral terms

**GROUND** to keep an ear to the  
ground

to be well informed as to current  
developments

**GROUND** to kiss the ground  
to suffer a loss

**GROUND** to plow new ground  
to laboriously engage in an untried  
activity

**GROUND** to prepare one's ground  
to get ready for a confrontation

**GROUND** to run someone to the  
ground

to discover the whereabouts of a person

**GROUND** to stand one's ground

to maintain a stance in the face of  
opposition

**GROW** growing pains

problems encountered by virtue of  
expansion

**GROW** not to let grass grow under  
one's feet

not to let inertia or delay spoil some-  
thing

**GROW** something grows on one

one becomes gradually more favora-  
bly impressed with something

**GUARANTEE** to give a cast-iron

guarantee

to give a very secure undertaking to  
do something

**GUARD** new guard

changed regime

**GUARD** to catch someone off guard  
to surprise a person (a fencing term)

**GUARD** to slip under one's guard  
to cause a mistake to be made despite  
care being taken to prevent this

**GUARDIAN** someone's guardian  
angel

someone's friend, watching over him  
and advancing his interests

**GUIDE** guiding light  
yardstick for ethical behavior

**GUINEA** a guinea pig

a person on whom some new practice  
is tried out

**GULF** to bridge a gulf

to overcome a wide divergence in  
views

**GUM** to be up a gum tree

to be in difficulty or at the end of  
one's resources

**GUM** to gum up the works

to cause an activity to be halted

**GUN** a gun with no bullets

something incomplete and therefore  
useless for the desired purpose

**GUN** a shotgun approach

an effort going here, there and every-  
where, instead of being properly  
targeted

**GUN** a shotgun wedding

a wedding held to ensure that an  
impending birth will be legitimate (refers to threats by the bride's father to  
kill the bridegroom)

**GUN** to be a gun for hire

to be a person willing to undertake  
assignments for a fee

**GUN** to be going great guns

to be making very successful progress

**GUN** to be great guns at something  
to be very skilled at something

**GUN** to bring out one's biggest guns  
to use the most impressive persons or  
arguments

**GUN** to hold a gun at someone's  
head

to put pressure on a person to make a  
particular decision regardless of his  
desires in the matter

**GUN** to jump the gun

to start before one is meant to

**GUN** to look down the barrel of a gun  
to be given little choice in a matter

**GUN** to outgun someone  
to outmaneuver a person

**GUN** to spike someone's guns  
to cause something to become useless

**GUN** to stick to one's guns  
to continue to hold certain beliefs notwithstanding opposition by others

**GUN** to turn one's guns on someone  
to criticize a person

**GURGLER** to go down the gurgler  
to be ruined

**GUT** a gut feeling  
a belief based purely on intuition and unsupported by facts or evidence

**GUT** gutless wonder  
coward

**GUTFUL** to have had a gutful  
to be disgusted

**GUTS** I will have his guts for garters  
I am extremely angry and dissatisfied with him

**GUTS** to kick someone in the guts  
to take action needlessly hurtful to another person

**GUTS** something has no guts in it  
something has no real value to it

## H

**HA'P'ORTH** to spoil the ship for a ha'p'orth of tar  
to engage in a false economy (the current word "ship" is actually a mistake for the original word "sheep" and the tar refers to the treatment of wounds)

**HACKLE** to raise someone's hackles  
to make a person angry

**HAIR** hair-raising  
scary

**HAIR** not to touch a hair on someone's head  
not to harm a person

**HAIR** not to turn a hair  
to remain composed

**HAIR** to a hair  
exactly

**HAIR** to be within a hair's breadth of something  
to be extremely close to something

**HAIR** to get someone by the short and curly hairs  
to have domination over a person

**HAIR** to have a hair of the dog that bit one  
to drink more in an attempt to overcome the effects of alcohol already consumed

**HAIR** to keep one's hair on  
to remain calm in a crisis

**HAIR** to keep out of someone's hair  
to let another person get on with his work in his own way

**HAIR** to let one's hair down  
to relax

**HAIR** to make someone's hair curl  
(of news) to give someone a shock

**HAIR** to make someone's hair stand on end  
to give a person shocking news

**HAIR** to split hairs  
to draw absurdly fine distinctions

**HAIR** to tear one's hair out  
to be agitated

**HAIR** to wear a hair shirt  
to practice self-discipline

**HALCYON** in Halcyon days  
in past happier times (refers to the 14 days about the winter solstice when winds were calm and to the mythical bird said to breed in a floating nest at that time)

**HALF** *it is six of one and half a dozen of the other*  
it does not matter

**HALF** *not to do anything by halves*  
to do everything extremely well

**HALF** *to do everything by halves*  
to do everything imperfectly or incompletely

**HALF** *to have half a mind to do something*  
to be tempted or mildly inclined to do something

**HALF-BAKED** *half-baked*  
not well thought out

**HALF-COCKED** *to go off half-cocked*  
to act without adequate thought or preparation (refers to a gun at the half-ready)

**HALF-HEARTED** *half-hearted*  
unenthusiastic

**HALF-WAY** *a half-way house*  
an intermediate position

**HALL** *liberty hall*  
a place where one is free to do as one wishes

**HALL** *one can't beat City Hall*  
the ordinary citizen is powerless against bureaucracy

**HALLMARK** *a hallmark*  
a standard (refers to the official assay mark on gold and silver, originally put on at the Goldsmiths' Hall)

**HALT** *to grind to a halt*  
to cease some activity despite expectations that it would continue

**HAM** *ham-fisted*  
undiplomatic and clumsy

**HAM** *to be the ham in the sandwich*  
to be caught in the middle of a dispute between other parties

**HAMMER** *to go hammer and tongs*  
to do something with great energy

**HAMMER** *to use a sledgehammer to crack a nut*  
to devote vastly more resources to a project than is warranted by all the circumstances

**HAMSTRING** *to be hamstrung*  
to have limited freedom to act as one would wish

**HAND** *a backhanded compliment*  
a polite expression seemingly of praise but really intended as an insult

**HAND** *a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush*  
a benefit currently available is more valuable than a seemingly much larger benefit which may or may not be achieved in the future

**HAND** *a left-handed compliment*  
a thinly-disguised insult

**HAND** *all hands on deck*  
everybody is requested to help out

**HAND** *all hands to the pumps*  
everybody is requested to help out

**HAND** *at first hand*  
personally

**HAND** *hand over fist*  
rapidly overtaking each other during progress toward a common goal

**HAND** *high-handed*  
overbearing

**HAND** *on the one hand*  
putting one side of the proposition

**HAND** *one's right-hand man*  
one's chief aide

**HAND** *single-handedly*  
without help from other persons

**HAND** *sleight of hand*  
deceit by trickery

**HAND** *the hand of fate*  
chance

**HAND** *the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing*  
one section of a large bureaucracy does not realize that another section is simultaneously doing something inconsistent

**HAND** to accept something with both hands

to accept something eagerly

**HAND** to be able to do something with one hand behind one's back

to be able to do something very easily

**HAND** to be able to lay one's hands on something

to be able to locate something

**HAND** to be at hand

to be in the vicinity, ready to help

**HAND** to be in hand

to be under control

**HAND** to be in someone's hands

to be being dealt with by someone with the necessary authority

**HAND** to be out of someone's hands

to be up for decision by a different person

**HAND** to be putty in someone's hands

to be far too easily influenced by another person

**HAND** to bind someone hand and foot

to completely limit a person's freedom to act

**HAND** to bite the hand that feeds one

to show ingratitude

**HAND** to catch someone red-handed

to apprehend a person in the course of committing a crime

**HAND** to deal the final hand

to take steps which conclude a matter

**HAND** to disclose one's hand

to give away information regarding one's intention

**HAND** to eat out of someone's hands

to be unduly compliant

**HAND** to force someone's hand

to take action causing another person to react

**HAND** to gain the upper hand

to attain, after some effort, an advantage over another person

**HAND** to get one's hands dirty

to do the necessary but unpleasant or menial parts of a task

**HAND** to get out of hand

to get out of control

**HAND** to give someone a free hand

to authorize a person to act as he sees fit

**HAND** to give someone a hand

to assist a person

**HAND** to go cap in hand

to show humility while soliciting a favor

**HAND** to go down on one's hands

and knees to someone

with great humility to ask a favor of a person

**HAND** to grab some opportunity

with both hands

to seize some opportunity with great enthusiasm

**HAND** to hand on the torch

to pass on accumulated knowledge

**HAND** to hand over something on a silver platter

to provide a valuable benefit for virtually nothing

**HAND** to handpick someone

to carefully choose a person for his individual attributes

**HAND** to have a fight on one's hands

to encounter resistance or opposition to a proposal

**HAND** to have a hand in something

to be one of the participants in some project

**HAND** to have blood on one's hands

to be the person responsible for someone else's predicament

**HAND** to have clean hands  
to be innocent or to act ethically

**HAND** to have one's hands full  
to be fully occupied

**HAND** to have the whip hand  
to be in control of a situation

**HAND** to hold a winning hand  
to be in an unbeatable position to  
defeat others

**HAND** to hold someone's hand  
to give detailed on-the-job training  
and supervision

**HAND** to hold the power to do  
something in the hollow of one's  
hand

to have the right to make crucial  
decisions

**HAND** to join hands with someone  
to cooperate with a person

**HAND** to keep one's hands in  
to engage in activities which rein-  
force skills which one has previously  
acquired

**HAND** to lay one's hands on  
something  
to acquire something

**HAND** to lend a hand  
to assist

**HAND** to live from hand to mouth  
being in poor financial circumstances  
to survive with little by way of safety  
margin

**HAND** to lose money hand over fist  
to lose money very fast and convinc-  
ingly

**HAND** to play right into someone's  
hands  
to act so as to give a person an  
unintended advantage

**HAND** to put one's hand to the plow  
voluntarily to undertake some task  
(Luke 9:62)

**HAND** to put one's hand up  
to identify oneself

**HAND** to put one's hands in one's  
pockets  
to spend

**HAND** to rub one's hands with glee  
to express great satisfaction

**HAND** to rule with an iron hand  
to keep strict discipline

**HAND** to sit on one's hands  
deliberately to do nothing

**HAND** to stir a hand  
to volunteer assistance

**HAND** to strengthen someone's hand  
to give a person additional authority  
or greater moral support or more facts  
to support his case

**HAND** to take something in hand  
to assume control over something

**HAND** to throw in one's hand  
to give in or to give up

**HAND** to throw up one's hands  
to express disgust

**HAND** to tie someone's hands  
to prevent a person from acting as he  
sees fit

**HAND** to tie someone's hands  
behind his back  
to make it impossible for a person to  
act at all

**HAND** to tip one's hand  
to disclose details of one's position

**HAND** to try one's hand at  
something  
to attempt a new activity, especially  
by way of experiment

**HAND** to turn one's hand to  
something  
to tackle some project

**HAND** to wait hand and foot on  
someone  
to accommodate a person's every real  
or imagined whim

**HAND** to wash one's hands of  
something  
to emphatically decline future responsi-  
bility

**HAND** to win hands down  
to win very convincingly

**HAND** to work hand in glove with  
someone

to work in close cooperation with a  
person or to be in collusion with a  
person to the detriment of others

**HAND** to wring one's hands  
to express despair

**HAND** with a heavy hand  
in an oppressive fashion

**HAND** with a high hand  
arrogantly (Exodus 14:8)

**HAND** with an iron hand in a  
velvet glove

with a hard attitude made to seem soft

**HAND** with an open hand  
generously

**HANDFUL** a handful  
a small number

**HANDFUL** to be a handful  
to be difficult to manage

**HANDLE** to fly off the handle  
to show irrational anger

**HANDLE** to get a handle on  
something  
to acquire understanding of something

**HANDSHAKE** a golden handshake  
a large payment in connection with or  
as an inducement to retirement

**HANDSTAND** to turn handstands  
to express great joy

**HANG** a peg to hang a hat on  
something which provides a convenient  
or plausible excuse for some particular action

**HANG** not to be a hanging matter  
to be only a minor mistake

**HANG** one might as well be hanged  
for a sheep as for a lamb  
further action will not increase the  
adverse consequences already in train  
(refers to the stealing of both sheep  
and lambs being capital crimes under  
old English law)

**HANG** there is a big question mark  
hanging over someone's head  
there are considerable doubts about a  
person's competence, integrity or  
suitability

**HANG** to be a cliff-hanger  
to be very exciting

**HANG** to get the hang of something  
to learn how to do something

**HANG** to give someone enough  
rope to hang himself  
to give a person the opportunity to do  
something which is likely to get him  
into severe trouble

**HANG** to hang by a slender thread  
to only just survive

**HANG** to hang fire  
to take no immediate action

**HANG** to hang on by one's  
fingernails  
to have only a slender hold

**HANG** to hang on by one's nails  
to have only a slender hold

**HANG** to hang on by the eyelids  
to have only a slender hold

**HANG** to hang on by the skin of  
one's teeth  
to only just survive

**HANG** to hang one's head  
to be ashamed of oneself

**HANG** to hang onto someone's  
coat-tails  
to excessively rely on another person's initiatives

**HANG** to hang up one's boots  
to retire

**HANG** to hang up one's shingle  
to go into business offering expert  
personal services

**HANG** to have a cloud hanging  
over one's head  
there is doubt as to one's future

**HANG** to have a sword of Damocles hanging over one  
to be in imminent danger despite normal activity going on all around one

**HANG** to have a threat hanging over one's head  
to fear some intimated unpleasant action

**HANG** to let it all hang out  
to unburden oneself

**HAPPY** to be trigger-happy  
to be impetuous

**HAPPY** to present a happy face to the world  
bravely to gloss over one's problems

**HARD** that is hard to take  
it is difficult to face up to the reality of this

**HARD** to be a hard act to follow  
to be an impressive performance, not easily matched by the next person

**HARD** to be between a rock and a hard place  
to be faced with two equally difficult and uncomfortable choices

**HARD** to be hard to swallow  
not to be readily acceptable

**HARD** to be hard on the heels of something  
to closely follow something

**HARD** to be the hard core  
to be the central and most difficult problem

**HARD** to die hard  
not to give up easily

**HARD** to have a hard row to hoe  
to be a difficult assignment

**HARD** to hit someone hard  
to greatly affect a person emotionally or to cost a person a lot of money

**HARD** to put something into the "too hard" basket  
to defer consideration of a difficult issue

**HARD** to take a hard line  
to be uncompromising

**HARD-BITTEN** hard-bitten  
toughened by experience

**HARD-BOILED** hard-boiled  
toughened by experience

**HARD-FISTED** hard-fisted  
mean

**HARD-HEADED** hard-headed  
realistic

**HARD-HEARTED** hard-hearted  
unsympathetic

**HARD-MOUTHED** hard-mouthed  
uncontrollable

**HARD-NOSED** hard-nosed  
tough in negotiations

**HARE** first catch your hare  
do things in logical order and after proper preparation (advice on how to cook a hare in Mrs. Beeton's celebrated COOK BOOK)

**HARE** hare-brained  
wildly stupid

**HARE** to chase every hare  
to be easily sidetracked

**HARE** to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds  
to keep in with two opposing sides

**HARE** to set a hare running  
in order to achieve some desired effect to initiate some related activity

**HARMONIZE** to harmonize several things  
to make several things conform with each other

**HARMONY** to be in harmony with someone  
to act in the same way as another person

**HARNESS** in harness  
before retirement

**HARRY** every Tom, Dick and Harry  
just about everybody

**HARVEST** *harvest*  
end result of labor

**HASTE** *to go post haste*  
to go very fast

**HAT** *I'll eat my hat if so-and-so happens*

I do not believe that so-and-so will happen

**HAT** *a peg to hang a hat on*  
something which provides a convenient or plausible excuse for some particular action

**HAT** *at the drop of a hat*  
very readily

**HAT** *not to just pick something out of a hat*  
to choose carefully, after weighing all the considerations

**HAT** *to be old hat*  
to be a very widely-known fact

**HAT** *to buy straw hats in winter*  
to buy in a depressed market when most other people are sellers

**HAT** *to keep something under one's hat*  
to maintain a confidence

**HAT** *to knock something into a cocked hat*  
to twist something so that its original form is hardly recognizable

**HAT** *to pull a rabbit out of the hat*  
to produce an unexpected and seemingly miraculous but highly desirable solution

**HAT** *to score a hat trick*  
to have three successive favorable outcomes

**HAT** *to take one's hat off to someone*  
to be full of admiration for a person

**HAT** *to talk through one's hat*  
to say things which demonstrate the speaker's ignorance of the subject

**HAT** *to throw one's hat into the air*  
to express joy

**HAT** *to throw one's hat into the ring*  
to publicly announce one's interest in some position

**HAT** *to wear a particular hat*  
to act in a particular capacity or for a particular vested interest

**HATCH** *to batten down the hatches*  
to get ready for expected difficulties

**HATCH** *to count one's chickens before they are hatched*  
to treat as fact the expected results of a future proposal

**HATCHET** *to bury the hatchet*  
to abandon hostilities

**HATCHET** *to do a hatchet job*  
to destroy some existing activity or to ruin a person's credibility

**HAUL** *for the long haul*  
as a long-term proposition

**HAUL** *to haul someone over the coals*  
to reprimand a person

**HAUNT** *to come back to haunt someone*  
(of an unpleasant incident) to be a constant reminder to a person

**HAY** *to hit the hay*  
to go to sleep

**HAY** *to look for a needle in a haystack*  
to attempt something with a very small chance of success

**HAY** *to make hay while the sun shines*  
to utilize an opportunity before it disappears

**HAYSTACK** *to find a needle in a haystack*  
to find something when the probability of finding it is very small

**HAYWIRE** *to go haywire*  
to refuse to function properly

**HEAD** *a hothead*  
an impetuous person

<b>HEAD</b> <i>a hydra-headed monster</i> an evil which is not readily destroyable	
<b>HEAD</b> <i>a swelled head</i> an exaggerated idea of one's abilities or status	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to bang one's head up against a brick wall</i> to fight an unwinnable case
<b>HEAD</b> <i>an old head on young shoulders</i> experience, knowledge and maturity in a young person	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to be able to do something standing on one's head</i> to be able to do something very easily
<b>HEAD</b> <i>hard-headed</i> realistic	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to be at the head of the pack</i> to be the best of many or the de facto leader
<b>HEAD</b> <i>head first</i> precipitately	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to be head and shoulders above the rest</i> to be significantly more capable than others
<b>HEAD</b> <i>head over heels</i> topsy-turvy	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to be off one's head</i> to be crazy
<b>HEAD</b> <i>heads I win—tails you lose</i> whichever way this matter goes I will benefit at your expense	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to be over someone's head</i> to be beyond a person's ability to understand
<b>HEAD</b> <i>heads will roll</i> transgressors will be punished	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to be unable to make head or tail of something</i> to be unable to understand how something functions or what something means
<b>HEAD</b> <i>level-headed</i> rational	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to beat each other over the head</i> to be always fighting
<b>HEAD</b> <i>not to touch a hair on someone's head</i> not to harm a person	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to belt someone over the head</i> to override someone's views or arguments
<b>HEAD</b> <i>off the top of one's head</i> based on experience but without detailed consideration	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to bite someone's head off</i> to rudely express displeasure at some person
<b>HEAD</b> <i>pigheaded</i> unduly obstinate	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to bury one's head in the sand</i> to refuse to face up to an unpleasant truth (refers to the reputed habit of ostriches in danger)
<b>HEAD</b> <i>pull your head in!</i> do not interfere in this!	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to come to a head</i> to reach culmination
<b>HEAD</b> <i>someone's head is on the block</i> a person is in danger of having his appointment terminated	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to confront someone head on</i> to confront a person
<b>HEAD</b> <i>that is on your head</i> you will have to accept responsibility for that	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to develop a head of steam</i> to gain momentum
<b>HEAD</b> <i>there is a big question mark hanging over someone's head</i> there are considerable doubts about a person's competence, integrity or suitability	

	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to bang one's head up against a brick wall</i> to fight an unwinnable case
	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to be able to do something standing on one's head</i> to be able to do something very easily
	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to be at the head of the pack</i> to be the best of many or the de facto leader
	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to be head and shoulders above the rest</i> to be significantly more capable than others
	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to be off one's head</i> to be crazy
	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to be over someone's head</i> to be beyond a person's ability to understand
	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to be unable to make head or tail of something</i> to be unable to understand how something functions or what something means
	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to beat each other over the head</i> to be always fighting
	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to belt someone over the head</i> to override someone's views or arguments
	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to bite someone's head off</i> to rudely express displeasure at some person
	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to bury one's head in the sand</i> to refuse to face up to an unpleasant truth (refers to the reputed habit of ostriches in danger)
	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to come to a head</i> to reach culmination
	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to confront someone head on</i> to confront a person
	<b>HEAD</b> <i>to develop a head of steam</i> to gain momentum

**HEAD** to drag someone by the head and ears  
to force a person to reveal the true facts

**HEAD** to eat one's head off  
to eat excessively

**HEAD** to fall head over heels in love  
to fall very much in love

**HEAD** to get one's head blown off  
to be very soundly abused

**HEAD** to give someone his head  
to let a person do as he wants to

**HEAD** to go off one's head  
to lose one's temper

**HEAD** to go over someone's head  
to bypass lower levels of authority and approach someone more senior instead

**HEAD** to go to someone's head  
to cause a person to get an exaggerated idea of his abilities or status

**HEAD** to hang one's head  
to be ashamed of oneself

**HEAD** to have a cloud hanging over one's head  
there is doubt as to one's future

**HEAD** to have a head start  
to have an advantage over others

**HEAD** to have a threat hanging over one's head  
to fear some intimated unpleasant action

**HEAD** to have eyes at the back of one's head  
to know more of what is going on than is generally realized

**HEAD** to have one's head in the clouds  
to be unrealistic

**HEAD** to have one's head screwed on straight  
to be shrewd

**HEAD** to have rocks in the head  
to be mentally unbalanced

**HEAD** to head someone in the right direction  
to assist a person to achieve something

**HEAD** to hit the nail right on the head  
to astutely come to the correct conclusion

**HEAD** to hold a gun at someone's head  
to put pressure on a person to make a particular decision regardless of his desires in the matter

**HEAD** to hold one's head high  
to stay unruffled and to maintain one's dignity despite attempts by others to embarrass

**HEAD** to just hold one's head above water  
to cope with problems but with little margin to spare or to stay solvent

**HEAD** to keep a civil tongue in one's head  
to be polite, especially under provocation

**HEAD** to keep a cool head  
to stay calm and rational in a crisis

**HEAD** to keep a level head  
to stay calm and rational in a crisis

**HEAD** to keep one's head  
to remain calm in a crisis or to unexpectedly retain an elected or appointed position

**HEAD** to keep one's head down  
to work very diligently

**HEAD** to kick heads in  
to demonstrate annoyance at or dislike of certain persons

**HEAD** to knock an idea on the head  
to utterly reject a proposal

**HEAD** to knock two heads together  
to make two persons come to their senses and deal with each other

**HEAD** to laugh one's head off  
to greatly enjoy something

**HEAD** to let one's head go  
to do as one wants to

**HEAD** to let one's heart rule one's head  
to act on emotion rather than on reason

**HEAD** to lose one's head  
to become confused

**HEAD** to need something like a hole in the head  
to be landed with a completely undesired problem

**HEAD** to need to have one's head examined  
to be foolish

**HEAD** to promote someone over the heads of others  
to promote a person to a position more senior than that held by some persons previously outranking him

**HEAD** to pull one's head in  
to retreat from a previously held stance

**HEAD** to put one's head in the noose  
to recklessly and unnecessarily expose oneself to great danger

**HEAD** to put one's head into the lion's mouth  
to recklessly expose oneself to great danger

**HEAD** to put one's head on the block  
to have the courage of one's convictions

**HEAD** to put our heads together  
to confer and pool ideas

**HEAD** to rear its ugly head  
to make an unwelcome appearance

**HEAD** to scratch one's head  
to be amazed or puzzled

**HEAD** to scream one's head off  
to scream very loudly

**HEAD** to shake one's head  
to indicate disbelief or wonder or disapproval

**HEAD** to snap someone's head off  
to speak to a person aggressively

**HEAD** to tackle someone head-on  
to confront a person

**HEAD** to turn someone's head  
to cause a person to get an exaggerated idea of his abilities or status

**HEAD** to turn something on its head  
to reverse something

**HEAD** uneasy lies the head that wears a crown  
responsibility involves some risks and some burdens (from Shakespeare's HENRY IV)

**HEAD** woolly-headed  
slightly muddled

**HEAD** you want your head read  
you should reconsider this matter

**HEADACHE** a headache  
a cause for worry

**HEADWAY** to make headway  
to make progress

**HEAL** to heal wounds  
to affect a reconciliation

**HEALTH** to get a clean bill of health  
after proper investigation to be found not wanting

**HEAP** to be at the bottom of the heap  
to be in the lowest position in a hierarchy

**HEAP** to be destined for the scrap-heap  
to face a future in which one will have no meaningful role

**HEAP** to fall in a heap  
(of a proposal) to collapse utterly

**HEAR** the cheering could be heard a block away  
there was great rejoicing

**HEAR** to hear a whisper  
to learn a rumored hypothesis

<b>HEART</b> <i>chicken-hearted</i>	<b>HEART</b> <i>to eat one's heart out</i>
showing little courage	to suffer bitterly
<b>HEART</b> <i>cold-hearted</i>	<b>HEART</b> <i>to give someone heart</i>
cruel or mean or unmoved	to cause a person to cheer up
<b>HEART</b> <i>from the bottom of one's heart</i>	<b>HEART</b> <i>to have a change of heart</i>
very sincerely	to form a new view in place of a strongly-held previous view
<b>HEART</b> <i>half-hearted</i>	<b>HEART</b> <i>to have a heart</i>
unenthusiastic	to have compassion
<b>HEART</b> <i>hard-hearted</i>	<b>HEART</b> <i>to have a heart of gold</i>
unsympathetic	to have a generous disposition
<b>HEART</b> <i>heart and soul</i>	<b>HEART</b> <i>to have a heart of oak</i>
with great energy	to be brave
<b>HEART</b> <i>heart failure</i>	<b>HEART</b> <i>to have a heart of stone</i>
a shock	to be unfeeling
<b>HEART</b> <i>heart-stopping</i>	<b>HEART</b> <i>to have a heart-to-heart talk</i>
exciting	to have a confidential discussion on a highly personal matter
<b>HEART</b> <i>one's heart bleeds for someone</i>	<b>HEART</b> <i>to have one's heart in one's boots</i>
one feels truly sad for a person's fate	to be terrified
<b>HEART</b> <i>one's heart is not in some cause</i>	<b>HEART</b> <i>to have one's heart in one's mouth</i>
one has little enthusiasm for some cause	to be startled
<b>HEART</b> <i>one's heart sank</i>	<b>HEART</b> <i>to have one's heart in something</i>
one realized the extent of some disaster	to be enthusiastic about and committed to a cause
<b>HEART</b> <i>open-hearted</i>	<b>HEART</b> <i>to have one's heart in the right place</i>
cordial	to have a well-developed social conscience
<b>HEART</b> <i>this does my heart good</i>	<b>HEART</b> <i>to have one's heart set on something</i>
I rejoice at this	to be very keen to achieve something
<b>HEART</b> <i>to be close to one's heart</i>	<b>HEART</b> <i>to know something in one's heart of hearts</i>
to be a project on which one is very keen	to know something while reluctant to admit it, even to oneself
<b>HEART</b> <i>to be in good heart</i>	<b>HEART</b> <i>to let one's heart rule one's head</i>
to be brave in adversity	to act on emotion rather than on reason
<b>HEART</b> <i>to be of good heart</i>	
to be brave in adversity	
<b>HEART</b> <i>to be someone after one's own heart</i>	
to be a person who shares one's beliefs	
<b>HEART</b> <i>to break someone's heart</i>	
to act in a way causing great upset to another person	

**HEART** to lose heart  
to cease being enthusiastic

**HEART** to pour one's heart out to someone  
to inflict one's woes on another person

**HEART** to pull at one's heart strings  
to affect one emotionally

**HEART** to search one's heart  
to have misgivings

**HEART** to steal someone's heart  
to cause a person to fall in love with one

**HEART** to steel one's heart against something

to determine that, notwithstanding one's natural compassion, something shall not happen

**HEART** to take heart from something

to be encouraged by something

**HEART** to take something to heart  
to learn to appreciate the significance of something or to be much saddened by something

**HEART** to warm the cockles of someone's heart  
to delight a person

**HEART** to wear one's heart on one's sleeve

to lack the reserve expected of one

**HEART** warm-hearted  
affectionate or generous

**HEART** with a heavy heart  
in sorrow

**HEART** with a sinking heart  
with growing despondency

**HEART** you can eat your heart out  
you are entitled to feel sad or jealous

**HEARTACHE** heartache  
sadness

**HEARTBREAK** heartbreak  
despair

**HEARTBURN** heartburn  
regret at some non-achievement

**HEAT** if one can't stand the heat  
one should stay out of the kitchen  
a person should not put himself in a position involving pressures with which he cannot cope (words attributed to Harry S. Truman)

**HEAT** to take the heat off someone  
to divert attention away from a person

**HEAT** to turn the heat on something  
to intensify the investigation of some matter

**HEAT** to turn up the heat on someone

to increase the pressure on a person

**HEAVE** to heave a sigh a relief  
to express satisfaction at the achievement of a solution to a difficult problem

**HEAVEN** heaven help you!  
you are in trouble

**HEAVEN** heaven only knows  
it is not known

**HEAVEN** manna from heaven  
unexpected benefits (Exodus 16:15)

**HEAVEN** to be in seventh heaven  
to be very happy

**HEAVEN** to move heaven and earth  
to do everything possible

**HEAVEN** to reek to high heaven  
to be patently unethical

**HEAVY** to make heavy weather of something  
to struggle excessively with a relatively simple task

**HEAVY** to run into heavy weather  
to encounter difficulties

**HEAVY** with a heavy hand  
in an oppressive fashion

**HEAVY** with a heavy heart  
in sorrow

**HEAVYWEIGHT** a heavyweight  
a person of importance or influence

**HEDGE** to be hedged around  
(of a statement) to be surrounded by qualifications

**HEDGE** to hedge one's bets  
to take action involving a cost but which is designed to reduce the possible adverse consequences of some activity

**HEEL** head over heels  
topsy-turvy

**HEEL** to be hot on the heels of something  
to closely follow something

**HEEL** to be someone's Achilles' heel  
to represent a weakness in an otherwise strong position (refers to the Greek warrior who was the hero of Homer's *ILIAD*)

**HEEL** to bring someone to heel  
to make a person conform

**HEEL** to cool one's heels  
to be kept waiting

**HEEL** to dig one's heels in  
to become even more stubborn than at first

**HEEL** to drag one's heels  
to perform unduly slowly

**HEEL** to fall head over heels in love  
to fall very much in love

**HEEL** to kick one's heels  
to be kept waiting

**HEEL** to snap at someone's heels  
to be a minor irritation to a person

**HEEL** well-heeled  
rich

**HELL** all hell broke loose  
great confusion erupted

**HELL** come hell or high water  
regardless of the consequences

**HELL** on a cold day in hell  
never

**HELL** to be hell bent on something  
to be very determined to achieve something, regardless of the adverse consequences

**HELL** to frighten hell out of someone  
to alarm a person

**HELL** to give someone hell  
to make life difficult for a person

**HELL** to have a snowflake's chance in hell  
to have no hope or possibility at all

**HELL** to raise merry hell  
to prominently involve others in a matter in the expectation of significant results from this action

**HELM** to be at the helm  
to be in charge

**HELP** to cry for help  
a subconscious or indirect indication that a person is in need of psychological counselling

**HELP** heaven help you!  
you are in trouble

**HELP** not to lift a finger to help someone  
to refuse to assist

**HEM** to be hemmed in  
to be limited in the choice of actions available

**HEMORRHAGE** to stem the hemorrhage  
to put a stop to the financial losses of a project

**HEN** a mother hen  
an overly protective person

**HEN** hen-pecked  
subject to domination by one's wife

**HERCULEAN** a Herculean cleaning of the stables  
a thorough revision of operating procedure (refers to Hercules, a mythical Greek hero who cleaned the stables of Augeas)

**HERCULEAN** to be a Herculean task

to be laborious

**HERD** to follow the herd

to do what most other people are doing

**HERE** the buck stops here

I accept full responsibility (sign on the desk of Harry S. Truman when president of the United States)

**HERE** to be neither here nor there

to be irrelevant or unimportant

**HERESY** heresy

views different from those held by the majority

**HERO** to make a hero of oneself

to curry favors

**HERRING** neither fish, flesh nor

good red herring

unclassifiable by virtue of being neither one thing nor another (from Cervantes' DON QUIXOTE)

**HERRING** to be a red herring

to be something designed to divert attention away from the main question

**HIDE** to cover one's hide

to provide excuses or take other evasive action in an attempt to avoid the adverse consequences of one's actions

**HIDE** to have a thick hide

to be impervious to criticism

**HIDE** to have the hide of a rhinoceros

to be totally unaffected by and unresponsive to valid criticism

**HIDE** to hide one's light under a bushel

to keep others in ignorance of one's skills and experience

**HIDE** to hide under someone's skirts

to let someone else take the consequences of one's actions

**HIDE** to want someone's hide

to be keen to penalize a person

**HIDEBOUND** hidebound

narrow-minded

**HIGH** come hell or high water regardless of the consequences

**HIGH** high water mark triumph

**HIGH** to be for the high jump to be threatened with a reprimand and punishment

**HIGH** to be on one's high horse to be excessively pompous

**HIGH** to fly high to be ambitious

**HIGH** to have the high ground to have an advantage in moral terms

**HIGH** to hold one's head high to stay unruffled and to maintain one's dignity despite attempts by others to embarrass

**HIGH** to leave someone high and dry to withdraw all support from a person or to isolate a person from a desired involvement

**HIGH** to ride high to be successful but vulnerable

**HIGH** with a high hand arrogantly (Exodus 14:8)

**HIGH-HANDED** high-handed overbearing

**HIGHBROW** highbrow intellectual or cultural

**HIGHFLYER** a highflyer an ambitious and/or successful person

**HIGHLIGHT** a highlight a particularly important item

**HIGHLIGHT** to highlight something to draw particular attention to a matter

**HIGHWAY** highway robbery the charging of grossly excessive prices

**HIJACK** to hijack a debate to involve oneself in the public discussion of some matter and turn that discussion to one's advantage

<b>HILL</b> <i>light on the hill</i>	distant goal acting as an inspiration
<b>HILL</b> <i>to be over the hill</i>	to be old
<b>HILL</b> <i>to be pushing uphill</i>	to face difficulties
<b>HILL</b> <i>to fight an uphill battle</i>	to face difficulties or to have formidable opposition
<b>HILL</b> <i>to go downhill</i>	to deteriorate
<b>HILL</b> <i>to head for the hills</i>	to seek to escape one's commitments
<b>HILL</b> <i>to push water uphill</i>	to foolishly attempt the impossible
<b>HILT</b> <i>to the hilt</i>	to the maximum extent
<b>HIMALAYAN</b> <i>of Himalayan proportions</i>	huge
<b>HIND</b> <i>to stand up on one's hind legs</i>	to exert one's authority
<b>HIND</b> <i>to talk the hind leg off a donkey</i>	to talk excessively
<b>HINDSIGHT</b> <i>with 20/20 hindsight</i>	with the benefit of knowing what happened
<b>HIP</b> <i>the hip pocket nerve</i>	the assessment of issues by their financial effects on one
<b>HIP</b> <i>to shoot from the hip</i>	to speak frankly and openly
<b>HIRE</b> <i>to be a gun for hire</i>	to be a person willing to undertake assignments for a fee
<b>HIT</b> <i>it hits one</i>	one comes to realize something
<b>HIT</b> <i>to hit one's stride</i>	to settle down to some task
<b>HIT</b> <i>to hit someone below the belt</i>	to act unfairly toward another person

<b>HIT</b> <i>to hit someone for six</i>	to damage a person's cause
<b>HIT</b> <i>to hit someone hard</i>	to greatly affect a person emotionally or to cost a person a lot of money
<b>HIT</b> <i>to hit someone right between the eyes</i>	to be brutally frank
<b>HIT</b> <i>to hit the bull's eye</i>	to make the correct decision
<b>HIT</b> <i>to hit the hay</i>	to go to sleep
<b>HIT</b> <i>to hit the jackpot</i>	to be very lucky
<b>HIT</b> <i>to hit the mark</i>	to achieve one's object or to make the correct decision (refers to archery)
<b>HIT</b> <i>to hit the nail right on the head</i>	to astutely come to the correct conclusion
<b>HIT</b> <i>to hit the roof</i>	to be very angry
<b>HIT</b> <i>to hit the straps</i>	to really get going
<b>HOBBY</b> <i>to be off on one's hobby horse</i>	to throw into conversation aspects of a subject in which one has a passionate interest
<b>HOBSON</b> <i>Hobson's choice</i>	no right at all to select (refers to Thomas Hobson, a horsekeeper in Cambridge, England, who offered customers seeking a change of horses a single beast on a "take it or leave it" basis)
<b>HOE</b> <i>to have a hard row to hoe</i>	to be a difficult assignment
<b>HOG</b> <i>a road hog</i>	an inconsiderate motorist
<b>HOG</b> <i>to go the whole hog</i>	to do something very thoroughly (refers to the close shearing of lambs)

**HOG** to make a hog of oneself  
to demonstrate greed

**HOGWASH** hogwash  
nonsense

**HOIST** to be hoist with one's own petard  
to have one's own case used against one (refers to being blown up by one's own bomb)

**HOLD** an argument holding water  
a debating point of substance

**HOLD** hold your horses!  
just wait a little!

**HOLD** no holds barred  
without any limitation

**HOLD** not fit to hold a candle to  
someone  
greatly inferior to another person

**HOLD** not to hold one's breath for  
something  
to give up all expectation

**HOLD** to be left holding the baby  
to be tricked into accepting responsibility for someone else's problems

**HOLD** to hold a winning hand  
to be in an unbeatable position to  
defeat others

**HOLD** to hold all the aces  
to be in an unbeatable position to  
defeat others

**HOLD** to hold all the cards  
to be assured of victory

**HOLD** to hold fire  
to defer criticizing

**HOLD** to hold one's head high  
to stay unruffled and to maintain one's dignity despite attempts by others to embarrass

**HOLD** to hold one's tongue  
to keep quiet

**HOLD** to hold out an olive branch  
to make peace overtures (Genesis 8:11)

**HOLD** to hold someone at bay  
to successfully resist an attacker

**HOLD** to hold someone's hand  
to give detailed on-the-job training and supervision

**HOLD** to hold the floor  
to dominate a conversation

**HOLD** to hold the fort  
to be in charge during the temporary absence of a superior

**HOLD** to hold the purse strings  
to have control of expenditure

**HOLD** to hold the trump card  
to be in an unbeatable position to defeat others

**HOLD** to hold the wrong end of  
the stick  
to be completely mistaken about something

**HOLD** to just hold one's head  
above water

to cope with problems but with little margin to spare or to stay solvent

**HOLD** to put something on "hold"  
to put something aside for the time being with a view to resuming activity later on (refers to the telephone)

**HOLE** a black hole  
an intermediate range of values producing anomalous results or a particularly obnoxious prison cell

**HOLE** a dry hole  
an exercise which after much effort proves fruitless

**HOLE** a fox hole  
space which is really too small for a person's needs or comfort

**HOLE** a loop-hole  
means of getting around the intention of some regulation

**HOLE** a square peg in a round hole  
a person much more suitable for a position rather different from the one held

<b>HOLE</b> to be in a hole to experience some difficulties	<b>HOME</b> nothing to write home about unimpressive
<b>HOLE</b> to expose holes to expose weaknesses in an argument	<b>HOME</b> the chickens are coming home to roost the consequences of past actions are becoming obvious
<b>HOLE</b> to have money burning a hole in one's pocket to be impatient to spend or invest available funds	<b>HOME</b> to argue till the cows come home to argue forever
<b>HOLE</b> to need something like a hole in the head to be landed with a completely undesired problem	<b>HOME</b> to be home and hosed to have won
<b>HOLE</b> to pigeon-hole to put aside for further consideration in the distant future	<b>HOME</b> to be home on the sheep's back to be doing well
<b>HOLE</b> to stop up one hole in a sieve to do something quite useless	<b>HOME</b> to be too close to home to be too near the truth to be welcome
<b>HOLE</b> watch the doughnut—not the hole look for the positive aspects	<b>HOME</b> to bring a fact home to someone despite his inclination to the contrary to make a person realize a fact
<b>HOLE</b> watering hole a bar or place to get a drink	<b>HOME</b> to bring home the bacon to be successful
<b>HOLLOW</b> that has a hollow ring to it that statement is insincere	<b>HOME</b> to drive the lesson home to take certain action which is unpleasant but which has the effect of registering a message
<b>HOLLOW</b> to hold the power to do something in the hollow of one's hand to have the right to make crucial decisions	<b>HOME</b> to eat someone out of house and home to ruin a person by eating all he has
<b>HOLY</b> a holier-than-thou attitude excessive righteousness	<b>HOME</b> to enter the home stretch to commence the last stage
<b>HOLY</b> an unholy alliance a working relationship for a nefarious purpose between unlikely partners	<b>HOME</b> to keep the home fires burning to maintain normal domestic activity during the temporary absence of the breadwinner
<b>HOLY</b> search for the Holy Grail work toward a difficult goal (refers to a vessel supposedly used by Christ at the last supper and featuring in the Arthurian legends)	<b>HOME</b> to take one's bat and ball home as a gesture of spite to remove an essential ingredient which one has contributed to a joint enterprise
<b>HOME</b> charity begins at home a person's first responsibility should be to his family	<b>HOMEWORK</b> to do one's homework to thoroughly analyze an issue

**HONEY** *a land of milk and honey*  
a country in which everything is in abundant supply

**HONEYMOON** *a honeymoon*  
a short period enjoyed by a newcomer to some activity before his performance is criticized

**HOOK** *by hook or by crook*  
by fair means or foul

**HOOK** *hook line and sinker*  
wholly

**HOOK** *to be hooked on something*  
to be addicted to something

**HOOK** *to get someone off the hook*  
to rescue a person from an embarrassing predicament

**HOOK** *to let someone off the hook*  
to allow a person to escape the adverse consequences of his own actions

**HOOP** *to jump through hoops*  
to undergo some ordeal

**HOOT** *not to care a hoot*  
not to show the slightest concern or enthusiasm

**HOP** *something is but a hop, skip and jump away*  
something is nearby

**HOP** *to be on the hop*  
to be always bustling about

**HOP** *to catch someone on the hop*  
to take a person by surprise

**HOP** *to hop onto the bandwagon*  
to join the majority (the antonym of "bandwagon effect" is "underdog effect")

**HORIZON** *the one bright spot on the horizon*  
the only hopeful aspect

**HORIZON** *there are black clouds on the horizon*  
bad news is expected

**HORIZON** *to loom on the horizon*  
to be expected but not immediately

**HORN** *the horns of a dilemma*  
the unpalatable alternatives between which a choice must be made

**HORN** *to lock horns with someone*  
to have an argument with another person

**HORN** *to pull one's horns in*  
to retreat from previously stated views

**HORN** *to take the bull by the horns*  
to come to grips with the realities of a difficult problem

**HORNET** *to stir up a hornet's nest*  
to take action which results in unpleasant side-effects

**HORSE** *I could eat a horse*  
I am very hungry

**HORSE** *a Trojan horse*  
a trick (refers to a large gift horse full of soldiers used to bring about the fall of Troy, as described in Homer's Iliad)

**HORSE** *a dark horse*  
a person with unsuspected talents

**HORSE** *a nod is the same as a wink to a blind horse*  
fine distinctions are not appropriate here

**HORSE** *a stalking horse*  
an ostensible reason

**HORSE** *a two-horse race*  
a contest between only two serious contestants

**HORSE** *a warhorse*  
an old soldier who likes to relive past wartime experiences

**HORSE** *a willing horse*  
a cheerful worker

**HORSE** *hold your horses!*  
just wait a little!

**HORSE** *horse sense*  
natural shrewdness

**HORSE** *horsetrading*  
tough negotiations

**HORSE** *it is horses for courses*  
some combinations work particularly well

**HORSE** *that is a horse of a very different color*  
that is a much more acceptable proposition

**HORSE** *the horse and buggy days*  
long ago

**HORSE** *to back the wrong horse*  
to have faith in, give support to and/or invest in a project which proves to be unsuccessful

**HORSE** *to be off on one's hobby horse*  
to throw into conversation aspects of a subject in which one has a passionate interest

**HORSE** *to be on one's high horse*  
to be excessively pompous

**HORSE** *to drive a coach and horses through something*  
to demonstrate major errors in something

**HORSE** *to flog a dead horse*  
to misguidedly do something patently useless

**HORSE** *to frighten the horses*  
to scare people off by one's ill-considered tactics

**HORSE** *to learn something from the horse's mouth*  
to get information from someone qualified to impart it

**HORSE** *to look a gift horse in the mouth*  
to be suspicious about a benefit which has been volunteered

**HORSE** *to put the cart before the horse*  
to do things in the wrong order

**HORSE** *to shut the stable door after the horse has bolted*  
to take preventive action only after the relevant event

**HORSE** *to swap horses in midstream*  
to change direction during the course of a project

**HORSE** *wild horses would not cause me to do something*  
I absolutely refuse to do something (refers to a form of torture)

**HORSEPLAY** *horseplay*  
boisterous and undignified behavior

**HOSED** *to be home and hosed*  
to have won

**HOT** *a hot potato*  
an embarrassing issue

**HOT** *a hothead*  
an impetuous person

**HOT** *hot-blooded*  
very passionate

**HOT** *red-hot*  
highly exciting and desirable

**HOT** *to be full of hot air*  
to have an exaggerated opinion of one's own importance and to boast about it

**HOT** *to be hot off the press*  
to be the latest news

**HOT** *to be hot on a subject*  
to be knowledgeable and enthusiastic about a subject

**HOT** *to be hot on the heels of something*  
to closely follow something

**HOT** *to be hot stuff*  
to be skillful or very passionate

**HOT** *to be hot under the collar*  
to be very agitated

**HOT** *to be in hot water*  
to be very agitated

**HOT** *to be in hot water*  
to be in trouble or to be in difficulty

**HOT** *to be in the hot seat*  
to hold a position requiring one to answer criticism or accusations

**HOT** to blow hot and cold  
to vacillate

**HOT** to get hot  
to get close to the solution

**HOT** to go hot foot  
to do something fast

**HOT** to make some place too hot  
for someone

to persecute a person and thus make  
conditions very unpleasant for him

**HOT** to run hot  
(of equipment) to be subject to particularly high usage

**HOT** to strike while the iron is hot  
to take advantage of a situation which  
cannot last

**HOTBED** a hotbed of crime  
a place where crime flourishes

**HOUND** to run with the hare and  
hunt with the hounds  
to keep in with two opposing sides

**HOUND** to set the hounds baying  
to excite the gossips by providing  
material which they can use

**HOUR** at the eleventh hour  
at the last moment (actually "at the  
twenty-fourth hour" would be more  
logical) (Matthew 20:9)

**HOUSE** a half-way house  
an intermediate position

**HOUSE** a house of cards  
an organization which gives a misleading  
impression of solidity

**HOUSE** a madhouse  
an organization in great turmoil

**HOUSE** a plague on both your  
houses!  
I am disgusted with both of you (from  
Shakespeare's ROMEO AND JULIET)

**HOUSE** people in glass houses  
should not throw stones  
those who are less than perfect are  
foolish to criticize others

**HOUSE** to be in the doghouse  
to be in disgrace

**HOUSE** to be on the house  
to be free of cost

**HOUSE** to bring the house down  
to greatly amuse an audience

**HOUSE** to eat someone out of  
house and home  
to ruin a person by eating all he has

**HOUSE** to put one's house in order  
to fix up the deficiencies in one's  
affairs

**HOUSEHOLD** a household name  
a very familiar name

**HOYLE** according to Hoyle  
with authority

**HUMBLE** to eat humble pie  
to apologize

**HUNT** a witchhunt  
an exercise seeking to find someone  
who can be blamed

**HUNT** to run with the hare and  
hunt with the hounds  
to keep in with two opposing sides

**HURDLE** to jump a hurdle  
to overcome a problem or difficulty

**HURDLE** to jump that hurdle when  
one comes to it  
to deal with a particular problem only  
when it becomes necessary to do so

**HURL** to hurl something in  
someone's face  
to reproach a person in regard to  
something

**HURT** someone can't hurt a fly  
someone is very gentle and kindhearted

**HYDE** to do a Jekyll and Hyde  
to have a split personality (refers to  
THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND  
MR. HYDE by Robert Louis Stevenson)

**HYDRA** a hydra-headed monster  
an evil which is not readily destroyable

**HYMNAL** to all sing from the same hymnal  
to act consistently with each other

## I

**I** to dot the i's and cross the t's  
to be meticulous in completing the documentation for a transaction

**ICE** to break the ice  
to take the initiative in starting discussions

**ICE** to cut no ice with someone  
to have little effect on a person

**ICE** to put something on ice  
to put something aside for the time being

**ICE** to skate on thin ice  
to act in disregard of obvious danger

**ICEBERG** to be the tip of the iceberg  
to be only a very small portion of a much larger but less obvious whole

**ICING** to be icing on top of the cake  
to be an additional benefit in an already satisfactory scenario

**IMAGE** to tarnish one's image  
to become less highly regarded

**IMPETUS** to have impetus  
to move along forcefully

**IMPRIMATUR** *imprimatur*  
confirmation that something is in order (Latin, "let it be printed"; refers to the formal ruling given by a Roman Catholic bishop authorizing the publication of a book on religion or morals)

**INCH** give him an inch and he will take a mile  
make him a small concession and he will abuse it by taking much more

**INCH** not to give an inch  
not to budge or concede to the slightest degree despite pressure to do so

**INCH** to inch forward  
to make slow but steady progress

**INCH** to resist something every inch of the way  
to utterly resist something

**INDIAN** more chiefs than Indians  
a disproportionately large number of supervisors

**INFLAME** to inflame a situation  
to aggravate a situation

**INK** the ink is hardly dry  
something intended to last a long time is to be changed shortly after its establishment

**INN** no room at the inn  
no room

**INNER** a warm inner glow  
satisfaction at some achievement

**INNINGS** to have had a good innings  
to have had a successful life

**INSIDE** to know something inside out  
to know something very thoroughly

**INSIDE** to turn something inside out  
to examine something thoroughly

**INSTRUCTION** riding instructions  
directions as to how to do something

**INTEREST** to pay something back with interest  
to return a small favor with a bigger favor or to extract retribution of greater value than the circumstances warrant

**INTRODUCE** to introduce new blood  
to recruit new members to some organization

**IRON** the iron curtain  
the border between the communist nations and the rest of the world (from a speech by Sir Winston Churchill in 1946)

**IRON** to give a cast-iron guarantee  
to give a very secure undertaking to do something

**IRON** to have a cast-iron case  
to be absolutely assured of victory in legal proceedings

**IRON** to have other irons in the fire  
to have the opportunity to do something else as an alternative

**IRON** to have something in an iron grip

to hold something very securely

**IRON** to iron out something

to sort out a difficult problem

**IRON** to rule with a rod of iron

to keep strict discipline

**IRON** to rule with an iron fist

to keep strict discipline

**IRON** to rule with an iron hand

to keep strict discipline

**IRON** to strike while the iron is hot

to take advantage of a situation which cannot last

**IRON** with an iron hand in a velvet glove

with a hard attitude made to seem soft

**ISSUE** to be a black and white issue

to involve very clear distinctions

**ITCH** to be itching to go

to be highly enthusiastic and keen to start

**ITCHY** itchy feet

a desire to travel

**ITCHY** to have itchy fingers

to be impatient

**IVORY** to be in an ivory tower

to be immersed in theoretical considerations and ignorant of the practical realities (Song of Solomon 7:4)

**JACK** a Jack of all trades  
an amateur who can turn his hand to anything

**JACKAL** to keep the jackals at bay  
to pay one's creditors just sufficient to avoid repercussions

**JACKET** to keep someone in a straitjacket

to deny a person any discretionary powers at all

**JACKPOT** to hit the jackpot  
to be very lucky

**JAM** money for jam

remuneration easily earned

**JAM** to be in a jam  
to be in difficulties

**JAM** to just pick the plums out of the jam

to take only the very best items

**JAM** to put jam on someone's bread  
to make a good situation even better

**JAUNDICED** jaundiced  
affected by jealousy

**JAW** someone's jaw dropped

someone registered obvious disappointment, incredulity or shock

**JEKYLL** to do a Jekyll and Hyde  
to have a split personality (refers to THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE by Robert Louis Stevenson)

**JELLY** to be set like a jelly

to be very well established

**JEREMIAH** Jeremiah

a person who looks on the gloomy side of everything (refers to the prophet Jeremiah in the Old Testament)

**JERICHO** walls of Jericho

something seemingly solid but actually destructible (Joshua 6:20)

**JERK** a knee-jerk reaction

a response made instantaneously and without any proper consideration

**JETSAM** *flotsam and jetsam*  
derelict persons, without a fixed  
abode or stable life

**JETTISON** *to jettison some  
proposal*  
to abandon some proposal as worth-  
less or impracticable

**JEWEL** *a jewel*  
a valued assistant

**JEWEL** *the jewel in someone's  
crown*  
the most significant component

**JIB** *the cut of someone's jib*  
someone's personal appearance

**JOB** *something would try the  
patience of Job*  
something is very vexatious (James  
5:11)

**JOB** *to have a job in front of one  
to face difficulties*

**JOIN** *join the club!*  
you are only one of many people  
with similar problems

**JOIN** *to join forces*  
to cooperate with one another in or-  
der to achieve a common objective

**JOIN** *to join hands with someone*  
to cooperate with a person

**JOINT** *to put someone's nose out  
of joint*  
to upset another person

**JOT** *not a jot*  
not even a small amount (refers to the  
Greek letter iota or i)

**JOWL** *cheek by jowl*  
close to each other

**JOY** *to jump for joy*  
to express great satisfaction

**JUAN** *to be a Don Juan*  
to be a libertine

**JUDAS** *to play Judas*  
to betray a person (Matthew 26)

**JUDGE** *to judge a book by its cover*  
foolishly to go only by superficial  
appearances

**JUGULAR** *to go for the jugular*  
to attempt to destroy something com-  
pletely

**JUICE** *to stew in one's juice*  
to suffer the adverse consequences of  
one's acts or omissions

**JUMP** *something is but a hop, skip  
and jump away*  
something is nearby

**JUMP** *to be for the high jump*  
to be threatened with a reprimand and  
punishment

**JUMP** *to get the jump on someone*  
to get an advantage over a person

**JUMP** *to jump a hurdle*  
to overcome a problem or difficulty

**JUMP** *to jump at the opportunity*  
to enthusiastically take immediate ad-  
vantage of a good chance

**JUMP** *to jump down someone's  
throat*  
to react angrily to the remarks of the  
other party to a conversation

**JUMP** *to jump for joy*  
to express great satisfaction

**JUMP** *to jump in feet first*  
to take a calculated risk

**JUMP** *to jump into bed with someone*  
to enter into a joint enterprise with  
another person

**JUMP** *to jump into the ring*  
to join in enthusiastically

**JUMP** *to jump on the bus*  
to join an activity already well under  
way

**JUMP** *to jump straight in at the  
deep end*  
to do something without a proper  
lead-in

- JUMP** to jump that hurdle when one comes to it  
to deal with a particular problem only when it becomes necessary to do so
- JUMP** to jump the gun  
to start before one is meant to
- JUMP** to jump through hoops  
to undergo some ordeal
- JUMP** to jump to a conclusion  
to infer something without proper consideration
- JUMP** to jump to attention  
to show respect
- JUMP** to jump up and down  
to show excitement or anger or frustration
- JUMP** to nearly jump out of one's skin  
to receive a fright
- JUMP** to see which way the cat jumps  
to await developments
- JUMP** to want to jump all one's fences at once  
to be unrealistic
- JUMP** you can jump in the lake  
I intend to take no notice whatsoever of you or your views
- JUNGLE** a jungle  
a place where everyone makes his own rules
- JUNGLE** the law of the jungle  
the principle that those having power will use it at the expense of all others
- JURY** the jury is still out  
no decision has yet been made or the public has not yet given an indication of its views

**K**

- KEEL** to keep something on an even keel  
to ensure that something is not harmed

- KEELHAUL** to keelhaul someone to penalize a person
- KEEP** to be unable to keep people away with a big stick  
to be faced with a large crowd or much demand
- KEEP** to keep a civil tongue in one's head  
to be polite, especially under provocation
- KEEP** to keep a level head  
to stay calm and rational in a crisis
- KEEP** to keep a tally  
to keep a record (refers to a piece of wood with notches made on it to indicate a count)
- KEEP** to keep a weather eye out for something  
to look out with particular care
- KEEP** to keep body and soul together  
to keep alive
- KEEP** to keep one's chin up  
to maintain one's morale
- KEEP** to keep one's cotton-picking fingers off something  
not to interfere in something
- KEEP** to keep one's distance  
to avoid familiarity
- KEEP** to keep one's ears open  
to be on the lookout for useful information
- KEEP** to keep one's eye on someone  
to supervise a person or to monitor a person's activities and behavior
- KEEP** to keep one's eye on something  
to monitor a situation
- KEEP** to keep one's eyes open  
to be on the lookout for useful information
- KEEP** to keep one's eyes open for something  
to be on the lookout for an opportunity to do something

**KEEP** to keep one's eyes peeled for something  
to be on the constant lookout for something

**KEEP** to keep one's fingers crossed  
to hope for a good outcome

**KEEP** to keep one's hair on  
to remain calm in a crisis

**KEEP** to keep one's hands in  
to engage in activities which reinforce skills which one has previously acquired

**KEEP** to keep one's head  
to remain calm in a crisis or to unexpectedly retain an elected or appointed position

**KEEP** to keep one's head down  
to work very diligently

**KEEP** to keep one's mouth shut  
not to discuss some matter

**KEEP** to keep one's nose out of something  
not to meddle in something

**KEEP** to keep one's nose to the grindstone  
to work with particular diligence

**KEEP** to keep one's pecker up  
to stay cheerful

**KEEP** to keep one's powder dry  
to retain key arguments or resources in reserve for use later

**KEEP** to keep out of someone's hair  
to let another person get on with his work in his own way

**KEEP** to keep someone in a straitjacket  
to deny a person any discretionary powers at all

**KEEP** to keep someone in the dark  
to deliberately keep a person uninformed

**KEEP** to keep someone on his toes  
to induce a person to be efficient

**KEEP** to keep someone's seat warm  
to hold a position temporarily with a view to another person taking it over permanently in the near future

**KEEP** to keep something dark  
to keep something secret

**KEEP** to keep something on an even keel  
to ensure that something is not harmed

**KEEP** to keep something under one's hat  
to maintain a confidence

**KEEP** to keep something up one's sleeve  
to secretly retain something in reserve for use in the future or at a later stage of negotiations

**KEEP** to keep tabs on something  
to monitor something

**KEEP** to keep the ball rolling  
to take advantage of the existing momentum or to participate actively

**KEEP** to keep the homes fires burning  
to maintain normal domestic activity during the temporary absence of the breadwinner

**KEEP** to keep the jackals at bay  
to pay one's creditors just sufficient to avoid repercussions

**KEEP** to keep the lid on something  
to keep a matter under control

**KEEP** to keep the pot boiling  
to ensure that an issue stays current

**KEEP** to keep the wolf from the door  
to avoid imminent trouble

**KEEP** to keep track of something  
to be completely aware of where something is and how it is functioning

**KEEP** to keep under wraps  
to keep confidential

**KEEP** to keep up with the ball  
to stay on top of the situation

**KEEP** why keep a dog and bark oneself?

it is silly to pay for assistance and then do things personally

**KEEPER** keepers of the flame  
persons keen to maintain old traditions

**KEEPER** to let something go to the keeper  
to deliberately ignore a particular incident

**KETTLE** the pot calling the kettle black

a person criticizing another person without realizing his own even greater shortcomings

**KETTLE** to be a different kettle of fish

to be something very dissimilar

**KETTLE** to be a fine kettle of fish  
to be a terrible muddle

**KEY** to strike the right key  
to find the appropriate solution

**KEYNOTE** keynote address  
opening address, designed to set the theme of a conference

**KICK** I could kick myself  
I regret that I acted thus

**KICK** a kick in the pants  
an admonition

**KICK** to be alive and kicking  
to be in good form

**KICK** to kick a man when he is down  
to take unfair advantage of a person already in difficulty

**KICK** to kick heads in  
to demonstrate annoyance at or dislike of certain persons

**KICK** to kick in  
to contribute financially

**KICK** to kick off  
to start some action

**KICK** to kick one's heels  
to be kept waiting

**KICK** to kick over one's traces  
to become insubordinate

**KICK** to kick some proposal around  
to examine a proposal from all angles

**KICK** to kick someone around  
to abuse a person

**KICK** to kick someone in the guts  
to take action needlessly hurtful to another person

**KICK** to kick someone in the teeth  
to take action which demonstrates annoyance at or dislike of a person

**KICK** to kick someone out  
to expel a person

**KICK** to kick someone upstairs  
to promote a person to a purely ceremonial position

**KICK** to kick the bucket  
to die

**KICK** to kick the cat  
to take out one's anger on some innocent party

**KICK** to kick up a fuss  
to create a fuss

**KID** to treat someone with kid gloves  
to handle a person with great discretion

**KILL** to be dressed to kill  
to be more finely dressed than the occasion warrants

**KILL** to be in at the kill  
to be present at the climactic finish to something

**KILL** to be killed in the rush  
to be the supplier of something extremely popular

**KILL** to kill oneself laughing  
to be greatly amused

**KILL** to kill some proposal stone dead  
to abandon some proposal completely

**KILL** to kill the fatted calf  
to demonstrate welcome and forgiveness on a person's return (Luke 15:23)

**KILL** to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs  
through excessive greed to destroy a very profitable enterprise

**KILL** to kill two birds with one stone  
to achieve a second objective in the course of achieving the first objective

**KILL** to make a killing  
to be in a very successful business venture

**KINDRED** kindred spirit  
person with similar interests and eccentricities

**KING** a cat may look at a king  
don't give yourself airs!

**KING** to pay a king's ransom  
to pay a very large sum

**KINGMAKER** kingmaker  
person engaging in behind-the-scenes activities to promote another person to a particular leadership position

**KISS** to be the kiss of death  
to be something intended to be helpful but resulting in total destruction

**KISS** to kiss and make up  
to reconcile one's differences

**KISS** to kiss something good-bye  
to give something up as permanently lost

**KISS** to kiss the ground  
to suffer a loss

**KISS** to kiss the rod  
to accept punishment meekly

**KIT** to have a field marshal's baton in one's kit  
to be ambitious

**KITCHEN** everything but the kitchen sink  
a lot of things

**KITCHEN** if one can't stand the heat one should stay out of the kitchen

a person should not put himself in a position involving pressures with which he cannot cope (words attributed to Harry S. Truman)

**KITCHEN** to get the rounds of the kitchen

(of a husband) to be subject to personal abuse by his wife

**KITE** to fly a kite

to issue uncovered checks in the hope that they will be covered before clearance or to test public reaction to legislation in contemplation by leaking broad details of it to the media

**KITTEN** to have kittens

to be in a state of great dismay (refers to a superstition that certain acts would cause women to bear kittens instead of children)

**KNEE** a knee-jerk reaction

a response made instantaneously and without any proper consideration

**KNEE** since he was knee high to a grasshopper

since he was a very young child

**KNEE** to be cut off at the knees  
to have a pet project aborted

**KNEE** to beg on bended knees  
to request in great earnestness

**KNEE** to force someone onto his knees

to inflict a humiliating defeat on a person

**KNEE** to go down on one's hand and knees to someone

with great humility to ask a favor of a person

**KNEE** weak-kneed

unassertive or irresolute

**KNELL** to sound the death knell of something

to indicate the impending end of something

**KNICKERS** *to get one's knickers in a knot*  
to get unduly excited

**KNIFE** *before one can say "knife"*  
very quickly

**KNIFE** *one could have cut the atmosphere with a knife*  
those present were very tense

**KNIFE** *the knives are out*  
there is an active campaign against someone

**KNIFE** *to be on a knife edge*  
to be in danger

**KNIFE** *to hold a knife at someone's throat*  
to exert undue pressure on another person in an endeavor to achieve a result which would otherwise not be forthcoming

**KNIFE** *to sharpen the knives*  
to get ready for a concerted attack on some principle

**KNIFE** *to stick a knife into someone*  
to act vindictively toward a person

**KNIGHT** *a knight in shining armor*  
a very helpful person

**KNIGHT** *a white knight*  
a party voluntarily coming to the assistance of another party at considerable cost to itself

**KNIT** *to knit one's brows*  
to indicate one's displeasure

**KNOCK** *on the deathknock*  
at the last possible moment

**KNOCK** *to knock an idea on the head*  
to utterly reject a proposal

**KNOCK** *to knock on doors*  
to seek out opportunities to do business

**KNOCK** *to knock someone off his perch*  
to displace a person from his leadership position in some competitive situation

**KNOCK** *to knock something into a cocked hat*  
to twist something so that its original form is hardly recognizable

**KNOCK** *to knock the stuffing out of someone*  
to completely demoralize a person

**KNOCK** *to knock two heads together*  
to make two persons come to their senses and deal with each other

**KNOT** *at a rate of knots*  
very fast

**KNOT** *to cut the Gordian knot*  
to solve, especially by force, a virtually insoluble problem (refers to a complicated knot tied by Gordius and eventually cut by Alexander the Great)

**KNOT** *to get into a knot*  
to get into a state of confusion

**KNOT** *to get one's knickers in a knot*  
to get unduly excited

**KNOT** *to tie the knot*  
to marry

**KNOW** *I don't know whether I'm Arthur or Martha*  
I haven't time to think

**KNOW** *by their fruits ye shall know them*  
their reputation will be based on their results (Matthew 7:20)

**KNOW** *father knows best*  
as an expert I know better than you do just what is most suitable for you

**KNOW** *not to know someone from Adam*  
to be unable to recognize a person

**KNOW** *the devil one knows is better than the devil one does not know*  
the status quo is more comfortable than change

**KNOW** *the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing*  
 one section of a large bureaucracy does not realize that another section is simultaneously doing something inconsistent

**KNOW** *to know a thing or two about something*  
 to have acquired a lifetime of cunning about a subject

**KNOW** *to know how many beans make five*  
 to have common sense

**KNOW** *to know one's mind*  
 to form and adhere to an opinion

**KNOW** *to know the ropes*  
 to know how to do one's job

**KNOW** *to know where one stands*  
 to know what one supports or how one is affected

**KNOW** *to know which way to turn*  
 to know which strategy to adopt or where to seek assistance

**KNUCKLE** *to rap someone over the knuckles*  
 to admonish a person

**KOSHER** *to be kosher*  
 to fulfill all requirements (refers to food complying with all aspects of Jewish religious law)

## L

**LABEL** *to give something a label*  
 to classify something

**LABOR** *to labor mightily and bring forth a mouse*  
 to be quite ineffective

**LACE** *strait-laced*  
 puritanical

**LADDER** *a game of snakes and ladders*  
 a series of ups and downs

**LADDER** *rungs up a ladder*  
 gradual steps to an ultimate goal

**LADDER** *to be at the bottom of the ladder*  
 to be in the most junior position in some hierarchy

**LADY** *it's not over till the fat lady sings*  
 it is not finished yet

**LAKE** *you can jump in the lake*  
 I intend to take no notice whatsoever of you or your views

**LAMB** *a lamb led to slaughter*  
 a naive person allowing himself to be exploited

**LAMB** *one might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb*  
 further action will not increase the adverse consequences already in train (refers to the stealing of both sheep and lambs being capital crimes under old English law)

**LAMB** *sacrificial lamb*  
 somebody unfairly made to suffer for the mistakes of others

**LAMB** *to be mutton dressed up as lamb*  
 to foolishly pretend to be younger

**LAMB** *to wait two shakes of a lamb's tail*  
 to wait just a few moments

**LAME** *a lame dog*  
 a person under some disadvantage needing attention and assistance

**LAME** *a lame duck*  
 a person unable to fend for himself (a lame duck president—a president still in office but without influence because the commencement of his successor's term is imminent)

**LAND** *to ascertain the lay of the land*  
 to establish the pertinent facts and opinions

**LAND** *to be in cloud cuckoo land*  
 to be mad or to have unrealistic expectations

**LAND** *to be in the land of the living  
to be alive*

**LAND** *to land something  
to achieve something*

**LANDMARK** *a landmark ruling  
a decision marking a turning point in the way a matter is approached*

**LANDSCAPE** *to be part of the landscape  
to be present and fully accepted without question*

**LANDSLIDE** *a landslide  
an electoral result involving victory or defeat by an unexpectedly large margin*

**LANE** *life in the fast lane  
existence full of exciting but worthless activity*

**LANE** *to go down memory lane  
to reminisce*

**LANGUAGE** *to speak the same language  
to have a good understanding and similar ideas*

**LAP** *to be in the lap of the gods  
to be a matter of pure chance (refers to wax tablets inscribed with requests and placed on the knees of statues of Greek gods)*

**LAP** *to drop into one's lap  
to turn up fortuitously*

**LAP** *to dump something in someone's lap  
to impose some responsibility on another person*

**LAP** *to lap it up  
to enjoy the attention*

**LARGE** *larger than life  
in person and full of enthusiasm*

**LARGE** *to be a small cog in a large wheel  
to be a relatively unimportant person in a large organization*

**LARK** *to rise with the lark  
to get up early*

**LAST** *a cobbler should stick to his last  
every person should confine himself to activities for which he has been trained*

**LAST** *the final straw  
the latest step, which, when added to a large number of seemingly harmless previous steps, sets off a disaster resulting from the cumulative effect*

**LAST** *the last bastion  
the only remaining defensive measure*

**LAST** *the last of the Mohicans  
to be the last of a group (refers to a near extinct tribe of American Indians) (title of a novel by James Fenimore Cooper)*

**LAST** *to be on one's last legs  
to be nearly worn out*

**LAST** *to have come down in the last shower  
to be naive*

**LAST** *to make a last-ditch stand  
to make a brave effort to stave off final defeat*

**LAST** *to play the last card in the pack  
to lower one's standards in a final desperate effort*

**LAST** *to squeeze the last drop out of something  
to get the maximum advantage out of some favorable situation*

**LATE** *late in the day  
only when a project is well advanced*

**LATHER** *to get a lather up  
to get unduly excited*

**LATHER** *to whip oneself into a lather  
to become unduly excited*

<b>LAUGH</b> to laugh all the way to the bank to appreciate one's good fortune	
<b>LAUGH</b> to laugh one's head off to greatly enjoy something	
<b>LAUGH</b> to laugh something out of court to ridicule a proposition as having no basis whatsoever	
<b>LAUGH</b> you will laugh on the other side of your face you will regret this	
<b>LAUREL</b> to look to one's laurels to be careful not to lose one's reputation for some skill	
<b>LAUREL</b> to rest on one's laurels to use a reputation for success earned in earlier times as a substitute for current endeavor	
<b>LAW</b> Murphy's law the principle that everything which can go wrong will go wrong	
<b>LAW</b> Parkinson's law the principle that work expands to match the work capacity available (title of a book by Prof. C. Northcote Parkinson)	
<b>LAW</b> the law of the jungle the principle that those having power will use it at the expense of all others	
<b>LAW</b> to lay down the law to be officious	
<b>LAY</b> not to lay a finger on someone to refrain from hurting a person	
<b>LAY</b> to be a laid-down misere to be very easily accomplished and/or to be certain of outcome (refers to the declaration in certain card games undertaking to win no tricks)	
<b>LAY</b> to be able to lay one's hands on something to be able to locate something	

	<b>LAY</b> to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs through excessive greed to destroy a very profitable enterprise
	<b>LAY</b> to lay a proposal on the table to make a proposal available for discussion or to adjourn discussion on a proposal for an indefinite period
	<b>LAY</b> to lay down the law to be officious
	<b>LAY</b> to lay it on the line to make clear what the accepted rules of behavior are
	<b>LAY</b> to lay it on with a trowel to flatter
	<b>LAY</b> to lay one's cards on the table to be utterly frank and open or to honestly disclose one's position
	<b>LAY</b> to lay one's hands on something to acquire something
	<b>LAY</b> to lay some theory to rest to abandon some theory as being no longer appropriate
	<b>LEAD</b> a lamb led to slaughter a naive person allowing himself to be exploited
	<b>LEAD</b> all roads lead to Rome all alternatives will have the same outcome
	<b>LEAD</b> the blind leading the blind persons without the necessary skills for a task purporting to impart those skills to others
	<b>LEAD</b> to go down like a lead balloon to receive a very cool reception
	<b>LEAD</b> to lead a dog's life to be ill-treated
	<b>LEAD</b> to lead someone a merry dance to mislead a person

**LEAD** to lead someone by the nose  
to induce another person to comply  
with one's wishes

**LEAD** to lead someone up the  
garden path  
to mislead a person by deliberately  
fallacious arguments

**LEAD** to lead with one's chin  
by one's brash behavior to virtually  
invite one's opponents to take action  
against one

**LEAD** to swing the lead  
to cheat an employer by not working  
while being paid to do so

**LEADING** a leading question  
a very pertinent question (the misuse  
of a legal term, which actually means  
a question so framed as to suggest the  
answer)

**LEADING** to be the leading light  
to be the most important person in a  
venture

**LEADING** to have a leading edge  
to have an advantage

**LEAF** to take a leaf out of  
someone's book  
to model oneself on another person

**LEAF** to turn over a new leaf  
to reform

**LEAGUE** to be in the same league  
to have comparable skills

**LEAN** a shoulder to lean on  
sympathy

**LEAN** to lean on someone  
to utilize the support of another per-  
son or to pressure another person to  
do something against his inclination

**LEAP** a leap into the dark  
a rash move

**LEAP** a quantum leap  
a gigantic step forward

**LEAP** by leaps and bounds  
with surprisingly fast progress

**LEAP** to leap at an idea  
to accept a suggestion enthusiastically

**LEAP** to leapfrog something  
to overtake something, with the like-  
lihood of in turn being overtaken (re-  
fers to a game in which participants  
jump over each other in turn)

**LEAP** to leap in  
to commence an activity without con-  
sidering the wisdom of doing so or  
the best way to proceed

**LEARN** to learn a lesson  
to benefit from one's experience

**LEARN** to learn something from  
the horse's mouth  
to get information from someone  
qualified to impart it

**LEARN** to learn the ropes  
to be taught the elementary features

**LEASE** a new lease on life  
the prospect of a worry-free existence  
from now on

**LEASH** to hold someone on a short  
leash  
to give a person very little authority

**LEAST** to take the line of least  
resistance  
to succumb to outside pressure

**LEAVE** a case of rats leaving a  
sinking ship  
the desertion of an enterprise in antici-  
pation of imminent failure

**LEAVE** to be left holding the baby  
to be tricked into accepting responsi-  
bility for someone else's problems

**LEAVE** to leave no stone unturned  
to be very thorough

**LEAVE** to leave one's mark on  
something  
to be responsible for permanently  
altering the way something is operated

**LEAVE** to leave oneself wide open  
to act in such a way that one's oppo-  
nents will find much which can be  
easily criticized

**LEAVE** to leave others for dead  
to be vastly superior

**LEAVE** to leave someone cold  
to fail to impress a person

**LEAVE** to leave someone high and dry

to withdraw all support from a person  
or to isolate a person from a desired involvement

**LEAVE** to leave someone in the lurch

to desert a person who is in difficulties (refers to the score in certain games)

**LEAVE** to leave someone out in the cold

to deny a desired objective to a person

**LEAVE** to leave something up in the air

to continue with an unresolved problem

**LEAVE** to leave the door open

to issue a standing invitation for the resumption of some negotiations

**LEAVE** without leaving any

footprints

without making any impression

**LEECH** leech

person taking undue advantage of others

**LEEWAY** to make up leeway

to get back to a normal position or to get to the position held by one's competitors

**LEFT** a left-handed compliment  
a thinly-disguised insult

**LEFT** the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing  
one section of a large bureaucracy does not realize that another section is simultaneously doing something inconsistent

**LEFT** to have two left feet  
to be clumsy

**LEG** not to have a leg to stand on  
to have one's arguments completely demolished or to be without acceptable excuse or explanation

**LEG** to be on one's last legs  
to be nearly worn out

**LEG** to cost an arm and a leg  
to be excessively expensive

**LEG** to do the leg work

to carry out the tedious part of a project

**LEG** to give someone a leg up  
to give a person some assistance

**LEG** to have a leg in

to have an opportunity which has the potential to lead to bigger things

**LEG** to have one's tail between one's legs

to show great humility in the light of a backdown

**LEG** to pull someone's leg

to tell a false but plausible story as an act of humor

**LEG** to shake a leg

to hurry up

**LEG** to stand up on one's hind legs  
to exert one's authority

**LEG** to talk the hind leg off a donkey

to talk excessively

**LEG** with his tail between his legs  
contritely

**LEG ROPE** to put a leg rope on someone

to give a person very little authority

**LEMON** the answer is a lemon  
the outcome is inconclusive

**LEMON** to sell someone a lemon  
to sell a person a grossly defective product on the basis that it represents quality

**LEMON** to suck the lemon dry

to get the maximum advantage out of some favorable situation

**LEND** *to lend a hand*  
to assist

**LEND** *to lend one's name to something*  
to endorse something

**LEND** *to lend someone an ear*  
to pay attention to a person

**LEND** *to lend weight to something*  
to use one's influence in support of some cause

**LENGTH** *at arm's length*  
between parties who are strangers bearing no special duty to each other and who have no financial or other relationship with each other (a legal term)

**LENGTH** *to go to great lengths*  
to take much trouble

**LEOPARD** *a leopard cannot change his spots*  
each person is born with certain unalterable characteristics

**LESSON** *to drive the lesson home*  
to take certain action which is unpleasant but which has the effect of registering a message

**LESSON** *to learn a lesson*  
to benefit from one's experience

**LESSON** *to teach someone a lesson*  
to inflict something unpleasant on a person in the hope that it will lead to a change in his behavior.

**LET** *bloodletting*  
planned reductions

**LET** *to let blood*  
to allow some harm as the price for achieving some greater benefit

**LET** *to let someone off the hook*  
to allow a person to escape the adverse consequences of his own actions

**LETTER** *a dead letter*  
a rule still in existence but no longer observed in practice

**LETTER** *a red-letter day*  
an important occasion (refers to the color used to print saints' days on some calendars)

**LEVEL** *a level playing field*  
competition on equal terms

**LEVEL** *to be on the level*  
to be honest

**LEVEL** *to keep a level head*  
to stay calm and rational in a crisis

**LEVEL** *water will find its own level*  
people will reach an appropriate position relative to others

**LEVEL-HEADED** *level-headed*  
rational

**LIBERTY** *liberty hall*  
a place where one is free to do as one wishes

**LICENSE** *a license to print money*  
a lucrative government-conferred monopoly or privilege

**LICK** *to lick one's chops*  
to look forward to something with pleasurable anticipation

**LICK** *to lick one's wounds*  
to adjust oneself to defeat

**LICK** *to lick someone's boots*  
to show humility

**LICK** *to lick something into shape*  
to make something presentable and effective

**LID** *to blow the lid off something*  
to expose something no matter how embarrassing this might be

**LID** *to keep the lid on something*  
to keep a matter under control

**LIE** *one has made one's bed and one will now have to lie on it*  
one has to bear the consequences of one's actions

**LAY** *to ascertain the lay of the land*  
to establish the pertinent facts and opinions

**LIE to let sleeping dogs lie**  
to refrain from raising an issue which is not obviously requiring attention

**LIE to lie low**  
to stay inconspicuous

**LIE to take something lying down**  
to accept a disadvantage without protest

**LIE uneasy lies the head that wears a crown**

responsibility involves some risks and some burdens (from Shakespeare's HENRY IV)

**LIFE I cannot for the life of me**  
I just cannot

**LIFE a new lease on life**  
the prospect of a worry-free existence from now on

**LIFE larger than life**  
in person and full of enthusiasm

**LIFE life in the fast lane**  
existence full of exciting but worthless activity

**LIFE life raft**  
financial assistance sufficient to avert insolvency

**LIFE not on your life**  
definitely not

**LIFE to be the life and soul of the party**

to be the prime enthusiast for a cause

**LIFE to breathe life into a corpse**  
to revive something moribund

**LIFE to lead a dog's life**  
to be ill-treated

**LIFE to save someone's life**  
to be of great help to a person

**LIFE you can bet your life on something**  
something is certain to happen

**LIFEBLOOD the lifeblood**  
the main or essential ingredient; or the person or factor instilling enthusiasm

**LIFT not to lift a finger to help someone**  
to refuse to assist

**LIFT to lift one's game**  
to raise the standard of one's performance

**LIGHT a chink of light**  
a small hope of a solution or breakthrough

**LIGHT a highlight**  
a particularly important item

**LIGHT a light in the sky**  
a sign of great hope

**LIGHT guiding light**  
yardstick for ethical behavior

**LIGHT in the cold light of day**  
in an unemotional atmosphere at a later stage

**LIGHT light dawns**  
the point is grasped

**LIGHT light on the hill**  
distant goal acting as an inspiration

**LIGHT light-fingered**  
good at stealing

**LIGHT shining light**  
eminent or scholarly person

**LIGHT to be in the limelight**  
to be exposed to public attention

**LIGHT to be the leading light**  
to be the most important person in a venture

**LIGHT to bring something to light**  
to draw to public attention

**LIGHT to get the red light**  
to be forbidden to do something

**LIGHT to give the green light**  
to grant permission

**LIGHT to hide one's light under a bushel**  
to keep others in ignorance of one's skills and experience

**LIGHT** to highlight something  
to draw particular attention to a matter

**LIGHT** to light a fuse  
to cause serious reactions

**LIGHT** to see red lights flashing  
to be conscious of the danger

**LIGHT** to see someone in a good light  
to regard a person favorably

**LIGHT** to see the light  
to understand the real situation

**LIGHT** to see the light at the end of the tunnel  
to be close to finalizing a long exercise

**LIGHT** to see the light of day  
to be made public

**LIGHT** to shed light on something  
to give explanations

**LIGHT** to steal the spotlight  
to set out to be the center of attention

**LIGHT** to turn the spotlight on something  
to draw public attention to something

**LIGHTLY** to tread lightly  
to be careful

**LIGHTNING** a lightning rod  
a person who attracts trouble to himself

**LIGHTWEIGHT** lightweight  
uninfluential

**LILLIPUTIAN** Lilliputian  
small (refers to a place in Swift's GULLIVER'S TRAVELS)

**LILY** lily-livered  
cowardly

**LILY** lily-white  
honest and incorruptible

**LILY** to gild the lily  
(actually: to gild refined gold, to paint the lily) to do something patently unnecessary

**LIMB** to go out on a limb  
to put oneself at risk through foolish action

**LIMBO** to be in limbo  
to have one's ultimate fate yet to be determined

**LIMBO** to consign something to limbo  
to consider something as permanently disposed of

**LIMELIGHT** to be in the limelight  
to be exposed to public attention

**LIMIT** the sky is the limit  
the cost is no obstacle

**LINCHPIN** linchpin  
essential feature central to a project

**LINE** hook, line and sinker  
wholly

**LINE** someone's job is on the line  
a person's career path is under consideration and/or his present position is at risk

**LINE** the Plimsoll line  
the standard

**LINE** the bottom line  
the conclusion which matters or the net effect of a series of developments

**LINE** to be further down the line  
to have a low priority

**LINE** to be in the firing line  
to be among the first to be under attack

**LINE** to be line ball  
to be equal

**LINE** to be out of line  
to adopt a stance not held by others

**LINE** to draw the line at that  
to refuse to go any further

**LINE** to fall into line  
to conform with others

**LINE** to lay it on the line  
to make clear what the accepted rules of behavior are

**LINE** *to line one's pockets*  
to make, improperly and secretly, a profit out of some transaction

**LINE** *to make a beeline for something*  
to go straight to something with great enthusiasm or to head for some goal by the most direct route

**LINE** *to put one's reputation on the line*  
to take a public stance in the realization that there is a risk that one's reputation will suffer if one is proved wrong

**LINE** *to read between the lines*  
to appreciate the true significance of something not put into words

**LINE** *to sign on the dotted line*  
to confirm one's agreement

**LINE** *to sit on the sidelines*  
not to take part in the main action

**LINE** *to step out of line*  
to infringe accepted rules of behavior

**LINE** *to swallow the line*  
to accept as truth the story being proffered

**LINE** *to take a hard line*  
to be uncompromising

**LINE** *to take the line of least resistance*  
to succumb to outside pressure

**LINE** *to toe the line*  
to conform

**LINE** *to tread the thin line*  
cautiously to take action in circumstances where either too much or too little will cause difficulties

**LINEN** *to wash one's dirty linen in public*  
to expose one's domestic differences to the world at large

**LINGER** *the melody lingers on*  
the benefit of past actions remains

**LINING** *every cloud has a silver lining*  
there are benefits even in seemingly adverse situations

**LINK** *the weakest link in the chain*  
the least efficient component in a project the overall efficiency of which is governed by the efficiency of the least efficient component

**LION** *the lion's share*  
the biggest portion

**LION** *to beard the lion in his den*  
to visit someone important at his headquarters

**LION** *to put one's head into the lion's mouth*  
to recklessly expose oneself to great danger

**LION** *to throw someone to the lions*  
to abandon a person

**LIP** *a stiff upper lip*  
obstinate courage in the face of pain or adversity

**LIP** *to be tight-lipped*  
to keep confidences or to be uncommunicative

**LIP** *to bite one's lip*  
to control one's anger

**LIP** *to pay lip service to some rules*  
to disregard some rules in practice while acknowledging them in words

**LIP** *to seal one's lips*  
to keep a confidence

**LIST** *a shopping list*  
a catalogue of demands

**LISTEN** *a listening post*  
a place where information of strategic value can be collected

**LITMUS** *a litmus test*  
an event which allows the outcome of future events to be predicted more accurately

**LITTLE** *a little bird told me*  
I heard from an unnameable informant (Ecclesiastes 10:20)

**LITTLE** *a little tin god*  
a petty tyrant

**LITTLE** *little pitchers have long ears*  
children have a tendency to overhear things

**LITTLE** *tall oaks from little acorns grow*  
even major enterprises have to have small beginnings (from "Lines written for a School Declamation" by David Everett)

**LITTLE** *to be a big fish in a little pond*  
to be a person holding an important office but in an unimportant organization

**LITTLE** *to twist someone around one's little finger*  
by charm to get one's way

**LIVE** *not to live in each other's pockets*  
to each follow his own lifestyle

**LIVE** *to be a live wire*  
to be an enthusiast

**LIVE** *to live from hand to mouth*  
being in poor financial circumstances, to survive with little by way of safety margin

**LIVE** *to live in a fool's paradise*  
to delude oneself

**LIVER** *lily-livered*  
cowardly

**LIZARD** *flat out like a lizard*  
to be hard at work (a play on words, not a simile)

**LLOYD** *to be A1 at Lloyd's*  
to be in perfect order (refers to the classification of ships in Lloyd's register in London)

**LOAD** *that has taken a load off my mind*  
I am relieved

**LOAD** *to be the throw of a loaded die*  
to be an act of deceit

**LOCK** *lock, stock and barrel*  
entirely

**LOCK** *to lock horns with someone*  
to have an argument with another person

**LOCK** *to lock someone into some arrangement*

to create an agreement which cannot be broken by one of the parties

**LOCK** *to lock something up in the old oak chest*

to put in a safe place and out of mind

**LOGGERHEAD** *to be at loggerheads*

to constantly fight one another

**LOGJAM** *a logjam*

a stoppage of activity caused by input in greater volume than allowed for

**LOIN** *to gird up one's loins*  
to get ready for action

**LONDON** *it is London to a brick*  
it is virtually certain

**LONE** *a lone wolf*

a person who prefers to act without involving others

**LONE** *to be a lone voice in the wilderness*

to be the only person stating unpopular views

**LONG** *for the long haul*  
as a long-term proposition

**LONG** *he must have a long spoon that sups with the devil*  
great care is needed when negotiating deals with disreputable parties.

**LONG** *it is a long time between drinks*

activity is occurring only very spasmodically

**LONG** *it is as broad as it is long*  
it does not really matter

**LONG** *little pitchers have long ears*  
children have a tendency to overhear things

**LONG** *take a long walk on a short pier*

go away, I want no dealings with you

**LONG** *that is a long shot*

there is only a remote possibility

**LONG** *the long and the short of it*

all that needs to be said about this

**LONG** *to be long in the tooth*

to be old

**LONG** *to draw a long bow*

to state a conclusion which while possible is unlikely on the known facts

**LONG** *to enter a long road*

to commence a task which will take a long time

**LONG** *to have a long arm*

to have far-reaching power

**LONG** *to have a long face*

to look miserable

**LONG** *to throw a long shadow*

to have wide-spread ramifications

**LONG** *to win by a long chalk*

to win very conclusively

**LOOK** *a cat may look at a king*

don't give yourself airs!

**LOOK** *distant fields look greener*  
activities of which one has no experience seem much easier than is really the case

**LOOK** *one looks for elephants in elephant country*

one needs to search in the right place

**LOOK** *someone looks as if butter would not melt in his mouth*

a person looks sweet and innocent

**LOOK** *things look black*

there is little hope of success or prosperity or a favorable outcome

**LOOK** *to give someone a black look*  
to indicate one's displeasure with a person

**LOOK** *to look a gift horse in the mouth*

to be suspicious about a benefit which has been volunteered

**LOOK** *to look after number one*  
to act selfishly

**LOOK** *to look at someone sideways*  
to silently and politely indicate one's disapproval

**LOOK** *to look daggers at someone*  
to look at a person in a way which indicates great animosity

**LOOK** *to look down the barrel of a gun*

to be given little choice in a matter

**LOOK** *to look down the nose at something*

to treat a matter with obvious contempt

**LOOK** *to look for a needle in a haystack*

to attempt something with a very small chance of success

**LOOK** *to look on the dark side*  
to be pessimistic

**LOOK** *to look to one's laurels*

to be careful not to lose one's reputation for some skill

**LOOK** *to need to look over one's shoulder*

to be subject to attack which is not obvious

**LOOM** *to loom on the horizon*

to be expected but not immediately

**LOOP** *a loop-hole*

a means of getting around the intention of some regulation

**LOOSE** *a loose cannon on the deck*  
a mistake likely to cause trouble

**LOOSE** *to have a loose tongue*  
to speak foolishly or indiscreetly

**LOOSE** to have a screw loose  
to be mentally unbalanced

**LOOSE** to play fast and loose  
to disregard one's obligations

**LOOSE** to tie up the loose ends  
to complete the minor outstanding  
items of some substantially finished  
project

**LOSE** get lost!  
just go away!

**LOSE** heads I win—tails you lose  
whichever way this matter goes I will  
benefit at your expense

**LOSE** not to lose any sleep over  
something

not to worry about some matter

**LOSE** to be on the losing end of  
the stick

to be worse off while the other party  
to a transaction becomes correspond-  
ingly better off

**LOSE** to lose face

to endure embarrassment by virtue of  
being defeated or having one's errors  
found out

**LOSE** to lose heart

to cease being enthusiastic

**LOSE** to lose money hand over fist  
to lose money very fast and convinc-  
ingly

**LOSE** to lose one's head  
to become confused

**LOSE** to lose one's marbles  
to become senile

**LOSE** to lose one's nerve  
to abandon, out of fear, a decision to  
do something

**LOSE** to lose one's right arm  
to lose some highly-valued assistance

**LOSE** to lose one's touch  
to cease to be familiar with something

**LOSE** to lose steam  
to slow down

**LOSE** what one loses on the swings  
one gains on the roundabouts  
there are advantages and disadvan-  
tages which offset each other

**LOSE** you can get lost

I intend to take no notice whatsoever  
of you or your views

**LOUD** to come through loud and  
clear

to be well understood

**LOVE** love me—love my dog  
if you accept me then you must also  
accept my associates

**LOVE** not for love or money  
definitely not

**LOVELY** everything in the garden  
is lovely  
everything is fine

**LOW** low-down

confidential information relevant to  
something

**LOW** the lowest common  
denominator

the highest level of taste found among  
all the members of some target au-  
dience

**LOW** to lie low

to stay inconspicuous

**LOWER** to lower one's rights  
to reduce one's ambition

**LOWER** to lower the boom  
to terminate an activity

**LUCK** the very best of British luck  
you will have a hard time of it, but  
you carry my best wishes

**LUCK** to be the luck of the draw  
to be a chance result

**LUCK** to push one's luck

having already done well in some-  
thing, to then take risks which can  
prejudice everything

**LUCK** to take pot luck

to take whatever happens by chance  
to be available

**LUCKY** one can thank one's lucky stars  
one was extremely fortunate

**LUKEWARM** lukewarm  
unenthusiastic though not hostile

**LUMP** to have a lump in one's throat  
to feel emotional

**LURCH** to leave someone in the lurch  
to desert a person who is in difficulties (refers to the score in certain games)

**LURK** to lurk in the shadows  
to have a low profile at the moment, but with the possibility of becoming much more conspicuous at any time

**LYNX** lynx-eyed  
having acute vision

## M

**MACABRE** danse macabre  
gruesome final step (French, "ghastly dance")

**MACHINE** a sausage machine  
the turning out of large volumes without particular thought

**MACHINE** when the wash comes through the machine  
in due course

**MACHINERY** to be a well-oiled piece of machinery  
to be functioning very satisfactorily

**MACKEREL** to throw a sprat to catch a mackerel  
to risk a little in the hope of gaining much

**MAD** a madhouse  
an organization in great turmoil

**MAGIC** a magic bullet  
a guaranteed remedy

**MAGIC** the magic moment  
the perfect time

**MAGIC** there is no magic in that that is quite ordinary

**MAGIC** to get a magic carpet ride to something  
to be very fortunate in achieving some objective

**MAGIC** to wave a magic wand  
to direct affairs without the restraints of the real world

**MAGNET** to be a magnet  
to be a factor drawing a crowd of people

**MAHOMET** if the mountain will not come to Mahomet then Mahomet will go to the mountain  
on recognizing that one has insufficient power to effect one's most desired solution, one decides to make do with the next best alternative

**MAIDEN** the answer to a maiden's prayer  
an unexpected but very welcome happening

**MAIN** to splice the main brace  
to serve an extra ration of rum

**MAINSTREAM** mainstream  
orthodox

**MAKE** matchmaker  
intermediary facilitating or instigating some merger

**MAKE** not to be made of money  
not to be wealthy

**MAKE** ready-made  
easily fabricated or available without difficulty

**MAKE** to kiss and make up  
to reconcile one's differences

**MAKE** to make or break someone  
to be a factor leading either to a person's success or to his failure, with no intermediate position

**MAN** a poor man's something  
a second-best version

**MAN** *every man and his dog*  
everybody

**MAN** *he is your man*  
he conforms to an ideal

**MAN** *one man's meat is another  
man's poison*  
people's tastes differ

**MAN** *one's right-hand man*  
one's chief aide

**MAN** *the man in the street*  
the average citizen

**MAN** *to be a man of straw*  
to have no assets while giving a contrary appearance

**MAN** *to be one's own man*  
to approach every issue in a totally objective manner

**MAN** *to kick a man when he is down*  
to take unfair advantage of a person already in difficulty

**MAN** *to separate the men from the boys*  
to distinguish between those with and without certain skills

**MAN** *two men and a dog*  
very few people

**MANAGE** *to stage-manage something*  
to arrange how something happens

**MANGER** *to be a dog in the manger*  
to spitefully deny something to others, notwithstanding its uselessness to oneself

**MANNA** *manna from heaven*  
unexpected benefits (Exodus 16:15)

**MANSIZE** *a mansize job*  
a large task worth doing well

**MANTLE** *to assume someone's mantle*  
to take over another person's role

**MAP** *to put some organization on the map*  
to make the organization a force to be reckoned with

**MARATHON** *marathon*  
requiring great endurance (refers to the run to get aid during the battle of Marathon in 490 BC)

**MARBLE** *to be carved in marble*  
to be virtually unalterable

**MARBLE** *to lose one's marbles*  
to become senile

**MARCH** *in the course of a day's march*  
while carrying out one's normal activities

**MARCH** *to get one's marching orders*  
to be told to leave

**MARCH** *to march to a different drum*  
to show an independent approach

**MARCH** *to steal a march on someone*  
to anticipate another person's actions and get in ahead

**MARE** *a mare's nest*  
a discovery with illusory benefits

**MARGIN** *safety margin*  
allowance for miscalculations

**MARINE** *tell it to the marines*  
such nonsense is not believable

**MARINER** *to be an albatross around someone's neck*  
to be a great burden (popularized by Coleridge's ANCIENT MARINER)

**MARK** *a hallmark*  
a standard (refers to the official assay mark on gold and silver, originally put on at the Goldsmiths' Hall)

**MARK** *a landmark ruling*  
a decision marking a turning point in the way a matter is approached

**MARK** *high water mark*  
triumph

**MARK** *mark my words*  
you will find out that I am right

**MARK** *the mark of Cain*  
disgrace (Genesis 4:15)

**MARK** *the river found its mark*  
equilibrium between two pressures  
has been achieved

**MARK** *to be first off the mark*  
to start ahead of all others

**MARK** *to be slow off the mark*  
to be slow to start something

**MARK** *to be up to the mark*  
to be of the right standard

**MARK** *to be wide off the mark*  
to have a belief which is far removed  
from the true position

**MARK** *to get full marks for*  
*something*  
to deserve praise for something

**MARK** *to have a black mark*  
*against one's name*  
to have a tarnished reputation

**MARK** *to hit the mark*  
to achieve one's object or to make  
the correct decision (refers to archery)

**MARK** *to leave one's mark on*  
*something*  
to be responsible for permanently  
altering the way something is operated

**MARK** *to make one's mark*  
to make an impression on people (refers  
to the cross made as the signature  
of illiterate persons)

**MARK** *to make something one's*  
*trademark*  
to earn a reputation for maintaining  
some stance

**MARK** *to mark time*  
to do nothing while awaiting developments

**MARK** *to overstep the mark*  
to fail to observe the proprieties

**MARKET** *to be a drug on the*  
*market*  
to be in overplentiful supply

**MARSHAL** *to have a field*  
*marshal's baton in one's kit*  
to be ambitious

**MARTHA** *I don't know whether*  
*I'm Arthur or Martha*  
I haven't time to think

**MASK** *to unmask someone*  
to discover a person's true identity

**MAST** *to nail one's colors to the*  
*mast*  
to publicly declare one's position and  
to maintain it in the face of criticism

**MASTER** *a chessmaster*  
a clever strategist

**MASTER** *a master stroke*  
particularly brilliant action

**MASTER** *a past master*  
an expert with long experience

**MATCH** *game, set and match*  
completion

**MATCH** *the whole shooting match*  
the whole lot

**MATCH** *to put a match to gasoline*  
to make a bad situation worse

**MATCHMAKER** *matchmaker*  
intermediary facilitating or instigating  
some merger

**MATTER** *it is mind over matter*  
one's resolve to overcome suffering  
will succeed

**MATTER** *not to matter a row of*  
*beans*  
to be utterly unimportant

**MAVERICK** *maverick*  
a person who likes to do things differently  
from other persons (refers to unbranded livestock)

**MCCOY** to be the real McCoy  
the genuine article (refers to an American boxer who became world welter-weight champion in 1890)

**MEALY** mealy-mouthed  
not at all forceful in debate

**MEASURE** to take someone's measure  
to sum up a person's character or skills

**MEAT** one man's meat is another man's poison  
people's tastes differ

**MEAT** to be easy meat  
to be an opponent who is readily outwitted

**MEAT** to be meat and drink  
to be very pleasurable

**MEAT** to be the ham in the sandwich  
to be caught in the middle of a dispute between other parties

**MEAT** to contain much meat  
to contain much material worthy of consideration

**MEAT** to make mincemeat of something  
to devastate something

**MECCA** a Mecca for something  
a place at which supporters of something congregate

**MEDICINE** strong medicine  
a tough remedy

**MEDICINE** to get a taste of one's own medicine  
to suffer from an initiative intended to affect only other persons

**MEDICINE** to take one's medicine  
to submit to something unpleasant but necessary

**MEET** to make ends meet  
to live within one's income

**MEET** to meet one's Waterloo  
to receive a decisive defeat (refers to Napoleon's fate at the Battle of Waterloo)

**MELODY** the melody lingers on  
the benefit of past actions remains

**MELT** someone looks as if butter would not melt in his mouth  
a person looks sweet and innocent

**MELT** to go back into the melting pot  
to be up for reconsideration ab initio

**MELTING** a melting pot  
a country where people with different ethnic backgrounds over time merge into one nation

**MEND** to mend fences  
to achieve a reconciliation

**MERRY** the more the merrier  
everyone is welcome

**MERRY** to be on a merry-go-round  
to be sent from one bureaucrat to another

**MERRY** to lead someone a merry dance  
to mislead a person

**MERRY** to raise merry hell  
to prominently involve others in a matter in the expectation of significant results from this action

**MESS** to clean up a mess  
to sort out mistakes or neglect

**MESS** to sell one's birthright for a mess of pottage  
through foolishness to exchange something of substance for something of little value (Genesis 25)

**MESSAGE** to get the message  
to understand the real import of what is being said

**METEORIC** meteoric  
rapid

**MEXICAN** a Mexican standoff  
a situation where neither of two parties is making a move

**MICROSCOPE** to be under the microscope  
to be the subject of close examination

**MID** to swap horses in midstream  
to change direction during the course of a project

**MIDAS** the Midas touch  
attributes which cause a person's ventures to be extremely profitable (refers to King Midas of Phrygia, who had the power to turn everything he touched into gold)

**MIDDLE** a middle-of-the-road solution  
a solution near the middle of a range of possibilities

**MIDNIGHT** to burn the midnight oil  
to work late into the night

**MILCH** a milch cow  
an easy and plentiful source of some desired benefit

**MILE** a milestone  
an achievement

**MILE** someone would run a mile  
a person would do anything to escape his responsibilities

**MILE** to be able to spot trouble a mile away  
to be able to spot trouble before it actually happens

**MILE** to be miles apart  
to have great philosophical differences

**MILE** to be miles away  
to have one's mind on other matters

**MILE** to go the extra mile  
to work beyond the call of duty

**MILE** to miss something by a mile  
to be nowhere near one's target

**MILE** to stick out a mile  
to be very apparent

**MILE** give him an inch and he will take a mile  
make him a small concession and he will abuse it by taking much more

**MILEAGE** to get some mileage out of something  
to benefit from something

**MILK** a land of milk and honey  
a country in which everything is in abundant supply

**MILK** it is no use crying over spilt milk  
lamenting over a disaster achieves nothing

**MILK** to be cream on top of the milk  
to be an additional benefit in an already satisfactory scenario

**MILL** it is all grist to the mill  
this is useful but unexciting additional material

**MILL** run of the mill  
normal or average

**MILL** the mills of God grind slowly  
retribution may be delayed but is inevitable

**MILL** to put someone through the mill  
to give a person practical experience

**MILLSTONE** a millstone round someone's neck  
a great burden

**MINCE** not to mince words  
to speak bluntly

**MINCE** to make mincemeat of something  
to devastate something

**MIND** a thought in the back of one's mind  
an undeveloped idea

**MIND** in one's mind's eye  
using a vivid imagination

**MIND** it is mind over matter  
one's resolve to overcome suffering will succeed

**MIND** that has taken a load off my mind  
I am relieved

**MIND** *the mind boggles*  
this is astonishing

**MIND** *to be a weight off one's mind*  
to be a great relief

**MIND** *to be of two minds*  
to be undecided between two alternatives

**MIND** *to be of one mind*  
(of several people) to be agreed

**MIND** *to be out of one's cotton-picking mind*  
to act irrationally

**MIND** *to broaden someone's mind*  
to expose a person to a greater variety of experiences and interests than he had previously

**MIND** *to change one's mind*  
to alter the views which one had previously formed

**MIND** *to cloud one's mind*  
to allow irrelevant or extraneous factors to affect one's impartiality or judgment

**MIND** *to cross one's mind*  
to occur to one

**MIND** *to drive someone out of his mind*  
to cause great worry to a person

**MIND** *to give someone a piece of one's mind*  
to abuse another person

**MIND** *to have a mind of one's own*  
not to be easily influenced

**MIND** *to have a one-track mind*  
to keep coming back to one narrow topic of conversation

**MIND** *to have an open mind*  
to be willing to assess evidence on its merits and without prejudging it

**MIND** *to have half a mind to do something*  
to be tempted or mildly inclined to do something

**MIND** *to know one's mind*  
to form and adhere to an opinion

**MIND** *to make up one's mind*  
to reach a conclusion after contemplating a matter

**MIND** *to prey on one's mind*  
(of a problem) to keep worrying one

**MIND** *to put someone's mind at rest*  
to reassure a person

**MIND** *to slip one's mind*  
to be overlooked or forgotten

**MIND** *to speak one's mind*  
to express one's views frankly and forcefully

**MIND** *to spring to mind*  
to suddenly occur to a person

**MINE** *a goldmine*  
a source of much wealth or of many facts

**MINE** *a minefield*  
a source of great hidden danger or of difficulties not obvious on a first encounter

**MINNOW** *to miss the sharks while netting the minnows*  
to succeed in minor aspects but fail in the ones that really matter

**MINT** *to charge a mint*  
to impose very high prices

**MIRAGE** *mirage*  
illusory benefit

**MIRE** *to sink deeper into the mire*  
to get into further difficulties

**MISERE** *to be a laid-down misere*  
to be very easily accomplished and/or to be certain of outcome (refers to the declaration in certain card games undertaken to win no tricks)

**MISS** *not to miss a beat*  
to carry on without the slightest interruption

**MISS** to miss something by a mile  
to be nowhere near ones target

**MISS** to miss the boat  
to fail to exploit an opportunity

**MISS** to miss the bus  
to fail to exploit an opportunity

**MISS** to miss the sharks while  
netting the minnows  
to succeed in minor aspects but fail in  
the ones that really matter

**MISS** to miss the train  
to fail to exploit an opportunity

**MITE** not a mite  
not at all (refers to a Flemish coin of  
small value)

**MIX** a mixed bag  
some advantages and some disadvan-  
tages

**MIX** to be a mixed blessing  
to be an outcome with some desirable  
and some undesirable features

**MOHICAN** the last of the Mohicans  
to be the last of a group (refers to a  
near extinct tribe of American Indians)  
(title of a novel by James Fenimore  
Cooper)

**MOLD** to be cast in someone's mold  
to take after another person

**MOLE** to make mountains out of  
molehills  
to treat a minor problem as though it  
were a major disaster

**MOMENT** at the psychological  
moment  
at the most appropriate instant of  
time (a phrase which actually con-  
fuses the German word for "motive"  
with the term for an instant of time)

**MOMENT** the magic moment  
the perfect time

**MOMENTUM** to have momentum  
to move along forcefully

**MONEY** a license to print money  
a lucrative government-conferred mo-  
nopoly or privilege

**MONEY** money for jam  
remuneration easily earned

**MONEY** not for love or money  
definitely not

**MONEY** not to be made of money  
not to be wealthy

**MONEY** pin money  
an allowance to a wife for her per-  
sonal use

**MONEY** that is money down the  
drain  
money has been wastefully lost on a  
failed project

**MONEY** the money is rolling in  
the scheme is very profitable

**MONEY** to have a run for one's  
money  
to at least get some enjoyment out of  
an otherwise abortive exercise

**MONEY** to have money burning a  
hole in one's pocket  
to be impatient to spend or invest  
available funds

**MONEY** to have money flowing out  
of one's ears  
to be very rich

**MONEY** to lose money hand over  
fist  
to lose money very fast and convinc-  
ingly

**MONEY** to put money on the table  
to back one's judgment in a tangible  
way or to demonstrate one's sincerity

**MONEY** to put one's money where  
one's mouth is  
to back one's judgment by putting  
assets at risk

**MONEY** to see the color of  
someone's money  
to get evidence of the sincerity of a  
person's proposal

**MONEY** to throw good money  
after bad  
to waste further money in a vain  
attempt to recover money already lost

**MONKEY** *monkey business*  
mischievous or underhand activity

**MONKEY** *to play monkey tricks on someone*  
to engage in discreditable behavior  
affecting a person

**MONSTER** *a hydra-headed monster*  
an evil which is not readily destroyable

**MONSTER** *to create a Frankenstein*  
to create something wicked and out  
of control (a reference to the fictional  
creator of a monster, in mistake for a  
reference to the monster itself)

**MONTH** *to be the flavor of the month*  
to be a commodity temporarily popular  
without a logical reason

**MOON** *once in a blue moon*  
very rarely (refers to the volcanic  
eruption at Krakatoa in 1883 when  
volcanic dust caused the moon to  
appear blue)

**MOON** *to be over the moon*  
to be very excited

**MOONLIGHT** *a moonlight flit*  
an escape from creditors

**MOONSHINE** *moonshine*  
unrealistic ideas

**MORTEM** *to conduct a postmortem on something*  
to review past actions with a view to  
learning lessons for the future (Latin,  
“after the death”)

**MORTGAGE** *to have a mortgage on something*  
to have a moral claim in regard to a  
matter

**MORTGAGE** *to mortgage the future*  
to get benefits now but at a cost in  
due course

**MOSAIC** *a mosaic*  
something with a large number of  
different aspects to it

**MOTE** *a mote in someone's eye*  
a fault in another person which is  
trifling in comparison to an unrecog-  
nized major fault in oneself (Matthew  
7:3)

**MOTH** *moth-eaten*  
(of ideas, etc.) antiquated

**MOTHBALL** *to mothball equipment*  
to put equipment on a “care and  
maintenance” basis

**MOTHER** *a mother hen*  
an overly protective person

**MOTHERHOOD** *a motherhood statement*

a statement so obvious and uncontro-  
versial as not to be worth making  
(such as “motherhood is a good  
thing”)

**MOTION** *to set the wheels in motion*  
to institute appropriate action

**MOUNTAIN** *if the mountain will not come to Mahomet then Mahomet will go to the mountain*

on recognizing that one has insuffi-  
cient power to effect one’s most de-  
sired solution one decides to make do  
with the next best alternative

**MOUNTAIN** *to make mountains out of molehills*

to treat a minor problem as though it  
were a major disaster

**MOUSE** *a game of cat and mouse*  
negotiations between two parties of  
unequal bargaining power during  
which the stronger makes some tem-  
porary concessions to the weaker  
without, however, affecting the lat-  
ter’s eventual total default

**MOUSE** *mice have been here*  
intruders have entered this place

**MOUSE** *to labor mightily and bring forth a mouse*  
to be quite ineffective

**MOUSE** *when the cat is away the mice will play*  
in the absence of supervision discipline will be lax

**MOUTH** *hard-mouthed*  
uncontrollable

**MOUTH** *mealy-mouthed*  
not at all forceful in debate

**MOUTH** *out of the mouths of babes*

(as indiscreetly revealed) the truth

**MOUTH** *someone looks as if butter would not melt in his mouth*  
a person looks sweet and innocent

**MOUTH** *to be a big mouth*  
to lack discretion in one's conversation

**MOUTH** *to be born with a silver spoon in one's mouth*  
to be brought up by wealthy parents

**MOUTH** *to be down in the mouth*  
to be depressed

**MOUTH** *to be left with a nasty taste in one's mouth*  
to be appalled or very disappointed at another person's unethical behavior to one

**MOUTH** *to foam at the mouth*  
to show anger

**MOUTH** *to have one's heart in one's mouth*  
to be startled

**MOUTH** *to keep one's mouth shut*  
not to discuss some matter

**MOUTH** *to learn something from the horse's mouth*  
to get information from someone qualified to impart it

**MOUTH** *to live from hand to mouth*  
being in poor financial circumstances to survive with little by way of safety margin

**MOUTH** *to look a gift horse in the mouth*  
to be suspicious about a benefit which has been volunteered

**MOUTH** *to make one's mouth water*  
to excite desire

**MOUTH** *to put one's foot in one's mouth*  
to say something foolish

**MOUTH** *to put one's head into the lion's mouth*  
to recklessly expose oneself to great danger

**MOUTH** *to put one's money where one's mouth is*  
to back one's judgment by putting assets at risk

**MOUTH** *to put words into someone's mouth*  
to attempt to get someone to say something in the particular terms drafted by another person

**MOUTH** *to shoot one's mouth off*  
to speak without thinking

**MOUTH** *to take food out of the mouths of children*  
cruelly to deprive the needy

**MOUTH** *you took the words right out of my mouth*  
you have just said what I was about to say

**MOVE** *a moving target*  
an objective subject to constant revision

**MOVE** *move over and let the greyhound see the rabbit*  
move over

**MOVE** *to move down a notch*  
to accept a lower position

**MOVE** *to move heaven and earth*  
to do everything possible

**MOVE** *your move!*  
the next step is up to you

**MOVER** *prime mover*

person initiating and promoting a cause

**MUCKRAKER** *a muckraker*

a person who sets out to publicize misconduct of prominent persons or institutions

**MUD** *a stick-in-the-mud*

an unenterprising person

**MUD** *his name is mud*

he completely lacks credibility (a play on the name of one Dr. Samuel Mudd)

**MUD** *some mud will stick*

reputations will be hurt even after accusations are proved false

**MUD** *to muddy the waters*

to deliberately confuse an issue by creating a diversion

**MUD** *to sink deeper into the mud*

to get into even greater difficulty

**MUD** *to sling mud*

to make unfair imputations

**MUDRAKER** *a mudraker*

a person who sets out to publicize features harming another person's reputation

**MUG** *a mug's game*

activity which wise persons would eschew

**MUMBO** *mumbo jumbo*

blatant nonsense (refers to a deity worshipped by primitive tribes)

**MURDER** *to be sheer murder*

to be extremely unpleasant or difficult; or to be an inglorious defeat

**MURDER** *to get away with murder*

to do something outrageous without penalty

**MURPHY** *Murphy's law*

the principle that everything which can go wrong will go wrong

**MUSCLE** *to flex one's muscles*

to exert one's personality or powers

**MUSEUM** *a museum piece*

an old article the use of which is no longer efficient

**MUSHROOM** *to mushroom*

to expand rapidly

**MUSIC** *to be music to one's ears*

to be comments which one is very pleased to hear

**MUSIC** *to face the music*

to accept responsibility when confronted by one's critics

**MUSIC** *when the music stops*

suddenly and soon (refers to an imminent crisis leading to some resolution of a matter as in a game of musical chairs)

**MUSICAL** *to play musical chairs*

to be a part of a general reshuffling of duties or functions which is not necessarily to everyone's liking

**MUTTON** *to be mutton dressed up as lamb*

to foolishly pretend to be younger

**MYOPIA** *myopia*

the inability to appreciate an argument (lit., short-sightedness)

## N

**N** *to the nth degree*

with great precision

**NAIL** *a thumbnail sketch*

brief but pertinent details

**NAIL** *on the nail*

immediately

**NAIL** *to be another nail in someone's coffin*

to represent a further step toward someone's downfall

**NAIL** *to bite one's fingernails*

to anxiously await a decision

**NAIL** *to fight tooth and nail*

to strive very hard to win

**NAIL** to hang on by one's fingernails  
to have only a slender hold

**NAIL** to hit the nail right on the head  
to astutely come to the correct conclusion

**NAIL** to nail a lie  
to expose an untruth

**NAIL** to nail one's colors to the mast  
to publicly declare one's position and to maintain it in the face of criticism

**NAIL** to nail someone  
to put the blame on a person

**NAIL** to nail someone to the wall  
to outmaneuver another person

**NAIL** to nail something down  
to tie up the loose ends of an arrangement

**NAME** a rose by any other name would smell as sweet  
the form does not affect the substance  
(from Shakespeare's ROMEO AND JULIET)

**NAME** his name is mud  
he completely lacks credibility (a play on the name of one Dr. Samuel Mudd)

**NAME** no names—no packdrill  
the identities of the parties will be kept confidential in order to protect them

**NAME** so-and-so is the name of the game  
so-and-so is the essential element of the exercise

**NAME** to drop names  
to slip names of celebrities allegedly known to the speaker into a conversation in an attempt to impress

**NAME** to give a dog a bad name  
to malign a person

**NAME** to have a black mark against one's name  
to have a tarnished reputation

**NAME** to lend one's name to something  
to endorse something

**NAME** to make a name for oneself  
to earn a good reputation by virtue of some skill

**NARROW** to be on the straight and narrow  
to be completely honest

**NASTY** a nasty piece of work  
an unpleasant person

**NASTY** to be left with a nasty taste in one's mouth  
to be appalled or very disappointed at another person's unethical behavior to one

**NATURAL** to die a natural death  
by virtue of changed circumstances or the effluxion of time to be no longer relevant

**NATURE** the nature of the beast  
the reality of the situation

**NATURE** to be second nature to someone  
to be something which a person does intuitively

**NAVEL** to contemplate one's navel  
to be introspective

**NECK** a bottleneck  
a factor obstructing an even flow

**NECK** a millstone round someone's neck  
a great burden

**NECK** at a break-neck pace  
very fast

**NECK** it is neck or nothing  
a desperate effort is called for

**NECK** neck and neck  
(of contestants) with little between them

**NECK** *neck of the woods*  
localized area

**NECK** *to be a pain in the neck*  
to be an unpleasant person or to be a nuisance

**NECK** *to be an albatross around someone's neck*  
to be a great burden (popularized by Coleridge's ANCIENT MARINER)

**NECK** *to be up to one's neck in something*  
to be very deeply involved in something

**NECK** *to break one's neck to do something*  
to be particularly keen

**NECK** *to breathe down someone's neck*  
to cause annoyance to another person by remaining in his vicinity or by supervising him too closely; or to be narrowly behind another person in some competitive situation

**NECK** *to cop it in the neck*  
to suffer a severe disaster

**NECK** *to save someone's neck*  
to come to the rescue of a person

**NECK** *to send a chill down someone's neck*  
to be worrying news

**NECK** *to stick one's neck out*  
to have the courage of one's convictions or to take a calculated risk

**NEED** *to need something like a hole in the head*  
to be landed with a completely undesired problem

**NEEDLE** *to be on pins and needles*  
to be very agitated

**NEEDLE** *to find a needle in a haystack*  
to find something when the probability of finding it is very small

**NEEDLE** *to look for a needle in a haystack*

to attempt something with a very small chance of success

**NELLY** *nervous Nellies*  
persons unwilling to take any risks

**NEMESIS** *nemesis*  
downfall serving as retribution (refers to a goddess in Greek mythology)

**NERVE** *the hip pocket nerve*  
the assessment of issues by their financial effects on one

**NERVE** *to get on someone's nerves*  
by one's behavior to cause annoyance to a person

**NERVE** *to have a nerve*  
to be impudent

**NERVE** *to have nerves of steel*  
not to be easily frightened

**NERVE** *to lose one's nerve*  
to abandon, out of fear, a decision to do something

**NERVE** *to touch a nerve*  
to mention something which another person would rather pretend did not exist

**NERVOUS** *nervous Nellies*  
persons unwilling to take any risks

**NEST** *a mare's nest*  
a discovery with illusory benefits

**NEST** *a nest egg*  
life savings

**NEST** *to be a cuckoo in the nest*  
to purport to be a member of a group of people although having no such right

**NEST** *to feather one's own nest*  
to improperly arrange a transaction on behalf of others to one's own financial advantage

**NEST** *to foul one's own nest*  
to disparage one's home or work-place

**NEST** *to stir up a hornet's nest*  
to take action which results in unpleasant side-effects

**NET** *a safety net scheme*  
a scheme for dealing with the exceptional cases not covered by normal arrangements

**NET** *to catch someone in the net*  
to unexpectedly involve a particular person in the course of activity designed to involve many others

**NET** *to draw the nets closer*  
to intensify one's efforts

**NET** *to miss the sharks while netting the minnows*  
to succeed in minor aspects but fail in the ones that really matter

**NET** *to slip through the net*  
to happen as an isolated case despite steps taken to prevent such events

**NET** *to spread the net more widely*  
to become more comprehensive

**NETTLE** *to grasp the nettle*  
to deal with a neglected difficulty

**NEW** *a new broom*  
a changed regime which is likely to alter the status quo

**NEW** *a new lease on life*  
the prospect of a worry-free existence from now on

**NEW** *new guard*  
changed regime

**NEW** *one cannot teach an old dog new tricks*  
people get irreversibly set in their ways

**NEW** *to be a new ball game*  
to be subject to completely revised rules or very different conditions

**NEW** *to be the dawn of a new day*  
to be the start of a different regime

**NEW** *to break new ground*  
to do something for which there is no precedent

**NEW** *to introduce new blood*  
to recruit new members to some organization

**NEW** *to plow new ground*  
to laboriously engage in an untried activity

**NEW** *to put a new face on something*  
to alter the way something should be regarded

**NEW** *to turn over a new leaf*  
to reform

**NEWCASTLE** *to carry coals to Newcastle*  
to do something ridiculously unnecessary

**NICHE** *to carve out a niche for oneself*  
to deliberately create an opportunity to use one's talents effectively

**NICHE** *to find one's niche*  
to find the opportunity to use one's talents

**NIGGER** *the nigger in the woodpile*  
the factor spoiling an otherwise satisfactory arrangement

**NIGHT** *a fly-by-night operator*  
a confidence trickster

**NIGHT** *ships that pass in the night*  
persons who fail to meet up

**NIGHT** *the night is young*  
the project is only at a very early stage

**NIGHT** *to be a night owl*  
to habitually go to bed late

**NIGHT** *to spend a sleepless night*  
to worry about something

**NIGHTMARE** *a nightmare*  
an unpleasant experience

**NIMBLE** *nimble-footed*  
quick to change the direction of one's activities when circumstances warrant

**NINE** *a nine-day wonder*  
 an exciting event, but one which will cease to arouse interest when the novelty has worn off

**NINE** *a stitch in time saves nine*  
 preventive maintenance saves money in the long run

**NINE** *to be dressed up to the nines*  
 to be attired in excessively elaborate garments

**NINE** *to be on cloud nine*  
 to be very happy

**NINETEEN** *to talk nineteen to the dozen*  
 to engage in much idle chatter

**NIP** *to nip something in the bud*  
 to stop some activity in its early stages when stopping it is still relatively easy

**NIT** *to nitpick*  
 to criticize a person in respect to very minor matters

**NOBODY** *to be a nobody*  
 to be unimportant

**NOD** *a nod and a wink*  
 a sign that understanding has been reached in a matter which in the interests of discretion has not been discussed aloud

**NOD** *a nod is the same as a wink to a blind horse*  
 fine distinctions are not appropriate here

**NOD** *to get the nod*  
 to receive approval

**NOIRE** *to be someone's bete noire*  
 to be a person whose ideas and actions cause upset and loathing in another person (French, "black beast")

**NOISE** *to make a noise about something*  
 to complain or express dissatisfaction about something

**NOOK** *in every nook and cranny everywhere*

**NOOSE** *to put one's head in the noose*

to recklessly and unnecessarily expose oneself to great danger

**NOOSE** *to tighten the noose*  
 to get closer to inflicting defeat

**NOSE** *hard-nosed*  
 tough in negotiations

**NOSE** *to be no skin off someone's nose*

not to matter to a person

**NOSE** *to be on the nose*  
 to be accurate (of a proposal or scheme)

**NOSE** *to bite someone's nose off*  
 to speak to a person aggressively

**NOSE** *to cut one's nose off to spite one's face*  
 to act in pique in a way which harms only oneself

**NOSE** *to escape by the skin of one's nose*  
 to only just avoid some disaster

**NOSE** *to follow one's nose*  
 to act intuitively

**NOSE** *to get a bloody nose*  
 to suffer an undignified rebuff

**NOSE** *to get up someone's nose*  
 to irritate a person

**NOSE** *to have a good nose for business*

to be able to identify profitable business situations

**NOSE** *to keep one's nose clean*  
 to act with circumspection and honesty despite temptation to do otherwise

**NOSE** *to keep one's nose out of something*

not to meddle in something

**NOSE** *to keep one's nose to the grindstone*  
 to work with particular diligence

**NOSE** to lead someone by the nose  
to induce another person to comply  
with one's wishes

**NOSE** to look down the nose at  
something  
to treat a matter with obvious contempt

**NOSE** to pay through the nose  
to pay an excessive price

**NOSE** to poke one's nose into  
something  
to interfere

**NOSE** to poke one's nose outside  
to venture outside

**NOSE** to put someone's nose out of  
joint  
to upset another person

**NOSE** to rub someone's nose in it  
to humiliate a person by highlighting  
something embarrassing to him

**NOSE** to take a nosedive  
to suddenly and unexpectedly fall  
steeply

**NOSE** to take something on the  
nose  
to meekly accept a rebuff

**NOSE** to thumb one's nose at  
someone  
to show one's contempt for someone  
in authority and to ostentatiously dis-  
regard his orders

**NOSE** to turn up one's nose at  
something  
to express one's disdain

**NOSE** under someone's nose  
in a person's immediate area of re-  
sponsibility or in circumstances where  
he should have known something

**NOTCH** to move down a notch  
to accept a lower position

**NOTE** to compare notes  
to exchange information about some  
subject of mutual interest

**NOTE** to hit a sour note  
to discover an unexpected flaw in an  
otherwise satisfactory piece of work

**NOTE** to strike the right note  
to make a good impression

**NUUDGE** to give something a nudge  
forward  
to give modest encouragement to  
something

**NUMBER** one's days are numbered  
one is about to be abolished

**NUMBER** one's opposite number  
a person with similar responsibilities  
in another organization

**NUMBER** someone's number is up  
a person's period of activity or influ-  
ence is about to expire

**NUMBER** to look after number one  
to act selfishly

**NURSE** to nurse one's bruises  
to face up to the consequences of defeat

**NUT** nuts and bolts  
basic ingredients

**NUT** someone is a hard nut to crack  
it is very difficult to persuade a per-  
son to do something

**NUT** to be nuts  
to be crazy

**NUT** to be nuts about someone  
to be infatuated with a person

**NUT** to use a sledgehammer to  
crack a nut

to devote vastly more resources to a  
project than is warranted by all the  
circumstances

**NUTSHELL** in a nutshell  
by way of summary

## O

**OAK** tall oaks from little acorns  
grow

even major enterprises have to have  
small beginnings (from "Lines writ-  
ten for a School Declamation" by  
David Everett)

<b>OAK</b> to have a heart of oak to be brave	
<b>OAK</b> to lock something up in the old oak chest to put in a safe place and out of mind	
<b>OAR</b> to stick one's oar in to intervene without invitation in a dispute to which one is not a party	
<b>OATS</b> to feel one's oats to display self-importance	
<b>OATS</b> to sow wild oats to indulge in foolish behavior while a young adult	
<b>OCEAN</b> an ocean full of fish plenty of opportunity	
<b>OCEAN</b> to be only a drop in the ocean to be quite insignificant in the total scene	
<b>ODDS</b> that is over the odds that is unacceptable	
<b>ODDS</b> to be at odds with someone to disagree with a person	
<b>ODDS</b> to beat the odds to do better than could reasonably have been expected	
<b>ODDS</b> to have the odds stacked against one to be faced with many difficulties frustrating a project	
<b>ODDS</b> to pay over the odds to pay too much	
<b>OIL</b> not to be an oil painting to be ugly	
<b>OIL</b> to be a well-oiled piece of machinery to be functioning very satisfactorily	
<b>OIL</b> to burn the midnight oil to work late into the night	
<b>OIL</b> to get the good oil to receive useful, reliable and timely information	

<b>OIL</b> to oil the wheels to make things go smoothly	
<b>OIL</b> to pour oil on troubled waters to calm down a situation	
<b>OIL</b> to run something on the smell of an oil rag to run something very economically and efficiently	
<b>OINTMENT</b> a fly in the ointment a flaw (refers to dead flies turning perfumes rancid) (Ecclesiastes 10:1)	
<b>OLD</b> an old flame a former lover	
<b>OLD</b> an old head on young shoulders experience, knowledge and maturity in a young person	
<b>OLD</b> it is on for young and old the excitement has started	
<b>OLD</b> one cannot teach an old dog new tricks people get irreversibly set in their ways	
<b>OLD</b> to be old hat to be a very widely known fact	
<b>OLD</b> to lock something up in the old oak chest to put in a safe place and out of mind	
<b>OLD</b> to rekindle an old flame to inspire the reinstatement of a former loving relationship	
<b>OLIVE</b> to hold out an olive branch to make peace overtures (Genesis 8:11)	
<b>OMEGA</b> from alpha to omega from start to finish (refers to the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet)	
<b>OMELETTE</b> one cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs the desired end dictates the means even if they cause harm to others	
<b>OMELETTE</b> to unscramble the omelette to undo something which cannot be undone	

**ONE** *a one-way street*  
a flow of activity in only one direction

**ONE** *a one-man band*  
a person performing many different roles single-handedly

**ONE** *on the one hand*  
putting one side of the proposition

**ONE** *one for the road*  
a final drink before leaving

**ONE** *one-eyed*  
biased

**ONE** *to be one in the eye for someone*  
to represent an unexpected and unwelcome defeat

**ONE** *to be one out of the box*  
to be unexpectedly superb

**ONE** *to be only round one*  
to be only the first of many stages

**ONE** *to go back to square one*  
to start all over again

**ONE** *to have a one-track mind*  
to keep coming back to one narrow topic of conversation

**ONE** *to look after number one*  
to act selfishly

**ONION** *to know one's onions*  
to be well informed in some area (refers to Dr. C. T. Onions, editor of the SHORTER OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY)

**OPEN** *an open sesame*  
access to something normally inaccessible

**OPEN** *one's door is always open*  
people can take their problems to one at any time

**OPEN** *open slather*  
freedom for people to do what they want

**OPEN** *open-hearted*  
cordial

**OPEN** *to be an eye opener*  
to be a surprise

**OPEN** *to be an open and shut case*  
to be an unarguable proposition (a phrase popular in detective novels and probably a play on the two meanings of the word ““case””)

**OPEN** *to be out in the open*  
(of information) to be publicly available

**OPEN** *to come out into the open*  
to start being frank

**OPEN** *to have an open mind*  
to be willing to assess evidence on its merits and without prejudging it

**OPEN** *to keep one's ears open*  
to be on the lookout for useful information

**OPEN** *to keep one's eyes open*  
to be on the lookout for useful information

**OPEN** *to keep one's eyes open for something*  
to be on the lookout for an opportunity to do something

**OPEN** *to leave oneself wide open*  
to act in such a way that one's opponents will find much which can be easily criticized

**OPEN** *to leave the door open*  
to issue a standing invitation for the resumption of some negotiations

**OPEN** *to open someone's eyes to something*  
to alert another person to the truth of something

**OPEN** *to open the batting*  
to be the first in a series of persons speaking or doing something

**OPEN** *to open up a Pandora's box*  
to do something which produces all sorts of undesired and unexpected side-effects (refers to the woman in Greek mythology who brought misery to mankind; the box contained human ills)

**OPEN** *to open up an old wound*  
to take action which revives a long-standing grievance

**OPEN** *to open up doors*  
to create opportunities

**OPEN** *to open up the floodgates*  
to take action which will have massive consequences

**OPEN** *with an open hand*  
generously

**OPEN** *with one's eyes wide open*  
fully conscious of the ramifications

**OPEN** *with open arms*  
enthusiastically

**OPENING** *an opening wide enough to drive a coach and four through*  
an excellent opportunity

**OPENING** *opening gambit*  
the first in a series of strategic moves  
(a tautological expression which also involves a misunderstanding of a technical chess term)

**OPENING** *opening shot*  
first step in an activity expected to last a long time

**OPERA** *a soap opera*  
a radio or television serial, often based on exaggerated domestic situations of no great importance (refers to sponsorship by soap manufacturers)

**OPPOSITE** *one's opposite number*  
a person with similar responsibilities in another organization

**ORANGE** *to add apples to oranges*  
to quite illogically lump unconnected things together

**ORCHESTRATE** *to orchestrate something*

to arrange for something to happen

**ORDER** *in apple pie order*  
in perfect order and condition

**ORDER** *just what the doctor ordered*  
exactly right

**ORDER** *the order of the day*  
the customary behavior

**ORDER** *to be a tall order*  
to be an unreasonable expectation

**ORDER** *to get one's marching orders*  
to be told to leave

**ORDER** *to put one's house in order*  
to fix up the deficiencies in one's affairs

**OSTRICH** *to be an ostrich*  
to refuse to face up to an unpleasant truth (refers to the reputed habit of ostriches in danger)

**OTHER** *to be on the other side of the fence*  
to have an opposing point of view or position

**OUNCE** *not to have an ounce of sense*  
to be stupid

**OUNCE** *to drain every ounce out of something*  
to get the maximum use or pleasure out of something

**OUTGUN** *to outgun someone*  
to outmaneuver a person

**OVER** *to be all over bar the shouting*  
to be virtually finished

**OVERBOARD** *to go overboard*  
to act foolishly and in an excessive way

**OVERKILL** *overkill*  
more action than really required for the purpose

**OVERSHADOW** *to overshadow someone*  
to reduce the influence of a person by outshining him

**OVERSTEP** to overstep the mark  
to fail to observe the proprieties

**OVERTIME** to work overtime at  
something

to spend a lot of time and effort at  
doing something

**OVERTONE** overtones

implied threats

**OVERTURE** to make overtures to  
someone

to make suggestions to a person, in-  
viting further negotiations

**OWL** to be a night owl

to habitually go to bed late

**OYSTER** the world is one's oyster  
one has enormous scope for activity

## P

**P** to watch one's p's and q's

to be very careful (may refer to pints  
and quarts of beer on a hotel slate or  
to easily-confused printer's type)

**PACE** to put someone through his  
paces

to test a person

**PACE** to set the pace

to give a lead in regard to a rate of  
progression

**PACK** to be at the head of the  
pack

to be the best of many or the de facto  
leader

**PACK** to bring someone back to  
the pack

to make a person conform

**PACK** to pack one's bags

to signal one's intention to depart

**PACK** to play every card in the pack  
to try very hard and use every con-  
ceivable argument

**PACK** to play the last card in the pack  
to lower one's standards in a final  
desperate effort

**PACK** to send someone packing  
to dismiss a person ignominiously

**PACKDRILL** no names—no  
packdrill

the identities of the parties will be  
kept confidential in order to protect  
them

**PAD** to keep off someone's pad  
not to interfere with or compete  
against another person in his custom-  
ary area of activity

**PADDLE** to paddle one's canoe  
to do something unaided and in one's  
own way

**PADDOCK** to have a spell in the  
paddock

to have leave of absence

**PAIN** growing pains

problems encountered by virtue of  
expansion

**PAIN** to be a pain in the neck

to be an unpleasant person or to be a  
nuisance

**PAINT** to paint a black picture  
to state a set of unfavorable factors

**PAINT** to paint oneself into a  
corner

to foolishly put oneself into a posi-  
tion from which escape is impossible

**PAINT** to paint someone black  
to ruin a person's reputation

**PAINT** to paint the town red  
to go on an exciting social outing

**PAINTER** to cut the painter  
to become separated

**PAINTING** not to be an oil  
painting  
to be ugly

**PAIR** a pigeon pair

one son and one daughter as the sole  
offspring

**PAJAMAS** to be the cat's pajamas  
to have an exaggerated idea of one's  
importance

**PALACE** *a palace revolt*  
the overthrow of those in authority by  
their subordinates

**PALE** *to be beyond the pale*  
to be socially unacceptable, especially  
for unacceptable standards or behavior

**PALE** *to be only a pale shadow of something*  
to be a weak imitation

**PALM** *to grease someone's palms*  
to bribe a person

**PALPABLE** *palpable*  
readily understandable

**PAN** *a flash in the pan*  
something which begins promisingly  
but does not last (refers to the priming  
of old guns)

**PAN** *out of the frying pan into the fire*  
from one bad situation to an even  
worse one

**PAN** *to pan out*  
to succeed

**PANCAKE** *every Pancake Tuesday*  
only on rare occasions (refers to Shrove Tuesday, when pancakes are traditionally eaten)

**PANDORA** *to open up a Pandora's box*  
to do something which produces all sorts of undesired and unexpected side-effects (refers to the woman in Greek mythology who brought misery to mankind; the box contained human ills)

**PANIC** *to hit the panic button*  
to act hastily and irrationally

**PANTS** *a kick in the pants*  
an admonition

**PANTS** *to bore the pants off someone*  
to weary a person by dull and uninteresting conversation

**PANTS** *to catch someone with his pants down*  
to act when another person least expects it

**PANTS** *to charm the pants off someone*  
to delight a person

**PANTS** *to fly by the seat of one's pants*  
to act unprofessionally

**PANTS** *to scare the pants off someone*  
to greatly frighten a person

**PANTS** *to wear the trousers*  
to be the dominant party

**PAPER** *only a cigarette paper between them*  
virtually equal or close together

**PAPER** *a paper tiger*  
an empty threat

**PAPER** *paper warfare*  
an excessive amount of correspondence or red tape

**PAPER** *to have shares in a paper company*  
to institute unnecessary clerical procedures

**PAPER** *to paper over the cracks*  
to institute extremely superficial and basically ineffective remedies

**PAPER** *to start with a blank sheet of paper*  
to commence an exercise without being bound by any established practices

**PAR** *to be below par*  
to be less than the desired standard

**PAR** *to be par for the course*  
to be normal

**PARACHUTE** *golden parachute*  
generous provisions in a remuneration package which come into play in certain circumstances

**PARADISE** *to live in a fool's paradise*  
to delude oneself

**PARALLEL** *parallel*

similar or corresponding

**PARALYZE** *to paralyze something*

to bring something to a standstill

**PARCEL** *to be part and parcel*

to be the essential ingredients

**PARE** *cheese paring*

stingy

**PARIAH** *pariah*

social outcast (refers to members of a low caste in India)

**PARISH** *parish pump issues*

issues of trivial importance

**PARK** *to be in the right ballpark*

to be approximately correct

**PARKINSON** *Parkinson's law*

the principle that work expands to match the work capacity available (title of a book by Prof. C. Northcote Parkinson)

**PAROCHIAL** *parochial*

narrow minded

**PARRY** *to parry some argument*

to deflect some argument (refers to fencing)

**PART** *to be part and parcel*

to be the essential ingredients

**PART** *to be part of the furniture*

to be so familiar that one's presence goes completely unnoticed

**PART** *to be part of the landscape*

to be present and fully accepted without question

**PART** *to fire a parting shot*

to make a defiant gesture on leaving

**PART** *to play one's part*

to cooperate or carry out one's obligations under some arrangement

**PARTHIAN** *a Parthian shaft*

a cutting remark made at the moment of departure (refers to missiles shot backward by flying Parthian horsemen)

**PARTY** *the party is over*

the previous pleasant arrangements have been discontinued

**PARTY** *to be the life and soul of the party*

to be the prime enthusiast for a cause

**PARTY** *to come to the party*

to agree to someone's terms

**PAS** *faux pas*

something indiscreet or offending social conventions (French, "false step")

**PASS** *ships that pass in the night*

persons who fail to meet up

**PASS** *to pass the buck*

in an uncooperative spirit to decline responsibility for a matter on the grounds that someone else more properly has responsibility for it

**PASS** *to pass with flying colors*

to be very successful

**PASSPORT** *to be a passport to success*

to be a means of achieving success

**PASSWORD** *the password is so-and-so*

the main attraction is so-and-so

**PAST** *a past master*

an expert with long experience

**PASTOR** *pastor*

religious official in charge of a congregation

**PASTURE** *to move on to greener pastures*

to commence a new, better career

**PAT** *to pat oneself on the back*

immodestly to congratulate oneself

**PAT** *to pat someone on the back*

to congratulate a person or to reassure a person

**PATCH** *a sticky patch*

a period fraught with difficulties

**PATCH** *not to be a patch on someone*

not to be comparable to a person

**PATCH** *to be on someone's cabbage patch*

to engage in a competitive activity in a territory regarded by someone already there as rightfully belonging exclusively to him

**PATCH** *to patch up some quarrel*

to reconcile one's differences

**PATCHWORK** *a patchwork quilt*

a result arising from many uncoordinated inputs

**PATH** *path*

means of achieving an objective

**PATH** *slippery path*

dangerous course of action

**PATH** *to be on a path strewn with roses*

to lead a very pleasant life

**PATH** *to be on the warpath*

to be on the lookout for faults which can be criticized

**PATH** *to beat a path to someone's door*

to seek a person out in great numbers

**PATH** *to block someone's path*

to interfere with a person's opportunity to advance himself

**PATH** *to cross someone's path*

to meet another person by chance

**PATH** *to lead someone up the garden path*

to mislead a person by deliberately fallacious arguments

**PATH** *to smooth the path for someone*

to use one's influence to make arrangements so that a person's task will be easier or more readily accomplished

**PATH** *to tread a particular path*

to take certain initiatives

**PATIENCE** *something would try the patience of Job*

something is very vexatious (James 5:11)

**PATIENCE** *to have the patience of a saint*

to endure annoyances with particular calm

**PAUL** *to rob Peter in order to pay Paul*

to fix up one grievance by causing another

**PAVE** *to pave the way*

to prepare for something

**PAW** *to be a cat's paw*

to be a person who is being used as a tool by others

**PAWN** *a pawn*

a person of small importance who is manipulated by others

**PAY** *he who pays the piper calls the tune*

a person contributing money or resources to a project is entitled to a say in its control

**PAY** *that has put paid to it*

the project can no longer proceed

**PAY** *to pay a king's ransom*

to pay a very large sum

**PAY** *to pay lip service to some rules*

to disregard some rules in practice while acknowledging them in words

**PAY** *to pay off*

to be successful

**PAY** *to pay someone back in his own coin*

to retaliate in kind

**PAY** *to pay something back with interest*

to return a small favor with a bigger favor or to extract retribution of greater value than the circumstances warrant

**PAY** to pay the price  
to suffer the adverse consequences of one's acts or omissions

**PAY** to rob Peter in order to pay Paul  
to fix up one grievance by causing another

**PAY** to strike pay dirt  
to become successful

**PEA** a pea and thimble trick  
a clever fraud committed in the presence of its victim without this being obvious at the time

**PEANUT** to earn peanuts  
to get a reward which is far too small in relation to the value of the services rendered

**PEARL** a pearl  
a thing of great excellence

**PEARL** to cast pearls before swine  
to confer valuable benefits on someone who neither recognizes nor appreciates them

**PEBBLE** not to be the only pebble on the beach  
not to be the only available person

**PEBBLE** to throw a pebble against the window  
to gently draw attention to oneself

**PECK** hen-pecked  
subject to domination by one's wife

**PECK** pecking order  
order of seniority

**PECKER** to keep one's pecker up  
to stay cheerful

**PEDAL** to backpedal  
to reverse to some extent previously applied policies

**PEDAL** to softpedal  
to restrain oneself

**PEDESTAL** to put someone on a pedestal  
to admire a person and regard him as more marvelous than is warranted

**PEDESTRIAN** pedestrian  
uninspired

**PEEL** to keep one's eyes peeled for something  
to be on the constant lookout for something

**PEG** a peg to hang a hat on  
something which provides a convenient or plausible excuse for some particular action

**PEG** a square peg in a round hole  
a person much more suitable for a position rather different from the one held

**PEG off the peg**  
(of clothes) ready-made

**PEG** to be level pegging  
(of contestants) to have little between them

**PEG** to peg out  
to die (refers to the final stroke in a game of croquet)

**PEG** to take someone down a peg or two  
to point out to a person that he is not as good as he thinks he is

**PEN** to put pen to paper  
to set out one's ideas in written form

**PEN** with a stroke of the pen  
by edict

**PENCIL** to need to sharpen one's pencil  
to be required to improve one's performance

**PENDULUM** the swing of the pendulum  
the alternation of voter acceptance between opposing political parties

**PENETRATE** to penetrate someone's thick skull  
to make a person understand something difficult or acknowledge something unwelcome

**PENNY** a twopenny halfpenny outfit  
a quite insignificant operation

**PENNY** *in for a penny—in for a pound*

once something is commenced it ought to be finished; or if one is willing to take a small risk then one might as well take a bigger one

**PENNY** *penny-pinching*  
excessively frugal

**PENNY** *the penny dropped*

a person has just realized a fact which should have been obvious (refers to old-fashioned pay toilets)

**PENNY** *to be only ten pence in the shilling*

to be slightly stupid

**PENNY** *to throw in one's six pennies' worth*

to modestly supply one's own facts or views

**PENNY** *to turn an honest penny*  
to earn money out of odd jobs

**PEOPLE** *people in glass houses should not throw stones*

those who are less than perfect are foolish to criticize others

**PEOPLE** *to be unable to keep people away with a big stick*  
to be faced with a large crowd or much demand

**PERCH** *to knock someone off his perch*

to displace a person from his leadership position in some competitive situation

**PERSPECTIVE** *to put something into perspective*

to explain the background of something so that its significance in relation to other things can be better appreciated

**PETARD** *to be hoist with one's own petard*

to have one's own case used against one (refers to being blown up by one's own bomb)

**PETER** *to rob Peter in order to pay Paul*

to fix up one grievance by causing another

**PETER** *to tickle the Peter*  
to rob one's employer

**PETREL** *to be a stormy petrel*  
a person who disturbs a pleasant state of affairs by agitating for change

**PETRIFY** *to be petrified*  
to be badly scared

**PETTICOAT** *petticoat government*  
rule by women

**PHOENIX** *to rise from the ashes like a Phoenix*

to be the replacement for something destroyed in some disaster (refers to a mythical bird which was supposed to rise from the ashes in its funeral pyre with renewed youth)

**PHOTO** *a photo finish*  
a close result in a contest

**PICK** *not to just pick something out of a hat*

to choose carefully, after weighing all the considerations

**PICK** *to handpick someone*  
to carefully choose a person for his individual attributes

**PICK** *to have a bone to pick*  
to have a grievance which requires discussion

**PICK** *to just pick the plums out of the jam*

to take only the best items

**PICK** *to keep one's cotton-picking fingers off something*  
not to interfere in something

**PICK** *to nitpick*

to criticize a person in respect to very minor matters

**PICK** *to pick someone's brain*  
to get the benefit of another person's knowledge and experience

**PICK** to pick up the pieces  
to resume previous activities to the maximum extent possible after some setback

**PICKLE** to be in a pickle  
to be in difficulties

**PICNIC** to be no picnic  
to be unpleasant

**PICTURE** to balance the picture  
to put the other side of the story or to quote facts in contradiction

**PICTURE** to change the whole picture

to alter the major assumptions on which some assessment was based

**PICTURE** to conjure up a picture  
to use words to convey a vivid impression

**PICTURE** to have a clear picture of something  
to have a good understanding of something

**PICTURE** to paint a black picture  
to state a set of unfavorable factors

**PICTURE** to present a rosy picture  
to state a set of favorable factors

**PICTURE** to put someone in the picture  
to fill a person in with the background of a situation

**PICTURE** to see the big picture  
to have the vision and imagination enabling a project to be developed as part of a bigger whole

**PIE** in apple pie order  
in perfect order and condition

**PIE** pie in the sky  
a hoped for result unlikely to be achieved

**PIE** to eat humble pie  
to apologize

**PIE** to have a finger in the pie  
to have an interest in a project

**PIE** to have one's fingers in many different pies  
to be engaged in a variety of separate activities

**PIECE** a museum piece

an old article the use of which is no longer efficient

**PIECE** a nasty piece of work  
an unpleasant person

**PIECE** early in the piece  
at an early stage of some activity

**PIECE** to be a piece of cake  
to be very easy or greatly to one's liking

**PIECE** to be a well-oiled piece of machinery  
to be functioning very satisfactorily

**PIECE** to be cut to pieces  
to be very upset

**PIECE** to be shot to pieces  
to have one's case seriously damaged

**PIECE** to be thrilled to pieces  
to be greatly thrilled

**PIECE** to fall to pieces  
(of a plan) to collapse

**PIECE** to give someone a piece of one's mind  
to abuse another person

**PIECE** to have a piece of someone  
to vent one's frustration on a person

**PIECE** to have a piece of the action  
to be one of several parties to a project

**PIECE** to pick up the pieces

to resume previous activities to the maximum extent possible after some setback

**PIER** take a long walk on a short pier

go away, I want no dealings with you

**PIG** *a guinea pig*  
a person on whom some new practice  
is tried out

**PIG** *to buy a pig in a poke*  
to buy goods of unknown quality

**PIGEON** *a pigeon pair*  
one son and one daughter as the sole  
offspring

**PIGEON** *to be one's pigeon*  
to be one's area of responsibility

**PIGEON** *to pigeon-hole*  
to put aside for further consideration  
in the distant future

**PIGEON** *to throw a cat among the pigeons*  
to cause consternation by revealing  
an unpleasant and unexpected fact

**PIGHEADED** *pigheaded*  
unduly obstinate

**PILL** *to be a bitter pill to swallow*  
to be great humiliation and disappo-  
intment which have to be endured

**PILL** *to sugar the pill*  
to cause something to be more accept-  
able

**PILLAR** *a pillar of some organization*  
a significant supporter of some organiza-  
tion

**PILLAR** *to drive someone from pillar to post*  
to send a person to a series of places  
in a vain attempt to achieve something

**PILLORY** *to put someone in the pillory*  
to hold a person up to ridicule for his  
beliefs

**PIN** *for two pins I would do so-and-so*  
my tolerance is almost exhausted and  
I am very tempted to do so-and-so

**PIN** *not to care a pin for something*  
not to have the slightest interest in  
something

**PIN** *pin money*  
an allowance to a wife for her per-  
sonal use

**PIN** *to be on pins and needles*  
to be very agitated

**PIN** *to pin someone down*  
to find a person willing to accept  
blame or responsibility or to force a  
person to announce a decision or con-  
cede a point

**PIN** *with one's ears pinned back*  
chastened

**PINCH** *penny-pinching*  
excessively frugal

**PINCH** *to feel the pinch*  
to be adversely affected by financial  
stringency

**PINEAPPLE** *to have hold of the wrong end of the pineapple*  
to be utterly mistaken

**PINK** *to be tickled pink*  
to be very pleased

**PINK** *to look in the pink*  
to look well

**PINPOINT** *to pinpoint*  
to identify very precisely

**PINPRICK** *a pinprick*  
a trifling irritation

**PINT** *one can't get a quart into a pint pot*  
one cannot do the impossible

**PINTSIZE** *pintsize*  
small

**PIP** *to pip someone at the post*  
to achieve something only just ahead  
of a rival

**PIPE** *put that in your pipe and smoke it*  
contemplate that fact

**PIPE** *to pipe someone on board*  
to welcome a person

**PIPEDREAM** *a pipedream*  
a fanciful notion, wished for but unlikely

**PIPELINE** *a pipeline to someone*  
an intermediary used as a means of communicating ideas to a person

**PIPELINE** *to be in the pipeline*  
to be being dealt with

**PIPER** *he who pays the piper calls the tune*  
a person contributing money or resources to a project is entitled to a say in its control

**PIRATE** *pirate*  
(of radio) unlicensed; (of recordings or computer software) published in breach of copyright law

**PISTOL** *to hold a pistol at someone's head*  
to put pressure on a person to make a particular decision regardless of his desires in the matter

**PIT** *a pit of disaster*  
great and unexpected misfortune

**PITCH** *to be at fever pitch*  
to be in a state of excited activity

**PITCH** *to be up to concert pitch*  
to be ready

**PITCH** *to cruel someone's pitch*  
to spoil a person's chances

**PITCH** *to queer the pitch for someone*  
to spoil the opportunity a person has to do something

**PITCHER** *little pitchers have long ears*  
children have a tendency to overhear things

**PITFALL** *pitfall*  
unsuspected danger

**PLACE** *a place in the sun*  
a favorable situation

**PLACE** *to be between a rock and a hard place*  
to be faced with two equally difficult and uncomfortable choices

**PLACE** *to have one's heart in the right place*  
to have a well-developed social conscience

**PLACE** *to put someone back in his place*  
to make it clear to a person that he should not continue to act as though he had greater seniority than he really has

**PLAGUE** *a plague on both your houses!*  
I am disgusted with both of you (from Shakespeare's ROMEO AND JULIET)

**PLAGUE** *to be of plague proportions*  
to be great in number

**PLAIN** *to be plain sailing*  
to be quite straightforward and very easy

**PLANET** *to be off the planet*  
to be extremely naive or uninformed

**PLANK** *to walk the plank*  
to face certain doom

**PLATE** *to bring a plate*  
to take food to a party

**PLATE** *to have too much on one's plate*  
to be unable to cope with one's workload

**PLATE** *to serve something up to someone on a plate*  
to make something especially easy for a particular person

**PLATTER** *to hand over something on a silver platter*  
to provide a valuable benefit for virtually nothing

**PLAY** *a level playing field*  
competition on equal terms

**PLAY** *don't play games with me!*  
do not insult my intelligence by that  
line of conduct

**PLAY** *foul play*  
treachery or murder

**PLAY** *horseplay*  
boisterous and undignified behavior

**PLAY** *to be child's play*  
to be easy or to require only elemen-  
tary skills and knowledge

**PLAY** *to be in full play*  
to be fully operational

**PLAY** *to find out the state of play*  
to ascertain the current position of  
some project

**PLAY** *to play Judas*  
to betray a person (Matthew 26)

**PLAY** *to play Russian roulette*  
to take stupid risks

**PLAY** *to play a deep game*  
to show cunning

**PLAY** *to play ball*  
to cooperate

**PLAY** *to play by Marquis of  
Queensberry rules*  
to act ethically

**PLAY** *to play by the book*  
to apply the rules strictly

**PLAY** *to play down something*  
to seek to have less emphasis or at-  
tention given to something

**PLAY** *to play ducks and drakes*  
not to treat the matter seriously

**PLAY** *to play every card in the  
pack*  
to try very hard and use every con-  
ceivable argument

**PLAY** *to play fast and loose*  
to disregard one's obligations

**PLAY** *to play gooseberry*  
to act as an unwelcome chaperon

**PLAY** *to play it by ear*  
to develop one's strategy to always fit  
in with circumstances as they change  
from time to time

**PLAY** *to play it cool*  
to take a low-key and rational approach

**PLAY** *to play it safe*  
to take no risks

**PLAY** *to play monkey tricks on  
someone*  
to engage in discreditable behavior  
affecting a person

**PLAY** *to play musical chairs*  
to be a part of a general reshuffling of  
duties or functions which is not nec-  
essarily to everyone's liking

**PLAY** *to play one's cards right*  
to approach a matter sensibly

**PLAY** *to play one's part*  
to cooperate or carry out one's obli-  
gations under some arrangement

**PLAY** *to play possum*  
to pretend that one is not present

**PLAY** *to play right into someone's  
hands*  
to act so as to give a person an  
unintended advantage

**PLAY** *to play second fiddle*  
to fulfill a subordinate role

**PLAY** *to play the cards as they fall*  
to deal with problems as they arise

**PLAY** *to play the game*  
to observe the letter and the spirit of  
the rules or to act honorably

**PLAY** *to play the giddy goat*  
to act the fool

**PLAY** *to play the last card in the  
pack*  
to lower one's standards in a final  
desperate effort

**PLAY** *to play the trump card*  
to make a final move, thereby defeating  
one's opponents

**PLAY** *to play the gallery*

to do something which appeals to the general public rather than something which is right

**PLAY** *to play with dynamite*

to invite trouble by virtue of one's risky conduct

**PLAY** *to play with fire*

to invite trouble through one's foolish conduct

**PLAY** *to underplay some situation*

to hold something in reserve

**PLAY** *two can play at that game*

it is possible to retaliate

**PLAY** *when the cat is away the mice will play*

in the absence of supervision, discipline will be lax

**PLAY** *without any cards to play*

without the means to achieve something

**PLAYERS** *a trap for young players*

a good opportunity for the inexperienced or naive to make mistakes

**PLEAD** *to plead the Fifth Amendment*

to refuse to answer an unwelcome question (refers to the Fifth Amendment of the United States Constitution, which provides protection against self-incrimination)

**PLIMSOLL** *the Plimsoll line*

the standard

**PLOT** *to plot a safe course through troubled waters*

to make a plan which overcomes certain difficulties

**PLOW** *speed the plow!*

let us get on with this as fast as possible!

**PLOW** *to plow new ground*

to laboriously engage in an untried activity

**PLOW** *to plow on*

to methodically and painstakingly continue with an activity

**PLOW** *to plow profits back*

to retain profits in a business

**PLOW** *to put one's hand to the plow*

voluntarily to undertake some task (Luke 9:62)

**PLUCK** *to pluck figures out of the air*

to just make figures up arbitrarily

**PLUG** *to have the plug pulled out from under one*

to have a successful activity destroyed by the actions of someone else

**PLUM** *the plum*

the best item in a collection

**PLUM** *to just pick the plums out of the jam*

to take only the best items

**PLUNGE** *to take the plunge*

to expose oneself to certain risks

**POACH** *to poach on someone's preserves*

to encroach uninvited on another person's territory

**POCKET** *not to live in each other's pockets*

to each follow his own lifestyle

**POCKET** *the hip pocket nerve*

the assessment of issues by their financial effects on one

**POCKET** *to be in someone's pocket*

to be subject to undue influence by another person

**POCKET** *to be out of pocket*

to have been forced to spend money which cannot be recovered from others

**POCKET** *to have deep pockets*

to have large financial resources

**POCKET** *to have money burning a hole in one's pocket*

to be impatient to spend or invest available funds

**POCKET** *to line one's pockets*

to make, improperly and secretly, a profit out of some transaction

**POCKET** *to put one's hands in one's pockets*  
to spend

**POINT** *it is pointing in the right direction*  
success looks likely

**POINT** *not to put too fine a point on it*  
speaking bluntly

**POINT** *to get brownie points*  
to do a person a favor with the likely result that the recipient will do a favor in return in due course

**POINT** *to pinpoint*  
to identify very precisely

**POINT** *to point the bone at someone*  
to accuse a person (actually, an Australian Aboriginal method of applying a curse)

**POINT** *to point the finger at someone*  
to accuse a person or allege some indiscretion on his part

**POINT** *to reach boiling point*  
to reach a climax

**POINT** *to refuse point blank*  
to refuse outright

**POINT** *to score a point*  
to make a clever contribution in the course of debate

**POINT** *to score points*  
to make a good impression

**POINT** *to score top points*  
to outwit other persons

**POINT** *to take the point*  
to understand the proposition being advanced without necessarily accepting it

**POISON** *one man's meat is another man's poison*  
people's tastes differ

**POKE** *to be better than a poke in the eye with a burnt stick*  
to be particularly welcome

**POKE** *to be more than one can poke a stick at*  
to be more than can reasonably be handled

**POKE** *to buy a pig in a poke*  
to buy goods of unknown quality

**POKE** *to poke one's nose into something*  
to interfere

**POKE** *to poke one's nose outside*  
to venture outside

**POKER** *a game of poker*  
negotiations in which the parties try to bluff each other

**POKER** *a poker face*  
a facial expression which does not reveal one's thoughts during negotiations

**POLARIZE** *to polarize*  
to cause people to identify themselves as belonging to groups holding opposing views

**POLE** *not to touch something with a ten-foot pole*  
to go out of one's way to avoid something

**POLE** *to be at the bottom of the totem pole*  
to be in the most junior position in some hierarchy

**POLE** *to be poles apart*  
to have ideas which are very different

**POUND** *to be a big fish in a little pond*  
to be a person holding an important office but in an unimportant organization

**PONTIFICATE** *to pontificate*  
to speak as if with great authority and with an assumed air of infallibility

**PONY** *a show pony*  
a pompous person

**POOR** *a poor man's something*  
a second best version

**POOR** *poor devil*  
person to be pitied

**POP** *someone's eyes popped*  
a person expressed great surprise

**POPPY** *a tall poppy*  
a person with great power or responsibility and/or in receipt of high remuneration

**POPPY** *to cut tall poppies down to size*  
to humiliate haughty persons

**PORK** *to pork barrel*  
to spend taxpayers' money in one area in order to attract political support

**PORT** *any port in a storm*  
anything which helps to avoid difficulties is welcome

**PORT** *port of call*  
one of a series of places being visited

**POSSUM** *to play possum*  
to pretend that one is not present

**POSSUM** *to stir the possum*  
to set out to raise controversial issues

**POST** *a listening post*  
a place where information of strategic value can be collected

**POST** *a staging post*  
a place where action is initiated

**POST** *to conduct a postmortem on something*  
to review past actions with a view to learning lessons for the future (Latin, "after the death")

**POST** *to drive someone from pillar to post*  
to send a person to a series of places in a vain attempt to achieve something

**POST** *to go post haste*  
to go very fast

**POST** *to keep someone posted*  
to keep a person informed

**POST** *to pip someone at the post*  
to achieve something only just ahead of a rival

**POST** *to signpost something*  
to give an indication of the alternatives available

**POSTAGE** *only a postage stamp between them*  
virtually equal or close together

**POT** *a melting pot*  
a country where people with different ethnic backgrounds over time merge into one nation

**POT** *a pot of gold*  
wealth

**POT** *fleshpots*  
sumptuous living (Exodus 16:3)

**POT** *one can't get a quart into a pint pot*  
one cannot do the impossible

**POT** *the pot calling the kettle black*  
a person criticizing another person without realizing his own even greater shortcomings

**POT** *to go back into the melting pot*  
to be up for reconsideration ab initio

**POT** *to keep the pot boiling*  
to ensure that an issue stays current

**POT** *to seek the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow*  
to have naive expectations

**POT** *to stir the pot*  
to set out to raise controversial issues

**POT** *to sweeten the pot*  
to provide a few additional inducements

**POT** *to take pot luck*  
to take whatever happens by chance to be available

**POTATO** *a hot potato*  
an embarrassing issue

**POTATO** *to be small potatoes*  
to be quite unimportant

**POTSHOT** *to take a potshot at someone*  
to make disparaging remarks about a person

**POTTAGE** *to sell one's birthright for a mess of pottage*  
through foolishness to exchange something of substance for something of little value (Genesis 25)

**POUND** *in for a penny—in for a pound*

once something is commenced it ought to be finished; or if one is willing to take a small risk then one might as well take a bigger one

**POUND** *one's pound of flesh*  
that which is due to one (from Shakespeare's MERCHANT OF VENICE)

**POUR** *it never rains but it pours*  
crises often occur together

**POUR** *to pour cold water on some idea*

to be unenthusiastic about some proposal or scornful of its apparent weaknesses

**POUR** *to pour oil on troubled waters*  
to calm down a situation

**POUR** *to pour one's heart out to someone*

to inflict one's woes on another person

**POUR** *to pour gasoline on the flames*  
to make a bad situation worse

**POUR** *to pour vitriol on something*  
to sharply criticize something

**POWDER** *to keep one's powder dry*  
to retain key arguments or resources in reserve for use later

**POWER** *more power to your elbow*  
may your praiseworthy efforts lead to success

**POWER** *the power behind the throne*

a person exercising the real authority but without having the official right to do so (the antonym of "titular head")

**POWER** *under one's own power*  
without external help

**PRAYER** *on a wing and a prayer*  
without proper resources

**PRAYER** *the answer to a maiden's prayer*  
an unexpected but very welcome happening

**PRE-EMPT** *to pre-empt some issue*  
to deliberately do something which has the effect of limiting the range of alternative approaches to a matter

**PREACH** *to preach to the converted*  
to say something to those who already believe in it

**PREPARE** *to prepare one's ground*  
to get ready for a confrontation

**PRESENT** *to present a rosy picture*  
to state a set of favorable factors

**PRESERVES** *to poach on someone's preserves*  
to encroach uninvited on another person's territory

**PRESS** *to be hot off the press*  
to be the latest news

**PRESS** *to press a button*  
to make something happen

**PRESSURE** *to apply pressure on someone*

to induce a person to do something which he would otherwise not do by implying adverse consequences if he does not cooperate

**PRETTY** *to sit pretty*  
to be comfortably off

**PREY** *to prey on one's mind*  
(of a problem) to keep worrying one

**PRICE** *that has nothing to do with the price of fish*  
that is quite irrelevant

**PRICE** *to pay the price*  
to suffer the adverse consequences of one's acts or omissions

**PRICK** *a pinprick*  
a trifling irritation

**PRICK** *to prick up one's ears*  
to suddenly start paying attention to a conversation in progress as a result of a half-heard phrase

**PRIEST** *the high priest of something*  
the leading advocate of something

**PRIMA** *a prima donna*  
a person with an exaggerated opinion of his own importance which makes relations with others needlessly difficult (Italian, "first lady")

**PRIME** *prime mover*  
person initiating and promoting a cause

**PRIME** *to engage in pump priming*  
to spend public money with the aim of attracting parochial electoral support

**PRINT** *a license to print money*  
a lucrative government-conferred monopoly or privilege

**PRINT** *to fill in the fine print*  
to provide the precise details in respect of something presently existing in broad outline only

**PRIZE** *not to be here to win prizes*  
to be altruistic

**PRIZE** *to win the booby prize*  
to do worse than all others

**PRIZE** *to win the prize in a canter*  
to win very easily

**PROBLEM** *a problem child*  
a source of unnecessary difficulty

**PRODUCE** *to produce something out of thin air*  
to get hold of something in circumstances where this seemed impossible

**PROFILE** *profile*  
description

**PROMISE** *to promise the earth*  
to give extravagant assurances

**PROOF** *the proof of the pudding is in the eating*  
the success of a venture will be measured by its results

**PROPORTION** *to be of plague proportions*  
to be great in number

**PRUNE** *to prune*  
to remove the superfluous

**PSYCHOLOGY** *at the psychological moment*  
at the most appropriate instant of time (a phrase which actually confuses the German word for "motive" with the term for an instant of time)

**PUBLIC** *to wash one's dirty linen in public*  
to expose one's domestic differences to the world at large

**PUDDING** *the proof of the pudding is in the eating*  
the success of a venture will be measured by its results

**PULL** *not to pull any punches*  
to be brutally frank

**PULL** *pull your head in!*  
do not interfere in this!

**PULL** *to have pull*  
to have influence

**PULL** *to have the plug pulled out from under one*  
to have a successful activity destroyed by the actions of someone else

**PULL** *to pull a fast one*  
to engage in a dirty trick

**PULL** *to pull a rabbit out of the hat*  
to produce an unexpected and seemingly miraculous but highly desirable solution

**PULL** *to pull at one's heart strings*  
to affect one emotionally

**PULL** *to pull one's fingers out*  
to get on with a job with alacrity

**PULL** *to pull one's head in*  
to retreat from a previously held stance

**PULL** *to pull one's horns in*  
to retreat from previously stated views

**PULL** to pull one's socks up  
to set out to improve or correct one's inadequate behavior or performance

**PULL** to pull one's weight  
to do one's proper share of the work requiring to be done

**PULL** to pull oneself together  
to cease acting without purpose or enthusiasm

**PULL** to pull oneself up by one's bootstraps  
to make a praiseworthy effort to better oneself unaided

**PULL** to pull oneself up by one's own shoelaces  
to make a superhuman effort

**PULL** to pull out all stops  
to make maximum effort

**PULL** to pull someone's chestnuts out of the fire  
to retrieve a situation

**PULL** to pull someone's leg  
to tell a false but plausible story as an act of humor

**PULL** to pull something off  
to achieve success in some enterprise

**PULL** to pull something out of the fire  
to salvage something in a seemingly hopeless situation

**PULL** to pull strings  
to use one's special influence with those in a position to make favorable decisions which might otherwise not be forthcoming

**PULL** to pull the rug out from under someone  
to unexpectedly withdraw support and in the process cause embarrassment

**PULL** to pull the wool over someone's eyes  
to deceive or deliberately mislead another person

**PULL** to pull together  
to work in harmony

**PULL** to pull up the drawbridge  
to refuse to cooperate

**PULSE** to have one's fingers on the pulse  
to know what is going on

**PUMP** all hands to the pumps  
everybody is requested to help out

**PUMP** parish pump issues  
issues of trivial importance

**PUMP** to engage in pump priming  
to spend public money with the aim of attracting parochial electoral support

**PUNCH** not to pull any punches  
to be brutally frank

**PUNCH** to be punch drunk  
to be stupefied by some news

**PUNCH** to beat someone to the punch  
to get to some objective ahead of some keen rival

**PUNCH** to telegraph one's punches  
by one's actions to give advance warning of one's future plans

**PUNCTUATE** to punctuate something  
to interrupt something

**PUNISHMENT** to be a glutton for punishment  
to act irresponsibly in the face of inevitable retribution

**PUNT** to take a punt  
to take a calculated risk

**PUP** to sell someone a pup  
to cheat a person in a transaction, especially by misrepresentation as to the true value of something

**PURPLE** to be purple with rage  
to be very angry

**PURPOSE** the devil can cite scripture for his purpose  
a person can quote a respectable or hostile authority while advocating a disreputable cause of his own (from Shakespeare's MERCHANT OF VENICE)

**PURR** *to positively purr*

(of a person) to be very pleased; (of an engine) to run very smoothly

**PURSE** *one can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear*

it is impossible to manufacture something of a high standard without appropriate raw materials

**PURSE** *to button up one's purse*

to refuse to spend money

**PURSE** *to hold the purse strings*

to have control of expenditure

**PURSE** *to tighten the purse strings*

to reduce outlays

**PUSH** *to be pushing uphill*

to face difficulties

**PUSH** *to push a barrow*

to promote a particular cause

**PUSH** *to push one's luck*

having already done well in something, to then take risks which can prejudice everything

**PUSH** *to push someone around*

to exercise, in an obnoxious manner, one's superiority over another person

**PUSH** *to push someone over the brink*

by a small action to cause the absolute ruin (financially or emotionally) of someone already in peril

**PUSH** *to push water uphill*

to foolishly attempt the impossible

**PUSSY** *to pussyfoot around*

to take ineffectual steps

**PUTTY** *to be putty in someone's hands*

to be far too easily influenced by another person

**PUZZLE** *a Chinese puzzle*

a perplexing enigma

**PYRRHIC** *a Pyrrhic victory*

a win which costs more than if there had been a loss (refers to the battle at which King Pyrrhus of Epirus defeated the Romans at Asculum)

**Q****Q** *to watch one's p's and q's*

to be very careful (may refer to pints and quarts of beer on a hotel slate or to easily-confused printer's type)

**QUAGMIRE** *to be in a quagmire*

to be in great difficulty

**QUAKE** *to quake in one's boots*

to be afraid

**QUANTUM** *a quantum leap*

a gigantic step forward

**QUART** *one can't get a quart into a pint pot*

one cannot do the impossible

**QUEENSBERRY** *to play by Marquis of Queensberry rules*

to act ethically

**QUEER** *a queer fish*

an unusual type of person

**QUEER** *to be in Queer Street*

to be in debt

**QUEER** *to queer the pitch for someone*

to spoil the opportunity a person has to do something

**QUESTION** *a leading question*

a very pertinent question (the misuse of a legal term, which actually means a question so framed as to suggest the answer)

**QUESTION** *burning question*

a much-discussed question

**QUESTION** *there is a big question mark hanging over someone's head*

there are considerable doubts about a person's competence, integrity or suitability

**QUICK** to be quick on one's feet  
to cleverly take advantage of a situation

**QUICK** to be quick on the draw  
to act precipitately

**QUIET** on the quiet  
surreptitiously

**QUIET** to shed a quiet tear for  
something  
to lament the passing of something

**QUIETLY** to quietly fold up one's  
tent  
to surreptitiously abandon a previously-  
cherished stance

**QUILT** a patchwork quilt  
a result arising from many uncoordinated  
inputs

**QUIT** to quit the scene  
to depart

**QUIVER** another arrow in one's  
quiver  
an additional reason

**QUOTE** to quote chapter and verse  
to authenticate the information

## R

**RABBIT** move over and let the  
greyhound see the rabbit  
move over

**RABBIT** to pull a rabbit out of the  
hat  
to produce an unexpected and seem-  
ingly miraculous but highly desirable  
solution

**RACE** a two-horse race  
a contest between only two serious  
contestants

**RACE** not to be in the race  
to lack the required standard

**RACE** rat race  
pressures of modern living

**RACE** your race is run  
you have had your opportunity

**RACK** to go to rack and ruin  
to face downfall or destruction

**RAFT** life raft  
financial assistance sufficient to avert  
insolvency

**RAG** rags to riches  
the transition from poverty to wealth

**RAG** to be a red rag to a bull  
to be something which makes a per-  
son very angry and very excited (ref-  
ers to the erroneous belief that the  
color red, rather than the motion of  
waving, excites a bull)

**RAG** to run something on the smell  
of an oil rag  
to run something very economically  
and efficiently

**RAGE** to be purple with rage  
to be very angry

**RAIL** to run off the rails  
to significantly depart from the in-  
tended course of action

**RAILROAD** to railroad something  
through  
to rush people into accepting a proposal

**RAILWAY** what a way to run a  
railway!  
the way things are done is disgraceful  
(refers to a cartoon)

**RAIN** it never rains but it pours  
crises often occur together

**RAIN** to rain cats and dogs  
to rain heavily

**RAINBOW** to chase rainbows  
to be quite unrealistic

**RAINBOW** to seek the pot of gold at  
the end of the rainbow  
to have naive expectations

**RAINY** to keep something for a  
rainy day  
to keep something in reserve

**RAISE** curtain raiser  
introduction

**RAISE** *hair-raising*  
scary

**RAISE** *to raise Cain*  
to create a disturbance (Genesis 4:5)

**RAISE** *to raise merry hell*  
to prominently involve others in a matter in the expectation of significant results from this action

**RAISE** *to raise one's eyebrows*  
to express one's utter astonishment

**RAISE** *to raise one's voice for some cause*  
to publicly advocate some cause

**RAISE** *to raise someone's hackles*  
to make a person angry

**RAISE** *to raise something to a fine art form*  
to become very clever at doing something

**RAISE** *to raise the stake*  
to increase the amount of potential gain or loss in a project

**RAKE** *a muckraker*  
a person who sets out to publicize misconduct of prominent persons or institutions

**RAKE** *a mudraker*  
a person who sets out to publicize features harming another person's reputation

**RALLY** *to rally to the flag*  
to show support for a cause

**RAM** *to ram something down someone's throat*  
to pressure another person into accepting an idea with which he does not agree

**RANK** *to be the first cab off the rank*  
to start ahead of all others

**RANK** *to break ranks*  
to identify oneself as having separate interests or views from the rest of a group

**RANK** *to close ranks*  
to sink minor differences in order to present a unified front to a common enemy

**RANSOM** *to pay a king's ransom*  
to pay a very large sum

**RAP** *to rap someone over the knuckles*  
to admonish a person

**RARE** *to be a rare bird*  
to be an unusual type of individual

**RAREFY** *in a rarefied atmosphere*  
in ignorance of the real world

**RAT** *a case of rats leaving a sinking ship*  
the desertion of an enterprise in anticipation of imminent failure

**RAT** *rat race*  
pressures of modern living

**RAT** *to smell a rat*  
to become suspicious

**RATE** *at a rate of knots*  
very fast

**RATTLE** *saber rattling*  
hints of retribution if certain conduct does not cease

**RAW** *a raw deal*  
unfair treatment

**RAZOO** *not to have a brass razoo*  
to be very poor

**RAZOR** *to be on the razor's edge*  
to be in great danger

**READ** *to need to have one's head examined*  
to be foolish

**READ** *to read between the lines*  
to appreciate the true significance of something not put into words

**READ** *to read the Riot Act*  
to reprimand persons who are excessively noisy (refers to the police reading out to a rowdy crowd extracts from a law requiring its dispersement)

**READ** you want your head examined  
you should reconsider this matter

**READ** you wouldn't read about it!  
that is unbelievable

**READY** ready-made  
easily fabricated or available without  
difficulty

**REAL** to be a real trooper  
to be a person willing to try anything

**REAP** to reap as one has sown  
to experience the consequences of one's  
own actions

**REAP** to reap the whirlwind  
to suffer the adverse consequences of  
a bad act

**REAP** to sow the wind and reap the  
whirlwind  
to make bad mistakes and to suffer  
the even worse consequences

**REAR** to rear its ugly head  
to make an unwelcome appearance

**REARRANGE** to rearrange the  
deckchairs on the Titanic  
to take some initiative which is quite  
useless because it does not take much  
greater change into account

**REASON** without rhyme or reason  
quite unaccountably

**RECEIVE** to receive the coup de  
grace  
to be finished off by an opponent  
(French, "mercy stroke")

**RECHARGE** to recharge one's  
batteries  
to have a recuperative break

**RECIPE** a recipe for disaster  
a certain way of achieving disaster

**RECORD** track record  
proven performance

**RED** a red-letter day  
an important occasion (refers to the  
color used to print saints' days on  
some calendars)

**RED** neither fish, flesh nor good  
red herring

unclassifiable by virtue of being nei-  
ther one thing nor another (from  
Cervantes' DON QUIXOTE)

**RED** red-hot  
highly exciting and desirable

**RED** red tape  
excessively bureaucratic procedures

**RED** the red-carpet treatment  
courtesies extended to a person to  
make him feel important and welcome

**RED** to be a red herring  
to be something designed to divert  
attention away from the main question

**RED** to be a red rag to a bull  
to be something which makes a per-  
son very angry and very excited (re-  
fers to the erroneous belief that the  
color red, rather than the motion of  
waving, excites a bull)

**RED** to be in the red  
to owe money

**RED** to be left red-faced  
to be embarrassed

**RED** to catch someone red-handed  
to apprehend a person in the course  
of committing a crime

**RED** to get the red light  
to be forbidden to do something

**RED** to paint the town red  
to go on an exciting social outing

**RED** to see red  
to become very angry

**RED** to see red lights flashing  
to be conscious of the danger

**REED** to be a broken reed  
to be a weak and unreliable person

**REEK** to reek to high heaven  
to be patently unethical

**REEL** to leave someone reeling  
to leave a person in a state of shock

**REHEARSAL** *dress rehearsal*  
preliminary skirmish

**REIN** *a tight rein*  
strong controls

**REIN** *to give rein to one's fancy*  
to let one's imagination have free scope

**REIN** *to give someone free rein*  
to confer complete discretion on another person

**REIN** *to rein in something*  
to keep better control over something

**REIN** *to take over the reins*  
to assume control

**REINVENT** *to reinvent the wheel*  
to waste resources doing something already accomplished

**REKINDLE** *to rekindle an old flame*  
to inspire the reinstatement of a former loving relationship

**RELIGIOUSLY** *religiously*  
conscientiously

**REPEL** *to repel boarders*  
to keep out unwanted persons

**REPUBLIC** *a banana republic*  
a country with a poor economy

**RESISTANCE** *to take the line of least resistance*  
to succumb to outside pressure

**RESPONSIVE** *to strike a responsive chord*  
to get a favorable reaction to a proposal

**REST** *to be head and shoulders above the rest*  
to be significantly more capable than others

**REST** *to lay some theory to rest*  
to abandon some theory as being no longer appropriate

**REST** *to put someone's mind at rest*  
to reassure a person

**REST** *to rest on one's laurels*  
to use a reputation for success earned in earlier times as a substitute for current endeavor

**RETREAT** *to beat a retreat*  
to abandon some project

**RETREAT** *to retreat into one's shell*  
to become shy and introversive

**RETURN** *to return the compliment*  
to reciprocate or to extract revenge

**RHINOCEROS** *to have the hide of a rhinoceros*  
to be totally unaffected by and unresponsive to valid criticism

**RHYME** *without rhyme or reason*  
quite unaccountably

**RIBBON** *blue ribbon*  
of superb quality (refers to the insignia of the Order of the Garter)

**RIBBON** *to be shot to ribbons*  
(of an argument) to be utterly discredited

**RIBBON** *to tear something to ribbons*  
to damage something severely

**RICH** *that is a bit rich*  
that is very cheeky

**RICHES** *rags to riches*  
the transition from poverty to wealth

**RID** *to get rid of the dead wood*  
to terminate the services of unsatisfactory personnel

**RIDE** *a roller coaster ride*  
a series of successes followed by failures

**RIDE** *riding instructions*  
directions as to how to do something

**RIDE** *to be riding for a fall*  
to act in a reckless manner

**RIDE** *to get a magic carpet ride to something*  
to be very fortunate in achieving some objective

**RIDE** to get an armchair ride  
to be given a particularly easy time

**RIDE** to go along for the ride  
to seek to benefit from a project in  
which others contribute the effort

**RIDE** to ride high  
to be successful but vulnerable

**RIDE** to ride on the back of someone  
without effort to benefit from the prior  
efforts of others

**RIDE** to ride on the sheep's back  
to benefit from the production of wool

**RIDE** to ride out the storm  
to come safely through some dangerous  
situation

**RIDE** to ride roughshod over  
someone  
to disregard the feelings and wishes  
of a person

**RIDE** to ride the wave  
to be successful for the time being

**RIDE** to take someone for a ride  
to deceive a person

**RIGHT** I would give my right arm  
for something  
I am very keen to acquire something

**RIGHT** a step in the right direction  
the first in a series of measures de-  
signed to correct some problem

**RIGHT** one's right-hand man  
one's chief aide

**RIGHT** the left hand does not know  
what the right hand is doing  
one section of a large bureaucracy  
does not realize that another section  
is simultaneously doing something  
inconsistent

**RIGHT** to be in the right ballpark  
to be approximately correct

**RIGHT** to get on someone's right  
side  
to make a good impression on a person

**RIGHT** to have one's heart in the  
right place  
to have a well-developed social con-  
science

**RIGHT** to lose one's right arm  
to lose some highly-valued assistance

**RIGHT** to play one's cards right  
to approach a matter sensibly

**RIGHT** to sell one's birthright for a  
mess of pottage  
through foolishness to exchange some-  
thing of substance for something of  
little value (Genesis 25)

**RIGHT** to set someone on the right  
road  
to show a person how to go about  
doing something

**RIGHT** to start off on the right foot  
to commence an operation with great  
care to do it correctly

**RIGHT** to strike the right chord  
to appeal successfully to someone's  
emotions

**RIGHT** to strike the right key  
to find the appropriate solution

**RIGHT** to strike the right note  
to make a good impression

**RING** that has a hollow ring to it  
that statement is insincere

**RING** that has a nice ring to it  
that sounds attractive

**RING** the alarm bells are ringing  
it is unwise to proceed

**RING** to jump into the ring  
to join in enthusiastically

**RING** to ring a bell  
to sound familiar or recall something  
to mind

**RING** to ring down the curtain on  
something  
to treat something as concluded

**RING** *to ring the changes*

to exhaust the number of different ways of doing something (refers to the permutations used for ringing peals of church bells)

**RING** *to run rings around someone*

to easily outwit another person

**RING** *to step into the ring*

to enter a competitive environment

**RING** *to throw one's hat into the ring*

to publicly announce one's interest in some position

**RIOT** *to read the Riot Act*

to reprimand persons who are excessively noisy (refers to the police reading out to a rowdy crowd extracts from a law requiring its dispersement)

**RIOT** *to run riot*

to act impetuously and without restraint

**RIP** *to be a Rip van Winkle*

to be a person out of touch with current conditions (title of and character in a book by Washington Irving)

**RIP** *to rip someone off*

to exploit a person

**RIP** *to rip something to shreds*

to damage something severely

**RIPPLE** *to make ripples*

to disturb the status quo

**RISE** *rising star*

person making good progress in his career

**RISE** *the curtain rises on something*

something is about to start

**RISE** *to rise from the ashes like a Phoenix*

to be the replacement for something destroyed in some disaster (refers to a mythical bird which was supposed to rise from the ashes of its funeral pyre with renewed youth)

**RISE** *to rise with the lark*

to get up early

**RIVER** *the river found its mark*

equilibrium between two pressures has been achieved

**RIVER** *to be a river of gold*

to be a source of ongoing great profitability

**RIVER** *to sell someone down the river*

to betray a person who has placed his trust in one

**RIVET** *to be riveted to one's seat*

to find the activity being watched very exciting and worthy of full attention

**ROAD** *a middle-of-the-road solution*

a solution near the middle of a range of possibilities

**ROAD** *all roads lead to Rome*

all alternatives will have the same outcome

**ROAD** *fork in the road*

turning point for decisions

**ROAD** *one for the road*

a final drink before leaving

**ROAD** *roadblocks*

difficulties

**ROAD** *the royal road to success*

the way of attaining success without effort

**ROAD** *this is the end of the road for someone*

a person will have no further opportunity to do something

**ROAD** *to be at the crossroads*

to need to choose between several mutually exclusive alternatives

**ROAD** *to be on the road to Damascus*

to see the error of one's ways (Acts 9:3)

**ROAD** *to enter a long road*

to commence a task which will take a long time

**ROAD** to face a rocky road ahead  
to be likely to encounter difficulties

**ROAD** to get the show on the road  
to commence a planned activity

**ROAD** to go down a particular road  
to adopt a particular strategy

**ROAD** to happen down the road  
to happen later

**ROAD** to road test something  
to try something out under real conditions

**ROAD** to set someone on the right road  
to show a person how to go about doing something

**ROAR** to be within a bull's roar of something  
to be very close to something

**ROAST** a roasting  
a scolding

**ROB** to rob Peter in order to pay Paul  
to fix up one grievance by causing another

**ROBBERY** daylight robbery  
the charging of grossly excessive prices

**ROBBERY** highway robbery  
the charging of grossly excessive prices

**ROBIN** a round robin  
(1) series of checks from A to B, from B to C, from C to A, and so on, leaving all of them in the same net position as before

**ROBIN** a round robin  
(2) a document signed by members of an organization which has the same effect as a resolution of a meeting

**ROBINSON** before one can say "Jack Robinson"  
very quickly

**ROCK** bedrock price  
lowest possible price

**ROCK** rock bottom  
very low

**ROCK** someone's marriage is on the rocks  
someone's marriage has broken down

**ROCK** to be between a rock and a hard place  
to be faced with two equally difficult and uncomfortable choices

**ROCK** to be on the rocks  
to be bankrupt

**ROCK** to have rocks in the head  
to be mentally unbalanced

**ROCK** to rock the boat  
to disturb the comfortable status quo

**ROCKET** to give someone a rocket  
to severely reprimand a person

**ROCKET** to put a rocket under someone  
to induce a person to take some action

**ROCKET** to skyrocket  
(of a price or value) to increase greatly in a short time

**ROCKY** to face a rocky road ahead  
to be likely to encounter difficulties

**ROD** to kiss the rod  
to accept punishment meekly

**ROD** to make a rod for one's own back  
to act in disregard of likely disadvantages for oneself

**ROD** to rule with a rod of iron  
to keep strict discipline

**ROGUE** a rogue elephant  
a person of vicious temper who acts in an undisciplined way

**ROLL** heads will roll  
transgressors will be punished

**ROLL** the caravan will roll on  
the activity will continue

**ROLL** the money is rolling in  
the scheme is very profitable

**ROLL** to get rolled  
to be outvoted

**ROLL** to have an audience rolling in the aisles  
to amuse an audience

**ROLL** to keep the ball rolling  
to take advantage of the existing momentum or to participate actively

**ROLL** to roll off the tongue  
to be said very easily

**ROLL** to roll up one's sleeves  
to get on with a job energetically

**ROLL** to start the ball rolling  
to commence and enthusiastically advance an activity involving people

**ROLLER** a roller coaster ride  
a series of successes followed by failures

**ROME** all roads lead to Rome  
all alternatives will have the same outcome

**ROME** to fiddle while Rome burns  
to neglect important considerations while concentrating on trivial side-issues

**ROME** when in Rome do as the Romans do  
it is best to conform to the local customs

**ROOF** the roof has fallen in  
an enterprise has collapsed

**ROOF** to go through the roof  
(of a person) to be very upset or (of prices) to escalate greatly

**ROOF** to hit the roof  
to be very angry

**ROOF** to scream something from the rooftops  
to communicate a message to a wide audience

**ROOF** under one roof  
under the same management

**ROOM** no room at the inn  
no room

**ROOM** there is no room to swing a cat  
this place is very small (actually refers to a cat-o'-nine-tails)

**ROOST** the chickens are coming home to roost  
the consequences of past actions are becoming obvious

**ROOST** to rule the roost  
to dominate

**ROOT** deep-rooted  
strongly felt

**ROOT** grass roots  
at the lowest level

**ROOT** to put one's roots down  
to settle in

**ROOT** to strike at the roots of something  
to work toward the destruction of something

**ROPE** to be on the ropes  
to be facing defeat

**ROPE** to give someone enough rope to hang himself  
to give a person the opportunity to do something which is likely to get him into severe trouble

**ROPE** to give someone too much rope  
to give a person too much latitude

**ROPE** to know the ropes  
to know how to do one's job

**ROPE** to learn the ropes  
to be taught the elementary features

**ROPE** to put a leg rope on someone  
to give a person very little authority

**ROPE** to show someone the ropes  
to teach a beginner how to do something

**ROSE** a rose between two thorns  
something beautiful in the midst of ugliness

**ROSE** *a rose by any other name would smell as sweet*  
 the form does not affect the substance  
 (from Shakespeare's ROMEO AND JULIET)

**ROSE** *to be no bed of roses*  
 to be difficult or uncomfortable

**ROSE** *to be on a path strewn with roses*  
 to lead a very pleasant life

**ROSE** *to come up smelling like a rose*  
 not to have a stain on one's character

**ROSE** *to see something through rose-colored spectacles*  
 to appreciate only the advantages and to completely disregard the disadvantages

**ROSY** *to present a rosy picture*  
 to state a set of favorable factors

**ROT** *the rot set in*  
 conditions started to deteriorate

**ROTTEN** *a rotten apple*  
 an isolated dishonest person in an otherwise honest group

**ROTTEN** *rotten to the core*  
 completely corrupt

**ROTTEN** *something is rotten in the state of Denmark*  
 the situation is not correct (from Shakespeare's HAMLET)

**ROUGH** *to be a rough diamond*  
 to have many attributes but a gruff manner

**ROUGH** *to feel the rough side of someone's tongue*  
 to be verbally abused by a person

**ROUGH** *to take the rough with the smooth*  
 to accept the hardships of life along with its pleasant features

**ROUGHSHOD** *to ride roughshod over someone*  
 to disregard the feelings and wishes of a person

**ROULETTE** *to play Russian roulette*  
 to take stupid risks

**ROUND** *a round robin*

(1) a series of checks from A to B, from B to C, from C to A, and so on, leaving all of them in the same net position as before

**ROUND** *a round robin*

(2) a document signed by members of an organization which has the same effect as a resolution of a meeting

**ROUND** *a square peg in a round hole*

a person much more suitable for a position rather different from the one held

**ROUND** *going the rounds*  
 (of a rumor) being spread

**ROUND** *to be only round one*  
 to be only the first of many stages

**ROUND** *to be round the bend*  
 to be crazy

**ROUND** *to get the rounds of the kitchen*  
 (of a husband) to be subject to personal abuse by his wife

**ROUND** *to make the wheels go round*

to cause something to happen

**ROUND** *to turn round*  
 to reverse one's policy

**ROUND** *to win some rounds*  
 to be partly successful

**ROUNDABOUT** *what one loses on the swings one gains on the roundabouts*

there are advantages and disadvantages which offset each other

**ROW** *not to matter a row of beans*  
 to be utterly unimportant

**ROW** *to be on skid row*  
 to have no means

**ROW** to have a hard row to hoe  
to be a difficult assignment

**ROYAL** a battle royal  
a fight or argument with many simultaneous participants

**ROYAL** the royal road to success  
the way of attaining success without effort

**RUB** here's the rub  
this is where a difficulty arises (a term used in lawn bowling)

**RUB** not to have the wherewithal to rub two sticks together  
to be very poor

**RUB** to rub it in  
to humiliate another person by emphasizing his defeat

**RUB** to rub off on someone  
to benefit a person through an association which increases his skills

**RUB** to rub one's chin  
to muse

**RUB** to rub one's eyes  
to express astonishment

**RUB** to rub one's hands with glee  
to express great satisfaction

**RUB** to rub salt into someone's wound  
to deliberately make damage even worse

**RUB** to rub shoulders with someone  
to mingle with a person

**RUB** to rub someone up the wrong way  
to annoy someone with actions failing to recognize his current mood

**RUB** to rub someone's nose in it  
to humiliate a person by highlighting something embarrassing to him

**RUBBER** to rubber-stamp something  
to endorse without considering the merits

**RUBBISH** a load of rubbish  
blatant nonsense

**RUBICON** to cross the Rubicon  
to make an irreversible decision in regard to some commitment

**RUDDER** to be a rudderless ship  
to be a project not managed properly

**RUFFLE** to ruffle someone's feathers  
to engage in behavior which irritates another person

**RUG** to pull the rug out from under someone  
to unexpectedly withdraw support and in the process cause embarrassment

**RUG** to sweep something under the carpet  
to pretend that some blemish does not exist

**RUIN** to go to rack and ruin  
to face downfall or destruction

**RULE** ground rules  
basic principles

**RULE** to bend the rules  
to overlook minor infractions of the rules

**RULE** to let one's heart rule one's head  
to act on emotion rather than on reason

**RULE** to play by Marquis of Queensberry rules  
to act ethically

**RULE** to rule the roost  
to dominate

**RUMINATE** to ruminate  
to ponder over a matter (lit., to chew the cud)

**RUN** a dry run  
a trial exercise

**RUN** run of the mill  
normal or average

**RUN** someone would run a mile  
a person would do anything to escape his responsibilities

**RUN** *the sands are running out*  
the time available for some action is  
nearly at an end

**RUN** *the tide is running in favor of  
some proposition*  
public opinion supports some proposition

**RUN** *to be up and running*  
to be operative

**RUN** *to duck for cover*  
to seek to avoid blame

**RUN** *to have a dream run*  
to encounter no difficulties

**RUN** *to have a run for one's money*  
to at least get some enjoyment out of  
an otherwise abortive exercise

**RUN** *to have the runs on the board*  
to have a demonstrable record of  
achievement

**RUN** *to run a tight ship*  
to manage an efficient organization

**RUN** *to run around in circles*  
to engage in excited but useless activity

**RUN** *to run hot*  
(of equipment) to be subject to particularly high usage

**RUN** *to run into a dead end*  
to get nowhere in an investigation

**RUN** *to run into heavy weather*  
to encounter difficulties

**RUN** *to run its course*  
to come to a natural end

**RUN** *to run off the rails*  
to significantly depart from the intended course of action

**RUN** *to run one's own ship*  
to do things and organize subordinates in one's own way

**RUN** *to run out of steam*  
to lose one's energy and enthusiasm

**RUN** *to run rings around someone*  
to easily outwit another person

**RUN** *to run riot*  
to act impetuously and without restraint

**RUN** *to run someone off his feet*  
to keep a person very busy on some physical task

**RUN** *to run someone to earth*  
to locate a person

**RUN** *to run someone to the ground*  
to discover the whereabouts of a person

**RUN** *to run the gauntlet*  
to be subjected to criticism (from the Spanish word for "passage," in reference to punishment inflicted on delinquents made to run between two files of soldiers)

**RUN** *to run to seed*  
to become shabby

**RUN** *to run with something*  
to take advantage of some current development

**RUN** *to run with the ball*  
to make the most of the opportunity

**RUN** *to run with the hare and hunt  
with the hounds*  
to keep in with two opposing sides

**RUN** *to set a hare running*  
in order to achieve some desired effect to initiate some related activity

**RUN** *your race is run*  
you have had your opportunity

**RUNG** *rungs up a ladder*  
gradual steps to an ultimate goal

**RUNNER** *front-runner*  
person expected to win

**RUSH** *fools rush in where angels  
fear to tread*  
unsophisticated persons take unwise risks in circumstances where more knowledgeable persons would exercise caution

**RUSH** *to be killed in the rush*  
to be the supplier of something extremely popular

**RUSH** to rush one's fences  
to act precipitately

**RUSSIAN** to play Russian roulette  
to take stupid risks

**RUT** to be in a rut  
to lead a dull life, with no change  
from long-established habits

## S

**SABER** saber rattling  
hints of retribution if certain conduct  
does not cease

**SACK** to get the sack  
to be dismissed (refers to the bag of  
tradesmen's tools)

**SACKCLOTH** to wear sackcloth  
and ashes  
humbly to demonstrate repentance

**SACRED** a sacred cow  
an institution so well established that  
it is virtually unalterable

**SACRED** a sacred trust  
a moral obligation

**SACRED** nothing is sacred  
nothing is safe from interference

**SACRIFICIAL** sacrificial lamb  
somebody unfairly made to suffer for  
the mistakes of others

**SADDLE** to be in the saddle  
to be in command

**SAFE** to play it safe  
to take no risks

**SAFE** to plot a safe course through  
troubled waters  
to make a plan which overcomes cer-  
tain difficulties

**SAFETY** a safety net scheme  
a scheme for dealing with the excep-  
tional cases not covered by normal  
arrangements

**SAFETY** safety margin  
allowance for miscalculations

**SAFETY** to act as a safety valve  
to be a procedure which allows per-  
sons with grievances to ventilate them  
in an orderly fashion

**SAIL** to be plain sailing  
to be quite straightforward and very  
easy

**SAIL** to sail against the wind  
to oppose the views currently being  
held by others

**SAIL** to sail close to the wind  
to act in a very dangerous manner

**SAIL** to sail under false colors  
to pretend that one's real character  
or beliefs are different from what they  
really are

**SAIL** to set sail  
to commence a voyage

**SAIL** to take the wind out of  
someone's sails

to upset a person by anticipating his  
actions or using arguments which he  
was proposing to use

**SAIL** to trim one's sails  
to institute austerity

**SAINT** a saint  
a good person

**SAINT** to have the patience of a  
saint  
to endure annoyances with particular  
calm

**SALE** fire sale  
a forced sale, realizing bargain prices

**SALLY** an Aunt Sally  
a person who can readily be singled  
out and criticized as the proxy for a  
group

**SALT** below the salt  
in a subordinate position (refers to  
the seating order at ancient Roman  
dining tables)

**SALT** not to be worth one's salt  
not to be pulling one's weight (refers  
to Roman soldiers being paid in salt—a  
practice giving rise to the modern  
word "salary")

**SALT** *to be the salt of the earth*  
to be a person whose ordinary efforts benefit the community (Matthew 5:13)

**SALT** *to rub salt into someone's wound*  
to deliberately make damage even worse

**SALT** *to take something with a grain of salt*  
to regard the facts in a statement with considerable skepticism

**SALVAGE** *to salvage something out of the wreck*  
to achieve some minor benefits out of a disastrous situation

**SALVO** *to fire a salvo at someone*  
to present a series of criticisms to a person

**SAMARITAN** *a good Samaritan*  
a person going out of his way to do a kindness to others (Luke 10:33)

**SAME** *to all sing from the same hymnal*  
to act consistently with each other

**SAME** *to be in the same boat*  
to share a common set of difficulties

**SAME** *to be in the same league*  
to have comparable skills

**SAND** *shifting sands*  
arguments which are constantly being changed

**SAND** *the sands are running out*  
the time available for some action is nearly at an end

**SAND** *to bury one's head in the sand*  
to refuse to face up to an unpleasant truth (refers to the reputed habit of ostriches in danger)

**SANDWICH** *to be the ham in the sandwich*  
to be caught in the middle of a dispute between other parties

**SAUCE** *what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander*  
arguments which apply in one case also apply in another

**SAUSAGE** *a sausage machine*  
the turning out of large volumes without particular thought

**SAVE** *saved by the bell*  
rescued before disaster strikes

**SAVE** *to save face*  
to be allowed to keep one's dignity despite having suffered a defeat or made an error

**SAVE** *to save one's bacon*  
to escape harm

**SAVE** *to save one's skin*  
to get off safely

**SAVE** *to save someone's life*  
to be of great help to a person

**SAVE** *to save someone's neck*  
to come to the rescue of a person

**SAY** *before one can say "Jack Robinson"*  
very quickly

**SCALES** *to tip the scales*  
to be a factor which in combination with other factors results in a particular decision which would otherwise not have been reached

**SCALP** *to be after someone's scalp*  
to be keen to penalize a person

**SCAPEGOAT** *a scapegoat*  
a person unfairly blamed for something not his fault

**SCAR** *to scar someone*  
to leave a person permanently grieving

**SCARCE** *to make oneself scarce*  
to take oneself out of view

**SCARE** *to scare the pants off someone*  
to greatly frighten a person

**SCATTER** *a scattergun approach*  
an effort going here, there and everywhere, instead of being properly targeted

**SCATTER** *to scatter something to the four winds*  
to permanently get rid of something

**SCENARIO** *scenario*  
details of arrangements

**SCENE** *behind the scenes*  
out of public view or awareness

**SCENE** *to make a scene*  
to create a fuss

**SCENE** *to quit the scene*  
to depart

**SCENE** *to set the scene for something*  
to get things ready for something

**SCENT** *to throw someone off the scent*  
to deceive a person by giving out misleading indications

**SCHOOL** *to tell tales out of school*  
to deliberately leak a secret

**SCHOOLBOY** *as every schoolboy knows*  
as is recognized by everyone

**SCORE** *to even the score*  
to get one's own back for some past action

**SCORE** *to score a goal*  
to achieve an objective

**SCORE** *to score a hat trick*  
to have three successive favorable outcomes

**SCORE** *to score a point*  
to make a clever contribution in the course of debate

**SCORE** *to score an own goal*  
to blow oneself up

**SCORE** *to score points*  
to make a good impression

**SCORE** *to score top points*  
to outwit other persons

**SCORE** *to see the score*  
to appreciate the reality of a situation

**SCORE** *to underscore something*  
to emphasize something

**SCOT** *to get off scot free*  
to go unpunished (refers to an exemption from tax)

**SCRAPE** *to really scrape the bottom of the barrel*  
to lower one's standards because one is short of important or relevant issues

**SCRAP-HEAP** *to be destined for the scrap-heap*  
to face a future in which one will have no meaningful role

**SCRATCH** *to be back to scratch*  
to have to start all over again

**SCRATCH** *to be up to scratch*  
to be of the required standard

**SCRATCH** *to only scratch the surface*  
to deal with only a small portion of a much larger whole

**SCRATCH** *to scratch one another's backs*  
to help each other

**SCRATCH** *to scratch one's head*  
to be amazed or puzzled

**SCRATCH** *to scratch something together*  
to improvise

**SCRATCH** *to start from behind scratch*  
to be faced with a handicap

**SCRATCH** *to start from scratch*  
to commence something without the benefit of any past activity

**SCREAM** *to scream and yell*  
to protest violently

**SCREAM** *to scream blue murder*  
to make serious allegations

**SCREAM** to scream something from the rooftops  
to communicate a message to a wide audience

**SCREEN** to set up a smokescreen  
to deliberately confuse an issue by disguising its salient features

**SCREW** to have a screw loose  
to be mentally unbalanced

**SCREW** to have one's head screwed on straight  
to be shrewd

**SCREW** to put the screws on someone  
to exert pressure on a person

**SCREW** to tighten the screw  
to increase the moral and psychological pressure

**SCRIPTURE** the devil can cite scripture for his purpose  
a person can quote a respectable or hostile authority while advocating a disreputable cause of his own (from Shakespeare's MERCHANT OF VENICE)

**SCROOGE** to be a real Scrooge  
to be miserly and unmoved (refers to a character in Charles Dickens' A CHRISTMAS CAROL)

**SCYLLA** to be between Scylla and Charybdis  
to be faced with two equally unpalatable alternatives which cannot both be avoided (refers to the voyage of Ulysses)

**SEA** a South Sea bubble  
an unrealistic financial venture which is bound to result in total loss

**SEA** between the devil and the deep blue sea  
to be faced with two equally unpalatable alternatives which cannot both be avoided

**SEA** to be all at sea  
to be confused as to what is going on and what to do next

**SEAL** a seal of approval  
confirmation that something is satisfactory

**SEAL** to seal one's lips  
to keep a confidence

**SEAL** to seal someone's fate  
to cause a certain outcome adversely affecting a person

**SEAL** to set the seal on something  
to confirm absolutely that something is agreed

**SEAM** to be bursting at the seams  
to be very crowded

**SEAM** to come apart at the seams  
(of an arrangement) to break down

**SEARCH** a soul-searching exercise  
an examination of the advantages and disadvantages of a proposal

**SEARCH** search for the Holy Grail  
work toward a difficult goal (refers to a vessel supposedly used by Christ at the last supper and featuring in the Arthurian legends)

**SEARCH** to search one's heart  
to have misgivings

**SEASON** the silly season  
the holiday period, when hard news is scarce and journalistic standards are lowered

**SEAT** a backseat driver  
a person seeking to exercise control

**SEAT** to be in the box seat  
to be in a very powerful position to control activity

**SEAT** to be in the driver's seat  
to be in charge

**SEAT** to be in the hot seat  
to hold a position requiring one to answer criticism or accusations

**SEAT** to be on the edge of one's seat  
to be very excited at what is currently happening

**SEAT** to be riveted to one's seat  
to find the activity being watched  
very exciting and worthy of full  
attention

**SEAT** to fly by the seat of one's pants  
to act unprofessionally

**SEAT** to keep someone's seat warm  
to hold a position temporarily with a  
view to another person taking it over  
permanently in the near future

**SEAT** to take a backseat  
not to actively involve oneself

**SECOND** a second-class citizen  
a person not treated as an equal

**SECOND** second childhood  
dotage

**SECOND** the second eleven  
persons performing an important function  
but one which is less important  
than that performed by others (refers  
to cricket)

**SECOND** to be second nature to  
someone  
to be something which a person does  
intuitively

**SECOND** to have a second string to  
one's bow  
to have an additional qualification appropriate  
to the task

**SECOND** to play second fiddle  
to fulfill a subordinate role

**SEE** blind Freddy could see that  
something is such-and-such  
it is very obvious that something is  
such-and-such

**SEE** not to see the wood for the trees  
to overlook the general picture because  
of undue concentration on the details

**SEE** suck it and see  
discover experimentally how something works

**SEE** to see blood  
to be very angry

**SEE** to see daylight  
to get the right answer

**SEE** to see eye to eye with someone  
to agree

**SEE** to see red  
to become very angry

**SEE** to see red lights flashing  
to be conscious of the danger

**SEE** to see someone in a good light  
to regard a person favorably

**SEE** to see something with half an  
eye  
to sum up a matter instantly

**SEE** to see the back of someone  
to know that a person is no longer  
involved in something

**SEE** to see the big picture  
to have the vision and imagination  
enabling a project to be developed as  
part of a bigger whole

**SEE** to see the color of someone's  
eyes  
to see how a person matches expectations  
or requirements

**SEE** to see the color of someone's  
money  
to get evidence of the sincerity of a  
person's proposal

**SEE** to see the light  
to understand the real situation

**SEE** to see the light at the end of the  
tunnel  
to be close to finalizing a long exercise

**SEE** to see the light of day  
to be made public

**SEE** to see the score  
to appreciate the reality of a situation

**SEE** to see the writing on the wall  
to appreciate the inevitability of some  
event (Daniel 5)

**SEE** to see which way the cat jumps  
to await developments

**SEED** to run to seed  
to become shabby

**SEED** to sow seeds

to propagate ideas in the hope that they will be adopted

**SEEK** to seek the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow

to have naive expectations

**SELL** to be sold on something

to be utterly dedicated to a proposal

**SELL** to sell off the family silver

to sell off one's prized possessions

**SELL** to sell one's birthright for a mess of pottage

through foolishness to exchange something of substance for something of little value (Genesis 25)

**SELL** to sell someone a lemon

to sell a person a grossly defective product on the basis that it represents quality

**SELL** to sell someone a pup

to cheat a person in a transaction, especially by misrepresentation as to the true value of something

**SELL** to sell someone down the river

to betray a person who has placed his trust in one

**SEND** to send a chill down

someone's neck

to be worrying news

**SEND** to send a cold shiver down

someone's spine

to horrify a person

**SEND** to send a smoke signal

to give an indication

**SEND** to send someone away with a flea in his ear

to give a person frank but unwelcome facts (refers to fleas trapped in the armor of ancient knights)

**SEND** to send someone packing

to dismiss a person ignominiously

**SEND** to send someone to Coventry  
to ostentatiously and collectively ignore a person by way of punishment

**SENSE** a sixth sense

intuition (refers to the five senses—sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch)

**SENSE** horse sense

natural shrewdness

**SENTENCE** to be sentenced to some fate

to be condemned by circumstances to endure some fate

**SEPARATE** to separate the men from the boys

to distinguish between those with and without certain skills

**SEPARATE** to separate the sheep from the goats

to distinguish between those with and without certain attributes (Matthew 25:32)

**SEPARATE** to separate the wheat from the chaff

to distinguish between important and unimportant ingredients

**SERVE** to serve something up to someone on a plate

to make something especially easy for a particular person

**SERVICE** to pay lip service to some rules

to disregard some rules in practice while acknowledging them in words

**SESAME** an open sesame

access to something normally inaccessible

**SET** game, set and match completion

**SET** the rot set in

conditions started to deteriorate

**SET** the stage is set

something is about to happen

**SET** the sun has set on something

something has concluded

**SET** to be set like a jelly  
to be very well established

**SET** to have one's heart set on something  
to be very keen to achieve something

**SET** to set a hare running  
in order to achieve some desired effect, to initiate some related activity

**SET** to set one's cap at someone  
(of females) to try to attract a person as a marriage partner

**SET** to set one's sights on something  
to aim to achieve something

**SET** to set sail  
to commence a voyage

**SET** to set someone on the right road  
to show a person how to go about doing something

**SET** to set someone's teeth on edge  
to cause a person to feel unhappy at a situation

**SET** to set something in concrete  
to make something virtually unalterable

**SET** to set the Thames on fire  
to do something noteworthy

**SET** to set the hounds baying  
to excite the gossips by providing material which they can use

**SET** to set the pace  
to give a lead in regard to a rate of progression

**SET** to set the scene for something  
to get things ready for something

**SET** to set the seal on something  
to confirm absolutely that something is agreed

**SET** to set the wheels in motion  
to institute appropriate action

**SET** to set the world on fire  
to do something particularly brilliant

**SET** to set tongues wagging  
to behave in a way which encourages scandal mongers

**SET** to set up a smokescreen  
to deliberately confuse an issue by disguising its salient features

**SETTLE** when the dust settles  
when sufficient time has passed

**SEVEN** to be at sixes and sevens  
to be confused, concerned and undecided

**SEVEN** to be in seventh heaven  
to be very happy

**SEVERE** to be a severe blow  
to be a great disappointment

**SEW** to sew something up  
to negotiate a deal

**SHACKLE** golden shackles  
financial arrangements designed to discourage employees changing employers

**SHADE** to throw someone in the shade  
to surpass a person

**SHADOW** to be in someone's shadow  
to be unable to exert one's personality because of association with a more important person

**SHADOW** to be only a pale shadow of something  
to be a weak imitation

**SHADOW** to cast a shadow over something  
to introduce a note of warning or sadness in regard to some matter

**SHADOW** to lurk in the shadows  
to have a low profile at the moment, but with the possibility of becoming much more conspicuous at any time

**SHADOW** to overshadow someone  
to reduce the influence of a person by outshining him

**SHADOW** to shadow box  
to go through the motions without achieving or intending to achieve anything

**SHADOW** *to throw a long shadow*  
to have widespread ramifications

**SHAFT** *a Parthian shaft*

a cutting remark made at the moment of departure (refers to missiles shot backward by flying Parthian horsemen)

**SHAGGY** *a shaggy-dog story*

an amusing anecdote with an unexpected ending, often involving talking animals given certain human skills

**SHAKE** *a golden handshake*

a large payment in connection with or as an inducement to retirement

**SHAKE** *in two shakes of a duck's tail*

in an instant

**SHAKE** *to shake a leg*

to hurry up

**SHAKE** *to shake a tree*

to do something in order to see what will result

**SHAKE** *to shake down*

to sleep on an improvised bed

**SHAKE** *to shake one's head*

to indicate disbelief or wonder or disapproval

**SHAKE** *to wait two shakes of a lamb's tail*

to wait just a few moments

**SHAKY** *to be on shaky ground*

not to have strong arguments

**SHAMBLES** *to throw something into a shambles*

to make something messy and useless

**SHAPE** *not to do something in any shape or form*

not to do something

**SHAPE** *shipshape*

in excellent condition

**SHAPE** *to lick something into shape*

to make something presentable and effective

**SHARE** *a share of the cake*  
a portion of the total available for distribution

**SHARE** *the lion's share*

the biggest portion

**SHARE** *to have shares in a paper company*

to institute unnecessary clerical procedures

**SHARK** *to miss the sharks while netting the minnows*

to succeed in minor aspects but fail in the ones that really matter

**SHARP** *sharp dealer*

person engaging in barely honest or mildly unethical practices

**SHARP** *to have a sharp tongue*

to speak one's mind in forceful language

**SHARPEN** *to need to sharpen one's pencil*

to be required to improve one's performance

**SHARPEN** *to sharpen one's ax*

to get ready for a difficult task

**SHARPEN** *to sharpen the knives*

to get ready for a concerted attack on some principle

**SHATTER** *earth-shattering*

very significant

**SHAVE** *to be a close shave*

to be a narrow escape

**SHED** *to shed a quiet tear for something*

to lament the passing of something

**SHED** *to shed crocodile tears*

to be a hypocrite

**SHED** *to shed light on something*

to give explanations

**SHEEP** *a black sheep*

a disreputable member of an otherwise reputable group

**SHEEP** one might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb  
further action will not increase the adverse consequences already in train (refers to the stealing of both sheep and lambs being capital crimes under old English law)

**SHEEP** to be a wolf in sheep's clothing  
to be a hypocrite or to be dangerous although masquerading as something harmless (Matthew 7:15)

**SHEEP** to be home on the sheep's back  
to be doing well

**SHEEP** to cast sheep's eyes at someone  
to look at a person amorously

**SHEEP** to ride on the sheep's back  
to benefit from the production of wool

**SHEEP** to separate the sheep from the goats  
to distinguish between those with and without certain attributes (Matthew 25:32)

**SHEEP** to spoil the ship for a ha' p' orth of tar  
to engage in a false economy (the current word "ship" is actually a mistake for the original word "sheep" and the tar refers to the treatment of wounds)

**SHEEPISH** sheepish  
embarrassed, as though guilty

**SHEER** to be sheer murder  
to be extremely unpleasant or difficult; or to be an inglorious defeat

**SHEET** the sheet anchor  
the source of one's confidence

**SHEET** to start with a blank sheet of paper  
to commence an exercise without being bound by any established practices

**SHELF** to be on the shelf  
to be available for marriage

**SHELL** to be shell-shocked  
to be stunned by unexpected bad news

**SHELL** to retreat into one's shell  
to become shy and introversive

**SHELVE** to shelve some proposal  
to abandon some proposal

**SHEPHERD** to shepherd some group  
to marshall the members of some group

**SHIBBOLETH** a shibboleth  
a doctrine once held as essential but now abandoned as having outlived its usefulness (a word used as a test to determine to which tribe an Israelite belonged) (Judges 12:6)

**SHIFT** shifting sands  
arguments which are constantly being changed

**SHILLING** to be only ten pence in the shilling  
to be slightly stupid

**SHILLING** to cut someone off with a shilling  
to exclude a person as a beneficiary under one's will (refers to the mistaken belief that a will cannot be upset in favor of a person actually named in a will and clearly not overlooked)

**SHINE** a knight in shining armor  
a very helpful person

**SHINE** shining light  
eminent or scholarly person

**SHINE** to make hay while the sun shines  
to utilize an opportunity before it disappears

**SHINE** to take a shine to someone  
to be keen on a person

**SHINE** to take the shine off something  
to spoil the performance of something

**SHINE** to take the shine out of something  
to demonstrably surpass

**SHINGLE** *to hang up one's shingle*  
to go into business offering expert personal services

**SHIP** *a case of rats leaving a sinking ship*

the desertion of an enterprise in anticipation of imminent failure

**SHIP** *enough to sink a battleship*  
more than sufficient

**SHIP** *shipshape*

in excellent condition

**SHIP** *ships that pass in the night*  
persons who fail to meet up

**SHIP** *to abandon ship*

to abrogate one's responsibilities or to abandon a project

**SHIP** *to be a rudderless ship*

to be a project not managed properly

**SHIP** *to run a tight ship*

to manage an efficient organization

**SHIP** *to run one's own ship*

to do things and organize subordinates in one's own way

**SHIP** *to spoil the ship for a ha'p'orth of tar*

to engage in false economy (the current word "ship" is actually a mistake for the original word "sheep" and the tar refers to the treatment of wounds)

**SHIP** *when one's ship comes in*

when one's business venture is successfully completed or when luck arrives

**SHIRT** *keep your shirt on!*  
relax!

**SHIRT** *so-and-so would give one the shirt off his back*

so-and-so is very generous

**SHIRT** *to lose one's shirt*

to suffer heavy financial losses

**SHIRT** *to put one's shirt on something*

to invest heavily in some speculative venture

**SHIRT** *to wear a hair shirt*  
to practice self-discipline

**SHIVER** *to send a cold shiver down someone's spine*  
to horrify a person

**SHOAL** *to founder on the shoals of something*

to come to grief because of unexpected dangers

**SHOCK** *to be shell-shocked*

to be stunned by unexpected bad news

**SHOE** *to be in someone's shoes*

to have another person's responsibility

**SHOE** *to fill someone's shoes*

to be a good successor

**SHOE** *to wait for the other shoe to drop*

to await the seemingly imminent and inevitable (refers to a man undressing, disturbing a neighbor by dropping one shoe, then frustrating his expectation by putting the other shoe down gently)

**SHOELACE** *to pull oneself up by one's own shoelaces*

to make a superhuman effort

**SHOESTRING** *to do something on a shoestring*

to do something with great economy

**SHOOT** *a straight shooter*

a person who is frank and outspoken

**SHOOT** *a troubleshooter*

a person good at finding and then rectifying faults

**SHOOT** *shoot!*

go on, speak!

**SHOOT** *the whole shooting match*  
the whole lot

**SHOOT** *to be on a slippery shoot*  
to court disaster

**SHOOT** *to be shot to pieces*

to have one's case seriously damaged

**SHOOT** *to be shot to ribbons*

(of an argument) to be utterly discredited

**SHOOT** to shoot from the hip  
to speak frankly and openly

**SHOOT** to shoot one's bolt  
to lose one's temper

**SHOOT** to shoot one's mouth off  
to speak without thinking

**SHOOT** to shoot oneself in the foot  
to act in a foolish way and thus harm  
one's own cause

**SHOOT** to shoot someone down in  
flames  
to utterly destroy another person's  
arguments

**SHOOT** to shoot something out of  
the water  
to frustrate something

**SHOP** a bull in a china shop  
a careless person likely to cause great  
damage

**SHOP** a shopping list  
a catalogue of demands

**SHOP** to shop around  
to explore alternatives

**SHOP** to shut up shop  
to cease an established activity

**SHOP** to talk shop  
to discuss business or professional  
matters on a social occasion

**SHORT** take a long walk on a short  
pier  
go away, I want no dealings with you

**SHORT** the long and the short of it  
all that needs to be said about this

**SHORT** to be short and sweet  
to be very brief and to the point

**SHORT** to be shortchanged  
to be given less than is due to one

**SHORT** to draw the short straw  
to be the one appointed to do something

**SHORT** to get someone by the short  
and curly hairs  
to have domination over a person

**SHORT** to give someone short shift  
to be impatient with a person (refers  
to the confession to a priest just be-  
fore an execution)

**SHORT** to have a short fuse  
to lose one's temper very readily

**SHORT** to hold someone on a short  
leash  
to give a person very little authority

**SHORT** to short-circuit something  
to do something, eliminating various  
intermediate steps

**SHORT** to take shortcuts  
to do something by a faster but less  
thorough method

**SHORTHAND** to be a shorthand  
way of saying something  
to be a way of saying something in  
summarized form

**SHORTSIGHTED** to be  
shortsighted  
not to recognize the likely consequen-  
ces

**SHOT** a bit shot  
an important person

**SHOT** a shot in the arm  
something to revive a person's enthu-  
siasm

**SHOT** a shot in the dark  
an intelligent or lucky guess

**SHOT** a sitting shot  
an initial move which is designed to  
establish facts for use in a later action

**SHOT** opening shot  
first step in an activity expected to  
last a long time

**SHOT** shots across the bow  
warnings

**SHOT** that is a long shot  
there is only a remote possibility

**SHOT** to be a sitting shot  
to be a person whose actions make  
him very vulnerable to criticism

**SHOT** to beat by a long shot  
to defeat very convincingly

**SHOT** to call the shots  
to have the direction over a project

**SHOT** to fire a parting shot  
to make a defiant gesture on leaving

**SHOT** to give one's best shot  
to make the best attempt possible

**SHOT** to have a shot at someone  
to use subtly chosen words implying friendly criticism but designed to embarrass another person

**SHOT** to have a shot at something  
to attempt to achieve something

**SHOT** to take a potshot at someone  
to make disparaging remarks about a person

**SHOTGUN** a shotgun wedding  
a wedding held to ensure that an impending birth will be legitimate (refers to threats by the bride's father to kill the bridegroom)

**SHOULDER** a shoulder to cry on  
sympathy

**SHOULDER** a shoulder to lean on  
sympathy

**SHOULDER** an old head on young shoulders  
experience, knowledge and maturity in a young person

**SHOULDER** shoulder to shoulder  
in close proximity

**SHOULDER** straight from the shoulder  
bluntly

**SHOULDER** to be head and shoulders above the rest  
to be significantly more capable than others

**SHOULDER** to carry the world on one's shoulders  
to resent being left to perform a huge task single-handedly (refers to Atlas, who was condemned to bear the heavens on his shoulders for leading the Titans against the gods)

**SHOULDER** to give someone the cold shoulder  
to ostentatiously ignore a person

**SHOULDER** to have a chip on one's shoulder  
to unreasonably resent something

**SHOULDER** to have broad shoulders  
to be able to cope well with responsibility

**SHOULDER** to need to look over one's shoulder  
to be subject to attack which is not obvious

**SHOULDER** to put a burden on someone's shoulders  
to impose responsibilities on a person

**SHOULDER** to put one's shoulder to the wheel  
to make a strong effort

**SHOULDER** to rub shoulders with someone  
to mingle with a person

**SHOULDER** to shoulder the blame  
to accept the blame

**SHOULDER** to shrug one's shoulders  
to indicate that one does not know or care or that one is unable or unwilling to assist

**SHOULDER** to stand on someone's shoulders  
to build upon another person's ideas

**SHOULDER** to take a weight off someone's shoulder  
to assist a person by relieving him of some responsibility

**SHOULDER** to work shoulder to shoulder  
to work with united effort

**SHOUT** to be all over bar the shouting  
to be virtually finished

**SHOW** *a show pony*  
a pompous person

**SHOW** *a sideshow*  
an unimportant adjunct

**SHOW** *the show must go on*  
despite difficulties the action in contemplation has to proceed

**SHOW** *to bare one's teeth*  
to imply threats

**SHOW** *to get the show on the road*  
to commence a planned activity

**SHOW** *to give the show away*  
to indiscreetly reveal sensitive information

**SHOW** *to show dividends*  
to be successful

**SHOW** *to show one's face*  
to put in an appearance

**SHOW** *to show one's true colors*  
to disclose one's real character or beliefs

**SHOW** *to show someone the door*  
to ask a person to leave

**SHOW** *to show someone the ropes*  
to teach a beginner how to do something

**SHOW** *to show the flag*  
to visit a place in order to boost morale there

**SHOW** *to show the white feather*  
to indicate cowardice (refers to cross-bred birds, not regarded as useful in cock fighting)

**SHOW** *to steal the show*  
to have the maximum appeal to those watching

**SHOWCASE** *showcase*  
magnificent

**SHOWDOWN** *showdown*  
disclosure of certain pertinent facts

**SHOWER** *to have come down in the last shower*  
to be naive

**SHRED** *to rip something to shreds*  
to damage something severely

**SHRIFT** *to give someone short shrift*  
to be impatient with a person (refers to the confession to a priest just before an execution)

**SHRINK** *a shrinking violet*  
a shy person

**SHRUG** *to shrug one's shoulders*  
to indicate that one does not know or care or that one is unable or unwilling to assist

**SHRUG** *to shrug something off*  
to indicate that one is unable or unwilling to do something

**SHUDDER** *one shudders to think what the outcome might be*  
there is great concern as to the outcome

**SHUT** *to be an open and shut case*  
to be an unarguable proposition (a phrase popular in detective novels and probably a play on the two meanings of the word "case")

**SHUT** *to keep one's mouth shut*  
not to discuss some matter

**SHUT** *to shut one's eyes to something*  
to deliberately take no notice of something, especially in dereliction of one's duty

**SHUT** *to shut the door on someone*  
to deny another person a desired opportunity

**SHUT** *to shut the stable door after the horse has bolted*  
to take preventive action only after the relevant event

**SHUT** *to shut up shop*  
to cease an established activity

**SHUTTER** *to put up the shutters*  
to cease an established activity

**SHYLOCK** *a Shylock*  
a hard-hearted creditor who insists on his legal due (from Shakespeare's MERCHANT OF VENICE)

**SIDE** *a broadside*

a short verbal attack

**SIDE** *on our side of the fence*  
in the group representing our vested interest

**SIDE** *the bright side*  
the favorable aspects

**SIDE** *the other side of the coin*  
the arguments for the opposite point of view

**SIDE** *to be a thorn in someone's flesh*

to be a person whose persistent presence and righteous views annoy

**SIDE** *to be born on the wrong side of the blanket*

to be illegitimate

**SIDE** *to be on the other side of the fence*

to have an opposing point of view or position

**SIDE** *to be on the side of the angels*  
to be on the side of righteousness  
(from a speech by Benjamin Disraeli)

**SIDE** *to feel the rough side of*

*someone's tongue*

to be verbally abused by a person

**SIDE** *to get on someone's right side*

to make a good impression on a person

**SIDE** *to get out of bed on the wrong side*

to be grumpy

**SIDE** *to know on which side one's bread is buttered*

to be aware of the important considerations

**SIDE** *to look on the dark side*

to be pessimistic

**SIDE** *to split one's side*

to be convulsed with laughter

**SIDE** *you will laugh on the other side of your face*

you will regret this

**SIDELIGHT** *sidelight*

incidental happening

**SIDELINE** *to sit on the sidelines*  
not to take part in the main action

**SIDESHOW** *a sideshow*  
an unimportant adjunct

**SIDEWAYS** *to look at someone sideways*  
to silently and politely indicate one's disapproval

**SIEVE** *to stop up one hole in a sieve*  
to do something quite useless

**SIFT** *to sift*

to closely examine the evidence or a set of facts with a view to attaching different significance as appropriate to each of the various components

**SIGH** *to heave a sigh of relief*

to express satisfaction at the achievement of a solution to a difficult problem

**SIGHT** *to be a sight for sore eyes*  
to be something welcome

**SIGHT** *to be shortsighted*

not to recognize the likely consequences

**SIGHT** *to lower one's sights*

to reduce one's ambition

**SIGHT** *to set one's sights on something*

to aim to achieve something

**SIGHT** *with 20/20 hindsight*

with the benefit of knowing what happened

**SIGN** *to sign on the dotted line*

to confirm one's agreement

**SIGN** *to sign one's own death warrant*

to foolishly do something which is inevitably bound to lead to utter disaster

**SIGNAL** *to send a smoke signal*

to give an indication

**SIGNPOST** *to signpost something*  
to give an indication of the alternatives available

**SILENCE** deafening silence  
great apathy and lack of enthusiasm

**SILENCE** silence is golden  
it is better not to incriminate anyone

**SILK** one can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear  
it is impossible to manufacture something of a high standard without appropriate raw materials

**SILLY** the silly season  
the holiday period, when hard news is scarce and journalistic standards are lowered

**SILVER** every cloud has a silver lining  
there are benefits even in seemingly adverse situations

**SILVER** to be born with a silver spoon in one's mouth  
to be brought up by wealthy parents

**SILVER** to hand over something on a silver platter  
to provide a valuable benefit for virtually nothing

**SILVER** to have a silver tongue  
to be eloquent

**SILVER** to sell off the family silver  
to sell off one's prized possessions

**SIMON** a simple Simon  
a foolish, gullible or half-witted person

**SIMPLE** a simple Simon  
a foolish, gullible or half-witted person

**SIN** for one's sins  
by way of punishment, as it were

**SING** it's not over till the fat lady sings  
it is not finished yet

**SING** to all sing from the same hymnal  
to act consistently with each other

**SING** to sing a particular song  
to state particular views

**SING** to sing for one's supper  
to carry out a task in order to receive a favor in return

**SING** to sing someone's praises  
to commend a person exuberantly

**SINGLE** single-handedly  
without help from other persons

**SINK** a case of rats leaving a sinking ship  
the desertion of an enterprise in anticipation of imminent failure

**SINK** enough to sink a battleship  
more than sufficient

**SINK** everything but the kitchen sink  
a lot of things

**SINK** it is a case of sink or swim  
the attempt is worthwhile, despite the risk of failure

**SINK** one's heart sank  
one realized the extent of some disaster

**SINK** to sink deeper into the mire  
to get into further difficulties

**SINK** to sink deeper into the mud  
to get into even greater difficulty

**SINK** to sink slowly in the west  
to fail gradually

**SINK** to sink without a trace  
to disappear completely

**SINK** with a sinking heart  
with growing despondency

**SINKER** hook, line and sinker  
wholly

**SIT** to be a sitting duck  
to be readily exploited

**SIT** to be a sitting shot  
to be a person whose actions make him very vulnerable to criticism

**SIT** to sit on one's hands  
deliberately to do nothing

**SIT** to sit on someone  
to repress a person

**SIT** to sit on the fence  
to refuse to choose between two alternatives

**SIT** to sit on the sidelines  
not to take part in the main action

**SIT** to sit pretty  
to be comfortably off

**SIT** to sit tight  
obstinately to do nothing

**SITE** a siting shot  
an initial move which is designed to establish facts for use in a later action

**SIX** it is six of one and half a dozen of the other  
it does not matter

**SIX** to be at sixes and sevens  
to be confused, concerned and undecided

**SIX** to be six feet under  
to be dead

**SIX** to hit someone for six  
to damage a person's cause

**SIX** to throw in one's six pennies' worth  
to modestly supply one's own facts or views

**SIXTH** a sixth sense  
intuition (refers to the five senses—sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch)

**SIXTY-FOUR** a sixty-four thousand dollar question  
a pertinent but very difficult question (refers to a TV quiz show in which an initial prize doubles with the successful answering of progressively more difficult questions)

**SIZE** to cut tall poppies down to size  
to humiliate haughty persons

**SIZE** to try something on for size  
to cheekily do something

**SKATE** to get one's skates on  
to hurry up

**SKATE** to skate around some subject  
by diversionary tactics to avoid discussing some subject

**SKATE** to skate on thin ice  
to act in disregard of obvious danger

**SKELETON** a skeleton in the cupboard  
an unpleasant truth the knowledge of which has been deliberately suppressed

**SKELETON** to flesh out the skeleton  
to supply the missing pertinent details

**SKETCH** a thumbnail sketch  
brief but pertinent details

**SKID** to be on skid row  
to have no means

**SKID** to put the skids under someone  
to ruin a person

**SKIN** a cleanskin  
a person without a criminal record

**SKIN** there is more than one way to skin a cat  
this can be achieved in a variety of acceptable ways

**SKIN** to be no skin off someone's nose  
not to matter to a person

**SKIN** to escape by the skin of one's nose  
to only just avoid some disaster

**SKIN** to escape by the skin of one's teeth  
to only just avoid some disaster

**SKIN** to get under someone's skin  
to annoy another person through stupidity

**SKIN** to hang on by the skin of one's teeth  
to only just survive

**SKIN** to have a thick skin  
to be impervious to criticism

**SKIN** to nearly jump out of one's skin  
to receive a fright

**SKIN** to save one's skin  
to get off safely

**SKIP** something is but a hop, skip  
and jump away  
something is nearby

**SKIRT** to hide under someone's  
skirts  
to let someone else take the conse-  
quences of one's actions

**SKIRT** to skirt around the difficulties  
to act as though the difficulties did  
not exist

**SKITTLES** not to be all beer and  
skittles  
not to be all pleasant and easy

**SKULL** to penetrate someone's thick  
skull  
to make a person understand some-  
thing difficult or acknowledge some-  
thing unwelcome

**SKY** a light in the sky  
a sign of great hope

**SKY** blue sky  
supremely optimistic

**SKY** pie in the sky  
a hoped for result unlikely to be  
achieved

**SKY** the sky fell in  
a very serious problem arose

**SKY** the sky is the limit  
the cost is no obstacle

**SKYROCKET** to skyrocket  
(of a price or value) to increase greatly  
in a short time

**SLACK** to take up the slack  
to take advantage of surplus capacity

**SLAM** to slam the door in someone's  
face  
ostentatiously to refuse to have any  
dealings with a person

**SLAP** a slap in the face  
a calculated insult or action amounting  
to a rebuke

**SLAP** a slap on the wrist  
a mild rebuke

**SLATE** to wipe the slate clean  
to forgive past indiscretions

**SLATHER** open slather  
freedom for people to do what they  
want

**SLAUGHTER** a lamb led to  
slaughter  
a naive person allowing himself to be  
exploited

**SLEDGEHAMMER** to use a  
sledgehammer to crack a nut  
to devote vastly more resources to a  
project than is warranted by all the  
circumstances

**SLEEP** not to lose any sleep over  
something  
not to worry about some matter

**SLEEP** to go to sleep  
to become inactive

**SLEEP** to let sleeping dogs lie  
to refrain from raising an issue which  
is not obviously requiring attention

**SLEEP** to sleep on one's rights  
to fail to exercise some entitlement  
within a reasonable period

**SLEEP** to spend a sleepless night  
to worry about something

**SLEEVE** to have a card up one's  
sleeve  
to secretly have information relevant  
to a transaction

**SLEEVE** to have an ace up one's  
sleeve  
to hold an impressive counter-argument  
in reserve

**SLEEVE** to keep something up one's  
sleeve  
to secretly retain something in re-  
serve for use in the future or at a later  
stage of negotiations

**SLEEVE** to laugh up one's sleeve  
to laugh surreptitiously

**SLEEVE** to roll up one's sleeves  
to get on with a job energetically

**SLEEVE** to wear one's heart on  
one's sleeve  
to lack the reserve expected of one

**SLEIGHT** sleight of hand  
deceit by trickery

**SLENDER** to hang by a slender  
thread  
to only just survive

**SLICE** to claim that something is the  
best thing since sliced bread  
to have an exaggerated opinion of the  
importance or novelty of an invention  
or practice

**SLICE** to have a piece of the action  
to be one of several parties to a  
project

**SLIDE** to be on a slippery shoot  
to court disaster

**SLING** to sling mud  
to make unfair imputations

**SLIP** a slip of the tongue  
incorrect words uttered accidentally

**SLIP** to be slipping  
to be losing one's cunning or expertise

**SLIP** to let something slip through  
one's fingers  
to allow something to escape from  
one's ownership or control

**SLIP** to slip one's mind  
to be overlooked or forgotten

**SLIP** to slip through the net  
to happen as an isolated case despite  
steps taken to prevent such events

**SLIP** to slip under one's guard  
to cause a mistake to be made despite  
care being taken to prevent this

**SLIPPERY** a slippery customer  
a shifty person

**SLIPPERY** slippery path  
dangerous course of action

**SLIPPERY** to be on a slippery shoot  
to court disaster

**SLOUGH** a slough of despond  
a feeling of hopelessness

**SLOW** to be slow off the mark  
to be slow to start something

**SLOWLY** to slowly bleed to death  
to be heading in gradual steps toward  
total ruin

**SLUG** to slug it out  
to engage in a minor skirmish

**SLY** a sly dog  
a person who is discreet about his  
weaknesses

**SMACK** a smack in the eye  
a rebuff

**SMALL** it's a small world  
it is surprising to meet people one  
knows in unexpected places

**SMALL** to be a small cog in a large  
wheel  
to be a relatively unimportant person  
in a large organization

**SMALL** to be small beer  
to be quite unimportant

**SMALL** to be small potatoes  
to be quite unimportant

**SMART** to be a smart Alec  
to give witty but cheeky responses to  
one's superiors or customers

**SMELL** a rose by any other name  
would smell as sweet  
the form does not affect the substance  
(from Shakespeare's ROMEO AND JULIET)

**SMELL** something smells  
something is suspicious

**SMELL** to come up smelling like a  
rose

not to have a stain on one's character

**SMELL** to run something on the  
smell of an oil rag  
to run something very economically  
and efficiently

**SMELL** to smell a rat  
to become suspicious

**SMELL** to smell blood  
to divine imminent victory

**SMELL** to smell out something  
to discover something by careful investigation

**SMELL** to smell trouble  
to perceive difficulties

**SMILE** to wipe the smile off  
someone's face  
to destroy a person's complacency

**SMILE** wipe that smile off your face!  
treat this matter more seriously!

**SMOKE** put that in your pipe and  
smoke it  
contemplate that fact

**SMOKE** the big smoke  
the big city

**SMOKE** to go up in smoke  
to come to nothing

**SMOKE** to send a smoke signal  
to give an indication

**SMOKE** to set up a smokescreen  
to deliberately confuse an issue by  
disguising its salient features

**SMOKE** when the smoke clears  
when sufficient time has passed

**SMOKE** where there is smoke there  
is fire

if there is a hint of trouble, then it is  
highly likely that there really is trouble

**SMOOTH** to be in smooth water  
to have no troubles

**SMOOTH** to smooth the path for  
someone

to use one's influence to make ar-  
rangements so that a person's task  
will be easier or more readily accom-  
plished

**SMOOTH** to take the rough with the  
smooth

to accept the hardships of life along  
with its pleasant features

**SMORGASBORD** *smorgasbord*  
a series of different items from which  
a number can be chosen (from the  
Swedish words for "butter," "goose"  
and "table")

**SNAG** to strike a snag  
to encounter a difficulty

**SNAIL** at a snail's pace  
very slowly

**SNAKE** a game of snakes and  
ladders

a series of ups and downs

**SNAKE** a snake in the grass  
a person of low character

**SNAP** to snap at someone's heels  
to be a minor irritation to a person

**SNAP** to snap someone's head off  
to speak to a person aggressively

**SNEEZE** that is not to be sneezed  
at  
that is so significant that it should not  
be rejected

**SNOW** to snow someone under  
to overload a person with work

**SNOWBALL** to snowball  
to grow rapidly in size or influence

**SNOWFLAKE** to have a snowflake's  
chance in hell  
to have no hope or possibility at all

**SOAP** a soap opera  
a radio or television serial, often based  
on exaggerated domestic situations of  
no great importance (refers to spon-  
sorship by soap manufacturers)

**SOAP** to be on one's soap box  
to hold forth on an issue about which  
one feels keenly

**SOAP** to soft-soap someone  
to flatter a person

**SOCK** to chop someone off at the  
socks

to stop someone's proposals pre-  
maturely

**SOCK** *to pull one's socks up*  
to set out to improve or correct one's inadequate behavior or performance

**SODOM** *a Sodom and Gomorrah*  
a place of vice (Genesis 18:20)

**SOFT** *to have a soft spot for someone*  
to be very fond of a person

**SOFT** *to have a soft underbelly*  
to have a weakness which can be exploited

**SOFT** *to soft-pedal*  
to restrain oneself

**SOFT** *to soft-soap someone*  
to flatter a person

**SOFSEN** *to soften someone up*  
to make a person more favorably disposed to one's wishes

**SOFSEN** *to soften the blow*  
to take action to reduce the trauma of bad news

**SOFTLY** *speak softly and carry a big stick*  
be polite to your potential enemies but maintain an active and visible defense capability (from a speech by Theodore Roosevelt in 1901)

**SOLDIER** *to be a brave soldier*  
to be brave

**SOLDIER** *to soldier on*  
to carry on despite difficulties

**SOLOMON** *to need the wisdom of Solomon*  
to be faced with the need to make a difficult decision (1 Kings 3:16-28)

**SOMERSAULT** *to turn a complete somersault*  
to reverse one's established policy

**SON** *favorite son*  
person preferred by many people for some office

**SONG** *nothing to make a song or dance about*  
unexciting or unimportant

**SONG** *swan song*  
last appearance before retirement

**SONG** *to buy something for a song*  
to buy something very cheaply

**SONG** *to make a song and dance about something*  
to create a fuss

**SONG** *to sing a particular song*  
to state particular views

**SOOTHE** *soothing syrup*  
insincere expressions of sympathy or flattery

**SORE** *eyesore*  
extremely ugly object

**SORE** *to be a sight for sore eyes*  
to be something welcome

**SORE** *to open up a festering sore*  
to upset a person by drawing attention to a long-standing grievance

**SORROW** *to drown one's sorrows*  
to drink by way of solace and in an attempt to forget some misfortune

**SOUL** *a soul brother*  
a person of similar ideals

**SOUL** *a soul-searching exercise*  
an examination of the advantages and disadvantages of a proposal

**SOUL** *heart and soul*  
with great energy

**SOUL** *soul-destroying*  
extremely boring and demotivating

**SOUL** *to bare one's soul*  
talkatively to give a revealing insight into oneself

**SOUL** *to be the life and soul of the party*  
to be the prime enthusiast for a cause

**SOUL** *to keep body and soul together*  
to keep alive

**SOUND** *to sound alarm bells*  
to give warning

**SOUND** to sound the death knell of something  
to indicate the impending end of something

**SOUNDING** to act as a sounding board  
to give, on request, constructive criticisms of ideas tentatively held

**SOUNDING** to take a sounding to ascertain people's views

**SOUP** to be in the soup  
to be in great difficulties

**SOUR** that is just sour grapes  
those are disparaging remarks made only because he is peeved and resentful at someone else's better fortune

**SOUR** to hit a sour note  
to discover an unexpected flaw in an otherwise satisfactory piece of work

**SOUR** to turn sour  
to become impracticable or unprofitable

**SOUTH** a South Sea bubble  
an unrealistic financial venture which is bound to result in total loss

**SOW** one can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear  
it is impossible to manufacture something of a high standard without appropriate raw materials

**SOW** to get the wrong sow by the ear  
to reach an incorrect conclusion

**SOW** to reap as one has sown  
to experience the consequences of one's own actions

**SOW** to sow seeds  
to propagate ideas in the hope that they will be adopted

**SOW** to sow the wind and reap the whirlwind  
to make bad mistakes and to suffer the even worse consequences

**SOW** to sow wild oats  
to indulge in foolish behavior while a young adult

**SPACE** to get some breathing space to get more time in which to accomplish something

**SPADE** to call a spade a spade  
not to mince words

**SPADE** to do the spadework  
to prepare

**SPAIN** a castle in Spain  
an impracticable proposition

**SPANNER** to throw a spanner into the works  
to cause an unexpected complication

**SPARE** to carry a spare tire  
to be fat

**SPARK** to make sparks fly  
to cause rapid activity to take place

**SPARK** to spark on all cylinders  
to work extremely well

**SPARTAN** Spartan  
tough and efficient, with a complete absence of the finer things of life

**SPEAK** speak softly and carry a big stick  
be polite to your potential enemies but maintain an active and visible defense capability (from a speech by Theodore Roosevelt in 1901)

**SPEAK** speak of the devil  
here is the person we were just discussing

**SPEAK** to speak one's mind  
to express one's views frankly and forcefully

**SPEAK** to speak the same language  
to have a good understanding and similar ideas

**SPEAK** to speak volumes for something  
to place something in a favorable light

**SPEARHEAD** to spearhead something  
to lead a movement

**SPECTACLES** *to see something through rose-colored spectacles*  
to appreciate only the advantages and to completely disregard the disadvantages

**SPECTER** *to raise the specter of something*  
to draw attention to a worrying expectation of something

**SPECTRUM** *spectrum*  
wide range of different opinions or backgrounds

**SPEED** *speed the plow!*  
let us get on with this as fast as possible!

**SPELL** *to break the spell*  
to spoil the effect

**SPELL** *to have a spell in the paddock*  
to have leave of absence

**SPELL** *to spell something out*  
to explain something in detail

**SPELLBINDING** *spellbinding*  
fascinating to an audience

**SPEND** *to spend a sleepless night*  
to worry about something

**SPIDER** *to be the center of the spider's web*  
to control an operation which involves numerous and/or complex ingredients

**SPIKE** *to spike someone's guns*  
to cause something to become useless

**SPILL** *it is no use crying over spilt milk*  
lamenting over a disaster achieves nothing

**SPILL** *to spill the beans*  
to indiscreetly reveal sensitive information

**SPIN** *tailspin*  
very fast fall

**SPIN** *to be a money spinner*  
to produce large profits easily and quickly

**SPIN** *to be in a flat spin*  
to be in a state of high excitement

**SPIN** *to spin a yarn*  
to tell an amusing or unlikely story

**SPIN** *to spin something out*  
to prolong some matter

**SPINE** *to send a cold shiver down someone's spine*  
to horrify a person

**SPIRIT** *kindred spirit*  
persons with similar interests and eccentricities

**SPIRIT** *the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak*  
the body is not up to the demands made on it

**SPIT** *spit it out!*  
unburden yourself!

**SPITE** *to cut one's nose off to spite one's face*  
to act in pique in a way which harms only oneself

**SPLASH** *to make a splash*  
to create a sensation

**SPLEEN** *to vent one's spleen on someone*  
to demonstrate one's ill temper to a person

**SPLICE** *to splice the main brace*  
to serve an extra ration of rum

**SPLIT** *to split hairs*  
to draw absurdly fine distinctions

**SPLIT** *to split one's side*  
to be convulsed with laughter

**SPOIL** *to spoil the ship for a ha'p'orth of tar*  
to engage in a false economy (the current word "ship" is actually a mistake for the original word "sheep" and the tar refers to the treatment of wounds)

**SPOIL** *too many cooks spoil the broth*  
one leader is all that is required

**SPOKE** to put a spoke in someone's wheel

to interfere with another person's activity, so preventing its continuance

**SPONGE** to throw up the sponge  
to concede defeat

**SPOON** he must have a long spoon that sups with the devil  
great care is needed when negotiating deals with disreputable parties

**SPOON** to be born with a silver spoon in one's mouth  
to be brought up by wealthy parents

**SPOON** to get the wooden spoon  
to come in gloriously last

**SPOT** a leopard cannot change his spots  
each person is born with certain unalterable characteristics

**SPOT** the one bright spot on the horizon  
the only hopeful aspect

**SPOT** to be a tender spot  
to be a subject on which a person is touchy

**SPOT** to have a blind spot about something  
to fail to recognize the adverse aspects of something

**SPOT** to have a soft spot for someone  
to be very fond of a person

**SPOT** to put someone on the spot  
to embarrass a person

**SPOTLIGHT** to steal the spotlight  
to set out to be the center of attention

**SPOTLIGHT** to turn the spotlight on something  
to draw public attention to something

**SPRAT** to throw a sprat to catch a mackerel  
to risk a little in the hope of gaining much

**SPREAD** to spread one's wings  
to assert authority which has not yet been conferred by one's superiors and for which one may not be ready

**SPREAD** to spread oneself thin  
to attempt to do more than is feasible in the available time

**SPREAD** to spread the net more widely  
to become more comprehensive

**SPRING** a spring cleaning  
a thorough review occurring a long time after the previous one

**SPRING** to spring to mind  
to suddenly occur to a person

**SPRINGBOARD** a springboard  
a situation from which one intends to make a rapid advance

**SPUR** to spur someone on  
to agitate a person into doing something

**SPUR** to win one's spurs  
to gain recognition after a period of effort (refers to the earning of a knighthood in battle)

**SQUARE** a square peg in a round hole  
a person much more suitable for a position rather different from the one held

**SQUARE** four square  
honest and reliable

**SQUARE** to go back to square one  
to start all over again

**SQUARE** to try to square the circle  
to attempt the impossible (refers to a classical problem in geometry, namely, to construct with a compass a square of the same area as a given circle)

**SQUEAKY** the squeaky wheel gets the most attention  
those complaining the most loudly will get their problems sorted out first

<b>SQUEEZE</b> to squeeze someone out to force a person to leave	
<b>SQUEEZE</b> to squeeze the last drop out of something	
to get the maximum advantage out of some favorable situation	
<b>SQUIB</b> a damp squib	
disappointingly ineffective action (refers to fireworks which fail to go off)	
<b>STAB</b> a stab in the dark	
a sheer guess	
<b>STAB</b> to stab someone in the back	
to deliberately and surreptitiously harm a person who regarded one as a friend	
<b>STABLE</b> a Herculean cleaning of the stables	
a thorough revision of operating procedure (refers to Hercules, a mythical Greek hero who cleaned the stables of Augeas)	
<b>STABLE</b> to shut the stable door after the horse has bolted	
to take preventive action only after the relevant event	
<b>STACK</b> to have the cards stacked against one	
to be faced with many difficulties frustrating a project	
<b>STACK</b> to have the odds stacked against one	
to be faced with many difficulties frustrating a project	
<b>STAGE</b> the stage is set	
something is about to happen	
<b>STAGE</b> to be center stage	
to have everyone's attention	
<b>STAGE</b> to be on a world stage	
to be prominent in international affairs	
<b>STAGE</b> to stage-manage something	
to arrange how something happens	
<b>STAGE</b> to upstage someone	
to deprive another person of the glory which he would otherwise have enjoyed	
<b>STAGING</b> a staging post	
a place where action is initiated	

<b>STAKE</b> to raise the stake to increase the amount of potential gain or loss in a project	
<b>STAKE</b> to stake a claim to indicate one's desire to obtain something	
<b>STALEMATE</b> stalemate a final result in which neither party to a dispute is victorious	
<b>STALK</b> a stalking horse an ostensible reason	
<b>STAMP</b> only a postage stamp between them virtually equal or close together	
<b>STAMP</b> to put one's own stamp on something to affect something with one's own characteristic style	
<b>STAMP</b> to rubber-stamp something to endorse without considering the merits	
<b>STAMPEDE</b> to stampede someone into something to pressure a person into taking some action	
<b>STAND</b> if one can't stand the heat one should stay out of the kitchen a person should not put himself in a position involving pressures with which he cannot cope (words attributed to Harry S. Truman)	
<b>STAND</b> not to have a leg to stand on to have one's arguments completely demolished or to be without acceptable excuse or explanation	
<b>STAND</b> to be able to do something standing on one's head to be able to do something very easily	
<b>STAND</b> to know where one stands to know what one supports or how one is affected	
<b>STAND</b> to make a last-ditch stand to make a brave effort to stave off final defeat	

**STAND** to make someone's hair stand on end  
to give a person shocking news

**STAND** to stand in someone's way  
to prevent a person achieving his goal

**STAND** to stand in the breach  
to bear the brunt of criticisms

**STAND** to stand on one's own two feet  
not to require the help of others

**STAND** to stand on someone's shoulders  
to build upon another person's ideas

**STAND** to stand one's ground  
to maintain a stance in the face of opposition

**STAND** to stand out from the crowd  
to be noticeably better than one's competitors

**STAND** to stand over someone with a big stick  
to intimidate a person in order to get him to act in a particular way

**STAND** to stand up and be counted  
to publicly announce one's position on some issue

**STAND** to stand up on one's hind legs  
to exert one's authority

**STANDARD** a standard bearer  
a highly visible activist for a cause

**STANDOFF** a Mexican standoff  
a situation where neither of two parties is making a move

**STANDSTILL** a standstill  
an inability to proceed

**STAR** one can thank one's lucky stars  
one was extremely fortunate

**STAR** rising star  
person making good progress in his career

**STAR** to have stars in one's eyes  
(for emotional rather than rational reasons) to be ecstatic

**STAR** to shoot for the stars  
to be unrealistic

**STARE** to stare someone in the face  
(of a solution, etc.) to become obvious

**START** to have a head start  
to have an advantage over others

**START** to start from behind scratch  
to be faced with a handicap

**START** to start from scratch  
to commence something without the benefit of any past activity

**START** to start the ball rolling  
to commence and enthusiastically advance an activity involving people

**START** to start with a blank sheet of paper  
to commence an exercise without being bound by any established practices

**STATE** to be in a state of flux  
to be subject to continuous change

**STATE** to find out the state of play  
to ascertain the current position of some project

**STAY** if one can't stand the heat one should stay out of the kitchen  
a person should not put himself in a position involving pressure with which he cannot cope (words attributed to Harry S. Truman)

**STAY** to stay tuned  
to keep in touch for further information as it becomes available

**STEAL** to steal a march on someone  
to anticipate another person's actions and get in ahead

**STEAL** to steal someone's clothes  
to plagiarize another person's ideas

**STEAL** to steal someone's heart  
to cause a person to fall in love with one

**STEAL** *to steal someone's thunder*  
to take credit for another person's good work (refers to a dispute over the copying of a machine invented by a 17th-century dramatist to reproduce the sound of thunder during a play)

**STEAL** *to steal the show*  
to have the maximum appeal to those watching

**STEAL** *to steal the spotlight*  
to set out to be the center of attention

**STEAM** *full steam ahead!*  
get going as fast as possible!

**STEAM** *to develop a head of steam*  
to gain momentum

**STEAM** *to let off steam*  
to engage in noisy or robust activity as a form of relaxation

**STEAM** *to lose steam*  
to slow down

**STEAM** *to run out of steam*  
to lose one's energy and enthusiasm

**STEAM** *under one's own steam*  
without external help

**STEAMROLL** *to steamroll something through*  
to use enormous force to achieve an objective

**STEEL** *to be a man of steel*  
to be a person with moral courage

**STEEL** *to have nerves of steel*  
not to be easily frightened

**STEEL** *to steel one's heart against something*  
to determine that, notwithstanding one's natural compassion, something shall not happen

**STEM** *to stem the hemorrhage*  
to put a stop to the financial losses of a project

**STEM** *to stem the tide*  
to make progress against something

**STEP** *a step in the right direction*  
the first in a series of measures designed to correct some problem

**STEP** *a stepping stone*  
a means to an end

**STEP** *by small steps*  
gradually

**STEP** *step by step*  
gradually

**STEP** *to follow in someone's footsteps*  
to do as another person did

**STEP** *to get in step with someone*  
to do as another person does

**STEP** *to overstep the mark*  
to fail to observe the proprieties

**STEP** *to step down*  
to retire from some position

**STEP** *to step into the ring*  
to enter a competitive environment

**STEP** *to step out of line*  
to infringe accepted rules of behavior

**STEP** *to take a giant step forward*  
to make a significant advance

**STEP** *to take a step backward*  
to move farther away from one's goal

**STEP** *to step on someone's corns*  
to upset another person by interfering in his area of responsibility

**STEP** *to step on someone's toes*  
to upset another person by interfering in his area of responsibility

**STEP** *to watch one's step*  
to be on the lookout for danger or to set out to improve one's behavior

**STEW** *to be in a stew*  
to be in difficulties

**STEW** *to stew in one's juice*  
to suffer the adverse consequences of one's acts or omissions

**STICK** *a cobbler should stick to his last*

every person should confine himself to activities for which he has been trained

**STICK** *a stick-in-the-mud*  
an unenterprising person

**STICK** *any stick to beat a dog*  
any excuse will do if it serves one's purpose

**STICK** *it sticks in my throat*  
I find it galling

**STICK** *not to have the wherewithal to rub two sticks together*  
to be very poor

**STICK** *some mud will stick*  
reputations will be hurt even after accusations are proved false

**STICK** *speak softly and carry a big stick*

be polite to your potential enemies but maintain an active and visible defense capability (from a speech by Theodore Roosevelt in 1901)

**STICK** *sticks and carrots*  
disincentives and incentives in combination (refers to the handling of donkeys)

**STICK** *the words stuck in my throat*  
I just could not get myself to say the intended words

**STICK** *to be a good old stick*  
to be a kind and thoughtful person

**STICK** *to be better than a poke in the eye with a burnt stick*  
to be particularly welcome

**STICK** *to be in a cleft stick*  
to be in a dilemma

**STICK** *to be more than one can poke a stick at*  
to be more than can reasonably be handled

**STICK** *to be on the losing end of the stick*

to be worse off while the other party to a transaction becomes correspondingly better off

**STICK** *to be unable to keep people away with a big stick*  
to be faced with a large crowd or much demand

**STICK** *to get stuck into some problem*  
to attempt to solve a problem with great vigor

**STICK** *to get stuck into someone*  
to castigate a person

**STICK** *to give someone a bit of stick*  
to mildly criticize a person

**STICK** *to hold the wrong end of the stick*  
to be completely mistaken about something

**STICK** *to stand over someone with a big stick*  
to intimidate a person in order to get him to act in a particular way

**STICK** *to stick a knife into someone*  
to act vindictively toward a person

**STICK** *to stick one's neck out*  
to have the courage of one's convictions or to take a calculated risk

**STICK** *to stick out a mile*  
to be very apparent

**STICK** *to stick to one's game*  
to confine oneself to activities in areas in which one has knowledge and expertise

**STICK** *to stick to one's guns*  
to continue to hold certain beliefs notwithstanding opposition by others

**STICK** *to wield a big stick*  
to exert power

**STICKY** *a sticky patch*  
a period fraught with difficulties

**STICKY** to be a sticky beak  
to show excessive curiosity into matters not of one's concern

**STICKY** to be on a sticky wicket  
to face some difficulties

**STICKY** to come to a sticky end  
to endure an unpleasant fate

**STICKY** to have sticky fingers  
to be dishonest

**STIFF** a stiff upper lip  
obstinate courage in the face of pain or adversity

**STIFF** stiff cheese!

circumstances which may be unwelcome but which will not be altered and in respect of which no great sympathy is felt

**STILL** still waters run deep  
a person with a quiet manner may have a surprisingly great knowledge of a subject

**STING** to be the sting in the tail  
to be the unexpected unpleasant conclusion

**STIR** to stir a finger  
to make some minimum effort

**STIR** to stir a hand  
to volunteer assistance

**STIR** to stir the possum  
to set out to raise controversial issues

**STIR** to stir the pot  
to set out to raise controversial issues

**STIR** to stir up a hornet's nest  
to take action which results in unpleasant side-effects

**STITCH** a stitch in time saves nine  
preventive maintenance saves money in the long run

**STITCH** to have someone in stitches  
to greatly amuse a person

**STITCH** to stitch up a deal  
to successfully conclude a deal

**STOCK** lock, stock and barrel  
entirely

**STOCK** to be a blue-chip stock  
to be of excellent quality

**STOCK** to take stock  
to contemplate the alternatives

**STOKE** to stoke the fires  
to provoke a violent reaction

**STOMACH** someone's eyes are bigger than his stomach  
a person is unrealistic

**STOMACH** to have butterflies in one's stomach  
a feeling of anxiety

**STOMACH** to have no stomach for something  
to have no taste or fortitude for something

**STONE** a milestone  
an achievement

**STONE** a stepping stone  
a means to an end

**STONE** cornerstone  
key ingredient

**STONE** people in glass houses should not throw stones  
those who are less than perfect are foolish to criticize others

**STONE** the touchstone  
the standard

**STONE** to draw blood from a stone  
to do the impossible

**STONE** to have a heart of stone  
to be unfeeling

**STONE** to kill some proposal stone dead  
to abandon some proposal completely

**STONE** to kill two birds with one stone  
to achieve a second objective in the course of achieving the first objective

**STONE** to leave no stone unturned  
to be very thorough

**STONE** *within a stone's throw*  
very close

**STONEWALLING** *stonewalling*  
deliberate obstruction or delaying tactics

**STOOL** *to fall between two stools*  
not to fit neatly into either of two  
available alternatives and waver be-  
tween them

**STOP** *a whistlestop tour*  
a hurried (especially ceremonial) visit  
to many places

**STOP** *heart-stopping*  
exciting

**STOP** *the buck stops here*  
I accept full responsibility (sign on  
the desk of Harry S. Truman when  
president of the United States)

**STOP** *to be stopped in one's tracks*  
suddenly and unexpectedly to be  
prevented from carrying on with a  
project

**STOP** *to come to a full stop*  
to completely cease activity

**STOP** *to pull out all stops*  
to make maximum effort

**STOP** *to stop up one hole in a sieve*  
to do something quite useless

**STOP** *when the music stops*  
suddenly and soon (refers to an im-  
minent crisis leading to some resolu-  
tion of a matter, as in a game of  
musical chairs)

**STORAGE** *to put something into*  
*cold storage*  
to put something aside for dealing  
with at some indeterminate future time

**STORE** *to take over the store*  
to assume the management

**STORM** *any port in a storm*  
anything which helps to avoid diffi-  
culties is welcome

**STORM** *the calm before the storm*  
the quiet period before an expected or  
inevitable crisis

**STORM** *there are black clouds on*  
*the horizon*  
bad news is expected

**STORM** *to barnstorm*  
to visit accompanied by a show of  
force

**STORM** *to be in the eye of the storm*  
to be at the center of a controversy

**STORM** *to brainstorm*  
to pool thoughts in the course of a  
session designed to generate fresh ideas  
and especially to build upon the ideas  
of others

**STORM** *to create a storm*  
to kick up a fuss

**STORM** *to ride out the storm*  
to come safely through some danger-  
ous situation

**STORM** *to run into a firestorm*  
to be faced with many protests

**STORM** *to take someone by storm*  
to captivate an audience

**STORM** *to weather the storm*  
to come safely through a crisis

**STORMY** *to be a stormy petrel*  
a person who disturbs a pleasant state  
of affairs by agitating for change

**STORY** *a cock and bull story*  
an explanation which is completely  
unbelievable and unacceptable

**STORY** *a tall story*  
an interesting but untrue and unbe-  
lievable tale

**STRAIGHT** *a straight face*  
a facial expression which does not  
reveal one's thoughts in a humorous  
situation

**STRAIGHT** *a straight shooter*  
a person who is frank and outspoken

**STRAIGHT** *straight from the*  
*shoulder*  
bluntly

**STRAIGHT** to be on the straight and narrow

to be completely honest

**STRAIGHT** to jump straight in at the deep end

to do something without a proper lead in

**STRAIGHT** to maintain a straight bat

to be efficient

**STRAIN** to strain at a gnat

to be scrupulous about trifles

**STRAIT** in dire straits

in great need

**STRAIT** strait-laced

puritanical

**STRAIT** to keep someone in a straitjacket

to deny a person any discretionary powers at all

**STRANGLE** to strangle some discussion

to cut off some unfinished discussion

**STRANGLEHOLD** a stranglehold

a firm grip on a commercial situation, effectively freezing out a competitor

**STRAP** to hit the straps

to really get going

**STRAW** one can't make bricks without straw

one cannot achieve results in the absence of adequate resources

**STRAW** straws in the wind

unofficial preliminary indications of something likely to be formally revealed soon

**STRAW** the final straw

the latest step, which, when added to a large number of seemingly harmless previous steps, sets off a disaster resulting from the cumulative effect

**STRAW** the straw which broke the camel's back

the latest step, which, when added to a large number of seemingly harmless previous steps, sets off a disaster resulting from the cumulative effect

**STRAW** to be a man of straw

to have no assets while giving a contrary appearance

**STRAW** to buy straw hats in winter

to buy in a depressed market when most other people are sellers

**STRAW** to clasp at straws

to have a hopeless case but show unjustified optimism on noting minor positive features

**STRAW** to draw the short straw

to be the one appointed to do something

**STREAM** mainstream

orthodox

**STREAM** to get on stream

to now operate successfully following the end of a settling-in period

**STREAM** to swap horses in midstream

to change direction during the course of a project

**STREET** a one-way street

a flow of activity in only one direction

**STREET** not to be in the same street as someone

not to be of comparable quality

**STREET** the man in the street

the average citizen

**STREET** there is blood in the streets

much damage has been done to a cause

**STREET** to be in Queer Street

to be in debt

**STREET** to be streets ahead

to outperform one's competitors by a wide margin

**STREET** to be up one's alley  
to be right within a person's expertise or area of interest

**STREET** to walk in off the street  
to come without prior arrangement or notification

**STRENGTH** to be a tower of strength  
to be a person who supports and comforts another

**STRENGTHEN** to strengthen someone's hand  
to give a person additional authority or greater moral support or more facts to support his case

**STRETCH** to enter the home stretch  
to commence the last stage

**STREW** to be on a path strewn with roses  
to lead a very pleasant life

**STRICTLY** that is strictly for the birds  
that is blatant and naive nonsense

**STRIDE** to hit one's stride  
to settle down to some task

**STRIDE** to take something in one's stride  
to cope with something easily

**STRIKE** it strikes me  
it occurs to me

**STRIKE** to be thunderstruck  
to be amazed

**STRIKE** to be within striking distance  
to be fairly close

**STRIKE** to strike a blow  
to resume work

**STRIKE** to strike a blow for some principle  
to work toward the attainment of some principle

**STRIKE** to strike a chord  
to sound familiar or recall something to mind

**STRIKE** to strike a responsive chord  
to get a favorable reaction to a proposal

**STRIKE** to strike a snag  
to encounter a difficulty

**STRIKE** to strike at the roots of something  
to work toward the destruction of something

**STRIKE** to strike gold  
to have one's efforts suddenly rewarded by great success

**STRIKE** to strike pay dirt  
to become successful

**STRIKE** to strike the right chord  
to appeal successfully to someone's emotions

**STRIKE** to strike the right key  
to find the appropriate solution

**STRIKE** to strike the right note  
to make a good impression

**STRIKE** to strike while the iron is hot  
to take advantage of a situation which cannot last

**STRING** to be tied to someone's apron strings  
to be excessively influenced by a female

**STRING** to have a second string to one's bow  
to have an additional qualification appropriate to the task

**STRING** to have strings attached  
to be subject to conditions

**STRING** to hold the purse strings  
to have control of expenditures

**STRING** to pull at one's heart strings  
to affect one emotionally

**STRING** to pull strings  
to use one's special influence with those in a position to make favorable decisions which might otherwise not be forthcoming

**STRING** to tighten the purse strings  
to reduce outlays

**STRIBE** to earn one's stripes  
to deserve promotion

**STROKE** a master stroke  
particularly brilliant action

**STROKE** with a stroke of the pen  
by edict

**STUFF** to be hot stuff  
to be skillful or very passionate

**STUFFING** to knock the stuffing out  
of someone  
to completely demoralize a person

**STUMBLE** stumbling block  
an impediment or difficulty preventing  
the easy completion of some project or a dilemma involving a moral issue

**STUMPS** until stumps are drawn  
until the project ends (refers to cricket)

**SUCK** suck it and see  
discover experimentally how something works

**SUCK** to suck someone in  
to embroil an innocent party in an unethical enterprise

**SUCK** to suck the lemon dry  
to get the maximum advantage out of some favorable situation

**SUCK** to teach one's grandmother  
how to suck eggs  
to try to tell a much more experienced person something very obvious to him

**SUDDEN** sudden death  
instantaneously or without phasing in

**SUGAR** to sugar the pill  
to cause something to be more acceptable

**SUIT** one's long suit  
one's main skills

**SUIT** to follow suit  
to do the same as others

**SUMMER** one swallow does not make a summer  
much further evidence is desirable before any action taken

**SUN** a place in the sun  
a favorable situation

**SUN** everything under the sun  
everything

**SUN** the sun has set on something  
something has concluded

**SUN** to make hay while the sun shines  
to utilize an opportunity before it disappears

**SUP** he must have a long spoon that sups with the devil  
great care is needed when negotiating deals with disreputable parties

**SUPPER** to sing for one's supper  
to carry out a task in order to receive a favor in return

**SURE** sure-fire  
guaranteed

**SURFACE** on the surface  
on the basis of a superficial first impression

**SURFACE** to only scratch the surface  
to deal with only a small portion of a much larger whole

**SWALLOW** one swallow does not make a summer  
much further evidence is desirable before any action taken

**SWALLOW** someone has swallowed a dictionary  
a person uses excessively long words

**SWALLOW** to be a bitter pill to swallow  
to be a great humiliation and disappointment which have to be endured

**SWALLOW** to be hard to swallow  
not to be readily acceptable

**SWALLOW** to swallow one's pride  
to take action despite the humiliating nature of this course

**SWALLOW** to swallow the bait  
to succumb to a temptation deliberately put in one's way

**SWALLOW** to swallow the line  
to accept as truth the story being proffered

**SWAMP** to swamp someone  
to overload a person

**SWAN** swan song  
last appearance before retirement

**SWAP** to swap horses in midstream  
to change direction during the course of a project

**SWARM** to swarm out  
to gather in large numbers

**SWEAT** blood, sweat and tears  
hard work and much effort

**SWEAT** no sweat  
this presents no difficulty

**SWEAT** to be in a cold sweat  
to be afraid

**SWEAT** to sweat it out  
to await one's fate calmly

**SWEEP** a clean sweep  
the complete removal in an election of all sitting members

**SWEEP** to sweep someone off her feet  
to cause a person to lose all discernment

**SWEEP** to sweep something under the carpet  
to pretend that some blemish does not exist

**SWEET** a rose by any other name would smell as sweet  
the form does not affect the substance (from Shakespeare's ROMEO AND JULIET)

**SWEET** to be short and sweet  
to be very brief and to the point

**SWEETEN** to sweeten a deal  
to offer some concessions or incentives

**SWEETEN** to sweeten the pot  
to provide a few additional inducements

**SWEETHEART** a sweetheart deal  
an agreement negotiated in private without full regard to the interests of those affected

**SWELL** a swelled head  
an exaggerated idea of one's abilities or status

**SWIM** it is a case of sink or swim  
the attempt is worthwhile, despite the risk of failure

**SWIM** to be in the swim  
to be a member of a group knowing what is going on

**SWIM** to swim against the tide  
to take up a minority position

**SWINE** to cast pearls before swine  
to confer valuable benefits on someone who neither recognizes nor appreciates them

**SWING** the swing of the pendulum  
the alternation of voter acceptance between opposing political parties

**SWING** there is no room to swing a cat  
this place is very small (actually refers to a cat-o'-nine-tails)

**SWING** to be in full swing  
to be very active

**SWING** to swing the lead  
to cheat an employer by not working while being paid to do so

**SWING** what one loses on the swings one gains on the roundabouts  
there are advantages and disadvantages which offset each other

**SWIPE** to take a swipe at someone  
to attempt to embarrass a person for something that person has done

**SWOOP** in one fell swoop  
all at the same time

**SWORD** to be a two-edged sword  
to involve both advantages and disadvantages of similar significance

**SWORD** to cross swords with someone  
to have a disagreement with another person

**SWORD** to have a sword of Damocles hanging over one  
to be in imminent danger despite normal activity going on all around one

**SWORD** to hold a sword at someone's throat  
to exert undue pressure on another person in an endeavor to achieve a result which would otherwise not be forthcoming

**SYRUP** soothing syrup  
insincere expressions of sympathy or flattery

**SYSTEM** to be all systems "“go”"  
to go ahead as fast as possible

## T

**T** to a t  
exactly

**T** to dot the i's and cross the t's  
to be meticulous in completing the documentation for a transaction

**TAB** to keep tabs on something  
to monitor something

**TABLE** to lay a proposal on the table  
to make a proposal available for discussion or to adjourn discussion on a proposal for an indefinite period

**TABLE** to lay one's cards on the table  
to be utterly frank and open or to honestly disclose one's position

**TABLE** to put money on the table  
to back one's judgment in a tangible way or to demonstrate one's sincerity

**TABLE** to turn the tables on someone

to cause the relative positions of oneself and another person to be reversed

**TACK** to be on the wrong tack  
to be using an incorrect procedure or policy

**TACK** to change tack  
to alter one's direction

**TACK** to get down to brass tacks  
to discuss the aspects which really matter

**TACKLE** to tackle someone head-on  
to confront a person

**TAIL** bright-eyed and bushy-tailed  
naive but enthusiastic

**TAIL** heads I win—tails you lose  
whichever way this matter goes I will benefit at your expense

**TAIL** in two shakes of a duck's tail  
in an instant

**TAIL** the tail end of something  
the very end of something

**TAIL** the tail wagging the dog  
a minor aspect with disproportionate effect on a major aspect

**TAIL** to be the sting in the tail  
to be the unexpected unpleasant conclusion

**TAIL** to be unable to make head or tail of something  
to be unable to understand how something functions or what something means

**TAIL** to get off one's tail  
to stir oneself from one's inertia

**TAIL** to grab the devil by the tail  
to face up to difficulties

**TAIL** to hang onto someone's coat-tails  
to excessively rely on another person's initiatives

**TAIL** to have a tiger by the tail  
to be involved in an activity which is much more dangerous than one had realized

**TAIL** to have one's tail between one's legs  
to show great humility in the light of a backing down

**TAIL** to trail one's coat-tails  
to invite a quarrel

**TAIL** to wait two shakes of a lamb's tail  
to wait just a few moments

**TAIL** with his tail between his legs  
contritely

**TAILEND** tailend Charlie  
a person who habitually comes last

**TAILOR** to tailor something  
to do something in a way which has regard to the specific needs or preferences of a particular person

**TAILSPIN** tailspin  
very fast fall

**TALE** a telltale sign  
a visible indication revealing true facts despite efforts at concealment

**TALE** an old wives' tale  
a traditionally-held theory without any scientific backing

**TALE** to tell tales out of school  
to deliberately leak a secret

**TALK** talk of the devil  
here is the person we were just discussing

**TALK** to talk shop  
to discuss business or professional matters on a social occasion

**TALK** to talk turkey  
to talk realistically

**TALL** a tall poppy  
a person with great power or responsibility and/or in receipt of high remuneration

**TALL** a tall story  
an interesting but untrue and unbelievable tale

**TALL** tall oaks from little acorns grow  
even major enterprises have to have small beginnings (from "Lines written for a School Declamation" by David Everett)

**TALL** to be a tall order  
to be an unreasonable expectation

**TALL** to cut tall poppies down to size  
to humiliate haughty persons

**TALLY** to keep a tally  
to keep a record (refers to a piece of wood with notches made on it to indicate a count)

**TANGENT** to go off at a tangent  
to depart from the main matter under consideration and follow instead some other matter only marginally related to it

**TANGLE** a tangled web  
a series of lies, especially with inconsistencies leading to exposure (from Sir Walter Scott's MARMION)

**TANGO** it takes two to tango  
some activities cannot be carried out single-handedly

**TAP** to be on tap  
to be readily available on request

**TAP** to turn off the tap  
to deny further access to supplies or information

**TAPE** red tape  
excessively bureaucratic procedures

**TAR** to be tarred with the same brush  
to be damned merely because of one's association with another person

**TAR** to have a touch of the tarbrush  
to be not quite a full-blood Caucasian

**TAR** to spoil the ship for a ha'p'orth of tar

to engage in a false economy (the current word "ship" is actually a mistake for the original word "sheep" and the tar refers to the treatment of wounds)

**TARGET** a moving target

an objective subject to constant revision

**TARGET** target

objective

**TARGET** to zero in on a target

to move directly toward one's objective

**TARNISH** to tarnish one's image

to become less highly regarded

**TASTE** to be left with a nasty taste in one's mouth

to be appalled or very disappointed at another person's unethical behavior to one

**TASTE** to get a taste of one's own medicine

to suffer from an initiative intended to affect only other persons

**TAT** tit for tat

reprisals

**TATTER** in tatters

utterly destroyed

**TEA** I would not do so-and-so for all the tea in China

I will never do so-and-so

**TEA** not to be someone's cup of tea

to be outside a person's expertise or area of interest

**TEACH** one cannot teach an old dog new tricks

people get irreversibly set in their ways

**TEACH** to teach one's grandmother how to suck eggs

to try to tell a much more experienced person something very obvious to him

**TEACH** to teach someone a lesson to inflict something unpleasant on a person in the hope that it will lead to a change in his behavior

**TEACUP** a tempest in a teacup a controversy about a minor matter but one which looms large in the minds of the parties

**TEAM** a cricket team

eleven people

**TEAR** blood, sweat and tears

hard work and much effort

**TEAR** that's torn it

that has foiled the proposal

**TEAR** to almost drive someone to tears

to present information designed to make another person express sympathy not warranted by the facts

**TEAR** to bore someone to tears

to greatly weary a person by dull and uninteresting conversation or by lack of action

**TEAR** to shed a quiet tear for something

to lament the passing of something

**TEAR** to shed crocodile tears

to be a hypocrite

**TEAR** to tear one's hair out

to be agitated

**TEAR** to tear oneself away

to leave despite a great desire to stay

**TEAR** to tear someone apart

to ruthlessly destroy another person's case

**TEAR** to tear something to ribbons to damage something severely

**TELEGRAPH** to telegraph one's punches

by one's actions to give advance warning of one's future plans

**TELL** a telltale sign

a visible indication revealing true facts despite efforts at concealment

**TELL** if I've told you once I've told you a thousand times

I express resentment at the need to constantly repeat some statement

**TELL** tell it to the marines  
such nonsense is not believable

**TELL** to tell tales out of school  
to deliberately leak a secret

**TEMPEST** a tempest in a teacup  
a controversy about a minor matter  
but one which looms large in the minds of the parties

**TEN** to be only ten pence in the shilling  
to be slightly stupid

**TEN** not to touch something with a ten-foot pole  
to go out of one's way to avoid something

**TENDER** to be a tender spot  
to be a subject on which a person is touchy

**TENT** to quietly fold up one's tent  
to surreptitiously abandon a previously-cherished stance

**TENTACLE** tentacles  
strong and unpleasant influence extending a long way from its base and in many directions

**TENTERHOOK** to be on tenterhooks  
to anxiously await some result

**TERRIBLE** an enfant terrible  
a person who raises pertinent but unpalatable issues (French, "little terror")

**TEST** a litmus test  
an event which allows the outcome of future events to be predicted more accurately

**TEST** to be the acid test  
to establish something beyond doubt

**TEST** to road test something  
to try something out under real conditions

**TEST** to test the water  
to try out an idea in a small way

**TETHER** to be at the end of one's tether

to be frustrated by a lack of knowledge, authority or patience

**THAMES** to set the Thames on fire  
to do something noteworthy

**THANK** one can thank one's lucky stars  
one was extremely fortunate

**THEME** variations on a theme  
alternative approaches in similar vein

**THERE** to be neither here nor there  
to be irrelevant or unimportant

**THICK** through thick and thin  
regardless of any obstacles

**THICK** to be in the thick of things  
to get involved at the center of some activity

**THICK** to come in thick and fast  
to arrive quickly and in great volume

**THICK** to have a thick skin  
to be impervious to criticism

**THICK** to have the hide of a rhinoceros  
to be totally unaffected by and unresponsive to valid criticism

**THICK** to penetrate someone's thick skull  
to make a person understand something difficult or acknowledge something unwelcome

**THIMBLE** a pea and thimble trick  
a clever fraud committed in the presence of its victim without this being obvious at the time

**THIN** that argument is wearing a bit thin  
that is a very weak case

**THIN** through thick and thin  
regardless of any obstacles

**THIN** to be the thin edge of the wedge

by conceding a small point to create an undesirable precedent for much larger issues

**THIN** to be thin on the ground to be scarce

**THIN** to produce something out of thin air

to get hold of something in circumstances where this seemed impossible

**THIN** to skate on thin ice

to act in disregard of obvious danger

**THIN** to spread oneself thin

to attempt to do more than is feasible in the available time

**THIN** to tread the thin line

cautiously to take action in circumstances where either too much or too little will cause difficulties

**THIN** to vanish into thin air

unexpectedly to disappear

**THING** to be in the thick of things

to get involved at the center of some activity

**THINK** one shudders to think what the outcome might be

there is great concern as to the outcome

**THINK** to put one's thinking cap on

to concentrate on finding a solution to a difficult problem

**THINK** to think twice before doing something

to consider with particular care

**THINLY** thinly-veiled

barely concealed

**THIRD** to give someone the third degree

to apply pressure while questioning closely a person under suspicion

**THIRST** to thirst for blood

to be eager for revenge

**THOMAS** a doubting Thomas

a person who refuses to believe claims in the absence of proof (John 20:25)

**THORN** a rose between two thorns

something beautiful in the midst of ugliness

**THORN** to be a thorn in someone's flesh

to be a person whose persistent presence and righteous views annoy

**THORN** to wear one's crown of thorns

to have one's own difficulties (John 19:5)

**THOUSAND** a sixty-four thousand dollar question

a pertinent but very difficult question (refers to a TV quiz show in which an initial prize doubles with the successful answering of progressively more difficult questions)

**THOUSAND** a thousand and one many

**THOUSAND** if I've told you once I've told you a thousand times

I express resentment at the need to constantly repeat some statement

**THREAD** the thread

the connecting link of a set of arguments

**THREAD** to hang by a slender thread

to only just survive

**THREE** a three-card trick

a ruse used by a dishonest person in order to induce his victims to hand over some of their assets

**THREE** yes sir—yes sir—three bags full!

(in servile response to some request) yes, very willingly!

**THROAT** cut-throat

highly competitive

**THROAT** *it sticks in my throat*

I find it galling

**THROAT** *the words stuck in my throat*

I just could not get myself to say the intended words

**THROAT** *to be at each other's throats*

to be always fighting

**THROAT** *to cut one's own throat*

to act in a way which damages one's own interests

**THROAT** *to have a lump in one's throat*

to feel emotional

**THROAT** *to have someone by the throat*

to claim victory over an opponent

**THROAT** *to hold a knife at someone's throat*

to exert undue pressure on another person in an endeavor to achieve a result which would otherwise not be forthcoming

**THROAT** *to hold a sword at someone's throat*

to exert undue pressure on another person in an endeavor to achieve a result which would otherwise not be forthcoming

**THROAT** *to jump down someone's throat*

to react angrily to the remarks of the other party to a conversation

**THROAT** *to ram something down someone's throat*

to pressure another person into accepting an idea with which he does not agree

**THRONE** *the power behind the throne*

a person exercising the real authority but without having the official right to do so (the antonym of "titular head")

**THROUGH** *a breakthrough*

success in overcoming resistance to a proposal

**THROUGH** *to fall through*

not to eventuate as expected

**THROW** *people in glass houses*

*should not throw stones*

those who are less than perfect are foolish to criticize others

**THROW** *to be the throw of a loaded die*

to be an act of deceit

**THROW** *to throw a blanket over a proposal*

to refuse to proceed with a proposal

**THROW** *to throw a cat among the pigeons*

to cause consternation by revealing an unpleasant and unexpected fact

**THROW** *to throw a long shadow*

to have wide-spread ramifications

**THROW** *to throw a pebble against the window*

to gently draw attention to oneself

**THROW** *to throw a spanner into the works*

to cause an unexpected complication

**THROW** *to throw a sprat to catch a mackerel*

to risk a little in the hope of gaining much

**THROW** *to throw brickbats at someone*

to express displeasure with a person

**THROW** *to throw down the gauntlet*

to issue a challenge (refers to the glove worn by a knight)

**THROW** *to throw dust into someone's eyes*

to deceive a person by presenting inaccurate or misleading information

**THROW** *to throw good money after bad*

to waste further money in a vain attempt to recover money already lost

**THROW** to throw in one's hand  
to give in or to give up

**THROW** to throw in the towel  
to concede defeat

**THROW** to throw one's cap into the air  
to celebrate some achievement

**THROW** to throw one's hat into the air  
to express joy

**THROW** to throw one's weight about  
to use one's real or imagined status in order to achieve certain results

**THROW** to throw out the baby with the bathwater  
to discard a major benefit in the course of obtaining a comparatively minor advantage

**THROW** to throw someone a bone  
to fob a person off with a symbolic but unimportant gesture

**THROW** to throw someone a few crumbs  
to fob a person off with a few symbolic but unimportant concessions

**THROW** to throw someone in the shade  
to surpass a person

**THROW** to throw someone off the scent  
to deceive a person by giving out misleading indications

**THROW** to throw someone to the lions  
to abandon a person

**THROW** to throw someone to the wolves  
to expose a person to exploitation by more sophisticated persons

**THROW** to throw something into a shambles  
to make something messy and useless

**THROW** to throw something out of the window  
to completely reject an idea or proposal

**THROW** to throw something to the dogs  
to sacrifice something

**THROW** to throw the book at someone  
to prosecute a person with all the vigor allowed by law

**THROW** to throw up one's hands  
to express disgust

**THROW** to throw up the sponge  
to concede defeat

**THROW** within a stone's throw  
very close

**THUD** to come down with a thud  
to be suddenly disillusioned

**THUMB** a rule of thumb  
a simple yet useful approximation

**THUMB** a thumbnail sketch  
brief but pertinent details

**THUMB** someone's fingers are all thumbs  
a person is clumsy with his hands

**THUMB** to be under someone's thumb  
to be dominated by a person

**THUMB** to give a thumbs up  
to approve or grant permission (refers to sign given by Roman emperor sparing a life)

**THUMB** to thumb one's nose at someone

to show one's contempt for someone in authority and to ostentatiously disregard his orders

**THUMB** to twiddle one's thumbs  
not to be involved in any worthwhile activity

**THUMP** a tub thumper  
a preacher who rants and raves

**THUNDER** to be thunderstruck  
to be amazed

**THUNDER** *to steal someone's thunder*

to take credit for another person's good work (refers to a dispute over the copying of a machine invented by a 17th-century dramatist to reproduce the sound of thunder during a play)

**THUNDERBOLT** *a thunderbolt*  
a surprise

**TICK** *what makes someone tick*  
what causes a person to act as he does

**TICKET** *just the ticket*  
just what is needed

**TICKET** *that's the ticket!*  
that is the proper thing to do

**TICKET** *to write one's own ticket*  
to set one's own terms and conditions

**TICKLE** *to be tickled pink*  
to be very pleased

**TICKLE** *to tickle the Peter*  
to rob one's employer

**TICKLISH** *ticklish*  
awkward, requiring delicate handling

**TIDE** *the tide has turned*  
conditions have changed

**TIDE** *the tide is running in favor of some proposition*  
public opinion supports some proposition

**TIDE** *to be caught by the tide*  
to be dealt with by something inevitable

**TIDE** *to stem the tide*  
to make progress against something

**TIDE** *to swim against the tide*  
to take up a minority position

**TIDE** *to turn the tide*  
to reverse the direction of something

**TIE** *to be tied down*  
to have responsibilities precluding alternative activities

**TIE** *to be tied to someone's apron strings*

to be excessively influenced by a female

**TIE** *to be tied up*  
to be engaged

**TIE** *to tie in with something*  
to be consistent with something

**TIE** *to tie someone's hands*  
to prevent a person from acting as he sees fit

**TIE** *to tie someone's hands behind his back*  
to make it impossible for a person to act at all

**TIE** *to tie something up*  
to finalize the arrangements for something

**TIE** *to tie the knot*  
to marry

**TIE** *to tie up the loose ends*  
to complete the minor outstanding items of some substantially finished project

**TIGER** *a paper tiger*  
an empty threat

**TIGER** *a toothless tiger*  
an authority which has been given totally inadequate powers for its task

**TIGER** *to have a tiger by the tail*  
to be involved in an activity which is much more dangerous than one had realized

**TIGHT** *a tight rein*  
strong controls

**TIGHT** *a watertight contract*  
a contract without loopholes or escape clauses

**TIGHT** *tight-fisted*  
stingy

**TIGHT** *to be in a tight corner*  
to experience a crisis

**TIGHT** to be tight-lipped  
to keep confidences or to be uncommunicative

**TIGHT** to run a tight ship  
to manage an efficient organization

**TIGHT** to sit tight  
obstinately to do nothing

**TIGHTEN** to tighten one's belt  
to lower one's rate of spending

**TIGHTEN** to tighten the noose  
to get closer to inflicting defeat

**TIGHTEN** to tighten the purse strings  
to reduce outlays

**TIGHTEN** to tighten the screw  
to increase the moral and psychological pressure

**TIGHTROPE** to walk a tightrope  
to do something very dangerous

**TILL** to have one's fingers in the till  
to steal from one's employer

**TIILT** to tilt at windmills  
to attack an imagined but nonexistent enemy (from Cervantes' DON QUIXOTE)

**TIME** a stitch in time saves nine  
preventive maintenance saves money in the long run

**TIME** a time bomb  
a source of serious problems which are certain to surface later on

**TIME** he would not give one the time of day  
he is unwilling to help anybody

**TIME** if I've told you once I've told you a thousand times

I express resentment at the need to constantly repeat some statement

**TIME** to live on borrowed time  
to live longer than expected

**TIME** to mark time  
to do nothing while awaiting developments

**TIN** a little tin god  
a petty tyrant

**TINKER** not worth a tinker's curse  
worthless

**TINKER** to tinker at the edges  
to make minor or cosmetic changes without affecting the substance

**TIP** it is on the tip of my tongue  
the right word has momentarily escaped me

**TIP** to be the tip of the iceberg  
to be only a very small portion of a much larger but less obvious whole

**TIP** to cling on by one's fingertips  
to have only a slender hold

**TIP** to have some subject at one's fingertips  
to be very familiar with a subject

**TIP** to tip a bucket on someone  
to point out in a humiliating way another person's faults

**TIP** to tip one's hand  
to disclose details of one's position

**TIP** to tip someone over the edge  
to cause a person to become mentally ill

**TIP** to tip the balance  
to provide further information or argument which results in an issue, which could have been decided either way, being determined in a particular way

**TIP** to tip the scales  
to be a factor which in combination with other factors results in a particular decision which would otherwise not have been reached

**TIP** to tiptoe around the difficulties  
to act as though the difficulties did not exist

**TIRE** to carry a spare tire  
to be fat

**TISSUE** only a tissue between them  
virtually equal or close together

**TIT** *tit for tat*  
reprisals

**TITANIC** *to rearrange the deckchairs on the Titanic*

to take some initiative which is quite useless because it does not take much greater change into account

**TOAST** *to have someone on toast*  
to be victorious over a person

**TOE** *a toehold*

an opportunity small in itself but with the potential to lead to bigger things

**TOE** *to dig one's toes in*

to become even more stubborn than at first

**TOE** *to dip one's toe in the water*  
to gently explore an opportunity

**TOE** *to keep someone on his toes*  
to induce a person to be efficient

**TOE** *to tiptoe around the difficulties*  
to act as though the difficulties did not exist

**TOE** *to toe the line*  
to conform

**TOE** *to tread on someone's toes*  
to upset another person by interfering in his area of responsibility

**TOKEN** *by the same token*  
by way of corroboration

**TOM** *every Tom, Dick and Harry*  
just about everybody

**TONE** *overtones*  
implied threats

**TONGS** *to go hammer and tongs*  
to do something with great energy

**TONGUE** *I could have bitten my tongue off*

I wish that I had not made such a hurtful remark

**TONGUE** *a slip of the tongue*  
incorrect words uttered accidentally

**TONGUE** *it is on the tip of my tongue*  
the right word has momentarily escaped me

**TONGUE** *to feel the rough side of someone's tongue*  
to be verbally abused by a person

**TONGUE** *to find one's tongue*  
to overcome one's shyness and speak

**TONGUE** *to have a loose tongue*  
to speak foolishly or indiscreetly

**TONGUE** *to have a sharp tongue*  
to speak one's mind in forceful language

**TONGUE** *to have a silver tongue*  
to be eloquent

**TONGUE** *to hold one's tongue*  
to keep quiet

**TONGUE** *to keep a civil tongue in one's head*  
to be polite, especially under provocation

**TONGUE** *to roll off the tongue*  
to be said very easily

**TONGUE** *to set tongues wagging*  
to behave in a way which encourages scandal mongers

**TONGUE** *to speak with forked tongues*  
to utter half-truths with the intention of misleading the listener

**TONGUE** *tongue in cheek*  
full of irony

**TONIC** *to be a tonic*  
to cheer someone up

**TOOL** *tools*  
the means to do something

**TOOTH** *a tooth for a tooth*  
retaliation (Exodus 21:24)

**TOOTH** *one would give one's eye teeth for something*  
a person would very much like to achieve some objective

**TOOTH** *teething trouble*  
problems in the early stages of a project

**TOOTH** *to bare one's teeth*  
to imply threats

**TOOTH** *to be armed to the teeth*  
to carry many weapons

**TOOTH** *to be fed up to the back teeth*  
to be disgusted

**TOOTH** *to be long in the tooth*  
to be old

**TOOTH** *to believe in the tooth fairy*  
to be particularly gullible

**TOOTH** *to cut one's teeth on something*  
to get one's first experience by doing something

**TOOTH** *to escape by the skin of one's teeth*  
to only just avoid some disaster

**TOOTH** *to fight tooth and nail*  
to strive very hard to win

**TOOTH** *to get one's teeth into something*  
to tackle a task with enthusiasm

**TOOTH** *to gnash one's teeth*  
to express frustration

**TOOTH** *to go through something with a fine-tooth comb*  
to conduct an extremely thorough investigation

**TOOTH** *to grit one's teeth*  
to get ready to suffer pain

**TOOTH** *to hang on by the skin of one's teeth*  
to only just survive

**TOOTH** *to have a sweet tooth*  
to be particularly fond of cakes and confectionery

**TOOTH** *to have teeth*  
to be effective

**TOOTH** *to kick someone in the teeth*  
to take action which demonstrates annoyance at or dislike of a person

**TOOTH** *to lie through one's teeth*  
to tell blatant untruths

**TOOTH** *to set someone's teeth on edge*  
to cause a person to feel unhappy at a situation

**TOOTH** *to take the bit between one's teeth*  
to face up to a problem

**TOOTHLESS** *a toothless tiger*  
an authority which has been given totally inadequate powers for its task

**TOP** *off the top of one's head*  
based on experience but without detailed consideration

**TOP** *the top dog*  
the person in the most powerful position

**TOP** *to be at the top of the tree*  
to be a leading member of one's profession

**TOP** *to be icing on top of the cake*  
to be an additional benefit in an already satisfactory scenario

**TOP** *to be in top gear*  
to be making excellent progress

**TOP** *to be on top of the world*  
to be very happy

**TOP** *to be over the top*  
to be quite outrageous

**TOP** *to blow one's top*  
to show anger (refers to a volcano)

**TOP** *to score top points*  
to outwit other persons

**TOP** *top drawer*  
first class

**TORCH** *to carry a torch for someone*

to act as an enthusiastic advocate of another person's cause

**TORCH** *to hand on the torch*  
to pass on accumulated knowledge

**TORPEDO** *to torpedo something*  
to make something ineffective

**TORRENT** *a torrent of words*  
a rapid and uninterrupted outpouring  
of words

**TOSS** *it is a toss-up*  
either alternative is equally acceptable

**TOSS** *to argue the toss*  
to dispute a decision

**TOSS** *to toss up*  
to decide on a fairly arbitrary basis

**TOTEM** *to be at the bottom of the*  
*totem pole*  
to be in the most junior position in  
some hierarchy

**TOUCH** *it was touch and go*  
there were considerable risks—the ob-  
jective was achieved, but only just

**TOUCH** *not to touch a hair on*  
*someone's head*  
not to harm a person

**TOUCH** *not to touch something with*  
*a ten-foot pole*  
to go out of one's way to avoid something

**TOUCH** *the Midas touch*  
attributes which cause a person's ven-  
tures to be extremely profitable (re-  
fers to King Midas of Phrygia, who  
had the power to turn everything he  
touched into gold)

**TOUCH** *the touchstone*  
the standard

**TOUCH** *to have a touch of the*  
*tarbrush*  
to be not quite a full-blood Caucasian

**TOUCH** *to lose one's touch*  
to cease to be familiar with something

**TOUCH** *to touch a nerve*  
to mention something which another  
person would rather pretend did not  
exist

**TOUCH** *to touch wood*  
it is to be hoped that our good luck  
will not go away

**TOUCHE** *touche*  
well said (French, “touched”)

**TOUR** *a Cook's tour*  
a guided tour of inspection (refers to  
Thomas Cook, the travel company)

**TOUR** *a whistlestop tour*  
a hurried (especially ceremonial) visit  
to many places

**TOUR** *tour de force*  
feat of skill or strength (French, “feat  
of strength”)

**TOWEL** *to throw in the towel*  
to concede defeat

**TOWER** *a tower of Babel*  
a noisy and confused assembly (Gen-  
esis 11)

**TOWER** *to be a tower of strength*  
to be a person who supports and  
comforts another

**TOWER** *to be in an ivory tower*  
to be immersed in theoretical consider-  
ations and ignorant of the practical  
realities (Song of Solomon 7:4)

**TOWN** *the only game in town*  
the only event worthy of attention

**TOWN** *to go to town*  
to spend lavishly

**TOWN** *to paint the town red*  
to go on an exciting social outing

**TRACE** *to kick over one's traces*  
to become insubordinate

**TRACK** *to be down the track*  
to be making progress

**TRACK** *to be off the beaten track*  
to do unconventional things

**TRACK** *to be off the track*  
to be irrelevant

**TRACK** *to be on the wrong track*  
to be heading toward an incorrect  
solution

<b>TRACK</b> to be on track	to be making the scheduled progress
<b>TRACK</b> to be stopped in one's tracks	suddenly and unexpectedly to be prevented from carrying on with a project
<b>TRACK</b> to cover one's tracks	to hide the evidence of one's involvement
<b>TRACK</b> to go down a particular track	to make decisions aimed at a particular goal
<b>TRACK</b> to have a one-track mind	to keep coming back to one narrow topic of conversation
<b>TRACK</b> to keep track of something	to be completely aware of where something is and how it is functioning
<b>TRACK</b> to make tracks	to leave
<b>TRACK</b> track record	proven performance
<b>TRADE</b> a Jack of all trades	an amateur who can turn his hand to anything
<b>TRADE</b> horsetrading	tough negotiations
<b>TRADE</b> to make something one's trademark	to earn a reputation for maintaining some stance
<b>TRAIL</b> to blaze a trail	to be the first person to do something
<b>TRAIL</b> to trail one's coat-tails	to invite a quarrel
<b>TRAIN</b> to get on a gravy train	to take steps to become a recipient of benefits which are available but undeserved
<b>TRAIN</b> to miss the train	to fail to exploit an opportunity

<b>TRAM</b> to be on the wrong tram	to be completely mistaken as to the basic facts
<b>TRAMPLE</b> to trample someone underfoot	by virtue of one's great power to treat a person's rights with contempt and not to give them proper consideration
<b>TRANSFUSION</b> to give something a blood transfusion	to give something new enthusiasm
<b>TRANSPARENT</b> transparent	(of behavior, etc.) to be easily seen as not genuine
<b>TRAP</b> a trap for young players	a good opportunity for the inexperienced or naive to make mistakes
<b>TRAP</b> to walk into a trap	to be tricked into doing something
<b>TREACHEROUS</b> to enter treacherous waters	to engage in an enterprise with risks which are not obvious
<b>TREAD</b> fools rush in where angels fear to tread	unsophisticated persons take unwise risks in circumstances where more knowledgeable persons would exercise caution
<b>TREAD</b> to tread a particular path	to take certain initiatives
<b>TREAD</b> to tread lightly	to be careful
<b>TREAD</b> to tread on someone's corns	to upset another person by interfering in his area of responsibility
<b>TREAD</b> to tread on someone's toes	to upset another person by interfering in his area of responsibility
<b>TREAD</b> to tread someone under foot	to oppress a person
<b>TREAD</b> to tread the thin line	cautiously to take action in circumstances where either too much or too little will cause difficulties

**TREADMILL** *to be on a treadmill*  
to be involved in some unpleasant ongoing activity which cannot readily be stopped

**TREASURE** *a treasure trove*  
a valuable discovery

**TREAT** *to treat someone with kid gloves*  
to handle a person with great discretion

**TREATMENT** *the red-carpet treatment*  
courtesies extended to a person to make him feel important and welcome

**TREE** *not to see the wood for the trees*  
to overlook the general picture because of undue concentration on the details

**TREE** *to bark up the wrong tree*  
to reach an incorrect conclusion

**TREE** *to be at the top of the tree*  
to be a leading member of one's profession

**TREE** *to be up a gum tree*  
to be in difficulty or at the end of one's resources

**TREE** *to be up a tree*  
to be perplexed or cornered

**TREE** *to shake a tree*  
to do something in order to see what will result

**TREMBLE** *in fear and trembling*  
in a state of apprehension

**TRENCH** *to be back in the trenches*  
to be made to carry out menial tasks

**TRICK** *a pea and thimble trick*  
a clever fraud committed in the presence of its victim without this being obvious at the time

**TRICK** *a three-card trick*  
a ruse used by a dishonest person in order to induce his victims to hand over some of their assets

**TRICK** *a whole bag of tricks*  
a series of articles or a series of artificial devices

**TRICK** *one cannot teach an old dog new tricks*  
people get irreversibly set in their ways

**TRICK** *something has done the trick*  
something has achieved the desired purpose

**TRICK** *to be unable to take a trick*  
to be unable to achieve success in anything

**TRICK** *to play monkey tricks on someone*  
to engage in discreditable behavior affecting a person

**TRICK** *to score a hat trick*  
to have three successive favorable outcomes

**TRICK** *to use every trick in the book*  
to try very hard and use every conceivable argument

**TRICKLE** *a trickle*  
a small amount, in gradual stages

**TRIGGER** *to be trigger-happy*  
to be impetuous

**TRIGGER** *trigger*  
factor responsible for certain events occurring at that particular time

**TRIM** *to trim one's sails*  
to institute austerity

**TRIM** *to trim the fat*  
to increase efficiency by reducing outlays

**TROJAN** *a Trojan horse*  
a trick (refers to a large gift horse full of soldiers used to bring about the fall of Troy, as described in Homer's ILIAD)

**TROOPER** *to be a real trooper*  
to be a person willing to try anything

**TROUBLE** *a troubleshooter*  
a person good at finding and then rectifying faults

**TROUBLE** *teething trouble*  
problems in the early stages of a project

**TROUBLE** *to fish in troubled waters*  
to profit from a disturbed situation

**TROUBLE** *to plot a safe course through troubled waters*  
to make a plan which overcomes certain difficulties

**TROUBLE** *to pour oil on troubled waters*  
to calm down a situation

**TROUBLE** *to smell trouble*  
to perceive difficulties

**TROUSERS** *to catch someone with his trousers down*  
to act when another person least expects it

**TROUSERS** *to wear the trousers*  
to be the dominant party

**TROVE** *a treasure trove*  
a valuable discovery

**TROWEL** *to lay it on with a trowel*  
to flatter

**TRUCK** *it fell off the back of a truck*  
(of goods) they were stolen; (of a politically sensitive document) it was leaked to me

**TRUCK** *to have no truck with someone*  
to refuse to deal with a person

**TRUE** *to show one's true colors*  
to disclose one's real character or beliefs

**TRUE** *true blue*  
superbly loyal

**TRUMP** *to hold the trump card*  
to be in an unbeatable position to defeat others

**TRUMP** *to play the trump card*  
to make a final move, thereby defeating one's opponents

**TRUMP** *to trump someone*  
to defeat a person

**TRUMP** *to turn up trumps*  
to finish up better than expected or to experience unexpected good luck

**TRUMPET** *to blow one's own trumpet*  
to immodestly publicize one's own attributes

**TRUMPET** *with a flourish of trumpets*  
triumphantly

**TRUST** *a sacred trust*  
a moral obligation

**TRY** *something would try the patience of Job*  
something is very vexatious (James 5:11)

**TRY** *to try something on for size*  
to cheekily do something

**TUB** *a tub thumper*  
a preacher who rants and raves

**TUBE** *to go down the tube*  
to fail

**TUCK** *to tuck something away in a drawer*  
to put something aside for the time being

**TUESDAY** *every Pancake Tuesday*  
only on rare occasions (refers to Shrove Tuesday, when pancakes are traditionally eaten)

**TUG** *a tug of war*  
a dispute in which each protagonist desires a different course of action

**TUNE** *he who pays the piper calls the tune*  
a person contributing money or resources to a project is entitled to a say in its control

**TUNE** to be in tune with someone  
to think on the same lines as another person

**TUNE** to change one's tune  
to alter one's publicly-expressed views

**TUNE** to fine-tune something  
to adjust something in order to bring it to perfection or to make it fit the circumstances in a much more appropriate fashion

**TUNE** to stay tuned  
to keep in touch for further information as it becomes available

**TUNE** to tune in  
to pay attention

**TUNNEL** to see the light at the end of the tunnel  
to be close to finalizing a long exercise

**TUNNEL** tunnel vision  
an extremely narrow and inflexible way of considering issues

**TURF** to be on one's own turf  
to engage in one's own customary area of activity

**TURK** young Turks  
members of an organization who hold ideas regarded as too revolutionary

**TURKEY** cold turkey  
the sudden cessation of drugs to an addict

**TURKEY** to talk turkey  
to talk realistically

**TURN** as soon as someone's back was turned  
at the moment it became possible to do something without a person's knowledge

**TURN** he would turn in his grave  
he would have been very surprised or displeased if he had known while still alive

**TURN** not to turn a hair  
to remain composed

**TURN** the tide has turned  
conditions have changed

**TURN** the wheel has turned  
circumstances have changed

**TURN** the wheel has turned the complete circle  
things are now back to where they were before

**TURN** the worm has turned  
a previously compliant person is now exerting his personality

**TURN** to be a turn up for the books  
to be a surprising development

**TURN** to do a U-turn  
to reverse one's thinking

**TURN** to know which way to turn  
to know which strategy to adopt or where to seek assistance

**TURN** to leave no stone unturned  
to be very thorough

**TURN** to turn a blind eye to something  
to pretend something obvious does not exist (refers to action by Nelson when disregarding Admiralty signals)

**TURN** to turn a complete somersault  
to reverse one's established policy

**TURN** to turn an honest penny  
to earn money out of odd jobs

**TURN** to turn around 180 degrees  
to completely reverse a stance

**TURN** to turn back the clock  
to have another opportunity to do something which should have been done already or to undo something which cannot be undone

**TURN** to turn green  
to become very envious

**TURN** to turn handstands  
to express great joy

**TURN** to turn off the tap  
to deny further access to supplies or information

- TURN** to turn one's back on someone  
to decline to further assist or deal with a person
- TURN** to turn one's chips in  
to convert one's assets or entitlements into cash
- TURN** to turn one's guns on someone  
to criticize a person
- TURN** to turn one's hand to something  
to tackle some project
- TURN** to turn over a new leaf  
to reform
- TURN** to turn round  
to reverse one's policy
- TURN** to turn someone on  
to excite a person
- TURN** to turn something inside out  
to examine something thoroughly
- TURN** to turn something on its ear  
to reverse something
- TURN** to turn something on its head  
to reverse something
- TURN** to turn something upside down  
to greatly revolutionize something
- TURN** to turn sour  
to become impractical or unprofitable
- TURN** to turn the corner  
to commence being successful after initial failures
- TURN** to turn the heat on something  
to intensify the investigation of some matter
- TURN** to turn the other cheek  
to show that one has not been intimidated (Matthew 5:39)
- TURN** to turn the spotlight on something  
to draw public attention to something

- TURN** to turn the tables on someone  
to cause the relative positions of oneself and another person to be reversed
- TURN** to turn the tide  
to reverse the direction of something
- TURN** to turn turtle  
to capsize
- TURN** to turn up one's nose at something  
to express one's disdain
- TURN** to turn up the heat on someone  
to increase the pressure on a person
- TURN** to turn up trumps  
to finish up better than expected or to experience unexpected good luck
- TURN** to turn white  
to express shock at unexpected news
- TURNOAT** a turncoat  
a person changing sides (refers to the practice of mercenary soldiers switching to the winning side and displaying that side's colors by turning their coats inside out)
- TURTLE** to turn turtle  
to capsize
- TWENTY** with 20/20 hindsight  
with the benefit of knowing what happened
- TWICE** to think twice before doing something  
to consider with particular care
- TWIDDLE** to twiddle one's thumbs  
not to be involved in any worthwhile activity
- TWILIGHT** twilight zone  
state of imperfect understanding
- TWIST** to twist someone around one's little finger  
by charm to get one's way
- TWIST** to twist someone's arms  
to coerce another person to do something against his will or better judgment

**TWO** *a two-horse race*  
a contest between only two serious contestants

**TWO** *for two pins I would do so-and-so*  
my tolerance is almost exhausted and I am very tempted to do so-and-so

**TWO** *in two shakes of a duck's tail*  
in an instant

**TWO** *it takes two to tango*  
some activities cannot be carried out single-handedly

**TWO** *not to have the wherewithal to rub two sticks together*  
to be very poor

**TWO** *to be a two-edged sword*  
to involve both advantages and disadvantages of similar significance

**TWO** *to be of two minds*  
to be undecided between two alternatives

**TWO** *to have two bob each way*  
to equivocate

**TWO** *to have two left feet*  
to be clumsy

**TWO** *to kill two birds with one stone*  
to achieve a second objective in the course of achieving the first objective

**TWO** *to knock two heads together*  
to make two persons come to their senses and deal with each other

**TWO** *to put two and two together*  
to reach a conclusion by combining isolated pieces of information

**TWO** *to take someone down a peg or two*  
to point out to a person that he is not as good as he thinks he is

**TWO** *to throw in one's two cents' worth*  
to modestly supply one's own facts or views

**TWO** *to wait two shakes of a lamb's tail*  
to wait just a few moments

**TWO** *two can play at that game*  
it is possible to retaliate

**TWO** *two men and a dog*  
very few people

**TWO** *two-faced*  
insincere

**TWOPENNY** *a twopenny halfpenny outfit*  
a quite insignificant operation

## U

**U-TURN** *to do a U-turn*  
to reverse one's thinking

**UGLY** *an ugly duckling*  
a person initially thought unintelligent who develops and becomes brilliant (refers to a cygnet in a brood of ducks in a children's story of that name by Hans Christian Andersen)

**UGLY** *to rear its ugly head*  
to make an unwelcome appearance

**UMBRELLA** *an umbrella*  
protection; or something all-embracing

**UMBRELLA** *under the umbrella of some organization*  
under the auspices of some organization

**UNCHARTED** *to be in uncharted waters*  
to be the first to experience something

**UNCLE** *Bob's your uncle*  
that solves the problem

**UNDER** *to have the plug pulled out from under one*  
to have a successful activity destroyed by the actions of someone else

**UNDERBELLY** *to have a soft underbelly*  
to have a weakness which can be exploited

**UNDERCURRENT** *an undercurrent*  
a barely noticeable feeling of dissent  
in the community which is not being  
vocalized

**UNDERDOG** *underdog*  
object of sympathy (the antonym of  
“underdog effect” is “bandwagon  
effect”)

**UNDERFOOT** *to trample someone  
underfoot*

by virtue of one’s great power to treat  
a person’s rights with contempt and  
not to give them proper consideration

**UNDERMINE** *to undermine  
someone’s position*

to injure another person’s reputation  
and influence by unfair and secret  
tactics

**UNDERMINE** *to undermine  
something*  
to sabotage something

**UNDERPLAY** *to underplay some  
situation*  
to hold something in reserve

**UNDERSCORE** *to underscore  
something*  
to emphasize something

**UNEARTH** *to unearth something*  
to discover something after research

**UNEASY** *uneasy lies the head that  
wears a crown*  
responsibility involves some risks and  
some burdens (from Shakespeare’s  
*HENRY IV*)

**UNHOLY** *an unholy alliance*  
a working relationship for a nefarious  
purpose between unlikely partners

**UNMASK** *to unmask someone*  
to discover a person’s true identity

**UNSCRAMBLE** *to unscramble the  
omelette*  
to undo something which cannot be  
undone

**UNSTUCK** *he came unstuck*  
his plans did not work out

**UNVEIL** *to unveil something*  
to give details not previously available

**UP** *to be up and running*  
to be operative

**UPHILL** *to be pushing uphill*  
to face difficulties

**UPHILL** *to fight an uphill battle*  
to face difficulties or to have formida-  
ble opposition

**UPHILL** *to push water uphill*  
to foolishly attempt the impossible

**UPPER** *to gain the upper hand*  
to attain, after some effort, an advan-  
tage over another person

**UPSET** *to upset the applecart*  
to engage in conduct disturbing a  
peaceful state of affairs and thereby  
cause discomfort

**UPSIDE** *the upside*  
the advantage

**UPSIDE** *to turn something upside  
down*  
to greatly revolutionize something

**UPSTAGE** *to upstage someone*  
to deprive another person of the glory  
which he would otherwise have enjoyed

**UPSTAIRS** *to kick someone upstairs*  
to promote a person to a purely cere-  
monial position

**USE** *to use every trick in the book*  
to try very hard and use every con-  
ceivable argument

**UTOPIAN** *Utopian*  
ideally perfect (refers to the mythical  
island in Sir Thomas More’s *UTOPIA*)

## V

**VACUUM** *to fill a vacuum*  
to take advantage of an opportunity  
not acted on by others

**VALUE** *to take something at face  
value*  
(of alleged facts) to accept something  
without question or challenge

**VALVE** to act as a safety valve  
to be a procedure which allows persons with grievances to ventilate them in an orderly fashion

**VANGUARD** to be at the vanguard of something  
to be among the first to do something

**VANISH** to vanish into thin air  
unexpectedly to disappear

**VAPOR** to have a fit of the vapors  
to be horrified

**VARIATION** variations on a theme  
alternative approaches in similar vein

**VEGETABLE** to become a vegetable  
to lose one's mental and physical faculties

**VEIL** thinly-veiled  
barely concealed

**VEIL** to draw a veil over something  
pointedly to avoid discussing something

**VEIL** to unveil something  
to give details not previously available

**VEIL** under the veil of something  
on the pretext of something

**VEIN** in another vein  
as an alternative way of looking at things

**VELVET** with an iron hand in a velvet glove  
with a hard attitude made to seem soft

**VENGEANCE** to attack with a vengeance  
to attack strongly

**VENGEANCE** to rebound with a vengeance  
to return to an issue with great enthusiasm

**VENOM** venom  
deep-rooted ill will

**VENT** to vent one's spleen on someone  
to demonstrate one's ill temper to a person

**VERSE** to quote chapter and verse  
to authenticate the information

**VICTORY** a Pyrrhic victory  
a win which costs more than if there had been a loss (refers to the battle at which King Pyrrhus of Epirus defeated the Romans at Asculum)

**VIEW** a bird's-eye view  
a general overview or summary of a subject, emphasizing the major features

**VIEW** to take a dim view of something  
not to regard something favorably

**VINE** to hear on the grapevine  
to learn unofficially

**VINE** to wither on the vine  
by virtue of changed circumstances or the effluxion of time to be no longer relevant

**VIOLET** a shrinking violet  
a shy person

**VISION** tunnel vision  
an extremely narrow and inflexible way of considering issues

**VITRIOL** to pour vitriol on something  
to sharply criticize something

**VOICE** to be a lone voice in the wilderness  
to be the only person stating unpopular views

**VOICE** to raise one's voice for some cause  
to publicly advocate some cause

**VOLCANO** to be sitting on a volcano  
to be safe for the time being but exposed to the risk of a sudden great disaster

**VOLLEY** to fire a volley at someone  
to send a series of angry messages to someone

**VOLTE** volte face  
a reversal of previously-held beliefs (French, "a turning around")

**VOLUME** to speak volumes for something  
to place something in a favorable light

**VOTE** to vote with one's feet  
to show one's displeasure by terminating an association

**VULTURE** *vulture*  
person benefiting from another's misfortune

## W

**WAG** the tail wagging the dog  
a minor aspect with disproportionate effect on a major aspect

**WAG** to set tongues wagging  
to behave in a way which encourages scandal mongers

**WAGON** to be on the water wagon  
to be teetotal

**WAIT** to wait for the other shoe to drop  
to await the seemingly imminent and inevitable (refers to a man undressing, disturbing a neighbor by dropping one shoe, then frustrating his expectation by putting the other shoe down gently)

**WAIT** to wait hand and foot on someone  
to accommodate a person's every real or imagined whim

**WAIT** to wait in the wings  
to be prepared to stay unobtrusive till the appropriate time for action arrives

**WAIT** to wait with bated breath  
to be excited in anticipation of some event

**WAKE** in the wake of someone  
following a person's example

**WAKE** to make noise enough to wake the dead  
to be excessively noisy

**WAKE** to wake up to something  
to realize a fact or its significance

**WALK** take a long walk on a short pier  
go away, I want no dealings with you

**WALK** to walk a tightrope  
to do something very dangerous

**WALK** to walk all over someone  
to act in a way which completely disregards another person's sensibility

**WALK** to walk away from something  
to abrogate one's responsibilities in regard to some matter

**WALK** to walk away with a profit  
to achieve a profit on concluding a project

**WALK** to walk in off the street  
to come without prior arrangement or notification

**WALK** to walk into a trap  
to be tricked into doing something

**WALK** to walk on air  
to be joyful

**WALK** to walk the plank  
to face certain doom

**WALKOVER** a walkover  
an easy victory

**WALL** Chinese walls  
a system to ensure that different parts of some organization do not gain access to each other's confidential information

**WALL** I would love to be a fly on the wall

I would love to hear what goes on

**WALL** a chink in the wall  
an opportunity to do something which otherwise could not be done

**WALL** to bang one's head up against a brick wall  
to fight an unwinnable case

**WALL** to be a crack in the wall  
to represent a small unintended opportunity which can be exploited

**WALL** to be up against a brick wall  
to be unable to achieve anything because of intractable opposition or apathy

**WALL** to drive someone to the wall  
to ruin a person

**WALL** to drive someone up the wall  
to annoy another person by one's actions

**WALL** to go to the wall  
to become bankrupt

**WALL** to have one's back to the wall  
to be hard-pressed by creditors or opponents

**WALL** to nail someone to the wall  
to outmaneuver another person

**WALL** to put a wall around someone  
to stop a person associating with others

**WALL** to see the writing on the wall  
to appreciate the inevitability of some event (Daniel 5)

**WALL** walls have ears  
someone may be overhearing (words on wartime posters, reminding people of the existence of spies; may also refer to certain rooms in the Louvre, constructed so that conversations could be heard in other rooms)

**WALL** walls of Jericho  
something seemingly solid but actually destructible (Joshua 6:20)

**WAND** to wave a magic wand  
to direct affairs without the restraints of the real world

**WANT** to want something both ways  
to desire two mutually exclusive objectives

**WANT** to want the best of both worlds  
to unreasonably desire to get some advantage without incurring a corresponding disadvantage

**WANT** you want your head read  
you should reconsider this matter

**WAR** a tug of war  
a dispute in which each protagonist desires a different course of action

**WAR** the cold war  
the unfriendly relations between the communist nations and the rest of the world

**WAR** to be on the warpath  
to be on the lookout for faults which can be criticized

**WARFARE** paper warfare  
an excessive amount of correspondence or red tape

**WARHORSE** a warhorse  
an old soldier who likes to relive past wartime experiences

**WARM** a warm inner glow  
satisfaction at some achievement

**WARM** to keep someone's seat warm  
to hold a position temporarily with a view to another person taking it over permanently in the near future

**WARM** to warm the cockles of someone's heart  
to delight a person

**WARM** to warm up  
to get ready

**WARM** warm-hearted  
affectionate or generous

**WARRANT** to sign one's own death warrant  
to foolishly do something which is inevitably bound to lead to utter disaster

**WART** warts and all  
with the unfavorable features as well as the favorable ones (Oliver Cromwell's direction to an artist painting his portrait)

**WASH** backwash  
consequence

**WASH** hogwash  
nonsense

**WASH** in the wash-up  
when everything is finalized

**WASH** *it will all come out in the wash*  
the facts will emerge as work proceeds

**WASH** *it won't wash*  
this explanation is not acceptable

**WASH** *someone's brain needs washing*  
a person is very silly

**WASH** *that washes with me*  
I agree

**WASH** *to be all washed out*  
to feel feeble

**WASH** *to be eye wash*  
to be nonsense

**WASH** *to wash one's dirty linen in public*  
to expose one's domestic difference  
to the world at large

**WASH** *to wash one's hands of something*  
to emphatically decline future responsibility

**WASH** *when the wash comes through the machine*  
in due course

**WASTE** *to waste one's breath*  
to talk or request something without achieving anything

**WATCH** *a watchdog*  
a person or organization monitoring behavior

**WATCH** *to need to watch one's back*  
to find it necessary to take care in case others act against one's interest

**WATCH** *to watch one's p's and q's*  
to be very careful (may refer to pints and quarts of beer on a hotel slate or to easily-confused printer's type)

**WATCH** *to watch one's step*  
to be on the lookout for danger or to set out to improve one's behavior

**WATCH** *watch the doughnut—not the hole*  
look for the positive aspects

**WATER** *a backwater*  
a place of little activity

**WATER** *a lot of water has flowed under the bridge since then*  
much has happened since then

**WATER** *an argument holding water*  
a debating point of substance

**WATER** *come hell or high water*  
regardless of the consequences

**WATER** *high water mark*  
triumph

**WATER** *still waters run deep*  
a person with a quiet manner may have a surprisingly great knowledge of a subject

**WATER** *there is blood in the water*  
something is likely to cause a person to go into a frenzy

**WATER** *to be a fish out of water*  
to be in difficulty by virtue of being in a strange environment

**WATER** *to be above water*  
(of securities) to have a market value in excess of the cost price

**WATER** *to be in deep water*  
to be in great difficulty

**WATER** *to be in hot water*  
to be in trouble or to be in difficulty

**WATER** *to be in smooth water*  
to have no troubles

**WATER** *to be in uncharted waters*  
to be the first to experience something

**WATER** *to be like water off a duck's back*  
(of advice or criticism) to be completely rejected

**WATER** *to be on the water wagon*  
to be teetotal

**WATER** *to be water under the bridge*  
to matter no longer

**WATER** *to blow something out of the water*  
to destroy something

**WATER** to brave the water  
to enter a venture with courage and determination

**WATER** to cast one's bread upon the waters

not to expect gratitude or recognition for one's good works (Ecclesiastes 11:1)

**WATER** to dip one's toe in the water  
to gently explore an opportunity

**WATER** to enter treacherous waters  
to engage in an enterprise with risks which are not obvious

**WATER** to fish in troubled waters  
to profit from a disturbed situation

**WATER** to go through fire and water  
to undertake all attendant risks

**WATER** to go to water  
to succumb to pressure

**WATER** to just hold one's head above water

to cope with problems but with little margin to spare or to stay solvent

**WATER** to make one's mouth water  
to excite desire

**WATER** to muddy the waters  
to deliberately confuse an issue by creating a diversion

**WATER** to plot a safe course through troubled waters  
to make a plan which overcomes certain difficulties

**WATER** to pour cold water on some idea

to be unenthusiastic about some proposal or scornful of its apparent weakness

**WATER** to pour oil on troubled waters

to calm down a situation

**WATER** to push water uphill  
to foolishly attempt the impossible

**WATER** to shoot something out of the water  
to frustrate something

**WATER** to test the water  
to try out an idea in a small way

**WATER** to water down something  
to reduce the severe impact of something

**WATER** water will find its own level  
people will reach an appropriate position relative to others

**WATER** watering hole  
hotel

**WATERLOO** to meet one's Waterloo  
to receive a decisive defeat (refers to Napoleon's fate at the Battle of Waterloo)

**WATERSHED** a watershed  
an occasion dividing two distinct phases of activity

**WATERTIGHT** a watertight contract  
a contract without loopholes or escape clauses

**WAVE** a brainwave  
a suddenly occurring bright idea

**WAVE** to be on the crest of a wave  
to enjoy success which may not last

**WAVE** to cause waves  
to disturb the status quo

**WAVE** to ride the wave  
to be successful for the time being

**WAVE** to wave a finger at someone  
to indicate mild displeasure at another person's actions

**WAVE** to wave a flag for someone  
to promote a person's cause

**WAVE** to wave a magic wand  
to direct affairs without the restraints of the real world

**WAVELLENGTH** to be on the same wavelength  
to think on similar lines

**WAVELLENGTH** to be on the wrong wavelength  
to be incorrect in one's thinking

**WAY** *a half-way house*  
an intermediate position

**WAY** *a one-way street*  
a flow of activity in only one direction

**WAY no way!**  
definitely not!

**WAY** *that is the way the chips fall*  
that is the actual situation

**WAY** *there is more than one way to skin a cat*  
this can be achieved in a variety of acceptable ways

**WAY to cut both ways**  
to involve both advantages and disadvantages of similar significance

**WAY to go the way of all flesh**  
to die

**WAY to have fifty cents each way**  
to equivocate

**WAY to have two bob each way**  
to equivocate

**WAY to know which way to turn**  
to know which strategy to adopt or where to seek assistance

**WAY to laugh all the way to the bank**  
to appreciate one's good fortune

**WAY to make headway**  
to make progress

**WAY to pave the way**  
to prepare for something

**WAY to resist something every inch of the way**  
to utterly resist something

**WAY to rub someone up the wrong way**  
to annoy someone with actions failing to recognize his current mood

**WAY to see which way the cat jumps**  
to await developments

**WAY to see which way the wind is blowing**  
to establish the factors relevant to a situation

**WAY to stand in someone's way**  
to prevent a person achieving his goal

**WAY to want something both ways**  
to desire two mutually exclusive objectives

**WAY to worm one's way in**  
to subtly insinuate oneself into a person's trust

**WAYSIDE to fall by the wayside**  
to abandon and not complete what one set out to do

**WEAK the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak**  
the body is not up to the demands made on it

**WEAK the weakest link in the chain**  
the least efficient component in a project the overall efficiency of which is governed by the efficiency of the least efficient component

**WEAK weak-kneed**  
unassertive or irresolute

**WEALTH a wealth of something**  
a great quantity of something

**WEAPON to use all the weapons at one's disposal**  
to utilize all available advantages

**WEAR if the cap fits then wear it**  
if your circumstances correspond with those described then you must endure the consequences

**WEAR that argument is wearing a bit thin**  
that is a very weak case

**WEAR to have to wear something**  
to have to put up with something

**WEAR to wear a hair shirt**  
to practice self-discipline

**WEAR to wear one's crown of thorns**  
to have one's own difficulties (John 19:5)

**WEAR to wear sackcloth and ashes**  
humbly to demonstrate repentance

**WEAR** *to wear the trousers*  
to be the dominant party

**WEAR** *uneasy lies the head that  
wears a crown*

responsibility involves some risks and  
some burdens (from Shakespeare's  
**HENRY IV**)

**WEATHER** *a fair-weather friend*  
a person purporting to be a friend  
who offers no support in difficult times

**WEATHER** *to be under the weather*  
to be drunk or (less often) sick

**WEATHER** *to keep a weather eye  
out for something*  
to look out with particular care

**WEATHER** *to make heavy weather  
of something*

to struggle excessively with a relatively simple task

**WEATHER** *to run into heavy  
weather*

to encounter difficulties

**WEATHER** *to weather the storm*  
to come safely through a crisis

**WEB** *a tangled web*

a series of lies, especially with inconsistencies leading to exposure (from Sir Walter Scott's **MARMION**)

**WEB** *to be the center of the spider's  
web*

to control an operation which involves numerous and/or complex ingredients

**WED** *to be wed to something*

to be utterly dedicated to a proposal

**WEDDING** *a shotgun wedding*

a wedding held to ensure that an impending birth will be legitimate (refers to threats by the bride's father to kill the bridegroom)

**WEDDING** *wedding*  
amalgamation

**WEDGE** *to be the thin end of the  
wedge*

by conceding a small point, to create an undesirable precedent for much larger issues

**WEDGE** *to drive a wedge between  
two persons*

to set out to cause two persons to confront each other

**WEED** *to weed some group out*  
to get rid of some elements not meeting a desired standard

**WEIGH** *to weigh anchor*  
to move to another address

**WEIGH** *to weigh in with a  
particular argument*  
to produce a strong argument

**WEIGH** *to weigh in with something*  
to bring something along

**WEIGH** *to weigh two alternative  
propositions in the balance*  
to assess the relative significance of two alternative propositions

**WEIGHT** *a heavyweight*  
a person of importance or influence

**WEIGHT** *lightweight*  
uninfluential

**WEIGHT** *to be a weight off one's  
mind*

to be a great relief

**WEIGHT** *to be worth one's weight  
in gold*

to be very desirable

**WEIGHT** *to carry weight*  
to be influential

**WEIGHT** *to lend weight to  
something*

to use one's influence in support of some cause

**WEIGHT** *to pull one's weight*  
to do one's proper share of the work requiring to be done

**WEIGHT** *to take a weight off  
someone's shoulder*  
to assist a person by relieving him of some responsibility

**WEIGHT** *to throw one's weight  
about*

to use one's real or imagined status in order to achieve certain results

<b>WELL</b> to go back to the well to go to the original source
<b>WEST</b> to sink slowly in the west to fail gradually
<b>WET</b> to be a wet blanket to be a spoilsport
<b>WET</b> to be wet behind the ears to be excessively naive and inexperienced
<b>WET</b> to get one's feet wet to do the necessary but unpleasant or menial parts of a task
<b>WETHER</b> bell-wether first indication
<b>WHEAT</b> to separate the wheat from the chaff to distinguish between important and unimportant ingredients
<b>WHEEL</b> a big wheel an important person
<b>WHEEL</b> fortune's wheel the vicissitudes of life
<b>WHEEL</b> the squeaky wheel gets the most attention those complaining the most loudly will get their problems sorted out first
<b>WHEEL</b> the wheel has turned circumstances have changed
<b>WHEEL</b> the wheel has turned the complete circle things are now back to where they were before
<b>WHEEL</b> the wheels are back under the bus normal activity has been resumed
<b>WHEEL</b> the wheels fell off the plan failed
<b>WHEEL</b> to be a fifth wheel to be superfluous
<b>WHEEL</b> to be a small cog in a large wheel to be a relatively unimportant person in a large organization

<b>WHEEL</b> to make the wheels go round to cause something to happen
<b>WHEEL</b> to oil the wheels to make things go smoothly
<b>WHEEL</b> to put a spoke in someone's wheel to interfere with another person's activity, so preventing its continuance
<b>WHEEL</b> to put one's shoulder to the wheel to make a strong effort
<b>WHEEL</b> to reinvent the wheel to waste resources doing something already accomplished
<b>WHEEL</b> to set the wheels in motion to institute appropriate action
<b>WHEEL</b> to wheel and deal to energetically enter into commercial transactions of dubious propriety
<b>WHEEL</b> to wheel someone in to bring a person along for a confrontation
<b>WHEEL</b> wheels within wheels secret machinations
<b>WHET</b> to whet one's appetite to arouse one's curiosity or interest
<b>WHIP</b> a whipping boy a person made to suffer for the faults of others
<b>WHIP</b> to be a fair crack of the whip to be just
<b>WHIP</b> to crack the whip to exert one's authority
<b>WHIP</b> to have the whip hand to be in control of a situation
<b>WHIP</b> to whip oneself into a lather to become unduly excited
<b>WHIRL</b> to reap the whirlwind to suffer the adverse consequences of a bad act

**WHIRLWIND** *to sow the wind and reap the whirlwind*  
to make bad mistakes and to suffer  
the even worse consequences

**WHISKER** *by a whisker*  
only just

**WHISPER** *to hear a whisper*  
to learn a rumored hypothesis

**WHISTLE** *a whistlestop tour*  
a hurried (especially ceremonial) visit  
to many places

**WHISTLE** *bells and whistles*  
imaginative variations

**WHISTLE** *to blow the whistle on  
someone*  
to report a person's improper behav-  
ior to the authorities or to publicize it

**WHISTLE** *to whistle in the dark*  
to feign greater confidence than one  
really has

**WHISTLE** *you can whistle for it*  
you wish in vain

**WHITE** *a white elephant*  
an expensive and useless luxury (re-  
fers to gifts of sacred elephants by  
the King of Siam to persons then  
ruined by the expense of their upkeep)

**WHITE** *a white knight*  
a party voluntarily coming to the as-  
sistance of another party at considera-  
ble cost to itself

**WHITE** *a white lie*  
a false statement uttered in a good  
cause

**WHITE** *in black and white*  
in writing, spelling out all the details

**WHITE** *lily-white*  
honest and incorruptible

**WHITE** *to be a black and white  
issue*  
to involve very clear distinctions

**WHITE** *to show the white feather*  
to indicate cowardice (refers to cross-  
bred birds, not regarded as useful in  
cock fighting)

**WHITE** *to turn white*  
to express shock at unexpected news

**WHITE** *to white ant someone*  
to surreptitiously seek to destroy a  
person

**WHITEWASH** *to whitewash*  
to exonerate when this is not warranted  
by the facts

**WOA** *from go to whoa*  
from start to finish (refers to the com-  
mand given to horses)

**WHOLE** *a whole bag of tricks*  
a series of articles or a series of  
artificial devices

**WHOLE** *the whole box and dice*  
all relevant components

**WHOLE** *to go the whole hog*  
to do something very thoroughly (re-  
fers to the close shearing of lambs)

**WICKET** *to be on a sticky wicket*  
to face some difficulties

**WIDE** *to be wide off the mark*  
to have a belief which is far removed  
from the true position

**WIDE** *to give something a wide  
berth*  
to go out of one's way to avoid con-  
tact with a person

**WIELD** *to wield a big stick*  
to exert power

**WIFE** *an old wives' tale*  
a traditionally-held theory without any  
scientific backing

**WILD** *a wild card*  
an unexpected development

**WILD** *a wild goose chase*  
a foolish search for something which  
does not exist

**WILD** *to be successful beyond one's  
wildest dreams*  
to be far more successful than one  
could have expected

**WILD** to sow wild oats  
to indulge in foolish behavior while a young adult

**WILD** wildcat  
(of a strike) unofficial; (of an oil well) drilled as a pure prospect; (of a financial scheme) very hazardous

**WILD** wild horses would not cause me to do something

I absolutely refuse to do something (refers to a form of torture)

**WILDERNESS** to be a lone voice in the wilderness

to be the only person stating unpopular views

**WILDERNESS** to be in the wilderness  
to be out of office against one's will

**WILLING** a willing horse  
a cheerful worker

**WILLING** the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak  
the body is not up to the demands made on it

**WIN** a breadwinner  
a person earning by personal exertion the income of a household

**WIN** heads I win—tails you lose  
whichever way this matter goes I will benefit at your expense

**WIN** to hold a winning hand  
to be in an unbeatable position to defeat others

**WIN** to win by a long chalk  
to win very conclusively

**WIN** to win hands down  
to win very convincingly

**WIN** to win one's spurs  
to gain recognition after a period of effort (refers to the earning of a knighthood in battle)

**WIN** to win some rounds  
to be partly successful

**WIN** to win the booby prize  
to do worse than all others

**WIN** to win the prize in a canter  
to win very easily

**WIND** something in the wind  
something is going on secretly (this phrase uses the actual word "something")

**WIND** straws in the wind  
unofficial preliminary indications of something likely to be formally revealed soon

**WIND** the cold wind of change  
the unpleasant realities of new circumstances

**WIND** to cast prudence to the winds  
to cease being prudent

**WIND** to get wind of something  
to hear rumors giving advance information

**WIND** to put the wind up someone  
to alarm a person

**WIND** to reap the whirlwind  
to suffer the adverse consequences of a bad act

**WIND** to sail against the wind  
to oppose the views currently being held by others

**WIND** to sail close to the wind  
to act in a very dangerous manner

**WIND** to scatter something to the four winds  
to permanently get rid of something

**WIND** to see which way the wind is blowing  
to establish the factors relevant to a situation

**WIND** to sow the wind and reap the whirlwind  
to make bad mistakes and to suffer the even worse consequences

<b>WIND</b> to take the wind out of someone's sails	<b>WINK</b> a nod is the same as a wink to a blind horse
to upset a person by anticipating his actions or using arguments which he was proposing to use	fine distinctions are not appropriate here
<b>WINDFALL</b> windfall	<b>WINK</b> not to get a wink of sleep
unexpected good fortune	not to sleep at all
<b>WINDMILL</b> to tilt at windmills	<b>WINKLE</b> to be a <i>Rip van Winkle</i>
to attack an imagined but nonexistent enemy (from Cervantes' DON QUIXOTE)	to be a person out of touch with current conditions (title of and character in a book by Washington Irving)
<b>WINDOW</b> a window of opportunity	<b>WINNER</b> to be on a winner
an opportunity temporarily available	to have faith in, give support to and/or invest in a project which proves to be successful
<b>WINDOW</b> to engage in window dressing	<b>WINTER</b> to buy straw hats in winter
to present figures in an artificially favorable light	to buy in a depressed market when most other people are sellers
<b>WINDOW</b> to fly out the window	<b>WIPE</b> to wash one's hands of something
to be lost	to emphatically decline future responsibility
<b>WINDOW</b> to throw a pebble against the window	<b>WIPE</b> to wipe the floor with someone
to gently draw attention to oneself	to inflict a humiliating defeat on a person
<b>WINDOW</b> to throw something out of the window	<b>WIPE</b> to wipe the slate clean
to completely reject an idea or proposal	to forgive past indiscretions
<b>WING</b> on a wing and a prayer	<b>WIPE</b> to wipe the smile off someone's face
without proper resources	to destroy a person's complacency
<b>WING</b> to clip someone's wings	<b>WIPE</b> wipe that smile off your face!
to reduce another person's freedom to act as he thinks fit	treat this matter more seriously!
<b>WING</b> to spread one's wings	<b>WIRE</b> to be a live wire
to assert authority which has not yet been conferred by one's superiors and for which one may not be ready	to be an enthusiast
<b>WING</b> to take someone under one's wing	<b>WIRE</b> to go haywire
to protect a person	to refuse to function properly
<b>WING</b> to wait in the wings	<b>WIRE</b> to have one's wires crossed
to be prepared to stay unobtrusive till the appropriate time for action arrives	to be mistaken about key facts
<b>WINK</b> a nod and a wink	<b>WISH</b> a death wish
a sign that understanding has been reached in a matter which in the interest of discretion has not been discussed aloud	the contemplation of action so foolish that it is likely to lead to utter disaster

<b>WINK</b> a nod is the same as a wink to a blind horse	<b>WITCH</b> a witchhunt
fine distinctions are not appropriate here	an exercise seeking to find someone who can be blamed
<b>WINK</b> not to get a wink of sleep	
not to sleep at all	
<b>WINKLE</b> to be a <i>Rip van Winkle</i>	
to be a person out of touch with current conditions (title of and character in a book by Washington Irving)	
<b>WINNER</b> to be on a winner	
to have faith in, give support to and/or invest in a project which proves to be successful	
<b>WINTER</b> to buy straw hats in winter	
to buy in a depressed market when most other people are sellers	
<b>WIPE</b> to wash one's hands of something	
to emphatically decline future responsibility	
<b>WIPE</b> to wipe the floor with someone	
to inflict a humiliating defeat on a person	
<b>WIPE</b> to wipe the slate clean	
to forgive past indiscretions	
<b>WIPE</b> to wipe the smile off someone's face	
to destroy a person's complacency	
<b>WIPE</b> wipe that smile off your face!	
treat this matter more seriously!	
<b>WIRE</b> to be a live wire	
to be an enthusiast	
<b>WIRE</b> to go haywire	
to refuse to function properly	
<b>WIRE</b> to have one's wires crossed	
to be mistaken about key facts	
<b>WISH</b> a death wish	
the contemplation of action so foolish that it is likely to lead to utter disaster	
<b>WITCH</b> a witchhunt	
an exercise seeking to find someone who can be blamed	

**WITH** to be with it

to think on the same lines as the current generation or to be fully informed

**WITHER** to wither on the vine

by virtue of changed circumstances or the effluxion of time to be no longer relevant

**WOLF** a lone wolf

person who prefers to act without involving others

**WOLF** to be a wolf in sheep's clothing

to be a hypocrite or to be dangerous although masquerading as something harmless (Matthew 7:15)

**WOLF** to cry "wolf"

to repeatedly raise an unjustified concern with the result that one will be ignored when the circumstances change

**WOLF** to keep the wolf from the door

to avoid imminent trouble

**WOLF** to throw someone to the wolves

to expose a person to exploitation by more sophisticated persons

**WONDER** a nine-day wonder

an exciting event, but one which will cease to arouse interest when the novelty has worn off

**WONDER** gutless wonder

coward

**WOOD** neck of the woods

localized area

**WOOD** not to see the wood for the trees

to overlook the general picture because of undue concentration on the details

**WOOD** to be babes in the wood

to be excessively naive and inexperienced and thus ripe for exploitation

**WOOD** to be out of the woods

the previous difficulties have been overcome

**WOOD** to get rid of the dead wood

to terminate the services of unsatisfactory personnel

**WOOD** to touch wood

it is to be hoped that our good luck will not go away

**WOODEN** to get the wooden spoon

to come ingloriously last

**WOODPILE** the nigger in the woodpile

the factor spoiling an otherwise satisfactory arrangement

**WOODWORK** to crawl out of the woodwork

to turn up unexpectedly and in large numbers

**WOOL** dyed in the wool

very loyal and partisan

**WOOL** to pull the wool over someone's eyes

to deceive or deliberately mislead another person

**WOOL** to wrap someone in cotton wool

to be overprotective toward a person

**WOOL** woolly-headed

slightly muddled

**WORD** a torrent of words

a rapid and uninterrupted outpouring of words

**WORD** a word in someone's ear

a confidential discussion

**WORD** from the word "go"

from the beginning

**WORD** mark my words

you will find out that I am right

**WORD** not to mince words

to speak bluntly

**WORD** the password is so-and-so

the main attraction is so-and-so

**WORD** *the word is out*  
it is now known

**WORD** *the words stuck in my throat*  
I just could not get myself to say the intended words

**WORD** *to eat one's words*  
to retract

**WORD** *to echo someone's words*  
to repeat another person's views as though they were one's own

**WORD** *to get words in edgeways*  
to manage to interrupt a conversation in order to put in a separate point of view

**WORD** *to put words into someone's mouth*  
to attempt to get someone to say something in the particular terms drafted by another person

**WORD** *you took the words right out of my mouth*  
you have just said what I was about to say

**WORK** *a nasty piece of work*  
an unpleasant person

**WORK** *donkey work*  
necessary but uninspiring routine work

**WORK** *to do someone's dirty work*  
to do something unethical on behalf of another person

**WORK** *to do the leg work*  
to carry out the tedious part of a project

**WORK** *to do the spadework*  
to prepare

**WORK** *to have one's work cut out to do something*  
it will be difficult to achieve something

**WORK** *to work hand in glove with someone*  
to work in close cooperation with a person or to be in collusion with a person to the detriment of others

**WORKS** *to be in the works*  
to be being dealt with

**WORKS** *to get the works*  
to get the full treatment

**WORKS** *to gum up the works*  
to cause an activity to be halted

**WORKS** *to throw a spanner into the works*  
to cause an unexpected complication

**WORLD** *it's a small world*  
it is surprising to meet people one knows in unexpected places

**WORLD** *to be on top of the world*  
to be very happy

**WORLD** *to be out of this world*  
to be superb

**WORLD** *to carry the world on one's shoulders*  
to resent being left to perform a huge task single-handedly (refers to Atlas, who was condemned to bear the heavens on his shoulders for leading the Titans against the gods)

**WORLD** *to get the worst of all worlds*  
to get a series of disadvantages without achieving any corresponding advantages

**WORLD** *to make a world of difference*  
to make a great deal of difference

**WORLD** *to set the world on fire*  
to do something particularly brilliant

**WORLD** *to want the best of both worlds*  
to unreasonably desire to get some advantage without incurring a corresponding disadvantage

**WORLD** *why in the world?*  
why?

**WORM** *a bookworm*  
a person who likes reading and study

**WORM** *a can of worms*  
a heterogeneous collection of unexpected problems

**WORM** *the early bird gets the worm*  
a person who acts ahead of others gets an advantage over them

**WORM** *the worm has turned*  
a previously compliant person is now exerting his personality

**WORM** *to worm one's way in*  
to subtly insinuate oneself into a person's trust

**WORSE** *someone's bark is worse than his bite*  
the harsh words belie the reality of mild action

**WORST** *to get the worst of all worlds*  
to get a series of disadvantages without achieving any corresponding advantages

**WORTH** *not to be worth one's salt*  
not to be pulling one's weight (refers to Roman soldiers being paid in salt—a practice giving rise to the modern word "salary")

**WORTH** *not worth a tinker's curse*  
worthless

**WORTH** *to be worth one's weight in gold*  
to be very desirable

**WORTH** *to throw in one's six pennies' worth*  
to modestly supply one's own facts or views

**WORTH** *to throw in one's two-cents' worth*  
to modestly supply one's own facts or views

**WOUND** *to charge like a wounded bull*  
to impose excessive prices (a play on words; not a simile)

**WOUND** *to heal wounds*  
to affect a reconciliation

**WOUND** *to lick one's wounds*  
to adjust oneself to defeat

**WOUND** *to open up an old wound*  
to take action which revives a long-standing grievance

**WOUND** *to rub salt into someone's wound*  
to deliberately make damage even worse

**WRAP** *that wraps it up*  
that is the end

**WRAP** *to be wrapped in something*  
to enjoy something

**WRAP** *to keep under wraps*  
to keep confidential

**WRAP** *to wrap someone in cotton wool*  
to be overprotective toward a person

**WRAP** *to wrap up a deal*  
to bring a deal to a successful conclusion

**WRECK** *to salvage something out of the wreck*  
to achieve some minor benefits out of a disastrous situation

**WRING** *to wring one's hands*  
to express despair

**WRIST** *a slap on the wrist*  
a mild rebuke

**WRITE** *nothing to write home about*  
unimpressive

**WRITE** *to see the writing on the wall*  
to appreciate the inevitability of some event (Daniel 5)

**WRITE** *to write one's own ticket*  
to set one's own terms and conditions

**WRONG** *not to put a foot wrong*  
to behave impeccably

**WRONG** *to back the wrong horse*  
to have faith in, give support to and/or invest in a project which proves to be unsuccessful

**WRONG** *to bark up the wrong tree*  
to reach an incorrect conclusion

**WRONG** *to be born on the wrong side of the blanket*  
to be illegitimate

**WRONG** *to be on the wrong tack*  
to be using an incorrect procedure or policy

**WRONG** *to be on the wrong track*  
to be heading toward an incorrect solution

**WRONG** *to be on the wrong tram*  
to be completely mistaken as to the basic facts

**WRONG** *to be on the wrong wavelength*  
to be incorrect in one's thinking

**WRONG** *to get off on the wrong foot with someone*  
to make an unfavorable initial impression on a person

**WRONG** *to get out of bed on the wrong side*  
to be grumpy

**WRONG** *to get the wrong sow by the ear*  
to reach an incorrect conclusion

**WRONG** *to have hold of the wrong end of the pineapple*  
to be utterly mistaken

**WRONG** *to hold the wrong end of the stick*  
to be completely mistaken about something

**WRONG** *to rub someone up the wrong way*  
to annoy someone with actions failing to recognize his current mood

## Y

**YARD** *in one's own backyard*  
in one's own domain

**YARDSTICK** *a yardstick*  
a standard by which something is measured

**YARN** *to spin a yarn*  
to tell an amusing or unlikely story

**YEAR** *for donkey's years*  
for a long time

**YEAR** *from the year dot*  
from time immemorial

**YELL** *to scream and yell*  
to protest violently

**YEOMAN** *yeoman service*  
valuable assistance over a long time

**YESTERDAY** *not to have been born yesterday*  
not to be naive

**YOUNG** *a trap for young players*  
a good opportunity for the inexperienced or naive to make mistakes

**YOUNG** *an old head on young shoulders*  
experience, knowledge, and maturity in a young person

**YOUNG** *it is on for young and old*  
the excitement has started

**YOUNG** *the night is young*  
the project is only at a very early stage

**YOUNG** *young Turks*  
members of an organization who hold ideas regarded as too revolutionary

## Z

**Z** *from a to z*  
from start to finish

**ZERO** *to zero in on a target*  
to move directly toward one's objective

**180** *to turn around 180 degrees*  
to completely reverse a stance

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## THEMATIC SECTION

### ANIMALS

**ALBATROSS** *to be an albatross around someone's neck*  
to be a great burden (popularized by Coleridge's ANCIENT MARINER)

**ANIMAL** *there is no such animal that does not exist*

**ANIMAL** *to be a political animal*  
to want to be in politics

**ANT** *to white ant someone*  
to surreptitiously seek to destroy a person

**ASS** *to make an ass of oneself*  
to act stupidly in public

**BAIT** *to swallow the bait*  
to succumb to a temptation deliberately put in one's way

**BARK** *someone's bark is worse than his bite*  
the harsh words belie the reality of mild action

**BARK** *to bark up the wrong tree*  
to reach an incorrect conclusion

**BAT** *to have bats in the belfry*  
to be mad

**BAY** *to hold someone at bay*  
to successfully resist an attacker

**BEAK** *to be a sticky beak*  
to show excessive curiosity into matters not of one's concern

**BEAST** *the nature of the beast*  
the reality of the situation

**BEAVER** *an eager beaver*  
a person with great drive and enthusiasm even if this causes annoyance to others

**BEAVER** *to beaver away*  
to work diligently at some task

**BEE** *to be a busy bee*  
to work with great diligence

**BEE** *to have a bee in one's bonnet*  
to have an obsession

**BEELINE** *to make a beeline for something*  
to go straight to something with great enthusiasm or to head for some goal by the most direct route

**BETE** *to be someone's bete noire*  
to be a person whose ideas and actions cause upset and loathing in another person (French "black heart")

**BIRD** *a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush*  
a benefit currently available is more valuable than a seemingly much larger benefit which may or may not be achieved in the future

**BIRD** *a bird's-eye view*

a general overview or summary of a subject, emphasizing the major features

**BIRD** *a little bird told me*

I heard from an unnamable informant (Ecclesiastes 10:20)

**BIRD** *birds of a feather flock together*

persons of like interests gather in the same place

**BIRD** *that is strictly for the birds*

that is blatant and naive nonsense

**BIRD** *the bird has flown*

the person sought is no longer about

**BIRD** *the early bird gets the worm*

a person who acts ahead of others gets an advantage over them

**BIRD** *to be a rare bird*

to be an unusual type of individual

**BIRD** *to have a bird brain*

to be stupid

**BIRD** *to kill two birds with one stone*

to achieve a second objective in the course of achieving the first objective

**BIT** *to champ at the bit*

to be impatient

**BLOOD** *to smell blood*

to divine imminent victory

**BONE** *a bone of contention*

the subject matter of violent disagreement

**BONE** *the bare bones*

(of a story) nothing but the essential elements

**BONE** *to have a bone to pick*

to have a grievance which requires discussion

**BONE** *to throw someone a bone*

to fob a person off with a symbolic but unimportant gesture

**BULL** *a bull in a china shop*

a careless person likely to cause great damage

**BULL** *a cock and bull story*

an explanation which is completely unbelievable and unacceptable

**BULL** *to be a red rag to a bull*

to be something which makes a person very angry and very excited (refers to the erroneous belief that the color red, rather than the motion of waving, excites a bull)

**BULL** *to be within a bull's roar of something*

to be very close to something

**BULL** *to charge like a wounded bull*

to impose excessive prices (a play on words; not a simile)

**BULL** *to hit the bull's eye*

to make the correct decision

**BULL** *to take the bull by the horns*

to come to grips with the realities of a difficult problem

**BUTT** *to butt in*

uninvited to involve oneself in someone else's conversation

**BUTTERFLY** *to have a butterfly mind*

not to concentrate on the matter on hand

**BUTTERFLY** *to have butterflies in one's stomach*

a feeling of anxiety

**BUZZ** *to buzz off*

to go away

**CALF** *to kill the fatted calf*

to demonstrate welcome and forgiveness on a person's return (Luke 15:23)

**CAMEL** *the straw which broke the camel's back*

the latest step, which, when added to a large number of seemingly harmless previous steps, sets off a disaster resulting from the cumulative effect

**CAT** *a cat and dog existence*

a life full of frequent squabbles

**CAT** *a cat may look at a king*  
don't give yourself airs!

**CAT** *a copycat*  
a person who imitates another person's ideas

**CAT** *a game of cat and mouse*  
negotiations between two parties of unequal bargaining power during which the stronger makes some temporary concessions to the weaker without, however, affecting the latter's eventual total defeat

**CAT** *there is more than one way to skin a cat*  
this can be achieved in a variety of acceptable ways

**CAT** *there is no room to swing a cat*  
this place is very small (actually refers to a cat-o'-nine-tails)

**CAT** *to be a cat's paw*  
to be a person who is being used as a tool by others

**CAT** *to be the cat's pajamas*  
to have an exaggerated idea of one's own importance

**CAT** *to bell the cat*  
to do some dangerous but highly useful mission (refers to a fable in which none of the mice was willing to put a warning bell on a cat)

**CAT** *to kick the cat*  
to take out one's anger on some innocent party

**CAT** *to let the cat out of the bag*  
to reveal an embarrassing secret (refers to the exposure of cheats at fairs, attempting to pass a cat wrapped in a sack off as a piglet)

**CAT** *to rain cats and dogs*  
to rain heavily

**CAT** *to see which way the cat jumps*  
to await developments

**CAT** *to throw a cat among the pigeons*  
to cause consternation by revealing an unpleasant and unexpected fact

**CAT** *when the cat is away the mice will play*  
in the absence of supervision discipline will be lax

**CAT** *wildcat*  
(of a strike) unofficial; (of an oil well) drilled as a pure prospect; (of a financial scheme) very hazardous

**CHAMELEON** *a chameleon*  
a person without character who changes his stance all the time to reflect the current circumstances

**CHICKEN** *chicken and egg*  
two factors each of which results in the other

**CHICKEN** *chicken-hearted*  
showing little courage

**CHICKEN** *the chickens are coming home to roost*  
the consequences of past actions are becoming obvious

**CHICKEN** *to be chicken feed*  
to be small and unimportant

**CHICKEN** *to count one's chickens before they are hatched*  
to treat as fact the expected results of a future proposal

**CHOP** *to lick one's chops*  
to look forward to something with pleasurable anticipation

**COBWEB** *to blow the cobwebs away*  
to revive an old issue

**COCK** *a cock and bull story*  
an explanation which is completely unbelievable and unacceptable

**COCK** *cock-eyed*  
stupid

**COCOON** *in a cocoon*  
in a safe and isolated environment

**COW** *a cash cow*  
a source of ready money

**COW** *a milch cow*  
an easy and plentiful source of some desired benefit

**COW** *a sacred cow*  
an institution so well established that it is virtually unalterable

**COW** *to argue till the cows come home*  
to argue forever

**CRAWL** *to crawl out of the woodwork*  
to turn up unexpectedly and in large numbers

**CRESTFALLEN** *crestfallen*  
dejected

**CROCODILE** *to shed crocodile tears*  
to be a hypocrite

**CROW** *as the crow flies*  
by the shortest distance

**CROW** *to eat crow*  
to accept a humiliating defeat

**CUCKOO** *to be a cuckoo in the nest*  
to purport to be a member of a group of people although having no such right

**CUCKOO** *to be in cloud cuckoo land*  
to be mad or to have unrealistic expectations

**CUD** *to chew the cud*  
to reflect on something

**DINOSAUR** *a dinosaur*  
a person with incredibly outmoded idea

**DOG** *a cat and dog existence*  
a life full of frequent squabbles

**DOG** *a dogfight*  
a small side-skirmish, especially between airplanes

**DOG** *a lame dog*  
a person under some disadvantage needing attention and assistance

**DOG** *a shaggy dog story*  
an amusing anecdote with an unexpected ending, often involving talking animals given certain human skills

**DOG** *a sly dog*  
a person who is discreet about his weaknesses

**DOG** *a watchdog*  
a person or organization monitoring behavior

**DOG** *all the dogs are barking*  
this news is being widely disseminated

**DOG** *any stick to beat a dog*  
any excuse will do if it serves one's purpose

**DOG** *dog-eared*  
(of pages) well-thumbed

**DOG** *dog-tired*  
tired out

**DOG** *every dog has his day*  
good luck comes sooner or later

**DOG** *every man and his dog*  
everybody

**DOG** *love me—love my dog*  
if you accept me then you must also accept my associates

**DOG** *not a dog's chance*  
no hope at all

**DOG** *one cannot teach an old dog new tricks*  
people get irreversibly set in their ways

**DOG** *the tail wagging the dog*  
a minor aspect with disproportionate effect on a major aspect

**DOG** *the top dog*  
the person in the most powerful position

**DOG** to be a dog in the manger  
to spitefully deny something to others, notwithstanding its uselessness to oneself

**DOG** to be a dog's breakfast  
to be a very messy arrangement

**DOG** to be a gay dog  
to lead an idle life while flaunting the symbols of wealth

**DOG** to be in the doghouse  
to be in disgrace

**DOG** to call off the dogs  
to abandon an audit or other inquiry

**DOG** to give a dog a bad name  
to malign a person

**DOG** to go to the dogs  
to be ruined

**DOG** to have a hair of the dog that bit one  
to drink more in an attempt to overcome the effects of alcohol already consumed

**DOG** to lead a dog's life  
to be ill-treated

**DOG** to let sleeping dogs lie  
to refrain from raising an issue which is not obviously requiring attention

**DOG** to rain cats and dogs  
to rain heavily

**DOG** to throw something to the dogs  
to sacrifice something

**DOG** two men and a dog  
very few people

**DOG** underdog  
object of sympathy (the antonym of "underdog effect" is "bandwagon effect")

**DOG** why keep a dog and bark oneself?

it is silly to pay for assistance and then do things personally

**DONKEY** donkey work  
necessary but uninspiring routine work

**DONKEY** for donkey's years  
for a long time

**DONKEY** to talk the hind leg off a donkey  
to talk excessively

**DRAKE** to play ducks and drakes  
not to treat the matter seriously

**DRONE** a drone  
an idle person

**DROVE** people stayed away in droves  
few people came

**DUCK** a lame duck  
a person unable to fend for himself (a lame duck president - a president still in office but without influence because the commencement of his successor's term is imminent)

**DUCK** in two shakes of a duck's tail  
in an instant

**DUCK** to be a dead duck  
to have failed

**DUCK** to be a sitting duck  
to be readily exploited

**DUCK** to be like water off a duck's back  
(of advice or criticism) to be completely rejected

**DUCK** to play ducks and drakes  
not to treat the matter seriously

**DUCKLING** an ugly duckling  
a person initially thought unintelligent who develops and becomes brilliant (refers to a cygnet in a brood of ducks in a children's story of that name by Hans Christian Andersen)

**EAGLE** to have an eagle eye  
to be able to notice small mistakes very readily

**EAR** to turn something on its ear  
to reverse something

**EARMARK** to earmark  
to allocate to a specific purpose

**EGG** to be a bad egg  
to engage in dishonest behavior

**ELEPHANT** a rogue elephant  
a person of vicious temper who acts  
in an undisciplined way

**ELEPHANT** a white elephant  
an expensive and useless luxury (refers to gifts of sacred elephants by  
the King of Siam to persons then  
ruined by the expense of their upkeep)

**ELEPHANT** one looks for elephants  
in elephant country  
one needs to search in the right place

**EYE** bright-eyed and bushy-tailed  
naive but enthusiastic

**FEATHER** to make feathers fly  
to cause trouble to those misbehaving

**FEATHER** to ruffle someone's  
feathers  
to engage in behavior which irritates  
another person

**FEATHER** to show the white feather  
to indicate cowardice (refers to cross-bred birds, not regarded as useful in  
cock fighting)

**FEATHER** to thrash with a feather  
to award only a minor punishment for  
a very serious offense

**FERRET** to ferret something out  
by diligent research to discover some  
secret

**FETTER** to fetter someone  
to stop a person acting on his own  
initiative

**FISH** a queer fish  
an unusual type of person

**FISH** an ocean full of fish  
plenty of opportunity

**FISH** neither fish, flesh nor good  
red herring  
unclassifiable by virtue of being nei-  
ther one thing nor another (from  
Cervantes' DON QUIXOTE)

**FISH** that has nothing to do with the  
price of fish  
that is quite irrelevant

**FISH** to be a big fish in a little pond  
to be a person holding an important  
office but in an unimportant organiza-  
tion

**FISH** to be a cold fish  
to be an unemotional person

**FISH** to be a different kettle of fish  
to be something very dissimilar

**FISH** to be a fine kettle of fish  
to be a terrible muddle

**FISH** to be a fish out of water  
to be in difficulty by virtue of being  
in a strange environment

**FISH** to fish in troubled waters  
to profit from a disturbed situation

**FISHY** to be fishy  
to be suspicious

**FLEA** to send someone away with  
a flea in his ear  
to give a person frank but unwelcome  
facts (refers to fleas trapped in the  
armor of ancient knights)

**FLOCK** flock  
congregation in the charge of a reli-  
gious official

**FLY** I would love to be a fly on the  
wall  
I would love to hear what goes on

**FLY** a fly in the ointment  
a flaw (refers to dead flies turning  
perfumes rancid) (Ecclesiastes 10:1)

**FLY** a fly-by-night operator  
a confidence trickster

**FLY** someone can't hurt a fly  
someone is very gentle and kindhearted

**FLY** there are no flies on someone  
a person is alert

**FLY** to fly the coop  
to grow up and become independent

**FOLD** *the fold*

the body of believers (refers to an enclosure for sheep)

**FOOT** *to put something back on its feet*

to repair something

**FOUR** *an opening wide enough to drive a coach and four through*

an excellent opportunity

**FOX** *a fox hole*

space which is really too small for a person's needs or comfort

**FROG** *to have a frog in one's throat*

to be hoarse

**FROG** *to leap frog something*

to overtake something, with the likelihood of in turn being overtaken (refers to a game in which participants jump over each other in turn)

**FUR** *to make the fur fly*

to create a disturbance

**GAME** *to be fair game*

to be someone who can legitimately be attacked

**GANDER** *what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander*

arguments which apply in one case also apply in another

**GNAT** *to strain at a gnat*

to be scrupulous about trifles

**GO** *from the word "go"*

from the beginning

**GOAT** *a scapegoat*

a person unfairly blamed for something not his fault

**GOAT** *to play the giddy goat*

to act the fool

**GOAT** *to separate the sheep from the goats*

to distinguish between those with and without certain attributes (Matthew 25:32)

**GOLDFISH** *to be in a goldfish bowl*

to be very open to view

**GOLDFISH** *what is this—a bunch of grapes or a bowl of goldfish?*

surely you know what this is!

**GOOSE** *a wild goose chase*

a foolish search for something which does not exist

**GOOSE** *to be too frightened to say "boo" to a goose*

to be excessively shy

**GOOSE** *to cook one's goose*

to do something which backfires on one

**GOOSE** *to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs*

through excessive greed to destroy a very profitable enterprise

**GOOSE** *what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander*

arguments which apply in one case also apply in another

**GRASSHOPPER** *since he was knee high to a grasshopper*

since he was a very young child

**HACKLE** *to raise someone's hackles*

to make a person angry

**HALCYON** *in Halcyon days*

in past happier times (refers to the 14 days about the winter solstice when winds were calm and to the mythical bird said to breed in a floating nest at that time)

**HAMSTRUNG** *to be hamstrung*

to have limited freedom to act as one would wish

**HARE** *first catch your hare*

do things in logical order and after proper preparation (advice on how to cook a hare in Mrs. Beeton's celebrated COOK BOOK)

**HARE** *hare-brained*

wildly stupid

**HARE** to chase every hare  
to be easily sidetracked

**HARE** to run with the hare and hunt  
with the hounds  
to keep in with two opposing sides

**HARE** to set a hare running  
in order to achieve some desired effect  
to initiate some related activity

**HARNESS** in harness  
before retirement

**HEAD** to rear its ugly head  
to make an unwelcome appearance

**HEN** a mother hen  
an overly protective person

**HEN** hen-pecked  
subject to domination by one's wife

**HERD** to follow the herd  
to do what most other people are doing

**HERRING** to be a red herring  
to be something designed to divert attention away from the main question

**HIDE** to cover one's hide  
to provide excuses or take other evasive action in an attempt to avoid the adverse consequences of one's actions

**HIDEBOUND** hidebound  
narrow-minded

**HOG** a road hog  
an inconsiderate motorist

**HOG** to go the whole hog  
to do something very thoroughly (refers to the close shearing of lambs)

**HOG** to make a hog of oneself  
to demonstrate greed

**HOGWASH** hogwash  
nonsense

**HOOT** not to care a hoot  
not to show the slightest concern or enthusiasm

**HORN** the horns of a dilemma  
the unpalatable alternatives between which a choice must be made

**HORN** to lock horns with someone  
to have an argument with another person

**HORN** to pull one's horns in  
to retreat from previously stated views

**HORSE** I could eat a horse  
I am very hungry

**HORSE** a Trojan horse  
a trick (refers to a large gift horse full of soldiers used to bring about the fall of Troy, as described in Homer's ILIAD)

**HORSE** a dark horse  
a person with unsuspected talents

**HORSE** a nod is the same as a wink to a blind horse  
fine distinctions are not appropriate here

**HORSE** a stalking horse  
an ostensible reason

**HORSE** a two-horse race  
a contest between only two serious contestants

**HORSE** a warhorse  
an old soldier who likes to relive past wartime experiences

**HORSE** a willing horse  
a cheerful worker

**HORSE** hold your horses!  
just wait a little!

**HORSE** horse sense  
natural shrewdness

**HORSE** horsetrading  
tough negotiations

**HORSE** it is horses for courses  
some combinations work particularly well

**HORSE** that is a horse of a very different color  
that is a much more acceptable proposition

**HORSE** the horse and buggy days  
long ago

**HORSE** to back the wrong horse  
to have faith in, give support to and/or invest in a project which proves to be unsuccessful

**HORSE** to be off on one's hobby horse  
to throw into conversation aspects of a subject in which one has a passionate interest

**HORSE** to be on one's high horse  
to be excessively pompous

**HORSE** to drive a coach and horses through something  
to demonstrate major errors in something

**HORSE** to flog a dead horse  
to misguidedly do something patently useless

**HORSE** to frighten the horses  
to scare people off by one's ill-considered tactics

**HORSE** to learn something from the horse's mouth  
to get information from someone qualified to impart it

**HORSE** to look a gift horse in the mouth  
to be suspicious about a benefit which has been volunteered

**HORSE** to put the cart before the horse  
to do things in the wrong order

**HORSE** to shut the stable door after the horse has bolted  
to take preventive action only after the relevant event

**HORSE** to swap horses in midstream  
to change direction during the course of a project

**HORSE** wild horses would not cause me to do something  
I absolutely refuse to do something (refers to a form of torture)

**HORSEPLAY** horseplay  
boisterous and undignified behavior

**HOUND** to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds  
to keep in with two opposing sides

**HOUND** to set the hounds baying  
to excite the gossips by providing material which they can use

**JACKAL** to keep the jackals at bay  
to pay one's creditors just sufficient to avoid repercussions

**KID** to treat someone with kid gloves  
to handle a person with great discretion

**KITTEN** to have kittens  
to be in a state of great dismay (refers to a superstition that certain acts would cause women to bear kittens instead of children)

**LAMB** a lamb led to slaughter  
a naive person allowing himself to be exploited

**LAMB** one might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb  
further action will not increase the adverse consequences already in train (refers to the stealing of both sheep and lambs being capital crimes under old English law)

**LAMB** sacrificial lamb  
somebody unfairly made to suffer for the mistakes of others

**LAMB** to be mutton dressed up as lamb  
to foolishly pretend to be younger

**LAMB** to wait two shakes of a lamb's tail  
to wait just a few moments

**LAP** to lap it up  
to enjoy the attention

**LARK** to rise with the lark  
to get up early

**LEASH** to hold someone on a short leash  
to give a person very little authority

**LEECH** *leech*

person taking undue advantage of others

**LEOPARD** *a leopard cannot change his spots*

each person is born with certain unalterable characteristics

**LION** *the lion's share*

the biggest portion

**LION** *to beard the lion in his den*

to visit someone important at his headquarters

**LION** *to put one's head into the lion's mouth*

to recklessly expose oneself to great danger

**LION** *to throw someone to the lions*

to abandon a person

**LIZARD** *flat out like a lizard*

to be hard at work (a play on words, not a simile)

**LYNX** *lynx-eyed*

having acute vision

**MACKEREL** *to throw a sprat to catch a mackerel*

to risk a little in the hope of gaining much

**MARE** *a mare's nest*

a discovery with illusory benefits

**MAVERICK** *maverick*

a person who likes to do things differently from other persons (refers to unbranded livestock)

**MINNOW** *to miss the sharks while netting the minnows*

to succeed in minor aspects but fail in the ones that really matter

**MOLE** *to make mountains out of molehills*

to treat a minor problem as though it were a major disaster

**MONKEY** *monkey business*

mischievous or underhand activity

**MONKEY** *to play monkey tricks on someone*

to engage in discreditable behavior affecting a person

**MOTH** *moth-eaten*

(of ideas, etc.) antiquated

**MOTHBALL** *to mothball equipment*

to put equipment on a "care and maintenance" basis

**MOUSE** *a game of cat and mouse*

negotiations between two parties of unequal bargaining power during which the stronger makes some temporary concessions to the weaker without, however, affecting the latter's eventual total defeat

**MOUSE** *mice have been here*

intruders have entered this place

**MOUSE** *to labor mightily and bring forth a mouse*

to be quite ineffective

**MOUSE** *when the cat is away the mice will play*

in the absence of supervision discipline will be lax

**NEST** *a nest egg*

life savings

**NEST** *to feather one's own nest*

to improperly arrange a transaction on behalf of others to one's own financial advantage

**NEST** *to foul one's own nest*

to disparage one's home or workplace

**NIT** *to nitpick*

to criticize a person in respect of very minor matters

**OSTRICH** *to be an ostrich*

to refuse to face up to an unpleasant truth (refers to the reputed habit of ostriches in danger)

**OWL** *to be a night owl*

to habitually go to bed late

**OYSTER** *the world is one's oyster*

one has enormous scope for activity

**PACK** to be at the head of the pack  
to be the best of many or the de facto leader

**PACK** to bring someone back to the pack  
to make a person conform

**PEARL** a pearl  
a thing of great excellence

**PECK** pecking order  
order of seniority

**PECKER** to keep one's pecker up  
to stay cheerful

**PERCH** to knock someone off his perch  
to displace a person from his leadership position in some competitive situation

**PETREL** to be a stormy petrel  
a person who disturbs a pleasant state of affairs by agitating for change

**PIG** a guinea pig  
a person on whom some new practice is tried out

**PIG** to buy a pig in a poke  
to buy goods of unknown quality

**PIGEON** a pigeon pair  
one son and one daughter as the sole offspring

**PIGEON** to be one's pigeon  
to be one's area of responsibility

**PIGEON** to pigeon-hole  
to put aside for further consideration in the distant future

**PIGEON** to throw a cat among the pigeons  
to cause consternation by revealing an unpleasant and unexpected fact

**PIGHEADED** pigheaded  
unduly obstinate

**PITFALL** pitfall  
unsuspected danger

**PLAGUE** to be of plague proportions  
to be great in number

**PONY** a show pony  
a pompous person

**POSSUM** to play possum  
to pretend that one is not present

**POSSUM** to stir the possum  
to set out to raise controversial issues

**PUP** to sell someone a pup  
to cheat a person in a transaction, especially by misrepresentation as to the true value of something

**PURR** to positively purr  
(of a person) to be very pleased; (of an engine) to run very smoothly

**PUSSY** to pussyfoot around  
to take ineffectual steps

**RABBIT** move over and let the greyhound see the rabbit  
move over

**RABBIT** to pull a rabbit out of the hat  
to produce an unexpected and seemingly miraculous but highly desirable solution

**RAT** a case of rats leaving a sinking ship  
the desertion of an enterprise in anticipation of imminent failure

**RAT** rat race  
pressures of modern living

**RAT** to smell a rat  
to become suspicious

**REIN** a tight rein  
strong controls

**REIN** to give rein to one's fancy  
to let one's imagination have free scope

**REIN** to rein in something  
to keep better control over something

**RHINOCEROS** to have the hide of a rhinoceros  
to be totally unaffected by and unresponsive to valid criticism

**ROBIN** *a round robin*

(1) a series of checks from A to B, from B to C, from C to A, and so on, leaving all of them in the same net position as before

**ROBIN** *a round robin*

(2) a document signed by members of an organization which has the same effect as a resolution of a meeting

**ROOST** *to rule the roost*

to dominate

**RUMINATE** *to ruminate*

to ponder over a matter (lit., to chew the cud)

**SHARK** *to miss the sharks while netting the minnows*

to succeed in minor aspects but fail in the ones that really matter

**SHEEP** *a black sheep*

a disreputable member of an otherwise reputable group

**SHEEP** *one might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb*

further action will not increase the adverse consequences already in train (refers to the stealing of both sheep and lambs being capital crimes under old English law)

**SHEEP** *to be a wolf in sheep's clothing*

to be a hypocrite or to be dangerous although masquerading as something harmless (Matthew 7:15)

**SHEEP** *to be home on the sheep's back*

to be doing well

**SHEEP** *to cast sheep's eyes at someone*

to look at a person amorously

**SHEEP** *to ride on the sheep's back*

to benefit from the production of wool

**SHEEP** *to separate the sheep from the goats*

to distinguish between those with and without certain attributes (Matthew 25:32)

**SHEEP** *to spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar*

to engage in a false economy (the current word "ship" is actually a mistake for the original word "sheep" and the tar refers to the treatment of wounds)

**SHEEPISH** *sheepish*

embarrassed, as though guilty

**SHELL** *to retreat into one's shell*

to become shy and introversive

**SKIN** *a cleanskin*

a person without a criminal record

**SNAIL** *at a snail's pace*

very slowly

**SNAKE** *a game of snakes and ladders*

a series of ups and downs

**SNAKE** *a snake in the grass*

a person of low character

**SNAP** *to snap at someone's heels*

to be a minor irritation to a person

**SOW** *one can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear*

it is impossible to manufacture something of a high standard without appropriate raw materials

**SOW** *to get the wrong sow by the ear*

to reach an incorrect conclusion

**SPIDER** *to be the center of the spider's web*

to control an operation which involves numerous and/or complex ingredients

**SPRAT** *to throw a sprat to catch a mackerel*

to risk a little in the hope of gaining much

**SPUR** *to spur someone on*

to agitate a person into doing something

**SQUIB** *a damp squib*

disappointingly ineffective action (refers to fireworks which fail to go off)

**STAMPEDE** *to stampede someone into something*  
to pressure a person into taking some action

**STICK** *sticks and carrots*  
disincentives and incentives in combination (refers to the handling of donkeys)

**STING** *to be the sting in the tail*  
to be the unexpected unpleasant conclusion

**STIR** *to stir up a hornet's nest*  
to take action which results in unpleasant side-effects

**SWALLOW** *one swallow does not make a summer*  
much further evidence is desirable before any action taken

**SWARM** *to swarm out*  
to gather in large numbers

**SWINE** *to cast pearls before swine*  
to confer valuable benefits on someone who neither recognizes nor appreciates them

**TAIL** *bright-eyed and bushy-tailed*  
naive but enthusiastic

**TAIL** *the tail end of something*  
the very end of something

**TAIL** *to be the sting in the tail*  
to be the unexpected unpleasant conclusion

**TAIL** *to get off one's tail*  
to stir oneself from one's inertia

**TAIL** *to have one's tail between one's legs*  
to show great humility in the light of a back down

**TAIL** *with his tail between his legs*  
contritely

**TENTACLE** *tentacles*  
strong and unpleasant influence extending a long way from its base and in many directions

**TIGER** *a paper tiger*  
an empty threat

**TIGER** *a toothless tiger*  
an authority which has been given totally inadequate powers for its task

**TIGER** *to have a tiger by the tail*  
to be involved in an activity which is much more dangerous than one had realized

**TOOTH** *to bare one's teeth*  
to imply threats

**TOOTH** *to take the bit between one's teeth*  
to face up to a problem

**TRACE** *to kick over one's traces*  
to become insubordinate

**TRAMPLE** *to trample someone underfoot*

by virtue of one's great power to treat a person's rights with contempt and not to give them proper consideration

**TURKEY** *cold turkey*  
the sudden cessation of drugs to an addict

**TURKEY** *to talk turkey*  
to talk realistically

**TURTLE** *to turn turtle*  
to capsized

**UNDERBELLY** *to have a soft underbelly*

to have a weakness which can be exploited

**VENOM** *venom*  
deep-rooted ill will

**VULTURE** *vulture*  
person benefiting from another's misfortune

**WEB** *a tangled web*  
a series of lies, especially with inconsistencies leading to exposure (from Sir Walter Scott's MARMION)

**WETHER** *bell-wether*  
first indication

**WHISKER** *by a whisker*  
only just

**WOHA** *from go to whoa*  
from start to finish (refers to the command given to horses)

**WING** *to clip someone's wings*  
to reduce another person's freedom to act as he thinks fit

**WING** *to spread one's wings*  
to assert authority which has not yet been conferred by one's superiors and for which one may not be ready

**WING** *to take someone under one's wing*  
to protect a person

**WOLF** *a lone wolf*  
a person who prefers to act without involving others

**WOLF** *to be a wolf in sheep's clothing*  
to be a hypocrite or to be dangerous although masquerading as something harmless (Matthew 7:15)

**WOLF** *to cry "wolf"*  
to repeatedly raise an unjustified concern with the result that one will be ignored when the circumstances change

**WOLF** *to keep the wolf from the door*

to avoid imminent trouble

**WOLF** *to throw someone to the wolves*  
to expose a person to exploitation by more sophisticated persons

**WOOL** *dyed in the wool*  
very loyal and partisan

**WORM** *a bookworm*  
a person who likes reading and study

**WORM** *a can of worms*  
a heterogeneous collection of unexpected problems

**WORM** *the early bird gets the worm*  
a person who acts ahead of others gets an advantage over them

**WORM** *the worm has turned*  
a previously compliant person is now exerting his personality

**WORM** *to worm one's way in*  
to subtly insinuate oneself into a person's trust

## ART

**ART** *to raise something to a fine art form*

to become very clever at doing something

**CANVAS** *to have a blank canvas*  
to be bereft of ideas

**EXHIBITION** *to make an exhibition of oneself*  
to behave in a way which invites ridicule

**MOSAIC** *a mosaic*  
something with a large number of different aspects to it

**PAINT** *to paint a black picture*  
to state a set of unfavorable factors

**PAINTING** *not to be an oil painting*  
to be ugly

**PEDESTAL** *to put someone on a pedestal*  
to admire a person and regard him as more marvelous than is warranted

**PERSPECTIVE** *to put something into perspective*  
to explain the background of something so that its significance in relation to other things can be better appreciated

**PICTURE** *to balance the picture*  
to put the other side of the story or to quote facts in contradiction

**PICTURE** *to change the whole picture*  
to alter the major assumptions on which some assessment was based

**PICTURE** *to conjure up a picture*  
to use words to convey a vivid impression

**PICTURE** *to have a clear picture of something*  
 to have a good understanding of something

**PICTURE** *to put someone in the picture*  
 to fill a person in with the background of a situation

**PICTURE** *to see the big picture*  
 to have the vision and imagination enabling a project to be developed as part of a bigger whole

**SKETCH** *a thumbnail sketch*  
 brief but pertinent details

## AVIATION

**BAIL** *to bail out of something*  
 to abandon an enterprise in anticipation of disaster

**BALLOON** *to go down like a lead balloon*  
 to receive a very cool reception

**BALLOON** *when the balloon goes up*  
 when the adverse facts come to light

**EDGE** *to have a leading edge*  
 to have an advantage

**FLY** *a highflyer*  
 an ambitious and/or successful person

**FLY time flies**  
 time passes very quickly, but if wasted can never be recovered (from Virgil's GEORGICS)

**FLY** *to fly by the seat of one's pants*  
 to act unprofessionally

**FLY** *to fly high*  
 to be ambitious

**FLY** *to have to fly*  
 to need to leave in order to reach the next destination quickly

**FLY** *to let fly at someone*  
 to attack a person with strong words

**FLYING** *to achieve a flying start*  
 to get operational very quickly

**GROUND** *to get something off the ground*  
 to take a project beyond its initial stages and make it operational

**LAND** *to land something*  
 to achieve something

**PARACHUTE** *golden parachute*  
 generous provisions in a remuneration package which come into play in certain circumstances

**TAILSPIN** *tailspin*  
 very fast fall

**WING** *on a wing and a prayer*  
 without proper resources

**ZERO** *to zero in on a target*  
 to move directly toward one's objective

## BUILDINGS

**ARCHITECT** *to be the architect of something*  
 to be the person devising something innovative

**BACKYARD** *in one's own backyard*  
 in one's own domain

**BELFRY** *to have bats in the belfry*  
 to be mad

**BENCHMARK** *a benchmark*  
 a standard by which something is measured

**BLOWTORCH** *to apply the blowtorch to something*  
 to totally destroy something

**BLUEPRINT** *blueprint*  
 a master plan for some activity or a model which others can copy

**BOLT** *nuts and bolts*  
 basic ingredients

**BRICK** *it is London to a brick*  
 it is virtually certain

<b>BRICK</b> <i>one can't make bricks without straw</i>	<b>CASTLE</b> <i>a castle in the air</i> an impracticable proposition
one cannot achieve results in the absence of adequate resources	
<b>BRICK</b> <i>to be up against a brick wall</i>	<b>CEILING</b> <i>ceiling</i>
to be unable to achieve anything because of intractable opposition or apathy	upper permitted limit
<b>BRICK</b> <i>to drop a brick</i>	<b>CEMENT</b> <i>to cement a relationship</i>
to make a sudden shattering and unexpected announcement	to do something in an endeavor to make a relationship permanent
<b>BRICKBATS</b> <i>to throw brickbats at someone</i>	<b>CHISEL</b> <i>to chisel away at something</i>
to express displeasure with a person	to reduce the size of something in a series of small stages
<b>BRIDGE</b> <i>a lot of water has flowed under the bridge since then</i>	<b>CLOSET</b> <i>to come out of the closet</i>
much has happened since then	to publicly admit one's homosexuality
<b>BRIDGE</b> <i>to be water under the bridge</i>	<b>CORNER</b> <i>to be around the corner</i>
to matter no longer	to be imminent
<b>BRIDGE</b> <i>to bridge a gap</i>	<b>CORNER</b> <i>to be in a tight corner</i>
to fill a need or make up a shortfall	to experience a crisis
<b>BRIDGE</b> <i>to bridge a gulf</i>	<b>CORNER</b> <i>to cut corners</i>
to overcome a wide divergence in views	to lower one's standards in order to complete something more quickly
<b>BRIDGE</b> <i>to build bridges</i>	<b>DOOR</b> <i>a foot in the door</i>
to work at improving relationships	the opportunity to do business
<b>BRIDGE</b> <i>to burn one's bridges</i>	<b>DOOR</b> <i>never darken my door again</i>
to do something irreversible	do not ever return
<b>BRIDGE</b> <i>to cross a bridge only when one comes to it</i>	<b>DOOR</b> <i>not to break someone's door down</i>
to await the crystallization of a situation before sorting it out	to be quite unenthusiastic about someone's goods or services
<b>BRUSH</b> <i>a broad brush approach</i>	<b>DOOR</b> <i>one's door is always open</i>
rough justice	people can take their problems to one at any time
<b>BRUSH</b> <i>to be tarred with the same brush</i>	<b>DOOR</b> <i>through the back door</i>
to be damned merely because of one's association with another person	unofficially or surreptitiously
<b>CARPET</b> <i>to be on the carpet</i>	<b>DOOR</b> <i>to be out the door</i>
to be lectured in regard to one's alleged misdeeds	to have one's position terminated
<b>CASTLE</b> <i>a castle in Spain</i>	<b>DOOR</b> <i>to beat a path to someone's door</i>
an impracticable proposition	to seek a person out in great numbers

**DOOR** to put something at someone's door  
to blame a person

**DOOR** to show someone the door  
to ask a person to leave

**DOOR** to shut the door on someone  
to deny another person a desired opportunity

**DOOR** to slam the door in someone's face  
ostentatiously to refuse to have any dealings with a person

**DOORSTEP** on one's own doorstep  
in one's own domain

**DRAIN** that is money down the drain  
money has been wastefully lost on a failed project

**DRAW** back to the drawing board  
the details need to be reconsidered

**DRAW** to be on the drawing board  
to be being planned in detail

**DRAWBRIDGE** to pull up the drawbridge  
to refuse to cooperate

**DUST** when the dust settles  
when sufficient time has passed

**EAVESDROP** to eavesdrop  
to deliberately listen to conversations to which one is not a party

**FENCE** on our side of the fence  
in the group representing our vested interest

**FENCE** to be on the other side of the fence  
to have an opposing point of view or position

**FENCE** to be over the fence  
to be unreasonable

**FENCE** to mend fences  
to achieve a reconciliation

**FENCE** to sit on the fence  
to refuse to choose between two alternatives

**FENCE** to want to jump all one's fences at once  
to be unrealistic

**FLOOR** to get in on the ground floor  
to invest on very favorable terms

**FLOOR** to hold the floor  
to dominate a conversation

**FLOOR** to wipe the floor with someone  
to inflict a humiliating defeat on a person

**FRAMEWORK** framework  
outline of a proposal, on which further details can be developed

**FUSE** to have a short fuse  
to lose one's temper very readily

**GARDEN** everything in the garden is lovely  
everything is fine

**GATE** to close the gate  
to deny an opportunity which was previously available

**GATE** to gatecrash a gathering  
to attend a gathering without any right to be there

**GATEPOST** between you and me  
and the gatepost  
confidentially

**GATEWAY** gateway to something  
method of achieving something

**HALL** liberty hall  
a place where one is free to do as one wishes

**HAMMER** to go hammer and tongs  
to do something with great energy

**HOLE** a square peg in a round hole  
a person much more suitable for a position rather different from the one held

**HOME** charity begins at home  
a person's first responsibility should be to his family

**HOME** to be too close to home  
to be too near the truth to be welcome

**HOME** to keep the home fires  
burning  
to maintain normal domestic activity  
during the temporary absence of the  
breadwinner

**HOUSE** a half-way house  
an intermediate position

**HOUSE** people in glass houses  
should not throw stones  
those who are less than perfect are  
foolish to criticize others

**HOUSE** to be on the house  
to be free of cost

**HOUSE** to bring the house down  
to greatly amuse an audience

**HOUSE** to eat someone out of house  
and home  
to ruin a person by eating all he has

**HOUSE** to put one's house in order  
to fix up the deficiencies in one's  
affairs

**HOUSEHOLD** a household name  
a very familiar name

**INN** no room at the inn  
no room

**KITCHEN** to get the rounds of the  
kitchen  
(of a husband) to be subject to per-  
sonal abuse by his wife

**LADDER** a game of snakes and  
ladders  
a series of ups and downs

**LADDER** runs up a ladder  
gradual steps to an ultimate goal

**LADDER** to be at the bottom of the  
ladder  
to be in the most junior position in  
some hierarchy

**LEAD** to swing the lead  
to cheat an employer by not working  
while being paid to do so

**LOCK** to lock someone into some  
arrangement  
to create an agreement which cannot  
be broken by one of the parties

**MARBLE** to be carved in marble  
to be virtually unalterable

**NAIL** on the nail  
immediately

**NAIL** to hit the nail right on the  
head  
to astutely come to the correct conclu-  
sion

**NAIL** to nail someone  
to put the blame on a person

**NAIL** to nail something down  
to tie up the loose ends of an arrange-  
ment

**NICHE** to carve out a niche for  
oneself  
to deliberately create an opportunity  
to use one's talents effectively

**NICHE** to find one's niche  
to find the opportunity to use one's  
talents

**NOOK** in every nook and cranny  
everywhere

**NUT** nuts and bolts  
basic ingredients

**PAINT** to paint oneself into a corner  
to foolishly put oneself into a posi-  
tion from which escape is impossible

**PAPER** to paper over the cracks  
to institute extremely superficial and  
basically ineffective remedies

**PATH** path  
means of achieving an objective

**PATH** slippery path  
dangerous course of action

**PATH** to be on a path strewn with  
roses  
to lead a very pleasant life

**PATH** to beat a path to someone's  
door  
to seek a person out in great numbers

**PATH** to block someone's path  
to interfere with a person's opportunity to advance himself

**PATH** to cross someone's path  
to meet another person by chance

**PATH** to lead someone up the garden path  
to mislead a person by deliberately fallacious arguments

**PATH** to smooth the path for someone  
to use one's influence to make arrangements so that a person's task will be easier or more readily accomplished

**PATH** to tread a particular path  
to take certain initiatives

**PEG** a square peg in a round hole  
a person much more suitable for a position rather different from the one held

**PENNY** the penny dropped  
a person has just realized a fact which should have been obvious (refers to old-fashioned pay toilets)

**PILLAR** a pillar of some organization  
a significant supporter of some organization

**PLUG** to have the plug pulled out from under one  
to have a successful activity destroyed by the actions of someone else

**PUTTY** to be putty in someone's hands  
to be far too easily influenced by another person

**RIVET** to be riveted to one's seat  
to find the activity being watched very exciting and worthy of full attention

**ROCK** bedrock price  
lowest possible price

**ROOF** the roof has fallen in  
an enterprise has collapsed

**ROOF** to go through the roof  
(of a person) to be very upset or (of prices) to escalate greatly

**ROOF** to hit the roof  
to be very angry

**ROOF** to scream something from the rooftops  
to communicate a message to a wide audience

**ROOF** under one roof  
under the same management

**ROOM** there is no room to swing a cat  
this place is very small (actually refers to a cat-o'-nine-tails)

**SCREW** to have a screw loose  
to be mentally unbalanced

**SCREW** to tighten the screw  
to increase the moral and psychological pressure

**SHINGLE** to hang up one's shingle  
to go into business offering expert personal services

**SINK** everything but the kitchen sink  
a lot of things

**SLEDGEHAMMER** to use a sledgehammer to crack a nut  
to devote vastly more resources to a project than is warranted by all the circumstances

**STABLE** a Herculean cleaning of the stables  
a thorough revision of operating procedure (refers to Hercules, a mythical Greek hero who cleaned the stables of Augeas)

**STEAMROLL** to steamroll something through  
to use enormous force to achieve an objective

**STONE** cornerstone  
key ingredient

**STONE** the touchstone  
the standard

**TACK** to get down to brass tacks  
to discuss the aspects which really matter

**TAR** to have a touch of the tarbrush  
to be not quite a full-blood Caucasian

**TONGS** to go hammer and tongs  
to do something with great energy

**TOOLS** tools

the means to do something

**TOWER** a tower of Babel  
a noisy and confused assembly (Genesis 11)

**TOWER** to be a tower of strength  
to be a person who supports and comforts another

**TROWEL** to lay it on with a trowel  
to flatter

**TUNNEL** tunnel vision

an extremely narrow and inflexible way of considering issues

**WALL** Chinese walls

a system to ensure that different parts of some organization do not gain access to each other's confidential information

**WALL** I would love to be a fly on the wall

I would love to hear what goes on

**WALL** a chink in the wall

an opportunity to do something which otherwise could not be done

**WALL** to be a crack in the wall

to represent a small unintended opportunity which can be exploited

**WALL** to drive someone to the wall  
to ruin a person

**WALL** to drive someone up the wall  
to annoy another person by one's actions

**WALL** to go to the wall

to become bankrupt

**WALL** to have one's back to the wall  
to be hard-pressed by creditors or opponents

**WALL** to nail someone to the wall  
to outmaneuver another person

**WALL** to put a wall around someone  
to stop a person associating with others

**WALL** to see the writing on the wall  
to appreciate the inevitability of some event (Daniel 5)

**WALL** walls have ears

someone may be overhearing (words on wartime posters, reminding people of the existence of spies; may also refer to certain rooms in the Louvre, constructed so that conversations could be heard in other rooms)

**WALL** walls of Jericho

something seemingly solid but actually destructible (Joshua 6:20)

**WAY** to pave the way  
to prepare for something

**WEDGE** to be the thin end of the wedge

by conceding a small point to create an undesirable precedent for much larger issues

**WHITEWASH** to whitewash

to exonerate when this is not warranted by the facts

**WINDMILL** to tilt at windmills

to attack an imagined but non-existent enemy (from Cervantes' DON QUIXOTE)

**WINDOW** a window of opportunity  
an opportunity temporarily available

**WINDOW** to engage in window dressing

to present figures in an artificially favorable light

**WINDOW** to fly out the window  
to be lost

**WINDOW** to throw a pebble against the window

to gently draw attention to oneself

**WINDOW** to throw something out of the window

to completely reject an idea or proposal

**YARDSTICK** *a yardstick*  
a standard by which something is measured

## CARDS

**ACE** *to be within an ace of something*

to be extremely close to something

**ACE** *to have an ace up one's sleeve*  
to hold an impressive counter-argument in reserve

**ACE** *to hold all the aces*

to be in an unbeatable position to defeat others

**BUCK** *the buck stops here*

I accept full responsibility (sign on the desk of Harry S. Truman when President of the United States)

**BUCK** *to pass the buck*

in an uncooperative spirit to decline responsibility for a matter on the grounds that someone else more properly has responsibility for it

**CARD** *a house of cards*

an organization which gives a misleading impression of solidity

**CARD** *a three-card trick*

a ruse used by a dishonest person in order to induce his victims to hand over some of their assets

**CARD** *a wild card*

an unexpected development

**CARD** *let the cards fall where they may*

irrespective of what happens

**CARD** *to have the cards stacked against one*

to be faced with many difficulties frustrating a project

**CARD** *to hold all the cards*

to be assured of victory

**CARD** *to hold one's cards close to one's chest*

to keep one's plans and strategies secret

**CARD** *to lay one's cards on the table*

to be utterly frank and open or to honestly disclose one's position

**CARD** *to play every card in the pack*  
to try very hard and use every conceivable argument

**CARD** *to play one's cards right*  
to approach a matter sensibly

**CARD** *to play the cards as they fall*  
to deal with problems as they arise

**CARD** *to play the last card in the pack*

to lower one's standards in a final desperate effort

**CARD** *without any cards to play*  
without the means to achieve something

**DEALER** *sharp dealer*

person engaging in barely honest or mildly unethical practices

**HAND** *to deal the final hand*  
to take steps which conclude a matter

**HAND** *to disclose one's hand*  
to give away information regarding one's intention

**HAND** *to force someone's hand*  
to take action causing another person to react

**HAND** *to hold a winning hand*  
to be in an unbeatable position to defeat others

**HAND** *to throw in one's hand*  
to give in or to give up

**HAND** *to tip one's hand*

to disclose details of one's position

**HANDS** *to win hands down*  
to win very convincingly

**MISERE** *to be a laid-down misere*  
to be very easily accomplished and/or to be certain of outcome (refers to the declaration in certain card games undertaking to win no tricks)

**ODDS** *to have the odds stacked against one*  
to be faced with many difficulties frustrating a project

**PACK** *to play the last card in the pack*  
to lower one's standards in a final desperate effort

**PEG** *to be level pegging*  
(of contestants) to have little between them

**POKER** *a game of poker*  
negotiations in which the parties try to bluff each other

**POKER** *a poker face*  
a facial expression which does not reveal one's thoughts during negotiations

**SHOWDOWN** *showdown*  
disclosure of certain pertinent facts

**SUIT** *one's long suit*  
one's main skills

**SUIT** *to follow suit*  
to do the same as others

**TRICK** *to be unable to take a trick*  
to be unable to achieve success in anything

**TRUMP** *to hold the trump card*  
to be in an unbeatable position to defeat others

**TRUMP** *to play the trump card*  
to make a final move, thereby defeating one's opponents

**TRUMP** *to trump someone*  
to defeat a person

**TRUMP** *to turn up trumps*  
to finish up better than expected or to experience unexpected good luck

**UNDERPLAY** *to underplay some situation*  
to hold something in reserve

## CHESS

**CHECKMATE** *checkmate*  
defeat

**CHESS** *to be a chess game*  
to be a complex exercise, requiring great skill

**CHESSMASTER** *a chessmaster*  
a clever strategist

**GAMBIT** *a gambit*  
an opening move in a competitive situation which involves short term losses in the expectation of long term gains

**GAMBIT** *opening gambit*  
the first in a series of strategic moves (a tautological expression which also involves a misunderstanding of a technical chess term)

**KNIGHT** *a white knight*  
a party voluntarily coming to the assistance of another party at considerable cost to itself

**MOVE** *your move!*  
the next step is up to you

**PAWN** *a pawn*  
a person of small importance who is manipulated by others

**STALEMATE** *stalemate*  
a final result in which neither party to a dispute is victorious

## CIRCUSES

**AUNT** *an Aunt Sally*  
a person who can readily be singled out and criticized as the proxy for a group

**BALL** *to have too many balls in the air*  
to attempt to do more than can be coped with

**CARD** *to be on the cards*  
to be likely

**CARD** *to have a card up one's sleeve*  
to secretly have information relevant to a transaction

**CIRCUS** *to be a real circus*  
to be a highly disorganized affair

**CONJURE** *to conjure up a picture*  
to use words to convey a vivid impression

**CONJURE** *to conjure up something*  
to produce something in circumstances where this seemed impossible

**HOOP** *to jump through hoops*  
to undergo some ordeal

**LINE** *to tread the thin line*  
cautiously to take action in circumstances where either too much or too little will cause difficulties

**MAGIC** *the magic moment*  
the perfect time

**MAGIC** *there is no magic in that*  
that is quite ordinary

**MERRY** *to be on a merry-go-round*  
to be sent from one bureaucrat to another

**NET** *a safety net scheme*  
a scheme for dealing with the exceptional cases not covered by normal arrangements

**PULL** *to pull a rabbit out of the hat*  
to produce an unexpected and seemingly miraculous but highly desirable solution

**ROLLER** *a roller coaster ride*  
a series of successes followed by failures

**SLEIGHT** *sleight of hand*  
deceit by trickery

**SPOTLIGHT** *to turn the spotlight on something*  
to draw public attention to something

**SWING** *what one loses on the swings one gains on the roundabouts*  
there are advantages and disadvantages which offset each other

**TIGHTROPE** *to walk a tightrope*  
to do something very dangerous

**TRICK** *one cannot teach an old dog new tricks*  
people get irreversibly set in their ways

**TRICK** *something has done the trick*  
something has achieved the desired purpose

**TRICK** *to score a hat trick*  
to have three successive favorable outcomes

**TRICK** *to use every trick in the book*  
to try very hard and use every conceivable argument

**WAND** *to wave a magic wand*  
to direct affairs without the restraints of the real world

## CLOTHES

**APRON** *to be tied to someone's apron strings*  
to be excessively influenced by a female

**BELT** *to get something under one's belt*  
to achieve something

**BELT** *to hit someone below the belt*  
to act unfairly toward another person

**BELT** *to tighten one's belt*  
to lower one's rate of spending

**BONNET** *to have a bee in one's bonnet*  
to have an obsession

**BOOT** *to be too big for one's boots*  
to have an unwarranted belief as to one's capabilities or status

**BOOT** *to give someone the boot*  
to terminate a person's appointment

**BOOT** *to go in boots and all*  
to do something very roughly

**BOOT** *to hang up one's boots*  
to retire

**BOOT** *to have one's heart in one's boots*  
to be terrified

**BOOT** to lick someone's boots  
to show humility

**BOOT** to put the boot in  
to reprimand a person

**BOOT** to quake in one's boots  
to be afraid

**BOOTSTRAP** to be British to one's  
bootstraps

to be very demonstrative about one's  
Britishness

**BOOTSTRAP** to pull oneself up by  
one's bootstraps

to make a praiseworthy effort to bet-  
ter oneself unaided

**BREECHES** to be too big for one's  
breeches

to have an exaggerated idea of one's  
own importance

**CAP** a feather in one's cap  
a meritorious personal achievement

**CAP** cap  
upper permitted limit

**CAP** if the cap fits then wear it  
if your circumstances correspond with  
those described then you must endure  
the consequences

**CAP** to cap a story  
to tell an even funnier story than the  
one just told

**CAP** to earn a dunce's cap  
to do something stupid

**CAP** to go cap in hand  
to show humility while soliciting a  
favor

**CAP** to put one's thinking cap on  
to concentrate on finding a solution  
to a difficult problem

**CAP** to set one's cap at someone  
(of females) to try to attract a person  
as a marriage partner

**CAP** to throw one's cap into the air  
to celebrate some achievement

**CLOAK** cloak and dagger activity  
secret activity

**CLOAK** to cloak something  
to disguise the true nature of something

**CLOTHES** to steal someone's clothes  
to plagiarise another person's ideas

**CLOTHING** to be a wolf in sheep's  
clothing

to be a hypocrite or to be dangerous  
although masquerading as something  
harmless (Matthew 7:15)

**COAT** to cut one's coat according  
to the cloth

to accommodate oneself to limitations  
beyond one's control and to do the  
best in the circumstances

**COAT** to hang onto someone's  
coat-tails

to excessively rely on another per-  
son's initiatives

**COAT** to trail one's coattails  
to invite a quarrel

**COLLAR** to be hot under the collar  
to be very agitated

**CUFF** off the cuff  
impromptu

**DRESS** first in best dressed  
persons acting early will do better  
than latecomers

**DRESS** to dress someone down  
to scold a person

**GARTER** I will have his guts for  
garters

I am extremely angry and dissatisfied  
with him

**GAUNTLET** to throw down the  
gauntlet

to issue a challenge (refers to the  
glove worn by a knight)

**GLOVE** the gloves are off  
the challenge has been accepted

**GLOVE** to treat someone with kid  
gloves

to handle a person with great discretion

**GLOVE** to work hand in glove with someone  
to work in close cooperation with a person or to be in collusion with a person to the detriment of others

**GLOVE** with an iron hand in a velvet glove  
with a hard attitude made to seem soft

**HAT** I'll eat my hat if so-and-so happens  
I do not believe that so-and-so will happen

**HAT** a peg to hang a hat on  
something which provides a convenient or plausible excuse for some particular action

**HAT** at the drop of a hat  
very readily

**HAT** not to just pick something out of a hat  
to choose carefully, after weighing all the considerations

**HAT** to be old hat  
to be a very widely-known fact

**HAT** to keep something under one's hat  
to maintain a confidence

**HAT** to knock something into a cocked hat  
to twist something so that its original form is hardly recognizable

**HAT** to pull a rabbit out of the hat  
to produce an unexpected and seemingly miraculous but highly desirable solution

**HAT** to score a hat trick  
to have three successive favorable outcomes

**HAT** to take one's hat off to someone  
to be full of admiration for a person

**HAT** to talk through one's hat  
to say things which demonstrate the speaker's ignorance of the subject

**HAT** to throw one's hat into the air to express joy

**HAT** to wear a particular hat  
to act in a particular capacity or for a particular vested interest

**IRON** to iron out something  
to sort out a difficult problem

**JACKET** to keep someone in a strait-jacket  
to deny a person any discretionary powers at all

**KNICKERS** to get one's knickers in a knot  
to get unduly excited

**LACE** strait-laced  
puritanical

**LINEN** to wash one's dirty linen in public  
to expose one's domestic differences to the world at large

**MANTLE** to assume someone's mantle  
to take over another person's role

**MASK** to unmask someone  
to discover a person's true identity

**PAJAMAS** to be the cat's pajamas  
to have an exaggerated idea of one's importance

**PANTS** a kick in the pants  
an admonition

**PANTS** to bore the pants off someone  
to weary a person by dull and uninteresting conversation

**PANTS** to catch someone with his pants down  
to act when another person least expects it

**PANTS** to charm the pants off someone  
to delight a person

**PANTS** to fly by the seat of one's pants  
to act unprofessionally

**PANTS** to scare the pants off someone  
to greatly frighten a person

**PETTICOAT** petticoat government rule by women

**PIN** for two pins I would do so-and-so

my tolerance is almost exhausted and I am very tempted to do so-and-so

**PIN** not to care a pin for something not to have the slightest interest in something

**PIN** pin money

an allowance to a wife for her personal use

**PIN** to be on pins and needles

to be very agitated

**PINPOINT** to pinpoint

to identify very precisely

**POCKET** not to live in each other's pockets

to each follow his own lifestyle

**POCKET** the hip pocket nerve

the assessment of issues by their financial effects on one

**POCKET** to be in someone's pocket to be subject to undue influence by another person

**POCKET** to be out of pocket

to have been forced to spend money which cannot be recovered from others

**POCKET** to have deep pockets

to have large financial resources

**POCKET** to have money burning a hole in one's pocket

to be impatient to spend or invest available funds

**POCKET** to line one's pockets

to make, improperly and secretly, a profit out of some transaction

**POCKET** to put one's hands in one's pockets

to spend

**PURSE** one can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear  
it is impossible to manufacture something of a high standard without appropriate raw materials

**PURSE** to button up one's purse to refuse to spend money

**PURSE** to hold the purse strings to have control of expenditure

**PURSE** to tighten the purse strings to reduce outlays

**SACKCLOTH** to wear sackcloth and ashes

humbly to demonstrate repentance

**SEAM** to be bursting at the seams to be very crowded

**SEAM** to come apart at the seams (of an arrangement) to break down

**SEW** to sew something up to negotiate a deal

**SHIRT** keep your shirt on! relax!

**SHIRT** so-and-so would give one the shirt off his back

so-and-so is very generous

**SHIRT** to lose one's shirt to make heavy financial losses

**SHIRT** to put one's shirt on something

to invest heavily in some speculative venture

**SHIRT** to wear a hair shirt to practice self-discipline

**SHOE** to be in someone's shoes to have another person's responsibility

**SHOE** to fill someone's shoes to be a good successor

**SHOE** to wait for the other shoe to drop

to await the seemingly imminent and inevitable (refers to a man undressing, disturbing a neighbor by dropping one shoe, then frustrating his expectation by putting the other shoe down gently)

<b>SHOELACE</b> to pull oneself up by one's own shoelaces	
to make a superhuman effort	
<b>SHOESTRING</b> to do something on a shoestring	
to do something with great economy	
<b>SKIRT</b> to hide under someone's skirts	
to let someone else take the consequences of one's actions	
<b>SLEEVE</b> to have an ace up one's sleeve	
to hold an impressive counter-argument in reserve	
<b>SLEEVE</b> to keep something up one's sleeve	
to secretly retain something in reserve for use in the future or at a later stage of negotiations	
<b>SLEEVE</b> to laugh up one's sleeve	
to laugh surreptitiously	
<b>SLEEVE</b> to roll up one's sleeves	
to get on with a job energetically	
<b>SLEEVE</b> to wear one's heart on one's sleeve	
to lack the reserve expected of one	
<b>SOCK</b> to chop someone off at the socks	
to stop someone's proposals prematurely	
<b>SOCK</b> to pull one's socks up	
to set out to improve or correct one's inadequate behavior or performance	
<b>STITCH</b> a stitch in time saves nine	
preventive maintenance saves money in the long run	
<b>STITCH</b> to stitch up a deal	
to successfully conclude a deal	
<b>THREAD</b> to hang by a slender thread	
to only just survive	
<b>TROUSERS</b> to catch someone with his trousers down	
to act when another person least expects it	

<b>TROUSERS</b> to wear the trousers	
to be the dominant party	
<b>TRY</b> to try something on for size	
to cheekily do something	
<b>UMBRELLA</b> an umbrella	
protection; or something all embracing	
<b>UMBRELLA</b> under the umbrella of some organization	
under the auspices of some organization	
<b>UNVEIL</b> to unveil something	
to give details not previously available	
<b>VEIL</b> thinly-veiled	
barely concealed	
<b>VEIL</b> to draw a veil over something	
pointedly to avoid discussing something	
<b>VEIL</b> under the veil of something	
on the pretext of something	
<b>WASH</b> it will all come out in the wash	
the facts will emerge as work proceeds	
<b>WASH</b> it won't wash	
this explanation is not acceptable	
<b>WASH</b> when the wash comes through the machine	
in due course	
<b>WEAR</b> that argument is wearing a bit thin	
that is a very weak case	
<b>WEAR</b> to have to wear something	
to have to put up with something	

## COLORS

<b>BLACK</b> a black hole	
an intermediate range of values producing anomalous results or a particularly obnoxious prison cell	
<b>BLACK</b> a black sheep	
a disreputable member of an otherwise reputable group	
<b>BLACK</b> in black and white	
in writing, spelling out all the details	

**BLACK** *the pot calling the kettle black*  
a person criticizing another person without realizing his own even greater shortcomings

**BLACK** *there are black clouds on the horizon*  
bad news is expected

**BLACK** *things look black*  
there is little hope of success or prosperity or a favorable outcome

**BLACK** *to be a black and white issue*  
to involve very clear distinctions

**BLACK** *to be in someone's black books*

to be out of favor with a person

**BLACK** *to be in the black*  
to have money

**BLACK** *to blackball someone*  
to reject a person as unsuitable

**BLACK** *to give someone a black look*  
to indicate one's displeasure with a person

**BLACK** *to have a black mark against one's name*  
to have a tarnished reputation

**BLACK** *to paint a black picture*  
to state a set of unfavorable factors

**BLACK** *to paint someone black*  
to ruin a person's reputation

**BLUE** *a blueblood*  
a person of high birth (refers to the appearance of veins on the skin of members of some royal families)

**BLUE** *between the devil and the deep blue sea*

to be faced with two equally unpalatable alternatives which cannot both be avoided

**BLUE** *blue ribbon*  
of superb quality (refers to the insignia of the Order of the Garter)

**BLUE** *blue sky*  
supremely optimistic

**BLUE** *blue-eyed boy*  
person shown unjustified favoritism

**BLUE** *once in a blue moon*  
very rarely (refers to the volcanic eruption at Krakatoa in 1883 when volcanic dust caused the moon to appear blue)

**BLUE** *to be a blue-chip stock*  
to be of excellent quality

**BLUE** *to be a bolt from the blue*  
to be a totally unexpected event

**BLUE** *to be in a blue funk*  
to be terrified

**BLUE** *to come out of the blue*  
to be totally unexpected

**BLUE** *to feel blue*  
to feel depressed

**BLUE** *to go on till one is blue in the face*  
to argue for a long time

**BLUE** *to have a blue fit*  
to be very agitated

**BLUE** *to scream blue murder*  
to make serious allegations

**BLUE** *true blue*  
superbly loyal

**BROWN** *to be browned off*  
to be fed-up

**COLOR** *that takes on added color*  
there are now further facts which alter the appearance of a matter

**COLOR** *to see the color of someone's money*  
to get evidence of the sincerity of a person's proposal

**GILD** *to gild the lily*  
(actually: to gild refined gold, to paint the lily) to do something patently unnecessary

**GILT** *gilt-edged*  
very safe

**GOLD** *a golden opportunity*  
an unparalleled opportunity

**GOLD** *silence is golden*  
it is better not to incriminate anyone

**GRAY** *to be a gray area*  
to be in an undefined position straddling two or more possibilities

**GREEN** *a green chum*  
an inexperienced person

**GREEN** *distant fields look greener*  
activities of which one has no experience seem much easier than is really the case

**GREEN** *to be green*  
to be naive

**GREEN** *to give the green light*  
to grant permission

**GREEN** *to have green fingers*  
to be good at gardening

**GREEN** *to move on to greener pastures*  
to commence a new, better career

**GREEN** *to turn green*  
to become very envious

**PINK** *to be tickled pink*  
to be very pleased

**PINK** *to look in the pink*  
to look well

**PURPLE** *to be purple with rage*  
to be very angry

**RED** *a red-letter day*  
an important occasion (refers to the color used to print saints' days on some calendars)

**RED** *neither fish, flesh nor good red herring*  
unclassifiable by virtue of being neither one thing nor another (from Cervantes' DON QUIXOTE)

**RED** *red-hot*  
highly exciting and desirable

**RED** *red tape*  
excessively bureaucratic procedures

**RED** *the red-carpet treatment*  
courtesies extended to a person to make him feel important and welcome

**RED** *to be a red herring*  
to be something designed to divert attention away from the main question

**RED** *to be a red rag to a bull*  
to be something which makes a person very angry and very excited (refers to the erroneous belief that the color red, rather than the motion of waving, excites a bull)

**RED** *to be in the red*  
to owe money

**RED** *to be left red-faced*  
to be embarrassed

**RED** *to catch someone red-handed*  
to apprehend a person in the course of committing a crime

**RED** *to get the red light*  
to be forbidden to do something

**RED** *to paint the town red*  
to go on an exciting social outing

**RED** *to see red*  
to become very angry

**RED** *to see red lights flashing*  
to be conscious of the danger

**ROSY** *to present a rosy picture*  
to state a set of favorable factors

**SILVER** *every cloud has a silver lining*  
there are benefits even in seemingly adverse situations

**WHITE** *a white elephant*  
an expensive and useless luxury (refers to gifts of sacred elephants by the King of Siam to persons then ruined by the expense of their upkeep)

**WHITE** *a white knight*  
a party voluntarily coming to the assistance of another party at considerable cost to itself

**WHITE** *a white lie*

a false statement uttered in a good cause

**WHITE** *in black and white*

in writing, spelling out all the details

**WHITE** *lily-white*

honest and incorruptible

**WHITE** *to be a black and white issue*

to involve very clear distinctions

**WHITE** *to show the white feather*

to indicate cowardice (refers to cross-bred birds, not regarded as useful in cock fighting)

**WHITE** *to turn white*

to express shock at unexpected news

**WHITE** *to white ant someone*

to surreptitiously seek to destroy a person

**COMMERCE****ADD** *it adds up*

it makes sense

**BANK** *to laugh all the way to the bank*

to appreciate one's good fortune

**BANKRUPT** *to be bankrupt of ideas*

to be bereft of ideas

**BARGAIN** *to be more than one bargained for*

to be more than one expected

**BASKET** *to put something into the 'too hard' basket*

to defer consideration of a difficult issue

**BLANK** *to give someone a blank check*

to give another person unlimited delegated authority

**BOOK** *to balance the books*

to get one's own back

**BUY** *I buy that*

I accept that idea

**BUY** *to buy into some argument*  
to seek to participate in some discussion

**BUY** *to buy straw hats in winter*  
to buy in a depressed market when most other people are sellers

**CENT** *to throw in one's two cents' worth*  
to modestly supply one's own facts or views

**CHANGE** *to be shortchanged*  
to be given less than is due to one

**COAL** *to carry coals to Newcastle*  
to do something ridiculously unnecessary

**COIN** *the other side of the coin*  
the arguments for the opposite point of view

**COIN** *to pay someone back in his own coin*  
to retaliate in kind

**CUSTOMER** *a slippery customer*  
a shifty person

**DIVIDENDS** *to show dividends*  
to be successful

**HEDGE** *to be hedged around*  
(of a statement) to be surrounded by qualifications

**I** *to dot the i's and cross the t's*  
to be meticulous in completing the documentation for a transaction

**INK** *the ink is hardly dry*  
something intended to last a long time is to be changed shortly after its establishment

**IRON** *to give a cast-iron guarantee*  
to give a very secure undertaking to do something

**LINE** *the bottom line*  
the conclusion which matters or the net effect of a series of developments

**LINE** *to sign on the dotted line*  
to confirm one's agreement

**LIST** *a shopping list*  
a catalogue of demands

**MARK** *to make something one's trademark*  
to earn a reputation for maintaining some stance

**MESSAGE** *to get the message*  
to understand the real import of what is being said

**MITE** *not a mite*  
not at all (refers to a Flemish coin of small value)

**MONEY** *not for love or money*  
definitely not

**MONEY** *not to be made of money*  
not to be wealthy

**MONEY** *to put one's money where one's mouth is*  
to back one's judgment by putting assets at risk

**MONEY** *to see the color of someone's money*  
to get evidence of the sincerity of a person's proposal

**PAPER** *to start with a blank sheet of paper*  
to commence an exercise without being bound by any established practices

**PAR** *to be below par*  
to be less than the desired standard

**PAY** *that has put paid to it*  
the project can no longer proceed

**PAY** *to pay off*  
to be successful

**PAY** *to pay something back with interest*  
to return a small favor with a bigger favor or to extract retribution of greater value than the circumstances warrant

**PENNY** *a twopenny halfpenny outfit*  
a quite insignificant operation

**PENNY** *in for a penny—in for a pound*

once something is commenced it ought to be finished; or if one is willing to take a small risk then one might as well take a bigger one

**PENNY** *to throw in one's six pennies' worth*  
to modestly supply one's own facts or views

**PENNY** *to turn an honest penny*  
to earn money out of odd jobs

**PITCH** *to queer the pitch for someone*  
to spoil the opportunity a person has to do something

**POUND** *in for a penny—in for a pound*  
once something is commenced it ought to be finished; or if one is willing to take a small risk then one might as well take a bigger one

**PRE-EMPT** *to pre-empt some issue*  
to deliberately do something which has the effect of limiting the range of alternative approaches to a matter

**PRICE** *to pay the price*  
to suffer the adverse consequences of one's acts or omissions

**RAZOO** *not to have a brass razoo*  
to be very poor

**SALE** *fire sale*  
a forced sale, realizing bargain prices

**SELL** *to be sold on something*  
to be utterly dedicated to a proposal

**SELL** *to sell one's birthright for a mess of pottage*  
through foolishness to exchange something of substance for something of little value (Genesis 25)

**SELL** *to sell someone down the river*  
to betray a person who has placed his trust in one

**SHAKE** *a golden handshake*  
a large payment in connection with or  
as an inducement to retirement

**SHARE** *to have shares in a paper  
company*  
to institute unnecessary clerical pro-  
cedures

**SHILLING** *to be only ten pence in  
the shilling*  
to be slightly stupid

**SHILLING** *to cut someone off with  
a shilling*  
to exclude a person as a beneficiary  
under one's will (refers to the mistak-  
en belief that a will cannot be upset  
in favor of a person actually named  
in a will and clearly not overlooked)

**SHOP** *to shop around*  
to explore alternatives

**SHOP** *to shut up shop*  
to cease an established activity

**SHOP** *to talk shop*  
to discuss business or professional  
matters on a social occasion

**SHOWCASE** *showcase*  
magnificent

**SHUTTER** *to put up the shutters*  
to cease an established activity

**SLATE** *to wipe the slate clean*  
to forgive past indiscretions

**STAMP** *to rubber-stamp something*  
to endorse without considering the  
merits

**STOCK** *to take stock*  
to contemplate the alternatives

**STORE** *to take over the store*  
to assume the management

**TRADE** *a Jack of all trades*  
an amateur who can turn his hand to  
anything

**TRUCK** *to have no truck with  
someone*  
to refuse to deal with a person

**VALUE** *to take something at face  
value*  
(of alleged facts) to accept some-  
thing without question or challenge

**WEALTH** *a wealth of something*  
a great quantity of something

## CRIME

**FELONY** *to compound the felony*  
having already acted improperly to  
make matters worse (the misuse of a  
legal term: compounding a felony is  
the crime of agreeing for money not  
to prosecute a person for felony; in  
reality it is therefore an offense by a  
different person—not a second and  
worse offense by the original culprit)

**HIJACK** *to hijack a debate*  
to involve oneself in the public dis-  
cussion of some matter and turn that  
discussion to one's advantage

**MURDER** *to be sheer murder*  
to be extremely unpleasant or diffi-  
cult; or to be an inglorious defeat

**MURDER** *to get away with murder*  
to do something outrageous without  
penalty

**MURDER** *to scream blue murder*  
to make serious allegations

**PINCH** *penny-pinching*  
excessively mean

**ROB** *to rob Peter in order to pay  
Paul*  
to fix up one grievance by causing  
another

**ROBBERY** *daylight robbery*  
the charging of grossly excessive prices

**ROBBERY** *highway robbery*  
the charging of grossly excessive prices

**SHOTGUN** *a shotgun wedding*  
a wedding held to ensure that an  
impending birth will be legitimate (ref-  
ers to threats by the bride's father to  
kill the bridegroom)

**THROAT** *cut-throat*  
highly competitive

## DEATH

**BLOCK** *someone's head is on the block*

a person is in danger of having his appointment terminated

**BLOW** *death blow*

incident which results in the destruction of something

**BODY** *over my dead body*  
never

**COFFIN** *to be another nail in someone's coffin*

to represent a further step toward someone's downfall

**CORPSE** *to breathe life into a corpse*

to revive something moribund

**CORPSE** *to chase a corpse*

to harp on something long ago resolved or a lost cause

**DEAD** *I wouldn't be caught dead without some object*

I regard some object as very important

**DEAD** *a dead letter*

a rule still in existence but no longer observed in practice

**DEAD** *dead and buried*

(of some issue) definitely concluded, especially so long ago as to be nearly forgotten

**DEAD** *drop dead!*

go away, I want no dealings with you

**DEAD** *to be a dead duck*

to have failed

**DEAD** *to cut someone dead*  
to snub a person

**DEAD** *to leave others for dead*

to be vastly superior

**DEAD** *to make noise enough to wake the dead*

to be excessively noisy

**DEAD** *to run into a dead end*  
to get nowhere in an investigation

**DEATH** *a death wish*

the contemplation of action so foolish that it is likely to lead to utter disaster

**DEATH** *sudden death*

instantaneously or without phasing in

**DEATH** *to be in at the death*

to be present at the conclusion of something

**DEATH** *to be on one's death bed*

(of an organization or a piece of equipment) to be about to cease functioning

**DEATH** *to be the kiss of death*

to be something intended to be helpful but resulting in total destruction

**DEATH** *to bore someone to death*

to greatly weary a person by dull and uninteresting conversation or by lack of action

**DEATH** *to die a natural death*

by virtue of changed circumstances or the effluxion of time to be no longer relevant

**DEATH** *to sign one's own death warrant*

to foolishly do something which is inevitably bound to lead to utter disaster

**DEATH** *to slowly bleed to death*

to be heading in gradual steps toward total ruin

**DEATH** *to sound the death knell of something*

to indicate the impending end of something

**DEATHKNOCK** *on the deathknock*

at the last possible moment

**DIE** *to be dying to do something*  
to be extremely keen to do something

**DIE** *to die hard*

not to give up easily

**FATAL** *to be fatal*

to be sufficient to destroy some proposal

**FUNERAL** *that is your funeral!*  
that is the fate which you will have to suffer

**GRAVE** *he would turn in his grave*  
he would have been very surprised or displeased if he had known while still alive

**GRAVE** *to dig one's own grave*  
to take action which results in an unintended disaster for oneself

**GRAVE** *to have one foot in the grave*  
to be dying

**HANG** *one might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb*  
further action will not increase the adverse consequences already in train  
(refers to the stealing of both sheep and lambs being capital crimes under old English law)

**KILL** *to be dressed to kill*  
to be more finely dressed than the occasion warrants

**KILL** *to be in at the kill*  
to be present at the climactic finish to something

**KILL** *to be killed in the rush*  
to be the supplier of something extremely popular

**KILL** *to kill oneself laughing*  
to be greatly amused

**KILL** *to kill some proposal stone dead*  
to abandon some proposal completely

**KILL** *to kill the fatted calf*  
to demonstrate welcome and forgiveness on a person's return (Luke 15:23)

**KILL** *to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs*  
through excessive greed to destroy a very profitable enterprise

**MORTEM** *to conduct a postmortem on something*  
to review past actions with a view to learning lessons for the future (Latin, "after the death")

**NOOSE** *to put one's head in the noose*  
to recklessly and unnecessarily expose oneself to great danger

**NOOSE** *to tighten the noose*  
to get closer to inflicting defeat

**SLAUGHTER** *a lamb led to slaughter*  
a naive person allowing himself to be exploited

## EDUCATION

**BOOK** *to take a leaf out of someone's book*

to model oneself on another person

**CANE** *to take a caning*  
to suffer the adverse consequences of one's acts or omissions

**COPYBOOK** *to blot one's copybook*  
to spoil one's previously good reputation or record

**DICTIONARY** *someone has swallowed a dictionary*  
a person uses excessively long words

**DUNCE** *to earn a dunce's cap*  
to do something stupid

**HOMEWORK** *to do one's homework*  
to thoroughly analyze an issue

**LESSON** *to drive the lesson home*  
to take certain action which is unpleasant but which has the effect of registering a message

**LESSON** *to learn a lesson*  
to benefit from one's experience

**LESSON** *to teach someone a lesson*  
to inflict something unpleasant on a person in the hope that it will lead to a change in his behavior

**SCHOOL** *to tell tales out of school*  
to deliberately leak a secret

**SCHOOLBOY** *as every schoolboy knows*  
as is recognized by everyone

**SPELL** to spell something out  
to explain something in detail

## FARMING

**AX** the ax has fallen  
it is now too late

**AX to ax**  
to cancel

**AX to have an ax to grind**  
to have a vested interest

**AX to sharpen one's ax**  
to get ready for a difficult task

**AX where the ax falls**  
who gets terminated

**BAG** it is in the bag  
the enterprise has succeeded

**BARN** to barnstorm  
to visit accompanied by a show of force

**BELL** bell-wether  
first indication

**BLOCK** to be a chip off the old block  
to resemble one's father

**BUCKET** to kick the bucket  
to die

**BULLDOZE** to bulldoze some proposal through  
to ensure the passage of some measure in complete disregard of criticism or opposition

**CHIP** that is the way the chips fall  
that is the actual situation

**CHIP** when the chips are down  
when all facts are known and taken into consideration

**COTTON** to be out of one's cotton-picking mind  
to act irrationally

**COTTON** to keep one's cotton-picking fingers off something  
not to interfere in something

**EARTH** a down-to-earth solution  
a realistic solution

**FIELD** distant fields look greener activities of which one has no experience seem much easier than is really the case

**FLEECE** to fleece someone  
to cheat a person out of some asset

**GROUND** to clear the ground  
to dispose of the preliminaries

**HARVEST** harvest  
end result of labor

**HAY** to hit the hay  
to go to sleep

**HAYSTACK** to find a needle in a haystack  
to find something when the probability of finding it is very small

**HOOK** to get someone off the hook  
to rescue a person from an embarrassing predicament

**HOOK** to let someone off the hook  
to allow a person to escape the adverse consequences of his own actions

**MILL** it is all grist to the mill  
this is useful but unexciting additional material

**MILL** run of the mill  
normal or average

**MILL** the mills of God grind slowly  
retribution may be delayed but is inevitable

**MILL** to put someone through the mill  
to give a person practical experience

**MOVER** prime mover  
person initiating and promoting a cause

**OATS** to sow wild oats  
to indulge in foolish behavior while a young adult

**PADDOCK** to have a spell in the paddock  
to have leave of absence

**PASTOR** *pastor*

religious official in charge of a congregation

**PASTURE** *to move on to greener pastures*

to commence a new, better career

**PLOW** *speed the plow!*

let us get on with this as fast as possible!

**PLOW** *to plow new ground*

to laboriously engage in an untried activity

**PLOW** *to plow on*

to methodically and painstakingly continue with an activity

**PLOW** *to plow profits back*

to retain profits in a business

**PLOW** *to put one's hand to the plow*

voluntarily to undertake some task (Luke 9:62)

**PUMP** *to engage in pump priming*

to spend public money with the aim of attracting parochial electoral support

**REAP** *to reap as one has sown*

to experience the consequences of one's own actions

**REAP** *to sow the wind and reap the whirlwind*

to make bad mistakes and to suffer the even worse consequences

**REIN** *to give someone free rein*

to confer complete discretion on another person

**ROOST** *the chickens are coming home to roost*

the consequences of past actions are becoming obvious

**ROW** *to have a hard row to hoe*

to be a difficult assignment

**SHEPHERD** *to shepherd some group*

to marshall the members of some group

**SOW** *to sow the wind and reap the whirlwind*

to make bad mistakes and to suffer the even worse consequences

**SPADE** *to call a spade a spade*

not to mince words

**SPADE** *to do the spadework*

to prepare

**TALLY** *to keep a tally*

to keep a record (refers to a piece of wood with notches made on it to indicate a count)

**TETHER** *to be at the end of one's tether*

to be frustrated by a lack of knowledge, authority or patience

**TRAP** *to walk into a trap*

to be tricked into doing something

**WHIP** *to be a fair crack of the whip*

to be just

**WHIP** *to crack the whip*

to exert one's authority

**WOOL** *woolly-headed*

slightly muddled

**FOOD AND DRINK****APPLE** *a rotten apple*

an isolated dishonest person in an otherwise honest group

**APPLECART** *to upset the applecart*

to engage in conduct disturbing a peaceful state of affairs and thereby cause discomfort

**BACON** *to bring home the bacon*

to be successful

**BACON** *to save one's bacon*

to escape harm

**BAKE** *half-baked*

not well thought out

**BANANA** *a banana republic*

a country with a poor economy

<b>BARREL</b> to really scrape the bottom of the barrel	
to lower one's standards because one is short of important or relevant issues	
<b>BEAN</b> to be full of beans	
to be very cheerful	
<b>BEAN</b> to spill the beans	
to indiscreetly reveal sensitive information	
<b>BEER</b> not to be all beer and skittles	
not to be all pleasant and easy	
<b>BEER</b> to be small beer	
to be quite unimportant	
<b>BEER</b> to cry in one's beer	
to show remorse	
<b>BOIL</b> it boils down to this	
the essential features are as follows	
<b>BOTTLE</b> a bottleneck	
a factor obstructing an even flow	
<b>BOTTLE</b> to be a full bottle on something	
to be very knowledgeable	
<b>BREAD</b> a bread and butter issue	
a basic issue which is of importance to many people	
<b>BREAD</b> a breadwinner	
a person earning by personal exertion the income of a household	
<b>BREAD</b> to be someone's bread and butter	
to be a person's livelihood or to be a person's everyday experience	
<b>BREAD</b> to cast one's bread upon the waters	
not to expect gratitude or recognition for one's good works (Ecclesiastes 11:1)	
<b>BREAD</b> to know on which side one's bread is buttered	
to be aware of the important considerations	
<b>BREAD</b> to put jam on someone's bread	
to make a good situation even better	

<b>BREAKFAST</b> to be able to eat someone for breakfast	
to be able to outwit a person very easily	
<b>BROTH</b> too many cooks spoil the broth	
one leader is all that is required	
<b>BUN</b> a bunfight	
a minor and relatively friendly skirmish	
<b>BUTTER</b> a bread and butter issue	
a basic issue which is of importance to many people	
<b>BUTTER</b> a butter fingers	
a person unable to catch and/or hold on to an object	
<b>BUTTER</b> someone looks as if butter would not melt in his mouth	
a person looks sweet and innocent	
<b>BUTTER</b> to be someone's bread and butter	
to be a person's livelihood or to be a person's everyday experience	
<b>CAKE</b> a share of the cake	
a portion of the total available for distribution	
<b>CAKE</b> that takes the cake	
that is quite absurd or outrageous or excessively cheeky	
<b>CAKE</b> to be a piece of cake	
to be very easy or greatly to one's liking	
<b>CAKE</b> to be icing on top of the cake	
to be an additional benefit in an already satisfactory scenario	
<b>CAKE</b> to want to have one's cake and eat it too	
to want two mutually exclusive alternatives	
<b>CAN</b> to carry the can for someone	
to accept the blame for another person's actions or inactions	
<b>CHEESE</b> cheese paring	
stingy	

**CHEESE** *stiff cheese!*

circumstances which may be unwelcome but which will not be altered and in respect of which no great sympathy is felt

**CHEESE** *to be cheesed off*  
to be disgusted**CHESTNUT** *to pull someone's chestnuts out of the fire*  
to retrieve a situation**CHEW** *to bite off more than one can chew*

to be overly ambitious and thus unrealistic as to one's capabilities

**CHEW** *to have something to chew on*

to have firm facts on which to base a decision

**CHIP** *to have had one's chips*  
to have received all that is going to be forthcoming**COOK** *to be cooking with gas*  
to be fully operational**COOK** *to cook the books*  
fraudulently to maintain false records of financial transactions**COOKIE** *that is the way the cookie crumbles*  
that is the actual situation**CREAM** *to be cream on top of the milk*

to be an additional benefit in an already satisfactory scenario

**CREME** *creme de la creme*  
something quite superlative (French, "the cream of the cream")**CRUMB** *to throw someone a few crumbs*  
to fob a person off with a few symbolic but unimportant concessions**DINNER** *to be done like a dinner*  
to be defeated and humiliated**DOUGHNUT** *watch the doughnut—not the hole*  
look for the positive aspects**DRINK** *it is a long time between drinks*

activity is occurring only very spasmodically

**DRINK** *to be meat and drink*  
to be very pleasurable**DROP** *to squeeze the last drop out of something*

to get the maximum advantage out of some favorable situation

**DRUG** *to be a drug on the market*  
to be in overplentiful supply**EAT** *I'll eat my hat if so-and-so happens*

I do not believe that so-and-so will happen

**EAT** *to eat crow*  
to accept a humiliating defeat**EAT** *to eat one's words*  
to retract**EAT** *to eat out of someone's hands*  
to be unduly compliant**EAT** *you can eat your heart out*  
you are entitled to feel sad or jealous**EGG** *a nest egg*  
life savings**EGG** *as sure as eggs are eggs*  
with great certainty**EGG** *chicken and egg*  
two factors each of which results in the other**EGG** *not to put all one's eggs in one basket*  
to spread one's risks**EGG** *there are many ways to cook eggs*  
there are many ways to achieve an objective**EGG** *to be a curate's egg*  
to be good only in parts (refers to an 1895 cartoon in PUNCH)**EGG** *to have egg on one's face*  
to be embarrassed by the results of one's own stupidity

**EGG** to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs  
through excessive greed to destroy a very profitable enterprise

**EGG** to teach one's grandmother how to suck eggs  
to try to tell a much more experienced person something very obvious to him

**FAT** the fat is in the fire  
action with certain unstoppable consequences has now been initiated

**FAT** to chew fat  
to eat and talk together

**FAT** to trim the fat  
to increase efficiency by reducing outlays

**FATTEN** to kill the fatted calf  
to demonstrate welcome and forgiveness on a person's return (Luke 15:23)

**FEAST** a movable feast  
an event not customarily held on a set date

**FEAST** to be either feast or famine  
to go from one extreme to the other

**FISH** to have more important fish to fry  
to have more important things to do

**FLAVOR** to be the flavor of the month  
to be a commodity temporarily popular without a logical reason

**FLESH** one's pound of flesh  
that which is due to one (from Shakespeare's MERCHANT OF VENICE)

**FLESHPOT** fleshpots  
sumptuous living (Exodus 16:3)

**FOOD** food for thought  
material for examination in one's mind

**FOOD** to take food out of the mouths of children  
cruelly to deprive the needy

**FRY** out of the frying pan into the fire  
from one bad situation to an even worse one

**GEL** to gel  
to make sense

**GRAVY** to get on a gravy train  
to take steps to become a recipient of benefits which are available but undeserved

**HARD-BOILED** hard-boiled  
toughened by experience

**HONEY** a land of milk and honey  
a country in which everything is in abundant supply

**ICE** to put something on ice  
to put something aside for the time being

**ICING** to be icing on top of the cake  
to be an additional benefit in an already satisfactory scenario

**JAM** money for jam  
remuneration easily earned

**JAM** to be in a jam  
to be in difficulties

**JAM** to just pick the plums out of the jam  
to take only the very best items

**JAM** to put jam on someone's bread  
to make a good situation even better

**JELLY** to be set like a jelly  
to be very well established

**KITCHEN** if one can't stand the heat one should stay out of the kitchen

a person should not put himself in a position involving pressures with which he cannot cope (words attributed to Harry S. Truman)

**KNIFE** before one can say "knife"  
very quickly

**KNIFE** one could have cut the atmosphere with a knife  
those present were very tense

**KNIFE** *the knives are out*  
there is an active campaign against someone

**KNIFE** *to be on a knife edge*  
to be in danger

**KNIFE** *to hold a knife at someone's throat*

to exert undue pressure on another person in an endeavor to achieve a result which would otherwise not be forthcoming

**KNIFE** *to sharpen the knives*  
to get ready for a concerted attack on some principle

**KNIFE** *to stick a knife into someone*  
to act vindictively toward a person

**KOSHER** *to be kosher*

to fulfill all requirements (refers to food complying with all aspects of Jewish religious law)

**MANNA** *manna from heaven*  
unexpected benefits (Exodus 16:15)

**MEAT** *to be easy meat*

to be an opponent who is readily outwitted

**MEAT** *to be meat and drink*

to be very pleasurable

**MEAT** *to contain much meat*

to contain much material worthy of consideration

**MILK** *a land of milk and honey*  
a country in which everything is in abundant supply

**MILK** *it is no use crying over spilt milk*  
lamenting over a disaster achieves nothing

**MILK** *to be cream on top of the milk*  
to be an additional benefit in an already satisfactory scenario

**MINCE** *not to mince words*  
to speak bluntly

**MINCE** *to make mincemeat of something*  
to devastate something

**MUG** *a mug's game*  
activity which wise persons would eschew

**MUTTON** *to be mutton dressed up as lamb*  
to foolishly pretend to be younger

**NUT** *someone is a hard nut to crack*

it is very difficult to persuade a person to do something

**NUT** *to use a sledgehammer to crack a nut*

to devote vastly more resources to a project than is warranted by all the circumstances

**OMELETTE** *one cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs*  
the desired end dictates the means even if they cause harm to others

**OMELETTE** *to unscramble the omelette*

to undo something which cannot be undone

**P** *to watch one's p's and q's*

to be very careful (may refer to pints and quarts of beer on a hotel slate or to easily-confused printer's type)

**PANCAKE** *every Pancake Tuesday*  
only on rare occasions (refers to Shrove Tuesday, when pancakes are traditionally eaten)

**PAPER** *only a cigarette paper between them*

virtually equal or close together

**PARTY** *to come to the party*  
to agree to someone's terms

**PEANUT** *to earn peanuts*

to get a reward which is far too small in relation to the value of the services rendered

**PICKLE** to be in a pickle  
to be in difficulties

**PICNIC** to be no picnic  
to be unpleasant

**PIE** in apple pie order  
in perfect order and condition

**PIE** pie in the sky  
a hoped for result unlikely to be achieved

**PIE** to eat humble pie  
to apologize

**PIE** to have a finger in the pie  
to have an interest in a project

**PIE** to have one's fingers in many different pies  
to be engaged in a variety of separate activities

**PLATE** to bring a plate  
to take food to a party

**PLATE** to have too much on one's plate  
to be unable to cope with one's workload

**PLATE** to serve something up to someone on a plate  
to make something especially easy for a particular person

**PLATTER** to hand over something on a silver platter  
to provide a valuable benefit for virtually nothing

**PLUM** to just pick the plums out of the jam  
to take only the best items

**PORK** to pork barrel  
to spend taxpayers' money in one area in order to attract political support

**POT** one can't get a quart into a pint pot  
one cannot do the impossible

**POT** the pot calling the kettle black  
a person criticizing another person without realizing his own even greater shortcomings

**POT** to keep the pot boiling  
to ensure that an issue stays current

**POT** to stir the pot  
to set out to raise controversial issues

**POT** to sweeten the pot  
to provide a few additional inducements

**POT** to take pot luck  
to take whatever happens by chance to be available

**POTTAGE** to sell one's birthright for a mess of pottage  
through foolishness to exchange something of substance for something of little value (Genesis 25)

**PUDDING** the proof of the pudding is in the eating  
the success of a venture will be measured by its results

**RECIPE** a recipe for disaster  
a certain way of achieving disaster

**ROAST** a roasting  
a scolding

**SALT** below the salt  
in a subordinate position (refers to the seating order at ancient Roman dining tables)

**SALT** not to be worth one's salt  
not to be pulling one's weight (refers to Roman soldiers being paid in salt—a practice giving rise to the modern word "salary")

**SALT** to be the salt of the earth  
to be a person whose ordinary efforts benefit the community (Matthew 5:13)

**SALT** to rub salt into someone's wound  
to deliberately make damage even worse

**SALT** to take something with a grain of salt  
to regard the facts in a statement with considerable skepticism

**SAND** the sands are running out  
the time available for some action is nearly at an end

**SANDWICH** to be the ham in the sandwich  
to be caught in the middle of a dispute between other parties

**SAUCE** what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander  
arguments which apply in one case also apply in another

**SAUSAGE** a sausage machine  
the turning out of large volumes without particular thought

**SILVER** to sell off the family silver  
to sell off one's prized possessions

**SMORGASBORD** smorgasbord  
a series of different items from which a number can be chosen (from the Swedish words for "butter," "goose" and "table")

**SOUP** to be in the soup  
to be in great difficulties

**SOUR** to turn sour  
to become impracticable or unprofitable

**SPOON** to be born with a silver spoon in one's mouth  
to be brought up by wealthy parents

**SPOON** to get the wooden spoon  
to come ingloriously last

**STEW** to be in a stew  
to be in difficulties

**STEW** to stew in one's juice  
to suffer the adverse consequences of one's acts or omissions

**STORAGE** to put something into cold storage  
to put something aside for dealing with at some indeterminate future time

**SUCK** suck it and see  
discover experimentally how something works

**SUCK** to suck the lemon dry  
to get the maximum advantage out of some favorable situation

**SUP** he must have a long spoon that sups with the devil  
great care is needed when negotiating deals with disreputable parties

**SUPPER** to sing for one's supper  
to carry out a task in order to receive a favor in return

**SWEET** to be short and sweet  
to be very brief and to the point

**SWEETEN** to sweeten a deal  
to offer some concessions or incentives

**SYRUP** soothing syrup  
insincere expressions of sympathy or flattery

**TEA** I would not do so-and-so for all the tea in China  
I will never do so-and-so

**TEA** not to be someone's cup of tea  
to be outside a person's expertise or area of interest

**TEACUP** a storm in a teacup  
a controversy about a minor matter but one which looms large in the minds of the parties

**TOAST** to have someone on toast  
to be victorious over a person

## FURNITURE

**BED** a hotbed of crime  
a place where crime flourishes

**BED** one has made one's bed and one will now have to lie on it  
one has to bear the consequences of one's actions

**BED** to be on one's death bed  
(of an organization or a piece of equipment) to be about to cease functioning

**BED** to bed something down  
to find a taker for something

**BED** to get out of bed on the wrong side  
to be grumpy

**BED** to jump into bed with someone  
to enter into a joint enterprise with another person

**BED** to put something to bed  
to finally dispose of

**BEDDING** feather bedding

(in industrial relations) creating unnecessary jobs solely to increase employment; (in economics) assisting an inefficient industry by government grants or excessive tariff protection

**BLANKET** to be a wet blanket  
to be a spoilsport

**BLANKET** to be born on the wrong side of the blanket  
to be illegitimate

**BLANKET** to throw a blanket over a proposal  
to refuse to proceed with a proposal

**BOWL** to be in a goldfish bowl  
to be very open to view

**CARPET** the red-carpet treatment  
courtesies extended to a person to make him feel important and welcome

**CARPET** to get a magic carpet ride to something  
to be very fortunate in achieving some objective

**CARPET** to sweep something under the carpet  
to pretend that some blemish does not exist

**CENTERPIECE** the centerpiece  
(of a proposal) the highlight or the main ingredient

**CHAIR** to play musical chairs  
to be a part of a general reshuffling of duties or functions which is not necessarily to everyone's liking

**CHEST** to lock something up in the old oak chest  
to put in a safe place and out of mind

**CLOCK** to turn back the clock  
to have another opportunity to do something which should have been done already or to undo something which cannot be undone

**CUPBOARD** a skeleton in the cupboard

an unpleasant truth the knowledge of which has been deliberately suppressed

**CUPBOARD** the cupboard is bare  
the wished-for resources are just not available

**CURTAIN** the iron curtain

the border between the communist nations and the rest of the world (from a speech by Sir Winston Churchill in 1946)

**DECKCHAIR** to rearrange the deckchairs on the Titanic

to take some initiative which is quite useless because it does not take much greater change into account

**DOOR** to knock on doors

to seek out opportunities to do business

**DRAWER** to tuck something away in a drawer

to put something aside for the time being

**DRAWER** top drawer

first class

**FURNITURE** to be part of the furniture

to be so familiar that one's presence goes completely unnoticed

**PAD** to keep off someone's pad

not to interfere with or compete against another person in his customary area of activity

**PEG** a peg to hang a hat on

something which provides a convenient or plausible excuse for some particular action

**PEG off the peg**  
(of clothes) ready-made

**PEG to take someone down a peg or two**  
to point out to a person that he is not as good as he thinks he is

**PICTURE to paint a black picture**  
to state a set of unfavorable factors

**PICTURE to present a rosy picture**  
to state a set of favorable factors

**QUILT a patchwork quilt**  
a result arising from many uncoordinated inputs

**RUG to pull the rug out from under someone**  
to unexpectedly withdraw support and in the process cause embarrassment

**SEAT to be in the hot seat**  
to hold a position requiring one to answer criticism or accusations

**SEAT to keep someone's seat warm**  
to hold a position temporarily with a view to another person taking it over permanently in the near future

**SHELF to be on the shelf**  
to be available for marriage

**SHELVE to shelve some proposal**  
to abandon some proposal

**SPRING a spring cleaning**  
a thorough review occurring a long time after the previous one

**STOOL to fall between two stools**  
not to fit neatly into either of two available alternatives and waver between them

**TABLE to lay a proposal on the table**  
to make a proposal available for discussion or to adjourn discussion on a proposal for an indefinite period

**TABLE to lay one's cards on the table**  
to be utterly frank and open or to honestly disclose one's position

**TABLE to put money on the table**  
to back one's judgment in a tangible way or to demonstrate one's sincerity

**TABLE to turn the tables on someone**  
to cause the relative positions of oneself and another person to be reversed

## GAMBLING

**BET a good bet**  
a good proposition

**BET to hedge one's bets**  
to take action involving a cost but which is designed to reduce the possible adverse consequences of some activity

**BET you bet!**  
definitely!

**BET you can bet your life on something**  
something is certain to happen

**BLANK to draw a blank**  
to be unsuccessful

**BOB to have two bob each way**  
to equivocate

**BOOK to be a turn up for the books**  
to be a surprising development

**CENT to have fifty cents each way**  
to equivocate

**CHIP bargaining chips**  
benefits which can be conceded in negotiations in order to obtain some advantage

**CHIP to turn one's chips in**  
to convert one's assets or entitlements into cash

**DIE no dice**  
the proposal is totally unacceptable

**DIE the die is cast**  
the course of action in train is irreversible

**DIE the whole box and dice**  
all relevant components

**DIE** to be the throw of a loaded die  
to be an act of deceit

**DRAW** to be the luck of the draw  
to be a chance result

**HEAD** heads I win—tails you lose  
whichever way this matter goes I will benefit at your expense

**HEAD** to be unable to make head or tail of something  
to be unable to understand how something functions or what something means

**JACKPOT** to hit the jackpot  
to be very lucky

**LONDON** it is London to a brick  
it is virtually certain

**LUCK** to push one's luck  
having already done well in something to then take risks which can prejudice everything

**ODDS** that is over the odds  
that is unacceptable

**ODDS** to be at odds with someone  
to disagree with a person

**ODDS** to beat the odds  
to do better than could reasonably have been expected

**ODDS** to pay over the odds  
to pay too much

**PUNT** to take a punt  
to take a calculated risk

**ROULETTE** to play Russian roulette  
to take stupid risks

**SIX** to be at sixes and sevens  
to be confused, concerned and undecided

**STAKE** to raise the stake  
to increase the amount of potential gain or loss in a project

**TAIL** heads I win—tails you lose  
whichever way this matter goes I will benefit at your expense

**TAIL** to be unable to make head or tail of something  
to be unable to understand how something functions or what something means

**TOSS** it is a toss-up  
either alternative is equally acceptable

**TOSS** to argue the toss  
to dispute a decision

**TOSS** to toss up  
to decide on a fairly arbitrary basis

**WHEEL** fortune's wheel  
the vicissitudes of life

## GEOGRAPHY

**ABYSS** to be close to the abyss  
to face imminent total destruction

**AVALANCHE** avalanche  
a great volume manifesting itself in a short time

**BEACH** not to be the only pebble on the beach  
not to be the only available person

**BRINK** to push someone over the brink  
by a small action to cause the absolute ruin (financially or emotionally) of someone already in peril

**CAVE** to cave in  
to yield to pressure

**CHINA** I would not do so-and-so for all the tea in China  
I will never do so-and-so

**CHINESE** a Chinese puzzle  
a perplexing enigma

**CHINESE** Chinese walls  
a system to ensure that different parts of some organization do not gain access to each other's confidential information

**CLIFF** to be a cliff-hanger  
to be very exciting

**COAST** *the coast is clear*  
there are no observers to one's activity around

**CORNER** *from the four corners of the globe*  
from everywhere

**COUNTRY** *one looks for elephants in elephant country*  
one needs to search in the right place

**COURSE** *to runs its course*  
to come to a natural end

**CURRENT** *an undercurrent*  
a barely noticeable feeling of dissent in the community which is not being vocalized

**DAM** *the dam burst*  
the cumulative effect of many things caused a disaster

**DAMASCUS** *to be on the road to Damascus*  
to see the error of one's ways (Acts 9:3)

**DISTANCE** *to keep one's distance*  
to avoid familiarity

**DOWNHILL** *to go downhill*  
to deteriorate

**DRY** *to dry up*  
to cease

**EARTH** *earth-shattering*  
very significant

**EARTH** *how on earth?*  
just how?

**EARTH** *to bring someone down to earth*  
to disillusion a person

**EARTH** *to charge the earth*  
to impose very high prices

**EARTH** *to move heaven and earth*  
to do everything possible

**EARTH** *to promise the earth*  
to give extravagant assurances

**EARTH** *to run someone to earth*  
to locate a person

**ECHO** *to echo someone's words*  
to repeat another person's views as though they were one's own

**FOUNTAINHEAD** *fountainhead*  
source of all wisdom

**GREEK** *I fear the Greeks even when they bear gifts*  
I am suspicious of generous behavior from traditional opponents (from Virgil's AENEID, in reference to the Trojan horse)

**GREEK** *something is all Greek to someone*  
something is incomprehensible to a person

**GROUND** *to be on shaky ground*  
not to have strong arguments

**GROUND** *to fall to the ground*  
to fail

**GROUND** *to give ground*  
to make some concessions or to retreat or to concede some arguments

**GROUND** *to go to ground*  
to become unavailable to those seeking a person

**GROUND** *to have the high ground*  
to have an advantage in moral terms

**GROUND** *to run someone to the ground*  
to discover the whereabouts of a person

**GULF** *to bridge a gulf*  
to overcome a wide divergence in views

**HERE** *to be neither here nor there*  
to be irrelevant or unimportant

**HILL** *light on the hill*  
distant goal acting as an inspiration

**HILL** *to be over the hill*  
to be old

**HILL** *to head for the hills*  
to seek to escape one's commitments

**HIMALAYAN** *of Himalayan proportions*  
huge

**HORIZON** *there are black clouds on the horizon*  
bad news is expected

**JUNGLE** *a jungle*  
a place where everyone makes his own rules

**LAKE** *you can jump in the lake*  
I intend to take no notice whatsoever of you or your views

**LAND** *to be in cloud cuckoo land*  
to be mad or to have unrealistic expectations

**LAND** *to be in the land of the living*  
to be alive

**LANDMARK** *a landmark ruling*  
a decision marking a turning-point in the way a matter is approached

**LANDSCAPE** *to be part of the landscape*  
to be present and fully accepted without question

**LANDSLIDE** *a landslide*  
an electoral result involving victory or defeat by an unexpectedly large margin

**LANE** *to go down memory lane*  
to reminisce

**LANGUAGE** *to speak the same language*  
to have a good understanding and similar ideas

**LEVEL** *to be on the level*  
to be honest

**LOSE** *you can get lost*  
I intend to take no notice whatsoever of you or your views

**MAINSTREAM** *mainstream*  
orthodox

**MAP** *to put some organization on the map*  
to make the organization a force to be reckoned with

**MARATHON** *marathon*  
requiring great endurance (refers to the run to get aid during the battle of Marathon in 490 BC)

**MECCA** *a Mecca for something*  
a place at which supporters of something congregate

**MEXICAN** *a Mexican standoff*  
a situation where neither of two parties is making a move

**MILE** *a milestone*  
an achievement

**MILE** *to be miles apart*  
to have great philosophical differences

**MILE** *to be miles away*  
to have one's mind on other matters

**MILE** *to go the extra mile*  
to work beyond the call of duty

**MILE** *to miss something by a mile*  
to be nowhere near one's target

**MILE** *to stick out a mile*  
to be very apparent

**MIRAGE** *mirage*  
illusory benefit

**MIRE** *to sink deeper into the mire*  
to get into further difficulties

**MOUNTAIN** *if the mountain will not come to Mahomet then Mahomet will go to the mountain*  
on recognizing that one has insufficient power to effect one's most desired solution, one decides to make do with the next best alternative

**MUD** *to sink deeper into the mud*  
to get into even greater difficulty

**PATCH** *a sticky patch*  
a period fraught with difficulties

**PLACE** *a place in the sun*  
a favorable situation

**POND** *to be a big fish in a little pond*  
to be a person holding an important office but in an unimportant organization

**QUAGMIRE** *to be in a quagmire*  
to be in great difficulty

**RIVER** *the river found its mark*  
equilibrium between two pressures has been achieved

**RIVER** *to be a river of gold*  
to be a source of ongoing great profitability

**RIVER** *to sell someone down the river*  
to betray a person who has placed his trust in one

**ROME** *all roads lead to Rome*  
all alternatives will have the same outcome

**ROME** *when in Rome do as the Romans do*  
it is best to conform to the local customs

**SAMARITAN** *a good Samaritan*  
a person going out of his way to do a kindness to others (Luke 10:33)

**SAND** *shifting sands*  
arguments which are constantly being changed

**SLOUGH** *a slough of despond*  
a feeling of hopelessness

**SODOM** *a Sodom and Gomorrah*  
a place of vice (Genesis 18:20)

**SPAIN** *a castle in Spain*  
an impracticable proposition

**STONE** *a stepping stone*  
a means to an end

**STRAIT** *in dire straits*  
in great need

**STREAM** *to swap horses in midstream*  
to change direction during the course of a project

**STREET** *to be in Queer Street*  
to be in debt

**SWAMP** *to swamp someone*  
to overload a person

**THAMES** *to set the Thames on fire*  
to do something noteworthy

**TOP** *to blow one's top*  
to show anger (refers to a volcano)

**TOWN** *to go to town*  
to spend lavishly

**TOWN** *to paint the town red*  
to go on an exciting social outing

**TRACK** *to be down the track*  
to be making progress

**TRACK** *to be off the beaten track*  
to do unconventional things

**TRACK** *to be off the track*  
to be irrelevant

**TRACK** *to be on the wrong track*  
to be heading toward an incorrect solution

**TRACK** *to be on track*  
to be making the scheduled progress

**TRACK** *to be stopped in one's tracks*  
suddenly and unexpectedly to be prevented from carrying on with a project

**TRACK** *to cover one's tracks*  
to hide the evidence of one's involvement

**TRACK** *to go down a particular track*  
to make decisions aimed at a particular goal

**TRACK** *to have a one-track mind*  
to keep coming back to one narrow topic of conversation

**TRACK** *to keep track of something*  
to be completely aware of where something is and how it is functioning

**TRACK** *to make tracks*  
to leave

**TRICKLE** *a trickle*  
a small amount, in gradual stages

**TURK** *young Turks*  
members of an organization who hold ideas regarded as too revolutionary

**UPHILL** to be pushing uphill  
to face difficulties

**UTOPIAN** Utopian

ideally perfect (refers to the mythical island in Sir Thomas More's UTOPIA)

**VOLCANO** to be sitting on a  
volcano

to be safe for the time being but exposed to the risk of a sudden great disaster

**WATER** a backwater  
a place of little activity

**WATER** come hell or high water  
regardless of the consequences

**WATER** high water mark  
triumph

**WATER** still waters run deep  
a person with a quiet manner may have a surprisingly great knowledge of a subject

**WATER** to be above water  
(of securities) to have a market value in excess of the cost price

**WATER** to be in deep water  
to be in great difficulty

**WATER** to be in smooth water  
to have no troubles

**WATER** to blow something out of  
the water

to destroy something

**WATER** to brave the water  
to enter a venture with courage and determination

**WATER** to cast one's bread upon  
the waters  
not to expect gratitude or recognition for one's good works (Ecclesiastes 11:1)

**WATER** to dip one's toe in the water  
to gently explore an opportunity

**WATER** to enter treacherous waters  
to engage in an enterprise with risks which are not obvious

**WATER** to fish in troubled waters  
to profit from a disturbed situation

**WATER** to go through fire and water  
to undertake all attendant risks

**WATER** to go to water  
to succumb to pressure

**WATER** to muddy the waters  
to deliberately confuse an issue by creating a diversion

**WATER** to plot a safe course  
through troubled waters  
to make a plan which overcomes certain difficulties

**WATER** to pour cold water on some idea  
to be unenthusiastic about some proposal or scornful of its apparent weaknesses

**WATER** to pour oil on troubled waters  
to calm down a situation

**WATER** to push water uphill  
to foolishly attempt the impossible

**WATER** to shoot something out of  
the water  
to frustrate something

**WATER** to test the water  
to try out an idea in a small way

**WATER** water will find its own level  
people will reach an appropriate position relative to others

**WATERLOO** to meet one's Waterloo  
to receive a decisive defeat (refers to Napoleon's fate at the Battle of Waterloo)

**WATERSHED** a watershed  
an occasion dividing two distinct phases of activity

**WATERTIGHT** a watertight  
contract  
a contract without loop-holes or escape clauses

**WAVE** to ride the wave  
to be successful for the time being

**WAY** no way!  
definitely not!

**WAY** to cut both ways  
to involve both advantages and disadvantages of similar significance

**WAY** to know which way to turn  
to know which strategy to adopt or where to seek assistance

**WAY** to want something both ways  
to desire two mutually exclusive objectives

**WAYSIDE** to fall by the wayside  
to abandon and not complete what one set out to do

**WILDERNESS** to be a lone voice in the wilderness  
to be the only person stating unpopular views

**WILDERNESS** to be in the wilderness  
to be out of office against one's will

**WIND** to get wind of something  
to hear rumors giving advance information

**WOOD** neck of the woods  
localized area

**WOOD** to be babes in the wood  
to be excessively naive and inexperienced and thus ripe for exploitation

**WOOD** to be out of the woods  
the previous difficulties have been overcome

**WORLD** it's a small world  
it is surprising to meet people one knows in unexpected places

**WORLD** to be on top of the world  
to be very happy

**WORLD** to be out of this world  
to be superb

**WORLD** to carry the world on one's shoulders

to resent being left to perform a huge task single-handedly (refers to Atlas, who was condemned to bear the heavens on his shoulders for leading the Titans against the gods)

**WORLD** to get the worst of all worlds

to get a series of disadvantages without achieving any corresponding advantages

**WORLD** to make a world of difference  
to make a great deal of difference

**WORLD** to set the world on fire  
to do something particularly brilliant

**WORLD** to want the best of both worlds

to unreasonably desire to get some advantage without incurring a corresponding disadvantage

**WORLD** why in the world?  
why?

## GOVERNMENT

**AMENDMENT** to plead the Fifth Amendment

to refuse to answer an unwelcome question (refers to the Fifth Amendment of the United States Constitution, which provides protection against self-incrimination)

**BAILIWICK** to be in someone's bailiwick

to be some other person's responsibility

**COURT** to have a friend at court  
a person with influence who is willing to use it on one's behalf

**CROWN** the crowning point  
the height of a person's achievement

**CROWN** the jewel in someone's crown  
the most significant component

**CROWN** *uneasy lies the head that wears a crown*  
 responsibility involves some risks and some burdens (from Shakespeare's HENRY IV)

**DENMARK** *something is rotten in the state of Denmark*  
 the situation is not correct (from Shakespeare's HAMLET)

**EMPIRE** *to engage in empire building*  
 to set out to expand the size of the business or bureaucratic unit for which one is responsible, especially as a means of increasing one's own importance

**ESTATE** *the fourth estate*  
 the press

**FLAG** *to rally to the flag*  
 to show support for a cause

**HALL** *one can't beat City Hall*  
 the ordinary citizen is powerless against bureaucracy

**HARD** *to put something into the 'too hard' basket*  
 to defer consideration of a difficult issue

**KING** *a cat may look at a king*  
 don't give yourself airs!

**KING** *to pay a king's ransom*  
 to pay a very large sum

**KINGMAKER** *kingmaker*  
 person engaging in behind-the-scenes activities to promote another person to a particular leadership position

**LICENSE** *a license to print money*  
 a lucrative government-conferred monopoly or privilege

**MINT** *to charge a mint*  
 to impose very high prices

**PALACE** *a palace revolt*  
 the overthrow of those in authority by their subordinates

**ROYAL** *the royal road to success*  
 the way of attaining success without effort

**SCOT** *to get off scot free*  
 to go unpunished (refers to an exemption from tax)

**STONEWALLING** *stonewalling*  
 deliberate obstruction or delaying tactics

**THRONE** *the power behind the throne*  
 a person exercising the real authority but without having the official right to do so (the antonym of "titular head")

## HERALDRY

**ESCUTCHEON** *to be a blot on someone's escutcheon*  
 to be a blemish on a person's character

**LEFT** *a left-handed compliment*  
 a thinly-disguised insult

**RIBBON** *blue ribbon*  
 of superb quality (refers to the insignia of the Order of the Garter)

**STANDARD** *a standard bearer*  
 a highly visible activist for a cause

## HISTORY

**ALL warts and all**  
 with the unfavorable features as well as the favorable ones (Oliver Cromwell's direction to an artist painting his portrait)

**BARREL** *to have someone over a barrel*  
 to take advantage of someone's weakened position in relation to oneself

**BEDLAM** *bedlam*  
 a scene of uproar (refers to the Hospital of St. Mary of Bethlehem, which was used as a lunatic asylum from 1547 onwards)

**BELOW** *below the salt*  
in a subordinate position (refers to the seating order at ancient Roman dining tables)

**BOY** *a whipping boy*  
a person made to suffer for the faults of others

**BURN** *to burn the midnight oil*  
to work late into the night

**CANDLE** *not fit to hold a candle to someone*  
greatly inferior to another person

**CANDLE** *not to be worth the candle*  
to be too expensive in relation to the true value

**CANDLE** *to burn the candle at both ends*  
to work excessively long hours

**CONTINENTAL** *not to be worth a continental*  
to have no value (refers to currency notes)

**CROSS** *to be a cross which one has to bear*  
to be a difficulty which one has to endure

**CRUSADE** *a crusade*  
an aggressive campaign to achieve some political or social objective

**FEATHER** *a feather in one's cap*  
a meritorious personal achievement

**HOBSON** *Hobson's choice*  
no right at all to select (refers to Thomas Hobson, a horsekeeper in Cambridge, England, who offered customers seeking a change of horses a single beast on a "take it or leave it" basis)

**INDIAN** *more chiefs than Indians*  
a disproportionately large number of supervisors

**KNIGHT** *a knight in shining armor*  
a very helpful person

**MEET** *to meet one's Waterloo*  
to receive a decisive defeat (refers to Napoleon's fate at the Battle of Waterloo)

**NAME** *his name is mud*  
he completely lacks credibility (a play on the name of Dr. Samuel Mudd)

**PALE** *to be beyond the pale*  
to be socially unacceptable, especially for unacceptable standards or behavior

**PARTHIAN** *a Parthian shaft*  
a cutting remark made at the moment of departure (refers to missiles shot backward by flying Parthian horsemen)

**PILLORY** *to put someone in the pillory*  
to hold a person up to ridicule for his beliefs

**PYRRHIC** *a Pyrrhic victory*  
a win which costs more than if there had been a loss (refers to the battle at which King Pyrrhus of Epirus defeated the Romans at Asculum)

**REARRANGE** *to rearrange the deckchairs on the Titanic*  
to take some initiative which is quite useless because it does not take much greater change into account

**RIOT** *to read the Riot Act*  
to reprimand persons who are excessively noisy (refers to the police reading out to a rowdy crowd extracts from a law requiring its dispersement)

**RUBICON** *to cross the Rubicon*  
to make an irreversible decision in regard to some commitment

**SPARTAN** *Spartan*  
tough and efficient, with a complete absence of the finer things of life

**TREADMILL** *to be on a treadmill*  
to be involved in some unpleasant ongoing activity which cannot readily be stopped

**TURNOAT** *a turncoat*

a person changing sides (refers to the practice of mercenary soldiers switching to the winning side and displaying that side's colors by turning their coats inside out)

**WITCH** *a witchhunt*

an exercise seeking to find someone who can be blamed

**HUMAN BODY****APPETITE** *to whet one's appetite*

to arouse one's curiosity or interest

**ARM** *I would give my right arm for something*

I am very keen to acquire something

**ARM** *a shot in the arm*

something to revive a person's enthusiasm

**ARM** *at arm's length*

between parties who are strangers bearing no special duty to each other and who have no financial or other relationship with each other (a legal term)

**ARM** *to chance one's arm*

to take a great risk (refers to the stripes on the uniforms of non-commissioned officers)

**ARM** *to cost an arm and a leg*

to be excessively expensive

**ARM** *to have a long arm*

to have far-reaching power

**ARM** *to lose one's right arm*

to lose some highly-valued assistance

**ARM** *to twist someone's arms*

to coerce another person to do something against his will or better judgment

**ARM** *with open arms*

enthusiastically

**ARMPIT** *to be in something up to one's armpits*

to be very deeply involved in something

**BABE** *to be babes in the wood*

to be excessively naive and inexperienced and thus ripe for exploitation

**BABY** *to be left holding the baby*

to be tricked into accepting responsibility for someone else's problems

**BABY** *to be one's baby*

to be one's area of responsibility

**BABY** *to throw out the baby with the bathwater*

to discard a major benefit in the course of obtaining a comparatively minor advantage

**BACK** *as soon as someone's back was turned*

at the moment it became possible to do something without a person's knowledge

**BACK** *back-breaking*  
overburdening**BACK** *behind someone's back*  
in a way which deliberately conceals an activity from a person**BACK** *put your back into it!*  
work energetically!**BACK** *so-and-so would give one the shirt off his back*  
so-and-so is very generous**BACK** *to be able to do something with one hand behind one's back*  
to be able to do something very easily**BACK** *to cover one's back*  
to take precautions**BACK** *to engage in back biting*  
to criticize in an unfriendly manner**BACK** *to get off someone's back*  
to leave a person alone to carry on without constant criticism**BACK** *to get one's own back on someone*  
to extract revenge**BACK** *to get someone's back up*  
to annoy or antagonize a person

**BACK** to have one's back to the wall  
to be hard-pressed by creditors or opponents

**BACK** to make a rod for one's own back  
to act in disregard of likely disadvantages for oneself

**BACK** to need to watch one's back  
to find it necessary to take care in case others act against one's interests

**BACK** to pat oneself on the back  
immodestly to congratulate oneself

**BACK** to pat someone on the back  
to congratulate a person or to reassure a person

**BACK** to put one's back into something

to work hard at achieving some goal

**BACK** to ride on the back of someone

without effort to benefit from the prior efforts of others

**BACK** to scratch one another's backs

to help each other

**BACK** to see the back of someone  
to know that a person is no longer involved in something

**BACK** to stab someone in the back  
to deliberately and surreptitiously harm a person who regarded one as a friend

**BACK** to tie someone's hands behind his back

to make it impossible for a person to act at all

**BACK** to turn one's back on someone  
to decline to further assist or deal with a person

**BACKBONE** backbone  
chief strength or character

**BAREFACED** barefaced  
shameless

**BELLY** I've had a belly full  
I have had enough of this

**BELLY** a fire in someone's belly  
great enthusiasm

**BEND** to bend over backward to do something  
to go to great trouble to accommodate another person's wishes

**BITE** hard-bitten  
toughened by experience

**BITE** to be bitten  
to be swindled

**BITE** to be bitten with something  
to become very enthusiastic over something

**BITE** to bite  
to respond predictively to a remark designed to provoke

**BITE** to bite someone's head off  
to rudely express displeasure at some person

**BITE** to bite the bullet  
to face up to the difficulties of a situation

**BITE** to bite the dust  
to die

**BITE** to get only one bite at the cherry  
to receive no further opportunity

**BITE** to start to bite  
to start to be effective

**BLIND** the blind leading the blind  
persons without the necessary skills for a task purporting to impart those skills to others

**BLIND** to be blind to something  
to be unaware of some matter and its significance

**BLINDLY** to follow someone blindly  
to follow a person unquestioningly

**BLINKER** to take one's blinkers off  
to face reality

**BLOOD** a blueblood  
a person of high birth (refers to the appearance of veins on the skin of members of some royal families)

**BLOOD** *bad blood*  
animosity

**BLOOD** *blood, sweat and tears*  
hard work and much effort

**BLOOD** *bloodshed*  
retribution

**BLOOD** *fresh blood*  
newly joined members of some organization

**BLOOD** *full-blooded*  
vigorous

**BLOOD** *hot-blooded*  
very passionate

**BLOOD** *one's own flesh and blood*  
one's offspring

**BLOOD** *there is blood in the streets*  
much damage has been done to a cause

**BLOOD** *there is blood in the water*  
something is likely to cause a person to go into a frenzy

**BLOOD** *there is blood on the floor*  
this has caused great anguish

**BLOOD** *to be after someone's blood*  
to be keen to make a person the victim of an angry confrontation

**BLOOD** *to be in someone's blood*  
to be something about which a person is very knowledgeable or keen

**BLOOD** *to curdle one's blood*  
to be horrific

**BLOOD** *to do something in cold blood*  
to be cruel without feeling any emotion about it

**BLOOD** *to draw first blood*  
to get an advantage

**BLOOD** *to give something a blood transfusion*  
to give something new enthusiasm

**BLOOD** *to have blood on one's hands*  
to be the person responsible for someone else's predicament

**BLOOD** *to introduce new blood*  
to recruit new members to some organization

**BLOOD** *to let blood*  
to allow some harm as the price for achieving some greater benefit

**BLOOD** *to make bad blood between two parties*  
to cause ill feeling between two parties

**BLOOD** *to make someone's blood boil*  
to make a person very angry

**BLOOD** *to see blood*  
to be very angry

**BLOOD** *to thirst for blood*  
to be eager for revenge

**BLOODBATH** *a bloodbath*  
catastrophic losses

**BLOODLETTING** *bloodletting*  
planned reductions

**BLUSH** *at first blush*  
prima facie

**BODY** *a body blow*  
a very damaging event

**BODY** *to keep body and soul together*  
to keep alive

**BONE** *to cut costs to the bone*  
to economize

**BONE** *to feel something in one's bones*  
to suspect something without having any real evidence for it

**BONE** *to get close to the bone*  
to cause discomfort by being accurate

**BONE** *to make no bones about it*  
to be brutally frank

**BONE** *to point the bone at someone*  
to accuse a person (actually, an Australian Aboriginal method of applying a curse)

**BONE** to put flesh and bone on something

to supply details of a proposal previously revealed only in outline

**BONE** to work one's fingers to the bone

to work very hard

**BONEHEADED** boneheaded  
stupid

**BOUNCE** to bounce back

to resume a cheerful existence after some setback

**BOW** to bow down

to succumb to pressure

**BRAIN** anyone with even half a brain

everyone

**BRAIN** someone's brain needs washing

a person is very silly

**BRAIN** to have something on one's brain

to be obsessed with some notion

**BRAIN** to pick someone's brain

to get the benefit of another person's knowledge and experience

**BRAINCHILD** brainchild

inspired original idea

**BRAINSTORM** to brainstorm

to pool thoughts in the course of a session designed to generate fresh ideas and especially to build upon the ideas of others

**BRAINWAVE** a brainwave

a suddenly occurring bright idea

**BREAST** to beat one's breast

to express sorrow

**BREAST** to make a clean breast of something

to confess

**BREATH** not to hold one's breath for something

to give up all expectation

**BREATH** to be a breath of fresh air  
to be a pleasant change from the past

**BREATH** to draw a deep breath  
to get ready for exertion or for emotional news

**BREATH** to take one's breath away  
to greatly surprise or astonish

**BREATH** to wait with bated breath  
to be excited in anticipation of some event

**BREATH** to waste one's breath  
to talk or request something without achieving anything

**BREATHE** to breathe easy  
(following some crisis) to relax

**BREATHE** to get some breathing space

to get more time in which to accomplish something

**BROW** highbrow

intellectual or cultural

**BROW** to knit one's brows

to indicate one's displeasure

**BRUISE** to nurse one's bruises

to face up to the consequences of defeat

**BUMP** to bump into someone

to meet a person accidentally

**BUTT** to get up off one's butt

to cease being apathetic

**CHEEK** cheek by jowl

close to each other

**CHEEK** to turn the other cheek

to show that one has not been intimidated (Matthew 5:39)

**CHEEK** tongue in cheek

full of irony

**CHEER** the cheering could be heard a block away

there was great rejoicing

**CHEST** to get something off one's chest

to confess

**CHEST** *to hold one's cards close to one's chest*  
to keep one's plans and strategies secret

**CHILD** *a problem child*  
a source of unnecessary difficulty

**CHIN** *to keep one's chin up*  
to maintain one's morale

**CHIN** *to lead with one's chin*  
by one's brash behavior to virtually invite one's opponents to take action against one

**CHIN** *to rub one's chin*  
to muse

**CHIN** *to take it on the chin*  
to cheerfully accept a misfortune

**COLD** *to leave someone cold*  
to fail to impress a person

**CORD** *to cut the cord*  
to sever a connection (refers to the umbilical cord)

**CORN** *to tread on someone's corns*  
to upset another person by interfering in his area of responsibility

**CRADLE** *to be the cradle of something*  
to be the place where some idea was first nurtured

**CRUCIFY** *to crucify someone*  
to unfairly do severe damage to a person's reputation or credibility

**CRUSOE** *not to be Robinson Crusoe*  
to be one of a large number of people with a common problem (from Daniel Defoe's ROBINSON CRUSOE)

**CRUTCH** *a crutch*  
an artificial non-permanent support

**CRY** *a cry for help*  
a subconscious or indirect indication that a person is in need of psychological counselling

**DADDY** *the daddy of them all*  
the progenitor

**DREAM** *a pipedream*  
a fanciful notion, wished for but unlikely

**DREAM** *to be successful beyond one's wildest dreams*  
to be far more successful than one could have expected

**DREAM** *to dream up some story*  
to concoct a false story naively or maliciously

**DREAM** *to have a dream run*  
to encounter no difficulties

**EAR** *a word in someone's ear*  
a confidential discussion

**EAR** *little pitchers have long ears*  
children have a tendency to overhear things

**EAR** *to be all ears*  
to be very attentive

**EAR** *to be music to one's ears*  
to be comments which one is very pleased to hear

**EAR** *to be out on one's ear*  
to have one's services abruptly terminated

**EAR** *to be up to one's ears in something*  
to be very deeply involved in something

**EAR** *to be wet behind the ears*  
to be excessively naive and inexperienced

**EAR** *to chew someone's ears*  
to force one's conversation on an unwilling listener

**EAR** *to come out of one's ears*  
to be plentiful

**EAR** *to come to someone's ears*  
to come to someone's attention

**EAR** *to drag someone by the head and ears*  
to force a person to reveal the true facts

**EAR** to fall around one's ears  
to collapse utterly

**EAR** to fall on deaf ears  
to be totally disregarded

**EAR** to go in one ear and out the other  
to leave no impression

**EAR** to have money flowing out of one's ears  
to be very rich

**EAR** to have someone's ear  
to have a person's attention

**EAR** to keep an ear to the ground  
to be well informed as to current developments

**EAR** to keep one's ears open  
to be on the lookout for useful information

**EAR** to lend someone an ear  
to pay attention to a person

**EAR** to play it by ear  
to develop one's strategy to always fit in with circumstances as they change from time to time

**EAR** to prick up one's ears  
to suddenly start paying attention to a conversation in progress as a result of a half-heard phrase

**EAR** to send someone away with a flea in his ear  
to give a person frank but unwelcome facts (refers to fleas trapped in the armor of ancient knights)

**EAR** walls have ears  
someone may be overhearing (words on wartime posters, reminding people of the existence of spies; may also refer to certain rooms in the Louvre, constructed so that conversations could be heard in other rooms)

**EAR** were your ears burning?  
we were discussing you

**EAR** with one's ears pinned back  
chastened

**ELBOW** elbow grease  
hard manual work

**ELBOW** more power to your elbow  
may your praiseworthy efforts lead to success

**ELBOW** to be up to one's elbow in something  
to be deeply involved in something

**ELBOW** to elbow someone out  
to force a person out of some office and oneself into it

**ENFANT** an enfant terrible  
a person who raises pertinent but unpalatable issues (French, "terrible child")

**EYE** a mote in someone's eye  
a fault in another person which is trifling in comparison to an unrecognized major fault in oneself (Matthew 7:3)

**EYE** a smack in the eye  
a rebuff

**EYE** all eyes are on something  
everyone's attention is focused on something

**EYE** an eye for an eye  
retaliation (Exodus 21:24)

**EYE** beauty is in the eye of the beholder  
some things are matters for subjective judgments

**EYE** blue-eyed boy  
person shown unjustified favoritism

**EYE** in someone's eyes  
in a person's judgment

**EYE** one-eyed  
biased

**EYE** someone's eyes are bigger than his stomach  
a person is unrealistic

**EYE** someone's eyes popped  
a person expressed great surprise

**EYE** to be a sight for sore eyes  
to be something welcome

**EYE** to be all eyes  
to observe very closely

**EYE** to be an eye opener  
to be a surprise

**EYE** to be better than a poke in the eye with a burnt stick  
to be particularly welcome

**EYE** to be easy on the eye  
to be visually attractive

**EYE** to be eye wash  
to be nonsense

**EYE** to be in the public eye  
to have one's every action subject to scrutiny by the community

**EYE** to be one in the eye for someone  
to represent an unexpected and unwelcome defeat

**EYE** to be only a gleam in someone's eyes  
to be a long way from final achievement

**EYE** to be the apple of someone's eye  
to be a person of whom another person is proud

**EYE** to cast an eye over something  
to look at something critically

**EYE** to catch someone's eye  
to attract the attention of another person or to seek permission to address that person

**EYE** to clap eyes on something  
to catch sight of something

**EYE** to cock one's eye at someone  
to glance knowingly at a person

**EYE** to cry one's eyes out  
to express great sadness at a situation

**EYE** to do someone in the eye  
to cheat a person

**EYE** to have an eye for something  
to appreciate the appearance of something

**EYE** to have eyes at the back of one's head  
to know more of what is going on than is generally realized

**EYE** to have one's beady eyes on something  
to await the chance to acquire something to which one is not properly entitled

**EYE** to have one's eyes glued to something  
to concentrate on looking at something to the exclusion of other competing calls for attention

**EYE** to have stars in one's eyes  
(for emotional rather than rational reasons) to be ecstatic

**EYE** to hit someone right between the eyes  
to be brutally frank

**EYE** to keep a weather eye out for something  
to look out with particular care

**EYE** to keep an eye on the ball  
to monitor a fast-changing situation

**EYE** to keep one's eye on someone  
to supervise a person or to monitor a person's activities and behavior

**EYE** to keep one's eye on something  
to monitor a situation

**EYE** to keep one's eyes open  
to be on the lookout for useful information

**EYE** to keep one's eyes open for something  
to be on the lookout for an opportunity to do something

**EYE** to keep one's eyes peeled for something  
to be on the constant lookout for something

**EYE** to make eyes at someone  
to look at a person amorously

**EYE** to open someone's eyes to something  
to alert another person to the truth of something

**EYE** to pick the eyes out of something  
to choose the most valuable items from among a large number

**EYE** to pull the wool over someone's eyes  
to deceive or deliberately mislead another person

**EYE** to rub one's eyes  
to express astonishment

**EYE** to see eye to eye with someone to agree

**EYE** to see something with half an eye  
to sum up a matter instantly

**EYE** to see the color of someone's eyes  
to see how a person matches expectations or requirements

**EYE** to shut one's eyes to something  
to deliberately take no notice of something, especially in dereliction of one's duty

**EYE** to throw dust into someone's eyes  
to deceive a person by presenting inaccurate or misleading information

**EYE** to turn a blind eye to something  
to pretend something obvious does not exist (refers to action by Nelson when disregarding Admiralty signals)

**EYE** with an eye toward doing something  
with the intention that something particular be done

**EYE** with one's eyes wide open  
fully conscious of the ramifications

**EYEBALL** eyeball to eyeball  
confronting each other and taking account of each other's reactions

**EYEBALL** to be up to the eyeballs in something  
to be very deeply involved in something

**EYEBROW** to raise one's eyebrows to express one's utter astonishment

**EYEFUL** to get an eyeful of something  
to see something impressive

**EYELASH** not to bat an eyelash  
to fail to express any surprise

**EYELID** to hang on by the eyelids  
to have only a slender hold

**EYESORE** eyesore  
extremely ugly object

**FACE** a poker face  
a facial expression which does not reveal one's thoughts during negotiations

**FACE** a slap in the face  
a calculated insult or action amounting to a rebuke

**FACE** a straight face  
a facial expression which does not reveal one's thoughts in a humorous situation

**FACE** someone's face fell  
someone registered obvious disappointment

**FACE** to be left red-faced  
to be embarrassed

**FACE** to blow up in someone's face  
to rebound on a person

**FACE** to cut one's nose off to spite one's face  
to act in pique in a way which harms only oneself

**FACE** to do an about-face  
to reverse a previously enunciated policy

**FACE** to fall flat on one's face  
to make a bad error of judgment

**FACE** to go on till one is blue in the face

to argue for a long time

**FACE** to have a long face

to look miserable

**FACE** to have egg on one's face

to be embarrassed by the results of one's own stupidity

**FACE** to hurl something in someone's face

to reproach a person in regard to something

**FACE** to lose face

to endure embarrassment by virtue of being defeated or having one's errors found out

**FACE** to present a happy face to the world

bravely to gloss over one's problems

**FACE** to put a brave face on it

to face adversity cheerfully

**FACE** to put a new face on something

to alter the way something should be regarded

**FACE** to put one's best face on something

to focus on the positive features surrounding a basically disastrous situation

**FACE** to save face

to be allowed to keep one's dignity despite having suffered a defeat or made an error

**FACE** to set one's face against something

to oppose some matter

**FACE** to show one's face

to put in an appearance

**FACE** to slam the door in someone's face

ostentatiously to refuse to have any dealings with a person

**FACE** stare someone in the face

(of a solution, etc) to become obvious

**FACE** to wipe the smile off someone's face

to destroy a person's complacency

**FACE** two-faced

insincere

**FACE** wipe that smile off your face!

treat this matter more seriously!

**FACE** you will laugh on the other side of your face

you will regret this

**FALL** they fell over themselves to do something

they showed great keenness while doing something

**FINGER** light-fingered

good at stealing

**FINGER** not to lay a finger on someone

to refrain from hurting person

**FINGER** not to lift finger to help someone

to refuse to assist

**FINGER** someone's fingers are all thumbs

a person is clumsy with his hands

**FINGER** to burn one's fingers

to lose money through foolishness

**FINGER** to gnaw one's fingers to the bone

to fret

**FINGER** to have a finger in something

to be involved in something

**FINGER** to have a finger in the pie

to have an interest in a project

**FINGER** to have green fingers

to be good at gardening

**FINGER** to have itchy fingers

to be impatient

**FINGER** to have one's fingers in many different pies

to be engaged in a variety of separate activities

**FINGER** to have one's finger in the till  
to steal from one's employer

**FINGER** to have one's fingers on the pulse  
to know what is going on

**FINGER** to have sticky fingers  
to be dishonest

**FINGER** to keep one's cotton-picking finger off something  
not to interfere in something

**FINGER** to keep one's fingers crossed  
to hope for a good outcome

**FINGER** to let something slip through one's fingers  
to allow something to escape from one's ownership or control

**FINGER** to point the finger at someone  
to accuse a person or allege some indiscretion on his part

**FINGER** to pull one's fingers out  
to get on with a job with alacrity

**FINGER** to put one's finger on something  
to identify the essential features of something

**FINGER** to stir a finger  
to make some minimum effort

**FINGER** to twist someone around one's little finger  
by charm to get one's way

**FINGER** to wave a finger at someone  
to indicate mild displeasure at another person's actions

**FINGER** to work one's fingers to the bone  
to work very hard

**FINGERNAIL** to hang on by one's fingernails  
to have only a slender hold

**FINGERTIP** to cling on by ones fingertips  
to have only a slender hold

**FINGERTIP** to have some subject at one's fingertips  
to be very familiar with a subject

**FIST** ham-fisted  
undiplomatic and clumsy

**FIST** hand over fist  
rapidly overtaking each other during progress toward a common goal

**FIST** hard-fisted  
stingy

**FIST** tight-fisted  
stingy

**FIST** to lose money hand over fist  
to lose money very fast and convincingly

**FIST** to make a good fist of something  
to be successful in a difficult task

**FIST** to rule with an iron fist  
to keep strict discipline

**FISTFUL** to hold out a fistful of dollars  
to offer money by way of inducement

**FIT** not to get along with someone in a fit  
not to get along with a person

**FIT** to have a blue fit  
to be very agitated

**FIT** to have a fit  
to be in a state of great agitation

**FIT** to have a fit of the vapors  
to be horrified

**FLANK** to expose one's flank  
to allow others to take advantage of one

**FLESH** one's own flesh and blood  
one's offspring

**FLESH** the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak  
the body is not up to the demands made on it

**FLESH** to be a thorn in someone's flesh  
to be a person whose persistent presence and righteous views annoy

**FLESH** to be more than flesh can stand  
to be more than a person can reasonably be expected to endure

**FLESH** to flesh out the skeleton  
to supply the missing pertinent details

**FLESH** to go the way of all flesh  
to die

**FLESH** to make someone's flesh creep  
to frighten a person with something horrific

**FLESH** to put flesh and bone on something  
to supply details of a proposal previously revealed only in outline

**FLESH** to see someone in the flesh  
to see someone in person

**FOOT** a foot in the door  
the opportunity to do business

**FOOT** itchy feet  
a desire to travel

**FOOT** nimble-footed  
quick to change the direction of one's activities when circumstances warrant

**FOOT** not to let grass grow under one's feet  
not to let inertia or delay spoil something

**FOOT** not to put a foot wrong  
to behave impeccably

**FOOT** the boot is on the other foot  
the real facts are the other way round

**FOOT** to be at one's feet  
to be in the immediate vicinity

**FOOT** to be quick on one's feet  
to cleverly take advantage of a situation

**FOOT** to be rushed off one's feet  
to be rushed

**FOOT** to bind someone hand and foot  
to completely limit a person's freedom to act

**FOOT** to catch someone flat-footed  
to embarrass a person in the course of his making mistakes or being unprepared

**FOOT** to cut the ground from under someone's feet  
to unexpectedly withdraw support and in the process cause embarrassment or to demolish a person's case

**FOOT** to drag one's feet  
to perform unduly slowly

**FOOT** to fall on one's feet  
surprisingly to succeed despite difficulties

**FOOT** to fall over one's own feet  
to be very clumsy

**FOOT** to find one's feet  
to develop one's skills

**FOOT** to get back on one's feet  
to recover from an illness or some other setback

**FOOT** to get cold feet  
to become scared

**FOOT** to get off on the wrong foot with someone  
to make an unfavorable initial impression on a person

**FOOT** to get one's feet wet  
to do the necessary but unpleasant or menial parts of a task

**FOOT** to go hot foot  
to do something fast

**FOOT** to have feet of clay  
to be vulnerable (Daniel 2:33)

**FOOT** to have one foot in the grave  
to be dying

**FOOT** to have one's feet firmly on the ground  
to know what one is doing

**FOOT** to have one's feet in both camps  
to have good relations with two opponents

**FOOT** to have one's foot on something  
to be about to acquire something or to be able to acquire something

**FOOT** to have the ball at one's feet  
to have unlimited opportunity

**FOOT** to have two left feet  
to be clumsy

**FOOT** to jump in feet first  
to take a calculated risk

**FOOT** to put one's best foot forward  
to make a special effort

**FOOT** to put one's feet up  
to relax

**FOOT** to put one's foot down  
to exert one's authority and insist on something

**FOOT** to put one's foot in it  
to make a foolish mistake

**FOOT** to put one's foot in one's mouth  
to say something foolish

**FOOT** to put someone on the back foot  
to cause a person to adopt a lower profile

**FOOT** to run someone off his feet  
to keep a person very busy on some physical task

**FOOT** to shoot oneself in the foot  
to act in a foolish way and thus harm one's own cause

**FOOT** to stand on one's own two feet  
not to require the help of others

**FOOT** to start off on the right foot  
to commence an operation with great care to do it correctly

**FOOT** to sweep someone off her feet  
to cause a person to lose all discernment

**FOOT** to tread someone under foot  
to oppress a person

**FOOT** to vote with one's feet  
to show one's displeasure by terminating an association

**FOOT** to wait hand and foot on someone  
to accommodate a person's every real or imagined whim

**FOOTHOLD** to gain a foothold  
to achieve a position from which further advances can readily be made

**FOOTLOOSE** footloose and fancyfree  
unmarried and without any romantic attachments

**FOOTPRINT** without leaving any footprints  
without making any impression

**FOOTSTEP** to follow in someone's footsteps  
to do as another person did

**FROWN** to frown on something  
to disapprove of some matter

**GALL** gall  
impudence

**GIANT** a giant  
a person whose ability and achievements exceed that of most other people

**GRIN** to grin and bear it  
to suffer adversity cheerfully

**GRIP** to come to grips with some problem  
to be on the way to solving a problem

**GUT** a gut feeling  
a belief based purely on intuition and unsupported by facts or evidence

**GUT** gutless wonder  
coward

**GUT** something has no guts in it  
something has no real value to it

**GUTFUL** to have had a gutful  
to be disgusted

**GUTS** I will have his guts for garters  
I am extremely angry and dissatisfied  
with him

**GUTS** to kick someone in the guts  
to take action needlessly hurtful to  
another person

**HAIR** hair-raising  
scary

**HAIR** not to touch a hair on  
someone's head  
not to harm a person

**HAIR** not to turn a hair  
to remain composed

**HAIR** to a hair  
exactly

**HAIR** to be within a hair's breadth  
of something  
to be extremely close to something

**HAIR** to get someone by the short  
and curly hairs  
to have domination over a person

**HAIR** to keep one's hair on  
to remain calm in a crisis

**HAIR** to keep out of someone's hair  
to let another person get on with his  
work in his own way

**HAIR** to let one's hair down  
to relax

**HAIR** to make someone's hair curl  
(of news) to give someone a shock

**HAIR** to make someone's hair stand  
on end  
to give a person shocking news

**HAIR** to split hairs  
to draw absurdly fine distinctions

**HAIR** to tear one's hair out  
to be agitated

**HAND** a backhanded compliment  
a polite expression seemingly of praise  
but really intended as an insult

**HAND** a bird in the hand is worth  
two in the bush

a benefit currently available is more  
valuable than a seemingly much larger  
benefit which may or may not be  
achieved in the future

**HAND** a left-handed compliment  
a thinly-disguised insult

**HAND** at first hand  
personally

**HAND** hand over fist  
rapidly overtaking each other during  
progress toward a common goal

**HAND** high-handed  
overbearing

**HAND** on the one hand  
putting one side of the proposition

**HAND** one's right-hand man  
one's chief aide

**HAND** single-handedly  
without help from other persons

**HAND** sleight of hand  
deceit by trickery

**HAND** the hand of fate  
chance

**HAND** the left hand does not know  
what the right hand is doing  
one section of a large bureaucracy  
does not realize that another section  
is simultaneously doing something  
inconsistent

**HAND** to accept something with both  
hands  
to accept something eagerly

**HAND** to be able to do something  
with one hand behind one's back  
to be able to do something very easily

**HAND** to be able to lay one's hands  
on something  
to be able to locate something

**HAND** to be at hand  
to be in the vicinity, ready to help

**HAND** to be in hand  
to be under control

**HAND** to be in someone's hands  
to be being dealt with by someone with the necessary authority

**HAND** to be out of someone's hands  
to be up for decision by a different person

**HAND** to be putty in someone's hand  
to be far too easily influenced by another person

**HAND** to bind someone hand and foot  
to completely limit a person's freedom to act

**HAND** to bite the hand that feeds one  
to show ingratitude

**HAND** to catch someone red-handed  
to apprehend a person in the course of committing a crime

**HAND** to eat out of someone's hands  
to be unduly compliant

**HAND** to gain the upper hand  
to attain, after some effort, an advantage over another person

**HAND** to get one's hands dirty  
to do the necessary but unpleasant or menial parts of a task

**HAND** to get out of hand  
to get out of control

**HAND** to give someone a free hand  
to authorize a person to act as he sees fit

**HAND** to give someone a hand  
to assist a person

**HAND** to go cap in hand  
to show humility while soliciting a favor

**HAND** to go down on one's hands and knees to someone  
with great humility to ask a favor of a person

**HAND** to grab some opportunity with both hands  
to seize some opportunity with great enthusiasm

**HAND** to handpick someone  
to carefully choose a person for his individual attributes

**HAND** to have a fight on one's hands  
to encounter resistance or opposition to a proposal

**HAND** to have a hand in something  
to be one of the participants in some project

**HAND** to have blood on one's hands  
to be the person responsible for someone else's predicament

**HAND** to have clean hands  
to be innocent or to act ethically

**HAND** to have one's hands full  
to be fully occupied

**HAND** to have the whip hand  
to be in control of a situation

**HAND** to hold someone's hand  
to give detailed on-the-job training and supervision

**HAND** to hold the power to do something in the hollow of one's hand  
to have the right to make crucial decisions

**HAND** to join hands with someone  
to cooperate with a person

**HAND** to keep one's hands in  
to engage in activities which reinforce skills which one has previously acquired

**HAND** to lay one's hands on something  
to acquire something

**HAND** to lend a hand  
to assist

**HAND** to live from hand to mouth  
being in poor financial circumstances, to survive with little by way of safety margin

**HAND** to lose money hand over fist  
to lose money very fast and convincingly

**HAND** to play right into someone's hands  
to act so as to give a person an unintended advantage

**HAND** to put one's hand to the plow  
voluntarily to undertake some task  
(Luke 9:62)

**HAND** to put one's hand up  
to identify oneself

**HAND** to put one's hands in one's pockets  
to spend

**HAND** to rub one's hands with glee  
to express great satisfaction

**HAND** to rule with an iron hand  
to keep strict discipline

**HAND** to sit on one's hands  
deliberately to do nothing

**HAND** to stir a hand  
to volunteer assistance

**HAND** to strengthen someone's hand  
to give a person additional authority or greater moral support or more facts to support his case

**HAND** to take something in hand  
to assume control over something

**HAND** to throw up one's hands  
to express disgust

**HAND** to tie someone's hands  
to prevent a person from acting as he sees fit

**HAND** to tie someone's hands behind his back  
to make it impossible for a person to act at all

**HAND** to try one's hand at something  
to attempt a new activity, especially by way of experiment

**HAND** to turn one's hand to something  
to tackle something

**HAND** to wait hand and foot on someone  
to accommodate a person's every real or imagined whim

**HAND** to wash one's hands of something  
to emphatically decline future responsibility

**HAND** to work hand in glove with someone  
to work in close cooperation with a person or to be in collusion with a person to the detriment of others

**HAND** to wring one's hands  
to express despair

**HAND** with a heavy hand  
in an oppressive fashion

**HAND** with a high hand  
arrogantly (Exodus 14:8)

**HAND** with an iron hand in a velvet glove  
with a hard attitude made to seem soft

**HAND** with an open hand  
generously

**HANDFUL** a handful  
a small number

**HANDFUL** to be a handful  
to be difficult to manage

**HANDSHAKE** a golden handshake  
a large payment in connection with or as an inducement to retirement

**HANDSTAND** to turn handstands  
to express great joy

**HANG** to give someone enough rope to hang himself  
to give a person the opportunity to do something which is likely to get him into severe trouble

**HEAD** *a hothead*  
an impetuous person

**HEAD** *a swelled head*  
an exaggerated idea of one's abilities or status

**HEAD** *an old head on young shoulders*  
experience, knowledge and maturity in a young person

**HEAD** *hard-headed*  
realistic

**HEAD** *head first*  
precipitately

**HEAD** *head over heels*  
topsy-turvy

**HEAD** *heads will roll*  
transgressors will be punished

**HEAD** *level-headed*  
rational

**HEAD** *not to touch a hair on someone's head*  
not to harm a person

**HEAD** *off the top of one's head*  
based on experience but without detailed consideration

**HEAD** *pull your head in!*  
do not interfere in this!

**HEAD** *someone's head is on the block*  
a person is in danger of having his appointment terminated

**HEAD** *that is on your head*  
you will have to accept responsibility for that

**HEAD** *there is a big question mark hanging over someone's head*  
there are considerable doubts about a persons' competence, integrity or suitability

**HEAD** *to bang one's head up against a brick wall*  
to fight an unwinnable case

**HEAD** *to be able to do something standing on one's head*  
to be able to do something very easily

**HEAD** *to be head and shoulders above the rest*  
to be significantly more capable than others

**HEAD** *to be off one's head*  
to be crazy

**HEAD** *to be over someone's head*  
to be beyond a person's ability to understand

**HEAD** *to beat each other over the head*  
to be always fighting

**HEAD** *to belt someone over the head*  
to override someone's views or arguments

**HEAD** *to bite someone's head off*  
to rudely express displeasure at some person

**HEAD** *to bury one's head in the sand*  
to refuse to face up to an unpleasant truth (refers to the reputed habit of ostriches in danger)

**HEAD** *to come to a head*  
to reach culmination

**HEAD** *to confront someone head-on*  
to confront a person

**HEAD** *to drag someone by the head and ears*  
to force a person to reveal the true facts

**HEAD** *to eat one's head off*  
to eat excessively

**HEAD** *to fall head over heels in love*  
to fall very much in love

**HEAD** *to get one's head blown off*  
to be very soundly abused

**HEAD** *to give someone his head*  
to let a person do as he wants to

**HEAD** to go off one's head  
to lose one's temper

**HEAD** to go over someone's head  
to bypass lower levels of authority  
and approach someone more senior  
instead

**HEAD** to go to someone's head  
to cause a person to get an exaggerated  
idea of his abilities or status

**HEAD** to hang one's head  
to be ashamed of oneself

**HEAD** to have a cloud hanging over  
one's head  
there is doubt as to one's future

**HEAD** to have a head start  
to have an advantage over others

**HEAD** to have a threat hanging over  
one's head  
to fear some intimated unpleasant  
action

**HEAD** to have eyes at the back of  
one's head  
to know more of what is going on  
than is generally realized

**HEAD** to have one's head in the  
clouds  
to be unrealistic

**HEAD** to have one's head screwed  
on straight  
to be shrewd

**HEAD** to have rocks in the head  
to be mentally unbalanced

**HEAD** to hold a gun at someone's  
head  
to put pressure on a person to make a  
particular decision regardless of his  
desires in the matter

**HEAD** to hold one's head high  
to stay unruffled and to maintain one's  
dignity despite attempts by others to  
embarrass

**HEAD** to just hold one's head above  
water  
to cope with problems but with little  
margin to spare or to stay solvent

**HEAD** to keep a civil tongue in one's  
head

to be polite, especially under provocation

**HEAD** to keep a cool head  
to stay calm and rational in a crisis

**HEAD** to keep a level head  
to stay calm and rational in a crisis

**HEAD** to keep one's head  
to remain calm in a crisis or to  
unexpectedly retain an elected or  
appointed position

**HEAD** to keep one's head down  
to work very diligently

**HEAD** to kick heads in  
to demonstrate annoyance at or dis-  
like of certain persons

**HEAD** to knock an idea on the head  
to utterly reject a proposal

**HEAD** to knock two heads together  
to make two persons come to their  
senses and deal with each other

**HEAD** to laugh one's head off  
to greatly enjoy something

**HEAD** to let one's head go  
to do as one wants to

**HEAD** to let one's heart rule one's  
head  
to act on emotion rather than on reason

**HEAD** to lose one's head  
to become confused

**HEAD** to need something like a hole  
in the head  
to be landed with a completely undesired  
problem

**HEAD** to need to have one's head  
read  
to be foolish

**HEAD** to promote someone over the  
heads of others  
to promote a person to a position  
more senior than that held by some  
persons previously outranking him

**HEAD** to pull one's head in  
to retreat from a previously held stance

**HEAD** to put one's head in the noose  
to recklessly and unnecessarily expose oneself to great danger

**HEAD** to put one's head into the lion's mouth  
to recklessly expose oneself to great danger

**HEAD** to put one's head on the block  
to have the courage of one's convictions

**HEAD** to put one's head together  
to confer and pool ideas

**HEAD** to scratch one's head  
to be amazed or puzzled

**HEAD** to scream one's head off  
to scream very loudly

**HEAD** to shake one's head  
to indicate disbelief or wonder or disapproval

**HEAD** to snap someone's head off  
to speak to a person aggressively

**HEAD** to tackle someone head-on  
to confront a person

**HEAD** to turn someone's head  
to cause a person to get an exaggerated idea of his abilities or status

**HEAD** uneasy lies the head that wears a crown  
responsibility involves some risk and some burdens (from Shakespeare's HENRY IV)

**HEAD** woolly-headed  
slightly muddled

**HEAD** you want your head read  
you should reconsider this matter

**HEADACHE** a headache  
a cause for worry

**HEADWAY** to make headway  
to make progress

**HEALTH** to get a clean bill of health  
after proper investigation to be found not wanting

**HEAR** to hear a whisper  
to learn a rumored hypothesis

**HEART** cold-hearted  
cruel or mean or unmoved

**HEART** from the bottom of one's heart  
very sincerely

**HEART** half-hearted  
unenthusiastic

**HEART** hard-hearted  
unsympathetic

**HEART** heart and soul  
with great energy

**HEART** heart failure  
a shock

**HEART** heart-stopping  
exciting

**HEART** one's heart bleeds for someone  
one feels truly sad for a person's fate

**HEART** one's heart is not in some cause  
one has little enthusiasm for some cause

**HEART** one's heart sank  
one realized the extent of some disaster

**HEART** open-hearted  
cordial

**HEART** this does my heart good  
I rejoice at this

**HEART** to be close to one's heart  
to be a project on which one is very keen

**HEART** to be in good heart  
to be brave in adversity

**HEART** to be of good heart  
to be brave in adversity

- HEART** to be someone after one's own heart  
to be a person who shares one's beliefs
- HEART** to break someone's heart  
to act in a way causing great upset to another person
- HEART** to eat one's heart out  
to suffer bitterly
- HEART** to give someone heart  
to cause a person to cheer up
- HEART** to have a change of heart  
to form a new view in place of a strongly-held previous view
- HEART** to have a heart  
to have compassion
- HEART** to have a heart of gold  
to have a generous disposition
- HEART** to have a heart of oak  
to be brave
- HEART** to have a heart of stone  
to be unfeeling
- HEART** to have a heart-to-heart talk  
to have a confidential discussion on a highly personal matter
- HEART** to have one's heart in one's boots  
to be terrified
- HEART** to have one's heart in one's mouth  
to be startled
- HEART** to have one's heart in something  
to be enthusiastic about and committed to a cause
- HEART** to have one's heart in the right place  
to have a well-developed social conscience
- HEART** to have one's heart set on something  
to be very keen to achieve something

- HEART** to know something in one's heart of hearts  
to know something while reluctant to admit it, even to oneself
- HEART** to let one's heart rule one's head  
to act on emotion rather than on reason
- HEART** to lose heart  
to cease being enthusiastic
- HEART** to pour one's heart out to someone  
to inflict one's woes on another person
- HEART** to pull at one's heart strings  
to affect one emotionally
- HEART** to search one's heart  
to have misgivings
- HEART** to steal someone's heart  
to cause a person to fall in love with one
- HEART** to steel one's heart against something  
to determine that, notwithstanding one's natural compassion, something shall not happen
- HEART** to take heart from something  
to be encouraged by something
- HEART** to take something to heart  
to learn to appreciate the significance of something or to be much saddened by something
- HEART** to warm the cockles of someone's heart  
to delight a person
- HEART** to wear one's heart on one's sleeve  
to lack the reserve expected of one
- HEART** warm-hearted  
affectionate or generous
- HEART** with a heavy heart  
in sorrow
- HEART** with a sinking heart  
with growing despondency

**HEART** *you can eat your heart out*  
you are entitled to feel sad or jealous

**HEARTACHE** *heartache*  
sadness

**HEARTBREAK** *heartbreak*  
despair

**HEARTBURN** *heartburn*  
regret at some non-achievement

**HEEL** *head over heels*  
topsy-turvy

**HEEL** *to be hot on the heels of something*  
to closely follow something

**HEEL** *to be someone's Achilles' heel*  
to represent a weakness in an otherwise strong position (refers to the Greek warrior who was the hero of Homer's *ILIAD*)

**HEEL** *to bring someone to heel*  
to make a person conform

**HEEL** *to cool one's heels*  
to be kept waiting

**HEEL** *to dig one's heels in*  
to become even more stubborn than at first

**HEEL** *to drag one's heels*  
to perform unduly slowly

**HEEL** *to fall head over heels in love*  
to fall very much in love

**HEEL** *to kick one's heels*  
to be kept waiting

**HEEL** *to snap at someone's heels*  
to be a minor irritation to a person

**HEEL** *well-heeled*  
rich

**HEMORRHAGE** *to stem the hemorrhage*  
to put a stop to the financial losses of a project

**HIDE** *to want someone's hide*  
to be keen to penalize a person

**HINDSIGHT** *with 20/20 hindsight*  
with the benefit of knowing what happened

**HIP** *to shoot from the hip*  
to speak frankly and openly

**HIT** *to hit someone hard*  
to greatly affect a person emotionally or to cost a person a lot of money

**HOP** *to catch someone on the hop*  
to take a person by surprise

**ITCH** *to be itching to go*  
to be highly enthusiastic and keen to start

**JAUNDICED** *jaundiced*  
affected by jealousy

**JAW** *someone's jaw dropped*  
someone registered obvious disappointment, incredulity or shock

**JOWL** *cheek by jowl*  
close to each other

**JUGULAR** *to go for the jugular*  
to attempt to destroy something completely

**JUMP** *to be for the high jump*  
to be threatened with a reprimand and punishment

**JUMP** *to get the jump on someone*  
to get an advantage over a person

**JUMP** *to jump at the opportunity*  
to enthusiastically take immediate advantage of a good chance

**JUMP** *to jump for joy*  
to express great satisfaction

**JUMP** *to jump to a conclusion*  
to infer something without proper consideration

**JUMP** *to jump to attention*  
to show respect

**JUMP** *to jump up and down*  
to show excitement or anger or frustration

**JUMP** to want to jump all one's fences at once  
to be unrealistic

**KICK** I could kick myself  
I regret that I acted thus

**KICK** a kick in the pants  
an admonition

**KICK** to be alive and kicking  
to be in good form

**KICK** to kick a man when he is down  
to take unfair advantage of a person already in difficulty

**KICK** to kick in  
to contribute financially

**KICK** to kick some proposal around  
to examine a proposal from all angles

**KICK** to kick someone around  
to abuse a person

**KICK** to kick someone out  
to expel a person

**KICK** to kick someone upstairs  
to promote a person to a purely ceremonial position

**KNEE** a knee-jerk reaction  
a response made instantaneously and without any proper consideration

**KNEE** since he was knee high to a grasshopper  
since he was a very young child

**KNEE** to be cut off at the knees  
to have a pet project aborted

**KNEE** to beg on bended knees  
to request in great earnestness

**KNEE** to force someone onto his knees  
to inflict a humiliating defeat on a person

**KNEE** to go down on one's hands and knees to someone  
with great humility to ask a favor of a person

**KNEE** weak-kneed  
unassertive or irresolute

**KNUCKLE** to rap someone over the knuckles  
to admonish a person

**LAP** to drop into one's lap  
to turn up fortuitously

**LAP** to dump something in someone's lap  
to impose some responsibility on another person

**LATHER** to get a lather up  
to get unduly excited

**LEAN** to lean on someone  
to utilize the support of another person or to pressure another person to do something against his inclination

**LEAP** by leaps and bounds  
with surprisingly fast progress

**LEAP** to leap at an idea  
to accept a suggestion enthusiastically

**LEAP** to leap in  
to commence an activity without considering the wisdom of doing so or the best way to proceed

**LEG** not to have a leg to stand on  
to have one's arguments completely demolished or to be without acceptable excuse or explanation

**LEG** to be on one's last legs  
to be nearly worn out

**LEG** to cost an arm and a leg  
to be excessively expensive

**LEG** to do the leg work  
to carry out the tedious part of a project

**LEG** to give someone a leg up  
to give a person some assistance

**LEG** to have a leg in  
to have an opportunity which has the potential to lead to bigger things

**LEG** to pull someone's leg  
to tell a false but plausible story as an act of humor

**LEG** to shake a leg  
to hurry up

**LEG** to stand up on one's hind legs  
to exert one's authority

**LICK** to lick one's chops  
to look forward to something with  
pleasurable anticipation

**LICK** to lick someone's boots  
to show humility

**LICK** to lick something into shape  
to make something presentable and  
effective

**LIE** to lie low  
to stay inconspicuous

**LIE** to take something lying down  
to accept a disadvantage without protest

**LIFE** I cannot for the life of me  
I just cannot

**LIFE** not on your life  
definitely not

**LIFE** to be the life and soul of the  
party  
to be the prime enthusiast for a cause

**LIFE** to save someone's life  
to be of great help to a person

**LIFEBLOOD** the lifeblood  
the main or essential ingredient; or  
the person or factor instilling enthusiasm

**LIP** a stiff upper lip  
obstinate courage in the face of pain  
or adversity

**LIP** to be tight-lipped  
to keep confidences or to be uncommunicative

**LIP** to bite one's lip  
to control one's anger

**LIP** to pay lip service to some rules  
to disregard some rules in practice  
while acknowledging them in words

**LIP** to seal one's lips  
to keep a confidence

**LISTEN** a listening post  
a place where information of strategic  
value can be collected

**LIVER** lily-livered  
cowardly

**LOIN** to gird up one's loins  
to get ready for action

**LOOK** to look at someone sideways  
to silently and politely indicate one's  
disapproval

**MAN** every man and his dog  
everybody

**MAN** he is your man  
he conforms to an ideal

**MAN** one man's meat is another  
man's poison  
people's taste differ

**MAN** to be one's own man  
to approach every issue in a totally  
objective manner

**MAN** to separate the men from the  
boys  
to distinguish between those with and  
without certain skills

**MAN** two men and a dog  
very few people

**MIND** a thought in the back of one's  
mind  
an undeveloped idea

**MIND** in one's mind's eye  
using a vivid imagination

**MIND** it is mind over matter  
one's resolve to overcome suffering  
will succeed

**MIND** that has taken a load off my  
mind  
I am relieved

**MIND** the mind boggles  
this is astonishing

**MIND** to be a weight off one's mind  
to be a great relief

**MIND** to be of two minds  
to be undecided between two alternatives

**MIND** to be of one mind  
(of several people) to be agreed

**MIND** to be out of one's cotton-picking mind  
to act irrationally

**MIND** to broaden someone's mind  
to expose a person to a greater variety of experiences and interests than he had previously

**MIND** to change one's mind  
to alter the views which one had previously formed

**MIND** to cross one's mind  
to occur to one

**MIND** to drive someone out of his mind  
to cause great worry to a person

**MIND** to give someone a piece of one's mind  
to abuse another person

**MIND** to have a mind of one's own  
not to be easily influenced

**MIND** to have a one-track mind  
to keep coming back to one narrow topic of conversation

**MIND** to have an open mind  
to be willing to assess evidence on its merits and without prejudging it

**MIND** to have half a mind to do something  
to be tempted or mildly inclined to do something

**MIND** to know one's mind  
to form and adhere to an opinion

**MIND** to make up one's mind  
to reach a conclusion after contemplating a matter

**MIND** to prey on one's mind  
(of a problem) to keep worrying one

**MIND** to put someone's mind at rest  
to reassure a person

**MIND** to slip one's mind  
to be overlooked or forgotten

**MIND** to speak one's mind  
to express one's views frankly and forcefully

**MIND** to spring to mind  
to suddenly occur to a person

**MOHICAN** the last of the *Mohicans*  
to be the last of a group (refers to a near extinct tribe of American Indian) (title of a novel by James Fenimore Cooper)

**MOTHERHOOD** a motherhood statement

a statement so obvious and uncontroversial as not to be worth making (such as "motherhood is a good thing")

**MOUTH** hard-mouthing  
uncontrollable

**MOUTH** mealy-mouthed  
not at all forceful in debate

**MOUTH** out of the mouths of babes  
(as indiscreetly revealed) the truth

**MOUTH** someone looks as if butter would not melt in his mouth  
a person looks sweet and innocent

**MOUTH** to be a big mouth  
to lack discretion in one's conversation

**MOUTH** to be born with a silver spoon in one's mouth  
to be brought up by wealthy parents

**MOUTH** to be down in the mouth  
to be depressed

**MOUTH** to be left with a nasty taste in one's mouth  
to be appalled or very disappointed at another person's unethical behavior to one

**MOUTH** to foam at the mouth  
to show anger

**MOUTH** to have one's heart in one's mouth  
to be startled

**MOUTH** to keep one's mouth shut  
not to discuss some matter

**MOUTH** to live from hand to mouth  
being in poor financial circumstances, to survive with little by way of safety margin

**MOUTH** to make one's mouth water  
to excite desire

**MOUTH** to put one's foot in one's mouth

to say something foolish

**MOUTH** to put one's money where one's mouth is

to back one's judgment by putting assets at risk

**MOUTH** to put words into someone's mouth

to attempt to get someone to say something in the particular terms drafted by another person

**MOUTH** to shoot one's mouth off  
to speak without thinking

**MOUTH** to take food out of the mouths of children

cruelly to deprive the needy

**MOUTH** you took the words right out of my mouth

you have just said what I was about to say

**MUSCLE** to flex one's muscles  
to exert one's personality or powers

**MYOPIA** myopia

the inability to appreciate an argument (lit., short-sightedness)

**NAIL** to bite one's fingernails  
to anxiously await a decision

**NAIL** to fight tooth and nail  
to strive very hard to win

**NAIL** to hang on by one's nails  
to have only a slender hold

**NAVEL** to contemplate one's navel  
to be introspective

**NECK** a millstone round someone's neck

a great burden

**NECK** at a break-neck pace  
very fast

**NECK** it is neck or nothing  
a desperate effort is called for

**NECK** neck and neck

(of contestants) with little between them

**NECK** to be a pain in the neck  
to be an unpleasant person or to be a nuisance

**NECK** to be an albatross around someone's neck

to be a great burden (popularized by Coleridge's ANCIENT MARINER)

**NECK** to be up to one's neck in something  
to be very deeply involved in something

**NECK** to break one's neck to do something  
to be particularly keen

**NECK** to breathe down someone's neck

to cause annoyance to another person by remaining in his vicinity or by supervising him too closely; or to be narrowly behind another person in some competitive situation

**NECK** to cop it in the neck  
to suffer a severe disaster

**NECK** to save someone's neck  
to come to the rescue of a person

**NECK** to send a chill down someone's neck  
to be worrying news

**NECK** to stick one's neck out  
to have the courage of one's convictions or to take a calculated risk

**NERVE** the hip pocket nerve  
the assessment of issues by their financial effects on one

**NERVE** to get on someone's nerves  
by one's behavior to cause annoyance to a person

**NERVE** to have a nerve  
to be impudent

**NERVE** to have nerves of steel  
not to be easily frightened

**NERVE** to lose one's nerve  
to abandon, out of fear, a decision to do something

**NERVE** to touch a nerve  
to mention something which another person would rather pretend did not exist

**NIGGER** the nigger in the woodpile  
the factor spoiling an otherwise satisfactory arrangement

**NIGHTMARE** a nightmare  
an unpleasant experience

**NOD** a nod and a wink  
a sign that understanding has been reached in a matter which in the interests of discretion has not been discussed aloud

**NOD** to get the nod  
to receive approval

**NOSE** hard-nosed  
tough in negotiations

**NOSE** to be no skin off someone's nose  
not to matter to a person

**NOSE** to be on the nose  
(of a proposal or scheme) to be accurate

**NOSE** to bite someone's nose off  
to speak to a person aggressively

**NOSE** to cut one's nose off to spite one's face  
to act in pique in a way which harms only oneself

**NOSE** to escape by the skin of one's nose  
to only just avoid some disaster

**NOSE** to follow one's nose  
to act intuitively

**NOSE** to get a bloody nose  
to suffer an undignified rebuff

**NOSE** to get up someone's nose  
to irritate a person

**NOSE** to have a good nose for business  
to be able to identify profitable business situations

**NOSE** to keep one's nose clean  
to act with circumspection and honesty despite temptation to do otherwise

**NOSE** to keep one's nose out of something  
not to meddle in something

**NOSE** to keep one's nose to the grindstone  
to work with particular diligence

**NOSE** to lead someone by the nose  
to induce another person to comply with one's wishes

**NOSE** to look down the nose at something  
to treat a matter with obvious contempt

**NOSE** to pay through the nose  
to pay an excessive price

**NOSE** to poke one's nose into something  
to interfere

**NOSE** to poke one's nose outside  
to venture outside

**NOSE** to put someone's nose out of joint  
to upset another person

**NOSE** to rub someone's nose in it  
to humiliate a person by highlighting something embarrassing to him

**NOSE** to take a nosedive  
to suddenly and unexpectedly fall steeply

**NOSE** to take something on the nose  
to meekly accept a rebuff

**NOSE** to thumb one's nose at someone  
to show one's contempt for someone in authority and to ostentatiously disregard his orders

**NOSE** to turn up one's nose at something  
to express one's disdain

**NOSE** under someone's nose  
in a person's immediate area of responsibility or in circumstances where he should have known something

**NUDGE** to give something a nudge forward  
to give modest encouragement to something

**OLD** it is on for young and old  
the excitement has started

**PALM** to grease someone's palms  
to bribe a person

**PALPABLE** palpable  
readily understandable

**PARALYZE** to paralyze something  
to bring something to a standstill

**PAS faux pas**  
something indiscreet or offending social conventions (French, "false step")

**PEOPLE** to be unable to keep people away with a big stick  
to be faced with a large crowd or much demand

**PIECE** to have a piece of someone  
to vent one's frustration on a person

**PROFILE** profile  
description

**PULL** to pull oneself together  
to cease acting without purpose or enthusiasm

**PULSE** to have one's fingers on the pulse  
to know what is going on

**PUNCH** not to pull any punches  
to be brutally frank

**PUSH** to push someone around  
to exercise, in an obnoxious manner, one's superiority over another person

**REEL** to leave someone reeling  
to leave a person in a state of shock

**RUB** to rub someone up the wrong way  
to annoy someone with actions failing to recognize his current mood

**RUN** to run around in circles  
to engage in excited but useless activity

**RUN** to run with something  
to take advantage of some current development

**SCALP** to be after someone's scalp  
to be keen to penalize a person

**SCAR** to scar someone  
to leave a person permanently grieving

**SCENT** to throw someone off the scent  
to deceive a person by giving out misleading indications

**SCREAM** to scream and yell  
to protest violently

**SENSE** a sixth sense  
intuition (refers to the five senses—sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch)

**SHADOW** to be in someone's shadow  
to be unable to exert one's personality because of association with a more important person

**SHAVE** to be a close shave  
to be a narrow escape

**SHORTSIGHTED** to be shortsighted  
not to recognize the likely consequences

**SHOULDER** a shoulder to cry on  
sympathy

**SHOULDER** a shoulder to lean on  
sympathy

**SHOULDER** an old head on young  
shoulders

experience, knowledge and maturity  
in a young person

**SHOULDER** shoulder to shoulder  
in close proximity

**SHOULDER** straight from the  
shoulder  
bluntly

**SHOULDER** to be head and  
shoulders above the rest  
to be significantly more capable than  
others

**SHOULDER** to carry the world on  
one's shoulders

to resent being left to perform a huge  
task single-handedly (refers to Atlas,  
who was condemned to bear the heavens  
on his shoulders for leading the  
Titans against the gods)

**SHOULDER** to give someone the  
cold shoulder

to ostentatiously ignore a person

**SHOULDER** to have a chip on one's  
shoulder

to unreasonably resent something

**SHOULDER** to have broad shoulders  
to be able to cope well with responsibility

**SHOULDER** to need to look over  
one's shoulder

to be subject to attack which is not  
obvious

**SHOULDER** to put a burden on  
someone's shoulders

to impose responsibilities on a person

**SHOULDER** to put one's shoulder  
to the wheel  
to make a strong effort

**SHOULDER** to rub shoulders with  
someone

to mingle with a person

**SHOULDER** to shoulder the blame  
to accept the blame

**SHOULDER** to shrug one's  
shoulders

to indicate that one does not know or  
care or that one is unable or unwilling  
to assist

**SHOULDER** to stand on someone's  
shoulders

to build upon another person's ideas

**SHOULDER** to take a weight off  
someone's shoulder

to assist a person by relieving him of  
some responsibility

**SHOULDER** to work shoulder to  
shoulder

to work with united effort

**SHOUT** to be all over bar the  
shouting

to be virtually finished

**SHRUG** to shrug something off

to indicate that one is unable or unwilling  
to do something

**SHUDDER** one shudders to think  
what the outcome might be  
there is great concern as to the outcome

**SIDE** to get on someone's right side  
to make a good impression on a person

**SIDE** to split one's side  
to be convulsed with laughter

**SIGH** to heave a sigh a relief  
to express satisfaction at the achievement  
of a solution to a difficult problem

**SIT** to sit on someone  
to repress a person

**SIT** to sit pretty  
to be comfortably off

**SIT** to sit tight  
obstinately to do nothing

**SKELETON** a skeleton in the cupboard  
an unpleasant truth the knowledge of which has been deliberately suppressed

**SKELETON** to flesh out the skeleton  
to supply the missing pertinent details

**SKIN** to be no skin off someone's nose  
not to matter to a person

**SKIN** to get under someone's skin  
to annoy another person through stupidity

**SKIN** to have a thick skin  
to be impervious to criticism

**SKIN** to nearly jump out of one's skin  
to receive a fright

**SKIN** to save one's skin  
to get off safely

**SKULL** to penetrate someone's thick skull

to make a person understand something difficult or acknowledge something unwelcome

**SLEEP** not to lose any sleep over something  
not to worry about some matter

**SLEEP** to go to sleep  
to become inactive

**SLEEP** to sleep on one's rights  
to fail to exercise some entitlement within a reasonable period

**SLEEP** to spend a sleepless night  
to worry about something

**SMELL** something smells  
something is suspicious

**SMELL** to run something on the smell of an oil rag  
to run something very economically and efficiently

**SMELL** to smell out something  
to discover something by careful investigation

**SMELL** to smell trouble  
to perceive difficulties

**SNEEZE** that is not to be sneezed at  
that is so significant that it should not be rejected

**SORE** to open up a festering sore  
to upset a person by drawing attention to a long-standing grievance

**SPINE** to send a cold shiver down someone's spine  
to horrify a person

**SPIT** spit it out!  
unburden yourself!

**SPLEEN** to vent one's spleen on someone  
to demonstrate one's ill temper to a person

**SPOT** to be a tender spot  
to be a subject on which a person is touchy

**SPOT** to have a blind spot about something  
to fail to recognize the adverse aspects of something

**SPOT** to have a soft spot for someone  
to be very fond of a person

**SPREAD** to spread oneself thin  
to attempt to do more than is feasible in the available time

**STAND** to know where one stands  
to know what one supports or how one is affected

**STAND** to stand out from the crowd  
to be noticeably better than one's competitors

**STAND** to stand up and be counted  
to publicly announce one's position on some issue

**STEP** *a step in the right direction*  
the first in a series of measures de-signed to correct some problem

**STEP** *by small steps*  
gradually

**STEP** *step by step*  
gradually

**STEP** *to get in step with someone*  
to do as another person does

**STEP** *to take a giant step forward*  
to make a significant advance

**STEP** *to take a step backward*  
to move farther away from one's goal

**STEP** *to watch one's step*  
to be on the lookout for danger or to set out to improve one's behavior

**STICK** *to give someone a bit of stick*  
to mildly criticize a person

**STITCH** *to have someone in stitches*  
to greatly amuse a person

**STOMACH** *someone's eyes are bigger than his stomach*  
a person is unrealistic

**STOMACH** *to have butterflies in one's stomach*  
a feeling of anxiety

**STOMACH** *to have no stomach for something*  
to have no taste or fortitude for something

**STRANGLEHOLD** *a stranglehold*  
a firm grip on a commercial situa-tion, effectively freezing out a com-petitor

**STRIDE** *to hit one's stride*  
to settle down to some task

**STRIDE** *to take something in one's stride*  
to cope with something easily

**SUCK** *to suck someone in*  
to embroil an innocent party in an unethical enterprise

**SUCK** *to teach one's grandmother how to suck eggs*  
to try to tell a much more experi-enced person something very obvious to him

**SWALLOW** *someone has swallowed a dictionary*  
a person uses excessively long words

**SWALLOW** *to be a bitter pill to swallow*  
to be a great humiliation and dis-appointment which have to be endured

**SWALLOW** *to be hard to swallow*  
not to be readily acceptable

**SWALLOW** *to swallow one's pride*  
to take action despite the humiliat-ing nature of this course

**SWALLOW** *to swallow the line*  
to accept as truth the story being proffered

**SWEAT** *blood, sweat and tears*  
hard work and much effort

**SWEAT** *no sweat*  
this presents no difficulty

**SWEAT** *to be in a cold sweat*  
to be afraid

**SWEAT** *to sweat it out*  
to await one's fate calmly

**TASTE** *to get a taste of one's own medicine*  
to suffer from an initiative intended to affect only other persons

**TEAR** *blood, sweat and tears*  
hard work and much effort

**TEAR** *to almost drive someone to tears*  
to present information designed to make another person express sympa-thy not warranted by the facts

**TEAR** *to bore someone to tears*  
to greatly weary a person by dull and uninteresting conversation or by lack of action

**TEAR** to shed a quiet tear for something  
to lament the passing of something

**TEAR** to tear someone apart  
to ruthlessly destroy another person's case

**THINK** to think twice before doing something  
to consider with particular care

**THROAT** it sticks in my throat  
I find it galling

**THROAT** the words stuck in my throat  
I just could not get myself to say the intended words

**THROAT** to be at each other's throats  
to be always fighting

**THROAT** to cut one's own throat  
to act in a way which damages one's own interests

**THROAT** to have a lump in one's throat  
to feel emotional

**THROAT** to have someone by the throat  
to claim victory over an opponent

**THROAT** to hold a knife at someone's throat  
to exert undue pressure on another person in an endeavor to achieve a result which would otherwise not be forthcoming

**THROAT** to hold a sword at someone's throat  
to exert undue pressure on another person in an endeavor to achieve a result which would otherwise not be forthcoming

**THROAT** to jump down someone's throat  
to react angrily to the remarks of the other party to a conversation

**THROAT** to ram something down someone's throat  
to pressure another person into accepting an idea with which he does not agree

**THUMB** a rule of thumb  
a simple yet useful approximation

**THUMB** a thumbnail sketch  
brief but pertinent details

**THUMB** someone's fingers are all thumbs  
a person is clumsy with his hands

**THUMB** to be under someone's thumb  
to be dominated by a person

**THUMB** to give a thumbs up  
to approve or grant permission (refers to sign given by Roman emperor sparing a life)

**THUMB** to twiddle one's thumbs  
not to be involved in any worthwhile activity

**TICKLE** to be tickled pink  
to be very pleased

**TICKLE** to tickle the Peter  
to rob one's employer

**TICKLISH** ticklish  
awkward, requiring delicate handling

**TOE** a toehold  
an opportunity small in itself but with the potential to lead to bigger things

**TOE** to dig one's toes in  
to become even more stubborn than at first

**TOE** to dip one's toes in the water  
to gently explore an opportunity

**TOE** to keep someone on his toes  
to induce a person to be efficient

**TOE** to tiptoe around the difficulties  
to act though the difficulties did not exist

**TOE** to toe the line  
to conform

**TOE** to tread on someone's toes  
to upset another person by interfering in his area of responsibility

**TONGUE** I could have bitten my tongue off  
I wish that I had not made such a hurtful remark

**TONGUE** a slip of the tongue  
incorrect words uttered accidentally

**TONGUE** it is on the tip of my tongue  
the right word has momentarily escaped me

**TONGUE** to feel the rough side of someone's tongue  
to be verbally abused by a person

**TONGUE** to find one's tongue  
to overcome one's shyness and speak

**TONGUE** to have a loose tongue  
to speak foolishly or indiscreetly

**TONGUE** to have a sharp tongue  
to speak one's mind in forceful language

**TONGUE** to have a silver tongue  
to be eloquent

**TONGUE** to hold one's tongue  
to keep quiet

**TONGUE** to keep a civil tongue in one's head  
to be polite, especially under provocation

**TONGUE** to roll off the tongue  
to be said very easily

**TONGUE** to set tongues wagging  
to behave in a way which encourages scandal mongers

**TONGUE** to speak with forked tongues  
to utter half-truths with the intention of misleading the listener

**TONGUE** tongue in cheek  
full of irony

**TOOTH** a tooth for a tooth  
retaliation (Exodus 21:24)

**TOOTH** one would give one's eye teeth for something  
a person would very much like to achieve some objective

**TOOTH** teething trouble  
problems in the early stages of a project

**TOOTH** to be armed to the teeth  
to carry many weapons

**TOOTH** to be fed up to the back teeth  
to be disgusted

**TOOTH** to be long in the tooth  
to be old

**TOOTH** to cut one's teeth on something  
to get one's first experience by doing something

**TOOTH** to escape by the skin of one's teeth  
to only just avoid some disaster

**TOOTH** to fight tooth and nail  
to strive very hard to win

**TOOTH** to get one's teeth into something  
to tackle a task with enthusiasm

**TOOTH** to gnash one's teeth  
to express frustration

**TOOTH** to grit one's teeth  
to get ready to suffer pain

**TOOTH** to hang on by the skin of one's teeth  
to only just survive

**TOOTH** to have a sweet tooth  
to be particularly fond of cakes and confectionery

**TOOTH** to have teeth  
to be effective

**TOOTH** to kick someone in the teeth  
to take action which demonstrates annoyance at or dislike of a person

<b>TOOTH</b> to lie through one's teeth	
to tell blatant untruths	
<b>TOOTH</b> to set someone's teeth on edge	
to cause a person to feel unhappy at a situation	
<b>TOUCH</b> the touchstone	
the standard	
<b>TOUCH</b> to lose one's touch	
to cease to be familiar with something	
<b>TOUCHE</b> touche	
well said (French, "touched")	
<b>TREAD</b> to tread lightly	
to be careful	
<b>TURN</b> to turn around 180 degrees	
to completely reverse a stance	
<b>TURN</b> to turn round	
to reverse one's policy	
<b>VEIN</b> in another vein	
as an alternative way of looking at things	
<b>VISION</b> tunnel vision	
an extremely narrow and inflexible way of considering issues	
<b>VOICE</b> to be a lone voice in the wilderness	
to be the only person stating unpopular views	
<b>VOICE</b> to raise one's voice for some cause	
to publicly advocate some cause	
<b>WAKE</b> to wake up to something	
to realize a fact or its significance	
<b>WALK</b> to take a long walk on a short pier	
go away, I want no dealings with you	
<b>WALK</b> to walk away with a profit	
to achieve a profit on concluding a project	
<b>WALK</b> to walk on air	
to be joyful	

<b>WART</b> warts and all	
with the unfavorable features as well as the favorable ones (Oliver Cromwell's direction to an artist painting his portrait)	
<b>WEIGHT</b> to pull one's weight	
to do one's proper share of the work requiring to be done	
<b>WEIGHT</b> to throw one's weight about	
to use one's real or imagined status in order to achieve certain results	
<b>WINK</b> a nod and a wink	
a sign that understanding has been reached in a matter which in the interests of discretion has not been discussed aloud	
<b>WINK</b> not to get a wink of sleep	
not to sleep at all	
<b>WOUND</b> to heal wounds	
to affect a reconciliation	
<b>WOUND</b> to lick one's wounds	
to adjust oneself to defeat	
<b>WOUND</b> to open up an old wound	
to take action which revives a long-standing grievance	
<b>WOUND</b> to rub salt into someone's wound	
to deliberately make damage even worse	
<b>WRIST</b> a slap on the wrist	
a mild rebuke	
<b>YOUNG</b> it is on for young and old	
the excitement has started	
<b>LAW</b>	
<b>ACT</b> to read the Riot Act	
to reprimand persons who are excessively noisy (refers to the police reading out to a rowdy crowd extracts from a law requiring its dispersement)	
<b>BAIL</b> to bail someone out	
to render assistance to someone unable to help himself	

**CASE** to make a Federal case out of something  
to attach far too much significance to a trivial issue

**COMPOUND** to compound the felony

having already acted improperly to make matters worse (the misuse of a legal term: compounding a felony is the crime of agreeing for money not to prosecute a person for felony; in reality it is therefore an offense by a different person—not a second and worse offense by the original culprit)

**COURT** to laugh something out of court

to ridicule a proposition as having no basis whatsoever

**COURT** to put oneself out of court  
to disqualify oneself from being considered for something

**DOCK** to be in the dock

to need to defend one's stance

**HANG** not to be a hanging matter  
to be only a minor mistake

**JURY** the jury is still out

no decision has yet been made or the public has not yet given an indication of its views

**LAW** to lay down the law

to be officious

**LEADING** a leading question

a very pertinent question (the misuse of a legal term, which actually means a question so framed as to suggest the answer)

**MORTGAGE** to have a mortgage on something

to have a moral claim in regard to a matter

**MORTGAGE** to mortgage the future  
to get benefits now but at a cost in due course

**SENTENCE** to be sentenced to some fate

to be condemned by circumstances to endure some fate

**T** to dot the i's and cross the t's  
to be meticulous in completing the documentation for a transaction

## MANUFACTURE

**BALANCE** to tip the balance

to provide further information or argument which results in an issue, which could have been decided either way, being determined in a particular way

**BOILER** not to bust one's boiler  
not to exert oneself unduly

**BRONZE** to be cast in bronze  
to be virtually unalterable

**BUTTON** to hit the panic button  
to act hastily and irrationally

**BUTTON** to press a button  
to make something happen

**CHAIN** the weakest link in the chain  
the least efficient component in a project the overall efficiency of which is governed by the efficiency of the least efficient component

**CHAIN** to drag the chain  
to perform unduly slowly

**COBBLER** a cobbler should stick to his last

every person should confine himself to activities for which he has been trained

**COG** to be a small cog in a large wheel

to be a relatively unimportant person in a large organization

**COMB** to go through something with a fine-tooth comb

to conduct an extremely thorough investigation

**CUT** to be at the cutting edge of something

to be in a position where important decisions need to be made

**CUT** to be cut and dried

to be well settled or long established

**CUT** to cut one's coat according to the cloth

to accommodate oneself to limitations beyond one's control and to do the best in the circumstances

**FIRE** to add fuel to the fire

to make a bad situation worse

**GOODS** to deliver the goods

to achieve the objective

**GRINDSTONE** to keep one's nose to the grindstone

to work with particular diligence

**HALLMARK** a hallmark

a standard (refers to the official assay mark on gold and silver, originally put on at the Goldsmith's Hall)

**IRON** to have a cast-iron case

to be absolutely assured of victory in legal proceedings

**IRON** to have other irons in the fire

to have the opportunity to do something else as an alternative

**IRON** to strike while the iron is hot

to take advantage of a situation which cannot last

**LINCHPIN** linchpin

essential feature central to a project

**LOGJAM** a logjam

a stoppage of activity caused by input in greater volume than allowed for

**MACHINERY** to be a well-oiled piece of machinery

to be functioning very satisfactorily

**MAKE** ready-made

easily fabricated or available without difficulty

**MOLD** to be cast in someone's mold to take after another person

**PIPELINE** a pipeline to someone an intermediary used as a means of communicating ideas to a person

**PIPELINE** to be in the pipeline to be being dealt with

**POT** a melting pot

a country where people with different ethnic backgrounds over time merge into one nation

**POT** to go back into the melting pot to be up for reconsideration ab initio

**PRESS** to be hot off the press to be the latest news

**PRESSURE** to apply pressure on someone

to induce a person to do something which he would otherwise not do by implying adverse consequences if he does not cooperate

**PRINT** to fill in the fine print

to provide the precise details in respect of something presently existing in broad outline only

**P** to watch one's p's and q's

to be very careful (may refer to pints and quarts of beer on a hotel slate or to easily-confused printer's type)

**SACK** to get the sack

to be dismissed (refers to the bag of tradesmen's tools)

**SAFETY** safety margin

allowance for miscalculations

**SEAL** a seal of approval

confirmation that something is satisfactory

**SIFT** to sift

to closely examine the evidence or a set of facts with a view to attaching different significance as appropriate to each of the various components

**SKIN** *there is more than one way to skin a cat*  
this can be achieved in a variety of acceptable ways

**SPARK** *to make sparks fly*  
to cause rapid activity to take place

**SPIN** *to be a money spinner*  
to produce large profits easily and quickly

**SPIN** *to spin something out*  
to prolong some matter

**STEEL** *to be a man of steel*  
to be a person with moral courage

**STEEL** *to have nerves of steel*  
not to be easily frightened

**SYSTEM** *to be all systems "go"*  
to go ahead as fast as possible

**TAILOR** *to tailor something*  
to do something in a way which has regard to the specific needs or preferences of a particular person

**TENTERHOOK** *to be on tenterhooks*  
to anxiously await some result

**THREAD** *the thread*  
the connecting link of a set of arguments

**TINKER** *not worth a tinker's curse*  
worthless

**TUNE** *to fine-tune something*  
to adjust something in order to bring it to perfection or to make it fit the circumstances in a much more appropriate fashion

**VALVE** *to act as a safety valve*  
to be a procedure which allows persons with grievances to ventilate them in an orderly fashion

**WHEEL** *a big wheel*  
an important person

**WHEEL** *to be a small cog in a large wheel*  
to be a relatively unimportant person in a large organization

**WHEEL** *to oil the wheels*  
to make things go smoothly

**WHEEL** *to set the wheels in motion*  
to institute appropriate action

**WHEEL** *wheels within wheels*  
secret machinations

**WIRE** *to be a live wire*  
to be an enthusiast

**WIRE** *to go haywire*  
to refuse to function properly

**WOOL** *to pull the wool over someone's eyes*  
to deceive or deliberately mislead another person

**WORKS** *to be in the works*  
to be being dealt with

**WORKS** *to get the works*  
to get the full treatment

**WORKS** *to gum up the works*  
to cause an activity to be halted

**WORKS** *to throw a spanner into the works*  
to cause an unexpected complication

**YARN** *to spin a yarn*  
to tell an amusing or unlikely story

## METEOROLOGY

**AIR** *a feeling in the air*  
a premonition held by many people

**AIR** *to be a breath of fresh air*  
to be a pleasant change from the past

**AIR** *to clear the air*  
to remove any possible misunderstandings

**AIR** *to leave something up in the air*  
to continue with an unresolved problem

**AIR** *to pluck figures out of the air*  
to continue with an unresolved problem

**AIR** *to produce something out of thin air*  
to get hold of something in circumstances where this seemed impossible

**AIR** *to vanish into thin air*  
unexpectedly to disappear

**ATMOSPHERE** *atmosphere*  
psychological environment

**ATMOSPHERE** *in a rarefied atmosphere*  
in ignorance of the real world

**BOLT** *to be a bolt from the blue*  
to be a totally unexpected event

**BREEZE** *it's a breeze*  
it is easy

**CLIMATE** *climate*  
commercial environment

**CLOUD** *every cloud has a silver lining*  
there are benefits even in seemingly adverse situation

**CLOUD** *there are black clouds on the horizon*  
bad news is expected

**CLOUD** *to be in cloud cuckoo land*  
to be mad or to have unrealistic expectations

**CLOUD** *to be on cloud nine*  
to be very happy

**CLOUD** *to be under a cloud*  
to be under suspicion or to be out of favor

**CLOUD** *to cast a cloud over something*  
to spoil the pleasure of an occasion

**CLOUD** *to cloud one's mind*  
to allow irrelevant or extraneous factors to affect one's impartiality or judgment

**CLOUD** *to have a cloud hanging over one's head*  
there is doubt as to one's future

**CLOUD** *to have one's head in the clouds*  
to be unrealistic

**COLD** *a cold day in hell*  
never

**COLD** *to come in out of the cold*  
to be welcomed into a group

**COLD** *to leave someone out in the cold*  
to deny a desired objective to a person

**DARK** *to be in the dark*  
to be uninformed

**DAWN** *a false dawn*  
an incident giving rise to unjustified hope

**DAWN** *to be the dawn of a new day*  
to be the start of a different regime

**DRAFT** *to feel the draft*  
to experience unfavorable conditions

**DROUGHT** *to break a drought*  
to resume supplies after an interval

**EVE** *to be on the eve of something*  
to occur just before some event

**FLASH** *in a flash*  
in an instant

**FLOODGATE** *to open up the floodgates*  
to take action which will have massive consequences

**FOG** *to be in a fog*  
to be in a state of confusion

**FOGGY** *not to have the foggiest notion*  
to know nothing at all about the subject

**ICE** *to break the ice*  
to take the initiative in starting discussions

**ICE** *to cut no ice with someone*  
to have little effect on a person

**ICE** *to skate on thin ice*  
to act in disregard of obvious danger

**LIGHTNING** *a lightning rod*  
a person who attracts trouble to himself

**MOON** *once in a blue moon*  
very rarely (refers to the volcanic eruption at Krakatoa in 1883 when volcanic dust caused the moon to appear blue)

**MOON** to be over the moon  
to be very excited

**MOONLIGHT** a moonlight flit  
an escape from creditors

**MOONSHINE** moonshine  
unrealistic ideas

**RAIN** it never rains but it pours  
crises often occur together

**RAINBOW** to chase rainbows  
to be quite unrealistic

**RAINBOW** to seek the pot of gold  
at the end of the rainbow  
to have naive expectations

**RAINY** to keep something for a rainy  
day  
to keep something in reserve

**SEASON** the silly season  
the holiday period, when hard news  
is scarce and journalistic standards  
are lowered

**SHOWER** to have come down in the  
last shower  
to be naive

**SKY** a light in the sky  
a sign of great hope

**SKY** blue sky  
supremely optimistic

**SKY pie in the sky**  
a hoped for result unlikely to be  
achieved

**SKY** the sky fell in  
a very serious problem arose

**SKY** the sky is the limit  
the cost is no obstacle

**SNOW** to snow someone under  
to overload a person with work

**STORM** any port in a storm  
anything which helps to avoid difficulties is welcome.

**STORM** to be in the eye of the storm  
to be at the center of a controversy

**STORM** to create a storm  
to kick up a fuss

**STORM** to ride out the storm  
to come safely through some dangerous situation

**STORM** to run into a firestorm  
to be faced with many protests

**STORM** to take someone by storm  
to captivate an audience

**STORM** to weather the storm  
to come safely through a crisis

**SUMMER** one swallow does not  
make a summer  
much further evidence is desirable  
before any action taken

**TEMPEST** a tempest in a teacup  
a controversy about a minor matter  
but one which looms large in the  
minds of the parties

**THUNDER** to be thunderstruck  
to be amazed

**THUNDER** to steal someone's  
thunder  
to take credit for another person's  
good work (refers to a dispute over  
the copying of a machine invented by  
a 17th-century dramatist to reproduce  
the sound of thunder during a play)

**THUNDERBOLT** a thunderbolt  
a surprise

**TORRENT** a torrent of words  
a rapid and uninterrupted outpouring  
of words

**WEATHER** a fair-weather friend  
a person purporting to be a friend  
who offers no support in difficult times

**WEATHER** to be under the weather  
to be drunk or (less often) sick

**WEATHER** to keep a weather eye  
out for something  
to look out with particular care

**WEATHER** to make heavy weather  
of something  
to struggle excessively with a relatively simple task

**WEATHER** *to run into heavy weather*

to encounter difficulties

**WHIRLWIND** *to sow the wind and reap the whirlwind*

to make bad mistakes and to suffer the even worse consequences

**WIND** *something is in the wind*

something is going on secretly (this phrase uses the actual word "something")

**WIND** *straws in the wind*

unofficial preliminary indications of something likely to be formally revealed soon

**WIND** *the cold wind of change*

the unpleasant realities of new circumstances

**WIND** *to cast prudence to the winds*

to cease being prudent

**WIND** *to put the wind up someone*

to alarm a person

**WIND** *to reap the whirlwind*

to suffer the adverse consequences of a bad act

**WIND** *to sail against the wind*

to oppose the views currently being held by others

**WIND** *to sail close to the wind*

to act in a very dangerous manner

**WIND** *to scatter something to the four winds*

to permanently get rid of something

**WIND** *to see which way the wind is blowing*

to establish the factors relevant to a situation

**WIND** *to sow the wind and reap the whirlwind*

to make bad mistakes and to suffer the even worse consequences

**WIND** *to take the wind out of someone's sails*

to upset a person by anticipating his actions or using arguments which he was proposing to use

**WINDFALL** *windfall*

unexpected good fortune

## MINING and OIL

**CLAIM** *to stake a claim*

to indicate one's desire to obtain something

**COAL** *to be at the coal face*

to be in the place where the real work is done

**COAL** *to haul someone over the coals*

to reprimand a person

**DIAMOND** *to be a rough diamond*

to have many attributes but a gruff manner

**DIRT** *to strike pay dirt*

to become successful

**DRY** *a dry hole*

an exercise which after much effort proves fruitless

**FUSE** *to light a fuse*

to cause serious reactions

**GOLD** *a golden handshake*

a large payment in connection with or as an inducement to retirement

**GOLD** *a pot of gold*

wealth

**GOLD** *all that glitters is not gold*

things are not always what they seem

**GOLD** *golden parachute*

generous provisions in a remuneration package which come into play in certain circumstances

**GOLD** *golden shackles*

financial arrangements designed to discourage employees changing employers

**GOLD** *to be a river of gold*

to be a source of ongoing great profitability

**GOLD** *to be worth one's weight in gold*

to be very desirable

**GOLD** to have a heart of gold  
to have a generous disposition

**GOLD** to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs  
through excessive greed to destroy a very profitable enterprise

**GOLD** to seek the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow  
to have naive expectations

**GOLD** to strike gold  
to have one's efforts suddenly rewarded by great success

**GOLDMINE** a goldmine  
a source of much wealth or of many facts

**IRON** to rule with a rod of iron  
to keep strict discipline

**JEWEL** a jewel  
a valued assistant

**OIL** get the good oil  
to receive useful, reliable and timely information

**PAN** a flash in the pan  
something which begins promisingly but does not last (refers to the priming of old guns)

**PAN** to pan out  
to succeed

**PETRIFY** to be petrified  
to be badly scared

**ROCK** rock bottom  
very low

**ROCK** someone's marriage is on the rocks  
someone's marriage has broken down

**ROCK** to be between a rock and a hard place  
to be faced with two equally difficult and uncomfortable choices

**ROCK** to be on the rocks  
to be bankrupt

**ROCK** to have rocks in the head  
to be mentally unbalanced

**SILVER** to be born with a silver spoon in one's mouth  
to be brought up by wealthy parents

**SILVER** to have a silver tongue  
to be eloquent

**STONE** to draw blood from a stone  
to do the impossible

**STONE** to have a heart of stone  
to be unfeeling

**STONE** to kill two birds with one stone  
to achieve a second objective in the course of achieving the first objective

**STONE** to leave no stone unturned  
to be very thorough

**TIN** a little tin god  
a petty tyrant

**TREASURE** a treasure trove  
a valuable discovery

**UNDERMINE** to undermine someone's position  
to injure another person's reputation and influence by unfair and secret tactics

**UNDERMINE** to undermine something  
to sabotage something

## MUSIC

**BAND** a one-man band  
a person performing many different roles single-handedly

**BANDWAGON** to hop onto the bandwagon  
to join the majority (the antonym of "bandwagon effect" is "underdog effect")

**BEAT** not to miss a beat  
to carry on without the slightest interruption

**BEAT** to beat a retreat  
to abandon some project

**BOARD** to act as a sounding board  
to give, on request, constructive criticisms of ideas tentatively held

**BOW** to have a second string to one's bow  
to have an additional qualification appropriate to the task

**CHORD** to strike a chord  
to sound familiar or recall something to mind

**CHORD** to strike a responsive chord  
to get a favorable reaction to a proposal

**CHORD** to strike the right chord  
to appeal successfully to someone's emotions

**DONNA** a prima donna  
a person with an exaggerated opinion of his own importance which makes relations with others needlessly difficult (Italian, "first lady")

**DRUM** to beat a drum for someone  
to propagate another person's cause

**DRUM** to beat one's drum  
to immodestly publicize one's own attributes

**DRUM** to drum up support  
to actively seek out support

**DRUM** to march to a different drum  
to show an independent approach

**FANFARE** with much fanfare  
with great enthusiasm and public acclaim

**FIDDLE** to fiddle while Rome burns  
to neglect important considerations while concentrating on trivial side-issues

**FIDDLE** to play second fiddle  
to fulfill a subordinate role

**GAMUT** the whole gamut  
the whole range of some activity

**HARMONIZE** to harmonize several things  
to make several things conform with each other

**HARMONY** to be in harmony with someone

to act in the same way as another person

**KEY** to strike the right key  
to find the appropriate solution

**KEYNOTE** keynote address  
opening address, designed to set the theme of a conference

**MELODY** the melody lingers on  
the benefit of past actions remains

**MUSIC** to be music to one's ears  
to be comments which one is very pleased to hear

**MUSIC** to face the music  
to accept responsibility when confronted by one's critics

**MUSIC** when the music stops  
suddenly and soon (refers to an imminent crisis leading to some resolution of a matter, as in a game of musical chairs)

**MUSICAL** to play musical chairs  
to be a part of a general reshuffling of duties or functions which is not necessarily to everyone's liking

**NOTE** to hit a sour note  
to discover an unexpected flaw in an otherwise satisfactory piece of work

**NOTE** to strike the right note  
to make a good impression

**OPERA** a soap opera  
a radio or television serial, often based on exaggerated domestic situations of no great importance (refers to sponsorship by soap manufacturers)

**ORCHESTRATE** to orchestrate something  
to arrange for something to happen

**OVERTONE** overtones  
implied threats

**OVERTURE** to make overtures to someone  
to make suggestions to a person, inviting further negotiations

**PEDAL** to *softpedal*  
to restrain oneself

**PIPE** to *pipe someone on board*  
to welcome a person

**PIPER** *he who pays the piper calls the tune*  
a person contributing money or resources to a project is entitled to a say in its control

**PITCH** to *be up to concert pitch*  
to be ready

**PLAY** to *play it by ear*  
to develop one's strategy to always fit in with circumstances as they change from time to time

**SING** *it's not over till the fat lady sings*  
it is not finished yet

**SING** to *all sing from the same hymnal*  
to act consistently with each other

**SING** to *sing for one's supper*  
to carry out a task in order to receive a favor in return

**SING** to *sing someone's praises*  
to commend a person exuberantly

**SONG** *nothing to make a song or dance about*  
unexciting or unimportant

**SONG** to *buy something for a song*  
to buy something very cheaply

**SONG** to *make a song and dance about something*  
to create a fuss

**SONG** to *sing a particular song*  
to state particular views

**SWAN** *swan song*  
last appearance before retirement

**TANGO** *it takes two to tango*  
some activities cannot be carried out single-handedly

**THEME** *variations on a theme*  
alternative approaches in similar vein

**TIME** to *mark time*  
to do nothing while awaiting developments

**TRUMPET** to *blow one's own trumpet*  
to immodestly publicize one's own attributes

**TRUMPET** with a flourish of trumpets triumphantly

**TUNE** *he who pays the piper calls the tune*  
a person contributing money or resources to a project is entitled to a say in its control

**TUNE** to *be in tune with someone*  
to think on the same lines as another person

**TUNE** to *change one's tune*  
to alter one's publicly-expressed views

**WHISTLE** *you can whistle for it*  
you wish in vain

## MYTHOLOGY

**ACHILLES** to *be someone's Achilles' heel*  
to represent a weakness in an otherwise strong position (refers to the Greek warrior who was the hero of Homer's ILIAD)

**ALADDIN** an Aladdin's cave  
a place full of unexpected treasure

**CARRY** to *carry the world on one's shoulders*  
to resent being left to perform a huge task single-handedly (refers to Atlas, who was condemned to bear the heavens on his shoulders for leading the Titans against the gods)

**CRYSTAL** a crystal ball  
accurate knowledge of the future

**DAMOCLES** to have a sword of Damocles hanging over one  
to be in imminent danger despite normal activity going on all around one

**DAY in Halcyon days**

in past happier times (refers to the 14 days about the winter solstice when winds were calm and to the mythical bird said to breed in a floating nest at that time)

**DELPHIC Delphic**

deliberately obscure (refers to the oracle at Delphi)

**FAIRY a fairy godmother**

a person showing great kindness

**FAIRY to believe in the tooth fairy**

to be particularly gullible

**GENIE to let the genie out of the bottle**

to cause something irreversible to take place

**GENIE to put the genie back in the bottle**

to undo something which cannot be undone

**GHOST not the ghost of a chance**

no hope at all

**GHOST to give up the ghost**

to die

**GIFT I fear the Greeks even when they bear gifts**

I am suspicious of generous behavior from traditional opponents (from Virgil's AENEID, in reference to the Trojan horse)

**GOD to be in the lap of the gods**

to be a matter of pure chance (refers to wax tablets inscribed with requests and placed on the knees of statues of Greek gods)

**GORDIAN to cut the Gordian knot**

to solve, especially by force, a virtually insoluble problem (refers to a complicated knot tied by Gordius and eventually cut by Alexander the Great)

**HERCULEAN a Herculean**

*cleaning of the stables*

a thorough revision of operating procedure (refers to Hercules, a mythical Greek hero who cleaned the stables of Augeas)

**HERCULEAN to be a Herculean task**

to be laborious

**HYDRA a hydra-headed monster**

an evil which is not readily destroyable

**MAGIC a magic bullet**

a guaranteed remedy

**MAGIC to get a magic carpet ride to something**

to be very fortunate in achieving some objective

**MARINER to be an albatross around someone's neck**

to be a great burden (popularized by Coleridge's ANCIENT MARINER)

**MIDAS the Midas touch**

attributes which cause a person's ventures to be extremely profitable (refers to King Midas of Phrygia, who had the power to turn everything he touched into gold)

**NEMESIS nemesis**

downfall serving as retribution (refers to a goddess in Greek mythology)

**PANDORA to open up a Pandora's box**

to do something which produces all sorts of undesired and unexpected side-effects (refers to the woman in Greek mythology who was meant to bring misery to mankind; the box contained human ills)

**PHOENIX to rise from the ashes like a Phoenix**

to be the replacement for something destroyed in some disaster (refers to a mythical bird which was supposed to rise from the ashes of its funeral pyre with renewed youth)

**SCYLLA to be between Scylla and Charybdis**

to be faced with two equally unpalatable alternatives which cannot both be avoided (refers to the voyage of Ulysses)

**SPELL** to break the spell  
to spoil the effect

**SPIRIT** kindred spirit  
person with similar interests and eccentricities

**TROJAN** a Trojan horse  
a trick (refers to a large gift horse full of soldiers used to bring about the fall of Troy, as described in Homer's *ILIAD*)

## NAUTICAL

**ADRIFT** to come adrift  
(of a plan) not to work out as intended

**AFLOAT** to stay afloat  
to remain solvent

**ANCHOR** the sheet anchor  
the source of one's confidence

**ANCHOR** to anchor  
to fix firmly

**ANCHOR** to weigh anchor  
to move to another address

**BACKWASH** backwash  
consequence

**BERTH** to give someone a wide berth  
to go out of one's way to avoid contact with a person

**BOARD** to pipe someone on board  
to welcome a person

**BOARD** to take something on board  
to offer to give further consideration to a matter

**BOARDER** to repel boarders  
to keep out unwanted persons

**BOAT** to be in the same boat  
to share a common set of difficulties

**BOAT** to get off the boat  
to disassociate oneself from some project

**BOAT** to miss the boat  
to fail to exploit an opportunity

**BOAT** to rock the boat  
to disturb the comfortable status quo

**BOW** shots across the bow  
warnings

**BRACE** to splice the main brace  
to serve an extra ration of rum

**CANOE** to paddle one's own canoe  
to do something unaided and in one's own way

**COLOR** to pass with flying colors  
to be very successful

**COLOR** to sail under false colors  
to pretend that one's real character or beliefs are different from what they really are

**COLOR** to show one's true colors  
to disclose one's real character or beliefs

**COURSE** to be on course  
to be progressing satisfactorily toward one's goal

**DECK** a loose cannon on the deck  
a mistake likely to cause trouble

**DECK** all hands on deck  
everybody is requested to help out

**DECK** to be back on deck  
to have returned after an absence

**DECK** to clear the decks  
to get ready for action

**DOLDRUMS** to be in the doldrums  
to be depressed or to show no activity (refers to a region of little wind near the equator, becalming sailing ships)

**EBB** ebb and flow  
fluctuations

**EBB** to ebb away  
to decline gradually

**FIGUREHEAD** a figurehead  
the ceremonial chief officer of some organization without any real power (refers to the carving at the front of a ship)

**FISH** a fishing expedition  
an exercise designed to get information to which one is not strictly entitled

**FLAGSHIP** *flagship*

most important member of a group of related entities

**FLOTSAM** *fLOTSAM and jetsam*

derelict persons, without a fixed abode or stable life (refers to goods found floating and to goods thrown overboard deliberately, respectively)

**FLOW** *ebb and flow*

fluctuations

**HATCH** *to batten down the hatches*

to get ready for expected difficulties

**HELM** *to be at the helm*

to be in charge

**HIGH** *to leave someone high and dry*

to withdraw all support from a person

**ICEBERG** *to be the tip of the iceberg*

to be only a very small portion of a much larger but less obvious whole

**JETSAM** *fLOTSAM and jetsam*

derelict persons, without a fixed abode or stable life (see fLOTSAM)

**JETTISON** *to jettison some proposal*

to abandon some proposal as worthless or impracticable

**JIB** *the cut of someone's jib*

someone's personal appearance

**KEEL** *to keep something on an even keel*

to ensure that something is not harmed

**KEELHAUL** *to keelhaul someone*

to penalize a person

**KEEP** *to keep a weather eye out for something*

to look out with particular care

**KNOT** *at a rate of knots*

very fast

**LEEWAY** *to make up leeway*

to get back to a normal position or to get to the position held by one's competitors

**LLOYD** *to be A1 at Lloyd's*

to be in perfect order (refers to the classification of ships in Lloyd's register in London)

**MAST** *to nail one's colors to the mast*

to publicly declare one's position and to maintain it in the face of criticism

**NET** *to catch someone in the net*

to unexpectedly involve a particular person in the course of activity designed to involve many others

**NET** *to draw the nets closer*

to intensify one's efforts

**NET** *to slip through the net*

to happen as an isolated case despite steps taken to prevent such events

**NET** *to spread the net more widely*

to become more comprehensive

**OCEAN** *an ocean full of fish*

plenty of opportunity

**OCEAN** *to be only a drop in the ocean*

to be quite insignificant in the total scene

**OIL** *to pour oil on troubled waters*

to calm down a situation

**OVERBOARD** *to go overboard*

to act foolishly and in an excessive way

**PAINTER** *to cut the painter*

to become separated

**PEBBLE** *not to be the only pebble on the beach*

not to be the only available person

**PIER** *take a long walk on a short pier*

go away, I want no dealings with you

**PIRATE** *pirate*

(of radio) unlicensed; (of recordings or computer software) published in breach of copyright law

**PLANK** *to walk the plank*  
to face certain doom

**PLIMSOLL** *the Plimsoll line*  
the standard

**POLE** *not to touch something with a ten-foot pole*  
to go out of one's way to avoid something

**PORT** *any port in a storm*  
anything which helps to avoid difficulties is welcome

**PORT** *port of call*  
one of a series of places being visited

**PUMP** *all hands to the pumps*  
everybody is requested to help out

**RAFT** *life raft*  
financial assistance sufficient to avert insolvency

**RIDE** *to ride out the storm*  
to come safely through some dangerous situation

**RIPPLE** *to make ripples*  
to disturb the status quo

**ROPE** *to know the ropes*  
to know how to do one's job

**ROPE** *to learn the ropes*  
to be taught the elementary features

**ROPE** *to show someone the ropes*  
to teach a beginner how to do something

**SAIL** *to be plain sailing*  
to be quite straightforward and very easy

**SAIL** *to sail against the wind*  
to oppose the views currently being helped by others

**SAIL** *to sail close to the wind*  
to act in a very dangerous manner

**SAIL** *to set sail*  
to commence a voyage

**SAIL** *to take the wind out of someone's sails*

to upset a person by anticipating his actions or using arguments which he was proposing to use

**SAIL** *to trim one's sails*  
to institute austerity

**SEA** *between the devil and deep blue sea*

to be faced with two equally unpalatable alternatives which cannot both be avoided

**SEA** *to be all at sea*  
to be confused as to what is going on and what to do next

**SHIP** *a case of rats leaving a sinking ship*

the desertion of an enterprise in anticipation of imminent failure

**SHIP** *enough to sink a battleship*  
more than sufficient

**SHIP** *ship shape*  
in excellent condition

**SHIP** *ships that pass in the night*  
persons who fail to meet up

**SHIP** *to abandon ship*  
to abrogate one's responsibilities or to abandon a project

**SHIP** *to be a rudderless ship*  
to be a project not managed properly

**SHIP** *to run a tight ship*  
to manage an efficient organization

**SHIP** *to run one's own ship*  
to do things and organize subordinates in one's own way

**SHIP** *to spoil the ship for ha'p'orth of tar*

to engage in a false economy (the current word "ship" is actually a mistake for the original word "sheep" and the tar refers to the treatment of wounds)

**SHIP** when one's ship comes in  
when one's business venture is successfully completed or when luck arrives

**SHOAL** to founder on the shoals of something  
to come to grief because of unexpected dangers

**SIDE** a broadside  
a short verbal attack

**SINK** it is a case of sink or swim  
the attempt is worthwhile, despite the risk of failure

**SINK** to sink without a trace  
to disappear completely

**SLACK** to take up the slack  
to take advantage of surplus capacity

**SNAG** to strike a snag  
to encounter a difficulty

**OUNDING** to take a sounding  
to ascertain people's views

**STORM** the calm before the storm  
the quiet period before an expected or inevitable crisis

**TACK** to be on the wrong tack  
to be using an incorrect procedure or policy

**TACK** to change tack  
to alter one's direction

**TIDE** the tide has turned  
conditions have changed

**TIDE** the tide is running in favor of some proposition  
public opinion supports some proposition

**TIDE** to be caught by the tide  
to be dealt with by something inevitable

**TIDE** to stem the tide  
to make progress against something

**TIDE** to swim against the tide  
to take up a minority position

**TIDE** to turn the tide  
to reverse the direction of something

**TITANIC** to rearrange the deckchairs on the *Titanic*

to take some initiative which is quite useless because it does not take much greater change into account

**TOUCH** it was touch and go  
there were considerable risks—the objective was achieved, but only just

**WAKE** in the wake of someone following a person's example

**WATER** to be in uncharted waters  
to be the first to experience something

**WAVE** to be on the crest of a wave  
to enjoy success which may not last

**WAVE** to cause waves  
to disturb the status quo

**WRECK** to salvage something out of the wreck  
to achieve some minor benefits out of a disastrous situation

## PLANTS

**ACORN** tall oaks from little acorns grow

even major enterprises have to have small beginnings (from "Lines written for a School Declamation" by David Everett)

**APPLE** to add apples to oranges  
to quite illogically lump unconnected things together

**APPLE** to be the apple of someone's eye  
to be a person of whom another person is proud

**BEAN** not to have a bean  
to have no money

**BEAN** not to matter a row of beans  
to be utterly unimportant

**BEAN** to know how many beans make five  
to have common sense

**BLOSSOM** to blossom  
(of a person's attributes) to develop

**BUD** to *nip something in the bud*  
to stop some activity in its early stages  
when stopping it is still relatively  
easy

**BUSH** a *bird in the hand is worth two in the bush*  
a benefit currently available is more  
valuable than a seemingly much larger  
benefit which may or may not be  
achieved in the future

**BUSH** to *beat about the bush*  
to hide the unpleasant truth

**BUSHEL** to *hide one's light under a bushel*  
to keep others in ignorance of one's  
skills and experience

**BUSHFIRE** to *fight bushfires*  
to deal with crises as they arise rather  
than take preventative action

**CABBAGE** to *be on someone's cabbage patch*  
to engage in a competitive activity in  
a territory regarded by someone already  
there as rightfully belonging  
exclusively to him

**CARROT** sticks and carrots  
disincentives and incentives in combination (refers to the handling of donkeys)

**CHAFF** to *separate the wheat from the chaff*  
to distinguish between important and unimportant ingredients

**CHERRY** to *get only one bite at the cherry*  
to receive no further opportunity

**CLOVER** to *be in clover*  
to enjoy a life of ease and luxury

**CORE** rotten to the core  
completely corrupt

**CORE** to be the hard core  
to be the central and most difficult problem

**DEFLOWER** to *deflower*  
to deprive of virginity

**DISSEMINATE** to *disseminate ideas*  
to spread ideas to a wide audience  
(lit., "to scatter seeds in various places")

**FALL** *windfall*  
unexpected good fortune

**FIG** one would not give a fig for something  
one regards something as worthless

**FRUIT** by their fruits ye shall know them  
their reputation will be based on their results (Matthew 7:20)

**FRUIT** forbidden fruit  
something particularly desired just because it is not allowed (Genesis 2:17)

**FRUIT** to bear fruit  
to result in success

**FRUITLESS** fruitless  
yielding no benefit

**GOOSEBERRY** to play gooseberry  
to act as an unwelcome chaperon

**GRAIN** something goes against the grain  
something is completely and frustratingly against a person's inclination

**GRAPE** that is just sour grapes  
those are disparaging remarks made only because he is peeved and resentful at someone else's better fortune

**GRAPE** to hear on the grapevine  
to learn unofficially

**GRAPE** what is this — a bunch of grapes or a bowl of goldfish?  
surely you know what this is!

**GRASS** a snake in the grass  
a person of low character

**GRASS** grass roots  
at the lowest level

**GRASS** *not to let grass grow under one's feet*  
not to let inertia or delay spoil something

**HAY** *to look for a needle in a haystack*  
to attempt something with a very small chance of success

**HAY** *to make hay while the sun shines*  
to utilize an opportunity before it disappears

**JUNGLE** *the law of the jungle*  
the principle that those having power will use it at the expense of all others

**LEMON** *the answer is a lemon*  
the outcome is inconclusive

**LEMON** *to sell someone a lemon*  
to sell a person a grossly defective product on the basis that it represents quality

**LEMON** *to suck the lemon dry*  
to get the maximum advantage out of some favorable situation

**LILY** *lily-livered*  
cowardly

**LILY** *lily-white*  
honest and incorruptible

**LILY** *to gild the lily*  
(actually: to gild refined gold, to paint the lily) to do something patently unnecessary

**LIMB** *to go out on a limb*  
to put oneself at risk through foolish action

**MUSHROOM** *to mushroom*  
to expand rapidly

**NETTLE** *to grasp the nettle*  
to deal with a neglected difficulty

**NUT** *to be nuts*  
to be crazy

**NUT** *to be nuts about someone*  
to be infatuated with a person

**NUTSHELL** *in a nutshell*  
by way of summary

**OAK** *tall oaks from little acorns grow*  
even major enterprises have to have small beginnings (from "Lines written for a School Declamation" by David Everett)

**OAK** *to have a heart of oak*  
to be brave

**OATS** *to feel one's oats*  
to display self-importance

**OLIVE** *to hold out an olive branch*  
to make peace overtures (Genesis 8:11)

**ONION** *to know one's onions*  
to be well informed in some area (refers to Dr. C.T. Onions, editor of the SHORTER OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY)

**ORANGE** *to add apples to oranges*  
to quite illogically lump unconnected things together

**PEA** *a pea and thimble trick*  
a clever fraud committed in the presence of its victim without this being obvious at the time

**PINEAPPLE** *to have hold of the wrong end of the pineapple*  
to be utterly mistaken

**PLUM** *the plum*  
the best item in a collection

**POPPY** *a tall poppy*  
a person with great power or responsibility and/or in receipt of high remuneration

**POPPY** *to cut tall poppies down to size*  
to humiliate haughty persons

**POTATO** *a hot potato*  
an embarrassing issue

**POTATO** *to be small potatoes*  
to be quite unimportant

**PRUNE** *to prune*  
to remove the superfluous

**REED** *to be a broken reed*  
to be a weak and unreliable person

**ROOT** *deep-rooted*  
strongly felt

**ROOT** *to put one's roots down*  
to settle in

**ROOT** *to strike at the roots of something*  
to work toward the destruction of something

**ROSE** *a rose between two thorns*  
something beautiful in the midst of ugliness

**ROSE** *a rose by any other name would smell as sweet*  
the form does not affect the substance  
(from Shakespeare's ROMEO AND JULIET)

**ROSE** *to be no bed of roses*  
to be difficult or uncomfortable

**ROSE** *to be on a path strewn with roses*  
to lead a very pleasant life

**ROSE** *to come up smelling like a rose*  
not to have a stain on one's character

**SEED** *to run to seed*  
to become shabby

**SEED** *to sow seeds*  
to propagate ideas in the hope that they will be adopted

**STRAW** *straws in the wind*  
unofficial preliminary indications of something likely to be formally revealed soon

**STRAW** *the final straw*  
the latest step, which, when added to a large number of seemingly harmless previous steps, sets off a disaster resulting from cumulative effect

**STRAW** *to be a man of straw*  
to have no assets while giving a contrary appearance

**STRAW** *to clasp at straws*  
to have a hopeless case but show unjustified optimism on noting minor positive features

**STRAW** *to draw the short straw*  
to be the one appointed to do something

**THORN** *to be a thorn in someone's flesh*  
to be a person whose persistent presence and righteous views annoy

**THORN** *to wear one's crown of thorns*  
to have one's own difficulties (John 19:5)

**TREE** *to bark up the wrong tree*  
to reach an incorrect conclusion

**TREE** *to be at the top of the tree*  
to be a leading member of one's profession

**TREE** *to be up a gum tree*  
to be in difficulty or at the end of one's resources

**TREE** *to be up a tree*  
to be perplexed or cornered

**TREE** *to shake a tree*  
to do something in order to see what will result

**VEGETABLE** *to become a vegetable*  
to lose one's mental and physical faculties

**VINE** *to wither on the vine*  
by virtue of changed circumstances of the effluxion of time to be no longer relevant

**VIOLET** *a shrinking violet*  
a shy person

**WEED** *to weed some group out*  
to get rid of some elements not meeting a desired standard

**WHEAT** *to separate the wheat from the chaff*  
to distinguish between important and unimportant ingredients

**WOOD** *not to see the wood for the trees*  
to overlook the general picture because of undue concentration on the details

**WOOD** *to get rid of the dead wood*  
to terminate the services of unsatisfactory personnel

## RELIGION AND BIBLICAL

**ADAM** *not to know someone from Adam*

to be unable to recognize a person

**ADAM** *since Adam was a boy*  
for a very long time

**ALTAR** *to sacrifice something on the altar of some belief*

to give up some benefit as a matter of principle

**ANGEL** *a fallen angel*

a previously trusted person who has transgressed

**ANGEL** *fools rush in where angels fear to tread*

unsophisticated persons take unwise risks in circumstances where more knowledgeable persons would exercise caution

**ANGEL** *someone's guardian angel*

someone's friend, watching over him and advancing his interests

**ANGEL** *to be an angel*

to be very helpful

**ANGEL** *to be no angel*

to have a great many serious faults

**ANGEL** *to be on the side of the angels*

to be on the side of righteousness (from a speech by Benjamin Disraeli)

**ANOINT** *the anointed one*

the desired successor

**ANTEDILUVIAN** *antediluvian*

very outmoded

**APOCRYPHAL** *apocryphal*  
fictitious but resembling truth and illustrating a point

**BABEL** *a tower of Babel*  
a noisy and confused assembly (Genesis 11)

**BAPTISM** *a baptism of fire*  
the commencement of an operation which presented great difficulty

**BE** *to be kosher*

to fulfill all requirements (refers to food complying with all aspects of Jewish religious law)

**BEADLEDOM** *beadledom*  
stupid officiousness

**BIBLE** *a bible basher*

a person who makes unwelcome attempts to force his religious beliefs on others

**BIBLE** *to be the bible*  
to be the authority

**BLESSING** *a blessing in disguise*  
an unwelcome but salutary experience

**BLESSING** *to be a mixed blessing*  
to be an outcome with some desirable and some undesirable features

**BLESSING** *to give one's blessing to something*

to indicate one's approval of something

**BRANCH** *to hold out an olive branch*

to make peace overtures (Genesis 8:11)

**CAST** *to cast one's bread upon the waters*

not to expect gratitude or recognition for one's good works (Ecclesiastes 11:1)

**CHANGE** *to ring the changes*

to exhaust the number of different ways of doing something (refers to the permutations used for ringing peals of church bells)

**CHRISTMAS** *all his Christmases came at once*  
he was overjoyed

**COMMANDMENT** *eleventh commandment*  
unwritten rule

**CURATE** *to be curate's egg*  
to be good only in parts (refers to an 1895 cartoon in PUNCH)

**DAY** *a red-letter day*  
an important occasion (refers to the color used to print saints' days on some calendars)

**DEVIL** *a devil-may-care attitude*  
a reckless attitude

**DEVIL** *be a devil!*  
take a chance!

**DEVIL** *between the devil and the deep blue sea*  
to be faced with two equally unpalatable alternatives which cannot both be avoided

**DEVIL** *he must have a long spoon that sups with the devil*  
great care is needed when negotiating deals with disreputable parties

**DEVIL** *poor devil*  
person to be pitied

**DEVIL** *talk of the devil*  
here is the person we were just discussing

**DEVIL** *the devil can cite scripture for his purpose*  
a person can quote a respectable or hostile authority while advocating a disreputable cause of his own (from Shakespeare's MERCHANT OF VENICE)

**DEVIL** *the devil one knows is better than the devil one does not know*  
the status quo is more comfortable than change

**DEVIL** *to act as a devil's advocate*  
to put a point of view which one does not hold in order to draw out the best arguments regarding a proposition (refers to a church official vetting a candidate for sainthood)

**DEVIL** *to give the devil his due*  
to be fair (a phrase used in parenthesis, and only in the infinitive)

**DEVIL** *to grab the devil by the tail*  
to face up to difficulties

**ENSHRINE** *to enshrine*  
to incorporate as an important part of something

**FAITH** *an article of faith*  
a fundamental belief on which certain behavior is based

**FAITHFUL** *the old faithful*  
a greatly loved article

**FOR** *a tooth for a tooth*  
retaliation (Exodus 21:24)

**GOD** *a little tin god*  
a petty tyrant

**GOD** *the mills of God grind slowly*  
retribution may be delayed but is inevitable

**GODFORSAKEN** *godforsaken*  
dismal and without any redeeming feature

**GOLIATH** *a Goliath*  
a giant or a person whose ability and achievements exceed those of most other people (1 Samuel 17)

**GOSPEL** *to take something as gospel*  
to believe that something is true

**HEAVEN** *heaven help you!*  
you are in trouble

**HEAVEN** *heaven only knows*  
it is not known

**HEAVEN** *manna from heaven*  
unexpected benefits (Exodus 16:15)

**HEAVEN** *to be in seventh heaven*  
to be very happy

**HEAVEN** *to move heaven and earth*  
to do everything possible

**HEAVEN** *to reek to high heaven*  
to be patently unethical

**HELL** *all hell broke loose*  
great confusion erupted

**HELL** *come hell or high water*  
regardless of the consequences

**HELL** *on a cold day in hell*  
never

**HELL** *to be hell bent on something*  
to be very determined to achieve something, regardless of the adverse consequences

**HELL** *to frighten hell out of someone*  
to alarm a person

**HELL** *to give someone hell*  
to make life difficult for a person

**HELL** *to have a snowflake's chance in hell*  
to have no hope or possibility at all

**HELL** *to raise merry hell*  
to prominently involve others in a matter in the expectation of significant results from this action

**HERESY** *heresy*  
views different from those held by the majority

**HOLY** *a holier-than-thou attitude*  
excessive righteousness

**HOLY** *search for the Holy Grail*  
work toward a difficult goal (refers to a vessel supposedly used by Christ at the last supper and featuring in the Arthurian legends)

**HYMNAL** *to all sing from the same hymnal*  
to act consistently with each other

**IMPRIMATUR** *imprimatur*  
confirmation that something is in order (Latin, "let it be printed"; refers to the formal ruling given by a Roman Catholic bishop authorizing the publication of a book on religion or morals)

**JEREMIAH** *Jeremiah*  
a person who looks on the gloomy side of everything (refers to the prophet Jeremiah in the Old Testament)

**JERICHO** *walls of Jericho*  
something seemingly solid but actually destructible (Joshua 6:20)

**JUDAS** *to play Judas*  
to betray a person (Matthew 26)

**LIMBO** *to be in limbo*  
to have one's ultimate fate yet to be determined

**LIMBO** *to consign something to limbo*  
to consider something as permanently disposed of

**MAHOMET** *if the mountain will not come to Mahomet then Mahomet will go to the mountain*  
on recognizing that one has insufficient power to effect one's most desired solution, one decides to make do with the next best alternative

**MOTE** *a mote in someone's eye*  
a fault in another person which is trifling in comparison to an unrecognized major fault in oneself (Matthew 7:3)

**MUMBO** *mumbo jumbo*  
blatant nonsense (refers to a deity worshipped by primitive tribes)

**PARADISE** *to live in a fool's paradise*  
to delude oneself

**PARISH** *parish pump issues*  
issues of trivial importance

**PAROCHIAL** *parochial*  
narrow minded

**POINT** *to point the bone at someone*  
to accuse a person (actually, an Australian Aboriginal method of applying a curse)

**PONTIFICATE** *to pontificate*  
to speak as if with great authority and with an assumed air of infallibility

**PRAYER** *on a wing and a prayer*  
without proper resources

**PRAYER** *the answer to a maiden's  
prayer*

an unexpected but very welcome  
happening

**PREACH** *to preach to the converted*  
to say something to those who already believe in it

**PRIEST** *the high priest of something*  
the leading advocate of something

**RELIGIOUSLY** *religiously*  
conscientiously

**SACRED** *a sacred cow*  
an institution so well established that it is virtually unalterable

**SACRED** *a sacred trust*  
a moral obligation

**SACRED** *nothing is sacred*  
nothing is safe from interference

**SACRIFICIAL** *sacrificial lamb*  
somebody unfairly made to suffer for the mistakes of others

**SAINT** *a saint*  
a good person

**SAINT** *to have the patience of a  
saint*  
to endure annoyances with particular calm

**SCAPEGOAT** *a scapegoat*  
a person unfairly blamed for something not his fault

**SCRIPTURE** *the devil can cite  
scripture for his purpose*  
a person can quote a respectable or hostile authority while advocating a disreputable cause of his own (from Shakespeare's MERCHANT OF VENICE)

**SHIBBOLETH** *a shibboleth*  
a doctrine once held as essential but now abandoned as having outlived its usefulness (a word used as a test to determine to which tribe an Israelite belonged) (Judges 12:6)

**SHRIFT** *to give someone short shrift*  
to be impatient with a person (refers to the confession to a priest just before an execution)

**SIN** *for one's sins*  
by way of punishment, as it were

**SOLOMON** *to need the wisdom of  
Solomon*  
to be faced with the need to make a difficult decision (1 Kings 3:16-28)

**SOUL** *a soul brother*  
a person of similar ideals

**SOUL** *a soul-searching exercise*  
an examination of the advantages and disadvantages of a proposal

**SOUL** *heart and soul*  
with great energy

**SOUL** *soul-destroying*  
extremely boring and demotivating

**SOUL** *to bare one's soul*  
talkatively to give a revealing insight into oneself

**SOUL** *to be the life and soul of the  
party*

to be the prime enthusiast for a cause

**SOUL** *to keep body and soul together*  
to keep alive

**SPIRIT** *the spirit is willing but the  
flesh is weak*

the body is not up to the demands made on it

**TOTEM** *to be at the bottom of the  
totem pole*

to be in the most junior position in some hierarchy

**UNHOLY** *an unholy alliance*  
a working relationship for a nefarious purpose between unlikely partners

**VERSE** *to quote chapter and verse*  
to authenticate the information

## SCIENCE AND MEDICINE

**ACID** *to be the acid test*  
to establish something beyond doubt

**ACID** to put the acid on someone  
to make demands on a person

**BALANCE** to weigh two alternative propositions in the balance  
to assess the relative significance to two alternative propositions

**BLOW** to blow up  
(of a person) to express rage

**BREAD** to claim that something is the best thing since sliced bread  
to have an exaggerated opinion of the importance or novelty of an invention or practice

**BUBBLE** the bubble has burst  
the inevitable has occurred or the scheme has come to ruination

**BURNER** something is on the back burner  
consideration is postponed pending further research

**CATALYST** a catalyst  
a factor causing something to happen

**CHEMISTRY** good chemistry  
a good ability to work closely together

**CIRCLE** to try to square the circle  
to attempt the impossible (refers to a classical problem in geometry, namely, to construct with a compass a square of the same area as a given circle)

**CIRCUIT** to short-circuit something  
to do something, eliminating various intermediate steps

**CONCRETE** to set something in concrete  
to make something virtually unalterable

**COUNT** the final countdown  
the last stages of something (refers to the launch of space vehicles)

**CRYSTALLIZE** to crystallize  
to emerge in its final form

**CURE** the cure is worse than the disease  
the remedy involves more disadvantages than if it were not applied

**DEGREE** to the nth degree  
with great precision

**DENOMINATOR** the lowest common denominator  
the highest level of taste found among all the members of some target audience

**DOCTOR** just what the doctor ordered  
exactly right

**ECLIPSE** to eclipse someone  
to outshine a person

**ELEMENT** to be in one's element  
to very comfortable in familiar surroundings or in an environment in which one can cope very readily

**EMOLLIENT** to be an emollient  
to be a measure designed to make people more favorably disposed to one's wishes

**ENCAPSULATE** to encapsulate some idea  
to reduce the essential points of a complicated proposal to a small number of words

**FEEDBACK** feedback  
response from a target audience to those seeking to influence it

**FEVER** to be at fever pitch  
to be in a state of excited activity

**FILTER** to filter through to someone (of information) to eventually reach a person

**FIREWORKS** fireworks  
aggressive behavior because of anger

**FLAME** an old flame  
a former lover

**FLAME** keepers of the flame  
persons keen to maintain old traditions

**FLAME** to fan the flames  
to increase unrest

**FLAME** to pour gasoline on the flames  
to make a bad situation worse

**FLAME** to rekindle an old flame  
to inspire the reinstatement of a former loving relationship

**FLUX** to be in a state of flux  
to be subject to continuous change

**FOCUS** to bring something into focus  
to put some matter into its proper context and explain its true significance

**FOCUS** to focus on something  
to concentrate attention on something

**FREEZE** to freeze someone out  
to deliberately exclude a person

**GALVANIZE** to galvanize someone into action  
to enthuse a person into doing something

**GRAVITY** the center of gravity  
the place most convenient to the greatest number

**GRAVITY** to defy gravity  
to go up when the expectation is to go down

**HOT** red hot  
highly exciting and desirable

**HOYLE** according to Hoyle  
with authority

**IMPETUS** to have impetus  
to move along forcefully

**LINE** to take the line of least resistance  
to succumb to outside pressure

**LITMUS** a litmus test  
an event which allows the outcome of future events to be predicted more accurately

**LOUD** to come through loud and clear  
to be well understood

**MAGNET** to be a magnet  
to be a factor drawing a crowd of people

**MEDICINE** strong medicine  
a tough remedy

**MEDICINE** to get a taste of one's own medicine  
to suffer from an initiative intended to affect only other persons

**MEDICINE** to take one's medicine  
to submit to something unpleasant but necessary

**METEORIC** meteoric  
rapid

**MICROSCOPE** to be under the microscope  
to be the subject of close examination

**MOMENTUM** to have momentum  
to move along forcefully

**PENDULUM** the swing of the pendulum

the alternation of voter acceptance between opposing political parties

**PILL** to be a bitter pill to swallow  
to be a great humiliation and disappointment which have to be endured

**PILL** to sugar the pill  
to cause something to be more acceptable

**PLANET** to be off the planet  
to be extremely naive or uninformed

**POLARIZE** to polarize  
to cause people to identify themselves as belonging to groups holding opposing views

**PSYCHOLOGY** at the psychological moment  
at the most appropriate instant of time (a phrase which actually confuses the German word for "motive" with the term for an instant of time)

**QUANTUM** a quantum leap  
a gigantic step forward

**SCALES** to tip the scales  
to be a factor which in combination with other factors results in a particular decision which would otherwise not have been reached

**SHOT** *a shot in the arm*  
something to revive a person's enthusiasm

**SKYROCKET** *to skyrocket*  
(of a price of value) to increase greatly in a short time

**SOFTEN** *to soften someone up*  
to make a person more favorably disposed to one's wishes

**SPECTACLES** *to see something through rose-colored spectacles*  
to appreciate only the advantages and to completely disregard the disadvantages

**SPECTRUM** *spectrum*  
wide range of different opinions or backgrounds

**STAR** *one can thank one's lucky stars*  
one was extremely fortunate

**STAR** *rising star*  
person making good progress in his career

**STAR** *to have stars in one's eyes*  
(for emotional rather than rational reasons) to be ecstatic

**STAR** *to shoot for the stars*  
to be unrealistic

**TANGENT** *to go off at a tangent*  
to depart from the main matter under consideration and follow instead some other matter only marginally related to it

**TONIC** *to be a tonic*  
to cheer someone up

**TUNE** *to stay tuned*  
to keep in touch for further information as it becomes available

**TUNE** *to tune in*  
to pay attention

**VACUUM** *to fill a vacuum*  
to take advantage of an opportunity not acted on by others

**VITRIOL** *to pour vitriol on something*  
to sharply criticize something

**WATER** *to water down something*  
to reduce the severe impact of something

**WAVELENGTH** *to be on the same wavelength*  
to think on similar lines

**WAVELENGTH** *to be on the wrong wavelength*  
to be incorrect in one's thinking

**WHEEL** *to reinvent the wheel*  
to waste resources doing something already accomplished

**WIRE** *to have one's wires crossed*  
to be mistaken about key facts

## SEX

**BASTARD** *a bastard*  
an unpleasant person

**BEAR** *not to have been born yesterday*  
not be naive

**BEAR** *to be born on the wrong side of the blanket*  
to be illegitimate

**BEAR** *to be born with a silver spoon in one's mouth*  
to be brought up by wealthy parents

**BIRTH** *to give birth to something*  
to create or invent something

**EMASCULATE** *to emasculate something*  
to delete the essential features of something

**JUMP** *to jump into bed with someone*  
to enter into a joint enterprise with another person

**PULL** *to pull one's fingers out*  
to get on with a job with alacrity

**SPORT****AND neck and neck**

(of contestants) with little between them

**BACK to back the wrong horse**

to have faith in, give support to and/or invest in a project which proves to be unsuccessful

**BALL to be a new ball game**

to be subject to completely revised rules or very different conditions

**BALL to be in the right ballpark**

to be approximately correct

**BALL to be on the ball**

to be fully informed

**BALL to be right behind the eight ball**

to be in a position of extreme disadvantage

**BALL to have the ball at one's feet**

to have unlimited opportunity

**BALL to keep an eye on the ball**

to monitor a fast-changing situation

**BALL to keep the ball rolling**

to take advantage of the existing momentum or to participate actively

**BALL to keep up with the ball**

to stay on top of the situation

**BALL to pass the ball along**

to cooperate with others

**BALL to play ball**

to cooperate

**BALL to run with the ball**

to make the most of the opportunity

**BALL to start the ball rolling**

to commence and enthusiastically advance an activity involving people

**BALL to take one's bat and ball home**

as a gesture of spite to remove an essential ingredient which one has contributed to a joint enterprise

**BANDY** to bandy something about to discuss something in a light-hearted manner**BASE** to get to first base

to succeed in getting others to start comprehending a problem

**BAT off one's own bat**

on a person's own initiative and without outside help

**BAT to go in to bat for someone**

to carry out a task on another person's behalf

**BAT to maintain a straight bat**

to be efficient

**BAT to open the batting**

to be the first in a series of persons speaking or doing something

**BAT to take one's bat and ball home**

as a gesture of spite to remove an essential ingredient which one has contributed to a joint enterprise

**BELL saved by the bell**

rescued before disaster strikes

**BLOCK stumbling block**

an impediment or difficulty preventing the easy completion of some project or a dilemma involving a moral issue

**BLOW a blow-by-blow description**

a description overburdened by unimportant or irrelevant detail

**BLOW to soften the blow**

to take action to reduce the trauma of bad news

**BORE full bore ahead!**

proceed forward!

**BOX to shadow box**

to go through the motions without achieving or intending to achieve anything

**CANTER to win the prize in a canter**

to win very easily

**CANVAS** to get off the canvas  
to recover after near defeat

**CHALK** to win by a long chalk  
to win very conclusively

**COMPETE** to compete on all fours  
with someone  
to strive on equal terms

**COUP** to receive the coup de grace  
to be finished off by an opponent  
(French, "mercy stroke")

**COURSE** it is horses for courses  
some combinations work particularly  
well

**COURSE** to be par for the course  
to be normal

**COURT** the ball is in someone's  
court  
it is some other person's responsibility

**CRICKET** a cricket team  
eleven people

**CRICKET** not to be cricket  
to be unfair

**DRAW** to draw first blood  
to get an advantage

**DUCK** to break one's duck  
to end a spell without results

**ELEVEN** the second eleven  
persons performing an important function  
but one which is less important  
than that performed by others (refers  
to cricket)

**END** to go off the deep end  
to lose one's temper

**END** to jump straight in at the deep  
end  
to do something without a proper  
lead-in

**FACE** volte face  
a reversal of previously-held beliefs  
(French, "a turning around")

**FENCE** to rush one's fences  
to act precipitately

**FIELD** a field day  
a very enjoyable and successful occasion

**FIELD** a level playing field  
competition on equal terms

**FIELD** to be ahead of the field  
to be better than one's competitors

**FIELD** to cover the field  
to be comprehensive

**FIELD** to exhaust the field  
to use up all the possibilities

**FINISH** a photo finish  
a close result in a contest

**FOOTBALL** a political football  
a political issue which is not being  
debated on its merits

**GAME** I'll soon stop his little game  
his activities are not tolerated and I  
will ensure that they cease

**GAME** a mug's game  
activity which wise persons would  
eschew

**GAME** fun and games  
amusement derived in the course of a  
serious activity

**GAME** game, set and match  
completion

**GAME** it is just a game to someone  
it is an exercise which a person does  
not take seriously

**GAME** the game is up  
escape is now impossible

**GAME** the only game in town  
the only event worthy of attention

**GAME** to beat someone at his own  
game  
to outwit a person in his own special-  
ization

**GAME** to give the game away  
to cease involvement with some activity

**GAME** to lift one's game  
to raise the standard of one's perfor-  
mance

**GAME** to play a deep game  
to show cunning

**GAME** to play the game  
to observe the letter and the spirit of the rules or to act honorably

**GAME** to stick to one's game  
to confine oneself to activities in areas in which one has knowledge and expertise

**GAME** what is his game?  
what is the significance of his actions?

**GLOVE** to take off the gloves  
to fight mercilessly or to debate with great ferocity

**GOAL** to score a goal  
to achieve an objective

**GOAL** to score an own goal  
to blow oneself up

**GOLD** to go for the gold  
to aim for victory (refers to Olympic medals)

**GRANDSTAND** to grandstand  
to bignote oneself

**GREYHOUND** move over and let the greyhound see the rabbit  
move over

**GROUND** to kiss the ground  
to suffer a loss

**GROUND** to prepare one's ground  
to get ready for a confrontation

**GUARD** to catch someone off guard  
to surprise a person (a fencing term)

**GUARD** to slip under one's guard  
to cause a mistake to be made despite care being taken to prevent this

**GUN** to jump the gun  
to start before one is meant to

**HEAVYWEIGHT** a heavyweight  
a person of importance or influence

**HIT** to hit someone below the belt  
to act unfairly toward another person

**HIT** to hit someone for six  
to damage a person's cause (refers to cricket)

**HOLD** no holds barred  
without any limitation

**HOLD** to hold someone at bay  
to successfully resist an attacker

**HOOK** hook, line and sinker  
wholly

**HOP** something is but a hop, skip and jump away  
something is nearby

**HURDLE** to jump a hurdle  
to overcome a problem or difficulty

**HURDLE** to jump that hurdle when one comes to it  
to deal with a particular problem only when it becomes necessary to do so

**INNINGS** to have had a good innings  
to have had a successful life (refers to cricket)

**KEEPER** to let something go to the keeper  
to deliberately ignore a particular incident

**KICK** to kick off  
to start some action

**LAUREL** to look to one's laurels  
to be careful not to lose one's reputation for some skill

**LAUREL** to rest on one's laurels  
to use a reputation for success earned in earlier times as a substitute for current endeavor

**LEAGUE** to be in the same league  
to have comparable skills

**LEAP** to leap frog something  
to overtake something, with the likelihood of in turn being overtaken (refers to a game in which participants jump over each other in turn)

**LIGHTWEIGHT** *lightweight*  
uninfluential

**LINE** *someone's job is on the line*  
a person's career path is under consideration and/or his present position is at risk

**LINE** *to be line ball*  
to be equal

**LOOK** *to need to look over one's shoulder*  
to be subject to attack which is not obvious

**LURCH** *to leave someone in the lurch*  
to desert a person who is in difficulties (refers to the score in certain games)

**MARK** *to be first off the mark*  
to start ahead of all others

**MARK** *to be slow off the mark*  
to be slow to start something

**MARK** *to be up to the mark*  
to be of the right standard

**MARK** *to be wide off the mark*  
to have a belief which is far removed from the true position

**MARK** *to hit the mark*  
to achieve one's object or to make the correct decision (refers to archery)

**MARK** *to overstep the mark*  
to fail to observe the proprieties

**MCCOY** *to be the real McCoy*  
the genuine article (refers to an American boxer who became world welterweight champion in 1890)

**OAR** *to stick one's oar in*  
to intervene without invitation in a dispute to which one is not a party

**PACE** *to put someone through his paces*

to test a person

**PACE** *to set the pace*  
to give a lead in regard to a rate of progression

**PADDLE** *to paddle one's canoe*  
to do something unaided and in one's own way

**PARRY** *to parry some argument*  
to deflect some argument (refers to fencing)

**PEDAL** *to backpedal*  
to reverse to some extent previously applied policies

**PEG** *to peg out*  
to die (refers to the final stroke in a game of croquet)

**PIN** *to pin someone down*  
to find a person willing to accept blame or responsibility or to force a person to announce a decision or concede a point

**PLAY** *foul play*  
treachery or murder

**PLAY** *to be in full play*  
to be fully operational

**PLAY** *to find out the state of play*  
to ascertain the current position of some project

**PLAY** *to play by Marquis of Queensberry rules*  
to act ethically

**PLAY** *to play by the book*  
to apply the rules strictly

**PLAY** *to play fast and loose*  
to disregard one's obligations

**PLAY** *to play it safe*  
to take no risks

**PLAYERS** *a trap for young players*  
a good opportunity for the inexperienced or naive to make mistakes

**PLUNGE** *to take the plunge*  
to expose oneself to certain risks

**POINT** *to score points*  
to make a good impression

**POINT** *to score top points*  
to outwit other persons

**POST** to pip someone at the post  
to achieve something only just ahead  
of a rival

**PRESERVES** to poach on someone's  
preserves  
to encroach uninvited on another per-  
son's territory

**PRIZE** not to be here to win prizes  
to be altruistic

**PRIZE** to win the booby prize  
to do worse than all others

**PUNCH** to be punch drunk  
to be stupefied by some news

**PUNCH** to beat someone to the  
punch  
to get to some objective ahead of  
some keen rival

**PUNCH** to telegraph one's punches  
by one's actions to give advance warn-  
ing of one's future plans

**RACE** not to be in the race  
to lack the required standard

**RACE** rat race  
pressures of modern living

**RACE** your race is run  
you have had your opportunity

**REIN** to take over the reins  
to assume control

**RIDE** riding instructions  
directions as to how to do something

**RIDE** to be riding for a fall  
to act in a reckless manner

**RIDE** to ride high  
to be successful but vulnerable

**RIDE** to ride roughshod over  
someone  
to disregard the feelings and wishes  
of a person

**RING** to jump into the ring  
to join in enthusiastically

**RING** to step into the ring  
to enter a competitive environment

**RING** to throw one's hat into the  
ring  
to publicly announce one's interest in  
some position

**ROPE** to be on the ropes  
to be facing defeat

**ROUND** to be only round one  
to be only the first of many stages

**ROUND** to win some rounds  
to be partly successful

**RUB** here's the rub  
this is where a difficulty arises (a  
term used in bowling)

**RUN** to be up and running  
to be operative

**RUN** to have a run for one's money  
to at least get some enjoyment out of  
an otherwise abortive exercise

**RUN** to have the runs on the board  
to have a demonstrable record of  
achievement

**RUNNER** front-runner  
person expected to win

**SADDLE** to be in the saddle  
to be in command

**SCORE** to even the score  
to get one's own back for some past  
action

**SCORE** to score a point  
to make a clever contribution in the  
course of debate

**SCORE** to see the score  
to appreciate the reality of a situation

**SCRATCH** to be back to scratch  
to have to start all over again

**SCRATCH** to be up to scratch  
to be of the required standard

**SCRATCH** to start from behind  
scratch  
to be faced with a handicap

**SCRATCH** to start from scratch  
to commence something without the  
benefit of any past activity

**SHOOT** to be on a slippery shoot  
to court disaster

**SIDELINE** to sit on the sidelines  
not to take part in the main action

**SIT** to be a sitting duck  
to be readily exploited

**SKATE** to get one's skates on  
to hurry up

**SKATE** to skate around some subject  
by diversionary tactics to avoid discussing some subject

**SKITTLES** not to be all beer and skittles  
not to be all pleasant and easy

**SOMERSAULT** to turn a complete somersault  
to reverse one's established policy

**SPLASH** to make a splash  
to create a sensation

**SPONGE** to throw up the sponge  
to concede defeat

**SPRINGBOARD** a springboard  
a situation from which one intends to make a rapid advance

**START** to have a head start  
to have an advantage over others

**STRAP** to hit the straps  
to really get going

**STRETCH** to enter the home stretch  
to commence the last stage

**STROKE** a master stroke  
particularly brilliant action

**STUMPS** until stumps are drawn  
until the project ends (refers to cricket)

**SWIM** it is a case of sink or swim  
the attempt is worthwhile, despite the risk of failure

**SWIM** to be in the swim  
to be a member of a group knowing what is going on

**SWIM** to swim against the tide  
to take up a minority position

**TOWEL** to throw in the towel  
to concede defeat

**TRACK** track record  
proven performance

**TUG** a tug of war  
a dispute in which each protagonist desires a different course of action

**TURF** to be on one's own turf  
to engage in one's own customary area of activity

**WALKOVER** a walkover  
an easy victory

**WARM** to warm up  
to get ready

**WICKET** to be on a sticky wicket  
to face some difficulties (refers to cricket)

**WINNER** to be on a winner  
to have faith in, give support to and/or invest in a project which proves to be successful

**WOODEN** to get the wooden spoon  
to come ingloriously last

## THEATER

**ACT** to be a hard act to follow  
to be an impressive performance, not easily matched by the next person

**ACT** to clean up one's act  
to fix up the deficiencies in one's affairs

**ACT** to get in on the act  
to participate in some activity started by others

**ACT** to get one's act together  
to organize one's activities so as to make them efficient

**AISLE** to have an audience rolling in the aisles  
to amuse an audience

**BOW** to bow out  
to retire from some activity

**BOW** to take a bow  
to receive recognition

**CHARADE** to act out a charade  
ostentatiously to pretend to be doing  
something in an ethical fashion

**CHOREOGRAPH** to choreograph  
something  
to organize the detail of who does  
what and when in a project

**COMEDY** a comedy of errors  
a series of separate mistakes in relation  
to some matter (name of a Shakespeare play)

**CURTAIN** curtain raiser  
introduction

**CURTAIN** it's curtains!  
this is the end!

**CURTAIN** the curtain rises on  
something  
something is about to start

**CURTAIN** to ring down the curtain  
on something  
to treat something as concluded

**DANCE** nothing to make a song or  
dance about  
unexciting or unimportant

**DANCE** to lead someone a merry  
dance  
to mislead a person

**DANCE** to make a song and dance  
about something  
to create a fuss

**DANSE** danse macabre  
gruesome final step (French, "ghastly  
dance")

**FRANKENSTEIN** to create a  
Frankenstein  
to create something wicked and out  
of control (a reference to the fictional  
creator of a monster, in mistake for a  
reference to the monster itself)

**GALLERY** to play to the gallery  
to do something which appeals to the  
general public rather than something  
which is right

**LIGHT** to be the leading light  
to be the most important person in a  
venture

**LIMELIGHT** to be in the limelight  
to be exposed to public attention

**PART** to play one's part  
to cooperate or carry out one's obligations  
under some arrangement

**REHEARSAL** dress rehearsal  
preliminary skirmish

**SCENARIO** scenario  
details of arrangements

**SCENE** behind the scenes  
out of public view or awareness

**SCENE** to make a scene  
to create a fuss

**SCENE** to quit the scene  
to depart

**SCENE** to set the scene for  
something  
to get things ready for something

**SEAT** to be on the edge of one's seat  
to be very excited at what is currently  
happening

**SHOW** the show must go on  
despite difficulties the action in contemplation  
has to proceed

**SHOW** to get the show on the road  
to commence a planned activity

**SHOW** to give the show away  
to indiscreetly reveal sensitive information

**SHOW** to steal the show  
to have the maximum appeal to those  
watching

**SIDE SHOW** a sideshow  
an unimportant adjunct

**SIXTY-FOUR** a sixty-four thousand  
dollar question  
a pertinent but very difficult question  
(refers to a TV show in which an initial prize doubles with the successful answering of progressively more difficult questions)

**SPOTLIGHT** *to steal the spotlight*  
to set out to be the center of attention

**STAGE** *the stage is set*  
something is about to happen

**STAGE** *to be center stage*  
to have everyone's attention

**STAGE** *to be on a world stage*  
to be prominent in international affairs

**STAGE** *to stage-manage something*  
to arrange how something happens

**STEAL** *to steal someone's thunder*  
to take credit for another person's good work (refers to a dispute over the copying of a machine invented by a 17th-century dramatist to reproduce the sound of thunder during a play)

**STRING** *to pull strings*  
to use one's special influence with those in a position to make favorable decisions which might otherwise not be forthcoming

**TRICK** *a whole bag of tricks*  
a series of articles or a series of artificial devices

**UPSTAGE** *to upstage someone*  
to deprive another person of the glory which he would otherwise have enjoyed

**WING** *to wait in the wings*  
to be prepared to stay unobtrusive till the appropriate time for action arrives

## TRANSPORT

**ALLEY** *to be up one's alley*  
to be right within a person's expertise of area of interest

**ALLEY** *to rush into a blind alley*  
to make a precipitate move which does not lead one anywhere

**AVENUE** *avenue*  
method of approach

**BACKFIRE** *to backfire*  
to be counterproductive

**BOX** *to be in the box seat*  
to be in a very powerful position to control activity

**BRAKE** *to put the brake on someone*  
to stop a person

**BUGGY** *the horse and buggy days*  
long ago

**BUS** *the wheels are back under the bus*  
normal activity has been resumed

**BUS** *to jump on the bus*  
to join an activity already well under way

**BUS** *to miss the bus*  
to fail to exploit an opportunity

**BUSMAN** *a busman's holiday*  
leisure time spent in a way not significantly different from one's normal business activities

**CAB** *to be the first cab off the rank*  
to start ahead of all others

**CARAVAN** *the caravan will roll on*  
the activity will continue

**CARRY** *to be carried away*  
to be excited by something imaginative

**CART** *to put the cart before the horse*  
to do things in the wrong order

**CART** *to upset the applecart*  
to engage in conduct disturbing a peaceful state of affairs and thereby cause discomfort

**CLASS** *to be first class*  
to be very satisfactory

**COACH** *an opening wide enough to drive a coach and four through*  
an excellent opportunity

**COACH** *to drive a coach and horses through something*  
to demonstrate major errors in something

<b>COLLISION</b> to be on a collision course	<b>HALT</b> to grind to a halt to cease some activity despite expectations that it would continue
to be headed for a clash with an opponent	
<b>COOK</b> a Cook's tour	<b>HAUL</b> for the long haul as a long-term proposition
a guided tour of inspection (refers to Thomas Cook, the travel company)	
<b>COVENTRY</b> to send someone to Coventry	<b>LANE</b> life in the fast lane existence full of exciting but worthless activity
to ostentatiously and collectively ignore a person by way of punishment	
<b>CREEK</b> to be up the creek	<b>MILEAGE</b> to get some mileage out of something
to be completely mistaken	to benefit from something
<b>CYLINDER</b> to spark on all cylinders	<b>NOTCH</b> to move down a notch to accept a lower position
to work extremely well	
<b>DERRAIL</b> to derail some strategy	<b>PASSPORT</b> to be a passport to success
to cause a strategy to fail	to be a means of achieving success
<b>DRIFT</b> to drift apart	<b>PEDESTRIAN</b> pedestrian uninspired
to lose contact or to change feelings once held in common	
<b>DRIVE</b> to drive someone from pillar to post	<b>POLE</b> to be poles apart to have ideas which are very different
to send a person to a series of places in a vain attempt to achieve something	
<b>DRIVE</b> to drive someone up the wall	<b>POST</b> a staging post a place where action is initiated
to annoy another person by one's actions	
<b>DRIVER</b> a backseat driver	<b>POST</b> to go post haste to go very fast
a person seeking to exercise control	
<b>DRIVER</b> to be in the driver's seat	<b>POWER</b> under one's own power without external help
to be in charge	
<b>GARAGE</b> garage sale	<b>RAIL</b> to run off the rails to significantly depart from the intended course of action
sale of miscellaneous assets at cheap prices	
<b>GEAR</b> to be geared up to do something	<b>RAILROAD</b> to railroad something through to rush people into accepting a proposal
to have equipment, labor and know-how in place adequate for some task	
<b>GEAR</b> to be in top gear	<b>RAILWAY</b> what a way to run a railway! the way things are done is disgraceful (refers to a cartoon)
to be making excellent progress	
<b>GRADE</b> to be on the downgrade	<b>RIDE</b> to get a magic carpet ride to something
to be of deteriorating quality	to be very fortunate in achieving some objective

<b>GRADE</b> to be on the downgrade	<b>RIDE</b> to get a magic carpet ride to something
to be of deteriorating quality	to be very fortunate in achieving some objective
	<b>RIDE</b> to get an armchair ride to be given a particularly easy time

**RIDE** to go along for the ride  
to seek to benefit from a project in which others contribute the effort

**RIDE** to take someone for a ride  
to deceive a person

**ROAD** a middle-of-the-road solution  
a solution near the middle of a range of possibilities

**ROAD** all roads lead to Rome  
all alternatives will have the same outcome

**ROAD** fork in the road  
turning point for decisions

**ROAD** one for the road  
a final drink before leaving

**ROAD** roadblocks  
difficulties

**ROAD** the royal road to success  
the way of attaining success without effort

**ROAD** this is the end of the road for someone  
a person will have no further opportunity to do something

**ROAD** to be at the crossroads  
to need to choose between several mutually exclusive alternatives

**ROAD** to enter a long road  
to commence a task which will take a long time

**ROAD** to face a rocky road ahead  
to be likely to encounter difficulties

**ROAD** to go down a particular road  
to adopt a particular strategy

**ROAD** to happen down the road  
to happen later

**ROAD** to road test something  
to try something out under real conditions

**ROAD** to set someone on the right road  
to show a person how to go about doing something

**SEAT** to take a backseat  
not to actively involve oneself

**STEAM** full steam ahead!  
get going as fast as possible!

**STEAM** to develop a head of steam  
to gain momentum

**STEAM** to let off steam  
to engage in noisy or robust activity as a form of relaxation

**STEAM** to lose steam  
to slow down

**STEAM** to run out of steam  
to lose one's energy and enthusiasm

**STEAM** under one's own steam  
without external help

**STOP** to come to a full stop  
to completely cease activity

**STOP** to pull out all stops  
to make maximum effort

**STREAM** to get on stream  
to now operate successfully following the end of a settling-in period

**STREET** a one-way street  
a flow of activity in only one direction

**STREET** not to be in the same street as someone  
not to be of comparable quality

**STREET** the man in the street  
the average citizen

**STREET** to be streets ahead  
to outperform one's competitors by a wide margin

**STREET** to walk in off the street  
to come without prior arrangement or notification

**TIRE** to carry a spare tire  
to be fat

**TRAIL** to blaze a trail  
to be the first person to do something

**TRAIN** to get on a gravy train  
to take steps to become a recipient of benefits which are available but undeserved

**TRAIN** to miss the train  
to fail to exploit an opportunity

**TRAM** to be on the wrong tram  
to be completely mistaken as to the basic facts

**TRUCK** it fell off the back of a truck  
it was leaked to me

**TUNNEL** to see the light at the end of the tunnel  
to be close to finalizing a long exercise

**U-TURN** to do a U-turn  
to reverse one's thinking

**WAGON** to be on the water wagon  
to be teetotal

**WAY** to stand in someone's way  
to prevent a person achieving his goal

**WHEEL** the squeaky wheel gets the most attention  
those complaining the most loudly will get their problems sorted out first

**WHEEL** the wheel has turned  
circumstances have changed

**WHEEL** the wheel has turned the complete circle  
things are now back to where they were before

**WHEEL** the wheels fell off  
the plan failed

**WHEEL** to be a fifth wheel  
to be superfluous

**WHEEL** to make the wheels go round  
to cause something to happen

**WHEEL** to put a spoke in someone's wheel  
to interfere with another person's activity, so preventing its continuance

**WHEEL** to wheel someone in  
to bring a person along for a confrontation

## WAR AND MILITARY

**AMMUNITION** ammunition  
arguments helpful to a case

**ARM** to be armed to the teeth  
to carry many weapons

**ARMOR** a chink in someone's armor  
an opportunity to do something which otherwise could not be done

**ARMOR** a knight in shining armor  
a very helpful person

**ARMS** to be up in arms against something  
to express violent opposition to a proposal

**ARROW** another arrow in one's quiver  
an additional reason

**AX** an old battle-ax  
a hostile woman

**BARREL** with both barrels blazing  
with great intensity

**BASTION** the last bastion  
the only remaining defensive measure

**BATON** to have a field marshal's baton in one's kit  
to be ambitious

**BATTLE** a battle royal  
a fight or argument with many simultaneous participants

**BATTLE** to fight an uphill battle  
to face difficulties or to have formidable opposition

**BATTLESHIP** enough to sink a battleship  
more than sufficient

**BEARER** a standard bearer  
a highly visible activist for a cause

**BOLT** to shoot one's bolt  
to lose one's temper

**BOMB** a bombshell  
an unpleasant surprise

**BOMB** a time bomb  
a source of serious problems which are certain to surface later on

**BOMB** to be a bomb  
to be grossly defective

**BOMB** *to put a bomb under someone*  
to induce a person to take some action

**BOMBARD** *to bombard someone with something*  
to overwhelm a person with material or to persistently assail a person with words of argument or abuse

**BOW** *to draw a long bow*  
to state a conclusion which while possible is unlikely on the known facts

**BREACH** *once more unto the breach*  
let us get on with the task (from Shakespeare's HENRY V)

**BREACH** *to stand in the breach*  
to bear the brunt of criticisms

**BRIDGEHEAD** *a bridgehead*  
an advanced post set up to facilitate further access to some new market, etc.

**BROADSIDE** *a broadside*  
a short verbal attack

**BULLET** *a gun with no bullets*  
something incomplete and therefore useless for the desire purpose

**BULLET** *to bite the bullet*  
to face up to the difficulties of a situation

**BULLET** *to have a bullet which can be fired*  
to have available an effective response which can be used at will

**BURN** *to burn one's bridges*  
to do something irreversible

**CAMP** *in our camp*  
in the group representing our vested interest

**CANNON** *a loose cannon on the deck*  
a mistake likely to cause trouble

**CATAPULT** *to catapult*  
(of sales, etc.) to increase rapidly

**CATAPULT** *to catapult to fame*  
to achieve fame unexpectedly quickly

**CATCH** *catch-22*

a situation made impossible because it requires as a prior fulfillment something which does not exist until that condition is satisfied (title of a novel by Joseph Heller)

**COCK** *to go off half-cocked*

to act without adequate thought or preparation (refers to a gun at the half-ready)

**COLUMNIST** *a fifth columnist*

a person using his position of trust to work for a rival cause

**COMMAND** *to be in a commanding position*

to have a strategic advantage

**COMMAND** *to be in command*  
to be on top of a situation

**CORPS** *esprit de corps*

a feeling of camaraderie and concern for the good name of some organization of which one is a member (French, "vital breath of a body")

**CUDGEL** *to take up the cudgels for someone*

to defend a person

**DAGGER** *cloak and dagger activity*  
secret activity

**DAGGER** *to look daggers at someone*

to look at a person in a way which indicates great animosity

**DECIMATE** *to decimate*

to greatly reduce in size (often used in the sense of "to reduce to one tenth," although the original meaning was "to reduce by one tenth")

**DECIPHER** *to decipher something*  
to understand the significance of something

**DEVASTATE** *to be devastated*  
to be extremely disappointed

**DISASTER** *a pit of disaster*  
great and unexpected misfortune

**DISPATCH** *to be mentioned in dispatches*

to be favorably mentioned (refers to military recognition for bravery)

**DITCH** *to make a last-ditch stand*  
to make a brave effort to stave off final defeat**DRAW** *to be quick on the draw*  
to act precipitately**DRUM** *to drum someone out of some organization*

to terminate in ignominy a person's employment or membership (refers to the ceremonial cashing in the army to the beating of parade drums)

**DYNAMITE** *to be dynamite*  
to cause outrage**DYNAMITE** *to play with dynamite*  
to invite trouble by virtue of one's risky conduct**EXPLODE** *to explode*  
(of a person) to express rage**FIRE** *sure-fire*  
guaranteed**FIRE** *to be in the firing line*  
to be among the first to be under attack**FIRE** *to draw fire*  
to encounter criticism**FIRE** *to hang fire*  
to take no immediate action**FIRE** *to hold fire*  
to defer criticizing**FIRE** *to hold one's fire*  
to delay proposed action**FLAK** *to attract flak*  
to attract criticism**FORCE** *to join forces*  
to cooperate with one another in order to achieve a common objective**FORT** *to hold the fort*  
to be in charge during the temporary absence of a superior**GAUNTLET** *to run the gauntlet*

to be subjected to criticism (from the Spanish word for "passage," in reference to punishment inflicted on delinquents made to run between two files of soldiers)

**GROUND** *to gain ground*  
to advance one's position relative to others**GUARD** *new guard*  
changed regime**GUN** *a gun with no bullets*  
something incomplete and therefore useless for the desired purpose**GUN** *a scattergun approach*  
an effort going here, there and everywhere, instead of being properly targeted**GUN** *to be a gun for hire*  
to be a person willing to undertake assignments for a fee**GUN** *to be going great guns*  
to be making very successful progress**GUN** *to be great guns at something*  
to be very skilled at something**GUN** *to bring out one's biggest guns*  
to use the most impressive persons or arguments**GUN** *to hold a gun at someone's head*  
to put pressure on a person to make a particular decision regardless of his desires in the matter**GUN** *to look down the barrel of a gun*  
to be given little choice in a matter**GUN** *to outgun someone*  
to outmaneuver a person**GUN** *to spike someone's guns*  
to cause something to become useless**GUN** *to stick to one's guns*  
to continue to hold certain beliefs notwithstanding opposition by others

**GUN** to turn one's guns on someone  
to criticize a person

**HATCHET** to bury the hatchet  
to abandon hostilities

**HERO** to make a hero of oneself  
to curry favors

**HILT** to the hilt  
to the maximum extent

**LAND** to ascertain the lay of the land  
to establish the pertinent facts and  
opinions

**LINE** to be out of line  
to adopt a stance not held by others

**LINE** to fall into line  
to conform with others

**LINE** to put one's reputation on the  
line  
to take a public stance in the realization  
that there is a risk that one's  
reputation will suffer if one is proved  
wrong

**LINE** to step out of line  
to infringe accepted rules of behavior

**LOCK** lock, stock and barrel  
entirely

**MARCH** in the course of a day's  
march  
while carrying out one's normal  
activities

**MARINE** tell it to the marines  
such nonsense is not believable

**MINE** a minefield  
a source of great hidden danger or of  
difficulties not obvious on a first  
encounter

**ORDER** the order of the day  
the customary behavior

**ORDER** to get one's marching orders  
to be told to leave

**OVERKILL** overkill  
more action than really required for  
the purpose

**PACKDRILL** no names—no  
packdrill

the identities of the parties will be  
kept confidential in order to protect  
them

**PASSWORD** the password is  
so-and-so

the main attraction is so-and-so

**PETARD** to be hoist with one's own  
petard

to have one's own case used against  
one (refers to being blown up by  
one's own bomb)

**POINT** to refuse point blank  
to refuse outright

**POTSHOT** to take a potshot at

someone  
to make disparaging remarks about a  
person

**POWDER** to keep one's powder dry  
to retain key arguments or resources  
in reserve for use later

**RANK** to break ranks

to identify oneself as having separate  
interests or views from the rest of a  
group

**RANK** to close ranks

to sink minor differences in order to  
present a unified front to a common  
enemy

**READ** to read between the lines  
to appreciate the true significance of  
something not put into words

**RETREAT** to beat a retreat  
to abandon some project

**ROCKET** to give someone a rocket  
to severely reprimand a person

**ROCKET** to put a rocket under  
someone  
to induce a person to take some action

**ROCKET** to skyrocket

(of a price or value) to increase greatly  
in a short time

**SABER** *saber rattling*  
hints of retribution if certain conduct does not cease

**SALVO** *to fire a salvo at someone*  
to present a series of criticisms to a person

**SHELL** *to be shell-shocked*  
to be stunned by unexpected bad news

**SHOOT** *a straight shooter*  
a person who is frank and outspoken

**SHOOT** *a troubleshooter*  
a person good at finding and then rectifying faults

**SHOOT** *shoot!*  
go on, speak!

**SHOOT** *the whole shooting match*  
the whole lot

**SHOOT** *to be shot to pieces*  
to have one's case seriously damaged

**SHOOT** *to be shot to ribbons*  
(of an argument) to be utterly discredited

**SHOOT** *to shoot from the hip*  
to speak frankly and openly

**SHOOT** *to shoot one's mouth off*  
to speak without thinking

**SHOOT** *to shoot someone down in flames*  
to utterly destroy another person's arguments

**SHOT** *a big shot*  
an important person

**SHOT** *a shot in the dark*  
an intelligent or lucky guess

**SHOT** *a sitting shot*  
an initial move which is designated to establish facts for use in a later action

**SHOT** *opening shot*  
first step in an activity expected to last a long time

**SHOT** *shots across the bow*  
warnings

**SHOT** *that is a long shot*  
there is only a remote possibility

**SHOT** *to be a sitting shot*  
to be a person whose actions make him very vulnerable to criticism

**SHOT** *to beat by a long shot*  
to defeat very convincingly

**SHOT** *to call the shots*  
to have the direction over a project

**SHOT** *to fire a parting shot*  
to make a defiant gesture on leaving

**SHOT** *to give one's best shot*  
to make the best attempt possible

**SHOT** *to have a shot at someone*  
to use subtly chosen words implying friendly criticism but designed to embarrass another person

**SHOT** *to have a shot at something*  
to attempt to achieve something

**SIGHT** *to lower one's sights*  
to reduce one's ambition

**SIGHT** *to set one's sights on something*  
to aim to achieve something

**SIGNAL** *to send a smoke signal*  
to given an indication

**SMOKE** *to set up a smokescreen*  
to deliberately confuse an issue by disguising its salient features

**SMOKE** *when the smoke clears*  
when sufficient time has passed

**SOLDIER** *to be a brave soldier*  
to be brave

**SOLDIER** *to soldier on*  
to carry on despite difficulties

**SPEARHEAD** *to spearhead something*  
to lead a movement

**SPUR** *to win one's spurs*  
to gain recognition after a period of effort (refers to the earning of a knighthood in battle)

**STANDOFF** *a Mexican standoff*  
a situation where neither of two parties is making a move

**STORM** *to barnstorm*  
to visit accompanied by a show of force

**STREET** *there is blood in the streets*  
much damage has been done to a cause

**STRIKE** *to be within striking distance*  
to be fairly close

**STRIPE** *to earn one's stripes*  
to deserve promotion

**SWORD** *to be a two-edged sword*  
to involve both advantages and disadvantages of similar significance

**SWORD** *to cross swords with someone*  
to have a disagreement with another person

**SWORD** *to have a sword of Damocles hanging over one*  
to be in imminent danger despite normal activity going on all around one

**SWORD** *to hold a sword at someone's throat*  
to exert undue pressure on another person in an endeavor to achieve a result which would otherwise not be forthcoming

**TARGET** *a moving target*  
an objective subject to constant revision

**TARGET** *target*  
objective

**TORPEDO** *to torpedo something*  
to make something ineffective

**TOWER** *to be in an ivory tower*  
to be emersed in theoretical considerations and ignorant of the practical realities (Song of Solomon 7:4)

**TRENCH** *to be back in the trenches*  
to be made to carry out menial tasks

**TRIGGER** *to be trigger-happy*  
to be impetuous

**TRIGGER** *trigger*  
factor responsible for certain events occurring at that particular time

**TROOPER** *to be a real trooper*  
to be a person willing to try anything

**VANGUARD** *to be at the vanguard of something*  
to be among the first to do something

**VICTORY** *a Pyrrhic victory*  
a win which costs more than if there had been a loss (refers to the battle at which King Pyrrhus of Epirus defeated the Romans at Asculum)

**VOLLEY** *to fire a volley at someone*  
to send a series of angry messages to someone

**WAR** *the cold war*  
the unfriendly relations between the communist nations and the rest of the world

**WAR** *to be on the warpath*  
to be on the lookout for faults which can be criticized

**WARFARE** *paper warfare*  
an excessive amount of correspondence or red tape

**WEAPON** *to use all the weapons at one's disposal*  
to utilize all available advantages

## THESAURUS

**ABUSE**

*give him an inch and he will take a mile*

make him a small concession and he will abuse it by taking much more

*to feel the rough side of someone's tongue*

to be verbally abused by a person

*to get one's head blown off*

to be very soundly abused

*to get the rounds of the kitchen*

(of a husband) to be subject to personal abuse by his wife

*to give someone a piece of one's mind*

to abuse another person

*to kick someone around*

to abuse a person

**ACHIEVEMENT**

*a Goliath*

a giant or a person whose ability and achievements exceed those of most other people (1 Samuel 17)

*a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush*

a benefit currently available is more valuable than a seemingly much larger benefit which may or may not be achieved in the future

*a crusade*

an aggressive campaign to achieve some political or social objective

*a feather in one's cap*

a meritorious personal achievement

*a giant*

a person whose ability and achievements exceed those of most other people

*a milestone*

an achievement

*a recipe for disaster*

a certain way of achieving disaster

*a warm inner glow*

satisfaction at some achievement

*gateway to something*

method of achieving something

*heartburn*

regret at some non-achievement

*it is no use crying over spilt milk*

lamenting over a disaster achieves nothing

*it was touch and go*

there were considerable risks—the objective was achieved, but only just

*one can't make bricks without straw*

one cannot achieve results in the absence of adequate resources

*one would give one's eye teeth for something*

a person would very much like to achieve some objective

*path*

means of achieving an objective

*pie in the sky*

a hoped-for result unlikely to be achieved

*something has done the trick*

something has achieved the desired purpose

*the crowning point*

the height of a person's achievement

*the river found its mark*

equilibrium between two pressures has been achieved

*there are many ways to cook eggs*

there are many ways to achieve an objective

*there is more than one way to skin a cat*

this can be achieved in a variety of acceptable ways

*to achieve a flying start*

to get operational very quickly

*to be a passport to success*

to be a means of achieving success

*to be hell bent on something*

to be very determined to achieve something, regardless of the adverse consequences

*to be only a gleam in one's eyes*

to be a long way from final achievement

*to be unable to take a trick*

to be unable to achieve success in anything

*to be up against a brick wall*

to be unable to achieve anything because of intractable opposition or apathy

*to catapult to fame*

to achieve fame unexpectedly quickly

*to deliver the goods*

to achieve the objective

*to drive someone from pillar to post*

to send a person to a series of places in a vain attempt to achieve something

*to gain a foothold*

to achieve a position from which further advances can readily be made

*to get a magic carpet ride to something*

to be very fortunate in achieving some objective

*to get something under one's belt*

to achieve something

*to get the worst of all worlds*

to get a series of disadvantages without achieving any corresponding advantages

*to have a shot at something*

to attempt to achieve something

*to have one's heart set on something*

to be very keen to achieve something

*to have one's work cut out to do something*

it will be difficult to achieve something

*to have the runs on the board*

to have a demonstrable record of achievement

*to head someone in the right direction*

to assist a person to achieve something

*to heave a sigh of relief*

to express satisfaction at the achievement of a solution to a difficult problem

*to hit the mark*

to achieve one's object or to make the correct decision (refers to archery)

*to hold a knife at someone's throat*

to exert undue pressure on another person in an endeavor to achieve a result which would otherwise not be forthcoming

*to hold a sword at someone's throat*

to exert undue pressure on another person in an endeavor to achieve a result which would otherwise not be forthcoming

<i>to join forces</i>	<i>to throw one's weight about</i>
to cooperate with one another in order to achieve a common objective	to use one's real or imagined status in order to achieve certain results
<i>to kill two birds with one stone</i>	<i>to walk away with a profit</i>
to achieve a second objective in the course of achieving the first objective	to achieve a profit on concluding a project
<i>to land something</i>	<i>to waste one's breath</i>
to achieve something	to talk or request something without achieving anything
<i>to let blood</i>	<i>without any cards to play</i>
to allow some harm as the price for achieving some greater benefit	without the means to achieve something
<i>to mend fences</i>	
to achieve a reconciliation	
<i>to pip someone at the post</i>	<b>ACTIVITY</b>
to achieve something only just ahead of a rival	<i>I'll soon stop his little game</i>
<i>to pull something off</i>	his activities are not tolerated and I will ensure that they cease
to achieve success in some enterprise	
<i>to put one's back into something</i>	<i>a backwater</i>
to work hard at achieving some goal	a place of little activity
<i>to salvage something out of the wreck</i>	<i>a busman's holiday</i>
to achieve some minor benefits out of a disastrous situation	leisure time spent in a way not significantly different from one's normal business activities
<i>to score a goal</i>	<i>a cobbler should stick to his last</i>
to achieve an objective	every person should confine himself to activities for which he has been trained
<i>to set a hare running</i>	<i>a honeymoon</i>
in order to achieve some desired effect, to initiate some related activity	a short period enjoyed by a newcomer to some activity before his performance is criticized
<i>to set one's sights on something</i>	<i>a logjam</i>
to aim to achieve something	a stoppage of activity caused by input in greater volume than allowed for
<i>to shadow box</i>	<i>a mug's game</i>
to go through the motions without achieving or intending to achieve anything	activity which wise persons would eschew
<i>to stand in someone's way</i>	<i>a one-way street</i>
to prevent a person achieving his goal	a flow of activity in only one direction
<i>to steamroll something through</i>	<i>a standard bearer</i>
to use enormous force to achieve an objective	a highly visible activist for a cause
<i>to throw one's cap into the air</i>	<i>a watershed</i>
to celebrate some achievement	an occasion dividing two distinct phases of activity

*across the board*  
over the whole range of activity

*behind someone's back*  
in a way which deliberately conceals an activity from a person

*blueprint*  
a master plan for some activity or a model which others can copy

*cloak and dagger activity*  
secret activity

*distant fields look greener*  
activities of which one has no experience seem much easier than is really the case

*early in the piece*  
at an early stage of some activity

*fun and games*  
amusement derived in the course of a serious activity

*in the course of a day's march*  
while carrying out one's normal activities

*it is a long time between drinks*  
activity is occurring only very spasmodically

*it takes two to tango*  
some activities cannot be carried out single-handedly

*kingmaker*  
person engaging in behind-the-scenes activities to promote another person to a particular leadership position

*life in the fast lane*  
existence full of exciting but worthless activity

*monkey business*  
mischievous or underhand activity

*nimble-footed*  
quick to change the direction of one's activities when circumstances warrant

*opening shot*  
first-step in an activity expected to last a long time

*someone's number is up*  
a person's period of activity or influence is about to expire

*the caravan will roll on*  
the activity will continue

*the coast is clear*  
there are no observers to one's activity around

*the wheels are back under the bus*  
normal activity has been resumed

*the whole gamut*  
the whole range of some activity

*the world is one's oyster*  
one has enormous scope for activity

*to be at fever pitch*  
to be in a state of excited activity

*to be in full swing*  
to be very active

*to be in the box seat*  
to be in a very powerful position to control activity

*to be in the doldrums*  
to be depressed or to show no activity (refers to a region of little wind near the equator, becalming sailing ships)

*to be in the thick of things*  
to get involved at the center of some activity

*to be on a treadmill*  
to be involved in some unpleasant ongoing activity which cannot readily be stopped

*to be on one's own turf*  
to engage in one's own customary area of activity

*to be on someone's cabbage patch*  
to engage in a competitive activity in a territory regarded by someone already there as rightfully belonging exclusively to him

*to be riveted to one's seat*  
to find the activity being watched very exciting and worthy of full attention

<i>to be tied down</i>	<i>to have one's fingers in many different pies</i>
to have responsibilities precluding alternative activities	to be engaged in a variety of separate activities
<i>to bow out</i>	<i>to have the plug pulled out from under one</i>
to retire from some activity	to have a successful activity destroyed by the actions of someone else
<i>to call it a day</i>	<i>to hedge one's bets</i>
to cease involvement with some activity	to take action involving a cost but which is designed to reduce the possible adverse consequences of some activity
<i>to catch someone in the net</i>	<i>to jump on the bus</i>
to unexpectedly involve a particular person in the course of activity designed to involve many others	to join an activity already well under way
<i>to close the book on something</i>	<i>to keep off someone's pad</i>
to terminate an activity	not to interfere with or compete against another person in his customary area of activity
<i>to come to a full stop</i>	<i>to keep one's eye on someone</i>
to completely cease activity	to supervise a person or to monitor a person's activities and behavior
<i>to do a hatchet job</i>	<i>to keep one's hand in</i>
to destroy some existing activity or to ruin a person's credibility	to engage in activities which reinforce skills which one has previously acquired
<i>to get in on the act</i>	<i>to keep the ball rolling</i>
to participate in some activity started by others	to take advantage of the existing momentum or to participate actively
<i>to get one's act together</i>	<i>to keep the home fires burning</i>
to organize one's activities so as to make them efficient	to maintain normal domestic activity during the temporary absence of the breadwinner
<i>to get the show on the road</i>	<i>to leap in</i>
to commence a planned activity	to commence an activity without considering the wisdom of doing so or the best way to proceed
<i>to give the game away</i>	<i>to let off steam</i>
to cease involvement with some activity	to engage in a noisy or robust activity as a form of relaxation
<i>to go to sleep</i>	<i>to lower the boom</i>
to become inactive	to terminate an activity
<i>to grind to a halt</i>	<i>to make sparks fly</i>
to cease some activity despite expectations that it would continue	to cause rapid activity to take place
<i>to gum up the works</i>	
to cause an activity to be halted	
<i>to have a sword of Damocles hanging over one</i>	
to be in imminent danger despite normal activity going on all around one	
<i>to have a tiger by the tail</i>	
to be involved in an activity which is much more dangerous than one had realized	

*to nip something in the bud*  
to stop some activity in its early stages  
when stopping it is still relatively  
easy

*to pick up the pieces*  
to resume previous activities to the  
maximum extent possible after some  
setback

*to plow new ground*  
to laboriously engage in an untried  
activity

*to plow on*  
to methodically and painstakingly con-  
tinue with an activity

*to put a spoke in someone's wheel*  
to interfere with another person's ac-  
tivity, so preventing its continuance

*to put something on "hold"*  
to put something aside for the time  
being with a view to resuming activi-  
ty later on (refers to the telephone)

*to put up the shutters*  
to cease an established activity

*to run around in circles*  
to engage in excited but useless activity

*to set a hare running*  
in order to achieve some desired ef-  
fect, to initiate some related activity

*to shut up shop*  
to cease an established activity

*to start from scratch*  
to commence something without the  
benefit of any past activity

*to start the ball rolling*  
to commence and enthusiastically ad-  
vance an activity involving people

*to stick to one's game*  
to confine oneself to activities in areas  
in which one has knowledge and  
expertise

*to take a backseat*  
not to actively involve oneself

*to try one's hand at something*  
to attempt a new activity, especially  
by way of experiment

*to twiddle one's thumbs*  
not to be involved in any worthwhile  
activity

## ADVANTAGE

*a lame dog*  
a person under some disadvantage  
needing attention and assistance

*a mixed bag*  
some advantages and some disadvan-  
tages

*a soul-searching exercise*  
an examination of the advantages and  
disadvantages of a proposal

*bargaining chips*  
benefits which can be conceded in  
negotiations in order to obtain some  
advantage

*leech*  
person taking undue advantage of  
others

*the cure is worse than the disease*  
the remedy involves more disadvan-  
tages than if it were not applied

*the early bird gets the worm*  
a person who acts ahead of others  
gets an advantage over them

*the upside*  
the advantage

*to be a two-edged sword*  
to involve both advantages and disad-  
vantages of similar significance

*to be in a commanding position*  
to have a strategic advantage

*to be quick on one's feet*  
to cleverly take advantage of a situation

*to be right behind the eight ball*  
to be in a position of extreme disad-  
vantage

<i>to cut both ways</i>	<i>to keep the ball rolling</i>
to involve both advantages and disadvantages of similar significance	to take advantage of the existing momentum or to participate actively
<i>to draw first blood</i>	<i>to kick a man when he is down</i>
to get an advantage	to take unfair advantage of a person already in difficulty
<i>to expose one's flank</i>	<i>to make a rod for one's own back</i>
to allow others to take advantage of one	to act in disregard of likely disadvantages for oneself
<i>to feather one's own nest</i>	<i>to play right into someone's hands</i>
to improperly arrange a transaction on behalf of others to one's own financial advantage	to act so as to give a person an unintended advantage
<i>to fill a vacuum</i>	<i>to run with something</i>
to take advantage of an opportunity not acted on by others	to take advantage of some current development
<i>to gain the upper hand</i>	<i>to see something through rose-colored spectacles</i>
to attain, after some effort, an advantage over another person	to appreciate only the advantages and to completely disregard the disadvantages
<i>to get the jump on someone</i>	<i>to squeeze the last drop out of something</i>
to get an advantage over a person	to get the maximum advantage out of some favorable situation
<i>to get the worst of all worlds</i>	<i>to strike while the iron is hot</i>
to get a series of disadvantages without achieving any corresponding advantages	to take advantage of a situation which cannot last
<i>to give someone the edge</i>	<i>to suck the lemon dry</i>
to give a person an advantage over others	to get the maximum advantage out of some favorable situation
<i>to have a head start</i>	<i>to take something lying down</i>
to have an advantage over others	to accept a disadvantage without protest
<i>to have a leading edge</i>	<i>to take up the slack</i>
to have an advantage	to take advantage of surplus capacity
<i>to have someone over a barrel</i>	<i>to throw out the baby with the bathwater</i>
to take advantage of someone's weakened position in relation to oneself	to discard a major benefit in the course of obtaining a comparatively minor advantage
<i>to have the high ground</i>	<i>to use all the weapons at one's disposal</i>
to have an advantage in moral terms	to utilize all available advantages
<i>to hijack a debate</i>	<i>to want the best of both worlds</i>
to involve oneself in the public discussion of some matter and turn that discussion to one's advantage	to unreasonably desire to get some advantage without incurring a corresponding disadvantage
<i>to jump at the opportunity</i>	
to enthusiastically take immediate advantage of a good chance	

*what one loses on the swings one gains on the roundabouts*  
there are advantages and disadvantages which offset each other

## AGREEMENT

*a bone of contention*

the subject matter of violent disagreement

*a sweetheart deal*

an agreement negotiated in private without full regard to the interests of those affected

*that washes with me*

I agree

*to be at odds with someone*

to disagree with a person

*to be of one mind*

(of several people) to be agreed

*to come to the party*

to agree to someone's terms

*to cross swords with someone*

to have a disagreement with another person

*to lock someone into some arrangement*

to create an agreement which cannot be broken by one of the parties

*to ram something down someone's throat*

to pressure another person into accepting an idea with which he does not agree

*to see eye to eye with someone*

to agree

*to set the seal on something*

to confirm absolutely that something is agreed

*to sign on the dotted line*

to confirm one's agreement

## AIM

*a crusade*

an aggressive campaign to achieve some political or social objective

*a gun with no bullets*

something incomplete and therefore useless for the desired purpose

*a moving target*

an objective subject to constant revision

*an unholy alliance*

a working relationship for a nefarious purpose between unlikely partners

*any stick to beat a dog*

any excuse will do if it serves one's purpose

*it was touch and go*

there were considerable risks—the objective was achieved, but only just

*one would give one's eye teeth for something*

a person would very much like to achieve some objective

*overkill*

more action than really required for the purpose

*path*

means of achieving an objective

*something has done the trick*

something has achieved the desired purpose

*target*

objective

*the devil can cite scripture for his purpose*

a person can quote a respectable or hostile authority while advocating a disreputable cause of his own (from Shakespeare's MERCHANT OF VENICE)

*there are many ways to cook eggs*

there are many ways to achieve an objective

*to beat someone to the punch*

to get to some objective ahead of some keen rival

*to deliver the goods*

to achieve the objective

*to earmark*

to allocate to a specific purpose

*to engage in pump priming*  
to spend public money with the aim  
of attracting parochial electoral support  
*to get a magic carpet ride to something*  
to be very fortunate in achieving some  
objective

*to go down a particular track*  
to make decisions aimed at a particu-  
lar goal

*to go for the gold*  
to aim for victory (refers to Olympic  
medals)

*to hit the mark*  
to achieve one's object or to make  
the correct decision (refers to archery)

*to join forces*  
to cooperate with one another in order  
to achieve a common objective

*to kill two birds with one stone*  
to achieve a second objective in the  
course of achieving the first objective

*to leave someone out in the cold*  
to deny a desired objective to a person

*to pull oneself together*  
to cease acting without purpose or  
enthusiasm

*to score a goal*  
to achieve an objective

*to set one's sights on something*  
to aim to achieve something

*to stake a claim*  
to indicate one's desire to obtain  
something

*to steamroll something through*  
to use enormous force to achieve an  
objective

*to want something both ways*  
to desire two mutually exclusive  
objectives

*to zero in on a target*  
to move directly toward one's objective

## ALTERNATIVE

*all roads lead to Rome*  
all alternatives will have the same  
outcome

*between the devil and the deep blue sea*  
to be faced with two equally unpalatable  
alternatives which cannot both  
be avoided

*if the mountain will not come to  
Mahomet then Mahomet will go to  
the mountain*

on recognizing that one has insufficient  
power to effect one's most desired  
solution, one decides to make do with the next best alternative

*in another vein*  
as an alternative way of looking at  
things

*it is a toss-up*  
either alternative is equally acceptable

*the horns of a dilemma*  
the unpalatable alternatives between  
which a choice must be made

*to be at the crossroads*  
to need to choose between several  
mutually exclusive alternatives

*to be between Scylla and Charybdis*  
to be faced with two equally unpalatable  
alternatives which cannot both  
be avoided (refers to the voyage of  
Ulysses)

*to be of two minds*  
to be undecided between two alternatives

*to be tied down*  
to have responsibilities precluding alterna-  
tive activities

*to fall between two stools*  
not to fit neatly into either of two  
available alternatives and waver be-  
tween them

*to have other irons in the fire*  
to have the opportunity to do some-  
thing else as an alternative

*to pre-empt some issue*  
to deliberately do something which has the effect of limiting the range of alternative approaches to a matter

*to shop around*  
to explore alternatives

*to signpost something*  
to give an indication of the alternatives available

*to sit on the fence*  
to refuse to choose between two alternatives

*to take stock*  
to contemplate the alternatives

*to want to have one's cake and eat it too*  
to want two mutually exclusive alternatives

*to weigh two alternative propositions in the balance*  
to assess the relative significance of two alternative propositions

*variations on a theme*  
alternative approaches in similar vein

## ANGER

*I will have his guts for garters*  
I am extremely angry and dissatisfied with him

*fireworks*  
aggressive behavior because of anger

*to be a red rag to a bull*  
to be something which makes a person very angry and very excited (refers to the erroneous belief that the color red, rather than the motion of waving, excites a bull)

*to be after someone's blood*  
to be keen to make a person the victim of an angry confrontation

*to be purple with rage*  
to be very angry

*to bite one's lip*  
to control one's anger

*to blow one's top*  
to show anger (refers to a volcano)

*to blow up*  
(of a person) to express rage

*to explode*  
(of a person) to express rage

*to fire a volley at someone*  
to send a series of angry messages to someone

*to fly off the handle*  
to show irrational anger

*to foam at the mouth*  
to show anger

*to hit the roof*  
to be very angry

*to jump up and down*  
to show excitement or anger or frustration

*to kick the cat*  
to take out one's anger on some innocent party

*to make someone's blood boil*  
to make a person very angry

*to raise someone's hackles*  
to make a person angry

*to see blood*  
to be very angry

*to see red*  
to become very angry

## ANNOYANCE

*an eager beaver*  
a person with great drive and enthusiasm even if this causes annoyance to others

*to be a thorn in someone's flesh*  
to be a person whose persistent presence and righteous views annoy

*to breathe down someone's neck*  
to cause annoyance to another person by remaining in his vicinity or by supervising him too closely; or to be narrowly behind another person in some competitive situation

*to drive someone up the wall*  
to annoy another person by one's actions

*to get on someone's nerves*  
by one's behavior to cause annoyance to a person

*to get someone's back up*  
to annoy or antagonize a person

*to get under someone's skin*  
to annoy another person through stupidity

*to have the patience of a saint*  
to endure annoyances with particular calm

*to kick heads in*  
to demonstrate annoyance at or dislike of certain persons

*to kick someone in the teeth*  
to take action which demonstrates annoyance at or dislike of a person

*to rub someone up the wrong way*  
to annoy someone with actions failing to recognize his current mood

## APPROVAL

*a seal of approval*  
confirmation that something is satisfactory

*to frown on something*  
to disapprove of some matter

*to get the nod*  
to receive approval

*to give a thumbs up*  
to approve or grant permission (refers to sign given by Roman emperor sparing a life)

*to give one's blessing to something*  
to indicate one's approval of something

*to look at someone sideways*  
to silently and politely indicate one's disapproval

*to shake one's head*  
to indicate disbelief or wonder or disapproval

## ARGUMENT

*a battle royal*  
a fight or argument with many simultaneous participants

*a political football*  
a political issue which is not being debated on its merits

*ammunition*  
arguments helpful to a case

*an argument holding water*  
a debating point of substance

*eyeball to eyeball*  
confronting each other and taking account of each other's reactions

*mealy-mouthed*  
not at all forceful in debate

*myopia*  
the inability to appreciate an argument (lit., short-sightedness)

*not to have a leg to stand on*  
to have one's arguments completely demolished or to be without acceptable excuse or explanation

*shifting sands*  
arguments which are constantly being changed

*that argument is wearing a bit thin*  
that is a very weak case

*the other side of the coin*  
the arguments for the opposite point of view

*the thread*  
the connecting link of a set of arguments

*to act as a devil's advocate*  
to put a point of view which one does not hold in order to draw out the best arguments regarding a proposition (refers to a church official vetting a candidate for sainthood)

*to argue the toss*  
to dispute a decision

*to argue till the cows come home*  
*to argue forever*

*to be after someone's blood*  
*to be keen to make a person the victim of an angry confrontation*

*to be an open and shut case*  
*to be an unarguable proposition (a phrase popular in detective novels and probably a play on the two meanings of the word "case")*

*to be on shaky ground*  
*not to have strong arguments*

*to be shot to ribbons*  
*(of an argument) to be utterly discredited*

*to belt someone over the head*  
*to override someone's views or arguments*

*to bring out one's biggest guns*  
*to use the most impressive persons or arguments*

*to buy into some argument*  
*to seek to participate in some discussion*

*to confront someone head-on*  
*to confront a person*

*to drive a wedge between two persons*  
*to set out to cause two persons to confront each other*

*to expose holes*  
*to expose weaknesses in an argument*

*to face the music*  
*to accept responsibility when confronted by one's critics*

*to give ground*  
*to make some concessions or to retreat or to concede some arguments*

*to go on till one is blue in the face*  
*to argue for a long time*

*to have an ace up one's sleeve*  
*to hold an impressive counter-argument in reserve*

*to hijack a debate*  
*to involve oneself in the public discussion of some matter and turn that discussion to one's advantage*

*to keep one's powder dry*  
*to retain key arguments or resources in reserve for use later*

*to lead someone up the garden path*  
*to mislead a person by deliberately fallacious arguments*

*to lock horns with someone*  
*to have an argument with another person*

*to parry some argument*  
*to deflect some argument (refers to fencing)*

*to play every card in the pack*  
*to try very hard and use every conceivable argument*

*to prepare one's ground*  
*to get ready for a confrontation*

*to score a point*  
*to make a clever contribution in the course of debate*

*to shoot someone down in flames*  
*to utterly destroy another person's arguments*

*to tackle someone head-on*  
*to confront a person*

*to take off the gloves*  
*to fight mercilessly or to debate with great ferocity*

*to take the wind out of someone's sails*  
*to upset a person by anticipating his actions or using arguments which he was proposing to use*

*to talk one's book*  
*to present arguments which, while plausible, are really designed to foster one's vested interest*

*to tip the balance*  
*to be further information or argument which results in an issue which could have been decided either way to be determined in a particular way*

*to use every trick in the book*  
to try very hard and use every conceivable argument

*to weigh in with a particular argument*  
to produce a strong argument

*to wheel someone in*  
to bring a person along for a confrontation

*what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.*  
arguments which apply in one case also apply in another

## BEHAVIOR

*I fear the Greeks even when they bear gifts*

I am suspicious of generous behavior from traditional opponents (from Virgil's AENEID, in reference to the Trojan horse)

*a watchdog*  
a person or organization monitoring behavior

*an article of faith*  
a fundamental belief on which certain behavior is based

*fireworks*  
aggressive behavior because of anger

*guiding light*  
yardstick for ethical behavior

*horseplay*  
boisterous and undignified behavior

*not to put a foot wrong*  
to behave impeccably

*the order of the day*  
the customary behavior

*to be a bad egg*  
to engage in dishonest behavior

*to be beyond the pale*  
to be socially unacceptable, especially for unacceptable standards or behavior

*to be left with a nasty taste in one's mouth*

to be appalled or very disappointed at another person's unethical behavior to one

*to blow the whistle on someone*  
to report a person's improper behavior to the authorities or to publicize it

*to get on someone's nerves*  
by one's behavior to cause annoyance to a person

*to keep one's eye on someone*  
to supervise a person or to monitor a person's activities and behavior

*to lay it on the line*  
to make clear what the accepted rules of behavior are

*to lead with one's chin*  
by one's brash behavior to virtually invite one's opponents to take action against one

*to make an exhibition of oneself*  
to behave in a way which invites ridicule

*to make feathers fly*  
to cause trouble to those misbehaving

*to play monkey tricks on someone*  
to engage in discreditable behavior affecting a person

*to pull one's socks up*  
to set out to improve or correct one's inadequate behavior or performance

*to ruffle someone's feathers*  
to engage in behavior which irritates another person

*to set tongues wagging*  
to behave in a way which encourages scandal mongers

*to sow wild oats*  
to indulge in foolish behavior while a young adult

*to step out of line*  
to infringe accepted rules of behavior

*to teach someone a lesson*  
to inflict something unpleasant on a person in the hope that it will lead to a change in his behavior

*to watch one's step*  
to be on the lookout for danger or to set out to improve one's behavior

*transparent*  
(of behavior, etc.) to be easily seen as not genuine

## BELIEF

*I'll eat my hat if so-and-so happens*  
I do not believe that so-and-so will happen

*a bible basher*  
a person who makes unwelcome attempts to force his religious beliefs on others

*a doubting Thomas*  
a person who refuses to believe claims in absence of proof (John 20:25)

*a gut feeling*  
a belief based purely on intuition and unsupported by facts or evidence

*a soul brother*  
a person of similar ideals

*an article of faith*  
a fundamental belief on which certain behavior is based

*anyone could be forgiven for believing that*  
it is understandable that people would believe that

*he is your man*  
he conforms to an ideal

*the fold*  
the body of believers (refers to an enclosure for sheep)

*to be someone after one's own heart*  
to be a person who shares one's beliefs

*to be too big for one's boots*  
to have an unwarranted belief as to one's capabilities or status

*to be wide off the mark*  
to have a belief which is far removed from the true position

*to believe in the tooth fairy*  
to be particularly gullible

*to go to the barricades for something*  
to very strongly believe in something

*to preach to the converted*  
to say something to those who already believe in it

*to put someone in the pillory*  
to hold a person up to ridicule for his beliefs

*to sacrifice something on the altar of some belief*

to give up some benefit as a matter of principle

*to sail under false colors*  
to pretend that one's real character or beliefs are different from what they really are

*to shake one's head*  
to indicate disbelief or wonder or disapproval

*to show one's true colors*  
to disclose one's real character or beliefs

*to stick to one's guns*  
to continue to hold certain beliefs notwithstanding opposition by others

*to take something as gospel*  
to believe that something is true

*Utopian*  
ideally perfect (refers to the mythical island in Sir Thomas More's UTOPIA)

*volte face*  
a reversal of previously-held beliefs (French, "a turning around")

## BENEFIT

*a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush*

a benefit currently available is more valuable than a seemingly much larger benefit which may or may not be achieved in the future

<i>a mare's nest</i>	to get some mileage out of something to benefit from something
<i>a milch cow</i>	to go along for the ride to seek to benefit from a project in which others contribute the effort
<i>bargaining chips</i>	to hand over something on a silver platter to provide a valuable benefit for virtually nothing
<i>every cloud has a silver lining</i>	to laugh all the way to the bank to appreciate one's good fortune
there are benefits even in seemingly adverse situations	
<i>fruitless</i>	to learn a lesson to benefit from one's experience
yielding no benefit	
<i>heads I win—tails you lose</i>	to let blood to allow some harm as the price for achieving some greater benefit
whichever way this matter goes I will benefit at your expense	
<i>manna from heaven</i>	to look a gift horse in the mouth to be suspicious about a benefit which has been volunteered
unexpected benefits (Exodus 16:15)	
<i>mirage</i>	to mortgage the future to get benefits now but at a cost in due course
illusory benefit	
<i>that is just sour grapes</i>	to pick someone's brain to get the benefit of another person's knowledge and experience
those are disparaging remarks made only because he is peeved and resentful at someone else's better fortune	
<i>the melody lingers on</i>	to ride on the back of someone without effort to benefit from the prior efforts of others
the benefit of past actions remains	
<i>to be cream on top of the milk</i>	to ride on the sheep's back to benefit from the production of wool
to be an additional benefit in an already satisfactory scenario	
<i>to be icing on top of the cake</i>	to rub off on someone to benefit a person through an association which increases his skills
to be an additional benefit in an already satisfactory scenario	
<i>to be the salt of the earth</i>	to sacrifice something on the altar of some belief to give up some benefit as a matter of principle
to be a person whose ordinary efforts benefit the community (Matthew 5:13)	
<i>to cast pearls before swine</i>	to salvage something out of the wreck to achieve some minor benefits out of a disastrous situation
to confer valuable benefits on someone who neither recognizes nor appreciates them	
<i>to get on a gravy train</i>	to start from scratch to commerce something without the benefit of any past activity
to take steps to become a recipient of benefits which are available but undeserved	

*to throw out the baby with the bathwater*  
to discard a major benefit in the course of obtaining a comparatively minor advantage

*vulture*  
person benefiting from another's misfortune

*windfall*  
unexpected good fortune

## BIGNESS

*a big bang*  
a sudden major change in the environment

*a big shot*  
an important person

*a big wheel*  
an important person

*a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush*  
a benefit currently available is more valuable than a seemingly much larger benefit which may or may not be achieved in the future

*a golden handshake*  
a large payment in connection with or as an inducement to retirement

*a landslide*  
an electoral result involving victory or defeat by an unexpectedly large margin

*a mansize job*  
a large task worth doing well

*a mosaic*  
something with a large number of different aspects to it

*a sausage machine*  
the turning out of large volumes without particular thought

*a tempest in a teacup*  
a controversy about a minor matter but one which looms large in the minds of the parties

*a toehold*  
an opportunity small in itself but with the potential to lead to bigger things

*in for a penny—in for a pound*  
once something is commenced it ought to be finished; or if one is willing to take a small risk then one might as well take a bigger one

*more chiefs than Indians*  
a disproportionately large number of supervisors

*not to be Robinson Crusoe*  
to be one of a large number of people with a common problem (from Daniel Defoe's ROBINSON CRUSOE)

*someone's eyes are bigger than his stomach*  
a person is unrealistic

*speak softly and carry a big stick*  
be polite to your potential enemies but maintain an active and visible defense capability (from a speech by Theodore Roosevelt in 1901)

*the big smoke*  
the big city

*the lion's share*  
the biggest portion

*to be a big fish in a little pond*  
to be a person holding an important office but in an unimportant organization

*to be a money spinner*  
to produce large profits easily and quickly

*to be a small cog in a large wheel*  
to be a relatively unimportant person in a large organization

*to be the thin end of the wedge*  
by conceding a small point to create an undesirable precedent for much larger issues

*to be the tip of the iceberg*  
to be only a very small portion of a much larger but less obvious whole

- to be too big for one's boots*  
to have an unwarranted belief as to one's capabilities or status
- to be too big for one's breeches*  
to have an exaggerated idea of one's own importance
- to be unable to keep people away with a big stick*  
to be faced with a large crowd or much demand
- to bring out one's biggest guns*  
to use the most impressive persons or arguments
- to crawl out of the woodwork*  
to turn up unexpectedly and in large numbers
- to have a leg in*  
to have an opportunity which has the potential to lead to bigger things
- to have deep pockets*  
to have large financial resources
- to only scratch the surface*  
to deal with only a small portion of a much larger whole
- to pay a king's ransom*  
to pay a very large sum
- to pay something back with interest*  
to return a small favor with a bigger favor or to extract retribution of greater value than the circumstances warrant
- to pick the eyes out of something*  
to choose the most valuable items from among a large number
- to stand over someone with a big stick*  
to intimidate a person in order to get him to act in a particular way
- to steamroll something through*  
to use enormous force to achieve an objective
- to swarm out*  
to gather in large numbers
- to wield a big stick*  
to exert power

**CARE**

- a bull in a china shop*  
a careless person likely to cause great damage
- he must have a long spoon that sups with the devil*  
great care is needed when negotiating deals with disreputable parties
- not to just pick something out of a hat*  
to choose carefully, after weighing all the considerations
- to handpick someone*  
to carefully choose a person for his individual attributes
- to keep a weather eye out for something*  
to look out with particular care
- to look to one's laurels*  
to be careful not to lose one's reputation for some skill
- to need to watch one's back*  
to find it necessary to take care in case others act against one's interests
- to slip under one's guard*  
to cause a mistake to be made despite care being taken to prevent this
- to smell out something*  
to discover something by careful investigation
- to start off on the right foot*  
to commence an operation with great care to do it correctly
- to think twice before doing something*  
to consider with particular care
- to tread lightly*  
to be careful
- to watch one's p's and q's*  
to be very careful (may refer to pints and quarts of beer on a hotel slate or to easily-confused printer's type)

**CHANCE**

- be a devil!*  
*take a chance!*

*the hand of fate*

chance

*to be in the lap of the gods*

to be a matter of pure chance (refers to wax tablets inscribed with requests and placed on the knees of statues of Greek gods)

*to be the luck of the draw*

to be a chance result

*to cross someone's path*

to meet another person by chance

*to cruel someone's pitch*

to spoil a person's chances

*to have one's beady eyes on something*

to await the chance to acquire something to which one is not properly entitled

*to jump at the opportunity*

to enthusiastically take immediate advantage of a good chance

*to look for a needle in a haystack*

to attempt something with a very small chance of success

*to take pot luck*

to take whatever happens by chance  
to be available

## CHANGE

*a big bang*

a sudden major change in the environment

*a chameleon*

a person without character who changes his stance all the time to reflect the current circumstances

*a leopard cannot change his spots*

each person is born with certain unalterable characteristics

*a new broom*

a changed regime which is likely to alter the status quo

*a sacred cow*

an institution so well established that it is virtually unalterable

*new guard*

changed regime

*nimble-footed*

quick to change the direction of one's activities when circumstances warrant

*shifting sands*

arguments which are constantly being changed

*stiff cheese!*

circumstances which may be unwelcome but which will not be altered and in respect of which no great sympathy is felt

*that takes on added color*

there are now further facts which alter the appearance of a matter

*the cold wind of change*

the unpleasant realities of new circumstances

*the devil one knows is better than the*

*devil one does not know*

the status quo is more comfortable than change

*the ink is hardly dry*

something intended to last a long time is to be changed shortly after its establishment

*the tide has turned*

conditions have changed

*the wheel has turned*

circumstances have changed

*to be a breath of fresh air*

to be a pleasant change from the past

*to be a stormy petrel*

a person who disturbs a pleasant state of affairs by agitating for change

*to be carved in marble*

to be virtually unalterable

*to be cast in bronze*

to be virtually unalterable

*to be in a rut*

to lead a dull life, with no change from long-established habits

- to be in a state of flux*  
to be subject to continuous change
- to change one's mind*  
to alter the views which one had previously formed
- to change one's tune*  
to alter one's publicly-expressed views
- to change tack*  
to alter one's direction
- to change the whole picture*  
to alter the major assumptions on which some assessment was based
- to cry "wolf"*  
to repeatedly raise an unjustified concern with the result that one will be ignored when the circumstances change
- to die a natural death*  
by virtue of changed circumstances or the effluxion of time, to be no longer relevant
- to drift apart*  
to lose contact or to change feelings once held in common
- to have a change of heart*  
to form a new view in place of a strongly-held previous view
- to leave one's mark on something*  
to be responsible for permanently altering the way something is operated
- to play it by ear*  
to develop one's strategy to always fit in with circumstances as they change from time to time
- to put a new face on something*  
to alter the way something should be regarded
- to rearrange the deckchairs on the Titanic*  
to take some initiative which is quite useless because it does not take much greater change into account

- to set something in concrete*  
to make something virtually unalterable
- to swap horses in midstream*  
to change direction during the course of a project
- to teach someone a lesson*  
to inflict something unpleasant on a person in the hope that it will lead to a change in his behavior
- to tinker at the edges*  
to make minor or cosmetic changes without affecting the substance
- to wither on the vine*  
by virtue of changed circumstances or the effluxion of time, to be no longer relevant
- ## CONFUSION
- a tower of Babel*  
a noisy and confused assembly (Genesis 11)
- all hell broke loose*  
great confusion erupted
- to be all at sea*  
to be confused as to what is going on and what to do next
- to be at sixes and sevens*  
to be confused, concerned and undecided
- to be in a fog*  
to be in a state of confusion
- to get into a knot*  
to get into state of confusion
- to lose one's head*  
to become confused
- to muddy the waters*  
to deliberately confuse an issue by creating a diversion
- to set up a smokescreen*  
to deliberately confuse an issue by disguising its salient features

*to watch one's p's and q's*  
to be very careful (may refer to pints and quarts of beer on a hotel slate or to easily-confused printer's type)

## CORRECTNESS

*a step in the right direction*  
the first in a series of measures designed to correct some problem

*it is on the tip of my tongue*  
the right word has momentarily escaped me

*it is pointing in the right direction*  
success looks likely

*just what the doctor ordered*  
exactly right

*mark my words*  
you will find out that I am right

*one looks for elephants in elephant country*  
one needs to search in the right place

*to be in the right ballpark*  
to be approximately correct

*to be up to the mark*  
to be of the right standard

*to have one's heart in the right place*  
to have a well-developed social conscience

*to head someone in the right direction*  
to assist a person to achieve something

*to hit the bull's eye*  
to make the correct decision

*to hit the mark*  
to achieve one's object or to make the correct decision (refers to archery)

*to hit the nail right on the head*  
to astutely come to the correct conclusion

*to play one's cards right*  
to approach a matter sensibly

*to play to the gallery*  
to do something which appeals to the general public rather than something which is right

*to pull one's socks up*  
to set out to improve or correct one's inadequate behavior or performance

*to see daylight*  
to get the right answer

*to set someone on the right road*  
to show a person how to go about doing something

*to start off on the right foot*  
to commence an operation with great care to do it correctly

*to strike the right key*  
to find the appropriate solution

*to strike the right note*  
to make a good impression

## COURAGE

*a stiff upper lip*  
obstinate courage in the face of pain or adversity

*chicken-hearted*  
showing little courage

*to be a brave soldier*  
to be brave

*to be a man of steel*  
to be a person with moral courage

*to be of good heart*  
to be brave in adversity

*to brave the water*  
to enter a venture with courage and determination

*to have a heart of oak*  
to be brave

*to make a last-ditch stand*  
to make a brave effort to stave off final defeat

*to present a happy face to the world*  
bravely to gloss over one's problems

*to put a brave face on it*  
to face adversity cheerfully

*to put one's head on the block*  
to have the courage of one's convictions

*to stick one's neck out*

to have the courage of one's convictions or to take a calculated risk

## CRITICISM

*a honeymoon*

a short period enjoyed by a newcomer to some activity before his performance is criticized

*an Aunt Sally*

a person who can readily be singled out and criticized as the proxy for a group

*people in glass houses should not throw stones*

those who are less than perfect are foolish to criticize others

*the pot calling the kettle black*

a person criticizing another person without realizing his own even greater shortcomings

*to act as a sounding board*

to give, on request, constructive criticisms of ideas tentatively held

*to attract flak*

to attract criticism

*to be a sitting shot*

to be a person whose actions make him very vulnerable to criticism

*to be in the hot seat*

to hold a position requiring one to answer criticism or accusations

*to be like water off a duck's back*

(of advice or criticism) to be completely rejected

*to be on the warpath*

to be on the lookout for faults which can be criticized

*to bulldoze some proposal through*

to ensure the passage of some measure in complete disregard of criticism or opposition

*to cover oneself*

to create evidence so that if one is criticized or accused later on, one can clear one's name

*to draw fire*

to encounter criticism

*to engage in back biting*

to criticize in an unfriendly manner

*to face the music*

to accept responsibility when confronted by one's critics

*to fire a salvo at someone*

to present a series of criticisms to a person

*to get off someone's back*

to leave a person alone to carry on without constant criticism

*to give someone a bit of stick*

to mildly criticize a person

*to have a shot at someone*

to use subtly chosen words implying friendly criticism but designed to embarrass another person

*to have a thick skin*

to be impervious to criticism

*to have the hide of a rhinoceros*

to be totally unaffected by and unresponsive to valid criticism

*to hold fire*

to defer criticizing

*to leave oneself wide open*

to act in such a way that one's opponents will find much which can be easily criticized

*to nail one's colors to the mast*

to publicly declare one's position and to maintain it in the face of criticism

*to nitpick*

to criticize a person in respect to very minor matters

*to pour vitriol on something*

to sharply criticize something

*to run the gauntlet*

to be subjected to criticism (from the Spanish word for "passage," in reference to punishment inflicted on delinquents made to run between two files of soldiers)

*to stand in the breach*

to bear the brunt of criticisms

*to turn one's guns on someone*

to criticize a person

## DANGER

*a minefield*

a course of great hidden danger or of difficulties not obvious on a first encounter

*pitfall*

unsuspected danger

*slippery path*

dangerous course of action

*someone's head is on the block*

a person is in danger of having his appointment terminated

*to be a wolf in sheep's clothing*

to be a hypocrite or to be dangerous although masquerading as something harmless (Matthew 7:15)

*to be on a knife edge*

to be in danger

*to be on the razor's edge*

to be in great danger

*to bell the cat*

to do some dangerous but highly useful mission (refers to a fable in which none of the mice was willing to put a warning bell on a cat)

*to fight fire with fire*

to counter a dangerous situation by making an equally dangerous move

*to founder on the shoals of something*

to come to grief because of unexpected dangers

*to have a sword of Damocles hanging over one*

to be in imminent danger despite normal activity going on all around one

*to have a tiger by the tail*

to be involved in an activity which is much more dangerous than one had realized

*to push someone over the brink*

by a small action to cause the absolute ruin (financially or emotionally) of someone already in peril

*to put one's head in the noose*

to recklessly and unnecessarily expose oneself to great danger

*to put one's head into the lion's mouth*

to recklessly expose oneself to great danger

*to ride out the storm*

to come safely through some dangerous situation

*to sail close to the wind*

to act in a very dangerous manner

*to see red lights flashing*

to be conscious of the danger

*to skate on thin ice*

to act in disregard of obvious danger

*to walk a tightrope*

to do something very dangerous

*to watch one's step*

to be on the lookout for danger or to set out to improve one's behavior

## DECISION

*a landmark ruling*

a decision marking a turning point in the way a matter is approached

*fork in the road*

turning point for decisions

*if the mountain will not come to Mahomet then Mahomet will go to the mountain*

on recognizing that one has insufficient power to effect one's most desired solution, one decides to make do with the next best alternative

*the jury is still out*  
no decision has yet been made or the public has not yet given an indication of its views

*to argue the toss*  
to dispute a decision

*to be at sixes and sevens*  
to be confused, concerned and undecided

*to be at the cutting edge of something*  
to be in a position where important decisions need to be made

*to be in two minds*  
to be undecided between two alternatives

*to be out of someone's hands*  
to be up for decision by a different person

*to bite one's fingernails*  
to anxiously await a decision

*to cross the Rubicon*  
to make an irreversible decision in regard to some commitment

*to go down a particular track*  
to make decisions aimed at a particular goal

*to have something to chew on*  
to have firm facts on which to base a decision

*to hit the bull's eye*  
to make the correct decision

*to hit the mark*  
to achieve one's object or to make the correct decision (refers to archery)

*to hold a gun at someone's head*  
to put pressure on a person to make a particular decision regardless of his desires in the matter

*to hold the power to do something in the hollow of one's hand*  
to have the right to make crucial decisions

*to lose one's nerve*  
to abandon, out of fear, a decision to do something

*to need the wisdom of Solomon*  
to be faced with the need to make a difficult decision (1 Kings 3:16-28)

*to pin someone down*  
to find a person willing to accept blame or responsibility or to force a person to announce a decision or concede a point

*to pull strings*  
to use one's special influence with those in a position to make favorable decisions which might otherwise not be forthcoming

*to tip the balance*  
to provide further information or argument which results in an issue, which could have been decided either way, being determined in a particular way

*to tip the scales*  
to be a factor which in combination with other factors results in a particular decision which would otherwise not have been reached

*to toss up*  
to decide on a fairly arbitrary basis

*when it comes to the crunch*  
when the matter comes up for decision

## DEVELOPMENT

*a thought in the back of one's mind*  
an undeveloped idea

*a wild card*  
an unexpected development

*an ugly duckling*  
a person initially thought unintelligent who develops and becomes brilliant (refers to a cygnet in a brood of ducks in a children's story of that name by Hans Christian Andersen)

*framework*

outline of a proposal, on which further details can be developed

*that is a turn up for the books*

that is a surprising favorable development

*the bottom line*

the conclusion which matters or the net effect of a series of developments

*to be a turn up for the books*

to be a surprising development

*to blossom*

(of a person's attributes) to develop

*to develop a head of steam*

to gain momentum

*to find one's feet*

to develop one's skills

*to keep an ear to the ground*

to be well informed as to current developments

*to mark time*

to do nothing while awaiting developments

*to play it by ear*

to develop one's strategy to always fit in with circumstances as they change from time to time

*to run with something*

to take advantage of some current development

*to see the big picture*

to have the vision and imagination enabling a project to be developed as part of a bigger whole

*to see which way the cat jumps*

to await developments

**DIFFICULTY***a baptism of fire*

the commencement of an operation which presented great difficulty

*a fair-weather friend*

a person purporting to be a friend who offers no support in difficult times

*a minefield*

a source of great hidden danger or of difficulties not obvious on a first encounter

*a prima donna*

a person with an exaggerated opinion of his own importance which makes relations with others needlessly difficult (Italian, "first lady")

*a problem child*

a source of unnecessary difficulty

*a sixty-four thousand dollar question*

a pertinent but very difficult question (refers to a TV quiz show in which an initial prize doubles with the successful answering of progressively more difficult questions)

*a sticky patch*

a period fraught with difficulties

*any port in a storm*

anything which helps to avoid difficulties is welcome

*blood, sweat and tears*

hard work and much effort

*elbow grease*

hard manual work

*here's the rub*

this is where a difficulty arises (a term used in lawn bowling)

*no sweat*

this presents no difficulty

*ready-made*

easily fabricated or available without difficulty

*road blocks*

difficulties

*search for the Holy Grail*

work toward a difficult goal (refers to a vessel supposedly used by Christ at the last supper and featuring in the Arthurian legends)

*someone is a hard nut to crack*

it is very difficult to persuade a person to do something

*stumbling block*

an impediment or difficulty preventing the easy completion of some project or a dilemma involving a moral issue

*that is hard to take*

it is difficult to face up to the reality of this

*the show must go on*

despite difficulties the action in contemplation has to proceed

*the very best of British luck*

you will have a hard time of it, but you carry my best wishes

*to back someone into a corner*

to drive a person into a position from which escape is difficult

*to batten down the hatches*

to get ready for expected difficulties

*to be a cross which one has to bear*

to be a difficulty which one has to endure

*to be a fish out of water*

to be in difficulty by virtue of being in a strange environment

*to be a handful*

to be difficult to manage

*to be a hard act to follow*

to be an impressive performance, not easily matched by the next person

*to be between a rock and a hard place*

to be faced with two equally difficult and uncomfortable choices

*to be in a hole*

to experience some difficulties

*to be in a jam*

to be in difficulties

*to be in a pickle*

to be in difficulties

*to be in a quagmire*

to be in great difficulty

*to be in a stew*

to be in difficulties

*to be in deep water*

to be in great difficulty

*to be in hot water*

to be in trouble or to be in difficulty

*to be in the same boat*

to share a common set of difficulties

*to be in the soup*

to be in great difficulties

*to be no bed of roses*

to be difficult or uncomfortable

*to be no fun*

to be difficult

*to be on a sticky wicket*

to face some difficulties (refers to cricket)

*to be out of one's depth*

to find that some issue is too complicated or too difficult

*to be out of the woods*

the previous difficulties have been overcome

*to be pushing uphill*

to face difficulties

*to be sheer murder*

to be extremely unpleasant or difficult; or to be an inglorious defeat

*to be the hard core*

to be the central and most difficult problem

*to be up a gum tree*

to be in difficulty or at the end of one's resources

*to bite the bullet*

to face up to the difficulties of a situation

*to catch someone in a bind*

to find a person in a difficulty from which he cannot readily extricate himself

*to face a rocky road ahead*

to be likely to encounter difficulties

<i>to fall on one's feet</i>	<i>to leave someone in the lurch</i>
surprisingly to succeed despite difficulties	to desert a person who is in difficulties (refers to the score in certain games)
<i>to fight an uphill battle</i>	<i>to make a good fist of something</i>
to face difficulties or to have formidable opposition	to be successful in a difficult task
<i>to get around some difficulty</i>	<i>to need the wisdom of Solomon</i>
to use an approach which overcomes some difficulty	to be faced with the need to make a difficult decision (1 Kings 3:16-28)
<i>to give someone hell</i>	<i>to penetrate someone's thick skull</i>
to make life difficult for a person	to make a person understand something difficult or acknowledge something unwelcome
<i>to grab the devil by the tail</i>	<i>to plot a safe course through troubled waters</i>
to face up to difficulties	to make a plan which overcomes certain difficulties
<i>to grasp the nettle</i>	<i>to put one's thinking cap on</i>
to deal with a neglected difficulty	to concentrate on finding a solution to a difficult problem
<i>to have a dream run</i>	<i>to put something into the "too hard" basket</i>
to encounter no difficulties	to defer consideration of a difficult issue
<i>to have a hard row to hoe</i>	<i>to run into heavy weather</i>
to be a difficult assignment	to encounter difficulties
<i>to have a job in front of one</i>	<i>to sharpen one's ax</i>
to face difficulties	to get ready for a difficult task
<i>to have one's work cut out to do something</i>	<i>to sink deeper into the mire</i>
it will be difficult to achieve something	to get into further difficulties
<i>to have the cards stacked against one</i>	<i>to sink deeper into the mud</i>
to be faced with many difficulties frustrating a project	to get into even greater difficulty
<i>to have the odds stacked against one</i>	<i>to skirt around the difficulties</i>
to be faced with many difficulties frustrating a project	to act as though the difficulties did not exist
<i>to heave a sigh of relief</i>	<i>to smell trouble</i>
to express satisfaction at the achievement of a solution to a difficult problem	to perceive difficulties
<i>to iron out something</i>	<i>to soldier on</i>
to sort out a difficult problem	to carry on despite difficulties
<i>to jump a hurdle</i>	<i>to strike a snag</i>
to overcome a problem or difficulty	to encounter a difficulty
<i>to kick a man when he is down</i>	<i>to take the bull by the horns</i>
to take unfair advantage of a person already in difficulty	to come to grips with the realities of a difficult problem

*to take the rough with the smooth*  
to accept the hardships of life along with its pleasant features

*to tiptoe around the difficulties*  
to act as though the difficulties did not exist

*to tread a fine line*  
cautiously to take action in circumstances whether either too much or too little will cause difficulties

*to tread the thin line*  
cautiously to take action in circumstances whether either too much or too little will cause difficulties

*to wear one's crown of thorns*  
to have one's own difficulties (John 19:5)

## DISAPPOINTMENT

*a damp squib*  
disappointingly ineffective action (refers to fireworks which fail to go off)

*someone's face fell*  
someone registered obvious disappointment

*someone's jaw dropped*  
someone registered obvious disappointment, incredulity, or shock

*to be a bitter pill to swallow*  
to be a great humiliation and disappointment which have to be endured

*to be a severe blow*  
to be a great disappointment

*to be devastated*  
to be extremely disappointed

*to be left with a nasty taste in one's mouth*  
to be appalled or very disappointed at another person's unethical behavior to one

## DISPLEASURE

*I will have his guts for garters*  
I am extremely angry and dissatisfied with him

*a damp squib*  
disappointingly ineffective action (refers to fireworks which fail to go off)

*he would turn in his grave*  
he would have been very surprised or displeased if he had known while still alive

*someone's face fell*  
someone registered obvious disappointment

*someone's jaw dropped*  
someone registered obvious disappointment

*to be a bitter pill to swallow*  
to be a great humiliation and disappointment which have to be endured

*to be a severe blow*  
to be a great disappointment

*to be at the end of one's tether*  
to be frustrated by a lack of knowledge, authority or patience

*to be cut to pieces*  
to be very upset

*to be devastated*  
to be extremely disappointed

*to be left with a nasty taste in one's mouth*  
to be appalled or very disappointed at another person's unethical behavior to one

*to be someone's bete noire*  
to be a person whose ideas and actions cause upset and loathing in another person (French, "black beast")

*to bite someone's head off*  
to rudely express displeasure at some person

*to break someone's heart*  
to act in a way causing great upset to another person

*to give someone a black look*  
to indicate one's displeasure with a person

*to go through the roof*  
 (of a person) to be very upset or (of prices) to escalate greatly

*to knit one's brows*  
 to indicate one's displeasure

*to make a noise about something*  
 to complain or express dissatisfaction about something

*to open up a festering sore*  
 to upset a person by drawing attention to a long-standing grievance

*to put someone's nose out of joint*  
 to upset another person

*to take the wind out of someone's sails*

to upset a person by anticipating his actions or using arguments which he was proposing to use

*to throw brickbats at someone*  
 to express displeasure with a person

*to tread on someone's corns*  
 to upset another person by interfering in his area of responsibility

*to tread on someone's toes*  
 to upset another person by interfering in his area of responsibility

*to upset the applecart*  
 to engage in conduct disturbing a peaceful state of affairs and thereby cause discomfort

*to vote with one's feet*  
 to show one's displeasure by terminating an association

*to wave a finger at someone*  
 to indicate mild displeasure at another person's actions

## EASE

*a milch cow*  
 an easy and plentiful source of some desired benefit

*a walkover*  
 an easy victory

*distant fields look greener*  
 activities of which one has no experience seem much easier than is really the case

*it's a breeze*  
 it is easy

*money for jam*  
 remuneration easily earned

*not to be all beer and skittles*  
 not to be all pleasant and easy

*ready-made*  
 easily fabricated or available without difficulty

*stumbling block*  
 an impediment or difficulty preventing the easy completion of some project or a dilemma involving a moral issue

*to be laid-down misere*  
 to be very easily accomplished and/or to be certain of outcome (refers to the declaration in certain card games undertaken to win no tricks)

*to be a money spinner*  
 to produce large profits easily and quickly

*to be a piece of cake*  
 to be very easy or greatly to one's liking

*to be able to do something standing on one's head*  
 to be able to do something very easily

*to be able to do something with one hand behind one's back*  
 to be able to do something very easily

*to be able to eat someone for breakfast*  
 to be able to outwit a person very easily

*to be child's play*  
 to be easy or to require only elementary skills and knowledge

*to be in clover*  
 to enjoy a life of ease and luxury

*to be plain sailing*  
to be quite straightforward and very easy

*to be putty in someone's hands*  
to be far too easily influenced by another person

*to chase every hare*  
to be easily sidetracked

*to die hard*  
not to give up easily

*to get an armchair ride*  
to be given a particularly easy time

*to have a mind of one's own*  
not to be easily influenced

*to have nerves of steel*  
not to be easily frightened

*to leave oneself wide open*  
to act in such a way that one's opponents will find much which can be easily criticized

*to nip something in the bud*  
to stop some activity in its early stages when stopping it is still relatively easy

*to roll off the tongue*  
to be said very easily

*to run rings around someone*  
to easily outwit another person

*to serve something up to someone on a plate*  
to make something especially easy for a particular person

*to smooth the path for someone*  
to use one's influence to make arrangements so that a person's task will be easier or more readily accomplished

*to take something in one's stride*  
to cope with something easily

*to win the prize in a canter*  
to win very easily

*transparent*  
(of behavior, etc.) to be easily seen as not genuine

## EMPLOYMENT

*a dead-end position*  
a job with no prospects of advancement

*feather bedding*  
(industrial relations) creating unnecessary jobs solely to increase employment; (in economics) assisting an inefficient industry by government grants or excessive tariff protection

*golden shackles*  
financial arrangements designed to discourage employees changing employers

*rising star*  
person making good progress in his career

*someone's job is on the line*  
a person's career path is under consideration and/or his present position is at risk

*to drum someone out of some organization*  
to terminate in ignominy a person's employment or membership (refers to the ceremonial cashing in the army to the beating of parade drums)

*to have one's fingers in the till*  
to steal from one's employer

*to hold someone's hand*  
to give detailed on-the-job training and supervision

*to know the ropes*  
to know how to do one's job

*to move on to greener pastures*  
to commence a new, better career

*to swing the lead*  
to cheat an employer by not working while being paid to do so

*to tickle the Peter*  
to rob one's employer

*to turn an honest penny*  
to earn money out of odd jobs

**END***a clean sweep*the complete removal in an election  
of all sitting members*a dead-end position*

a job with no prospects of advancement

*a logjam*a stoppage of activity caused by input  
in greater volume than allowed for*a photo finish*

a close result in a contest

*at the end of the day*in due course or at the conclusion of  
a project*cold turkey*the sudden cessation of drugs to an  
addict*cut it out!*

stop doing that!

*danse macabre*gruesome final step (French, "ghastly  
dance")*dead and buried*(of some issue) definitely concluded,  
especially so long ago as to be nearly  
forgotten*from a to z*

from start to finish

*from alpha to omega*from start to finish (refers to the first  
and last letters of the Greek alphabet)*from go to whoa*from start to finish (refers to the com-  
mand given to horses)*I'll soon stop his little game*his activities are not tolerated and I  
will ensure that they cease*in for a penny—in for a pound*once something is commenced it ought  
to be finished; or if one is willing to  
take a small risk then one might as  
well take a bigger one*in the wash-up*

when everything is finalized

*it's not over till the fat lady sings*

it is not finished yet

*one for the road*

a final drink before leaving

*saber rattling*hints of retribution if certain conduct  
does not cease*someone's head is on the block*a person is in danger of having his  
appointment terminated*stalemate*a final result in which neither party to  
a dispute is victorious*that wraps it up*

that is the end

*the bottom line*the conclusion which matters or the  
net effect of a series of develop-  
ments*the buck stops here*I accept full responsibility (sign on  
the desk of Harry S. Truman when  
president of the United States)*the final countdown*the last stages of something (refers to  
the launch of space vehicles)*the final straw*the latest step, which, when added to  
a large number of seemingly harm-  
less previous steps, sets off a disaster  
resulting from the cumulative effect*the sands are running out*the time available for some action is  
nearly at an end*the sun has set on something*

something has concluded

*the tail end of something*

the very end of something

*this is the end of the road for someone*a person will have no further oppor-  
tunity to do something

<i>to abandon ship</i>	<i>to break the back of a task</i>
to abrogate one's responsibilities or to abandon a project	to complete the bulk of the work
<i>to bale out of something</i>	<i>to bury the hatchet</i>
to abandon an enterprise in anticipa- tion of disaster	to abandon hostilities
<i>to be all over bar the shouting</i>	<i>to call it a day</i>
to be virtually finished	to cease involvement with some activity
<i>to be in at the death</i>	<i>to call off the dogs</i>
to be present at the conclusion of something	to abandon an audit or other inquiry
<i>to be in at the kill</i>	<i>to cast prudence to the winds</i>
to be present at the climatic finish to something	to cease being prudent
<i>to be on a treadmill</i>	<i>to chop someone off at the socks</i>
to be involved in some unpleasant ongoing activity which cannot readily be stopped	to stop someone's proposals prema- turely
<i>to be on one's death bed</i>	<i>to close the book on something</i>
(of an organization or a piece of equip- ment) to be about to cease functioning	to terminate an activity
<i>to be only a gleam in someone's eyes</i>	<i>to come to a full stop</i>
to be a long way from final achievement	to completely cease activity
<i>to be out on one's ear</i>	<i>to come to a head</i>
to have one's services abruptly termi- nated	to reach culmination
<i>to be out the door</i>	<i>to come to a sticky end</i>
to have one's position terminated	to endure an unpleasant fate
<i>to be stopped in one's tracks</i>	<i>to crystalize</i>
suddenly and unexpectedly to be prevented from carrying on with a project	to emerge in its final form
<i>to be the sting in the tail</i>	<i>to cut corners</i>
to be the unexpected unpleasant con- clusion	to lower one's standards in order to complete something more quickly
<i>to be up a gum tree</i>	<i>to deal the final hand</i>
to be in difficulty or at the end of one's resources	to take steps which conclude a matter
<i>to beat a retreat</i>	<i>to dot the i's and cross the t's</i>
to abandon some project	to be meticulous in completing the documentation for a transaction
<i>to break one's duck</i>	<i>to drum someone out of some organization</i>
to end a spell without results (refers to cricket)	to terminate in ignominy a person's employment or membership (refers to the ceremonial cashiering in the army to the beating of parade drums)
<i>to dry up</i>	<i>to fall by the wayside</i>
to cease	to abandon and not complete what one set out to do

<i>to fetter someone</i>	<i>to peg out</i>
to stop a person acting on his own initiative	to die (refers to the final stroke in a game of croquet)
<i>to finish with a bang</i>	<i>to play the last card in the pack</i>
to conclude something in grand style	to lower one's standards in a final desperate effort
<i>to get on stream</i>	<i>to play the trump card</i>
to now operate successfully following the end of a settling-in period	to make a final move, thereby defeating one's opponents
<i>to get rid of the dead wood</i>	<i>to pull oneself together</i>
to terminate the services of unsatisfactory personnel	to cease acting without purpose or enthusiasm
<i>to get up off one's butt</i>	<i>to put a wall around someone</i>
to cease being apathetic	to stop a person associating with others
<i>to give someone the boot</i>	<i>to put something to bed</i>
to terminate a person's appointment	to finally dispose of
<i>to give the game away</i>	<i>to put the brake on someone</i>
to cease involvement with some activity	to stop a person
<i>to grind to a halt</i>	<i>to put up the shutters</i>
to cease some activity despite expectations that it would continue	to cease an established activity
<i>to jettison some proposal</i>	<i>to quietly fold up one's tent</i>
to abandon some proposal as worthless or impracticable	to surreptitiously abandon a previously-cherished stance
<i>to kill some proposal stone dead</i>	<i>to receive the coup de grace</i>
to abandon some proposal completely	to be finished off by an opponent (French, "mercy stroke")
<i>to lay some theory to rest</i>	<i>to ring down the curtain on something</i>
to abandon some theory as being no longer appropriate	to treat something as concluded
<i>to lose heart</i>	<i>to run into a dead end</i>
to cease being enthusiastic	to get nowhere in an investigation
<i>to lose one's nerve</i>	<i>to run its course</i>
to abandon, out of fear, a decision to do something	to come to a natural end
<i>to lose one's touch</i>	<i>to see the light at the end of the tunnel</i>
to cease to be familiar with something	to be close to finalizing a long exercise
<i>to lower the boom</i>	<i>to shelve some proposal</i>
to terminate an activity	to abandon some proposal
<i>to make a last-ditch stand</i>	<i>to shut up shop</i>
to make a brave effort to stave off final defeat	to cease an established activity
<i>to nip something in the bud</i>	<i>to sound the death knell of something</i>
to stop some activity in its early stages when stopping it is still relatively easy	to indicate the impending end of something

- to stem the hemorrhage*  
to put a stop to the financial losses of a project
- to stitch up a deal*  
to successfully conclude a deal
- to strangle some discussion*  
to cut off some unfinished discussion
- to throw someone to the lions*  
to abandon a person
- to tie something up*  
to finalize the arrangement for something
- to tie up the loose ends*  
to complete the minor outstanding items of some substantially finished project
- to turn a complete somersault*  
to reverse one's established policy
- to turn up trumps*  
to finish up better than expected or to experience unexpected good luck
- to vote with one's feet*  
to show one's displeasure by terminating an association
- to walk away with a profit*  
to achieve a profit on concluding a project
- to wrap up a deal*  
to bring a deal to a successful conclusion
- until stumps are drawn*  
until the project ends
- when the crunch comes*  
when the inevitable conclusion is reached
- when the music stops*  
suddenly and soon (refers to an imminent crisis leading to some resolution of a matter, as in a game of musical chairs)
- where the ax falls*  
who gets terminated

**ENTHUSIASM**

- I would give my right arm for something*  
I am very keen to acquire something
- a fire in someone's belly*  
great enthusiasm
- a shot in the arm*  
something to revive a person's enthusiasm
- an eager beaver*  
a person with great drive and enthusiasm even if this causes annoyance to others
- bright-eyed and bushy-tailed*  
naive but enthusiastic
- deafening silence*  
great apathy and lack of enthusiasm
- half-hearted*  
unenthusiastic
- heart and soul*  
with great energy
- keepers of the flame*  
persons keen to maintain old traditions
- larger than life*  
in person and full of enthusiasm
- lukewarm*  
unenthusiastic though not hostile
- not to break someone's door down*  
to be quite unenthusiastic about someone's goods or services
- not to care a hoot*  
not to show the slightest concern or enthusiasm
- one's heart is not in some cause*  
one has little enthusiasm for some cause
- the lifeblood*  
the main or essential ingredient; or the person or factor instilling enthusiasm
- they fell over themselves to do something*  
they showed great keenness while doing something

<i>to be a live wire</i>	<i>to get one's teeth into something</i>
<i>to be an enthusiast</i>	<i>to tackle a task with enthusiasm</i>
<i>to be a political animal</i>	<i>to give something a blood transfusion</i>
<i>to want to be in politics</i>	<i>to give something new enthusiasm</i>
<i>to be after someone's blood</i>	<i>to go hammer and tongs</i>
<i>to be keen to make a person the victim of an angry confrontation</i>	<i>to do something with great energy</i>
<i>to be after someone's scalp</i>	<i>to grab some opportunity with both hands</i>
<i>to be keen to penalize a person</i>	<i>to seize some opportunity with great enthusiasm</i>
<i>to be bitten with something</i>	<i>to have one's heart in something</i>
<i>to become very enthusiastic over something</i>	<i>to be enthusiastic about and committed to a cause</i>
<i>to be close to one's heart</i>	<i>to have one's heart set on something</i>
<i>to be a project on which one is very keen</i>	<i>to be very keen to achieve something</i>
<i>to be dying to do something</i>	<i>to jump at the opportunity</i>
<i>to be extremely keen to do something</i>	<i>to enthusiastically take immediate advantage of a good chance</i>
<i>to be hot on a subject</i>	<i>to jump into the ring</i>
<i>to be knowledgeable and enthusiastic about a subject</i>	<i>to join in enthusiastically</i>
<i>to be in someone's blood</i>	<i>to leap at an idea</i>
<i>to be something about which a person is very knowledgeable or keen</i>	<i>to accept a suggestion enthusiastically</i>
<i>to be itching to go</i>	<i>to lose heart</i>
<i>to be highly enthusiastic and keen to start</i>	<i>to cease being enthusiastic</i>
<i>to be on one's soap box</i>	<i>to make a beeline for something</i>
<i>to hold forth on an issue about which one feels keenly</i>	<i>to go straight to something with great enthusiasm or to head for some goal by the most direct route</i>
<i>to be the life and soul of the party</i>	<i>to pour cold water on some idea</i>
<i>to be the prime enthusiast for a cause</i>	<i>to be unenthusiastic about some proposal or scornful of its apparent weaknesses</i>
<i>to beat someone to the punch</i>	<i>to pull oneself together</i>
<i>to get to some objective ahead of some keen rival</i>	<i>to cease acting without purpose or enthusiasm</i>
<i>to break one's neck to do something</i>	<i>to rebound with a vengeance</i>
<i>to be particularly keen</i>	<i>to return to an issue with great enthusiasm</i>
<i>to carry a torch for someone</i>	<i>to run out of steam</i>
<i>to act as an enthusiastic advocate of another person's cause</i>	<i>to lose one's energy and enthusiasm</i>
<i>to galvanize someone into action</i>	<i>to start the ball rolling</i>
<i>to enthuse a person into doing something</i>	<i>to commence and enthusiastically advance an activity involving people</i>

*to take a shine to someone*  
to be keen on a person

*to want someone's hide*  
to be keen to penalize a person

*with much fanfare*  
with great enthusiasm and public  
acclaim

*with open arms*  
enthusiastically

## EQUALITY

*a level playing field*  
competition on equal terms

*a second-class citizen*  
a person not treated as an equal

*between the devil and the deep blue sea*

to be faced with two equally unpalatable alternatives which cannot both be avoided

*it is a toss-up*  
either alternative is equally acceptable

*only a cigarette paper between them*  
virtually equal or close together

*only a postage stamp between them*  
virtually equal or close together

*only a tissue between them*  
virtually equal or close together

*the river found its mark*  
equilibrium between two pressures has been achieved

*to be between Scylla and Charybdis*  
to be faced with two equally unpalatable alternatives which cannot both be avoided (refers to the voyage of Ulysses)

*to be between a rock and a hard place*

to be faced with two equally difficult and uncomfortable choices

*to be line ball*  
to be equal

*to compete on all fours with someone*  
to strive on equal terms

*to fight fire with fire*  
to counter a dangerous situation by making an equally dangerous move

## EXCESS

*a holier-than-thou attitude*  
excessive righteousness

*daylight robbery*  
the charging of grossly excessive prices

*feather bedding*  
(in industrial relations) creating unnecessary jobs solely to increasing employment; (in economics) assisting an inefficient industry by government grants or excessive tariff protection

*highway robbery*  
the charging of grossly excessive prices

*paper warfare*  
an excessive amount of correspondence or red tape

*penny-pinching*  
excessively mean

*red tape*  
excessively bureaucratic procedures

*someone has swallowed a dictionary*  
a person uses excessively long words

*that takes the cake*  
that is quite absurd or outrageous or excessively cheeky

*to be a sticky beak*  
to show excessive curiosity into matters not of one's concern

*to be above water*  
(of securities) to have a market value in excess of the cost price

*to be babes in the wood*  
to be excessively naive and inexperienced and thus ripe for exploitation

*to be dressed up to the nines*  
to be attired in excessively elaborate garments

*to be on one's high horse*  
to be excessively pompous

*to be tied to someone's apron strings*  
to be excessively influenced by a female

*to be too frightened to say "boo"*

*to a goose*

to be excessively shy

*to be wet behind the ears*

to be excessively naive and inexperienced

*to burn the candle at both ends*

to work excessively long hours

*to charge like a wounded bull*

to impose excessive prices (a play on words; not a simile)

*to cost an arm and a leg*

to be excessively expensive

*to eat one's head off*

to eat excessively

*to go overboard*

to act foolishly and in an excessive way

*to hang onto someone's coattails*

to excessively rely on another person's initiatives

*to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs*

through excessive greed to destroy a very profitable enterprise

*to make heavy weather of something*  
to struggle excessively with a relatively simple task

*to make noise enough to wake the dead*

to be excessively noisy

*to pay through the nose*

to pay an excessive price

*to read the Riot Act*

to reprimand persons who are excessively noisy (refers to the police reading out to a rowdy crowd extracts from a law requiring its dispersement)

*to talk the hind leg off a donkey*  
to talk excessively

## EXPECTATION

*a gambit*

an opening move in a competitive situation which involves short-term losses in the expectation of long-term gains

*drawcard*

feature expected to attract a crowd

*front-runner*

person expected to win

*not to hold one's breath for something*  
to give up all expectation

*opening shot*

first step in an activity expected to last a long time

*the calm before the storm*

the quiet period before an expected or inevitable crisis

*there are black clouds on the horizon*  
bad news is expected

*to batten down the hatches*

to get ready for expected difficulties

*to be a tall order*

to be an unreasonable expectation

*to be in cloud cuckoo land*

to be mad or to have unrealistic expectations

*to be more than flesh can stand*

to be more than a person can reasonably be expected to endure

*to be more than one bargained for*

to be more than one expected

*to be successful beyond one's wildest dreams*

to be far more successful than one could have expected

*to beat the odds*

to do better than could reasonably have been expected

*to cast one's bread upon the waters*  
not to expect gratitude or recognition  
for one's good works (Ecclesiastes 11:1)

*to catch someone with his pants down*  
to act when another person least expects it

*to catch someone with his trousers down*

to act when another person least expects it

*to count one's chickens before they are hatched*  
to treat as fact the expected results of a future proposal

*to defy gravity*  
to go up when the expectation is to go down

*to fall through*  
not to eventuate as expected

*to grind to a halt*  
to cease some activity despite expectations that it would continue

*to live on borrowed time*  
to live longer than expected

*to loom on the horizon*  
to be expected but not immediately

*to raise merry hell*  
to prominently involve others in a matter in the expectation of significant results from this action

*to raise the specter of something*  
to draw attention to a worrying expectation of something

*to see the color of someone's eyes*  
to see how a person matches expectations or requirements

*to seek the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow*

to have naive expectations

*to turn up trumps*  
to finish up better than expected or to experience unexpected good luck

*to wait for the other shoe to drop*  
to await the seemingly imminent and inevitable (refers to a man undressing, disturbing a neighbor by dropping one shoe, then frustrating his expectation by putting the other shoe down gently)

*to wear one's heart on one's sleeve*  
to lack the reserve expected of one

## EXPENSE

*a Pyrrhic victory*

a win which costs more than if there had been a loss (refers to the battle at which King Pyrrhus of Epirus defeated the Romans at Asculum)

*a white elephant*

an expensive and useless luxury (refers to gifts of sacred elephants by the King of Siam to persons then ruined by the expense of their upkeep)

*a white knight*

a party voluntarily coming to the assistance of another party at considerable cost to itself

*garage sale*

sale of miscellaneous assets at cheap prices

*heads I win—tails you lose*

whichever way this matter goes I will benefit at your expense

*not to be worth the candle*

to be too expensive in relation to the true value

*the law of the jungle*

the principle that those having power will use it at the expense of all others

*the sky is the limit*

the cost is no obstacle

*to be above water*

(of securities) to have a market value in excess of the cost price

*to be on the house*

to be free of cost

<i>to buy something for a song</i>	<i>hard-bitten</i>
<i>to buy something very cheaply</i>	toughened by experience
<i>to cost an arm and a leg</i>	<i>hard-boiled</i>
<i>to be excessively expensive</i>	toughened by experience
<i>to cut costs to the bone</i>	<i>off the top of one's head</i>
<i>to economize</i>	based on experience but without detailed consideration
<i>to hedge one's bets</i>	<i>to be babes in the wood</i>
<i>to take action involving a cost but which is designed to reduce the possible adverse consequences of some activity</i>	to be excessively naive and inexperienced and thus ripe for exploitation
<i>to hit someone hard</i>	<i>to be in a hole</i>
<i>to greatly affect a person emotionally or to cost a person a lot of money</i>	to experience some difficulties
<i>to hold the purse strings</i>	<i>to be in a tight corner</i>
<i>to have control of expenditure</i>	to experience a crisis
<i>to mortgage the future</i>	<i>to be in uncharted waters</i>
<i>to get benefits now but at a cost in due course</i>	to be the first to experience something
<b>EXPERIENCE</b>	<i>to be someone's bread and butter</i>
<i>a blessing in disguise</i>	to be a person's livelihood or to be a person's everyday experience
<i>an unwelcome but salutary experience</i>	<i>to bet wet behind the ears</i>
<i>a green chum</i>	to be excessively naive and inexperienced
<i>an inexperienced person</i>	<i>to broaden someone's mind</i>
<i>a nightmare</i>	to expose a person to a greater variety of experiences and interests than he had previously
<i>an unpleasant experience</i>	<i>to cut one's teeth on something</i>
<i>a past master</i>	to get one's first experience by doing something
<i>an expert with long experience</i>	<i>to feel the draft</i>
<i>a trap for young players</i>	to experience unfavorable conditions
<i>a good opportunity for the inexperienced or naive to make mistakes</i>	<i>to hide one's light under a bushel</i>
<i>a warhorse</i>	to keep others in ignorance of one's skills and experience
<i>an old soldier who likes to relive past wartime experiences</i>	<i>to learn a lesson</i>
<i>an old head on young shoulders</i>	to benefit from one's experience
<i>experience, knowledge and maturity in a young person</i>	<i>to pick someone's brain</i>
<i>distant fields look greener</i>	to get the benefit of another person's knowledge and experience
<i>activities of which one has no experience seem much easier than is really the case</i>	<i>to put someone through the mill</i>
	to give a person practical experience

*to reap as one has sown*  
to experience the consequences of one's own actions

*to teach one's grandmother how to suck eggs*  
to try to tell a much more experienced person something very obvious to him

*to turn up trumps*  
to finish up better than expected or to experience unexpected good luck

## EXPERTISE

*a backroom boy*  
an expert unable to communicate effectively with the lay public

*a past master*  
an expert with long experience

*father knows best*  
as an expert I know better than you do just what is most suitable for you

*not to be someone's cup of tea*  
to be outside a person's expertise or area of interest

*to be slipping*  
to be losing one's cunning or expertise

*to be up one's alley*  
to be right within a person's expertise or area of interest

*to hang up one's shingle*  
to go into business offering expert personal services

*to stick to one's game*  
to confine oneself to activities in areas in which one has knowledge and expertise

## FACT

*a goldmine*  
a source of much wealth or of many facts

*a gut feeling*  
a belief based purely on intuition and unsupported by facts or evidence

*a sitting shot*  
an initial move which is designed to establish facts for use in a later action

*a telltale sign*  
a visible indication revealing true facts despite efforts at concealment

*it will all come out in the wash*  
the facts will emerge as work proceeds

*put that in your pipe and smoke it*  
contemplate that fact

*showdown*  
disclosure of certain pertinent facts

*that takes on added color*  
there are now further facts which alter the appearance of a matter

*the affair blew up*  
certain unwelcome facts have become publicly available

*the boot is on the other foot*  
the real facts are the other way round

*the penny dropped*  
a person has just realized a fact which should have been obvious (refers to old-fashioned pay toilets)

*to almost drive someone to tears*  
to present information designed to make another person express sympathy not warranted by the facts

*to ascertain the lay of the land*  
to establish the pertinent facts and opinions

*to balance the picture*  
to put the other side of the story or to quote facts in contradiction

*to be old hat*  
to be a very widely-known fact

*to be on the wrong tram*  
to be completely mistaken as to the basic facts

*to bring a fact home to someone*  
despite his inclination to the contrary, to make a person realize a fact

*to count one's chickens before they are hatched*  
 to treat as fact the expected results of a future proposal

*to drag someone by the head and ears*  
 to force a person to reveal the true facts

*to draw a long bow*  
 to state a conclusion which while possible is unlikely on the known facts

*to flush out the facts*  
 to ascertain, after some effort, the truth of some matter

*to have one's wires crossed*  
 to be mistaken about key facts

*to have something to chew on*  
 to have firm facts on which to base a decision

*to send someone away with a flea in his ear*  
 to give a person frank but unwelcome facts (refers to fleas trapped in the armor of ancient knights)

*to sift*  
 to closely examine the evidence or a set of facts with a view to attaching different significance as appropriate to each of the various components

*to strengthen someone's hand*  
 to give a person additional authority or greater moral support or more facts to support his case

*to take something at face value*  
 (of alleged facts) to accept something without question or challenge

*to take something with a grain of salt*  
 to regard the facts in a statement with considerable skepticism

*to throw a cat among the pigeons*  
 to cause consternation by revealing an unpleasant and unexpected fact

*to throw in one's six pennies' worth*  
 to modestly supply one's own facts or views

*to throw in one's two cents' worth*  
 to modestly supply one's own facts or views

*to wake up to something*  
 to realize a fact or its significance

*to whitewash*  
 to exonerate when this is not warranted by the facts

*when the balloon goes up*  
 when the adverse facts come to light

*when the chips are down*  
 when all facts are known and taken into consideration

## FACTOR

*a bottleneck*  
 a factor obstructing an even flow

*a catalyst*  
 a factor causing something to happen

*chicken and egg*  
 two factors each of which results in the other

*the lifeblood*  
 the main or essential ingredient; or the person or factor instilling enthusiasm

*the nigger in the woodpile*  
 the factor spoiling an otherwise satisfactory arrangement

*to be a magnet*  
 to be a factor drawing a crowd of people

*to cloud one's mind*  
 to allow irrelevant or extraneous factors to affect one's impartiality or judgment

*to make or break someone*  
 to be a factor leading either to a person's success or to his failure, with no intermediate position

*to paint a black picture*

to state a set of unfavorable factors

*to present a rosy picture*

to state a set of favorable factors

*to see which way the wind is blowing*

to establish the factors relevant to a situation

*to tip the scales*

to be a factor which in combination with other factors results in a particular decision which would otherwise not have been reached

*trigger*

factor responsible for certain events occurring at that particular time

## FAILURE

*a bloodbath*

catastrophic losses

*a case of rats leaving a sinking ship*

the desertion of an enterprise in anticipation of imminent failure

*a damp squib*

dissappointingly ineffective action (refers to fireworks which fail to go off)

*a flash in the pan*

something that begins promisingly but does not last (refers to the priming of old guns)

*a gambit*

an opening move in a competitive situation which involves short-term losses in the expectation of long-term gains

*a game of cat and mouse*

negotiations between two parties of unequal bargaining power during which the stronger makes some temporary concessions to the weaker without, however, affecting the latter's eventual total defeat

*a landslide*

an electoral result involving victory or defeat by an unexpectedly large margin

*a Pyrrhic victory*

a win which costs more than if there had been a loss (refers to the battle at which King Pyrrhus of Epirus defeated the Romans at Asculum)

*a roller coaster ride*

a series of successes followed by failures

*a South Sea bubble*

an unrealistic financial venture which is bound to result in total loss

*checkmate*

defeat

*it is a case of sink or swim*

the attempt is worthwhile, despite the risk of failure

*stalemate*

a final result in which neither party to a dispute is victorious

*that is money down the drain*

money has been wastefully lost on a failed project

*the wheels fell off*

the plan failed

*to back the wrong horse*

to have faith in, give support to and/or invest in a project which proves to be unsuccessful

*to bang one's head up against a brick wall*

to fight an unwinnable case

*to be a dead duck*

to have failed

*to be done like a dinner*

to be defeated and humiliated

*to be on the ropes*

to be facing defeat

*to be one in the eye for someone*

to represent an unexpected and unwelcome defeat

*to be sheer murder*

to be extremely unpleasant or difficult; or to be an inglorious defeat

<i>to be slipping</i>	<i>to kiss something good-bye</i>
to be losing one's cunning or expertise	to give something up as permanently lost
<i>to beat by a long shot</i>	<i>to kiss the ground</i>
to defeat very convincingly	to suffer a loss
<i>to become a vegetable</i>	<i>to lick one's wounds</i>
to lose one's mental and physical faculties	to adjust oneself to defeat
<i>to burn one's fingers</i>	<i>to lose face</i>
to lose money through foolishness	to endure embarrassment by virtue of being defeated or having one's errors found out
<i>to chase a corpse</i>	<i>to lose money hand over fist</i>
to harp on something long ago resolved or a lost cause	to lose money very fast and convincingly
<i>to derail some strategy</i>	<i>to lose one's shirt</i>
to cause a strategy to fail	to make heavy financial losses
<i>to draw a blank</i>	<i>to make a last ditch stand</i>
to be unsuccessful	to make a brave effort to stave off final defeat
<i>to eat crow</i>	<i>to make or break someone</i>
to accept a humiliating defeat	to be a factor leading either to a person's success or his failure, with no intermediate position
<i>to eat someone alive</i>	<i>to meet one's Waterloo</i>
to soundly defeat a person	to receive a decisive defeat (refers to Napoleon's fate at the Battle of Waterloo)
<i>to fall to the ground</i>	<i>to miss the boat</i>
to fail	to fail to exploit an opportunity
<i>to fly out the window</i>	<i>to miss the bus</i>
to be lost	to fail to exploit an opportunity
<i>to force someone onto his knees</i>	<i>to miss the sharks while netting the minnows</i>
to inflict a humiliating defeat on a person	to succeed in minor aspects but fail in the ones that really matter
<i>to get off the canvas</i>	<i>to miss the train</i>
to recover after near defeat	to fail to exploit an opportunity
<i>to give someone a bath</i>	<i>to nurse one's bruises</i>
to dramatically defeat a person	to face up to the consequences of defeat
<i>to go down the tube</i>	<i>to overstep the mark</i>
to fail	to fail to observe the proprieties
<i>to hold a winning hand</i>	
to be in an unbeatable position to defeat others	
<i>to hold all the aces</i>	
to be in an unbeatable position to defeat others	
<i>to hold the trump card</i>	
to be in an unbeatable position to defeat others	

*to play the trump card*  
to make a final move, thereby defeating one's opponents

*to raise the stake*  
to increase the amount of potential gain or loss in a project

*to rub it in*  
to humiliate another person by emphasizing his defeat

*to save face*  
to be allowed to keep one's dignity despite having suffered a defeat or made an error

*to sink slowly in the West*  
to fail gradually

*to stem the hemorrhage*  
to put a stop to the financial losses of a project

*to throw good money after bad*  
to waste further money in a vain attempt to recover money already lost

*to throw in the towel*  
to concede defeat

*to throw up the sponge*  
to concede defeat

*to tighten the noose*  
to get closer to inflicting defeat

*to trump someone*  
to defeat a person

*to turn the corner*  
to commence being successful after initial failures

*to wipe the floor with someone*  
to inflict a humiliating defeat on a person

## FALSITY

*a false dawn*  
an incident giving rise to unjustified hope

*a tall story*  
an interesting but untrue and unbelievable tale

*a white lie*  
a false statement uttered in a good cause

*some mud will stick*  
reputations will be hurt even after accusations are proved false

*to cook the books*  
fraudulently to maintain false records of financial transactions

*to dream up some story*  
to concoct a false story naively or maliciously

*to lie through one's teeth*  
to tell blatant untruths

*to nail a lie*  
to expose an untruth

*to pull someone's leg*  
to tell a false but plausible story as an act of humor

*to sail under false colors*  
to pretend that one's real character or beliefs are different from what they really are

*to speak with forked tongues*  
to utter half-truths with the intention of misleading the listener

*to swallow the line*  
to accept as truth the story being proffered

## FRANKNESS

*a straight shooter*  
a person who is frank and outspoken

*not to pull any punches*  
to be brutally frank

*to come out into the open*  
to start being frank

*to hit someone right between the eyes*  
to be brutally frank

*to lay one's cards on the table*  
to be utterly frank and open or to honestly disclose one's position

*to make no bones about it*  
to be brutally frank

*to send someone away with a flea in his ear*

to give a person frank but unwelcome facts (refers to fleas trapped in the armor of ancient knights)

*to shoot from the hip*

to speak frankly and openly

*to speak one's mind*

to express one's views frankly and forcefully

## FRIGHT

*in fear and trembling*

in a state of apprehension

*to frighten hell out of someone*

to alarm a person

*to frighten the horses*

to scare people off by one's ill-considered tactics

*to have a threat hanging over one's head*

to fear some intimated unpleasant action

*to have nerves of steel*

not to be easily frightened

*to lose one's nerve*

to abandon, out of fear, a decision to do something

*to make someone's flesh creep*

to frighten a person with something horrific

*to nearly jump out of one's skin*

to receive a fright

*to scare the pants off someone*

to greatly frighten a person

## FUTURE

*a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush*

a benefit currently available is more valuable than a seemingly much larger benefit which may or may not be achieved in the future

*a crystal ball*  
accurate knowledge of the future

*a litmus test*

an event which allows the outcome of future events to be predicted more accurately

*to be destined for the scrap-heap*  
to face a future in which one will have no meaningful role

*to conduct a postmortem on something*  
to review past actions with a view of learning lessons for the future (Latin, 'after the death')

*to count one's chickens before they are hatched*

to treat as fact the expected results of a future proposal

*to have a cloud hanging over one's head*

there is doubt as to one's future

*to keep someone's seat warm*

to hold a position temporarily with a view to another person taking it over permanently in the near future

*to keep something up one's sleeve*  
to secretly retain something in reserve for use in the future or at a later stage of negotiations

*to mortgage the future*

to get benefits now but at a cost in due course

*to pigeon-hole*

to put aside for further consideration in the distant future

*to put something into cold storage*  
to put something aside for dealing with at some indeterminate future time

*to telegraph one's punches*

by one's actions to give advance warning of one's future plans

*to wash one's hands of something*

to emphatically decline future responsibility

**HAPPINESS AND ENJOYMENT***a field day*

a very enjoyable and successful occasion

*all his Christmases came at once*

he was overjoyed

*in Halcyon days*

in past happier times (refers to the 14 days about the winter solstice when winds were calm and to the mythical bird said to breed in a floating nest at that time)

*to be in a seventh heaven*

to be very happy

*to be in clover*

to enjoy a life of ease and luxury

*to be on cloud nine*

to be very happy

*to be on the crest of a wave*

to enjoy success which may not last

*to be on top of the world*

to be very happy

*to be wrapped in something*

to enjoy something

*to have a ball*

to have an enjoyable time

*to have a run for one's money*

to at least get some enjoyment out of an otherwise abortive exercise

*to jump for joy*

to express great satisfaction

*to lap it up*

to enjoy the attention

*to laugh one's head off*

to greatly enjoy something

*to throw one's hat into the air*

to express joy

*to turn handstands*

to express great joy

*to walk on air*

to be joyful

*to warm the cockles of someone's heart*

to delight a person

**HARM***a muckraker*

a person who sets out to publicize misconduct of prominent persons or institutions

*a mudraker*

a person who sets out to publicize features harming another person's reputation

*not to touch a hair on someone's head*

not to harm a person

*one cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs*

the desired end dictates the means even if they cause harm to others

*the final straw*

the latest step, which, when added to a large number of seemingly harmless previous steps, sets off a disaster resulting from the cumulative effect

*the straw which broke the camel's back*

the latest step, which, when added to a large number of seemingly harmless previous steps, sets off a disaster resulting from the cumulative effect

*to be a wolf in sheep's clothing*

to be a hypocrite or to be dangerous although masquerading as something harmless (Matthew 7:15)

*to cut one's nose off to spite one's face*

to act in pique in a way which harms only oneself

*to keep something on an even keel*

to ensure that something is not harmed

*to let blood*

to allow some harm as the price for achieving some greater benefit

*to save one's bacon*

to escape harm

*to shoot oneself in the foot*

to act in a foolish way and thus harm one's own cause

*to stab someone in the back*

to deliberately and surreptitiously harm a person who regarded one as a friend

## HOPE

*a chink of light*

a small hope of a solution or breakthrough

*a false dawn*

an incident giving rise to unjustified hope

*a fat chance*

little hope

*a light in the sky*

a sign of great hope

*a slough of despond*

a feeling of hopelessness

*not a dog's chance*

no hope at all

*not the ghost of a chance*

no hope at all

*pie in the sky*

a hoped-for result unlikely to be achieved

*the one bright spot on the horizon*

the only hopeful aspect

*things look black*

there is little hope of success or prosperity or a favorable outcome

*to clasp at straws*

to have a hopeless case but show unjustified optimism on noting minor positive features

*to fish for compliments*

to drop hints in the hope that one will receive praise or recognition

*to fly a kite*

to issue uncovered checks in the hope that they will be covered before clearance or to test public reaction to legislation in contemplation by leaking broad details of it to the media

*to have a snowflake's chance in hell*

to have no hope or possibility at all

*to keep one's fingers crossed*

to hope for a good outcome

*to pull something out of the fire*

to salvage something in a seemingly hopeless situation

*to sow seeds*

to propagate ideas in the hope that they will be adopted

*to teach someone a lesson*

to inflict something unpleasant on a person in the hope that it will lead to a change in his behavior

*to throw a sprat to catch a mackerel*

to risk a little in the hope of gaining much

*to touch wood*

it is to be hoped that our good luck will not go away

## IDEA

*I buy that*

I accept that idea

*a brainwave*

a suddenly occurring bright idea

*a copycat*

a person who imitates another person's ideas

*a dinosaur*

a person with incredibly outmoded ideas

*a pipeline to someone*

an intermediary used as a means of communicating ideas to a person

<i>a swelled head</i>	<i>to encapsulate some idea</i>
an exaggerated idea of one's abilities or status	to reduce the essential points of a complicated proposal to a small number of words
<i>a thought in the back of one's mind</i>	<i>to go to someone's head</i>
an undeveloped idea	to cause a person to get an exaggerated idea of his abilities or status
<i>brainchild</i>	<i>to have a blank canvas</i>
inspired original idea	to be bereft of ideas
<i>moonshine</i>	<i>to knock an idea on the head</i>
unrealistic ideas	to utterly reject a proposal
<i>moth-eaten</i>	<i>to leap at an idea</i>
(of ideas, etc.) antiquated	to accept a suggestion enthusiastically
<i>to act as a sounding board</i>	<i>to pour cold water on some idea</i>
to give, on request, constructive criticisms of ideas tentatively held	to be unenthusiastic about some proposal or scornful of its apparent weaknesses
<i>to be bankrupt of ideas</i>	<i>to put one's heads together</i>
to be bereft of ideas	to confer and pool ideas
<i>to be poles apart</i>	<i>to put pen to paper</i>
to have ideas which are very different	to set out one's ideas in written form
<i>to be someone's bête noire</i>	<i>to ram something down someone's throat</i>
to be a person whose ideas and actions cause upset and loathing in another person (French, "black beast")	to pressure another person into accepting an idea with which he does not agree
<i>to be the cat's pajamas</i>	<i>to sow seeds</i>
to have an exaggerated idea of one's own importance	to propagate ideas in the hope that they will be adopted
<i>to be the cradle of something</i>	<i>to speak the same language</i>
to be the place where some idea was first nurtured	to have a good understanding and similar ideas
<i>to be too big for one's breeches</i>	<i>to stand on someone's shoulders</i>
to have an exaggerated idea of one's own importance	to build upon another person's ideas
<i>to brainstorm</i>	<i>to steal someone's clothes</i>
to pool thoughts in the course of a session designed to generate fresh ideas and especially to build upon the ideas of others	to plagiarize another person's ideas
<i>to disseminate ideas</i>	<i>to test the water</i>
to spread ideas to a wide audience (lit., "to scatter seeds in various places")	to try out an idea in a small way
<i>to dust some idea off</i>	<i>to throw something out of the window</i>
to revive some proposal	to completely reject an idea or proposal
	<i>to turn someone's head</i>
	to cause a person to get an exaggerated idea of his abilities or status

*young Turks*

members of an organization who hold ideas regarded as too revolutionary

## INFERENCE

*the answer is a lemon*

the outcome is inconclusive

*to bark up the wrong tree*

to reach an incorrect conclusion

*to draw a long bow*

to state a conclusion which while possible is unlikely on the known facts

*to get the wrong sow by the ear*

to reach an incorrect conclusion

*to hit the nail right on the head*

to astutely come to the correct conclusion

*to jump to a conclusion*

to infer something without proper consideration

*to make up one's mind*

to reach a conclusion after contemplating a matter

*to put two and two together*

to reach a conclusion by combining isolated pieces of information

## INTEREST

*a nine-day wonder*

an exciting event, but one which will cease to arouse interest when the novelty has worn off

*a sweetheart deal*

an agreement negotiated in private without full regard to the interests of those affected

*a tall story*

an interesting but untrue and unbelievable tale

*birds of a feather flock together*

persons of like interests gather in the same place

*in our camp*

in the group representing our vested interest

*kindred spirit*

person with similar interests and eccentricities

*not to be someone's cup of tea*

to be outside a person's expertise or area of interest

*not to care a pin for something*

not to have the slightest interest in something

*on our side of the fence*

in the group representing our vested interest

*someone's guardian angel*

someone's friend, watching over him and advancing his interests

*to be off on one's hobby horse*

to throw into conversation aspects of a subject in which one has a passionate interest

*to be up one's alley*

to be right within a person's expertise or area of interest

*to bore someone to death*

to greatly weary a person by full and uninteresting conversation or by lack of action

*to bore someone to tears*

to greatly weary a person by full and uninteresting conversation or by lack of action

*to bore the pants off someone*

to weary a person by dull and uninteresting conversation

*to break ranks*

to identify oneself as having separate interests or views from the rest of a group

*to broaden someone's mind*

to expose a person to a greater variety of experiences and interests than he had previously

*to compare notes*

to exchange information about some subject of mutual interest

*to have a finger in the pie*

to have an interest in a project

*to have an ax to grind*

to have a vested interest

*to need to watch one's back*

to find it necessary to take care in case others act against one's interests

*to talk one's book*

to present arguments which, while plausible, are really designed to foster one's vested interest

*to throw one's hat into the ring*

to publicly announce one's interest in some position

*to wear a particular hat*

to act in a particular capacity or for a particular vested interest

*to whet one's appetite*

to arouse one's curiosity or interest

## INTERFERENCE

*a logjam*

a stoppage of activity caused by input in greater volume than allowed for

*a palace revolt*

the overthrow of those in authority by their subordinates

*a stitch in time saves nine*

preventive maintenance saves money in the long run

*nothing is sacred*

nothing is safe from interference

*pull your head in!*

do not interfere in this!

*stumbling block*

an impediment or difficulty preventing the easy completion of some project or a dilemma involving some moral issue

*to be stopped in one's tracks*

suddenly and unexpectedly to be prevented from carrying on with a project

*to block someone's path*

to interfere with a person's opportunity to advance himself

*to break down the barriers*

to do away with the prejudice preventing something

*to cloud one's mind*

to allow irrelevant or extraneous factors to affect one's impartiality or judgement

*to get the red light*

to be forbidden to do something

*to go over someone's head*

to bypass lower levels of authority and approach someone more senior instead

*to hold someone on a short leash*

to give a person very little authority

*to keep off someone's pad*

not to interfere with or compete against another person in his customary area of activity

*to keep one's cotton-picking fingers off something*

not to interfere in something

*to keep someone in a straitjacket*

to deny a person any discretionary powers at all

*to let blood*

to allow some harm as the price for achieving some greater benefit

*to poke one's nose into something*

to interfere

*to put a legrope on someone*

to give a person very little authority

*to put a spoke in someone's wheel*

to interfere with another person's activity, so preventing its continuance

*to put one's foot down*  
to exert one's authority and insist on something

*to queer the pitch for someone*  
to spoil the opportunity a person has to do something

*to spike someone's guns*  
to cause something to become useless

*to stand in someone's way*  
to prevent a person achieving his goal

*to strengthen someone's hand*  
to give a person additional authority or greater moral support or more facts to support his case

*to throw a spanner in the works*  
to cause an unexpected complication

*to tie someone's hands*  
to prevent a person from acting as he sees fit

*to tie someone's hands behind his back*  
to make it impossible for a person to act at all

*to tread on someone's corns*  
to upset another person by interfering in his area of responsibility

*to tread on someone's toes*  
to upset another person by interfering in his area of responsibility

*to wipe the slate clean*  
to forgive past indiscretions

## INVOLVEMENT

*a lone wolf*  
a person who prefers to act without involving others

*a shaggy-dog story*  
an amusing anecdote with an unexpected ending, often involving talking animals given certain human skills

*to be in something up to one's armpits*  
to be very deeply involved in something

*to be in the thick of things*  
to get involved at the center of some activity

*to be on a treadmill*  
to be involved in some unpleasant ongoing activity which cannot readily be stopped

*to be the center of the spider's web*  
to control an operation which involves numerous and/or complex ingredients

*to be up to one's ears in something*  
to be very deeply involved in something

*to be up to one's elbow in something*  
to be deeply involved in something

*to be up to one's neck in something*  
to be very deeply involved in something

*to be up to the eyeballs in something*  
to be very deeply involved in something

*to butt in*  
uninvited to involve oneself in someone else's conversation

*to call it a day*  
to cease involvement with some activity

*to catch someone in the net*  
to unexpectedly involve a particular person in the course of activity designed to involve many others

*to cover one's tracks*  
to hide the evidence of one's involvement

*to give the game away*  
to cease involvement with some activity

*to have a finger in something*  
to be involved in something

*to have a tiger by the tail*  
to be involved in an activity which is much more dangerous than one had realized

*to hijack a debate*  
to involve oneself in the public discussion of some matter and turn that discussion to one's advantage

*to leave someone high and dry*  
to isolate a person from a desired involvement

*to raise merry hell*  
to prominently involve others in a matter in the expectation of significant results from this action

*to see the back of someone*  
to know that a person is no longer involved in something

*to start the ball rolling*  
to commence and enthusiastically advance an activity involving people

*to take a backseat*  
not to actively involve oneself

*to twiddle one's thumbs*  
not to be involved in any worthwhile activity

## JUDGMENT

*beauty is in the eye of the beholder*  
some things are matters for subjective judgments

*in someone's eyes*  
in a person's judgment

*to cloud one's mind*  
to allow irrelevant or extraneous factors to affect one's impartiality or judgment

*to fall flat on one's face*  
to make a bad error of judgment

*to have an open mind*  
to be willing to assess evidence on its merits and without prejudging it

*to judge a book by its cover*  
foolishly to go only by superficial appearances

*to put money on the table*  
to back one's judgment in a tangible way or to demonstrate one's sincerity

*to put one's money where one's mouth is*  
to back one's judgment by putting assets at risk

*to twist someone's arm*  
to coerce another person to do something against his will or better judgment

## KNOWLEDGE

*a crystal ball*  
accurate knowledge of the future

*a down-to-earth solution*  
a realistic solution

*a skeleton in the cupboard*  
an unpleasant truth the knowledge of which has been deliberately suppressed

*an old head on young shoulders*  
experience, knowledge and maturity in a young person

*as soon as someone's back was turned*  
at the moment it became possible to do something without a person's knowledge

*father knows best*  
as an expert I know better than you do just what is most suitable for you

*fools rush in where angels fear to tread*  
unsophisticated persons take unwise risks in circumstances where more knowledgeable persons would exercise caution

*hard-headed*  
realistic

*he would turn in his grave*  
he would have been very surprised or displeased if he had known while still alive

*heaven only knows*  
it is not known

*it hits one*  
one comes to realize something

*it's a small world*

it is surprising to meet people one knows in unexpected places

*not to have the foggiest notion*

to know nothing at all about the subject

*still waters run deep*

a person with a quiet manner may have a surprisingly great knowledge of a subject

*the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing*

one section of a large bureaucracy does not realize that another section is simultaneously doing something inconsistent

*the penny dropped*

a person has just realized a fact which should have been obvious (refers to old-fashioned pay toilets)

*the pot calling the kettle black*

a person criticizing another person without realizing his own even greater shortcomings

*the word is out*

it is now known

*to be a full bottle on something*

to be very knowledgeable

*to be at the end of one's tether*

to be frustrated by a lack of knowledge, authority or patience

*to be child's play*

to be easy or to require only elementary skills and knowledge

*to be geared up to do something*

to have equipment, labor and know-how in place adequate for some task

*to be hot on a subject*

to be knowledgeable and enthusiastic about a subject

*to be in someone's blood*

to be something about which a person is very knowledgeable or keen

*to be in the swim*

to be a member of a group knowing what is going on

*to be old hat*

to be a very widely-known fact

*to bring a fact home to someone*

despite his inclination to the contrary, to make a person realize a fact

*to buy a pig in a poke*

to buy goods of unknown quality

*to cock one's eye at someone*

to glance knowingly at a person

*to draw a long bow*

to state a conclusion which while possible is unlikely on the known facts

*to drop names*

to slip names of celebrities allegedly known to the speaker into a conversation in an attempt to impress

*to hand on the torch*

to pass on accumulated knowledge

*to have a tiger by the tail*

to be involved in an activity which is much more dangerous than one had realized

*to have eyes at the back of one's head*

to know more of what is going on than is generally realized

*to have one's feet firmly on the ground*

to know what one is doing

*to have one's fingers on the pulse*

to know what is going on

*to know something in one's heart of hearts*

to know something while reluctant to admit it, even to oneself

*to know something inside out*

to know something very thoroughly

*to know the ropes*

to know how to do one's job

*to know where one stands*  
to know what one supports or how one is affected

*to know which way to turn*  
to know which strategy to adopt or where to seek assistance

*to pick someone's brain*  
to get the benefit of another person's knowledge and experience

*to put one's reputation on the line*  
to take a public stance in the realization that there is a risk that one's reputation will suffer if one is proved wrong

*to see the back of someone*  
to know that a person is no longer involved in something

*to shrug one's shoulders*  
to indicate that one does not know or care or that one is unable or unwilling to assist

*to stick to one's game*  
to confine oneself to activities in areas in which one has knowledge and expertise

*to wake up to something*  
to realize a fact or its significance

*under someone's nose*  
in a person's immediate area of responsibility or in circumstances where he should have known something

*what is this—a bunch of grapes or a bowl of goldfish?*  
surely you know what this is!

*when the chips are down*  
when all facts are known and taken into consideration

*with 20/20 hindsight*  
with the benefit of knowing what happened

## LEADERSHIP

*kingmaker*  
person engaging in behind-the-scenes activities to promote another person to a particular leadership position

*the blind leading the blind*  
persons without the necessary skills for a task purporting to impart those skills to others

*the high priest of something*  
the leading advocate of something

*to be at the head of the pack*  
to be the best of many or the de facto leader

*to be at the top of the tree*  
to be a leading member of one's profession

*to be the leading light*  
to be the most important person in a venture

*to knock someone off his perch*  
to displace a person from his leadership position in some competitive situation

*to set the pace*  
to give a lead in regard to a rate of progression

*to spearhead something*  
to lead a movement

*too many cooks spoil the broth*  
one leader is all that is required

## LIKELIHOOD

*a bull in a china shop*  
a careless person likely to cause great damage

*a cancer*  
an evil which is likely to spread

*a death wish*  
the contemplation of action so foolish that it is likely to lead to utter disaster

*a loose cannon on the deck*  
a mistake likely to cause trouble

*a new broom*

a changed regime which is likely to alter the status quo

*a pipedream*

a fanciful notion, wished for but unlikely

*an unholy alliance*

a working relationship for a nefarious purpose between unlikely partners

*it is pointing in the right direction*

success looks likely

*pie in the sky*

a hoped-for result unlikely to be achieved

*straws in the wind*

unofficial preliminary indications of something likely to be formally revealed soon

*there is blood in the water*

something is likely to cause a person to go into a frenzy

*to be on the cards*

to be likely

*to be shortsighted*

not to recognize the likely consequences

*to draw a long bow*

to state a conclusion which while possible is unlikely on the known facts

*to face a rocky road ahead*

to be likely to encounter difficulties

*to find a needle in a haystack*

to find something when the probability of finding it is very small

*to get brownie points*

to do a person a favor with the likely result that the recipient will do a favor in return in due course

*to give someone enough rope to hang himself*

to give a person the opportunity to do something which is likely to get him into severe trouble

*to leap frog something*

to overtake something, with the likelihood of in turn being overtaken (refers to a game in which participants jump over each other in turn)

*to make a rod for one's own back*

to act in disregard of likely disadvantages for oneself

*to spin a yarn*

to tell an amusing or unlikely story

*where there is smoke there is fire*

if there is a hint of trouble, then it is highly likely that there really is trouble

## MEMBERSHIP

*a black sheep*

a disreputable member of an otherwise reputable group

*a blueblood*

a person of high birth (refers to the appearance of veins on the skin of members of some royal families)

*a clean sweep*

the complete removal in an election of all sitting members

*esprit de corps*

a feeling of camaraderie and concern for the good name of some organization of which one is a member (French, "vital breath of a body")

*flagship*

most important member of a group of related entities

*fresh blood*

newly joined members of some organization

*pariah*

social outcast (refers to members of a low caste in India)

*the lowest common denominator*

the highest level of taste found among all the members of some target audience

*to be a cuckoo in the nest*  
to purport to be a member of a group  
of people although having no such  
right

*to be at the top of the tree*  
to be a leading member of one's  
profession

*to be in the swim*  
to be a member of a group knowing  
what is going on

*to drum someone out of some organization*  
to terminate in ignominy a person's  
employment or membership (refers to  
the ceremonial cashing in the army  
to the beating of parade drums)

*to introduce new blood*  
to recruit new members to some  
organization

*to shepherd some group*  
to marshall the members of some  
group

*young Turks*  
members of an organization who hold  
ideas regarded as too revolutionary

## MISLEADING

*a house of cards*  
an organization which gives a mis-  
leading impression of solidity

*to lead someone a merry dance*  
to mislead a person

*to lead someone up the garden path*  
to mislead a person by deliberately  
fallacious arguments

*to pull the wool over someone's eyes*  
to deceive or deliberately mislead an-  
other person

*to speak with forked tongues*  
to utter half-truths with the intention  
of misleading the listener

*to throw dust into someone's eyes*  
to deceive a person by presenting  
inaccurate or misleading information

*to throw someone off the scent*  
to deceive a person by giving out  
misleading indications

## MISTAKE

*a comedy of errors*  
a series of separate mistakes in rela-  
tion to some matter (name of a Shake-  
speare play)

*a loose cannon on the deck*  
a mistake likely to cause trouble

*a slip of the tongue*  
incorrect words uttered accidentally

*a trap for young players*  
a good opportunity for the inexperi-  
enced or naive to make mistakes

*glaring error*  
patently obvious mistake

*Murphy's law*  
the principle that everything which  
can go wrong will go wrong

*not to be a hanging matter*  
to be only a minor mistake

*sacrificial lamb*  
somebody unfairly made to suffer for  
the mistakes of others

*something is rotten in the state of  
Denmark*  
the situation is not correct (from Shake-  
speare's HAMLET)

*to bark up the wrong tree*  
to reach an incorrect conclusion

*to be off beam*  
to be mistaken

*to be on the road to Damascus*  
to see the error of one's ways (Acts  
9:3)

*to be on the wrong tack*  
to be using an incorrect procedure or  
policy

*to be on the wrong track*  
to be heading toward an incorrect  
solution

- to be on the wrong tram*  
to be completely mistaken as to the basic facts
- to be on the wrong wavelength*  
to be incorrect in one's thinking
- to be up the creek*  
to be completely mistaken
- to be wide off the mark*  
to have a belief which is far removed from the true position
- to catch someone flat-footed*  
to embarrass a person in the course of his making mistakes or being unprepared
- to clean up a mess*  
to sort out mistakes or neglect
- to drive a coach and horses through something*  
to demonstrate major errors in something
- to fall flat on one's face*  
to make a bad error of judgment
- to get the wrong sow by the ear*  
to reach an incorrect conclusion
- to have an eagle eye*  
to be able to notice small mistakes very readily
- to have hold of the wrong end of the pineapple*  
to be utterly mistaken
- to have one's wires crossed*  
to be mistaken about key facts
- to hold the wrong end of the stick*  
to be completely mistaken about something
- to lose face*  
to endure embarrassment by virtue of being defeated or having one's errors found out
- to put one's foot in it*  
to make a foolish mistake

- to put one's reputation on the line*  
to take a public stance in the realization that there is a risk that one's reputation will suffer if one is proved wrong
- to put the cart before the horse*  
to do things in the wrong order
- to save face*  
to be allowed to keep one's dignity despite having suffered a defeat or made an error
- to slip under one's guard*  
to cause a mistake to be made despite care being taken to prevent this
- to sow the wind and reap the whirlwind*  
to make bad mistakes and to suffer the even worse consequences
- ## MONEY
- a cash cow*  
a source of ready money
- a license to print money*  
a lucrative government-conferred monopoly or privilege
- a stitch in time saves nine*  
preventive maintenance saves money in the long run
- he who pays the piper calls the tune*  
a person contributing money or resources to a project is entitled to a say in its control
- money for jam*  
remuneration easily earned
- not for love or money*  
definitely not
- not to be made of money*  
not to be wealthy
- not to have a bean*  
to have no money
- pin money*  
an allowance to a wife for her personal use

<i>that is money down the drain</i>	<i>to line one's pockets</i>
money has been wastefully lost on a failed project	to make, improperly and secretly, a profit out of some transaction
<i>the money is rolling in</i>	<i>to lose money hand over fist</i>
the scheme is very profitable	to lose money very fast and convincingly
<i>to be a money spinner</i>	<i>to pork barrel</i>
to produce large profits easily and quickly	to spend taxpayers' money in one area in order to attract political support
<i>to be in the black</i>	<i>to put money on the table</i>
to have money	to back one's judgment in a tangible way or to demonstrate one's sincerity
<i>to be in the red</i>	<i>to put one's hand in one's pockets</i>
to owe money	to spend
<i>to be out of pocket</i>	<i>to put one's money where one's mouth is</i>
to have been forced to spend money which cannot be recovered from others	to back one's judgment by putting assets at risk
<i>to burn one's fingers</i>	<i>to save a bundle</i>
to lose money through foolishness	to save much money
<i>to button up one's purse</i>	<i>to see the color of someone's money</i>
to refuse to spend money	to get evidence of the sincerity of a person's proposal
<i>to engage in pump priming</i>	<i>to throw good money after bad</i>
to spend public money with the aim of attracting parochial electoral support	to waste further money in a vain attempt to recover money already lost
<i>to have a run for one's money</i>	<i>to tighten the purse strings</i>
to at least get some enjoyment out of an otherwise abortive exercise	to reduce outlays
<i>to have deep pockets</i>	<i>to turn an honest penny</i>
to have large financial resources	to earn money out of odd jobs
<i>to have money burning a hole in one's pocket</i>	<i>to turn one's chips in</i>
to be impatient to spend or invest available funds	to convert one's assets or entitlements into cash
<i>to have money flowing out of one's ears</i>	
to be very rich	
<i>to hit someone hard</i>	
to greatly affect a person emotionally or to cost a person a lot of money	
<i>to hold out a fistful of dollars</i>	
to offer money by way of inducement	
<i>to hold the purse strings</i>	
to have control of expenditure	

<i>to line one's pockets</i>	<i>to keep an eye on the ball</i>
to make, improperly and secretly, a profit out of some transaction	to monitor a fast-changing situation
<i>to lose money hand over fist</i>	<i>to keep one's eye on someone</i>
to lose money very fast and convincingly	to supervise a person or to monitor a person's activities and behavior
<i>to pork barrel</i>	
to spend taxpayers' money in one area in order to attract political support	
<i>to put money on the table</i>	
to back one's judgment in a tangible way or to demonstrate one's sincerity	
<i>to put one's hand in one's pockets</i>	
to spend	
<i>to put one's money where one's mouth is</i>	
to back one's judgment by putting assets at risk	
<i>to save a bundle</i>	
to save much money	
<i>to see the color of someone's money</i>	
to get evidence of the sincerity of a person's proposal	
<i>to throw good money after bad</i>	
to waste further money in a vain attempt to recover money already lost	
<i>to tighten the purse strings</i>	
to reduce outlays	
<i>to turn an honest penny</i>	
to earn money out of odd jobs	
<i>to turn one's chips in</i>	
to convert one's assets or entitlements into cash	

## MONITORING

<i>a watchdog</i>
a person or organization monitoring behavior
<i>to keep an eye on the ball</i>
to monitor a fast-changing situation
<i>to keep one's eye on someone</i>
to supervise a person or to monitor a person's activities and behavior

*to keep one's eye on something*  
to monitor a situation

*to keep tabs on something*  
to monitor something

## NAIVETE

*a lamb led to slaughter*  
a naive person allowing himself to be exploited

*a trap for young players*  
a good opportunity for the inexperienced or naive to make mistakes

*bright-eyed and bushy-tailed*  
naive but enthusiastic

*not to have been born yesterday*  
not to be naive

*that is strictly for the birds*  
that is blatant and naive nonsense

*to be babes in the wood*  
to be excessively naive and inexperienced and thus ripe for exploitation

*to be green*  
to be naive

*to be off the planet*  
to be extremely naive or uninformed

*to be wet behind the ears*  
to be excessively naive and inexperienced

*to dream up some story*  
to concoct a false story naively or maliciously

*to have come down in the last shower*  
to be naive

*to seek the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow*  
to have naive expectations

## NONSENSE

*a load of rubbish*  
blatant nonsense

*hogwash*  
nonsense

*mumbo jumbo*  
blatant nonsense (refers to a deity worshipped by primitive tribes)

*tell it to the marines*  
such nonsense is not believable

*that is strictly for the birds*  
that is blatant and naive nonsense

*to be eye wash*  
to be nonsense

## OPINION

*a prima donna*  
a person with an exaggerated opinion of his own importance which makes relations with others needlessly difficult (Italian, "first lady")

*heresy*  
views different from those held by the majority

*spectrum*  
wide range of different opinions or backgrounds

*the jury is still out*  
no decision has yet been made or the public has not yet given an indication of its views

*the other side of the coin*  
the arguments for the opposite point of view

*the tide is running in favor of some proposition*  
public opinion supports some proposition

*to act as a devil's advocate*  
to put a point of view which one does not hold in order to draw out the best arguments regarding a proposition (refers to a church official vetting a candidate for sainthood)

*to ascertain the lay of the land*  
to establish the pertinent facts and opinions

*to be a lone voice in the wilderness*  
to be the only person stating unpopular views

- to be a thorn in someone's flesh*  
to be a person whose persistent presence and righteous views annoy
- to be full of hot air*  
to have an exaggerated opinion of one's own importance and to boast about it
- to be on the other side of the fence*  
to have an opposing point of view or position
- to belt someone over the head*  
to override someone's views or arguments
- to break ranks*  
to identify oneself as having separate interests or views from the rest of a group
- to bridge a gulf*  
to overcome a wide divergence in views
- to change one's mind*  
to alter the views which one had previously formed
- to change one's tune*  
to alter one's publicly-expressed views
- to claim that something is the best thing since sliced bread*  
to have an exaggerated opinion of the importance or novelty of an invention or practice
- to echo someone's words*  
to repeat another person's views as though they were one's own
- to get words in edgeways*  
to manage to interrupt a conversation in order to put a separate point of view
- to have a change of heart*  
to form a new view in place of a strongly-held previous view
- to know one's mind*  
to form and adhere to an opinion

- to polarize*  
to cause people to identify themselves as belonging to groups holding opposing views
- to pull one's horns in*  
to retreat from previously stated views
- to put someone back in his box*  
to make it clear to a person that his views are not welcome
- to sail against the wind*  
to oppose the views currently being held by others
- to sing a particular song*  
to state particular views
- to speak one's mind*  
to express one's views frankly and forcefully
- to take a sounding*  
to ascertain people's views
- to throw in one's six pennies' worth*  
to modestly supply one's own facts or views
- to throw in one's two cents' worth*  
to modestly supply one's own facts or views
- you can get lost*  
I intend to take no notice whatsoever of you or your views
- you can jump in the lake*  
I intend to take no notice whatsoever of you or your views

## OPPORTUNITY

- a chink in someone's armor*  
an opportunity to do something which otherwise could not be done
- a chink in the wall*  
an opportunity to do something which otherwise could not be done
- a foot in the door*  
the opportunity to do business

<i>a golden opportunity</i>	<i>to give someone enough rope to hang himself</i>
<i>an unparalleled opportunity</i>	<i>to give a person the opportunity to do something which is likely to get him into severe trouble</i>
<i>a toehold</i>	<i>to grab some opportunity with both hands</i>
<i>an opportunity small in itself but with the potential to lead to bigger things</i>	<i>to seize some opportunity with great enthusiasm</i>
<i>a trap for young players</i>	<i>to have a leg in</i>
<i>a good opportunity for the inexperienced or naive to make mistakes</i>	<i>to have an opportunity which has the potential to lead to bigger things</i>
<i>a window of opportunity</i>	<i>to have other irons in the fire</i>
<i>an opportunity temporarily available</i>	<i>to have the opportunity to do something else as an alternative</i>
<i>an ocean full of fish</i>	<i>to have the ball at one's feet</i>
<i>plenty of opportunity</i>	<i>to have unlimited opportunity</i>
<i>an opening wide enough to drive a coach and four through</i>	<i>to keep one's eyes open for something</i>
<i>an excellent opportunity</i>	<i>to be on the lookout for an opportunity to do something</i>
<i>this is the end of the road for someone</i>	<i>to knock on doors</i>
<i>a person will have no further opportunity to do something</i>	<i>to seek out opportunities to do business</i>
<i>to be a crack in the wall</i>	<i>to miss the boat</i>
<i>to represent a small unintended opportunity which can be exploited</i>	<i>to fail to exploit an opportunity</i>
<i>to block someone's path</i>	<i>to miss the bus</i>
<i>to interfere with a person's opportunity to advance himself</i>	<i>to fail to exploit an opportunity</i>
<i>to blow something</i>	<i>to miss the train</i>
<i>unintentionally to destroy some opportunity</i>	<i>to fail to exploit an opportunity</i>
<i>to carve out a niche for oneself</i>	<i>to open up doors</i>
<i>to deliberately create an opportunity</i>	<i>to create opportunities</i>
<i>to use one's talents effectively</i>	<i>to put one's toe in the water</i>
<i>to close the gate</i>	<i>to gently explore an opportunity</i>
<i>to deny an opportunity which was previously available</i>	<i>to queer the pitch for someone</i>
<i>to dip one's toe in the water</i>	<i>to spoil the opportunity a person has to do something</i>
<i>to gently explore an opportunity</i>	<i>to run with the ball</i>
<i>to fill a vacuum</i>	<i>to make the most of the opportunity</i>
<i>to take advantage of an opportunity not acted on by others</i>	<i>to shut the door on someone</i>
<i>to find one's niche</i>	<i>to deny another person a desired opportunity</i>
<i>to find the opportunity to use one's talents</i>	
<i>to get only one bite at the cherry</i>	
<i>to receive no further opportunity</i>	

*to turn back the clock*  
to have another opportunity to do something which should have been done already or to undo something which cannot be undone

*your race is run*  
you have had your opportunity

## PAST

*a past master*  
an expert with long experience

*a warhorse*  
an old soldier who likes to relive past wartime experiences

*in Halcyon days*  
in past happier times (refers to the 14 days about the winter solstice when winds are calm and to the mythical bird said to breed in a floating nest at that time)

*the chickens are coming home to roost*  
the consequences of past actions are becoming obvious

*the melody lingers on*  
the benefit of past actions remains

*to be a breath of fresh air*  
to be a pleasant change from the past

*to conduct a postmortem on something*  
to review past actions with a view to learning lessons for the future (Latin, "after the death")

*to even the score*  
to get one's own back for some past action

*to start from scratch*  
to commence something without the benefit of any past activity

*to wipe the slate clean*  
to forgive past indiscretions

## PLEASURE

*a willing horse*  
a cheerful worker

*fun and games*  
amusement derived in the course of a serious activity

*not to be all beer and skittles*  
not to be all pleasant and easy

*the cheering could be heard a block away*  
there was great rejoicing

*the party is over*  
the previous pleasant arrangements have been discontinued

*to be a breath of fresh air*  
to be a pleasant change from the past

*to be a stormy petrel*  
a person who disturbs a pleasant state of affairs by agitating for change

*to be a tonic*  
to cheer someone up

*to be full of beans*  
to be very cheerful

*to be in good heart*  
to be cheerful, especially in adversity

*to be meat and drink*  
to be very pleasurable

*to be music to one's ears*  
to be comments which one is very pleased to hear

*to be on a path strewn with roses*  
to lead a very pleasant life

*to be tickled pink*  
to be very pleased

*to bounce back*  
to resume a cheerful existence after some setback

*to bring the house down*  
to greatly amuse an audience

*to cast a cloud over something*  
to spoil the pleasure of an occasion

*to drain every ounce out of something*  
to get the maximum use or pleasure out of something

*to give someone heart*  
 to cause a person to cheer up

*to have an audience rolling in the aisles*  
 to amuse an audience

*to have someone in stitches*  
 to greatly amuse a person

*to kill oneself laughing*  
 to be greatly amused

*to lick one's chops*  
 to look forward to something with pleasurable anticipation

*to positively purr*  
 (of a person) to be very pleased; (of an engine) to run very smoothly

*to take the rough with the smooth*  
 to accept the hardships of life along with its pleasant features

## POSSIBILITY

*a middle-of-the-road solution*  
 a solution near the middle of a range of possibilities

*as soon as someone's back was turned*  
 at the moment it became possible to do something without a person's knowledge

*bedrock price*  
 lowest possible price

*catch-22*  
 a situation made impossible because it requires as a prior fulfillment something which does not exist until that condition is satisfied (title of a novel by Joseph Heller)

*on the deathknock*  
 at the last possible moment

*one can't get a quart into a pint pot*  
 one cannot do the impossible

*one can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear*  
 it is impossible to manufacture something of a high standard without appropriate raw materials

*that has put paid to it*  
 the project can no longer proceed

*that is a long shot*  
 there is only a remote possibility

*the game is up*  
 escape is now impossible

*there is more than one way to skin a cat*  
 this can be achieved in a variety of acceptable ways

*to be a crack in the wall*  
 to represent a small unintended opportunity which can be exploited

*to be a gray area*  
 to be in an undefined position straddling two or more possibilities

*to be able to do something standing on one's head*  
 to be able to do something very easily

*to be able to do something with one hand behind one's back*  
 to be able to do something very easily

*to be able to eat someone for breakfast*  
 to be able to outwit a person very easily

*to be able to lay one's hand on something*  
 to be able to locate something

*to be able to spot trouble a mile away*  
 to be able to spot trouble before it actually happens

*to conjure up something*  
 to produce something in circumstances where this seemed impossible

*to draw a long bow*  
 to state a conclusion which while possible is unlikely on the known facts

*to draw blood from a stone*  
 to do the impossible

*to exhaust the field*  
 to use up all the possibilities

*to have a good nose for business*  
to be able to identify profitable business situations

*to have a snowflake's chance in hell*  
to have no hope or possibility at all

*to have an eagle eye*  
to be able to notice small mistakes very readily

*to have broad shoulders*  
to be able to cope well with responsibility

*to have one's foot on something*  
to be about to acquire something or to be able to acquire something

*to lurk in the shadows*  
to have a low profile at the moment, but with the possibility of becoming much more conspicuous at any time

*to move heaven and earth*  
to do everything possible

*to paint oneself into a corner*  
to foolishly put oneself into a position from which escape is impossible

*to produce something out of thin air*  
to get hold of something in circumstances where this seemed impossible

*to push water uphill*  
to foolishly attempt the impossible

*to tie someone's hands behind his back*  
to make it impossible for a person to act at all

*to try to square the circle*  
to attempt the impossible (refers to a classical problem in geometry, namely, to construct with a compass a square of the same area as a given circle)

*two can play at that game*  
it is possible to retaliate

## POWER

*a figurehead*

the ceremonial chief officer of some organization without any real power (refers to the carving at the front of a ship)

*a game of cat and mouse*

negotiations between two parties of unequal bargaining power during which the stronger makes some temporary concessions to the weaker without, however, affecting the latter's eventual total defeat

*a tall poppy*

a person with great power or responsibility and/or in receipt of high remuneration

*a toothless tiger*

an authority which has been given totally inadequate powers for its task

*if the mountain will not come to Mahomet then Mahomet will go to the mountain*

on recognizing that one has insufficient power to effect one's most desired solution, one decides to make do with the next best alternative

*more power to your elbow*

may your praiseworthy efforts lead to success

*one can't beat City Hall*

the ordinary citizen is powerless against bureaucracy

*the law of the jungle*

the principles that those having power will use it at the expense of all others

*the power behind the throne*

a person exercising the real authority but without having the official right to do so (the antonym of "titular head")

*the top dog*

the person in the most powerful position

*to be in the box seat*  
to be in a very powerful position to control activity

*to flex one's muscles*  
to exert one's personality or powers

*to have a long arm*  
to have far-reaching power

*to hold the power to do something in the hollow of one's hand*  
to have the right to make crucial decisions

*to keep someone in a straitjacket*  
to deny a person any discretionary powers at all

*to trample someone underfoot*  
by virtue of one's great power to treat a person's rights with contempt and not to give them proper consideration

*to wield a big stick*  
to exert power

*under one's own power*  
without external help

## PRACTICABILITY

*a castle in Spain*  
an impractical proposition

*a castle in the air*  
an impractical proposition

*to be in an ivory tower*  
to be immersed in theoretical considerations and ignorant of the practical realities (Song of Solomon 7:4)

*to jettison some proposal*  
to abandon some proposal as worthless or impracticable

*to pay lip service to some rules*  
to disregard some rules in practice while acknowledging them in words

*to put someone through the mill*  
to give a person practical experience

*to start with a blank sheet of paper*  
to commence an exercise without being bound by any established practices

*to turn sour*  
to become impracticable or unprofitable

## PRAISE

*a backhanded compliment*  
a polite expression seemingly of praise but really intended as an insult

*more power to your elbow*  
may your praiseworthy efforts lead to success

*to fish for compliments*  
to drop hints in the hope that one will receive praise or recognition

*to get full marks for something*  
to deserve praise for something

*to pull oneself up by one's bootstraps*  
to make a praiseworthy effort to better oneself unaided

*to sing someone's praises*  
to commend a person exuberantly

## PRETENSE

*to act out a charade*  
ostentatiously to pretend to be doing something in an ethical fashion

*to be mutton dressed up as lamb*  
to foolishly pretend to be younger

*to play possum*  
to pretend that one is not present

*to sail under false colors*  
to pretend that one's real character or beliefs are different from what they really are

*to sweep something under the carpet*  
to pretend that some blemish does not exist

*to touch a nerve*  
to mention something which another person would rather pretend did not exist

*to turn a blind eye to something*  
to pretend something obvious does not exist (refers to action by Nelson when disregarding Admiralty signals)

**PREVENTION**

*I'll soon stop his little game*  
his activities are not tolerated and I  
will ensure that they cease

*a bottleneck*  
a factor obstructing an even flow

*a logjam*  
a stoppage of activity caused by input  
in greater volume than allowed for

*a stitch in time saves nine*  
preventive maintenance saves money  
in the long run

*cut it out!*  
stop doing that!

*stonewalling*  
deliberate obstruction or delaying tactics

*stumbling block*  
an impediment or difficulty preventing  
the easy completion of some project  
or a dilemma involving a moral issue

*the fat is in the fire*  
action with certain unstoppable  
consequences has now been initiated

*to be on a treadmill*  
to be involved in some unpleasant  
ongoing activity which cannot readily  
be stopped

*to be stopped in one's tracks*  
suddenly and unexpectedly to be  
prevented from carrying on with a  
project

*to break down the barriers*  
to do away with the prejudice prevent-  
ing something

*to chop someone off at the socks*  
to stop someone's proposals prema-  
turely

*to come to a full stop*  
to completely cease activity

*to fetter someone*  
to stop a person acting on his own  
initiative

*to fight bushfires*  
to deal with crises as they arise rather  
than take preventive action

*to nip something in the bud*  
to stop some activity in its early stages  
when stopping it is still relatively  
easy

*to put a spoke in someone's wheel*  
to interfere with another person's ac-  
tivity, so preventing its continuance

*to put a wall around someone*  
to stop a person associating with others

*to put the brake on someone*  
to stop a person

*to shut the stable door after the horse  
has bolted*

to take preventive action only after  
the relevant event

*to slip through the net*  
to happen as an isolated case despite  
steps taken to prevent such events

*to slip under one's guard*  
to cause a mistake to be made despite  
care being taken to prevent this

*to stand in someone's way*  
to prevent a person achieving his goal

*to stem the hemorrhage*  
to put a stop to the financial losses of  
a project

*to tie someone's hands*  
to prevent a person from acting as he  
sees fit

**PRICE AND VALUE**

*a bird in the hand is worth two in the  
bush*

a benefit currently available is more  
valuable than a seemingly much larger  
benefit which may or may not be  
achieved in the future

*a jewel*  
a valued assistant

<i>a listening post</i>	<i>to earn peanuts</i>
a place where information of strategic value can be collected	to get a reward which is far too small in relation to the value of the services rendered
<i>a treasure trove</i>	<i>to go through the roof</i>
a valuable discovery	(of a person) to be very upset or (of prices) to escalate greatly
<i>bedrock price</i>	<i>to hand over something on a silver platter</i>
lowest possible price	to provide a valuable benefit for virtually nothing
<i>daylight robbery</i>	<i>to lose one's right arm</i>
the charging of grossly excessive prices	to lose some highly-valued assistance
<i>fire sale</i>	<i>to pay something back with interest</i>
a forced sale, realizing bargain prices	to return a small favor with a bigger favor or to extract retribution of greater value than the circumstances warrant
<i>garage sale</i>	<i>to pay through the nose</i>
sale of miscellaneous assets at cheap prices	to pay an excessive price
<i>highway robbery</i>	<i>to pick the eyes out of something</i>
the charging of grossly excessive prices	to choose the most valuable items from among a large number
<i>not a mite</i>	<i>to sell one's birthright for a mess of pottage</i>
not at all (refers to a Flemish coin of small value)	through foolishness to exchange something of substance for something of little value (Genesis 25)
<i>not to be worth a continental</i>	<i>to sell someone a pup</i>
to have no value (refers to currency notes)	to cheat a person in a transaction, especially by misrepresentation as to the true value of something
<i>not to be worth the candle</i>	<i>to skyrocket</i>
to be too expensive in relation to the true value	(of a price or value) to increase greatly in a short time
<i>something has no guts in it</i>	<i>yeoman service</i>
something has no real value to it	valuable assistance over a long time
<i>to be above water</i>	
(of securities) have a market value in excess of the cost price	
<i>to cast pearls before swine</i>	
to confer valuable benefits on someone who neither recognizes nor appreciates them	
<i>to charge a mint</i>	
to impose very high prices	
<i>to charge like a wounded bull</i>	
to impose excessive prices (a play on words; not a simile)	
<i>to charge the earth</i>	
to impose very high prices	

**PRIDE AND HUMILITY**

*barefaced*  
shameless

*to be done like a dinner*  
to be defeated and humiliated

<i>to be in the doghouse</i>	<i>one's door is always open</i>
<i>to be in disgrace</i>	people can take their problems to one at any time
<i>to be the apple of someone's eye</i>	<i>teething trouble</i>
<i>to be a person of whom another person is proud</i>	problems in the early stages of a project
<i>to cut tall poppies down to size</i>	<i>the sky fell in</i>
<i>to humiliate haughty persons</i>	a very serious problem arose
<i>to hang one's head</i>	<i>the squeaky wheel gets the most attention</i>
<i>to be ashamed of oneself</i>	those complaining the most loudly will get their problems sorted out first
<i>to put on airs and graces</i>	<i>to be left holding the baby</i>
<i>to act in an affected manner</i>	to be tricked into accepting responsibility for someone else's problems
<i>to rub it in</i>	<i>to be the hard core</i>
<i>to humiliate another person by emphasizing his defeat</i>	to be the central and most difficult problem
<i>to rub someone's nose in it</i>	<i>to come to grips with some problem</i>
<i>to humiliate a person by highlighting something embarrassing to him</i>	to be on the way to solving a problem
<i>to swallow one's pride</i>	<i>to cut the Gordian knot</i>
<i>to take action despite the humiliating nature of this course</i>	to solve, especially by force, a virtually insoluble problem (refers to a complicated knot tied by Gordius and eventually cut by Alexander the Great)

## PROBLEM

<i>Bob's your uncle</i>	<i>to fiddle at the edges</i>
that solves the problem	to do some relatively minor things which do not deal with the substance of a problem
<i>a can of worms</i>	<i>to get stuck into some problem</i>
a heterogeneous collection of unexpected problems	to attempt to solve a problem with great vigor
<i>a step in the right direction</i>	<i>to get to first base</i>
the first in a series of measures designed to correct some problem	to succeed in getting others to start comprehending a problem
<i>a time bomb</i>	<i>to heave a sigh of relief</i>
a source of serious problems which are certain to surface later on	to express satisfaction at the achievement of a solution to a difficult problem
<i>growing pains</i>	<i>to iron out something</i>
problems encountered by virtue of expansion	to sort out a difficult problem
<i>join the club!</i>	<i>to jump a hurdle</i>
you are only one of many people with similar problems	to overcome a problem or difficulty
<i>not to be Robinson Crusoe</i>	
to be one of a large number of people with a common problem (from Daniel Defoe's ROBINSON CRUSOE)	

*to jump that hurdle when one comes to it*  
 to deal with a particular problem only when it becomes necessary to do so  
*to just hold one's head above water*  
 to cope with problems but with little margin to spare or to stay solvent  
*to leave something up in the air*  
 to continue with an unresolved problem  
*to make mountains out of molehills*  
 to treat a minor problem as though it were a major disaster  
*to need something like a hole in the head*  
 to be landed with a completely undesired problem  
*to play the cards as they fall*  
 to deal with problems as they arise  
*to present a happy face to the world*  
 bravely to gloss over one's problems  
*to prey on one's mind*  
 (of a problem) to keep worrying one  
*to put one's thinking cap on*  
 to concentrate on finding a solution to a difficult problem  
*to take the bit between one's teeth*  
 to face up a problem  
*to take the bull by the horns*  
 to come to grip with the realities of a difficult problem  
*to try to square the circle*  
 to attempt the impossible (refers to a classical problem in geometry, namely, to construct with a compass a square of the same area as a given circle)

## PUNISHMENT

*for one's sins*  
 by way of punishment, as it were  
*heads will roll*  
 transgressors will be punished

*to be a glutton for punishment*  
 to act irresponsibly in the face of inevitable retribution  
*to be for the high jump*  
 to be threatened with a reprimand and punishment  
*to get off scot free*  
 to go unpunished (refers to an exemption from tax)  
*to kiss the rod*  
 to accept punishment meekly  
*to send someone to Coventry*  
 to ostentatiously and collectively ignore a person by way of punishment  
*to thrash with a feather*  
 to award only a minor punishment for a very serious offense

## READINESS

*a cash cow*  
 a source of ready money  
*off the peg*  
 (of clothes) ready-made  
*ready-made*  
 easily fabricated or available without difficulty  
*to batten down the hatches*  
 to get ready for expected difficulties  
*to be at hand*  
 to be in the vicinity, ready to help  
*to be up to concert pitch*  
 to be ready  
*to clear the decks*  
 to get ready for action  
*to draw a deep breath*  
 to get ready for exertion or for emotional news  
*to gird up one's loins*  
 to get ready for action  
*to grit one's teeth*  
 to get ready to suffer pain

*to prepare one's ground*  
to get ready for a confrontation

*to set the scene for something*  
to get things ready for something

*to sharpen one's ax*  
to get ready for a difficult task

*to sharpen the knives*  
to get ready for a concerted attack on some principle

*to spread one's wings*  
to assert authority which has not yet been conferred by one's superiors and for which one may not be ready

*to warm up*  
to get ready

## REFUSAL AND REJECTION

*a doubting Thomas*

a person who refuses to believe claims in the absence of proof (John 20:25)

*not to lift a finger to help someone*  
to refuse to assist

*that is not to be sneezed at*  
that is so significant that it should not be rejected

*to be a dog in the manger*  
to spitefully deny something to others, notwithstanding its uselessness to oneself

*to be an ostrich*  
to refuse to face up to an unpleasant truth (refers to the reputed habit of ostriches in danger)

*to be like water off a duck's back*  
(of advice or criticism) to be completely rejected

*to blackball someone*  
to reject a person as unsuitable

*to bury one's head in the sand*  
to refuse to face up to an unpleasant truth (refers to the reputed habit of ostriches in danger)

*to button up one's purse*  
to refuse to spend money

*to close the gate*  
to deny an opportunity which was previously available

*to draw the line at that*  
to refuse to go any further

*to gather dust*  
not to be acted upon without being formally rejected

*to go haywire*  
to refuse to function properly

*to have no truck with someone*  
to refuse to deal with a person

*to keep someone in a straitjacket*  
to deny a person any discretionary powers at all

*to knock an idea on the head*  
to utterly reject a proposal

*to leave someone out in the cold*  
to deny a desired objective to a person

*to pass the buck*  
in an uncooperative spirit to decline responsibility for a matter on the grounds that someone else more properly has responsibility for it

*to plead the Fifth Amendment*  
to refuse to answer an unwelcome question (refers to the Fifth Amendment of the United States Constitution, which provides protection against self-incrimination)

*to pull up the drawbridge*  
to refuse to cooperate

*to refuse point blank*  
to refuse outright

*to shut the door on someone*  
to deny another person a desired opportunity

*to sit on the fence*  
to refuse to choose between two alternatives

*to slam the door in someone's face*  
ostentatiously to refuse to have any dealings with a person

*to throw a blanket over a proposal*  
to refuse to proceed with a proposal  
*to throw something out of the window*  
to completely reject an idea or proposal

*to turn off the tap*  
to deny further access to supplies or information

*to turn one's back on someone*  
to decline to further assist or deal with a person

*to wash one's hands of something*  
to emphatically decline future responsibility

*wild horses would not cause me to do something*

I absolutely refuse to do something  
(refers to a form of torture)

## REPUTATION

*a black sheep*

a disreputable member of an otherwise reputable group

*a muckraker*

a person who sets out to publicize misconduct of famous persons or institutions

*a mudraker*

a person who sets out to publicize features harming another person's reputation

*by their fruits ye shall know them*  
their reputation will be based on their results (Matthew 7:20)

*he must have a long spoon that sups with the devil*  
great care is needed when negotiating deals with disreputable parties

*some mud will stick*

reputations will be hurt even after accusations are proved false

*to blot one's copybook*  
to spoil one's previously good reputation or record

*to crucify someone*  
to unfairly do severe damage to a person's reputation or credibility

*to have a black mark against one's name*  
to have a tarnished reputation

*to look to one's laurels*  
to be careful not to lose one's reputation for some skill

*to make a name for oneself*  
to earn a good reputation by virtue of some skill

*to make something one's trademark*  
to earn a reputation for maintaining some stance

*to paint someone black*  
to ruin a person's reputation

*to put one's reputation on the line*  
to take a public stance in the realization that there is a risk that one's reputation will suffer if one is proved wrong

*to rest on one's laurels*

to use a reputation for success earned in earlier times as a substitute for current endeavor

*to undermine someone's position*  
to injure another person's reputation and influence by unfair and secret tactics

## RESPONSIBILITY

*a tall poppy*

a person with great power or responsibility and/or in receipt of high remuneration

*charity begins at home*

a person's first responsibility should be to his family

*one's opposite number*  
a person with similar responsibilities  
in another organization

*someone would run a mile*  
a person would do anything to escape  
his responsibilities

*that is on your head*  
you will have to accept responsibility  
for that

*the ball is in someone's court*  
it is some other person's responsibility

*the buck stops here*  
I accept full responsibility (sign on  
the desk of Harry S. Truman when  
president of the United States)

*to abandon ship*  
to abrogate one's responsibilities or  
to abandon a project

*to be a glutton for punishment*  
to act irresponsibly in the face of  
inevitable retribution

*to be in someone's bailiwick*  
to be some other person's responsibility

*to be in someone's shoes*  
to have another person's responsibility

*to be left holding the baby*  
to be tricked into accepting responsi-  
bility for someone else's problems

*to be one's baby*  
to be one's area of responsibility

*to be one's pigeon*  
to be one's area of responsibility

*to be tied down*  
to have responsibilities precluding alter-  
native activities

*to dump something in someone's lap*  
to impose some responsibility on an-  
other person

*to engage in empire building*  
to set out to expand the size of the  
business or bureaucratic unit for which  
one is responsible, especially as a  
means of increasing one's own import-  
ance

*to face the music*  
to accept responsibility when confron-  
ted by one's critics

*to have blood on one's hands*  
to be the person responsible for some-  
one else's predicament

*to have broad shoulders*  
to be able to cope well with responsi-  
bility

*to pass the buck*  
is an uncooperative spirit to decline  
responsibility for a matter on the  
grounds that someone else more prop-  
erly has responsibility for it

*to pin someone down*  
to find a person willing to accept  
blame or responsibility or to force a  
person to announce a decision or con-  
cede a point

*to put a burden on someone's shoulders*  
to impose responsibilities on a person

*to take a weight off someone's shoulder*  
to assist a person by relieving him of  
some responsibility

*to tread on someone's corns*  
to upset another person by interfering  
in his area of responsibility

*to tread on someone's toes*  
to upset another person by interfering  
in his area of responsibility

*to walk away from something*  
to abrogate one's responsibilities in  
regard to some matter

*to wash one's hands of something*  
to emphatically decline future responsi-  
bility

*under someone's nose*  
in a person's immediate area of re-  
sponsibility or in circumstances where  
he should have known something

*uneasy lies the head that wears a  
crown*  
responsibility involves some risks and  
some burdens (from Shakespeare's  
*HENRY IV*)

**RESULT**

*a South Sea bubble*

an unrealistic financial venture which is bound to result in total loss

*a landslide*

an electoral result involving victory or defeat by an unexpectedly large margin

*a litmus test*

an event which allows the outcome of future events to be predicted more accurately

*a patchwork quilt*

a result arising from many uncoordinated inputs

*a photo finish*

a close result in a contest

*all roads lead to Rome*

all alternatives will have the same outcome

*backwash*

consequence

*by their fruits ye shall know them*  
their reputation will be based on their results (Matthew 7:20)

*chicken and egg*

two factors each of which results in the other

*come hell or high water*

regardless of the consequences

*death blow*

incident which results in the destruction of something

*harvest*

end result of labor

*if the cap fits then wear it*

if your circumstances correspond with those described then you must endure the consequences

*one can't make bricks without straw*  
one cannot achieve results in the absence of adequate resources

*one has made one's bed and one will now have to lie on it*  
one has to bear the consequences of one's actions

*one might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb*

further action will not increase the adverse consequences already in train  
(refers to the stealing of both sheep and lambs being capital crimes under old English law)

*one shudders to think what the outcome might be*

there is great concern as to the outcome

*pie in the sky*

a hoped-for result unlikely to be achieved

*stalemate*

a final result in which neither party to a dispute is victorious

*the answer is a lemon*

the outcome is inconclusive

*the chickens are coming home to roost*  
the consequences of past actions are becoming obvious

*the fat is in the fire*

action with certain unstoppable consequences has now been initiated

*the final straw*

the latest step, which, when added to a large number of seemingly harmless previous steps, sets off a disaster resulting from the cumulative effect

*the proof of the pudding is in the eating*

the success of a venture will be measured by its results

*the straw which broke the camel's back*

the latest step, which, when added to a large number of seemingly harmless previous steps, sets off a disaster resulting from the cumulative effect

*things look black*

there is little hope of success or prosperity or a favorable outcome

*to apply pressure on someone*

to induce a person to do something which he would otherwise not do by implying adverse consequences if he does not cooperate

*to be a laid-down misere*

to be very easily accomplished and/or to be certain of outcome (refers to the declaration in certain card game undertaking to win no tricks)

*to be a mixed blessing*

to be an outcome with some desirable and some undesirable features

*to be hell bent on something*

to be very determined to achieve something, regardless of the adverse consequences

*to be on tenterhooks*

to anxiously await some result

*to be shortsighted*

not to recognize the likely consequences

*to be the kiss of death*

to be something intended to be helpful but resulting in total destruction

*to be the luck of the draw*

to be a chance result

*to bear fruit*

to result in success

*to break one's duck*

to end a spell without results

*to count one's chickens before they are hatched*

to treat as fact the expected results of a future proposal

*to cover one's hide*

to provide excess or take other evasive action in an attempt to avoid the adverse consequences of one's actions

*to cry "wolf"*

to repeatedly raise an unjustified concern with the result that one will be ignored when the circumstances change

*to dig one's own grave*

to take action which results in an unintended disaster for oneself

*to get brownie points*

to do a person a favor with the likely result that the recipient will do a favor in return in due course

*to have egg on one's face*

to be embarrassed by the results of one's own stupidity

*to hedge one's bets*

to take action involving a cost but which is designed to reduce the possible adverse consequences of some activity

*to hide under someone's skirts*

to let someone else take the consequences of one's actions

*to hold a knife at someone's throat*

to exert undue pressure on another person in an endeavor to achieve a result which would otherwise not be forthcoming

*to hold a sword at someone's throat*

to exert undue pressure on another person in an endeavor to achieve a result which would otherwise not be forthcoming

*to keep one's fingers crossed*

to hope for a good outcome

*to let someone off the hook*

to allow a person to escape the adverse consequences of his own actions

*to nurse one's bruises*

to face up to the consequences of defeat

*to open up the floodgates*

to take action which will have massive consequences

*to pay the price*  
to suffer the adverse consequences of one's acts or omissions

*to prick up one's ears*  
to suddenly start paying attention to a conversation in progress as a result of a half-heard phrase

*to raise merry hell*  
to prominently involve others in a matter in the expectation of significant results from this action

*to reap as one has sown*  
to experience the consequences of one's own actions

*to reap the whirlwind*  
to suffer the adverse consequences of a bad act

*to score a hat trick*  
to have three successive favorable outcomes

*to seal someone's fate*  
to cause a certain outcome adversely affecting a person

*to shake a tree*  
to do something in order to see what will result

*to sow the wind and reap the whirlwind*  
to make bad mistakes and to suffer the even worse consequences

*to stew in one's juice*  
to suffer the adverse consequences of one's acts or omissions

*to stir up a hornet's nest*  
to take action which results in unpleasant side-effects

*to take a caning*  
to suffer the adverse consequences of one's acts or omissions

*to throw one's weight about*  
to use one's real or imagined status in order to achieve certain results

*to tip the balance*  
to provide further information or argument which results in an issue which could have been decided either way being determined in a particular way

*to tip the scales*  
to be a factor which in combination with other factors results in a particular decision which would otherwise not have been reached

## RETIREMENT

*a golden handshake*  
a large payment in connection with or as an inducement to retirement

*in harness*  
before retirement

*swan song*  
last appearance before retirement

*to bow out*  
to retire from some activity

*to hang up one's boots*  
to retire

*to step down*  
to retire from some position

## REVENGE

*to get one's own back on someone*  
to extract revenge

*to pay someone back in his own coin*  
to retaliate in kind

*to return the compliment*  
to reciprocate or to extract revenge

*to thirst for blood*  
to be eager for revenge

*two can play at that game*  
it is possible to retaliate

## REVERSAL

*one cannot teach an old dog new tricks*  
people get irreversibly set in their ways

<i>the die is cast</i>	<i>in for a penny—in for a pound</i>
the course of action in train is irreversible	once something is commenced it ought to be finished; or if one is willing to take a small risk then one might as well take a bigger one
<i>to backpedal</i>	<i>it is a case of sink or swim</i>
to reverse to some extent previously applied policies	the attempt is worthwhile, despite the risk of failure
<i>to burn one's bridges</i>	<i>it was touch and go</i>
to do something irreversible	there were considerable risks—the objective was achieved, but only just
<i>to cross the Rubicon</i>	<i>nervous Nellies</i>
to make an irreversible decision in regard to some commitment	persons unwilling to take any risks
<i>to do a U-turn</i>	<i>not to put all one's eggs in one basket</i>
to reverse one's thinking	to spread one's risks
<i>to do an about-face</i>	<i>someone's job is on the line</i>
to reverse a previously enunciated policy	a person's career path is under consideration and/or his present position is at risk
<i>to let the genie out of the bottle</i>	<i>to be sitting on a volcano</i>
to cause something irreversible to take place	to be safe for the time being but exposed to the risk of a sudden great disaster
<i>to turn a complete somersault</i>	<i>to chance one's arm</i>
to reverse one's established policy	to take a great risk (refers to the stripes on the uniforms of non-commissioned officers)
<i>to turn around 180 degrees</i>	<i>to enter treacherous waters</i>
to completely reverse a stance	to engage in an enterprise with risks which are not obvious
<i>to turn round</i>	<i>to go out on a limb</i>
to reverse one's policy	to put oneself at risk through foolish action
<i>to turn something on its ear</i>	<i>to go through fire and water</i>
to reverse something	to undertake all attendant risks
<i>to turn something on its head</i>	<i>to jump in feet first</i>
to reverse something	to take a calculated risk
<i>to turn the tables on someone</i>	<i>to play Russian roulette</i>
to cause the relative positions of oneself and another person to be reversed	to take stupid risks
<i>to turn the tide</i>	<i>to play it safe</i>
to reverse the direction of something	to take no risks
<i>volte face</i>	<i>to play with dynamite</i>
a reversal of previously-held beliefs (French, "a turning around")	to invite trouble by virtue of one's risky conduct

**RISK**

*fools rush in where angels fear to tread*

unsophisticated persons take unwise risks in circumstances where more knowledgeable persons would exercise caution

*to push one's luck*

having already done well in something, to then take risks which can prejudice everything

*to put one's money where one's mouth is*

to back one's judgment by putting assets at risk

*to put one's reputation on the line*

to take a public stance in the realization that there is a risk that one's reputation will suffer if one is proved wrong

*to stick one's neck out*

to have the courage of one's convictions or to take a calculated risk

*to take a punt*

to take a calculated risk

*to take the plunge*

to expose oneself to certain risks

*to throw a sprat to catch a mackerel*

to risk a little in the hope of gaining much

*uneasy lies the head that wears a crown*

responsibility involves some risks and some burdens (from Shakespeare's HENRY IV)

## SADNESS

*heartache*

sadness

*heartbreak*

despair

*one's heart bleeds for someone*

one feels truly sad for a person's fate

*there is blood on the floor*

this has caused great anguish

*to beat one's breast*

to express sorrow

*to cast a shadow over something*

to introduce a note of warning or sadness in regard to some matter

*to cry one's eyes out*

to express great sadness at a situation

*to drown one's sorrows*

to drink by way of solace and in an attempt to forget some misfortune

*to set someone's teeth on edge*

to cause a person to feel unhappy at a situation

*to take something to heart*

to learn to appreciate the significance of something or to be much saddened by something

*with a heavy heart*

in sorrow

*you can eat your heart out*

you are entitled to feel sad or jealous

## SAMENESS

*a nod is the same as a wink to a blind horse*

fine distinctions are not appropriate here

*a round robin*

a series of checks from A to B, from B to C, from C to A, and so on, leaving all of them in the same net position as before

*all roads lead to Rome*

all alternatives will have the same outcome

*birds of a feather flock together*

persons of like interests gather in the same place

*Box and Cox*

two persons who are never around at the same time (from the name of a play)

*by the same token*

by way of corroboration

*in one fell swoop*

all at the same time

*not to be in the same street as someone*

not to be of comparable quality

*to all sing from the same hymnal*  
to act consistently with each other  
*to be in harmony with someone*  
to act in the same way as another person  
*to be in the same boat*  
to share a common set of difficulties  
*to be in the same league*  
to have comparable skills  
*to be in tune with someone*  
to think on the same lines as another person  
*to be on the same wavelength*  
to think on similar lines  
*to be tarred with the same brush*  
to be damned merely because of one's association with another person  
*to be with it*  
to think on the same lines as the current generation or to be fully informed  
*to follow suit*  
to do the same as others  
*to speak the same language*  
to have a good understanding and similar ideas  
*under one roof*  
under the same management

## SATISFACTION

*a seal of approval*  
confirmation that something is satisfactory  
*a warm inner glow*  
satisfaction at some achievement  
*I will have his guts for garters*  
I am extremely angry and dissatisfied with him  
*the nigger in the woodpile*  
the factor spoiling an otherwise satisfactory arrangement  
*to be a well-oiled piece of machinery*  
to be functioning very satisfactorily

*to be cream on top of the milk*  
to be an additional benefit in an already satisfactory scenario  
*to be first class*  
to be very satisfactory  
*to be icing on top of the cake*  
to be an additional benefit in an already satisfactory scenario  
*to be on course*  
to be progressing satisfactorily toward one's goal  
*to get rid of the dead wood*  
to terminate the services of unsatisfactory personnel  
*to heave a sigh a relief*  
to express satisfaction at the achievement of a solution to a difficult problem  
*to hit a sour note*  
to discover an unexpected flaw in an otherwise satisfactory piece of work  
*to jump for joy*  
to express great satisfaction  
*to make a noise about something*  
to complain or express dissatisfaction about something  
*to rub one's hands with glee*  
to express great satisfaction

## SECURITY

*a word in someone's ear*  
a confidential discussion  
*between you and me and the gatepost*  
confidentially  
*Chinese walls*  
a system to ensure that different parts of some organization do not gain access to each other's confidential information  
*cloak and dagger activity*  
secret activity  
*low-down*  
confidential information relevant to something

*no names—no packdrill*  
the identities of the parties will be kept confidential in order to protect them

*something is in the wind*  
something is going on secretly (this phrase uses the actual word "something")

*to be a closed book*  
to be a secret

*to be tight-lipped*  
to keep confidences or to be uncommunicative

*to ferret something out*  
by diligent research to discover some secret

*to have a card up one's sleeve*  
to secretly have information relevant to a transaction

*to have a heart-to-heart talk*  
to have a confidential discussion on a highly personal matter

*to hold one's cards close to one's chest*  
to keep one's plans and strategies secret

*to keep something dark*  
to keep something secret

*to keep something under one's hat*  
to maintain a confidence

*to keep something up one's sleeve*  
to secretly retain something in reserve for use in the future or at a later stage of negotiations

*to keep under wraps*  
to keep confidential

*to let the cat out of the bag*  
to reveal an embarrassing secret (refers to the exposure of cheats at fairs, attempting to pass a cat wrapped in a sack off as a piglet)

*to line one's pockets*  
to make, improperly and secretly, a profit out of some transaction

*to seal one's lips*  
to keep a confidence

*to tell tales out of school*  
to deliberately leak a secret

*to undermine someone's position*  
to injure another person's reputation and influence by unfair and secret tactics

*wheels within wheels*  
secret machinations

## SITUATION

*a Mexican standoff*  
a situation where neither of two parties is making a move

*a gambit*  
an opening move in a competitive situation which involves short-term losses in the expectation of long-term gains

*a place in the sun*  
a favorable situation

*a springboard*  
a situation from which one intends to make a rapid advance

*a straight face*  
a facial expression which does not reveal one's thoughts in a humorous situation

*a stranglehold*  
a firm grip on a commercial situation, effectively freezing out a competitor

*catch-22*  
a situation made impossible because it requires as a prior fulfillment something which does not exist until that condition is satisfied (title of a novel by Joseph Heller)

*every cloud has a silver lining*  
there are benefits even in seemingly adverse situations

*out of the frying pan into the fire*  
from one bad situation to an even worse one

<i>something is rotten in the state of Denmark</i>	<i>to inflame a situation</i> to aggravate a situation
the situation is not correct (from Shakespeare's HAMLET)	<i>to keep an eye on the ball</i> to monitor a fast-changing situation
<i>that is the way the chips fall</i>	<i>to keep one's eye on something</i> to monitor a situation
that is the actual situation	<i>to keep up with the ball</i> to stay on top of the situation
<i>that is the way the cookie crumbles</i>	<i>to knock someone off his perch</i> to displace a person from his leadership position in some competitive situation
that is the actual situation	<i>to pour oil on troubled waters</i> to calm down a situation
<i>the nature of the beast</i>	<i>to pour gasoline on the flames</i> to make a bad situation worse
the reality of the situation	<i>to pull someone's chestnuts out of the fire</i> to retrieve a situation
<i>to add fuel to the fire</i>	<i>to pull something out of the fire</i> to salvage something in a seemingly hopeless situation
to make a bad situation worse	<i>to put a match to petrol</i> to make a bad situation worse
<i>to be in command</i>	<i>to put jam on someone's bread</i> to make a good situation even better
to be on top of a situation	<i>to put one's best face on something</i> to focus on the positive features surrounding a basically disastrous situation
<i>to be quick on one's feet</i>	<i>to put someone in the picture</i> to fill a person in with the background of a situation
to cleverly take advantage of a situation	<i>to ride out the storm</i> to come safely through some dangerous situation
<i>to bite the bullet</i>	<i>to salvage something out of the wreck</i> to achieve some minor benefits out of a disastrous situation
to face up to the difficulties of a situation	<i>to see the light</i> to understand the real situation
<i>to breathe down someone's neck</i>	<i>to see the score</i> to appreciate the reality of a situation
to cause annoyance to another person by remaining in his vicinity or by supervising him too closely; or to be narrowly behind another person in some competitive situation	
<i>to cross a bridge only when one comes to it</i>	
to await the crystallization of a situation before sorting it out	
<i>to cry one's eyes out</i>	
to express great sadness at a situation	
<i>to feed the fire</i>	
to exacerbate a situation	
<i>to fight fire with fire</i>	
to counter a dangerous situation by making an equally dangerous move	
<i>to fish in troubled waters</i>	
to profit from a disturbed situation	
<i>to have a good nose for business</i>	
to be able to identify profitable business situations	
<i>to have the whip hand</i>	
to be in control of a situation	

*to see which way the wind is blowing*  
to establish the factors relevant to a situation

*to set someone's teeth on edge*  
to cause a person to feel unhappy at a situation

*to squeeze the last drop out of something*

to get the maximum advantage out of some favorable situation

*to strike while the iron is hot*  
to take advantage of a situation which cannot last

*to suck the lemon dry*  
to get the maximum advantage out of some favorable situation

*to underplay some situation*  
to hold something in reserve

## SKILL

*a chessmaster*  
a clever strategist

*a dark horse*  
a person with unsuspected talents

*a pea and thimble trick*  
a clever fraud committed in the presence of its victim without this being obvious at the time

*a shaggy-dog story*  
an amusing anecdote with an unexpected ending, often involving talking animals given certain human skills

*one's long suit*  
one's main skills

*the blind leading the blind*  
persons without the necessary skills for a task purporting to impart those skills to others

*to be a chess game*  
to be a complex exercise, requiring great skill

*to be child's play*  
to be easy or to require only elementary skills and knowledge

*to be great guns at something*  
to be very skilled at something

*to be hot stuff*  
to be skillful or very passionate

*to be in the same league*  
to have comparable skills

*to be quick on one's feet*  
to cleverly take advantage of a situation

*to carve out a niche for oneself*  
to deliberately create an opportunity to use one's talents effectively

*to find one's feet*  
to develop one's skills

*to find one's niche*  
to find the opportunity to use one's talents

*to hide one's light under a bushel*  
to keep others in ignorance of one's skills and experience

*to keep one's hands in*  
to engage in activities which reinforce skills which one has previously acquired

*to look to one's laurels*  
to be careful not to lose one's reputation for some skill

*to make a name for oneself*  
to earn a good reputation by virtue of some skill

*to raise something to a fine art form*  
to become very clever at doing something

*to rub off on someone*  
to benefit a person through an association which increases his skills

*to score a point*  
to make a clever contribution in the course of debate

*to separate the men from the boys*  
to distinguish between those with and without certain skills

*to take someone's measure*  
to sum up a person's character or skills

*tour de force*  
feat of skill or strength (French, "feat of strength")

## SLOWNESS

*at a snail's pace*  
very slowly

*the mills of God grind slowly*  
retribution may be delayed but is inevitable

*to be slow off the mark*  
to be slow to start something

*to drag one's feet*  
to perform unduly slowly

*to drag one's heels*  
to perform unduly slowly

*to drag the chain*  
to perform unduly slowly

*to inch forward*  
to make slow but steady progress

*to lose steam*  
to slow down

*to sink slowly in the West*  
to fail gradually

*to slowly bleed to death*  
to be heading in gradual steps toward total ruin

## SMALLNESS

*a backwater*  
a place of little activity

*a bunfight*  
a minor and relatively friendly skirmish

*a chink of light*  
a small hope of a solution or breakthrough

*a dogfight*  
a small side-skirmish, especially between airplanes

*a fat chance*  
little hope

*a fox hole*  
space which is really too small for a person's needs or comfort

*a handful*  
a small number

*a pawn*  
a person of small importance who is manipulated by others

*a tempest in a teacup*  
a controversy about a minor matter but one which looms large in the minds of the parties

*a toehold*  
an opportunity small in itself but with the potential to lead to bigger things

*a trickle*  
a small amount, in gradual stages

*give him an inch and he will take a mile*

make him a small concession and he will abuse it by taking much more

*in for a penny—in for a pound*  
once something is commenced it ought to be finished; or if one is willing to take a small risk then one might as well take a bigger one

*Lilliputian*  
small (refers to a place in Swift's GULLIVER'S TRAVELS)

*not a jot*  
not even a small amount (refers to the Greek letter iota or i)

*not to be a hanging matter*  
to be only a minor mistake

*one's heart is not in some cause*  
one has little enthusiasm for some cause

*people stayed away in droves*  
few people came

*pintsize*  
small

*tall oaks from little acorns grow*  
 even major enterprises have to have small beginnings (from "Lines written for a School Declamation" by David Everett)

*the tail wagging the dog*  
 a minor aspect with disproportionate effect on a major aspect

*there is no room to swing a cat*  
 this place is very small (actually refers to a cat-o'-nine-tails)

*to be a big fish in a little pond*  
 to be a person holding an important office but in an unimportant organization

*to be a crack in the wall*  
 to represent a small unintended opportunity which can be exploited

*to be a small cog in a large wheel*  
 to be a relatively unimportant person in a large organization

*to be chicken feed*  
 to be small and unimportant

*to be the thin end of the wedge*  
 by conceding a small point, to create an undesirable precedent for much larger issues

*to be the tip of the iceberg*  
 to be only a small portion of a much larger but less obvious whole

*to bend the rules*  
 to overlook minor infractions of the rules

*to chisel away at something*  
 to reduce the size of something in a series of small stages

*to cut no ice with someone*  
 to have little effect on a person

*to decimate*  
 to greatly reduce in size (often used in the sense of "to reduce to one tenth," although the original meaning was "to reduce by one tenth")

*to earn peanuts*  
 to get a reward which is far too small in relation to the value of the services rendered

*to encapsulate some idea*  
 to reduce the essential points of a complicated proposal to a small number of words

*to fiddle at the edges*  
 to do some relatively minor things which do not deal with the substance of a problem

*to find a needle in a haystack*  
 to find something when the probability of finding it is very small

*to have an eagle eye*  
 to be able to notice small mistakes very readily

*to hold someone on a short leash*  
 to give a person very little authority

*to live from hand to mouth*  
 being in poor financial circumstances, to survive with little by way of safety margin

*to look down the barrel of a gun*  
 to be given little choice in a matter

*to look for a needle in a haystack*  
 to attempt something with a very small chance of success

*to make mountains out of molehills*  
 to treat a minor problem as though it were a major disaster

*to miss the sharks while netting the minnows*  
 to succeed in minor aspects but fail in the ones that really matter

*to nitpick*  
 to criticize a person in respect to very minor matters

*to only scratch the surface*  
 to deal with only a small portion of a much larger whole

*to pay something back with interest*  
to return a small favor with a bigger favor or to extract retribution of greater value than the circumstances warrant

*to push someone over the brink*  
by a small action to cause the absolute ruin (financially or emotionally) of someone already in peril

*to salvage something out of the wreck*  
to achieve some minor benefits out of a disastrous situation

*to sell one's birthright for a mess of pottage*  
through foolishness to exchange something of substance for something of little value (Genesis 25)

*to slug it out*  
to engage in a minor skirmish

*to snap at someone's heels*  
to be a minor irritation to a person

*to test the water*  
to try out an idea in a small way

*to thrash with a feather*  
to award only a minor punishment for a very serious offense

*to throw a sprat to catch a mackerel*  
to risk a little in the hope of gaining much

*to throw out the baby with the bath-water*

to discard a major benefit in the course of obtaining a comparatively minor advantage

*to throw someone a few crumbs*  
to fob a person off with a few symbolic but unimportant concessions

*to tinker at the edges*  
to make minor or cosmetic changes without affecting the substance

*two men and a dog*  
very few people

## SPEECH

*a nod and a wink*

a sign that understanding has been reached in a matter which in the interests of discretion has not been discussed aloud

*a shaggy-dog story*

an amusing anecdote with an unexpected ending, often involving talking animals given certain human skills

*a word in someone's ear*  
a confidential discussion

*burning question*

a much discussed question

*not to mince words*  
to speak bluntly

*not to put too fine a point on it*  
speaking bluntly

*shoot!*

go on, speak!

*speak softly and carry a big stick*  
be polite to your potential enemies but maintain an active and visible defense capability (from a speech by Theodore Roosevelt in 1901)

*talk of the devil*

here is the person we were just discussing

*to bandy something about*

to discuss something in a light-hearted manner

*to bare one's soul*

talkatively to give a revealing insight into oneself

*to bite someone's nose off*

to speak to a person aggressively

*to break the ice*

to take the initiative in starting discussions

*to buy into some argument*

to seek to participate in some discussion

*to chew fat*

to eat and talk together

- to draw a veil over something*  
pointedly to avoid discussing something
- to drop names*  
to slip names of celebrities allegedly known to the speaker into a conversation in an attempt to impress
- to find one's tongue*  
to overcome one's shyness and speak
- to get down to brass tacks*  
to discuss the aspects which really matter
- to have a bone to pick*  
to have a grievance which requires discussion
- to have a heart-to-heart talk*  
to have a confidential discussion on a highly personal matter
- to have a loose tongue*  
to speak foolishly or indiscreetly
- to have a sharp tongue*  
to speak one's mind in forceful language
- to hijack a debate*  
to involve oneself in the public discussion of some matter and turn that discussion to one's advantage
- to keep one's mouth shut*  
not to discuss some matter
- to lay a proposal on the table*  
to make a proposal available for discussion or to adjourn discussion on a proposal for an indefinite period
- to open the batting*  
to be the first in a series of persons speaking or doing something
- to pontificate*  
to speak as if with great authority and with an assumed air of infallibility
- to shoot from the hip*  
to speak frankly and openly

- to shoot one's mouth off*  
to speak without thinking
- to skate around some subject*  
by diversionary tactics to avoid discussing some subject
- to snap someone's head off*  
to speak to a person aggressively
- to speak one's mind*  
to express one's views frankly and forcefully
- to speak the same language*  
to have a good understanding and similar ideas
- to speak with forked tongues*  
to utter half-truths with the intention of misleading the listener
- to strangle some discussion*  
to cut off some unfinished discussion
- to talk nineteen to the dozen*  
to engage in much idle chatter
- to talk one's book*  
to present arguments which, while plausible, are really designed to foster one's vested interest
- to talk shop*  
to discuss business or professional matters on a social occasion
- to talk the hind leg off a donkey*  
to talk excessively
- to talk through one's hat*  
to say things which demonstrate the speaker's ignorance of the subject
- to talk turkey*  
to talk realistically
- to waste one's breath*  
to talk or request something without achieving anything
- were your ears burning?*  
we were discussing you

**SPEED**

*at a break-neck pace*

very fast

*at a rate of knots*

very fast

*before you can say "Jack Robinson"*  
very quickly

*before one can say "knife"*  
very quickly

*by leaps and bounds*

with surprisingly fast progress

*fast and furious*

in an exciting way, in quick succession

*full steam ahead!*

get going as fast as possible!

*nimble-footed*

quick to change the direction of one's activities when circumstances warrant

*speed the plow!*

let us get on with this as fast as possible!

*tailspin*

very fast fall

*to achieve a flying start*

to get operational very quickly

*to be a money spinner*

to produce large profits easily and quickly

*to be all systems "go"*

to go ahead as fast as possible

*to be quick on one's feet*

to cleverly take advantage of a situation

*to be quick on the draw*

to act precipitately

*to catapult to fame*

to achieve fame unexpectedly quickly

*to come in thick and fast*

to arrive quickly and in great volume

*to cut corners*

to lower one's standards in order to complete something more quickly

*to go hot foot*  
to do something fast

*to go post haste*  
to go very fast

*to have to fly*  
to need to leave in order to reach the next destination quickly

*to keep an eye on the ball*  
to monitor a fast-changing situation

*to lose money hand over fist*  
to lose money very fast and convincingly

*to take shortcuts*  
to do something by a faster but less thorough method

**STANDARD**

*a benchmark*

a standard by which something is measured

*a hallmark*

a standard (refers to the official assay mark on gold and silver, originally put on at the Goldsmiths' Hall)

*a yardstick*

a standard by which something is measured

*guiding light*

yardstick for ethical behavior

*not to be in the race*

to lack the required standard

*one can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear*

it is impossible to manufacture something of a high standard without appropriate raw materials

*the Plimsoll line*

the standard

*the silly season*

the holiday period, when hard news is scarce and journalistic standards are lowered

*the touchstone*

the standard

*to be below par*

to be less than the desired standard

*to be beyond the pale*

to be socially unacceptable, especially for unacceptable standards or behavior

*to be up to scratch*

to be of the required standard

*to be up to the mark*

to be of the right standard

*to cut corners*

to lower one's standards in order to complete something more quickly

*to lift one's game*

to raise the standard of one's performance

*to play the last card in the pack*

to lower one's standards in a final desperate effort

*to really scrape the bottom of the barrel*

to lower one's standards because one is short of important or relevant issues

*to weed some group out*

to get rid of some elements not meeting a desired standard

## START

*a baptism of fire*

the commencement of an operation which presented great difficulty

*from a to z*

from start to finish

*from alpha to omega*

from start to finish (refers to the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet)

*from go to whoa*

from start to finish (refers to the command given to horses)

*from the word "go"*

from the beginning

*in for a penny—in for a pound*

once something is commenced it ought to be finished; or if one is willing to take a small risk then one might as well take a bigger one

*it is on for young and old*

the excitement has started

*tall oaks from little acorns grow*

even major enterprises have to have small beginnings (from "Lines written for a School Declamation" by David Everett)

*the curtain rises on something*

something is about to start

*the rot set in*

conditions started to deteriorate

*to achieve a flying start*

to get operational very quickly

*to be back to scratch*

to have to start all over again

*to be first off the mark*

to start ahead of all others

*to be itching to go*

to be highly enthusiastic and keen to start

*to be slow off the mark*

to be slow to start something

*to be the dawn of a new day*

to be the start of a different regime

*to be the first cab off the rank*

to start ahead of all others

*to break the ice*

to take the initiative in starting discussions

*to come out into the open*

to start being frank

*to enter a long road*

to commence a task which will take a long time

*to enter the home stretch*

to commence the last stage

- to get in on the act*  
to participate in some activity started by others
- to get the show on the road*  
to commence a planned activity
- to get to first base*  
to succeed in getting others to start comprehending a problem
- to go back to square one*  
to start all over again
- to jump the gun*  
to start before one is meant to
- to kick off*  
to start some action
- to leap in*  
to commence an activity without considering the wisdom of doing so or the best way to proceed
- to move on to greener pastures*  
to commence a new, better career
- to prick up one's ears*  
to suddenly start paying attention to a conversation in progress as a result of a half-heard phrase
- to set sail*  
to commence a voyage
- to show someone the ropes*  
to teach a beginner how to do something
- to start from scratch*  
to commence something without the benefit of any past activity
- to start off on the right foot*  
to commence an operation with great care to do it correctly
- to start the ball rolling*  
to commence and enthusiastically advance an activity involving people
- to start to bite*  
to start to be effective

*to start with a blank sheet of paper*  
to commence an exercise without being bound by any established practices

*to turn the corner*  
to commence being successful after initial failures

## STRATEGY

*a chessmaster*  
a clever strategist

*a listening post*  
a place where information of strategic value can be collected

*opening gambit*  
the first in a series of strategic moves (a tautological expression which also involves a misunderstanding of a technical chess term)

*to be in a commanding position*  
to have a strategic advantage

*to derail some strategy*  
to cause a strategy to fail

*to go down a particular road*  
to adopt a particular strategy

*to hold one's cards close to one's chest*  
to keep one's plans and strategies secret

*to play it by ear*  
to develop one's strategy to always fit in with circumstances as they change from time to time

## STUPIDITY

*a death wish*  
the contemplation of action so foolish that it is likely to lead to utter disaster

*a simple Simon*  
a foolish, gullible or half-witted person

*a wild goose chase*  
a foolish search for something which does not exist

<i>beadle-dom</i>	<i>to judge a book by its cover</i>
stupid officiousness	foolishly to go only by superficial appearances
<i>boneheaded</i>	<i>to make an ass of oneself</i>
stupid	to act stupidly in public
<i>cock-eyed</i>	<i>to need to have one's head read</i>
stupid	to be foolish
<i>hare-brained</i>	<i>to paint oneself into a corner</i>
wildly stupid	to foolishly put oneself into a position from which escape is impossible
<i>not to have an ounce of sense</i>	<i>to play Russian roulette</i>
to be stupid	to take stupid risks
<i>people in glass houses should not throw stones</i>	<i>to play with fire</i>
those who are less than perfect are foolish to criticize others	to invite trouble through one's foolish conduct
<i>someone's brain needs washing</i>	<i>to push water uphill</i>
a person is very silly	to foolishly attempt the impossible
<i>to be mutton dressed up as lamb</i>	<i>to put one's foot in it</i>
to foolishly pretend to be younger	to make a foolish mistake
<i>to be only ten pence in the shilling</i>	<i>to put one's foot in one's mouth</i>
to be slightly stupid	to say something foolish
<i>to burn one's fingers</i>	<i>to sell one's birthright for a mess of pottage</i>
to lose money through foolishness	through foolishness to exchange something of substance for something of little value (Genesis 25)
<i>to earn a dunce's cap</i>	<i>to shoot oneself in the foot</i>
to do something stupid	to act in a foolish way and thus harm one's own cause
<i>to get under someone's skin</i>	<i>to sign one's own death warrant</i>
to annoy another person through stupidity	to foolishly do something which is inevitably bound to lead to utter disaster
<i>to go out on a limb</i>	<i>to sow wild oats</i>
to put oneself at risk though foolish action	to indulge in foolish behavior while a young adult
<i>to go overboard</i>	<i>why keep a dog and bark oneself?</i>
to act foolishly and in an excessive way	it is silly to pay for assistance and then do things personally
<i>to have a bird brain</i>	
to be stupid	
<i>to have a loose tongue</i>	
to speak foolishly or indiscreetly	
<i>to have egg on one's face</i>	
to be embarrassed by the results of one's own stupidity	

## SUCCESS

*a breakthrough*

success in overcoming resistance to a proposal

*a field day*

a very enjoyable and successful occasion

*a flash in the pan*

something which begins promisingly but does not last (refers to the priming of old guns)

*a gambit*

an opening move in the competitive situation which involves short-term losses in the expectation of long-term gains

*a highflyer*

an ambitious and/or successful person

*a landslide*

an electoral result involving victory or defeat by an unexpectedly large margin

*a Pyrrhic victory*

a win which costs more than if there had been a loss (refers to the battle at which King Pyrrhus of Epirus defeated the Romans at Asculum)

*a roller coaster ride*

a series of successes followed by failures

*a walkover*

an easy victory

*chalk it up!*

the success was unexpected

*front-runner*

person expected to win

*it is in the bag*

the enterprise has succeeded

*it is mind over matter*

one's resolve to overcome suffering will succeed

*it is pointing in the right direction*

success looks likely

*more power to your elbow*

may your praiseworthy efforts lead to success

*stalemate*

a final result in which neither party to a dispute is victorious

*the proof of the pudding is in the eating*

the success of a venture will be measured by its results

*the royal road to success*

the way of attaining success without effort

*things look black*

there is little hope of success or prosperity or a favorable outcome

*to be a passport to success*

to be a means of achieving success

*to be going great guns*

to be making very successful progress

*to be home and hosed*

to have won

*to be on a winner*

to have faith in, give support to and/or invest in a project which proves to be successful

*to be on the crest of a wave*

to enjoy success which may not last

*to be successful beyond one's wildest dreams*

to be far more successful than one could have expected

*to be unable to take a trick*

to be unable to achieve success in anything

*to bear fruit*

to result in success

*to bring home the bacon*

to be successful

*to fight tooth and nail*

to strive very hard to win

*to get on stream*

to now operate successfully following the end of a settling-in period

<i>to get to first base</i>	<i>to make the grade</i>
to succeed in getting others to start comprehending a problem	to succeed
<i>to go for the gold</i>	<i>to miss the sharks while netting the minnows</i>
to aim for victory (refers to Olympic medals)	to success in minor aspects but fail in the ones that really matter
<i>to have a cast-iron case</i>	<i>to pan out</i>
to be absolutely assured of victory in legal proceedings	to succeed
<i>to have had a good innings</i>	<i>to pass with flying colors</i>
to have had a successful life	to be very successful
<i>to have someone by the throat</i>	<i>to pay off</i>
to claim victory over an opponent	to be successful
<i>to have someone on toast</i>	<i>to play the trump card</i>
to be victorious over a person	to make a final move, thereby defeating one's opponents
<i>to have the plug pulled out from under one</i>	<i>to pull something off</i>
to have a successful activity destroyed by the actions of someone else	to achieve success in some enterprise
<i>to hold a winning hand</i>	<i>to raise the stake</i>
to be in an unbeatable position to defeat others	to increase the amount of potential gain or loss in a project
<i>to hold all the aces</i>	<i>to rest on one's laurels</i>
to be in an unbeatable position to defeat others	to use a reputation for success earned in earlier times as a substitute for current endeavor
<i>to hold all the cards</i>	<i>to ride high</i>
to be assured of victory	to be successful but vulnerable
<i>to hold someone at bay</i>	<i>to ride the wave</i>
to successfully resist an attacker	to be successful for the time being
<i>to hold the trump card</i>	<i>to score a hat trick</i>
to be in an unbeatable position to defeat others	to have three successive favorable outcomes
<i>to look for a needle in a haystack</i>	<i>to show dividends</i>
to attempt something with a very small chance of success	to be successful
<i>to make a good fist of something</i>	<i>to smell blood</i>
to be successful in a difficult task	to divine imminent victory
<i>to make a killing</i>	<i>to stitch up a deal</i>
to be in a very successful business venture	to successfully conclude a deal
<i>to make or break someone</i>	<i>to strike gold</i>
to be a factor leading either to a person's success or to his failure, with no intermediate position	to have one's efforts suddenly rewarded by great success
	<i>to strike pay dirt</i>
	to become successful

*to strike the right chord*  
to appeal successfully to someone's emotions

*to throw a sprat to catch a mackerel*  
to risk a little in the hope of gaining much

*to turn the corner*  
to commence being successful after initial failures

*to win by a long chalk*  
to win very conclusively

*to win hands down*  
to win very convincingly

*to win some rounds*  
to be partly successful

*to win the prize in a canter*  
to win very easily

*to wrap up a deal*  
to bring a deal to a successful conclusion

*when one's ship comes in*  
when one's business venture is successfully completed or when luck arrives

## SURPRISE

*a bombshell*  
an unpleasant surprise

*a thunderbolt*  
a surprise

*he would turn in his grave*  
he would have been very surprised or displeased if he had known while still alive

*not to bat an eyelid*  
to fail to express any surprise

*someone's eyes popped*  
a person expressed great surprise

*the mind boggles*  
this is astonishing

*to be an eye opener*  
to be a surprise

*to catch someone off guard*  
to surprise a person (a fencing term)

*to catch someone on the hop*  
to take a person by surprise

*to raise one's eyebrows*  
to express one's utter astonishment

*to rub one's eyes*  
to express astonishment

*to take one's breath away*  
to greatly surprise or astonish

## TRUTH

*a skeleton in the cupboard*  
an unpleasant truth the knowledge of which has been deliberately suppressed

*a tall story*  
an interesting but untrue and unbelievable tale

*a telltale sign*  
a visible indication revealing true facts despite efforts at concealment

*apocryphal*  
fictitious but resembling truth and illustrating a point

*out of the mouths of babes*  
(as indiscreetly revealed) the truth

*to be an ostrich*  
to refuse to face up to an unpleasant truth (refers to the reputed habit of ostriches in danger)

*to be too close to home*  
to be too near the truth to be welcome

*to beat about the bush*  
to hide the unpleasant truth

*to bring something into focus*  
to put some matter into its proper context and explain its true significance

*to bury one's head in the sand*  
to refuse to face up to an unpleasant truth (refers to the reputed habit of ostriches in danger)

<i>to cloak something</i>	<i>a shaggy-dog story</i>
to disguise the true nature of something	an amusing anecdote with an unexpected ending, often involving talking animals given certain human skills
<i>to drag someone by the head and ears</i>	<i>a wild card</i>
to force a person to reveal the true facts	an unexpected development
<i>to flush out the facts</i>	<i>an Aladdin's cave</i>
to ascertain, after some effort, the truth of some matter	a place full of unexpected treasure
<i>to open someone's eyes to something</i>	<i>chalk it up!</i>
to alert another person to the truth of something	the success was unexpected
<i>to read between the lines</i>	<i>it's a small world</i>
to appreciate the true significance of something not put into words	it is surprising to meet people one knows in unexpected places
<i>to sell someone a pup</i>	<i>manna from heaven</i>
to cheat a person in a transaction, especially by misrepresentation as to the true value of something	unexpected benefits (Exodus 16:15)
<i>to show one's true colors</i>	<i>the answer to a maiden's prayer</i>
to disclose one's real character or beliefs	an unexpected but very welcome happening
<i>to speak with forked tongues</i>	<i>to be a bolt from the blue</i>
to utter half-truths with the intention of misleading the listener	to be a totally unexpected event
<i>to swallow the line</i>	<i>to be one in the eye for someone</i>
to accept as truth the story being proffered	to represent an unexpected and unwelcome defeat
<i>to take something as gospel</i>	<i>to be one out of the box</i>
to believe that something is true	to be unexpectedly superb
<i>to unmask someone</i>	<i>to be shell-shocked</i>
to discover a person's true identity	to be stunned by unexpected bad news
<b>UNEXPECTED HAPPENINGS</b>	
<i>a can of worms</i>	<i>to be stopped in one's tracks</i>
a heterogeneous collection of unexpected problems	suddenly and unexpectedly to be prevented from carrying on with a project
<i>a landslide</i>	<i>to be the sting in the tail</i>
an electoral result involving victory or defeat by an unexpectedly large margin	to be the unexpected unpleasant conclusion
<i>a pit of disaster</i>	<i>to catapult to fame</i>
great and unexpected misfortune	to achieve fame unexpectedly quickly

<i>a shaggy-dog story</i>	<i>to catch someone in the net</i>
an amusing anecdote with an unexpected ending, often involving talking animals given certain human skills	to unexpectedly involve a particular person in the course of activity designed to involve many others
<i>a wild card</i>	<i>to come out of the blue</i>
an unexpected development	to be totally unexpected
<i>an Aladdin's cave</i>	
a place full of unexpected treasure	
<i>chalk it up!</i>	
the success was unexpected	
<i>it's a small world</i>	
it is surprising to meet people one knows in unexpected places	
<i>manna from heaven</i>	
unexpected benefits (Exodus 16:15)	
<i>the answer to a maiden's prayer</i>	
an unexpected but very welcome happening	
<i>to be a bolt from the blue</i>	
to be a totally unexpected event	
<i>to be one in the eye for someone</i>	
to represent an unexpected and unwelcome defeat	
<i>to be one out of the box</i>	
to be unexpectedly superb	
<i>to be shell-shocked</i>	
to be stunned by unexpected bad news	
<i>to be stopped in one's tracks</i>	
suddenly and unexpectedly to be prevented from carrying on with a project	
<i>to be the sting in the tail</i>	
to be the unexpected unpleasant conclusion	
<i>to catapult to fame</i>	
to achieve fame unexpectedly quickly	
<i>to catch someone in the net</i>	
to unexpectedly involve a particular person in the course of activity designed to involve many others	
<i>to come out of the blue</i>	
to be totally unexpected	

*to crawl out of the woodwork*  
to turn up unexpectedly and in large numbers

*to cut the ground from under someone's feet*

to unexpectedly withdraw support and in the process cause embarrassment or to demolish a person's case

*to drop a brick*

to make a sudden shattering and unexpected announcement

*to founder on the shoals of something*  
to come to grief because of unexpected dangers

*to hit a sour note*

to discover an unexpected flaw in an otherwise satisfactory piece of work

*to keep one's head*

to remain calm in a crisis or to unexpectedly retain an elected or appointed position

*to open up a Pandora's box*

to do something which produces all sorts of undesired and unexpected side-effects (refers to the woman in Greek mythology who brought misery to mankind; the box contained human ills)

*to pull a rabbit out of the hat*

to produce an unexpected and seemingly miraculous but highly desirable solution

*to pull the rug out from under someone*  
to unexpectedly withdraw support and in the process cause embarrassment

*to take a nosedive*

to suddenly and unexpectedly fall steeply

*to throw a cat among the pigeons*  
to cause consternation by revealing an unpleasant and unexpected fact

*to throw a spanner into the works*  
to cause an unexpected complication

*to turn up trumps*

to finish up better than expected or to experience unexpected good luck

*to turn white*  
to express shock at unexpected news  
*to vanish into thin air*  
unexpectedly to disappear  
*windfall*  
unexpected good fortune

## UNREALISTIC IDEAS

*a South Sea bubble*

an unrealistic financial venture which is bound to result in total loss

*moonshine*

unrealistic ideas

*someone's eyes are bigger than his stomach*

a person is unrealistic

*to be in cloud cuckoo land*

to be mad or to have unrealistic expectations

*to bite off more than one can chew*  
to be overly ambitious and thus unrealistic as to one's capabilities

*to chase rainbows*

to be quite unrealistic

*to have one's head in the clouds*  
to be unrealistic

*to shoot for the stars*  
to be unrealistic

*to talk turkey*

to talk realistically

*to want to jump all one's fences at once*

to be unrealistic

## UNWELCOME

*a bible basher*

a person who makes unwelcome attempts to force his religious beliefs on others

*a blessing in disguise*

an unwelcome but salutary experience

*stiff cheese!*

circumstances which may be unwelcome but which will not be altered and in respect of which no great sympathy is felt

*the affair blew up*

certain unwelcome facts have become publicly available

*to be one in the eye for someone*  
to represent an unexpected and unwelcome defeat

*to be too close to home*

to be too near the truth to be welcome

*to penetrate someone's thick skull*  
to make a person understand something difficult or acknowledge something unwelcome

*to play gooseberry*

to act as an unwelcome chaperon

*to plead the Fifth Amendment*

to refuse to answer an unwelcome question (refers to the Fifth Amendment of the United States Constitution, which provides protection against self-incrimination)

*to put someone back in his box*

to make it clear to a person that his views are not welcome

*to rear its ugly head*

to make an unwelcome appearance

*to send someone away with a flea in his ear*

to give a person frank but unwelcome facts (refers to fleas trapped in the armor of ancient knights)

## WAITING

*hold your horses!*

just wait a little!

*to be on tenterhooks*

to anxiously await some result

*to bite one's fingernails*

to anxiously await a decision

*to cool one's heels*

to be kept waiting

*to cross a bridge only when one comes to it*

to await the crystallization of a situation before sorting it out

*to have one's beady eyes on something*  
to await the chance to acquire something to which one is not properly entitled

*to kick one's heels*

to be kept waiting

*to mark time*

to do nothing while awaiting developments

*to see which way the cat jumps*  
to await developments

*to sweat it out*

to await one's fate calmly

*to wait for the other shoe to drop*  
to await the seemingly imminent and inevitable (refers to a man undressing, disturbing a neighbor by dropping one shoe, then frustrating his expectation by putting the other shoe down gently)

*to wait in the wings*

to be prepared to stay unobtrusive till the appropriate time for action arrives

*to wait two shakes of a lamb's tail*  
to wait just a few moments

*to wait with bated breath*

to be excited in anticipation of some event

## WEALTH

*a banana republic*

a country with a poor economy

*a goldmine*

a source of much wealth or of many facts

*a pot of gold*

wealth

*life raft*

financial assistance sufficient to avert insolvency

*not to be made of money*

not to be wealthy

*not to have a brass razoo*

to be very poor

*not to have the wherewithal to rub**two sticks together*

to be very poor

*rags to riches*

the transition from poverty to wealth

*to be a gay dog*

to lead an idle life while flaunting the symbols of wealth

*to be born with a silver spoon in one's mouth*

to be brought up by wealthy parents

*to have money flowing out of one's ears*

to be very rich

*to just hold one's head above water*

to cope with problems but with little margin to spare or to stay solvent

*to live from hand to mouth*

being in poor financial circumstances, to survive with little by way of safety margin

*to stay afloat*

to remain solvent

*well-heeled*

rich

## WELCOME

*any port in a storm*

anything which helps to avoid difficulties is welcome

*the answer to a maiden's prayer*

an unexpected but very welcome happening

*the more the merrier*

everyone is welcome

*the red-carpet treatment*

courtesies extended to a person to make him feel important and welcome

*to be a sight for sore eyes*

to be something welcome

*to be better than a poke in the eye with a burnt stick*

to be particularly welcome

*to come in out of the cold*

to be welcomed into a group

*to kill the fatted calf*

to demonstrate welcome and forgiveness on a person's return (Luke 15:23)

*to pipe someone on board*

to welcome a person

## WORK AND EFFORT

*a dry hole*

an exercise which after much effort proves fruitless

*a fifth columnist*

a person using his position of trust to work for a rival cause

*a scattergun approach*

an effort going here, there and everywhere, instead of being properly targeted

*a willing horse*

a cheerful worker

*an unholy alliance*

a working relationship for a nefarious purpose between unlikely partners

*blood, sweat and tears*

hard work and much effort

*donkey work*

necessary but uninspiring routine work

*elbow grease*

hard manual work

*flat out like a lizard*

to be hard at work (a play on words, not a simile)

*good chemistry*

a good ability to work closely together

*harvest*

end result of labor

*it is neck or nothing*

a desperate effort is called for

*it will all come out in the wash*

the facts will emerge as work proceeds

*more power to your elbow*

may your praiseworthy efforts lead to success

*Parkinson's law*

the principle that work expands to match the work capacity available (title of a book by Prof. C. Northcote Parkinson)

*put your back into it!*

work energetically!

*search for the Holy Grail*

work toward a difficult goal (refers to a vessel supposedly used by Christ at the last supper and featuring in the Arthurian legends)

*the royal road to success*

the way of attaining success without effort

*to be a busy bee*

to work with great diligence

*to be at the coal face*

to be in the place where the real work is done

*to be geared up to do something*

to have equipment, labor and know-how in place adequate for some task

*to be the salt of the earth*

to be a person whose ordinary efforts benefit the community (Matthew 5:13)

*to beaver away*

to work diligently at some task

*to break the back of a task*

to complete the bulk of the work

*to burn the candle at both ends*

to work excessively long hours

*to burn the midnight oil*

to work late into the night

*to caste one's bread upon the waters*  
not to expect gratitude or recognition for one's good works (Ecclesiastes 11:1)*to compete on all fours with someone*  
to strive on equal terms*to do the leg work*

to carry out the tedious part of a project

*to draw the nets closer*

to intensify one's efforts

*to fight tooth and nail*

to strive very hard to win

*to gain the upper hand*

to attain, after some effort, an advantage over another person

*to go along for the ride*

to seek to benefit from a project in which others contribute the effort

*to go the extra mile*

to work beyond the call of duty

*to have too much on one's plate*

to be unable to cope with one's workload

*to hit a sour note*

to discover an unexpected flaw in an otherwise satisfactory piece of work

*to keep one's head down*

to work very diligently

*to keep one's nose to the grindstone*

to work with particular diligence

*to keep out of someone's hair*

to let another person get on with his work in his own way

*to play the last card in the pack*

to lower one's standards in a final desperate effort

*to pull one's fingers out*

to get on with a job with alacrity

*to pull one's weight*

to do one's proper share of the work requiring to be done

*to pull oneself up by one's bootstraps*  
to make a praiseworthy effort to better oneself unaided

*to pull oneself up by one's own shoelaces*  
to make a superhuman effort

*to pull out all stops*  
to make maximum effort

*to pull together*  
to work in harmony

*to put one's back into something*  
to work hard at achieving some goal

*to put one's best foot forward*  
to make a special effort

*to put one's shoulder to the wheel*  
to make a strong effort

*to ride on the back of someone*  
without effort to benefit from the prior efforts of others

*to roll up one's sleeves*  
to get on with a job energetically

*to snow someone under*  
to overload a person with work

*to spark on all cylinders*  
to work extremely well

*to steal someone's thunder*  
to take credit for another person's good work (refers to a dispute over the copying of a machine invented by a 17th-century dramatist to reproduce the sound of thunder during a play)

*to stir a finger*  
to make some minimum effort

*to strike a blow*  
to resume work

*to strike a blow for some principle*  
to work toward the attainment of some principle

*to strike at the roots of something*  
to work toward the destruction of something

*to strike gold*  
to have one's efforts suddenly rewarded by great success

*to swing the lead*  
to cheat an employer by not working while being paid to do so

*to take the rough with the smooth*  
to accept the hardships of life along with its pleasant features

*to win one's spurs*  
to gain recognition after a period of effort (refers to the earning of a knighthood in battle)

*to work hand in glove with someone*  
to work in close cooperation with a person or to be in collusion with a person to the detriment of others

*to work one's fingers to the bone*  
to work very hard

*to work overtime at something*  
to spend a lot of time and effort at doing something

*to work shoulder to shoulder*  
to work with united effort

## WORRY

*a headache*  
a cause for worry

*a new lease on life*  
the prospect of a worry-free existence from now on

*not to lose any sleep over something*  
not to worry about some matter

*to drive someone out of his mind*  
to cause great worry to a person

*to prey on one's mind*  
(of a problem) to keep worrying one

*to raise the specter of something*  
to draw attention to a worrying expectation of something

*to send a chill down someone's neck*  
to be worrying news

*to spend a sleepless night*  
to worry about something

# Appendix 1

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## KEYWORDS OCCURRING MOST FREQUENTLY

<i>Word</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
head	83
hand	81
eye	62
back	51
heart	47
foot	45
keep	45
turn	42
play	40
water	36
face	33
dog	32
all	32
throw	31
run	31
fall	30
ear	29
fire	28
blood	27
horse	26
mind	26
cut	26
stick	26
pull	25
light	25
nose	25
finger	24
come	24

<i>Word</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
line	23
open	23
game	23
set	22
tooth	22
jump	22
hold	22
mouth	22
fly	21
hang	21
blow	20
ground	20
see	20
way	20

# **Appendix 2**

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## **STATISTICAL SUMMARY OF THE CATEGORIES**

### **PART II: THEMATIC SECTION**

<i>Items</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>CATEGORY</i>
1	964	HUMAN BODY
2	381	ANIMALS
3	186	SPORT
4	173	FOOD AND DRINK
5	163	WAR AND MILITARY
6	160	BUILDINGS
7	155	GEOGRAPHY
8	127	CLOTHES
9	112	NAUTICAL
10	109	RELIGION AND BIBLICAL
11	99	TRANSPORT
12	94	PLANTS
13	86	METEOROLOGY
14	79	SCIENCE AND MEDICINE
15	72	COLORS
16	66	COMMERCE
17	63	MANUFACTURE
18	56	MUSIC
19	54	FARMING
20	46	THEATER
21	45	FURNITURE
22	45	DEATH
23	41	CARDS
24	40	MINING AND OIL
25	34	GAMBLING
26	30	HISTORY

<i>Items</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>CATEGORY</i>
27	30	1
28	24	1
29	22	1
30	17	0*
31	15	0*
32	15	0*
33	12	0*
34	11	0*
35	9	0*
36	8	0*
37	4	0*
3647	87	<b>CLASSIFIED</b>
568	13	<b>UNCLASSIFIED</b>
4215	100	<b>TOTAL</b>

\*Less than 1%.

## PART III: THESAURUS

<i>Subject Area</i>	<i>Items</i>
1 END	110
2 DIFFICULTY	86
3 ACTIVITY	85
4 SUCCESS	72
5 FAILURE	68
6 WORK AND EFFORT	66
7 RESULT	65
8 ACHIEVEMENT	63
9 SMALLNESS	58
10 ENTHUSIASM	52
11 KNOWLEDGE	51
12 SITUATION	49
13 ARGUMENT	47
14 SPEECH	45
15 ADVANTAGE	42
16 START	39
17 CHANGE	38
18 BIGNESS	38
19 OPPORTUNITY	37
20 MONEY	37
21 IDEA	37
22 UNEXPECTED HAPPENINGS	35
23 POSSIBILITY	35
24 FACT	35

<i>Subject Area</i>	<i>Items</i>
25 STUPIDITY	34
26 MISTAKE	34
27 BENEFIT	34
28 PROBLEM	33
29 OPINION	33
30 EASE	32
31 INTERFERENCE	31
32 EXPECTATION	31
33 AIM	31
34 RESPONSIBILITY	30
35 REFUSAL AND REJECTION	30
36 PRICE AND VALUE	29
37 EXCESS	29
38 CRITICISM	29
39 EXPERIENCE	27
40 DISPLEASURE	27
41 BEHAVIOR	27
42 SKILL	25
43 PREVENTION	25
44 PLEASURE	25
45 INTEREST	25
46 DECISION	25
47 SPEED	24
48 RISK	24
49 INVOLVEMENT	24
50 BELIEF	24
51 SECRECY	23
52 LIKELIHOOD	22
53 TRUTH	21
54 DANGER	21
55 CORRECTNESS	21
56 HOPE	20
57 ALTERNATIVE	20
58 SAMENESS	19
59 ANGER	19
60 STANDARD	18
61 POWER	18
62 HAPPINESS AND ENJOYMENT	18
63 EXPENSE	17
64 REVERSAL	16
65 READINESS	16
66 MEMBERSHIP	16
67 DEVELOPMENT	16
68 WEALTH	15

<i>Subject Area</i>	<i>Items</i>
69 SATISFACTION	15
70 REPUTATION	15
71 WAITING	14
72 FUTURE	14
73 FACTOR	13
74 EQUALITY	13
75 EMPLOYMENT	13
76 CARE	13
77 UNWELCOME	12
78 SURPRISE	12
79 SADNESS	12
80 NAIVETE	12
81 HARM	12
82 FALSITY	12
83 COURAGE	12
84 AGREEMENT	12
85 ANNOYANCE	11
86 CHANCE	10
87 UNREALISTIC IDEAS	10
88 SLOWNESS	10
89 PRIDE AND HUMILITY	10
90 PAST	10
91 LEADERSHIP	10
92 CONFUSION	10
93 WELCOME	9
94 JUDGMENT	9
95 FRIGHT	9
96 FRANKNESS	9
97 WORRY	8
98 STRATEGY	8
99 PUNISHMENT	8
100 PRACTICABILITY	8
101 INFERENCE	8
102 EXPERTISE	8
103 PRETENSE	7
104 MISLEADING	7
105 DISAPPOINTMENT	7
106 APPROVAL	7
107 RETIREMENT	6
108 PRAISE	6
109 NONSENSE	6
110 ABUSE	6
111 REVENGE	5
112 MONITORING	5

# Appendix 3

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## MATERIAL FOR PARTY GAMES

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the lists in this book can also be used as the raw material for various party games and similar pursuits. Twelve illustrations are set out below:

- A keyword—say, “horse” (or “ball,” “head,” “water,” etc.)—is selected. The object of the game is to see how many different metaphors using this keyword (whether included in this book or not) each player can recall within a short time limit. (Example: “to swap horses in midstream.”)
- A category—say, “music” (or “colors,” “domestic pets,” “numerals,” etc.)—is selected. The object of the game is to see how many different metaphors using words from this category (whether included in this book or not) each player can recall within a short time limit. (Examples: “to face the music” or “when the music stops,” music expressions used figuratively to convey non-music meanings.)
- A subject area—say, “defeat” (or “price,” “knowledge,” “responsibility,” etc.)—is selected. The object of the game is to see how many different metaphors using this particular subject area (whether included in this book or not) each player can recall within a short time limit. (Examples: “checkmate” or “to be on the ropes,” expressions which, while not being used literally, convey the meaning “defeat.”)
- The initial words (for example, “To beard . . .”) of some well-known metaphors are quoted. The object of the game is to provide the concluding words (“. . . the lion in his den”).
- A general topic is selected. The object of the game is to evolve the best paragraph using a certain minimum number of metaphors (say, ten). This would need to have regard to factors such as humor, originality and plausibility. (For an example of such a piece, see the passage in the box at the front of this book.) If desired, the players of this game could be given access to the book while drafting their paragraphs.

- One or two pages of the current issue of a daily newspaper are designated. The object of the game is to see how many different metaphors occurring on these pages each player can recognize. An element of luck as well as skill can be introduced by giving different pages to different players (say, the corresponding pages of successive issues).
- A number of specific metaphors are selected. The object of the game is to best translate them into bureaucratic language. (Example: "To flog a dead horse" could become "To impose flagellation measures on an equine quadruped which is permanently devoid of its original capacities.")
- The above game can also be played in reverse, with the players being given the bureaucratic versions and required to work out, within a short time limit, what the corresponding customary "Plain English" expressions are.
- The names of well-known persons are designated. The object of the game is to evolve appropriate "last words" for each, based on metaphors. (Example: Einstein—"To an observer on earth, my clock will appear to have stopped.")
- A series of definitions is given—say, "to strive very hard to win," "to be quite ineffective," "to be terrified," "to be a member of a group knowing what is going on," "to fight an unwinnable case," and so on. The object of the game is to match each definition with a well-known metaphor. (Examples: "to fight tooth and nail," "to labor mightily and produce a mouse," "to have one's heart in one's boots," "to be in the swim," "to bang one's head up against a brick wall," and so on, respectively.)
- The above game is rather difficult. An easier version involves producing two lists of, say, 20 items each, both in random order—one of metaphors and the other of definitions. The object of the game is to match up the items in the two lists as quickly as possible.
- One or two pages of the current issue of a daily newspaper are designated. The object of the game is to produce within a specified time limit fresh headlines for as many articles on these pages as possible, using for this purpose the metaphors which best fit in with the articles concerned. Judging would need to take into account the suitability and effectiveness of the metaphors chosen.

# Appendix 4

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## METAPHORS DERIVED FROM THE BIBLE

**ACTS** *to be on the road to Damascus*  
to see the error of one's ways (Acts 9:3)

**BABEL** *a tower of Babel*  
a noisy and confused assembly (Genesis 11)

**BIRD** *a little bird told me*  
I heard from an unnameable informant (Ecclesiastes 10:20)

**BIRTHRIGHT** *to sell one's birthright for a mess of pottage*  
through foolishness to exchange something of substance for something of little value (Genesis 25)

**BREAD** *to cast one's bread upon the waters*  
not to expect gratitude or recognition for one's good works (Ecclesiastes 11:1)

**CAIN** *the mark of Cain*  
disgrace (Genesis 4:15)

**CAIN** *to raise Cain*  
to create a disturbance (Genesis 4:5)

**CALF** *to kill the fatted calf*  
to demonstrate welcome and forgiveness on a person's return (Luke 15:23)

**CAST** *to cast one's bread upon the waters*  
not to expect gratitude or recognition for one's good works (Ecclesiastes 11:1)

**CHEEK** *to turn the other cheek*  
to show that one has not been intimidated (Matthew 5:39)

**CLAY** *to have feet of clay*  
to be vulnerable (Daniel 2:33)

**CLOTHING** *to be a wolf in sheep's clothing*  
to be a hypocrite or to be dangerous although masquerading as something harmless (Matthew 7:15)

**CROWN** *to wear one's crown of thorns*  
to have one's own difficulties (John 19:5)

**DAMASCUS** *to be on the road to Damascus*

to see the error of one's ways (Acts 9:3)

**DANIEL** *to have feet of clay*

to be vulnerable (Daniel 2:33)

**DANIEL** *to see the writing on the wall*

to appreciate the inevitability of some event (Daniel 5)

**DOUBT** *a doubting Thomas*

a person who refuses to believe claims in the absence of proof (John 20:25)

**EARTH** *to be the salt of the earth*

to be a person whose ordinary efforts benefit the community (Matthew 5:13)

**ECCLESIASTES** *a fly in the ointment*

a flaw (refers to dead flies turning perfumes rancid) (Ecclesiastes 10:1)

**ECCLESIASTES** *a little bird told me*

I heard from an unnameable informant (Ecclesiastes 10:20)

**ECCLESIASTES** *to cast one's bread upon the waters*

not to expect gratitude or recognition for one's good works (Ecclesiastes 11:1)

**ELEVEN** *at the eleventh hour*

at the last moment (actually "at the twenty-fourth hour" would be more logical) (Matthew 20:9)

**EXODUS** *a tooth for a tooth*

retaliation (Exodus 21:24)

**EXODUS** *an eye for an eye*

retaliation (Exodus 21:24)

**EXODUS** *fleshpots*

sumptuous living (Exodus 16:3)

**EXODUS** *manna from heaven*

unexpected benefits (Exodus 16:15)

**EXODUS** *with a high hand*

arrogantly (Exodus 14:8)

**EYE** *a mote in someone's eye*

a fault in another person which is trifling in comparison to an unrecognized major fault in oneself (Matthew 7:3)

**EYE** *an eye for an eye*

retaliation (Exodus 21:24)

**FLESHPOT** *fleshpots*

sumptuous living (Exodus 16:3)

**FLY** *a fly in the ointment*

a flaw (refers to dead flies turning perfumes rancid) (Ecclesiastes 10:1)

**FOOT** *to have feet of clay*

to be vulnerable (Daniel 2:33)

**FORBID** *forbidden fruit*

something particularly desired just because it is not allowed (Genesis 2:17)

**FRUIT** *by their fruits ye shall know them*

their reputation will be based on their results (Matthew 7:20)

**FRUIT** *forbidden fruit*

something particularly desired just because it is not allowed (Genesis 2:17)

**GENESIS** *a Sodom and Gomorrah*

a place of vice (Genesis 18:20)

**GENESIS** *a tower of Babel*

a noisy and confused assembly (Genesis 11)

**GENESIS** *forbidden fruit*

something particularly desired just because it is not allowed (Genesis 2:17)

**GENESIS** *the mark of Cain*

disgrace (Genesis 4:15)

**GENESIS** *to hold out an olive branch*

to make peace overtures (Genesis 8:11)

**GENESIS** *to raise Cain*

to create a disturbance (Genesis 4:5)

**GENESIS** *to sell one's birthright for a mess of pottage*

through foolishness to exchange something of substance for something of little value (Genesis 25)

**GOAT** *to separate the sheep from the goats*

to distinguish between those with and without certain attributes (Matthew 25:32)

**GOLIATH** *a Goliath*

a giant or a person whose ability and achievements exceed that of most other people (1 Samuel 17)

**GOMORRAH** *a Sodom and Gomorrah*

a place of vice (Genesis 18:20)

**HAND** *to put one's hand to the plow*

voluntarily to undertake some task (Luke 9:62)

**HAND** *with a high hand*

arrogantly (Exodus 14:8)

**HEAVEN** *manna from heaven*

unexpected benefits (Exodus 16:15)

**HIGH** *with a high hand*

arrogantly (Exodus 14:8)

**HOUR** *at the eleventh hour*

at the last moment (actually "at the twenty-fourth hour" would be more logical) (Matthew 20:9)

**IVORY** *to be in an ivory tower*

to be immersed in theoretical considerations and ignorant of the practical realities (Song of Solomon 7:4)

**JAMES** *something would try the patience of Job*

something is very vexatious (James 5:11)

**JERICHO** *walls of Jericho*

something seemingly solid but actually destructible (Joshua 6:20)

**JEREMIAH** *Jeremiah*

a person who looks on the gloomy side of everything (refers to the prophet Jeremiah in the Old Testament)

**JOB** *something would try the patience of Job*

something is very vexatious (James 5:11)

**JOHN** *a doubting Thomas*

a person who refuses to believe claims in the absence of proof (John 20:25)

**JOHN** *to wear one's crown of thorns*

to have one's own difficulties (John 19:5)

**JOSHUA** *walls of Jericho*

something seemingly solid but actually destructible (Joshua 6:20)

**JUDAS** *to play Judas*

to betray a person (Matthew 26)

**JUDGES** *a shibboleth*

a doctrine once held as essential but now abandoned as having outlived its usefulness (a word used as a test to determine to which tribe an Israelite belonged) (Judges 12:6)

**KILL** *to kill the fatted calf*

to demonstrate welcome and forgiveness on a person's return (Luke 15:23)

**KINGS** *to need the wisdom of Solomon*

to be faced with the need to make a difficult decision (1 Kings 3:16-28)

**KNOW** *by their fruits ye shall know them*

their reputation will be based on their results (Matthew 7:20)

**LITTLE** *a little bird told me*

I heard from an unnameable informant (Ecclesiastes 10:20)

**LUKE** *a good Samaritan*

a person going out of his way to do a kindness to others (Luke 10:33)

**LUKE** *to kill the fatted calf*

to demonstrate welcome and forgiveness on a person's return (Luke 15:23)

**LUKE** *to put one's hand to the plow*

voluntarily to undertake some task (Luke 9:62)

**MANNA** *manna from heaven*

unexpected benefits (Exodus 16:15)

**MARK** *the mark of Cain*

disgrace (Genesis 4:15)

**MATTHEW** *a mote in someone's eye*

a fault in another person which is trifling in comparison to an unrecognized major fault in oneself (Matthew 7:3)

**MATTHEW** *at the eleventh hour*

at the last moment (actually "at the twenty-fourth hour" would be more logical) (Matthew 20:9)

**MATTHEW** *by their fruits ye shall know them*

their reputation will be based on their results (Matthew 7:20)

**MATTHEW** *to be a wolf in sheep's clothing*

to be a hypocrite or to be dangerous although masquerading as something harmless (Matthew 7:15)

**MATTHEW** *to be the salt of the earth*

to be a person whose ordinary efforts benefit the community (Matthew 5:13)

**MATTHEW** *to play Judas*

to betray a person (Matthew 26)

**MATTHEW** *to separate the sheep from the goats*

to distinguish between those with and without certain attributes (Matthew 25:32)

**MATTHEW** *to turn the other cheek*

to show that one has not been intimidated (Matthew 5:39)

**MESS** *to sell one's birthright for a mess of pottage*

through foolishness to exchange something of substance for something of little value (Genesis 25)

**MOTE** *a mote in someone's eye*

a fault in another person which is trifling in comparison to an unrecognized major fault in oneself (Matthew 7:3)

**OINTMENT** *a fly in the ointment*

a flaw (refers to dead flies turning perfumes rancid) (Ecclesiastes 10:1)

**OLIVE** *to hold out an olive branch*

to make peace overtures (Genesis 8:11)

**PATIENCE** *something would try the patience of Job*

something is very vexatious (James 5:11)

**PLOW** *to put one's hand to the plow*

voluntarily to undertake some task (Luke 9:62)

**POT** *fleshpots*

sumptuous living (Exodus 16:3)

**POTTAGE** *to sell one's birthright for a mess of pottage*

through foolishness to exchange something of substance for something of little value (Genesis 25)

**RAISE** *to raise Cain*

to create a disturbance (Genesis 4:5)

**ROAD** *to be on the road to Damascus*

to see the error of one's ways (Acts 9:3)

**SALT** *to be the salt of the earth*

to be a person whose ordinary efforts benefit the community (Matthew 5:13)

**SAMARITAN** *a good Samaritan*

a person going out of his way to do a kindness to others (Luke 10:33)

**SAMUEL** *a Goliath*

a giant or a person whose ability and achievements exceed that of most other people (1 Samuel 17)

**SELL** *to sell one's birthright for a mess of pottage*

through foolishness to exchange something of substance for something of little value (Genesis 25)

**SEPARATE** *to separate the sheep from the goats*

to distinguish between those with and without certain attributes (Matthew 25:32)

**SHEEP** *to be a wolf in sheep's clothing*

to be a hypocrite or to be dangerous although masquerading as something harmless (Matthew 7:15)

**SHEEP** *to separate the sheep from the goats*

to distinguish between those with and without certain attributes (Matthew 25:32)

**SHIBBOLETH** *a shibboleth*

a doctrine once held as essential but now abandoned as having outlived its usefulness (a word used as a test to determine to which tribe an Israelite belonged) (Judges 12:6)

**SODOM** *a Sodom and Gomorrah*

a place of vice (Genesis 18:20)

**SOLOMON** *to need the wisdom of Solomon*

to be faced with the need to make a difficult decision (Kings 3:16-28)

**SONG** *to be in an ivory tower*

to be immersed in theoretical considerations and ignorant of the practical realities (Song of Solomon 7:4)

**THOMAS** *a doubting Thomas*

a person who refuses to believe claims in the absence of proof (John 20:25)

**THORN** *to wear one's crown of thorns*

to have one's own difficulties (John 19:5)

**TOOTH** *a tooth for a tooth*

retaliation (Exodus 21:24)

**TOWER** *to be in an ivory tower*

to be immersed in theoretical considerations and ignorant of the practical realities (Song of Solomon 7:4)

**TRY** *something would try the patience of Job*

something is very vexatious (James 5:11)

**TURN** *to turn the other cheek*

to show that one has not been intimidated (Matthew 5:39)

**WALL** *to see the writing on the wall*

to appreciate the inevitability of some event (Daniel 5)

**WALL** *walls of Jericho*

something seemingly solid but actually destructible (Joshua 6:20)

**WATER** *to cast one's bread upon the waters*

not to expect gratitude or recognition for one's good works (Ecclesiastes 11:1)

**WEAR** *to wear one's crown of thorns*

to have one's own difficulties (John 19:5)

**WISDOM** *to need the wisdom of Solomon*

to be faced with the need to make a difficult decision (1 Kings 3:16-28)

**WOLF** *to be a wolf in sheep's clothing*

to be a hypocrite or to be dangerous although masquerading as something harmless (Matthew 7:15)

**WRITE** *to see the writing on the wall*

to appreciate the inevitability of some event (Daniel 5)

## **Appendix 5**

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### **"YES, PRIME MINISTER"**

*The following extract from the "Conflict of Interest" episode of "Yes, Prime Minister," the popular BBC television series which uses scripts written by Jonathan Lynn and Antony Jay, is reproduced with the permission of BBC Enterprises Limited.*

*It features a discussion between Sir Desmond Glazebrook, a leading banker who is keen to become Governor of the Bank of England, and James Hacker, the British Prime Minister.*

*Glazebrook:*

City's a funny place, Prime Minister. You know, if you spill the beans you open up a whole can of worms. I mean, how can you let sleeping dogs lie if you let the cat out of the bag? You bring in a new broom and if you're not very careful you find you've thrown the baby out with the bathwater. Change horses in the middle of the stream, next thing you know you're up the creek without a paddle.

*Hacker:*

And then what happens?

*Glazebrook:*

Well! Obviously the balloon goes up. They hit you for six. An own goal, in fact.