English Idioms in Use

ENGLISH IDIOMS IN USE

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ANMOL PUBLICATIONS PVT. LTD.
NEW DELHI-110 002 (INDIA)

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New Delhi-110002 (India)
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IIIrd Phase, IIIrd Block, Bengaluru-560 085 (India)
Tel.: 080-41723429 • Fax: 080-26723604
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First Edition, 2013

ISBN 978-81-261-4959-9

PRINTED IN INDIA

Printed at Balaji Offset, Delhi.

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Preface

An idiom is a phrase where the words together have a meaning that is different from the dictionary definitions of the individual words, which can make idioms hard for English as Second Language students and learners to understand. In linguistics, idioms are usually presumed to be figures of speech contradicting the principle of compositionality; yet the matter remains debated. John Saeed defines an "idiom" as words collocated that became affixed to each other until metamorphosing into a fossilized term. This collocation — words commonly used in a group — redefines each component word in the word-group and becomes an *idiomatic expression*. The words develop a specialized meaning as an entity, as an *idiom*. Moreover, an idiom is an expression, word, or phrase whose sense means something different from what the words literally imply. When a speaker uses an idiom, the listener might mistake its actual meaning, if he or she has not heard this figure of speech before. Idioms usually do not translate well; in some cases, when an idiom is translated into another language, either its meaning is changed or it is meaningless. In the English expression *to kick the bucket*, a listener knowing only the meanings of *kick* and *bucket* would be unable to deduce the expression's true meaning: *to die*. Although this idiomatic phrase can, in fact, actually refer to kicking a bucket, native speakers of English rarely use it so. Cases like this are "opaque idioms". We use idioms to express something that other words do not express as clearly or as cleverly. We often use an image or symbol

to describe something as clearly as possible and thus make our point as effectively as possible. For example, "*in a nutshell*" suggests the idea of having all the information contained within very few words. Idioms tend to be informal and are best used in spoken rather than written English. Sometimes idioms are very easy for learners to understand because there are similar expressions in the speakers' mother tongue.

This publication titled, "English Idioms in Use" provides readers with an introductory overview of English language idioms. Focus lies on related aspects, such as, adage, cliché and collocation. Additional focus lies on double negative and figure of speech. Attempts are made towards understanding set phrase, euphemism and stylistic device. Efforts are also made towards understanding relationship between English idioms and proverbs. This publication titled, "English Idioms in Use" is completely user-friendly as it also gives readers a glossary, bibliography and index.

—Editor

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Introduction to English Language Idioms

IDIOM

Idiom ("special property", "special feature, special phrasing", "one's own") is an expression, word, or phrase that has a figurative meaning that is comprehended in regard to a common use of that expression that is separate from the literal meaning or definition of the words of which it is made. There are estimated to be at least 25,000 idiomatic expressions in the English language.

In linguistics, idioms are usually presumed to be figures of speech contradicting the principle of compositionality; yet the matter remains debated. John Saeed defines an "idiom" as words collocated that became affixed to each other until metamorphosing into a fossilised term. This collocation — words commonly used in a group — redefines each component word in the word-group and becomes an *idiomatic expression*. The words develop a specialized meaning as an entity, as an *idiom*. Moreover, an idiom is an expression, word, or phrase whose sense means something different from what the words literally imply. When a speaker uses an idiom, the listener might mistake its actual meaning, if he or she has not heard this figure of speech before. Idioms usually do not translate well; in

some cases, when an idiom is translated into another language, either its meaning is changed or it is meaningless.

Background

In the English expression *to kick the bucket*, a listener knowing only the meanings of *kick* and *bucket* would be unable to deduce the expression's true meaning: *to die*. Although this idiomatic phrase can, in fact, actually refer to kicking a bucket, native speakers of English rarely use it so. Cases like this are "opaque idioms'

Literal translation (word-by-word) of opaque idioms will not convey the same meaning in other languages – an analogous expression in Polish is *kopn¹æ w kalendarz* ("to kick the calendar"), with "calendar" detached from its usual meaning, just like "bucket" in the English phrase. In Bulgarian the closest analogous phrase is *da ritnesh kambanata* "to kick the bell"); in Dutch, *het loodje leggen* ("to lay the piece of lead"); in Finnish, *potkaista tyhjaa* ("to kick nothing", or more literally "to kick the absence of something"); in French, *manger des pissenlits par la racine* ("to eat dandelions by the root"); in Spanish, *estirar la pata* (to stretch the foot); in German, *den Loffel abgeben* ("to give the spoon away") or *ins Gras beiben* ("to bite into the grass"), closer to the English idiom, *im Eimer sein* ("to be in the bucket") actually means "to be done for" ; in Latvian, *nolikt karoti* ("to put the spoon down"); in Portuguese, *bater as botas* ("to beat the boots"); in Danish, *at stille træskoene* ("to take off the clogs"); in Swedish, *trilla av pinnen* ("to fall off the stick"); and in ("to shake the horse-shoes"). In Brazil, the expression "to kick the bucket" (*chutar o balde*) has a completely different meaning (to give up something complicated, as a bucket kicked makes too much noise, demonstrating impatience).

Some idioms, in contrast, are "transparent idioms" :

much of their meaning does get through if they are taken (or translated) literally. For example, "lay one's cards on the table" meaning to reveal previously unknown intentions, or to reveal a secret. Transparency is a matter of degree; "spill the beans" and "leave no stone unturned" are not entirely literally interpretable, but only involve a slight metaphorical broadening.

Another category of idioms is a word having several meanings, sometimes simultaneously, sometimes discerned from the context of its usage. This is seen in the (mostly un-inflected) English language in polysemes, the common use of the same word for an activity, for those engaged in it, for the product used, for the place or time of an activity, and sometimes for a verb.

Idioms tend to confuse those unfamiliar with them; students of a new language must learn its idiomatic expressions as vocabulary. Many natural language words have *idiomatic origins*, but are assimilated, so losing their figurative senses.

Relation with Culture

An idiom is generally a colloquial metaphor — a term requiring some foundational knowledge, information, or experience, to use only within a culture, where conversational parties must possess common cultural references. Therefore, idioms are not considered part of the language, but part of the culture. As culture typically is localized, idioms often are useless beyond their local context; nevertheless, some idioms can be more universal than others, can be easily translated, and the metaphoric meaning can be deduced.

As defined by The New International Webster's College Dictionary, an idiom is an expression not readily analyzable from its grammatical construction or from the meaning of

its component parts. It is the part of the distinctive form or construction of a particular language that has a specific form or style present only in that language. *Random House Webster's College Dictionary* seems to agree with this definition, even expanding it further, stating that an idiom is an expression whose meaning is not predictable from the usual grammatical rules of a language or from the usual meanings of its constituent elements. Unlike many other aspects of language, an idiom does not readily change as time passes. Some idioms gain and lose favor in popular culture, but they rarely have any actual shift in their construction. People also have a natural tendency to over exaggerate what they mean sometimes, also giving birth to new idioms by accident.

Many idiomatic expressions are based upon conceptual metaphors such as "time as a substance", "time as a path", "love as war", and "up is more"; the metaphor is essential, not the idioms. For example, "spend time", "battle of the sexes", and "back in the day" are idiomatic and based upon essential metaphors. These "deep metaphors" and their relationship to human cognition are discussed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980).

In forms such as "profits are up", the metaphor is carried by "up" itself. The phrase "profits are up" is not an idiom; anything measurable can supplant "profits": "crime is up", "satisfaction is up", "complaints are up" et cetera. Essential idioms generally involve prepositions, e.g. "out of" and "turn into".

Likewise, many Chinese characters are idiomatic constructs, since their meanings often not traceable to a literal (pictographic) meaning of their *radicals.* Because characters are composed from a small base of some 214 radicals, their assembled meanings follow different

interpretation modes – from the pictographic to the metaphoric to those that have lost their original meanings.

LIST OF 19TH CENTURY ENGLISH LANGUAGE IDIOMS

This is a list of idioms that were recognizable to literate people in the late 19th century, *and have become unfamiliar since*.

As the article list of idioms in the English language notes, a list of idioms can be useful, since the meaning of an idiom cannot be deduced by knowing the meaning of its constituent words. See that article for a fuller discussion of what an idiom is, and what it is not. In addition, the often obscure references or shared values that lie behind an idiom will themselves lose applicability over time, although the surviving literature of the period relies on their currency for full understanding.

- *Abbot of Misrule* – Lord of Misrule
- *Admirable Doctor* – Roger Bacon.
- *Attic Bee* – Sophocles, from the sweetness and beauty of his productions.
- *Bidding Prayer* – an exhortation to prayer in some special reference, followed by the Lord's Prayer, in which the congregation joins.
- *Blue-gown* – in Scotland a beggar, a bedesman of the king, who wore a blue gown, the gift of the king, and had his license to beg.
- *Bonnet-piece* – a gold coin of James V of Scotland, so called from the king being represented on it as wearing a bonnet instead of a crown.
- *Brown, Jones, and Robinson* – three middle-class Englishmen on their travels abroad, as figured in the pages of *Punch*.

- *Chicard* – (French loanword) the harlequin of the French carnival, grotesquely dressed up.
- *Circumlocution Office* – a name employed by Dickens in *Little Dorrit* to designate wearisome Government bureaucracy.
- *Cockney School* – An epithet, originally abusive, for the second generation of Romantic writers, centered about Leigh Hunt, of whom John Keats is the most famous, as centered in London, and by implication lower-middle-class. (Revived by a school of London working-class writers in the 1890s).
- *Comity of Nations* – the name given for the effect given in one country to the laws and institutions of another in dealing with a native of it.
- *Corn-cracker* – the nickname of a Kentucky man (pejorative).
- *Corpuscular Philosophy* – the philosophy which accounts for physical phenomena by the position and the motions of corpuscles.
- *Cincinnatus of the Americans* – George Washington after the original Roman Cincinnatus.
- *Conscript Fathers* – Translates Latin *Patres Conscripti*; this is a term for members of the Roman Senate.
- *Diamond Necklace* – specifically, the one belonging to Marie Antoinette
- *Dircaean Swan* or *Dircæan Swan* – Pindar, so called from the fountain Dirce, near Thebes, his birthplace.
- *Fagot vote* – a vote created by the partitioning of a property into as many apartments as will entitle the holders to vote.
- *First Gentleman of Europe* – George IV of the United Kingdom, from his fine style and manners.

- *Federal Union* – generally any union of states in which each State has jurisdiction in local matters, such as the United States.
- *Gehenna Bailiffs* – ministers of hell's justice, whose function is to see to and enforce the rights of hell.
- *Gens Braccata* – the Gauls, from *braccæ* or breeches.
- *Gens Togata* – the Romans, from wearing the toga.
- *German Voltaire* – name given sometimes to Wieland and sometimes to Goethe.
- *Gothamite* – a native of New York City (still in use in some contexts).
- *Hectic fever* – a fever connected with tuberculosis, and showing itself by a bright pink flush on the cheeks.
- *Horn Gate* – the gate of dreams which come true, as distinct from the Ivory Gate, through which the visions seen are shadowy and unreal.
- *In-and-in* – breeding of animals from the same parentage. Also an old two-dice game, where 'in' is a double and 'in-and-in' is double doubles, which sweeps the board.
- *Island of Saints* – a poetic name given to Ireland in the Middle Ages.
- *Ivan Ivanovitch* – a term invoking a lazy, good-natured Russian.
- *Jack Brag* – a pretender who ingratiates himself with people above him.
- *The Open Secret* – the secret that lies open to all, but is seen into and understood by only few, applied especially to the mystery of the life, the spiritual life, which is the possession of all (Carlyle).
- *Passing-bell* – a bell tolled at the moment of the

death of a person to invite his neighbours to pray for the safe passing of his soul.

- *Penny wedding* – a wedding at which the guests pay part of the charges of the festival.
- *Persiflage* – a light, quizzing mockery, or scoffing, especially on serious subjects, out of a cool, callous contempt for them.
- *Peter Bell* – a simple rustic (Wordsworth).
- *Petite Nature* – a French loanword applied to pictures containing figures less than life-size, but with the effect of life-size.
- *Pot-wallopers* – a class of electors in a borough who claimed the right to vote on the ground of boiling a pot within its limits for six months.
- *Pourparler* – a diplomatic conference towards the framing of a treaty.
- *Punic faith* – a promise that one can put no trust in. From Latin *punica fides*, alluding to Roman mistrust of Carthage.
- *Revival of Letters* – a term for literary aspects of the Renaissance, specifically the revival of the study of Greek literature.
- *Sacred cow* – a term for something untouchable, used in a sarcastic manner.
- *The Temple of Immensity* – the universe as felt to be in every corner of it a temple consecrated to worship in.
- *Tom & Jerry* – a pair of young men about town from the play Tom and Jerry, or Life in London which was very successful in England and the USA in the 1820s, based on the newspaper column by Pierce Egan.

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Focus on Adage, Cliché and Collocation

ADAGE

An adage is a short but memorable saying which holds some important fact of experience that is considered true by many people, or that has gained some credibility through its long use. It often involves a planning failure such as "don't count your chickens before they hatch" or "don't burn bridges behind you." Adages may be interesting observations, practical or ethical guidelines, or sceptical comments on life.

Some adages are products of folk wisdom that attempt to summarize some basic truth; these are generally known as proverbs or *bywords*. An adage that describes a general rule of conduct is a "maxim". A pithy expression that has not necessarily gained credit through long use, but is distinguished by particular depth or good style is an aphorism, while one distinguished by wit or irony is an epigram. Through overuse, an adage may become a cliché or truism, or be described as an "old saw." Adages coined in modernity are often given proper names and called "laws" in imitation of physical laws, or "principles". Some

adages, such as Murphy's Law, are first formulated informally and given proper names later, while others, such as the Peter Principle, have proper names in their initial formulation; it might be argued that the latter sort does not represent "true" adages, but the two types are often difficult to distinguish.

Adages formulated in popular works of fiction often find their way into popular culture, especially when there exists a subculture devoted to the work or its genre, as is the case with science fiction novels. Many professions and subcultures create their own adages, which may be seen as a sort of jargon; such adages may find their way into popular usage, sometimes becoming altered in the process. Online communities, such as those that develop in internet forums or Usenet newsgroups, are known for generating their own adages.

Example Adages

- Laws of infernal dynamics:
  - An object in motion will be moving in the wrong direction.
  - An object at rest will be in the wrong place.
  - The energy required to move an object in the correct direction, or put it in the right place, will be more than you wish to expend but not so much as to make the task impossible.
- Murphy's Law: Anything that can go wrong will go wrong.
- John Buckle: You can lead a fish to water but you can't cure its fin rot.
- TANSTAAFL: There ain't no such thing as a free lunch.
- If you want a job done well, then do it yourself.

CLICHÉ

A cliché or cliche is an expression, idea, or element of an artistic work which has been overused to the point of losing its original meaning or effect, rendering it a stereotype, especially when at some earlier time it was considered meaningful or novel. The term is frequently used in modern culture for an action or idea which is expected or predictable, based on a prior event. Typically a pejorative, "clichés" are not always false or inaccurate; a cliché may or may not be true. Some are stereotypes, but some are simply truisms and facts. Clichés are often for comic effect, typically in fiction.

Most phrases now considered clichéd were originally regarded as striking, but lost their force through overuse. In this connection, David Mason and John Frederick Nims cite a particularly harsh judgement by Salvador Dalí: "The first man to compare the cheeks of a young woman to a rose was obviously a poet; the first to repeat it was possibly an idiot."

A cliché is often a vivid depiction of an abstraction that relies upon analogy or exaggeration for effect, often drawn from everyday experience. Used sparingly, they may succeed. However, cliché in writing or speech is generally considered a mark of inexperience or unoriginality.

Origin

In printing, a cliché was a printing plate cast from movable type. This is also called a stereotype. When letters were set one at a time, it made sense to cast a phrase used repeatedly as a single slug of metal. "Cliché" came to mean such a ready-made phrase. The French word "cliché" is said to come from the sound made when the matrix is dropped into molten metal to make a printing plate, though some authorities express doubt.

Usage

Cliché is a noun that is also used as an adjective, although some dictionaries do not recognize the adjective sense. All dictionaries consulted recognize a derived adjective with the same meaning, *clichéd* or *cliché'd*.

COLLOCATION

Within the area of corpus linguistics, collocation defines a sequence of words or terms that co-occur more often than would be expected by chance. The term is often used in the same sense as linguistic government.

Collocation defines restrictions on how words can be used together, for example, which prepositions are used with ("governed by") particular verbs, or which verbs and nouns are typically used together. An example of this (from Michael Halliday) is the collocation *strong tea*. While the same meaning could be conveyed through the roughly equivalent *powerful tea*, the fact is that tea is thought of being strong rather than powerful. A similar observation holds for *powerful computers*, which is preferred over *strong computers*.

Collocations are examples of lexical units. Collocations should not be confused with idioms although both are similar in that there is a degree of meaning present in the collocation or idiom that is not entirely compositional. With idioms, the meaning is completely non-compositional whereas collocations are mostly compositional.

Collocation extraction is a task that extracts collocations automatically from a corpus, using computational linguistics.

Common Features

Arbitrary Restriction on the Substitution of the Elements of a Collocation

We can say *highly sophisticated*, and we can say

extremely happy. Both adverbs have the same lexical functions, that is adding the degree, or magnifying the impact of the adjectives (sophisticated, happy), However, they are not interchangeable. Still, other adverbs, such as *very* can replace both *highly* and *extremely*.

Syntactic Modifiability

Unlike the majority of idioms, collocations are subject to syntactic modification. For example, we can say *effective writing* and *write effectively*.

Expanded Definition

If the expression is heard often, transmitting itself memetically, the words become 'glued' together in our minds. 'Crystal clear', 'middle management', 'nuclear family', and 'cosmetic surgery' are examples of collocated pairs of words. Some words are often found together because they make up a compound noun, for example 'riding boots' or 'motor cyclist'.

Collocations can be in a syntactic relation (such as verb-object: 'make' and 'decision'), lexical relation (such as antonymy), or they can be in no linguistically defined relation. Knowledge of collocations is vital for the competent use of a language: a grammatically correct sentence will stand out as 'awkward' if collocational preferences are violated. This makes collocation an interesting area for language teaching.

Corpus Linguists specify a Key Word in Context (KWIC) and identify the words immediately surrounding them. This gives an idea of the way words are used.

The processing of collocations involves a number of parameters, the most important of which is the *measure of association*, which evaluates whether the co-occurrence is purely by chance or statistically significant. Due to the

non-random nature of language, most collocations are classed as significant, and the association scores are simply used to rank the results. Commonly used measures of association include mutual information, t scores, and log-likelihood.

Rather than select a single definition, Gledhill proposes that collocation involves at least three different perspectives: (i) cooccurrence, a statistical view, which sees collocation as the recurrent appearance in a text of a node and its collocates, (ii) construction, which sees collocation either as a correlation between a lexeme and a lexical-grammatical pattern, or as a relation between a base and its collocative partners and (iii) expression, a pragmatic view of collocation as a conventional unit of expression, regardless of form. It should be pointed out here that these different perspectives contrast with the usual way of presenting collocation in phraseological studies. Traditionally speaking, collocation is explained in terms of all three perspectives at once, in a continuum:

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3

Focus on Double Negative and Figure of Speech

DOUBLE NEGATIVE

A double negative occurs when two forms of negation are used in the same clause. Multiple negation is the more general term referring to the occurrence of more than one negative in a clause.

In most logics and some languages, double negatives cancel one another and produce an affirmative sense; in other languages, doubled negatives intensify the negation. Languages where multiple negatives intensity each other are said to have negative concord. French and Spanish are examples of negative-concord languages, while Latin and German do not have negative concord. Standard English is lacking negative concord, but some dialects do have it (e.g. African American Vernacular English), although its usage in English is often stigmatized.

Languages without negative concord typically have negative polarity items that are used in place of additional negatives when another negating word already occurs. Examples are "ever", "anything" and "anyone" in the sentence "I haven't ever owed anything to anyone" (cf. "I have*n't never* owed *nothing* to *no one*" in negative-concord dialects

of English, and "*Nunca* he debido *nada* a *nadie*" in Spanish). Note that negative polarity can be triggered not only by direct negatives such as "not" or "never", but by words such as "doubt" or "hardly" ("I doubt he has ever owed anything to anyone" or "He has hardly ever owed anything to anyone").

Stylistically, in English, double negatives can sometimes be used for understated affirmation (e.g. "I'm not feeling bad" vs. "I'm feeling good"). The rhetorical term for this is litotes.

English

In standard written English, when two negatives are used in one sentence, the negatives are understood to cancel one another and produce a weakened affirmative. However, in many dialects, the second negative is employed as an intensifier and should be understood as strengthening the negation rather than removing it.

Two Negatives Resolving to a Positive

In Standard English, two negatives are understood to resolve to a positive. This rule was observed as early as 1762, when Bishop Robert Lowth wrote *A Short Introduction to English Grammar with Critical Notes*. For instance, "I do not disagree" could mean "I certainly agree". Further statements may be necessary to resolve which particular meaning was intended.

Because of this ambiguity, double negatives are frequently employed when making back-handed compliments. The phrase "Mr. Jones was not incompetent" will seldom mean "Mr. Jones was very competent" since the speaker would have found a more flattering way to say so. Instead, some kind of problem is implied, though Mr. Jones possesses basic competence at his tasks.

Two or More Negatives Resolving to a Negative

Discussing English grammar, the term "double negative" is often though not universally applied to the non-standard use of a second negative as an intensifier to a negation.

Although they are uncommon in written English, double negatives are employed as a normal part of the grammar of Southern American English, African American Vernacular English, and most British regional dialects, particularly the East London and East Anglian dialects. Dialects which use double negatives do so consistently and follow a different set of descriptive linguistic rules.

Because of their non-standard nature, such double negatives are often employed in literature and the performing art as part of characterization, particularly to establish a speaker's lower-class or uneducated status. In the film *Mary Poppins*, the chimney sweep Bert employs a double negative when he says, "If you don't want to go nowhere..." Another is used by the bandits in the "Stinking Badges" scene of John Huston's *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*: "Badges? We ain't got no badges. We don't need no badges!" More recently, the British television show *EastEnders* has received some publicity over the Estuary accent of character Dot Branning, who speaks with double and triple negatives ("I ain't never heard of no license.").

In music, double negatives can be employed to similar effect (as in Pink Floyd's "Another Brick in the Wall", in which schoolchildren chant "We don't need no education / We don't need no thought control") or used to establish a frank and informal tone (as in The Rolling Stones' "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction.").

Historically, Chaucer made extensive use of double, triple, and even quadruple negatives in his *Canterbury Tales*. About the Friar, he writes "Ther nas no man no

wher so vertuous" ("There never was no man nowhere so virtuous"). About the Knight, "He nevere yet no vileynye ne sayde / In all his lyf unto no maner wight" ("He never yet no vileness didn't say / In all his life to no manner of man").

Following the battle of Marston Moor, Oliver Cromwell quoted his nephew's dying words in a letter to the boy's father Valentine Walton: "A little after, he said one thing lay upon his spirit. I asked him what it was. He told me it was that God had not suffered him to be no more the executioner of His enemies." Although this particular letter has often been reprinted, it is frequently changed to read "not ... any" instead.

Germanic Languages

Double negation is uncommon in other West Germanic languages. A notable exception is Afrikaans, where it is mandatory. (For example, "He cannot speak Afrikaans" becomes *Hy kan nie Afrikaans praat nie*, "He cannot Afrikaans speak not.") Dialectal Dutch, French and San have been suggested as possible origins for this trait. Its proper use follows a set of fairly complex rules as in these examples provided by Bruce Donaldson:

- *Ek het nie geweet dat hy sou kom nie*. ("I did not know that he would be coming.")
- *Ek het geweet dat hy nie sou kom nie*. ("I knew that he would not be coming.")
- *Hy sal nie kom nie, want hy is siek*. ("He will not be coming because he is sick.")
- *Dis nie so moeilik om Afrikaans te leer nie*. ("It is not so difficult to learn Afrikaans.")

While double negation is still found in the Low Franconian dialects of west Flanders (e.g., *Ik ne willen da*

nie doen, "I do not want to do that") and in some villages in the central Netherlands such as Garderen, it takes a different form than that found in Afrikaans. In Belgian Dutch dialects, however, there are still some widely used expressions like *nooit niet* ("never not") for "never".

Similar to some dialectal English, Bavarian employs both single and double negation, with the latter denoting special emphasis. For example, compare the Bavarian *Des hob i no nia ned g'hort* ("This have I yet never not heard") with the standard German "Das habe ich noch nie gehort".

Romance Languages

In Romance languages, negation is generally expressed by placing a negative adverb (*non* in Latin and Italian, *no* in Spanish and Catalan, *não* in Portuguese, *ne* in French, *nu* in Romanian) before the verb, but more negative adverbs or pronouns may appear elsewhere to indicate what kind of negation is being made.

In French, a second negative particle *pas* is normally employed in simple negation. Standard Catalan uses the same particle, but only to express emphasis or reversal of one's expectations. In Latin, *passus* was the word for "step", so that originally French *Je ne marche pas* and Catalan *No camino pas* meant "I will not go a single step". In French, this initially emphatic usage spread so thoroughly that in colloquial speech it is often *ne* which is left out while *pas* serves as the sole negating element. A similar practice occurs in dialectal Catalan, which omits *no*, and Occitan, which uses *non* only as a short answer to questions. In Venetan, the double negation *no ... mìa* can likewise lose the first particle and rely only on the second: *magno mìa* ("I eat not") and *vegno mìa* ("I know not").

In Italian a second negative particle usually turns the phrase into a positive one, but with a different meaning.

For instance *Voglio mangiare* ("I want to eat") and *Non voglio non mangiare* ("I don't want not to eat") mean "I want to eat", but the second one means more precisely "I'd prefer to eat".

Colloquial Brazilian Portuguese and Romanian often employ doubled negative correlatives. Portuguese *Não vi nada, não* ("I did not see nothing, no"), and Romanian *Nu văd nimic* ("I do not see nothing") are used to express "No, I didn't see anything".

Other Romance languages employ double negatives less regularly. In Asturian, an extra negative particle is used with negative adverbs: *Yo nunca nun lu viera* ("I had not never seen him") expresses "I have never seen him", and *A mi tampoco nun me presta* ("I neither do not like it") - "I do not like it, either".

Standard Catalan also formerly possessed a tendency to double *no* with other negatives, such as *Jo tampoc no l'he vista* ("I neither have not seen her") to mean "I have not seen her either", but this practice is dying out.

Welsh

In spoken Welsh, the word ddim (not) often occurs with a prefixed or mutated verb form that is negative in meaning: *Dydy hi ddim yma* (word-for-word, "Not-is she not here") expresses "She is not here" and *Chaiff Aled ddim mynd* (word-for-word, "Not-will-get Aled not go") expresses "Aled is not allowed to go".

Negative correlatives can also occur with already negative verb forms. In literary Welsh, the mutated verb form is caused by an initial negative particle, ni or nid.

The particle is usually omitted in speech but the mutation remains: *[Ni] wyddai neb* (word-for-word, "[Not] not-knew nobody") means "Nobody knew" and *[Ni] chaiff*

Aled fawr o bres (word-for-word, "[Not] not-will-get Aled lots of money") means "Aled will not get much money".

This is not usually regarded as three negative markers, however, because the negative mutation is really just an effect of the initial particle on the following word.

Greek

Doubled negatives are perfectly correct in Ancient Greek. With few exceptions, a simple negative following another negative results in an affirmation"No one was not suffering" means more simply "Everyone was suffering". Meanwhile, a compound negative following a negative strengthens the negation: "Do not permit no one to raise an uproar" means "Let not a single one among them raise an uproar".

These constructions apply only when the negatives all refer to the same word or expression. Otherwise, the negatives simply work independently of one another: means "It was not on account of their not throwing that they did not hit him", and one shouldn't blame them for not trying.

Modern Greek prefers double negation — "No one did not talk" — to single (here "None talked").

Slavic Languages

In Slavic languages other than Slavonic, multiple negatives are grammatically correct ways to express negation, while a single negative is often incorrect.

In complex sentences, every part should typically be negated.

For example, in Serbian, *Niko nikada nigde ništa nije uradio* ("Nobody never nowhere nothing did not do") means "Nobody has ever done anything, anywhere", and *Nisam tamo nikad išla* ("I did not there never go") means "I have never been there".

A single negation, while syntactically correct, may result in a very unusual meaning or make no sense at all. Saying "I saw nobody" in Polish (*Widzia³em nikogo*) in place of the more usual "I did not see nobody" (*Nie widzia³em nikogo*) might mean "I saw an instance of nobody" or "I saw Mr. Nobody" but would not have its plain English meaning. Likewise, in Slovenian, saying "I do not know anyone" (*Ne poznam kogarkoli*) in place of "I do not know no one" (*Ne poznam nikogar*) has the connotation "I do not know just *anyone*" — i.e., I know someone important or special.

Uralic Languages

Double or multiple negatives are grammatically required in Hungarian with negative pronouns, e.g. *Nincs semmim* ("I do not have nothing") means "I do not have anything". Negative pronouns are constructed by means of adding the prefixes *se-, sem-,* and *sen-* to interrogative pronouns.

Double negation is required also in Finnish, which uses the auxiliary verb *ei* to express negation. Negative pronouns are constructed by means of adding one of the suffixes *-an, -an, -kaan,* or *-kaan* to interrogative pronouns. An example: *Kukaan ei soittanut minulle* ("No one did not call me") is used to say "No one called me".

Japanese

Japanese employs litotes to phrase ideas in a more indirect and polite manner. Thus, one can indicate necessity by emphasizing that not doing something will not do. For instance, (*shinakereba naranai*, "must") literally means "not doing [it] would be unbecoming". *shinakereba ikemasen*, also "must") similarly means "not doing [it] will not go forward".

Of course, indirectness can also be employed to put an edge on one's rudeness as well. "He has studied Japanese,

so he should be able to write kanji" can be phrased (*kare wa nihongo o benkyô shita kara kanji ga kakenai wake ga arimasen*), the rather harsher idea that "As he has studied Japanese, an excuse for him to be unable to write kanji does not exist".

Chinese

Mandarin Chinese also employs litotes in a like manner. One common construction is, "cannot not"), which is used to express (or feign) a necessity more regretful and polite than that expressed.

Compared with ("I need to go"), tries to emphasize that the situation is out of the speaker's hands and that he has no choice in the matter: "Unfortunately, I've got to go". Similarly, "There is not a person who doesn't know") is a more emphatic way to express "Everyone knows".

Double negatives nearly always resolve to a positive meaning even in colloquial speech, but illogically so can triple negatives as well. Saying, "I do not believe no one will not come") should mean "I believe some people will not come" but is more often understood to mean "I think everyone will come".

However, triple and multiple negatives are considered obscure and are typically avoided.

History of Languages

Many languages, including all living Germanic languages, French, Welsh and some Berber and Arabic dialects, have gone through a process known as Jespersen's cycle, where an original negative particle is replaced by another, passing through a intermediate stage employing two particles (e.g. Old French *jeo ne dis* >> Modern Standard French *je ne dis pas* >> Modern Colloquial French *je dis pas* "I don't say"). In many cases the original sense of the

new negative particle is not negative *per se* (thus in French *pas* "step", originally "not a step" = "not a bit"), but in Germanic languages such as English and German the intermediate stage was a case of double negation, as the current negatives *not* and *nicht* in these languages originally meant "nothing": e.g. Old English *ic ne seah* "I didn't see" >> Middle English *I ne saugh nawiht*, lit. "I didn't see nothing" >> Early Modern English *I saw not*. A similar development to a circumfix from double negation can be seen in non-Indo-European languages, too: for example, in Maltese, *kiel* "he ate" is negated as *ma kielx* "he didn't eat", where the verb is preceded by a negative particle *ma-* "not" and followed by the particle *-x*, which was originally a shortened form of *xejn* "nothing" - thus, "he didn't eat nothing".

FIGURE OF SPEECH

A figure of speech is the use of a word or words diverging from its usual meaning. It can also be a special repetition, arrangement or omission of words with literal meaning, or a phrase with a specialized meaning not based on the literal meaning of the words in it, such as a metaphor, simile, hyperbole, or personification. Figures of speech often provide emphasis, freshness of expression, or clarity. However, clarity may also suffer from their use, as any figure of speech introduces an ambiguity between literal and figurative interpretation. A figure of speech is sometimes called a rhetoric or a locution.

Rhetoric originated as the study of the ways in which a source text can be transformed to suit the goals of the person reusing the material. For this goal, classical rhetoric detected four fundamental operations that can be used to transform a sentence or a larger portion of a text: expansion, abridgement, switching, and transferring.

The Four Fundamental Operations

Main article: rhetorical operations

The four fundamental operations, or categories of change, governing the formation of all figures of speech are:

- addition (adiectio), also called repetition/expansion/ superabundance
- omission (detractio), also called subtraction/ abridgement/lack
- transposition (transmutatio), also called transferring
- permutation (immutatio), also called switching/ interchange/substitution/transmutation

These four operations were detected by classical rhetoricians, and still serve to encompass the various figures of speech. Originally these were called, in Latin, the four operations of *quadripartita ratio*. The ancient surviving text mentioning them, although not recognizing them as the four fundamental principles, is the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, of unknown authorship. Quintillian then mentioned them in *Institutio Oratoria*. Philo of Alexandria also listed them as addition, subtraction, transposition, and transmutation.

Examples

The figure of speech comes in many varieties. The aim is to use the language inventively to accentuate the effect of what is being said. A few examples follow:

- "Round the rugged rocks the ragged rascal ran" is an example of alliteration, where the consonant *r* is used repeatedly. Whereas, "Sister Suzy sewing socks for soldiers" is a particular form of alliteration called sibilance, because it repeats the letter *s*. Both are commonly used in poetry.

- "She would run up the stairs and then a new set of curtains" is a variety of zeugma called a syllepsis. *Run up* refers to ascending and also to manufacturing. The effect is enhanced by the momentary suggestion, through a pun, that she might be climbing up the curtains. The ellipsis or omission of the second use of the verb makes the reader think harder about what is being said.
- "Military Intelligence is an oxymoron" is the use of direct sarcasm to suggest that the military would have no intelligence. This might be considered to be a satire and a terse aphorism. "But he's a soldier, so he has to be an Einstein" is the use of sarcasm through irony for the same effect. The use of hyperbole by using the word *Einstein* calls attention to the ironic intent. *An Einstein* is an example of synechdoche, as it uses a particular name to represent a class of people: geniuses.
- "I had butterflies in my stomach" is a metaphor, referring to my nervousness feeling as if there were flying insects in my stomach. To say "it was like having some butterflies in my stomach" would be a simile, because it uses the word *like* which is missing in the metaphor.

Categories of Figures of Speech

Scholars of classical Western rhetoric have divided figures of speech into two main categories: schemes and tropes. Schemes (from the Greek *schçma*, form or shape) are figures of speech that change the ordinary or expected pattern of words. For example, the phrase, "John, my best friend" uses the scheme known as apposition. Tropes (from the Greek *tropein*, to turn) change the general meaning of words. An example of a trope is irony, which is the use of

words to convey the opposite of their usual meaning ("For Brutus is an honorable man; / So are they all, all honorable men").

During the Renaissance, scholars meticulously enumerated and classified figures of speech. Henry Peacham, for example, in his *The Garden of Eloquence* (1577), enumerated 184 different figures of speech.

For simplicity, this article divides the figures between schemes and tropes, but does not further sub-classify them (e.g., "Figures of Disorder"). Within each category, words are listed alphabetically. Most entries link to a page that provides greater detail and relevant examples, but a short definition is placed here for convenience. Some of those listed may be considered rhetorical devices, which are similar in many ways.

Schemes

- accumulation: Summary of previous arguments in a forceful manner
- adnomination: Repetition of a word with a change in letter or sound
- alliteration: Series of words that begin with the same consonant or sound alike
- adynaton: hyperbole taken to such extreme lengths as to suggest a complete impossibility.
- anacoluthon: Change in the syntax with
- anaphora: Repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginning of successive clauses
- anastrophe: Inversion of the usual word order
- anticlimax: Arrangement of words in order of decreasing importance
- antimetabole: Repetition of words in successive clauses, in reverse order

- antistrophe: Repetition of the same word or phrase at the end of successive clauses
- antithesis: Juxtaposition of opposing or contrasting ideas
- aphorismus: Statement that calls into question the definition of a word
- aposiopesis: Breaking off or pausing speech for dramatic or emotional effect
- apostrophe: Directing the attention away from the audience and to a personified abstraction
- apposition: Placing of two elements side by side, in which the second defines the first
- assonance: Repetition of vowel sounds, most commonly within a short passage of verse
- asteismus: Facetious or mocking answer that plays on a word
- asyndeton: Omission of conjunctions between related clauses
- cacophony: Juxtaposition of words producing a harsh sound
- cataphora: Co-reference of one expression with another expression which follows it (example: If you need one, there's a towel in the top drawer.)
- classification (literature & grammar): Linking a proper noun and a common noun with an article
- chiasmus: Word order in one clause is inverted in the other (inverted parallelism).
- climax: Arrangement of words in order of increasing importance
- commoratio: Repetition of an idea, re-worded
- consonance: Repetition of consonant sounds, most commonly within a short passage of verse
- dystmesis: A synonym for tmesis

- ellipsis: Omission of words
- enallage: Substitution of forms that are grammatically different, but have the same meaning
- enjambment: Breaking of a syntactic unit (a phrase, clause, or sentence) by the end of a line or between two verses
- enthymeme: Informal method of presenting a syllogism
- epanalepsis: Repetition of the initial word or words of a clause or sentence at the end of the clause or sentence
- epistrophe: Repetition of the same word or group of words at the end of successive clauses. The counterpart of anaphora (also known as antistrophe)
- euphony: Opposite of cacophony - i.e. pleasant sounding
- hendiadys: Use of two nouns to express an idea when the normal structure would be a noun and a modifier
- hendiatris: Use of three nouns to express one idea
- homeoptoton: in a flexive language the use the first and last words of a sentence in the same forms
- homographs: Words that are identical in spelling but different in origin and meaning
- homonyms: Words that are identical with each other in pronunciation and spelling, but differing in origin and meaning
- homophones:Words that are identical with each other in pronunciation but differing in origin and meaning
- hypallage: Changing the order of words so that they are associated with words normally associated with others

- hyperbaton: Schemes featuring unusual or inverted word order
- hyperbole: Exaggeration of a statement
- hysteron proteron: The inversion of the usual temporal or causal order between two elements
- isocolon: Use of parallel structures of the same length in successive clauses
- internal rhyme: Using two or more rhyming words in the same sentence
- kenning: A metonymic compound where the terms together form a sort of anecdote
- merism: Referring to a whole by enumerating some of its parts
- non sequitur: Statement that bears no relationship to the context preceding
- onomatopoeia: Word that imitates a real sound (e.g. tick-tock or boom)
- paradiastole: Repetition of the disjunctive pair "neither" and "nor"
- parallelism: The use of similar structures in two or more clauses
- paraprosdokian: Unexpected ending or truncation of a clause
- parenthesis: Insertion of a clause or sentence in a place where it interrupts the natural flow of the sentence
- paroemion: Resolute alliteration in which every word in a sentence or phrase begins with the same letter
- parrhesia: Speaking openly or boldly, or apologizing for doing so (declaring to do so)
- perissologia: The fault of wordiness
- pleonasm: Use of superfluous or redundant words

- polyptoton: Repetition of words derived from the same root
- polysyndeton: Repetition of conjunctions
- pun: When a word or phrase is used in two different senses
- sibilance: Repetition of letter 's', it is a form of alliteration
- sine dicendo: A statement that is so obvious it need not be stated; when uttered almost seems pointless (e.g. 'You can never save too much')
- superlative: Saying something the best of something i.e. the ugliest,the most precious
- spoonerism: Interchanging of (usually initial) letters of words with amusing effect
- symploce: Simultaneous use of anaphora and epistrophe: the repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginning and the end of successive clauses
- synchysis: Interlocked word order
- synesis: Agreement of words according to the sense, and not the grammatical form
- synizesis: Pronunciation of two juxtaposed vowels or diphthongs as a single sound
- synonymia: Use of two or more synonyms in the same clause or sentence
- tautology: Redundancy due to superfluous qualification; saying the same thing twice
- tmesis: Division of the elements of a compound word
- zeugma: The using of one verb for two actions

Tropes

- allegory: Extended metaphor in which a story is told to illustrate an important attribute of the subject

- alliteration: Repetition of the first consonant sound in a phrase.
- allusion: Indirect reference to another work of literature or art
- anacoenosis: Posing a question to an audience, often with the implication that it shares a common interest with the speaker
- antanaclasis: A form of pun in which a word is repeated in two different senses
- anthimeria: Substitution of one part of speech for another, often turning a noun into a verb
- anthropomorphism: Ascribing human characteristics to something that is not human, such as an animal or a god
- antimetabole: Repetition of words in successive clauses, but in transposed grammatical order
- antiphrasis: Word or words used contradictory to their usual meaning, often with irony
- antonomasia: Substitution of a phrase for a proper name or vice versa
- aphorism: Tersely phrased statement of a truth or opinion, an adage
- apophasis: Invoking an idea by denying its invocation
- apostrophe: Addressing a thing, an abstraction or a person not present
- archaism: Use of an obsolete, archaic, word(a word used in olden language, e.g. Shakespeare's language)
- auxesis: Form of hyperbole, in which a more important sounding word is used in place of a more descriptive term
- catachresis: Mixed metaphor (sometimes used by design and sometimes a rhetorical fault)
- circumlocution: "Talking around" a topic by

substituting or adding words, as in euphemism or periphrasis

- commiseration: Evoking pity in the audience
- correctio: Linguistic device used for correcting one's mistakes, a form of which is epanorthosis
- denominatio: Another word for metonymy
- double negative: Grammar construction that can be used as an expression and it is the repetition of negative words
- dysphemism: Substitution of a harsher, more offensive, or more disagreeable term for another. Opposite of euphemism
- epanorthosis: Immediate and emphatic self-correction, often following a slip of the tongue
- enumeratio: A form of amplification in which a subject is divided, detailing parts, causes, effects, or consequences to make a point more forcibly
- epanados: Repetition in a sentence with a reversal of words. Example: The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath
- erotema: Synonym for rhetorical question
- euphemism: Substitution of a less offensive or more agreeable term for another
- hermeneia: Repetition for the purpose of interpreting what has already been said
- hyperbaton: Words that naturally belong together are separated from each other for emphasis or effect
- hyperbole: Use of exaggerated terms for emphasis
- hypocatastasis: An implication or declaration of resemblance that does not directly name both terms
- hypophora: Answering one's own rhetorical question at length

- hysteron proteron: Reversal of anticipated order of events; a form of hyperbaton
- innuendo: Having a hidden meaning in a sentence that makes sense whether it is detected or not
- invocation: Apostrophe to a god or muse
- irony: Use of word in a way that conveys a meaning opposite to its usual meaning
- kataphora: Repetition of a cohesive device at the end
- litotes: Emphasizing the magnitude of a statement by denying its opposite
- malapropism: Using a word through confusion with a word that sounds similar
- meiosis: Use of understatement, usually to diminish the importance of something
- merism: Statement of opposites to indicate reality
- metalepsis: Referring to something through reference to another thing to which it is remotely related
- metaphor: Stating one entity is another for the purpose of comparing them in quality
- metonymy: Substitution of a word to suggest what is really meant
- neologism: The use of a word or term that has recently been created, or has been in use for a short time. Opposite of archaism
- onomatopoeia: Words that sound like their meaning
- oxymoron: Using two terms together, that normally contradict each other
- parable: Extended metaphor told as an anecdote to illustrate or teach a moral lesson
- paradox: Use of apparently contradictory ideas to point out some underlying truth

- paradiastole: Extenuating a vice in order to flatter or soothe
- paraprosdokian: Phrase in which the latter part causes a rethinking or reframing of the beginning
- parallel irony: An ironic juxtaposition of sentences or situations (informal)
- paralipsis: Drawing attention to something while pretending to pass it over
- paronomasia: A form of pun, in which words similar in sound but with different meanings are used
- pathetic fallacy: Using a word that refers to a human action on something non-human
- periphrasis: Using several words instead of few
- personification/prosopopoeia/anthropomorphism: Attributing or applying human qualities to inanimate objects, animals, or natural phenomena
- praeteritio: Another word for paralipsis
- procatalepsis: Refuting anticipated objections as part of the main argument
- prolepsis: Another word for procatalepsis
- proslepsis: Extreme form of paralipsis in which the speaker provides great detail while feigning to pass over a topic
- proverb: Succinct or pithy expression of what is commonly observed and believed to be true
- pun: Play on words that will have two meanings
- repetition: Repeated usage of word(s)/group of words in the same sentence to create a poetic/rhythmic effect
- rhetorical question: Asking a question as a way of asserting something. Or asking a question not for the sake of getting an answer but for asserting

something (or as in a poem for creating a poetic effect)

- satire: Use of irony, sarcasm, ridicule, or the like, in exposing, denouncing, or deriding vice, folly, etc. A literary composition, in verse or prose, in which human folly and vice are held up to scorn, derision, or ridicule. A literary genre comprising such compositions
- simile: Comparison between two things using *like* or *as*
- snowclone: Quoted or misquoted cliché or phrasal template
- superlative: Saying that something is the best of something or has the most of some quality, e.g. the ugliest, the most precious etc.
- syllepsis: Form of pun, in which a single word is used to modify two other words, with which it normally would have differing meanings
- syncatabasis (condescension, accommodation): adaptation of style to the level of the audience
- synecdoche: Form of metonymy, in which a part stands for the whole
- synesthesia: Description of one kind of sense impression by using words that normally describe another.
- tautology: Needless repetition of the same sense in different words Example: The children gathered in a round circle
- transferred epithet: Placing of an adjective with what appears to be the incorrect noun
- truism: a self-evident statement
- tricolon diminuens: Combination of three elements, each decreasing in size

- tricolon crescens: Combination of three elements, each increasing in size
- zeugma: A figure of speech related to syllepsis, but different in that the word used as a modifier is not compatible with one of the two words it modifies
- zoomorphism: Applying animal characteristics to humans or gods

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4

Towards Understanding Set Phrase, Euphemism and Stylistic Device

SET PHRASE

A set phrase or fixed phrase is a phrase whose parts are fixed, even if the phrase could be changed without harming the literal meaning. This is because a set phrase is a culturally accepted phrase. A set phrase does not necessarily have any literal meaning in and of itself. Set phrases may function as idioms (e.g. *red herring*) or as words with a unique referent (e.g. *Red Sea*). There is no clear dividing line between a commonly used phrase and a set phrase. It is also not easy to draw a clear distinction between set phrases and compound words.

In theoretical linguistics, two-word set phrases are said to arise during the generative formation of English nouns.

A certain stricter notion of set phrases, more in line with the concept of a lexical item, provides an important underpinning for the formulation of Meaning-Text Theory.

Examples of Set Phrases

Some set phrases are used as either their own statement or as part of a longer statement:

- I see - Can be used both metaphorically and literally.
- I don't know
- Thank you - There is an implied "I" that is almost never used with the set phrase.
- You're welcome - Note that while 'You are welcome' would have the same literal meaning, it is very rarely used in the same way.

Others are almost always used with more detail added:

- Don't look now... - Used either literally or figuratively to warn someone about an imminent misfortune.
- You know... - Usually used rhetorically to make the audience think about the following topic.

EUPHEMISM

Euphemism is a substitution for an expression that may offend or suggest something unpleasant to the receiver, using instead an agreeable or less offensive expression, or to make it less troublesome for the speaker.

Some euphemisms are intended to amuse, while others are created to mislead.

Usage

When a phrase is used as a euphemism, it often becomes a metaphor whose literal meaning is dropped. Euphemisms may be used to hide unpleasant or disturbing ideas, even when the literal term for them is not necessarily offensive. This type of euphemism is used in public relations and politics, where it is sometimes called doublespeak. Sometimes the use of euphemisms is equated to politeness. There are also superstitious euphemisms, based (consciously or subconsciously) on the idea that words have the power to bring bad fortune, and there are religious euphemisms,

based on the idea that some words are holy, or that some words are spiritually perilous (*taboo*; see etymology).

Etymology

The word *euphemism* comes from the (*euphemia*), meaning "the use of words of good omen" which in turn is derived from the Greek root-words *eu*, "good/well" + *pheme* "speech/speaking". The *eupheme* was originally a word or phrase used in place of a religious word or phrase that should not be spoken aloud; etymologically, the *eupheme* is the opposite of the *blaspheme* (evil-speaking). Primary examples of taboo words requiring the use of a euphemism are names for deities, such as Persephone, Hecate, or Nemesis. The term *euphemism* itself was used as a euphemism by the ancient Greeks, meaning 'to keep a holy silence' (speaking well by not speaking at all).

Historical linguistics has revealed traces of taboo deformations in many languages. Several are known to have occurred in Indo-European languages, including the presumed original Proto-Indo-European words for *bear* (*rkso*), *wolf* (*wlko*), and *deer* (originally, *hart* — although the word hart remained commonplace in parts of England until the 20th century as is witnessed by the widespread use of the pub sign The White Hart). In different Indo-European languages, each of these words has a difficult etymology because of taboo deformations — a euphemism was substituted for the original, which no longer occurs in the language. An example is the Slavic root for *bear* — *medu-ed-* which means "honey eater". Names in Germanic languages—including English—are derived from the color brown. Another example in English is "donkey" replacing the old Indo-European-derived word "ass". The word "dandelion" (literally, tooth of lion, referring to the shape of the leaves) is another example, being a substitute for *pissenlit*, meaning "wet the bed", a possible reference to

the fact that dandelion was used as a diuretic. The Talmud describes the blind as having "much light" and this phrase - sagee nahor - is the modern Hebrew for euphemism.

In some languages of the Pacific, using the name of a deceased chief is taboo. Among indigenous Australians, it is forbidden to use the name, image, or audio-visual recording of the deceased, so that the Australian Broadcasting Corporation now publishes a warning to indigenous Australians when using names, images or audio-visual recordings of people who have died.

Since people are often named after everyday things, this leads to the swift development of euphemisms, as new names are frequently required for these things when the old word becomes taboo. These languages have a very high rate of vocabulary change.

In a similar manner, in imperial China, writers of classical Chinese texts were expected to avoid using characters contained within the name of the currently ruling emperor as a sign of respect. In these instances, the relevant characters were replaced by synonyms. (This practice may provide a fairly accurate means of dating a document.)

The common names of illicit drugs, and the plants used to obtain them, often undergo a process similar to taboo deformation, because new terms are devised in order to discuss them secretly in the presence of others. This process often occurs in English (e.g. *speed* or *crank* for *meth*) and is really slang formation, as it often is not intended to substitute a softer term. It occurs even more in Spanish, e.g. the deformation of names for cannabis: *mota* (literally, "something which moves" on the black market), replacing *grifa* (literally, "something coarse to the touch"),

replacing *marihuana* (a female personal name, María Juana), replacing *cáñamo* (the original Spanish name for the plant, derived from the Latin genus name *Cannabis*). All four of these names are still used in various parts of the Hispanophone world, although *cáñamo* ironically has the least underworld connotation, and is often used to describe industrial hemp, or legitimate medically-prescribed cannabis.

Categorizing Euphemisms

- Abstractions and ambiguities (*it* for excrement, *the situation* for pregnancy, *going to the other side* for death, *do it* or *come together* in reference to a sexual act, *tired and emotional* for drunkenness.)
- Indirections (*behind*, *unmentionables*, *privates*, *live together*, *go to the bathroom*, *sleep together*)
- Mispronunciation (*goldarnit*, *dadgummit*, *efing c*, *freakin*, *be-atch*,*shoot* — *see* minced oath)
- Litotes or reserved understatement (*not exactly thin* for "fat", *not completely truthful* for "lied", *not unlike cheating* for "an instance of cheating")
- Changing nouns to modifiers: e.g. *...makes her look slutty* for "...is a slut", *right-wing element* for "Right Wing")
- Personal names, such as *John Thomas* or *Willy* for "penis", *Fanny* for "vulva" (British English).
- Slang, e.g. *pot* for "cannabis", *laid* for "having sexual intercourse" and so on.

There is some disagreement over whether certain terms are or are not euphemisms. For example, sometimes the phrase *visually impaired* is labeled as a politically correct euphemism for *blind*. However, visual impairment can be a broader term, including, for example, people who have partial sight in one eye, or even those with uncorrected

poor vision, a group that would be excluded by the word *blind*.

There are three antonyms of euphemism: *dysphemism*, *cacophemism*, and *power word*. The first can be either offensive or merely humorously deprecating with the second one generally used more often in the sense of something deliberately offensive. The last is used mainly in arguments to make a point seem more correct.

Evolution of Euphemisms

Euphemisms may be formed in a number of ways. *Periphrasis* or *circumlocution* is one of the most common — to "speak around" a given word, implying it without saying it. Over time, circumlocutions become recognized as established euphemisms for particular words or ideas.

To alter the pronunciation or spelling of a taboo word (such as a swear word) to form a euphemism is known as *taboo deformation*. There is an astonishing number of taboo deformations in English, of which many refer to the infamous four-letter words. In American English, words which are unacceptable on television, such as *fuck*, may be represented by deformations such as *freak* — even in children's cartoons. Some examples of rhyming slang may serve the same purpose — to call a person a *berk* sounds less offensive than to call him a *cunt*, though *berk* is short for *Berkeley Hunt* which rhymes with *cunt*.

Bureaucracies such as the military and large corporations frequently spawn euphemisms of a more deliberate nature. Organizations coin *doublespeak* expressions to describe objectionable actions in terms that seem neutral or inoffensive. For example, a term used in the past for contamination by radioactive isotopes was *Sunshine units*.

Military organizations kill people, sometimes deliberately and sometimes by mistake; in doublespeak, the first may be called *neutralizing the target* or *Employing Kinetic Effects* and the second *collateral damage*. Violent destruction of non-state enemies may be referred to as *pacification*. Two common terms when a soldier is accidentally killed (*buys the farm*) by their own side are *friendly fire* or *blue on blue* (*BOBbing*) — "buy the farm" has its own interesting history.

Execution is an established euphemism referring to the act of putting a person to death, with or without judicial process. It originally referred to the execution, i.e., the carrying out, of a death warrant, which is an authorization to a sheriff, prison warden, or other official to put a named person to death. In legal usage, *execution* can still refer to the carrying out of other types of orders; for example, in U.S. legal usage, a writ of execution is a direction to enforce a civil money judgment by seizing property. Likewise, lethal injection itself may be considered a euphemism for putting the convict to death by poisoning.

Abortion originally meant premature birth, and came to mean birth before viability. The term "abort" was extended to mean any kind of premature ending, such as aborting the launch of a rocket. Euphemisms have developed around the original meaning. *Abortion*, by itself, came to mean *induced abortion* or *elective abortion* exclusively. Hence the parallel term *spontaneous abortion*, an "act of nature", was dropped in favor of the more neutral-sounding *miscarriage*.

Industrial unpleasantness such as pollution may be toned down to *outgassing* or *runoff* — descriptions of physical processes rather than their damaging consequences. Some of this may simply be the application of precise technical

terminology in the place of popular usage, but beyond precision, the advantage of technical terminology may be its lack of emotional undertones and the likelihood that the general public (at least initially) will not recognize it for what it really is; the disadvantage being the lack of real-life context. Terms like "waste" and "wastewater" are also avoided in favor of terms such as *byproduct*, *recycling*, *reclaimed water* and *effluent*. In the oil industry, *oil-based drilling muds* were simply renamed *organic phase drilling muds*, where *organic phase* is a euphemism for "oil".

Euphemism Treadmill

Euphemisms often evolve over time into taboo words themselves, through a process described by W.V.O. Quine, and more recently dubbed the "euphemism treadmill" by Steven Pinker, discussed in his The Blank Slate (2003) and The Stuff of Thought (2007) (*cf.* Gresham's Law in economics). This is the well-known linguistic process known as 'pejoration' or 'semantic change'.

Words originally intended as euphemisms may lose their euphemistic value, acquiring the negative connotations of their referents. In some cases, they may be used mockingly and become dysphemisms. Euphemisms related to disabilities have been prone to this.

- In his remarks on the ever-changing London slang, made in *Down and Out in Paris and London*, George Orwell mentioned both the euphemism treadmill and the dysphemism treadmill. He did not use these now-established terms, but observed and commented on the respective processes as early as in 1933.
- Where the words "lavatory" or "toilet" were deemed inappropriate, they were sometimes replaced with "bathroom" or "water closet", which in turn became

simply "restroom" or "W.C." These are also examples of geographic concentration: the term *restroom* is an Americanism rarely used outside the United States, while *washroom* is a Canadian euphemism.

The term "W.C." was previously quite popular in the United Kingdom, but is passing out of favor there, while becoming more popular in France, Germany, the Netherlands and Hungary as the polite term of choice.

- The word "sex", which originally meant simply "male or female", has acquired an additional meaning of "sexual intercourse". This may have led to "sex" being replaced by "gender" (originally a solely linguistic term) in its original meaning, as in gender studies.

Euphemisms for Disability and Handicap

Connotations easily change over time. "Idiot", "imbecile", and "moron" were once neutral terms for a developmentally delayed adult with the mental age comparable to a toddler, preschooler, and primary school child, respectively. As with Gresham's law, negative connotations tend to crowd out neutral ones, so the phrase mentally retarded was pressed into service to replace them. Mentally retarded, too, has come to be considered inappropriate by some, because the word "retarded" came to be commonly used as an insult of a person, thing, or idea. As a result, new terms like "mentally challenged", "with an intellectual disability", "learning difficulties" and "special needs" have replaced "retarded".

A similar progression occurred with the following terms for persons with physical handicaps being adopted by some people:

lame —> crippled —> handicapped —> disabled —> physically challenged —> differently abled

Euphemisms can also serve to recirculate words that have passed out of use because of negative connotation. The word "lame" from above, having faded from the vernacular, was revitalized as a slang word generally meaning *not living up to expectations* or *boring*. The connotation of a euphemism can also be subject-specific.

In the early 1960s, Major League Baseball franchise owner and promoter Bill Veeck, who was missing part of a leg, argued against the then-favored euphemism "handicapped", saying he preferred "crippled" because it was merely descriptive and did not carry connotations of limiting one's capability the way "handicapped" (and all of its subsequent euphemisms) seemed to do (*Veeck as in Wreck*, chapter "I'm Not Handicapped, I'm Crippled"). Later, comedian George Carlin gave a famous monologue of how he thought euphemisms can undermine appropriate attitudes towards serious issues such as the evolving terms describing the medical problem of the cumulative mental trauma of soldiers in high stress situations:

> *shell shock (World War I) —> battle fatigue (World War II) —> operational exhaustion (Korean War) —> posttraumatic stress disorder (Vietnam War)*

He contended that, as the name of the condition became more complicated and seemingly arcane, sufferers of this condition have been taken less seriously as people with a serious illness, and were given poorer treatment as a result. He also contended that Vietnam veterans would have received the proper care and attention they needed were the condition still called "shell shock". In the same routine, he echoed Bill Veeck's opinion that "crippled" was a perfectly valid term (and noted that early English translations of the Bible seemed to have no qualms about saying that Jesus "healed the cripples").

Similarly, spastic was once a neutral descriptor of a sufferer of muscular hypertonicity in British English, but playground use of "spastic" (and variants such as "spaz" and "spacker") as an insult led to the term being regarded by some as offensive. While the term was developing into an insult in British English, it was evolving in a radically different fashion in American English. In the U.S., "spastic" or "spaz" became a synonym for clumsiness, whether physical or mental, and nerdiness, and is very often used in a self-deprecating manner.

The difference between the British and American connotations of "spastic" was starkly shown in 2006 when golfer Tiger Woods used "spaz" to describe his putting in that year's Masters. The remark went completely unnoticed in America, but caused a major uproar in the UK.

Euphemisms for the Profane

Profane words and expressions in the English language are commonly taken from three areas: religion, excretion, and sex. While profanities themselves have been around for centuries, their limited use in public and by the media has only slowly become socially acceptable, and there are still many expressions which are out of place in polite conversation. One influence on the current tolerance of such language may be the frequency of its use on prime-time television. The word *damn* (and most other religious profanity in the English language) has long lost its shock value, and as a consequence, euphemisms for it (e.g., dang, darn-it) have taken on a very stodgy feeling. Euphemisms for male masturbation such as "bashing the bishop","petting the penguin", "jacking off", "waxing the dolphin", "slamming the ham" or "banging one out" are used often among young people to avoid embarrassment in public. Excretory profanity such as *piss* and *shit* in some cases may be acceptable among informal (and usually younger) friends (while they

almost are never acceptable in formal relationships or public use); euphemisms such as *Number One* and *Number Two* may be preferred for use with children. Most sexual terms and expressions, even technical ones, either remain unacceptable for general use or have undergone radical rehabilitation.

Religious Euphemisms

Euphemisms for deities as well as for religious practices and artifacts have been recorded since the earliest writings. Protection of sacred names, rituals, and concepts from the uninitiated has always given rise to euphemisms, whether it be for exclusion of outsiders or the retention of power among the select. Examples from the Egyptians and every other Western religion abound.

Euphemisms for God and Jesus, such as gosh and gee, are used by Christians to avoid taking the name of God in a vain oath, which would violate one of the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 20)

Jews consider the tetragramaton—the four-letter name of God as written in the Torah—to be of such great holiness that it was never to be pronounced as spelled, except in the Temple by the High Priest on Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the year. [Aryeh Kaplan, Meditation and Kabballa p. 134] (The pronunciation used in the Temple has been forgotten.) At all other times, when praying or reading from scripture, Jews say the word "Adonai" ('my Lords') in place of the letters. However, outside of prayer and scriptural contexts, traditional Jews will not pronounce the name "Adonai", but replace it, typically with the word "HaShem", which literally means, "The Name". The other name of God frequently used in the bible, "Elohim" - "Mighty Ones" - is also not pronounced as written except in formal, religious use; in other contexts, devout Jews typically change one of

its letters to "Elokim". Other names of God used in Jewish speech and writing, such as "HaMakom" - "The Place"; or "HaKadosh Baruch Hu". "The Holy One, Blessed is he" can be pronounced in any context. Whether they originated as euphemisms is not clear, but they are used as such, although they are also used in formal prayer. The respect Jews show for the name of God has created, and continues to create, written euphemisms in English. That is, Orthodox Jews usually will not write out the word "God", but instead spell it "G-d." Recently, some have begun making a similarly change to the spelling of the euphemism hashem (discussed above).

Euphemisms for hell, damnation, and the devil, on the other hand, are often used to avoid invoking the power or drawing the attention of the adversary. The most famous in the latter category is the expression *what the dickens* and its variants, which does not refer to the famed British writer but instead was a popular euphemism for Satan in its time. In questions, "what the hell" may be replaced by "what the heck", and in directive speech "get the hell out" is sometimes replaced by "get the heck out".

Excretory Euphemisms

While *urinate* and *defecate* are not euphemisms, they are used almost exclusively in a clinical sense. The basic Anglo-Saxon words for these functions, *piss* and *shit*, are considered vulgarities and unacceptable in general use.

The word *manure*, referring to animal feces used as fertilizer for plants, literally means "worked with the hands" (from the Latin: *manus, manûs* — "hand"), alluding to the mixing of manure with earth. Several zoos market the byproduct of elephants and other large herbivores as *Zoo Doo* or *Zoopoop*, and there is a brand of chicken manure available in garden stores under the name *Cock-a-Doodle*

Doo. Also, a brand of sheep manure is called "Baa Baa Doo." Similarly, the abbreviation *BS*, or the word *bull*, often replaces the word *bullshit* in polite society. (The term *bullshit* itself generally means lies or nonsense, and not the literal "shit of a bull", making it a dysphemism.)

What is currently known as a toilet, has been known by a number of previous euphemisms *"..The Honest Jakes or Privy has graduated via Offices to the final horror of Toilet..."* There are any number of lengthier periphrases for excretion used to excuse oneself from company, such as to *powder one's nose*, to *see a man about a dog* (or *horse*), to *drop the kids off at the pool* or to *release the chocolate hostages* (these expressions could actually be regarded as dysphemisms). In the Bible, *to cover one's feet* referred to excretion. Slang expressions which are neither particularly euphemistic nor dysphemistic, such as *take a leak*, form a separate category.

In some languages, various other sensitive subjects give rise to euphemisms and dysphemisms. In Spanish, one such subject is class and status. The word *señorito* is an example, although the euphemism treadmill has turned it to a disparagement, at least in Mexico.

Sexual Euphemisms

The Latin term *pudendum* and the Greek term *aidoion* for the genitals literally mean "shameful thing". *Groin, crotch,* and *loins* refer to a larger region of the body, but are euphemistic when used to refer to the genitals. The word *masturbate* is derived from Latin, the word *manus* meaning hand and the word *sturbare* meaning to defile. In pornographic stories, the words *rosebud* and *starfish* are often used as euphemisms for *anus,* generally in the context of anal sex.

Sexual intercourse was once a euphemism derived from the more general term *intercourse* by itself, which simply meant "meeting" but now is normally used as a synonym for the longer phrase, thus making the town of Intercourse, Pennsylvania, a subject of jokes in modern usage.

The "baseball metaphors for sex" are perhaps the most famous and widely-used set of polite euphemisms for sex and relationship behavior in the U.S. The metaphors encompass terms like "hitting it off" for a good start to relationship, "Striking out" for being unlucky with a love interest, and "running the bases" for progressing sexually in a relationship. The "bases" themselves, from first to third, stand for various levels of sexual activity from French kissing to "petting", itself a euphemism for manual genital stimulation, all of which is short of "scoring" or "coming home", sexual intercourse. "Hitting a home run" describes sex during the first date, "batting both ways" (also "switch-hitting") or "batting for the other team" describes bisexuality or homosexuality respectively, and "stealing bases" refers to initiating new levels of sexual contact without invitation. Baseball-related euphemisms also abound for the "equipment"; "Bat and balls" are a common reference to the male genitalia, while "glove" or "mitt" can refer to the female anatomy.

There are many euphemisms for birth control devices, sometimes even propagated by the manufacturers: Condoms are known as "rubbers", "sheaths", "love gloves", "diving suits", "raincoats", "Johnnies" (in Ireland and to a lesser degree Britain) etc. The birth control pill is known simply as "The Pill", and other methods of birth control are also given generalized euphemisms like "The Patch", "The Sponge", "Shots", etc.

Euphemisms are also common in reference to sexual

orientations and lifestyles. For example in the movie *Closer*, the character played by Jude Law uses the euphemism "He valued his privacy" for being gay. Another example is being a 'lover of musical theatre'.

As an aside, the use of euphemisms for sexual activity has grown under the pressure of recent rulings by the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regarding what constitutes "decent" on-air broadcast speech. The FCC included many well known euphemisms in its lists of banned terms but indicated that even new and unknown coinages might be considered indecent once it became clear what they referenced. George Carlin's "Seven Words You Can't Say On TV" evolved into the "Incomplete List of Impolite Words", available in text and audio form, and contains hundreds of euphemisms and dysphemisms to genitalia, the act of having sex, various forms of sex, sexual orientations, etc. that have all become too pejorative for polite conversation, including such notables as "getting your pole varnished" and "eating the tuna taco". Carlin also did a bit on the uses of the word "fuck", originally only a dysphemism for the sex act but becoming an adverb, adjective, noun, etc. This "diversity" is also mentioned on in the movie The Boondock Saints after the main characters commit a mass murder of bosses followed by a violent joke on a friend who is in the Mafia.

Euphemisms Referring to Profanity Itself

In the Spanish language, words that mean "swear word" are used as exclamations in lieu of an actual swear word. The Spanish word *maldición*, literally meaning "curse" or "bad word", is occasionally used as an interjection of lament or anger, to replace any of several Spanish profanities that would otherwise be used in that same context. The same is true in Italian with the word *maledizione*.

In Greek, the word "curse" is found, although, from *hubris* is more commonly used, and in English, an exclamation that is used in a similar style is *curses*, although it is these days less common. The stereotyped "Perils of Pauline" silent film might have the villain tying his victim to a railroad track. When the hero rescues the heroine, the card might say, "Curses! Foiled again!" in place of whatever cursing the character presumably uttered.

The English language phrase "Pardon my French" is also sometimes used as a euphemism for profanity.

On several primarily English speaking websites Cleveland is used in place of any and all swear words in order to not only confuse people, but to filter the chat.

In Ernest Hemingway's novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, swear words are replaced by the words "unprintable" and "obscenity", even though the characters are actually speaking Spanish that has been translated into English for the reader (in Spanish, foul language is used freely even when its equivalent is censored in English).

These replacements were not performed at the publisher's behest, but instead by Hemingway's choice.

In Wes Anderson's film Fantastic Mr. Fox, the replacement of swear words by the word "cuss" became a humorous motif throughout the film.

Euphemisms for Death and Murder

The English language contains numerous euphemisms related to dying, death, burial, and the people and places which deal with death. The practice of using euphemisms for death is likely to have originated with the magical belief that to speak the word "death" was to invite death; where to "draw Death's attention" is the ultimate bad fortune — a common theory holds that death is a taboo

subject in most English-speaking cultures for precisely this reason. It may be said that one is not dying, but *fading quickly* because *the end is near*. People who have died are referred to as having *passed away* or *passed* or *departed*.

Kick the bucket seems innocuous until one considers an explanation that has been proposed for the idiom: that a suicidal hanging victim must kick the bucket out from under his own feet during his suicide. *Deceased* is a euphemism for "dead", and sometimes the *deceased* is said to have *gone to a better place*, but this is used primarily among the religious with a concept of Heaven. *Was taken to Jesus* implies salvation specifically for Christians, but *met his maker* may imply some judgment, content implied or unknown, by God.

Some Christians often use phrases such as *gone to be with the Lord* or *called to higher service* (this latter expression being particularly prevalent in the Salvation Army) or "graduated" to express their belief that physical death is not the end, but the beginning of the fuller realization of redemption.

Orthodox Christians often use the euphemism *fallen asleep* or *fallen asleep in the Lord*, which reflects Orthodox beliefs concerning death and resurrection. Greeks in particular are apt to refer to the deceased as "the blessed", "the forgiven", or "the absolved" ones, in the belief that the dead person will be counted among the faithful at the Last Judgement.

The dead body entices many euphemisms, some polite and some profane, as well as dysphemisms such as *worm food*, or *dead meat*. Modern rhyming slang contains the expression *brown bread*. The corpse was once referred to as *the shroud (or house or tenement) of clay*, and modern

funerary workers use terms such as *the loved one* (title of a novel about Hollywood undertakers by Evelyn Waugh) or *the dear departed*. (They themselves have given up the euphemism *funeral director* for *grief therapist*, and hold *arrangement conferences* with relatives.) Among themselves, mortuary technicians often refer to the corpse as the *client*. A recently dead person may be referred to as "the late John Doe". The term *cemetery* for "graveyard" is a borrowing from Greek, where it was a euphemism, literally meaning 'sleeping place'. The term *undertaking* for "burial" is so well-established that most people do not even recognize it as a euphemism.

Contemporary euphemisms and dysphemisms for death tend to be quite colorful, and someone who has died is said to have *died*, *passed on*, *checked out*, *bit the big one*, *kicked the bucket*, *bitten the dust*, *popped their clogs*, *pegged it*, *carked it*, *snuffed it*, *turned their toes up*, *bought the farm*, *cashed in their chips*, *fallen off their perch*, *croaked*, *given up the ghost* (originally a more respectful term, *cf.* the death of Jesus as translated in the King James Version of the Bible Mark 15:37), *gone south*, *gone west*, *gone to California, shuffled off this mortal coil* (from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*), *Run down the curtain and joined the Choir Invisible*, or *assumed room temperature* (actually a dysphemism in use among mortuary technicians). When buried, they may be said to be *pushing up daisies*, *sleeping the big sleep*, *taking a dirt nap*, *checking out the grass from underneath* or *six feet under*. There are hundreds of such expressions in use. (Old Burma-Shave jingle: "If daisies are your favorite flower, keep pushin' up those miles per hour!") In Edwin Muir's 'The Horses' a euphemism is used to show the elimination of the human race 'The seven days war that put the world to sleep.'

The Dead Parrot Sketch from *Monty Python's Flying*

Circus contains an extensive list of euphemisms for death, including many cited above, referring to the deceased parrot that the character played by John Cleese had purchased. The popularity of the sketch has itself increased the popularity of some of these euphemisms — indeed, it has introduced another euphemism for death, "pining for the fjords" (since it was a Norwegian parrot) — although in the sketch that phrase was used by the shop owner to assert that the parrot was *not* dead, but was merely quiet and contemplative.

Euthanasia also attracts euphemisms. One may *put one out of one's misery*, *put one to sleep*, or *have one put down*, the latter two phrases being used primarily with dogs, cats, and horses who are being or have been euthanized by a veterinarian. (These terms are not usually applied to humans, because both medical ethics and law deprecate euthanasia.) In fact, Dr. Bernard Nathanson has pointed out that the word "euthanasia" itself is a euphemism, being Greek for "good death".

Some euphemisms for killing are neither respectful nor playful, but instead clinical and detached, including *terminate*, *wet work*, to *take care of* one, to *do them in*, to *off*, or to *take them out*. To *cut loose* or *open up* on someone or something means "to shoot at with every available weapon". Gangland euphemisms for murder include *ventilate*, *whack*, *rub out*, *hit*, *take him for a ride*, *to cut one down to size*, or "put him in cement boots", "sleep with the fishes" or "put him in a concrete overcoat", the latter three implying disposal in deep water, if then alive by drowning; the arrangement for a killing may be a simple "contract", with the victim referred to as the "client", which suggests a normal transaction of business.

One of the most infamous euphemisms in history was

the German term *Endlosung*, frequently translated in English as "Final Solution" as if it were the consequence of a bureaucratic decision or even an academic exercise instead of a systematic plan for genocide.

Some dysphemisms, especially for death are euphemisms or dysphemisms for other unpleasant events and thus are unpleasant in their literal meaning, used to generalize a bad event. "Having your ass handed to you", "left for the rats", "toasted", "roasted", "burned", "pounded", "bent over the barrel", "screwed over" or other terms commonly describe death or the state of imminent death, but also are common in describing defeat of any kind such as a humiliating loss in a sport or video game, being unfairly treated or cast aside in business affairs, being badly beaten in a fight, and similar. Such an execution device as the electric chair has been known as "Old Sparky" or "Yellow Mama", and the device that delivers lethal chemicals to the condemned in a lethal injection is reduced to "the needle".

To *terminate with prejudice* generally means to end one's employment without possibility of rehire (as opposed to *lay off*, where the person can expect rehire if business picks up), but the related term to *terminate with extreme prejudice* now usually means to kill. The adjective *extreme* may occasionally be omitted. In a famous line from the movie *Apocalypse Now*, Captain Willard is told to terminate Colonel Kurtz's commission "with extreme prejudice". An acronym, *TWEP* has been coined from this phrase, which can be used as a verb.

In a passage near the beginning of *The Twelve Chairs*, where Bezenchuk, the undertaker, astonishes Vorobyaninov with his classification of people by the euphemisms used to speak of their deaths. The game Dungeon Siege contains many euphemisms for death as well. Likewise the videogame

Secret of Mana uses the phrase *sees the reaper* to mean death.

Also, a scene in the film Patch Adams features Patch (Robin Williams) dressed in an angel costume, reading out various synonyms and euphemisms for the phrase "to die" to a man dying of cancer. This evolves into a contest between the two men to see who can come up with more, and better, euphemisms, ending when Patch comes up with "and if we bury you ass up, we'll have a place to park my bike."

Euphemisms in Job Titles

Euphemisms are common in job titles; some jobs have complicated titles that make them sound more impressive than the common names would imply, such as CPA in place of car parking attendant. Many of these euphemisms may include words such as engineer, although in fact the people who do the job are not accredited in engineering. Extreme cases, such as sanitation engineer for janitor, or 'transparent-wall maintenance officer' for window cleaner, are cited humorously more often than they are used seriously. Less extreme cases, such as custodian for janitor or administrative assistant for secretary, are considered more terms of respect than euphemisms. Where the work itself is seen as distasteful, a euphemism may be used, for example "rodent officer" for a rat-catcher, or "cemetery operative" for a gravedigger.

Doublespeak

Doublespeak, often incorrectly assumed to originate from George Orwell's novel *1984* (erroneously combining Orwell's "newspeak" and "doublethink"), is language deliberately constructed to disguise or distort its actual meaning, often resulting in a communication bypass. What distinguishes doublespeak from other euphemisms is its

deliberate usage. Doublespeak may be in the form of bald euphemisms such as "downsizing" or "rightsizing" for "firing of many employees"; or deliberately ambiguous phrases such as "wet work" for "assassination" and "take out" for "destroy".

These lists might suggest that most euphemisms are well-known expressions. Often euphemisms can be somewhat situational; what might be used as a euphemism in a conversation between two friends might make no sense to a third person. In this case, the euphemism is being used as a type of innuendo. At other times, the euphemism is common in some circles (such as the medical field) but not others, becoming a type of jargon or, in underworld situations especially, argot. One such example is the line "put him in bed with the captain's daughter" from the popular sea shanty *Drunken Sailor*, which means to give a whipping with the cat o' nine tails - euphemistically referred to by sailors as the "captain's daughter".

Euphemisms can also be used by governments to rename statutes to use a less offensive expression. For example, in Ontario, Canada, the "Disabled Person Parking Permit" was renamed to the "Accessible Parking Permit" in 2007.

The word euphemism itself can be used as a euphemism. In the animated short *It's Grinch Night* (See Dr. Seuss), a child asks to go to the *euphemism*, where *euphemism* is being used as a euphemism for *outhouse*. This euphemistic use of "euphemism" also occurred in the play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* where a character requests, "Martha, will you show her where we keep the, uh, euphemism?" It is analogous to the 19th-century use of *unmentionables* for *underpants*.

Also, lots of euphemisms are used in the improvised television show, *Whose Line Is It Anyway?*. They are used

often in the game 'If You Know What I Mean', where players are given a scene and have to use as many obscure clichés and euphemisms as possible.

STYLISTIC DEVICE

In literature and writing, a stylistic device is the use of any of a variety of techniques to give an auxiliary meaning, idea, or feeling to the literal or written.

Figurative Language

A figure of speech is any way of saying something other than the ordinary way. Figurative language is language using figures of speech.

Metaphor

A metaphor is a comparison used to add descriptive meaning to a phrase (without using the words "like" or "as"). Metaphors are generally not meant literally, and may have little connotative similarity to the concepts they are meant to portray.

Example: The man's arm exploded with pain, spiderwebs of fire crawling up and down its length as the tire of a passing car crushed it. (There is no literal explosion, spiderweb, or fire, but the words are used to create images and draw similarities to the way such an event would feel)

Simile

The easiest stylistic device to find is a simile, because you only have to look for the words "as" or "like". A simile is a comparison used to attract the reader's attention and describe something in descriptive terms.

Example: "From up here on the fourteenth floor, my brother Charley looks like an insect scurrying among other insects." (from "Sweet Potato Pie," Eugenia Collier)

Example: The beast had eyes as big as baseballs and teeth as long as knives.

Example: She put her hand to the boy's head, which was steaming like a hot train.

Synecdoche

Synecdoche occurs when a part of something is used to refer to the whole. Many examples of synecdoche are idioms, common to the language.

Example: Workers can be referred to as 'pairs of hands', a vehicle as ones 'wheels' or mounted infantrymen as 'horse', the latter appearing to be singular but actually employing the generic plural form: "Napoleon deployed two thousand horse to cover the left flank."

Metonymy

Metonymy is similar to synecdoche, but instead of a part representing the whole, a related object or part of a related object is used to represent the whole. Often it is used to represent the whole of an abstract idea.

Example: The phrase "The king's rifles stood at attention," uses 'rifles' to represent infantry.

Example: The word 'crown' may be used metonymically to refer to the king or queen, and at times to the law of the land.

Personification

Permitting an inanimate object to perform as if it were human.

Apostrophe

Similar to 'personification' but indirect. The speaker addresses someone absent or dead, or addresses an inanimate or abstract object as if it were human.

Charactonym

This is when the name of a character has a symbolic meaning. For example, in Dickens' *Great Expectations*, Miss Havisham has a sham, or lives a life full of pretense. In Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Rev. Dimmesdale metaphorically fades away (dims) as the novel progresses, while Chillingworth has a cold (chilled) heart.

Symbol

A symbol may be an object, a person, a situation, an action or some other object that has literal meaning in the story, and that represents something other than itself. It can also be a word or an idea. It is used as an expressive way to depict an idea. The symbol generally conveys an emotional response far beyond what the word, idea, or image itself dictates.

Example: A heart standing for love. (One might say "It broke my heart" rather than "I was really upset")

Example: A sunrise portraying new hope. ("All their fears melted in the face of the newly risen sun.")

Allegory

An allegory is a story that has a second meaning, usually by endowing characters, objects or events with symbolic significance. The entire story functions symbolically; often a pattern relates each literal item to a corresponding abstract idea or principle. Although the surface story may have its own interest, the author's major interest is in the ulterior meaning.

Imagery

This is when the author invokes sensory details. Often, this is simply to draw a reader more deeply into a story by helping the reader visualize what is being described.

However, imagery may also symbolize important ideas in a story.

For example, in Saki's "The Interlopers," two men engaged in a generational feud become trapped beneath a fallen tree in a storm: "Ulrich von Gradwitz found himself stretched on the ground, one arm numb beneath him and the other held almost as helplessly in a tight tangle of forked branches, while both legs were pinned beneath the fallen mass." Readers can not only visualize the scene, but may infer from it that it is actually the feud that has trapped him. Note also the diction used within the imagery: words like "forked" and "fallen" imply a kind of hell that he is trapped in.

Motif

When a word, phrase, image, or idea is repeated throughout a work or several works of literature.

For example, in Ray Bradbury's "There Will Come Soft Rains," he describes a futuristic "smart house" in a post-nuclear-war time period. All life is dead except for one dog, which dies in the course of the story. However, Bradbury mentions mice, snakes, robins, swallows, giraffes, antelopes, and many other animals in the course of the story. This animal motif establishes a contrast between the past, when life was flourishing, and the story's present, when all life is dead.

Motifs may also be used to establish mood (as the blood motif in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*), for foreshadowing (as when Mary Shelley, in *Frankenstein*, mentions the moon almost every time the creature is about to appear), to support the theme (as when, in Sophocles' drama *Oedipus Rex*, the motif of prophecy strengthens the theme of the irresistibility of the gods), or for other purposes.

Paradox

In literary terminology, a paradox is an apparent contradiction that is nevertheless somehow true. Paradox can take the form of an oxymoron, overstatement or understatement. Paradox can blend into irony.

Sound Techniques

Rhyme

The repetition of identical or similar sounds, usually accented vowel sounds and succeeding consonant sounds at the end of words, and often at the ends of lines of prose or poetry.

For example, in the following lines from a poem by A.E. Housman, the last words of both lines rhyme with each other.

Loveliest of trees, the cherry now

Is hung with bloom along the bough

Repetition

Repetition is the deliberate use of a word or phrase more than once in a sentence or a text to create a sense of pattern or form or to emphasize certain elements in the mind of the reader or listener.

Example: Pile the bodies high [...] And pile them high [...] And pile them high [...] (from "Grass," by Carl Sandburg)

There are further kinds of repetition like *parallelism*, which is the repeating of a structure.

Example: Pile the bodies high. Pile the foes high. Pile the allies high. Pile all of them high. [...] (hypothetical example only)

Alliteration

Alliteration is the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words.

Example: "...many a man is making friends with death/ Even as I speak, for lack of love alone." (Edna St. Vincent Millay's "Sonnet 30").

Alliteration is used by an author to create emphasis, to add beauty to the writing style, and occasionally to aid in shaping the mood.

Assonance

Similar to alliteration, in which vowel sounds are repeated.

Examples: "mad hatter", "free and easy."

Consonance

Similar to alliteration, but the consonants are at the ends of words.

Examples: "odds and ends", "short and sweet."

Rhythm

It is most important in poetry, but also used in prose for emphasis and aesthetic gain.

Example: The fallibly irrevocable cat met its intrinsic match in the oppositional form of a dog.

Onomatopoeia

This includes words that sound like their meaning, or imitations of sounds.

Example: "The bees were buzzing"

Structure

Formal Structure

Formal structure refers to the form of a text. In the

first place, a text is either a novel, a drama, a poem, or some other "form" of literature. However, this term can also refer to the length of lines, stanzas, or cantos in poems, as well as sentences, paragraphs, or chapters in prose. Furthermore, such visible structures as dialogue versus narration are also considered part of formal structure.

Storyline and Plot

The storyline is the chronological account of events that follow each other in the narrative. Plot includes the storyline, and is more; it includes the way in which elements in the story interact to create complexity, intrigue, and surprise. Plot is often created by having separate threads of storyline interact at critical times and in unpredictable ways, creating unexpected twists and turns in the overall storyline.

Plot Structure

Plot structure refers to the configuration of a plot in terms of its exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution/denouement. For example, Dickens' novel *Great Expectations* is noted for having only a single page of exposition before the rising action begins, while *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien has an unusually lengthy falling action. Plot can also be structured by use of devices such as flashbacks, framing and epistolary elements.

Flashback

A flashback (which is one of the most easily recognized utilization of plot structure) is a scene in a writing which occurs outside of the current timeline, before the events that are actually occurring in the story. It is used to explain plot elements, give background and context to a scene, or explain characteristics of characters or events. For instance, one chapter may be at the present time in a character's life, and then the next chapter might be the character's

life years ago. The second chapter gives meaning to the first, as it explains other events the character experienced and thus puts present events in context. In Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, the first short chapter occurs in the narrative's real time; most of the remainder of the book is a flashback.

Frame Story

When there is a lengthy flashback comprising more than half of the text, a frame story is the portion outside the flashback. For example, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* uses the adventures of a sea captain as a frame story for the famous tale of the scientist and his creation. Occasionally, an author will have an unfinished frame, such as in Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw." The lack of a finishing frame in this story has the effect of leaving the reader disoriented, adding to the disturbed mood of the shark.

Foreshadowing

This is when the author drops clues about what is to come in a story, which builds tension and the reader's suspense throughout the book.

Example: The boy kissed his mother and warmly embraced her, oblivious to the fact that this was the last time he would ever see her.

Allusion

Allusion is a reference to something from history or literature.

Irony

Verbal Irony

This is the simplest form of irony, in which the speaker says the opposite of what he or she intends. There are several forms, including euphemism, understatement, sarcasm, and some forms of humor.

Situational Irony

This is when the author creates a surprise that is the perfect opposite of what one would expect, often creating either humor or an eerie feeling. For example, in Steinbeck's novel *The Pearl*, one would think that Kino and Juana would have become happy and successful after discovering the "Pearl of the World," with all its value. However, their lives changed dramatically for the worse after discovering it.

Similarly, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the title character almost kills King Claudius at one point, but resists because Claudius is praying and therefore may go to heaven. As Hamlet wants Claudius to go to hell, he waits. A few moments later, after Hamlet leaves the stage, Claudius reveals that he doesn't really mean his prayers ("words without thoughts never to heaven go"), so Hamlet should have killed him after all.

The way to remember the name is that it's for an *ironic situation*.

Dramatic Irony

Dramatic Irony is when the reader knows something important about the story that one or more characters in the story do not know. For example, in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the drama of Act V comes from the fact that the audience knows Juliet is alive, but Romeo thinks she's dead. If the audience had thought, like Romeo, that she was dead, the scene would not have had anywhere near the same power.

Likewise, in Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," the energy at the end of the story comes from the fact that we know the narrator killed the old man, while the guests are oblivious. If we were as oblivious as the guests, there would be virtually no point to the story.

The way to remember the name is that dramatic irony adds to the *drama* of the story.

Depitation

Depitation is the over-use of extravagant words so as to appear more intelligent, or to ironically emphasize the opposite.

Register

Diction

Diction is the choice of specific words to communicate not only meaning, but emotion as well. Authors writing their texts consider not only a word's denotation, but also its connotation. For example, a person may be described as stubborn or tenacious, both of which have the same basic meaning, but are opposite in terms of their emotional background (the first is an insult, while the second is a compliment). Similarly, a bargain-seeker may be described as either thrifty (compliment) or stingy (insult). An author's diction is extremely important in discovering the narrator's tone, or attitude.

Syntax

Sentences can be long or short, written in the active voice or passive voice, composed as simple, compound, complex, or compound-complex. They may also include such techniques as inversion or such structures as appositive phrases, verbal phrases (gerund, participle, and infinitive), and subordinate clauses (noun, adjective, and adverb). These tools can be highly effective in achieving an author's purpose. Example: The ghetto was ruled by neither German nor Jew; it was ruled by delusion. (from *Night*, by Elie Wiesel) —In this sentence, Wiesel uses two parallel independent clauses written in the passive voice. The first clause establishes suspense about who actually rules the ghetto, and then the first few words of the second clause set up the

reader with the expectation of an answer, which is metaphorically revealed only in the final word of the sentence.

Voice

Imperative, interrogative, active or passive.

Tone

Tone expresses the writer's or speaker's attitude toward the subject, the reader, or herself or himself.

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5

Towards Understanding Relationship between English Idioms and Proverbs

ENGLISH IDIOMS & PROVERBS

Idioms

A bad apple

Be a piece of cake

Be all ears

Be the apple of someone's eye

Be as American as apple pie

Be as blind as a bat.

Backfire

Bark up the wrong tree

Beat around the bush

Beat it

Bend over backward/backwards

Bite off more than one can chew

Bookworm

The bottom line

Bring the house down

Be broke

Bug someone

Butterflies in someone's stomach

Can't make head nor tail (out) of something / someone

Cast pearls before swine

Catch someone's eye

Be chicken

Cold feet

Cold turkey

Cook someone's goose

Be (as) cool as a cucumber

Cool someone's heels

Couch potato

Be cut from the same cloth

Dear John letter

Don't let the grass grow under your feet.

Be down in the dumps

Drive someone up the wall

Eat out

Easy as pie

Eat one's words

Fall in love with someone/something

Feel like a fish out of water

Be fishy

Food for thought

A frog in someone's throat

Get over something

Get up (Wake up) on the wrong side of the bed

Give someone a hand

Be glued to something

Go nuts

Grab a bite

Great minds think alike.

A hand-me-down

Hat trick

Here you go / are

(Somebody's) heart sinks

Hit the books

Hit the ceiling / roof

Hit the nail on the head

Hold one's horses

Hit the sack/hay

Holy Cow

Be in a pickle

Be in the same boat

It's easier said than done.

Be in hot water

It's about time

Keep an eye on someone/something

Keep one's bed

Kick the bucket

Kill time

Know by heart

The last/final straw

Let someone know

Be like taking candy from a baby

Be like the cat that got the cream

Low-key

Make ends meet

Feel / Look like a million dollars

Not hold water

Be on the tip of someone's tongue

Once in a blue moon

Out of the blue

Out of the frying pan and into the fire

Be over the hill

Pop the question

Play it by ear

Pop quiz

Pull someone's leg

Put all your eggs into one basket

Put yourself in someone's shoes

Race against the clock/time

Rain cats and dogs

Read between the lines

Rings a bell

See the light

Shake a leg

Be shaking like a leaf

So far so good

Be sold out

Speak of the devil

Stay up

Stuffed shirt

Surf the Internet/Net/Web

Take a leaf out of someone's book

Take it easy

Take to *something* like a duck to water

Tearjerker

That makes two of us.

That's that.

Throw in the towel

The tip of the iceberg

Time will tell.

Be tongue-tied

Top dog

Turn over a new leaf

Turn your back on (someone)

Twenty-four seven

Be under pressure

Be up and running

Be up in the air

Wear one's heart on one's sleeve

When it rains, it pours.

When pigs fly

You can say that again.

Proverbs

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

The best advice is found on the pillow.

Better safe than sorry.

The bigger, the better.

A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.

Birds of a feather flock together.

Curiosity killed the cat.

Don't count your chickens before they hatch.

Don't cross your bridges before you get to them.

The early bird catches the worm.

Good things come in small packages.

The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.

Home is where the heart is.

It's no use crying over spilled milk.

A kite rises against the wind.

Money doesn't grow on trees.

Necessity is the mother of invention.

Opposites attract.

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

The pen is mightier than the sword.

A picture is worth a thousand words.

Procrastination is the thief of time.

Safety lies in the middle course.

Silence is golden.

A stitch in time saves nine.

There's no place like home.

Time flies.

Too many cooks spoil the broth.

Variety is the spice of life.

You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink.

You can't judge a book by its cover.

You can't take it with you when you die.

6

Learn English Idioms

English Idioms of Secrecy

Telling secrets

to leak = to let a secret out: "Somebody has leaked the diplomatic cables." (If something leaks, it lets out water.)

whistle blower = someone who blows the whistle on an organisation tells the wider world about bad / illegal practices: "Whistle blowers aren't always protected by the law."

spill the beans = to tell a secret: "Josie spilled the beans on her relationship with her boss."

let the cat out of the bag = let a secret out: "Don't let the cat out of the bag! I want his present to be a secret."

crack under pressure = tell something because you've been under pressure to: "The criminal cracked under pressure of his interrogation and confessed to robbery."

take the lid off something = reveal a secret: "He's taken the lid off what really happens in animal testing labs."

Some gossip idioms:

dish the dirt = tell the public about an ex: "Is she going to dish the dirt on her footballer husband?"

kiss and tell = a story told by an ex: "In the latest kiss and tell, we hear all about a Hollywood actor."

be a blabbermouth = tell everything (blab = slang for talk): "She's such a blabbermouth. I can't believe she told you!"

Keeping a secret

keep mum = keep quiet: "Can you keep mum? I've got something to tell you."

stay schtum = stay silent: "If you can stay schtum, I want to say something to you…"

my lips are sealed = I won't say a word: "You can trust me. My lips are sealed."

keep a poker face = not give away anything: "If you can keep a poker face, people will tell you secrets."

take your secret to the grave with you = never reveal a secret: "Unfortunately, he took his secret to the grave with him. We'll never know the truth."

keep something under wraps = keep something secret: "They kept their plans under wraps."

Party idioms

People who love parties

The life and soul of the party = the person who's at the centre of all parties!

She's the life and soul of the party.

let your hair down = forget all your inhibitions: "Go on! Let your hair down for once and have a good time."

have a whale of a time = have a great time: "We had a whale of a time at Sonia's birthday."

paint the town red = have a wild time: "They painted the town red all weekend."

a party animal = a person who loves going to parties: "John is a real party animal. He's never at home."

a wild child = a young adult who goes to lots of parties: "Emma is a bit of a wild child."

large it up (UK slang) = have a good time: "She larges it up at the weekend."

a social butterfly = a person with lots of friends and acquaintances: She's a bit of a social butterfly."

be a laugh = be good company: "Eric's a bit of a laugh."

throw a party = have a party: "We're throwing a party next Saturday."

People who hate parties

party-pooper = someone who doesn't like parties: "Don't be such a party-pooper!"

a wet blanket = someone who doesn't want to have fun: "He's such a wet blanket."

Billy no-mates (UK slang) = a man with no friends: "He doesn't want to go alone to the restaurant and look like Billy no-mates."

Norma no-mates (UK slang) = a woman with no friends: "She doesn't want to look like Norma no-mates."

pour cold water on = someone who turns the atmosphere cold: "So then he had to go and pour cold water on everything by refusing to sing Happy Birthday."

a wallflower = someone who stands on his own at parties: "Who's the wallflower over there?"

piss on someone's fireworks (UK slang) = ruin the happy mood: "Don't go and piss on his fireworks by turning down the music. Let him have some fun."

find someone in the kitchen at parties = refer to someone who doesn't like mixing socially: "You'll always find Kevin in the kitchen at parties."

Dancing

a slow dance = a slow, romantic dance: "She had a slow dance with Tony."

burn up the dance floor = dance a lot: "They like burning up the dance floor."

dance the night away = dance all night long: "Those two danced the night away."

dance cheek to cheek = dance very close to someone: "Everyone was looking at them dance cheek to cheek."

have a boogie = have a dance: "Fancy a boogie?"

put on your dancing shoes = get ready for dancing: "Come on Sarah! Put on your dancing shoes – we're going clubbing tonight!"

strut your stuff = enjoy dancing: "Look at him strut his stuff. Who does he think he is? John Travolta?"

English idioms using "hot"

to be hot = very popular / fashionable: "Iceland is a really hot weekend destination at the moment."

a hot favourite = someone / something most likely to win: "Red Rum was always the hot favourite to win the Grand National."

a hot tip = important or useful suggestion: "He gave me a hot tip for my interview."

a hot topic = an issue which is important: "Climate change is a hot topic at the moment."

hot off the press = very new story: "This gossip is hot off the press."

to get too hot = become too dangerous: "Things are getting too hot and the relief agencies are pulling out of the area."

a hot date = a date with someone you find very attractive: "She's got a hot date tonight!"

hot stuff = attractive: "Her new boyfriend is hot stuff."

in the hot seat = in a position of responsibility: "You make the decisions – you're in the hot seat now!"

in hot water = in trouble because you have done something wrong: "If you send that email now, you'll find yourself in hot water with the boss."

have a hot temper = to get angry easily: "He has a hot temper, so don't provoke him into an argument."

get hot under the collar = get angry about something which isn't very important: "You always seem to get hot under the collar about people's driving habits. Don't let it worry you!"

hot and bothered = feeling uncomfortable, either because it's too hot, or because you have too much to do in too little time: "She's all hot and bothered now that she's been invited to the theatre this evening."

be like a cat on a hot tin roof = restless or jumpy: "He's like a cat on a hot tin roof with all this talk about redundancies."

in hot pursuit = to follow closely: "The pickpocket ran off, with members of the public in hot pursuit."

hot on the trail = close to finding something: "The police are hot on the trail of the mastermind behind the bank robbery."

hot air = something which is not as important or true

as it sounds: "What he says is just a lot of hot air – don't take it too seriously."

more (something) **than you've had hot dinners** = an expression to mean that you've had a lot of something: "I've had more jobs than you've had hot dinners!"

blow hot and cold = keep changing your mind about something: "I'm blowing hot and cold about moving to the countryside."

English idioms using "cold"

We use the idea of "cold" in many idioms, to refer to weather, to people, and to relationships. Here are some of the more common idioms and phrases.

Weather and temperature

ice cold / freezing cold / stone cold = very cold: "This tea is stone cold!"

a cold snap / a cold spell = cold weather: "We're in for a cold snap this weekend."

People

cold-hearted = not be a warm person: "She is so cold-hearted, ignoring her boyfriend like that!"

cold-blooded killer / **kill someone in cold blood** = have no mercy for your victim: "He was killed in cold blood."

cold fish = a "cold" person: "The new manager is a bit of a cold fish. I don't know what to make of him."

Lack of enthusiasm or emotion

get cold feet = when you suddenly don't feel brave enough for something: "We wanted to go on holiday to Egypt, then my husband got cold feet about flying."

blow hot and cold = not be able to decide something: "I don't know about moving house. I'm blowing hot and cold about it."

in the cold light of day = when you can think clearly about something: "In the cold light of day, the ghost stories didn't seem so scary."

cold facts = plain facts: "Just give me the cold facts!"

leave someone cold = not be interested in something / someone: "I'm afraid that watching football on TV just leaves me cold."

throw cold water on something = destroy other people's enthusiasm about something: "We thought we had some really good ideas, but then she threw cold water on them."

Relationships

leave someone out in the cold = not include someone: "While the others were playing cards, she was left out in the cold."

come in from the cold = be accepted into a group: "He's finally come in from the cold."

give someone the cold shoulder = ignore someone: "After the party,he was given the cold shoulder."

Cold War = the state of unfriendliness between the USA and the USSR after World War II: "We're studying the Cold War in history".

Others

be out cold = be unconscious: "After a bottle of whisky he was out cold."

go cold turkey = to go through withdrawal symptoms

from drugs: "The only way to get off drugs is by going cold turkey."

cold call = call someone you don't know to sell them something: "Cold-calling isn't always an effective sales technique."

cold comfort = a small piece of good news which doesn't make much difference to a bad situation: "Sales reductions of 50% are cold comfort if you don't have any money to go shopping!"

get / catch a cold = become ill with a cold: "I caught a cold last week."

English idioms about time

Here are some common English idioms and phrases about time.

Clock

beat the clock = do something within the deadline: "We managed to beat the clock and get everything finished in time."

work against the clock = work hard knowing you have a deadline: "Scientists are working against the clock to come up with a new vaccine."

to clock on / off = sign in or out of a company to show the hours you've worked: "We need to clock in after we come back from lunch."

watch the clock (a clock watcher) = make sure you only work the hours: "If you're a clock watcher, then this job isn't for you."

Lack of time

pressed for time = not have much time: "I'm a bit pressed for time at the moment. Do you mind if we have the meeting tomorrow?"

run out of time = not have any time left: "We've run out of time on this project."

a race against time = have to do something fast within a deadline: "There's a race against time to save the rainforests."

no time to lose = no time to waste: "There's no time to lose. We've got to get going."

Have enough time

have all the time in the world = have plenty of time: "You don't need to hurry. We've got all the time in the world."

have spare time = have free time: "What do you do in your spare time?"

have time on your hands / time to kill = too much time: "We've got a bit of time on our hands. What do you want to do?"

take your time = not be in any hurry: "Take your time answering the question."

in your own time = do something without worrying about how much time it takes: "I'll fix the car in my own time!"

make good time = do something faster than you thought: "We made good time. It only took us an hour to get here."

time is on your side = be young and have plenty of time ahead of you: "You've got time on your side, so you shouldn't feel pressured into making a career decision now."

The right time for something

just in time: "They arrived just in time for the wedding."

in the nick of time = without a second to spare: "We got here in the nick of time. Look at all that rain!"

high time = the right time: "It's high time you got a job!" (Note: use the past simple after "high time")

not before time: "He's finally got a job. Not before time, I might add!"

it's about time: "It's about time you found your own place to live." (Use the past simple after "it's about time")

not the time / hardly the time = an inappropriate time for something: "It's not the time to ask me for a pay rise.!

Other expressions with time

lose track of time = forget about the time: "She was so engrossed in her book she lost all track of time."

two-time = go out with more than one person at the same time: "She ought to be careful. She's two-timing Jack with Bill and Jack is a very jealous person…"

call time on = bring an end to something: "The government are calling time on internet spammers."

take time out = have a pause from something: "He needs to take some time out from his work."

keep time = show the right time: "My watch doesn't keep good time."

do time = serve a prison sentence: "He's doing time for armed robbery."

on the company's time = do something else when you're at work: "We're not allowed to use twitter on the company's time."

ahead of his / her time = be forward-thinking: "He's

definitely ahead of his time. He's always got so many fascinating ideas."

behind the times = old-fashioned: "He's so behind the times. He still plays records! Can you believe it?"

keep up / move with the times = remain modern: "My mum is learning to use email to keep up with the times."

have the time of your life = have a great time: "She's having the time of her life at University. She loves it!"

before your time = before a person lived or worked in a place: "There used to be a post office here. That was before your time, of course."

time and a half = when a worker is paid extra for working overtime: "We get time and a half if we work on Saturdays."

overtime = money paid for working extra hours: "The firm are cutting back on overtime."

time share = a holiday home bought by more than one person, where each "owner" has a certain period of the year they can use it: "Time share apartments are cheap at the moment."

time warp = stuck in a past time: "This town seems to be stuck in a 1950s time warp. There are no fast food places and everything's closed on Sundays."

time zone = area where the clocks are the same: "The UK is in a different time zone from the rest of Europe."

House idioms

English idioms that use the word House, Home or related words.

House

safe as houses = very safe: "This plan is as safe as houses. It can't fail!"

get on like a house on fire = get on very well with someone: "Those two get on like a house on fire."

give house room to = give space in your house to something: "I wouldn't give house room to that lamp. It's horrible!"

eat someone out of house and home = eat a lot of food: "When they stayed with me, they ate me out of house and home!"

get a foot on the housing ladder = manage to buy your first house so that you can buy a bigger second one later: "It's becoming more difficult for young people to get a foot on the housing ladder."

get your own house in order = tidy up your own affairs before criticising other people's: "You should get your own house in order before telling me what to do!"

be on the house = be free (in a restaurant): "Can I get you a drink on the house?"

have a roof over your head = have somewhere to live: "Unless we find another flat to rent, we won't have a roof over our heads in two months' time!"

build castles in the air = have impossible dreams or plans: "She has this unrealistic idea of sailing around the world. She's building castles in the air again."

lead someone up the garden path = deceive someone: "He really led her up the garden path with his promises of promotion and career advancement."

everything but the kitchen sink = take a lot of

things when you go somewhere: "They took everything but the kitchen sink when they went on holiday."

throw money down the drain = waste money: "If you ask me, by giving your son all that money, you're really throwing money down the drain."

have a skeleton in the cupboard / in the closet = have an unpleasant secret: "There are a lot of skeletons in their cupboard."

Other expressions with house

housework = chores you do in the house: "She does all the housework."

house wine = the restaurant's own unlabelled wine: "Would you like the house red or the house white?"

house music = a type of dance music: "They played house all night at the club."

house speciality = a speciality of the restaurant: "Garlic oysters are one of their house specialities."

full house = a full theatre: "It's full house tonight."

Home

home in on = become closer to your target: "Police are homing in on the suspects."

there's no place like home = an expression to mean that your home is a special place: "What a great holiday! Still, there's no place like home."

home from home = a place that is as comfortable as your home: "The hotel was home from home."

be home and dry = succeed at something and not expect any further problems: "I'm glad we've got that new client. We're home and dry now."

make yourself at home = make yourself comfortable: "Make yourself at home! Can I get you a drink?"

ram something home = make a point forcefully: "They rammed home the idea that she had to get a good job."

Other expressions with home

home truth = an uncomfortable fact: "She's going to have to sit down and hear some home truths."

home comforts = the things that make you feel comfortable: "Our hotel room has all the home comforts, such as a coffee maker, reading lamp, nice soaps in the bathroom…"

homework = school exercises that you do at home: "Our teachers give us a ton of homework!"

homesick = when you miss your home: "He went away for two weeks, but was terribly homesick."

Idioms of change

blow away the cobwebs = literally to get rid of the webs that spiders make, this idiom means to do something which makes your mind "cleaner" and fresher: "After sitting in the same chair for five hours, I wanted to go out for a walk to blow away the cobwebs."

like a breath of fresh air = someone or something who has new, fresh ideas or behaviour: "After working for the old boss for 20 years, the new boss seems like a breath of fresh air."

out with the old, in with the new = to change the old for the new: "We have a new CEO who wants to make his mark on the company. Out with the old, in with the new."

new blood = to have fresh people and ideas in an

organisation: "In an effort to get new blood into our research department, we're having a recruitment drive."

shake things up (a shake up) = to change things a lot: "The government are having a shake up of their education policies."

give something a new lease of life = to renew something so that it lasts longer: "Those tablets have given our pet dog a new lease of life."

breathe new life into = to give new energy to something: "This sports club needs to increase its members to breathe new life into our finances."

New views

get a fresh perspective = to get a different point of view: "Let's ask the sales department for their opinion. The can bring us a fresh perspective."

see things from a different angle = to consider something from a different point of view: "Let's try to see this problem from a different angle."

Starting again

go back to square one = to have to start again because something didn't work: "Well, so much for trying! I suppose it's back to square one."

go back to the drawing board = to have to start again because something didn't work: "Unfortunately the plans didn't work out. We'll have to go back to the drawing board."

start with a clean sheet = to have another chance, perhaps because you have made serious mistakes: "He's paid for his mistakes, and now he can start with a clean sheet."

make a fresh start / make a clean break = to start something again: "Let's put the problems behind us and make a fresh start."

Some other expressions with change

a change is as good as a rest = it's often as refreshing to make a change than it is to have a break

a change for the better / worse = a change that results in either a better or a worse situation

a change of heart = when you change your mind on something: "I've had a change of heart. I think I'll stay in my present job, after all."

loose change / spare change = coins in your pocket: "Do you have any spare change for the parking meter?"

small change = money of little value: "I've got about 5 euros of small change in my pocket."

English idioms of emotion

Here are some emotional idioms to tell people whether you're happy, sad or angry.

All these idioms mean that you are absolutely delighted!

over the moon: "He was over the moon when he heard the news."

thrilled to bits: "She was thrilled to bits with her new bicycle."

in seventh heaven: "They were in seventh heaven when they learned they'd won a cruise."

on cloud nine: "When I got the job, I was on cloud nine for several weeks."

jump for joy: "We jumped for joy when we got the mortgage."

These idioms mean you are feeling sad.

down in the dumps: "When she left him, he was down in the dumps for a couple of weeks."

feel blue: "She felt a little blue when she lost her job."

beside yourself (with grief, worry): "When her son went missing, she was beside herself with worry."

Annoyed because you have missed an opportunity

sick as a parrot: "He was as sick as a parrot when he realised he had thrown away his lottery ticket."

These idioms mean that you are very angry.

see red: "Don't talk to him about his boss – it just makes him see red!"

hopping mad: "She was hopping mad when she found out her daughter had disobeyed her."

in a black mood: "Be careful what you say – she's in a black mood today."

Less angry idioms

cheesed off: "I was really cheesed off when I lost the competition."

to not be on speaking terms: "They're not on speaking terms at the moment after their row."

To be off someone's Christmas card list: "Oh dear. I think I'm off her Christmas card list after insulting her husband!"

have a downer on someone: "What's John done? You seem to have a real downer on him."

rub someone up the wrong way: "Those two are always arguing. They just seem to rub each other up the wrong way."

In desperation

These idioms mean you don't know what to do.

at the end of your tether: "I just can't cope. I'm at the end of my tether with all these bills and debts."

at your wits' end: "He's at his wits' end. He's tried everything to solve the problem, but nothing has worked."

Relationship idioms

English idioms that describe relationships.

Positive

get on like a house on fire = to get on really well with someone: "They get on like a house on fire."

have a soft spot for someone = to be very fond of someone: "She has a soft spot for her youngest child."

go back a long way = to know someone well for a long time: "Those two go back a long way. They were at primary school together."

be in with = to have favoured status with someone: "She's in with the management."

Negative

get off on the wrong foot with someone = to start off badly with someone: "She really got off on the wrong foot with her new boss."

keep someone at arm's length = to keep someone at a distance: "I'm keeping her at arm's length for the time being."

they're like cat and dog = to often argue with someone: "Those two are like cat and dog."

rub someone up the wrong way = to irritate someone: "She really rubs her sister up the wrong way."

be at loggerheads = to disagree strongly: "Charles and Henry are at loggerheads over the new policy."

sworn enemies = to hate someone: "Those two are sworn enemies."

Equality and inequality

bend over backwards for someone = do everything possible to help someone: "She bent over backwards for them when they first arrived in the town."

be at someone's beck and call = to always be ready to do what someone wants: "As the office junior, she was at his beck and call all day."

pull your weight = to do the right amount of work: "The kids always pull their weight around the house."

do your fair share = to do your share of the work: "He never does his fair share!"

take someone under your wing = to look after someone until they settle in: "He took her under his wing for her first month at work."

keep tabs on someone = to watch someone carefully to check what they are doing: "He's keeping tabs on the sales team at the moment."

wear the trousers = to be in control: "She wears the trousers in their relationship."

be under the thumb = to be controlled by someone else: "He really keeps her under the thumb."

How you communicate

get your wires crossed =to misunderstand someone because you think they are talking about something else: "I think I've got my wires crossed. Were you talking about car or personal insurance?"

get the wrong end of the stick = to misunderstand someone and understand the opposite of what they are saying: "You've got the wrong end of the stick. The fault was with the other driver, not with me."

be left in the dark = to be left without enough information: "We've been left in the dark over this project. We haven't been told how to do it."

talk at cross purposes = when two people don't understand each other because they are talking about two different things (but don't realise it): "We're talking at cross purposes here."

go round in circles = to say the same things over and again, so never resolving a problem: "We always end up going round in circles in these meetings."

leave things up in the air = to leave something undecided: "I hate leaving things up in the air."

Talking idioms

These idioms will help you describe talking and communication.

Talk

talk nineteen to the dozen = talk fast: "She was so excited that she was talking nineteen to the dozen."

talk the hind legs off a donkey = talk without stopping: "She can talk the hind legs off a donkey!"

talk something through / over = to discuss something: "Before we decide anything, I think we ought to talk it through."

talk something up = to make something appear more important: "She really talked the idea up, but I don't think that everyone was convinced."

talk someone into doing = to persuade someone: "He talked her into buying a new car."

talk someone through something = give step-by-step instructions: "She talked him through the procedure."

talk down to = talk in a condescending way: "Don't talk down to me! I understand you perfectly well."

talk back = respond to someone in authority in a rude way: "Don't talk back to your mother!"

This is similar to **back chat**: "I don't want any back chat from you!"

talk under your breath = talk quietly so that nobody can hear you: "They talked under their breath in the meeting."

talk rubbish = not to speak logically: "He talks complete rubbish sometimes!"

Also **talk through your arse** (British slang and quite rude): "You're talking through your arse again. You know nothing about it!"

talk at cross purposes = when two people don't understand each other because they are talking about two different things (but don't realise it): "We're talking at cross purposes here."

talk / speak with a plum in your mouth = talk with a posh (=upper class) accent: "She talks with a plum in her mouth!"

talk around the subject = not get to the point: "He didn't want to say they were in danger of losing their jobs, so he talked around the subject for half an hour."

talk highly of someone = praise someone: "He talks very highly of you!"

to give someone a talking-to = when you talk to someone because you are angry with them: "His boss gave him a real talking-to yesterday!"

talk to yourself = to speak to yourself, maybe because you are concentrating on something: "Are you talking to yourself again?"

to be like talking to a brick wall = to not have any effect on someone: "Sometimes talking to him is like talking to a brick wall!"

talk your way out of something = get out of a difficult situation by giving a clever explanation: "Whew! I think I managed to talk our way out of that one!"

straight talking = honest words: "I want some straight talking around here!"

talk shop = talk about work in a social situation: "Whenever I go out with my colleagues, we always end up talking shop."

Chat

to chat someone up = to talk to someone because you are attracted to them: "He went to a party and chatted up every woman."

a chatterbox = someone who talks a lot, but not saying anything important: "She's a bit of a chatterbox at work."

chit-chat = social conversation about unimportant subjects: "Enough of the chit-chat! I have to get on with some work."

Word

to have a word with someone = to talk to someone about something you are not happy with: "I'm going to have a word with him about his kids' behaviour."

to not have a good word to say about someone = to always criticise: "She never has a good word to say about the Browns."

a word in your ear = something you say before you give some advice or a warning: "A word in your ear – the company are monitoring internet use."

to not mince your words = say something directly, without trying to be diplomatic: "She doesn't mince her words!"

to have words = to have an argument: "They've had words and now they're not speaking."

to get a word in edgeways = to try to contribute to a conversation: "They were talking so fast it was impossible to get a word in edgeways!"

Clothing idioms

keep something under your hat = don't say anything to anyone: "I've got something to say to you. But keep it under your hat – it's not public knowledge."

take your hat off to someone = admire someone: "I really take my hat off to people who work full time and study at the same time!"

tied to his mother's apron strings = someone (normally a man) who does what his mother tells him: "He didn't want to come out last weekend, because his mother disapproves of us. He's really tied to her apron strings!"

keep something up your sleeve = keep something hidden for later: "We've been negotiating my new pay and conditions, but I've kept the other job offer up my sleeve for the time being."

all talk no trousers – someone who talks a lot but doesn't act: "I know he told you that he would get you a

limousine for the wedding. Don't believe him, though. He's all talk, no trousers."

who wears the trousers? = who has the power in a relationship: "What do you mean, she won't let you come out with us? Who wears the trousers in your house?"

pull your socks up = work harder: "You'll have to pull your socks up if you want a promotion next year."

it will blow your socks off = very hot food: "This is a fantastic stir-fry – it's hot enough to blow your socks off!"

hot under the collar = upset or angry about something: "He gets really hot under the collar about cruelty to animals – he can't stand seeing animals suffer."

***it's pants (UK slang)* –** rubbish: "What did you think of the film?" "Pants!"

get something under your belt – achieve something: "I'm really glad I passed the driving test. Now I've got that under my belt, I can relax for a little while."

belt up = keep quiet: "What's all that noise? Just belt up, would you? I can't hear myself think."

below the belt = unfair: "You know he's really sensitive about the accident. I think it was a bit below the belt to mention it."

the boot's on the other foot = your opponent now has the advantage: "Now that she has been promoted, the boot's on the other foot! You should watch what you say from now on."

get your skates on = to hurry up: "Get your skates on – we're late as it is!"

have the shirt off your back = to steal all you own: "He asked you for how much rent? He'd have the shirt off your back, if you let him."

in only the clothes he stood up in = to only possess what you wear: "After the fire, they were left with only the clothes they stood up in."

get shirty = become angry with someone: "Don't get shirty with me! I'm only reporting the new rules."

skirt around the issue = not talk directly about something: "They skirted around the issue for a while, then got down to the real business."

cloak and dagger = mysterious: "Who's arranging the party? I don't know – it's all very cloak and dagger at the moment."

give someone a dressing down = tell someone off / reprimand someone: "He gave the whole department a dressing down after they failed to meet their agreed targets."

dressed to the nines / dressed to kill = dressed up: "Where are you going, dressed up to the nines?"

Body idioms

English idioms connected with parts of the body.

The heart

break someone's heart = upset someone greatly: "She broke his heart when she left him."

learn something off by heart = learn something completely: "I've learnt this off by heart – I'm bound to pass the exam!"

you're all heart! = when you tell someone sarcastically how kind they are: "Thanks for giving me all this work – you're all heart!"

hand on heart = promise with sincerity: "Hand on heart, it's the honest truth."

have the heart = be able to give someone bad news: "I didn't have the heart to tell him he'd failed."

a heart of gold = be a very kind person: "She'll always help – she has a heart of gold."

Hands

hand over = pass on something: "Before I leave, I have to hand over all my work."

get out of hand = become impossible to manage: "You'll have to deal with this problem before it gets out of hand."

know something like the back of your hand = know something extremely well: "He knows London like the back of his hand."

have your hands full = be very busy: "I can't do anything about it now – my hands are full."

in hand = under control: "The company report is in hand – you'll have it next week."

live hand to mouth = only earn enough money for food: "After he lost his job, he had to live hand to mouth for a couple of months."

give someone a hand = help someone: "He always gives me a hand with the housework."

have someone in the palm of your hand = have influence over someone: "He's got her in the palm of his hand."

be caught red-handed = be caught doing something bad: "The children were caught red-handed picking the flowers."

Fingers

butter fingers = be clumsy and drop things: "You've dropped my vase! Butter fingers!"

keep your fingers crossed = wish something for

someone: "Keep your fingers crossed for me tomorrow – it's my job interview."

under your thumb = control someone: "She's got him under her thumb – he won't do anything without asking her first."

Arms

twist someone's arm = persuade someone: "I didn't want to go out, but he twisted my arm."

cost an arm and a leg = cost a fortune: "The car cost an arm and a leg – it'll take them ages to pay back the loan."

Feet and legs

put your foot in it = say or do something you shouldn't: "I think I've put my foot in it – I told her about the party."

have itchy feet = not able to settle down in one place: "She's going off travelling again – she's got really itchy feet."

keep someone on their toes = keep someone alert: "Our teacher keeps us on our toes – we have to pay attention in class."

stand on your own two feet = be independent: "I don't need your help – I can stand on my own two feet."

have two left feet = be awkward or clumsy: "He's a terrible dancer – he's got two left feet!"

walk on eggshells = be careful about what you say or do: "She's in a terrible mood – you'll have to walk on eggshells around her."

foot the bill = pay the bill: "He had to foot the bill for the party."

The back

go behind someone's back = do something secretly: "She went behind my back and told my boss I wanted a new job."

back off = stop trying to force someone to do something: "Will you just back off and let me decide what I should do!"

back down = accept defeat: "He finally backed down and let me buy a pet rabbit."

back someone up = support someone: "Thank you for backing me up in the meeting."

put your back into something = work very hard at something: "She put her back into it and got good results."

stab someone in the back = betray someone: "Be careful of him – he'll stab you in the back if it gets him what he wants."

Head idioms

Idioms that use parts of the head.

head to head = in a race, when two contestants are doing as well as each other: "They are head to head in the polls."

off the top of your head = when you give an answer to something without having the time to reflect: "What's our market strategy?" "Well, off the top of my head, I can suggest…"

have a good head for = be good at something: "He's an accountant and he has a good head for figures."

have your head in the clouds = dream: "He's always got his head in the clouds – he makes all these impossible plans."

go over your head = not understand something: "The

lesson went over my head – I didn't understand a word of it."

keep your head = stay calm: "He always keeps his head in a crisis."

be head over heels in love = be completely in love: "You can see that he's head over heels in love with her."

keep your head above water = manage to survive financially: "Despite the recession, they kept their heads above water."

use your head = think about something to solve a problem: "It's quite simple – just use your head!"

English idioms using 'mind'

keep / bear something in mind = remember something for future use: "I need a job in computers." "I'll bear it in mind – we often have vacancies for people with your skills."

make up your mind = decide: "I can't make up my mind about the job offer."

be in two minds about something = unable to decide: "I'm in two minds about buying a new car."

be out of your mind = be really worried: "Where have you been? I've been out of my mind with worry."

have a mind of your own = not be influenced by other people: "Don't tell me what to do! I've got a mind of my own, you know."

give someone a piece of your mind = tell someone how angry you are with them: "I'm going to give him a piece of my mind. He knows I cooked dinner for him and now he's an hour late."

English idioms of the face

English idioms that use parts of the face.

Face

face-to-face = in person: "We need to arrange a face-to-face meeting."

face the music = take responsibility for a difficult situation: "We've got to face the music – this company is going under."

face up to responsibilities = accept responsibilities: "You need to face up to your responsibilities – it's time you got a job and started to save money."

be two-faced = be hypocritical: "I can't believe she told you that she likes Harry – she told me she hates him! She's so two-faced!"

Ears

be all ears = listen attentively: "So, you've got an idea. I'm all ears."

have an ear for = be good at music: "He's doing well in his piano lessons – he's definitely got an ear for music."

keep your ears to the ground = listen out for something: "I'll keep my ears to the ground – the next time I hear someone wants to rent out a flat, I'll let you know."

up to your ears in something = be extremely busy: "I'm sorry I can't come out this weekend – I'm up to my ears in work."

Eyes

keep your eyes peeled = watch extremely attentively: "Keep your eyes peeled for him – he's in the crowd somewhere."

keep an eye out for = watch for someone or something: "Keep an eye out for the next turning on the left."

eye up = look at someone because you think they look

nice: "Whenever she goes to a club, she always gets eyed up by older men."

have your eye on something / someone = want someone or something: "I've got my eye on a new computer."

have eyes in the back of your head = warn someone that you can see exactly what they are doing: "Don't make those signs at me – I've got eyes in the back of my head!"

see eye to eye on something = agree with someone: "Those two don't always see eye to eye – they often argue."

Other parts of the face

stick your nose in = get involved in something or someone else's business: "I wish she wouldn't stick her nose in like that – I really don't want anyone else's help."

on the tip of my tongue = when you've forgotten the word you want to say: "What's the word for it – it's on the tip of my tongue…"

tongue-tied = when you can't say anything because you feel shy: "She's tongue-tied when she has to speak in public."

by the skin of my teeth = just manage to do something: "He got out of the burning building by the skin of his teeth."

cut your teeth on something = where you learn to do something: "He's the best man to run the company – he cut his teeth in the Production Department and ran it successfully for years."

teething problems = start-up problems with a new project: "We're having teething problems with our distribution systems."

have a cheek = be disrespectful: "He's got a cheek

saying you never help him – I saw you writing his report for him!"

a frog in my throat = when your throat tickles and makes you cough: "Sorry I can't stop coughing – I've got a frog in my throat."

stick your neck out = do or say something that might have negative results: "I'm going to stick my neck out and say what I think."

be up to your neck in = be in a difficult situation: "He's up to his neck in debt."

breathe down someone's neck = check constantly what someone else is doing: "I can't write this letter with you breathing down my neck!"

Work idioms

Idioms connected with the world of work.

Hiring and firing

take on = hire someone: "They're taking on more than 500 people at the canning factory."

get the boot = be fired: "She got the boot for being lazy."

give someone the sack = fire someone: "He was given the sack for stealing."

give someone their marching orders = fire someone: "After the argument, he was given his marching orders."

How do you work?

get your feet under the table = get settled in: "It only took him a week to get his feet under the table, then he started to make changes."

burn the candle at both ends = work day and night

at something: "He's been burning the candle at both ends to finish this project."

knuckle under = stop wasting time and start working: "The sooner you knuckle under and start work, the better."

put pen to paper = start writing: "She finally put pen to paper and wrote the letter."

work all the hours that God sends = work as much as possible: "She works all the hours that God sends to support her family."

work your fingers to the bone = work very hard: "I work my fingers to the bone for you."

go the extra mile = do more than is expected of you: "She's a hard worker and always goes the extra mile."

pull your weight = do your fair share of the work: "He's a good team worker and always pulls his weight."

pull your socks up = make a better effort: "You'll have to pull your socks up and work harder if you want to impress the boss!"

put your feet up = relax: "At last that's over – now I can put my feet up for a while."

Office politics and relationships

get on the wrong side of someone = make someone dislike you: "Don't get on the wrong side of him. He's got friends in high places!"

butter someone up = be very nice to someone because you want something: "If you want a pay rise, you should butter up the boss."

the blue-eyed boy = a person who can do nothing wrong: "John is the blue-eyed boy at the moment – he's making the most of it!"

get off on the wrong foot = start off badly with someone: "You got off on the wrong foot with him – he hates discussing office politics."

be in someone's good (or bad) books = be in favour (or disfavour) with someone: "I'm not in her good books today – I messed up her report."

a mover and shaker = someone whose opinion is respected: "He's a mover and shaker in the publishing world."

pull a few strings = use your influence for something: "I had to pull a few strings to get this assignment."

take the rap for something = take the blame for something: "They made a mistake, but we had to take the rap for it."

call in a favour = ask someone to return a favour: "I need a holiday – I'm going to call in a few favours and ask the others to cover for me."

put your cards on the table = tell people what you want: "You have to put your cards on the table and tell her that you want a pay rise!"

beat around the bush = not say exactly what you want: "Tell me – don't beat around the bush!"

sit on the fence = be unable to decide about something: "When there are arguments, she just sits on the fence and says nothing."

pass the buck = pass on responsibility to someone else: "The CEO doesn't pass the buck. In fact, he often says "**the buck stops here**!"

take someone under your wing = look after someone: "When he was taken on, Sarah took him under her wing."

show someone the ropes = show someone how things are done: "My predecessor showed me the ropes, so I felt quite confident."

be thrown in at the deep end = not get any advice or support: "He was thrown in at the deep end with his new job. No-one helped him at all."

a them and us situation = when you (us) are opposed to "them": "The atmosphere between the two departments is terrible. There's a real them and us situation."

English idioms using colour

A list of colourful English idioms…

Blue

feeling blue = feeling unhappy: "What's the matter with you? Feeling blue?"

out of the blue = completely unexpected: "I sent off my application to the company, but heard nothing. Then completely out of the blue they sent me a letter."

Red

see red = become extremely angry: "When people are cruel to animals, it really makes me see red."

a red letter day = a day of great importance: "It's a red letter day tomorrow in the company. It's our fiftieth birthday!"

paint the town red = celebrate: "They went out last night and really painted the town red – they didn't come home until 5 a.m."

in the red = overdrawn: "It's the end of the month and we're in the red again. We have to control our spending better."

like a red rag to a bull = likely to make someone angry: "Don't talk to him about politics – it's like a red rag to a bull."

red tape = bureaucratic paperwork: "You have to cut through a lot of red tape to get proposals accepted in this company."

red carpet treatment = treat someone with great respect: "When we visit our offices in Asia, we get the red carpet treatment."

Green

get the green light = get approval to start something: "We've finally got the green light to start research on the new product."

green fingers = be a good gardener: "Everything grows in her garden. She definitely has green fingers."

green-belt area = an area of protected land surrounding a town or city: "The green-belt area around London is disappearing fast."

green politics = environmental politics: "He's in green politics and often campaigns to fight pollution."

Black

black market = illegal trade: "You can change dollars for a much higher rate on the black market."

black economy = a part of the economy unregulated by the authorities: "He doesn't pay any taxes and thinks that the black economy will make him rich." (He's **working on the black**.)

give someone a black look = look at someone as if you are angry: "Why is he giving me such a black look?"

on the black list = be on a list of "undesirables": "We

won't be invited to their party this year – we're on their black list."

blacklisted = be banned: "Many actors and writers were blacklisted in Hollywood in the 1950's because they were considered "un-American."

in black and white = be extremely clear: "This contract is in black and white: we aren't allowed to keep any pets in this house."

black spot = a dangerous spot: "his roundabout is a black spot for traffic accidents."

black and blue = be badly bruised: "When she fell off her bicycle, she was black and blue for days."

White

white Christmas = when it snows at Christmas: "There hasn't been a white Christmas here since 1983."

whitewash = cover up the truth: "I don't believe his story. I think it's all a whitewash."

Grey

a grey area = something which is not definite: "I think genetic engineering is a bit of a grey area."

grey matter = your brain: "Doing crossword puzzles tests your grey matter."

Shape idioms

Here are some idioms using shapes.

Square

square meal = a big meal: "After all that travelling, we needed a square meal."

be back to square one = to be back to where you started: "I don't feel we're making any progress – we're back to square one."

look someone square in the eye = look at someone directly: "He looked me square in the eye and denied taking the money."

fair and square = completely fair: "We negotiated the deal fair and square."

square up to someone = to not be scared of dealing with someone or something difficult: "I'm glad you squared up to him in the meeting – you were definitely right!"

to be square = to be old-fashioned or boring: "She's so square – she hates doing anything fun!"

square it with someone = to get someone to agree to something: "I don't know if we can afford a car – we'll have to square it with the bank first."

a square peg in a round hole = something that doesn't fit: "He shouldn't be the boss – it would be like a square peg in a round hole."

Spiral

spiral out of control = a situation that gets worse all the time: "Our costs are spiralling out of control – we have to save money."

Circle

vicious circle = a situation which makes itself worse, so that there is little chance of improvement: "The two sides are locked in a vicious circle of hatred."

go round in circles = to never get out of a situation: "I feel we're not getting anywhere – we're just going round in circles."

go full circle = to go the whole distance and arrive back in the same place: "The company has now gone full circle and has returned to its original core products."

move in the same circles = know the same people socially: "I'm afraid I don't know the Queen personally – we don't move in the same circles!"

Round

in round figures = to the nearest unit: "In round figures, he earns 80 000 USD."

round something up or down to the nearest = give the closest even amount: "How much do we owe? Well, to round it up to the nearest dollar, I'd say about 60 USD."

the first time round = the first time that you did something: "Have you ever lived in London? Yes, the first time round, I was working in a school."

do the rounds = to be circulating: "There's a new joke doing the rounds about the President."

round on someone = to turn on someone: "She suddenly rounded on him and called him a liar."

a round of sandwiches = two sandwiches (made from two pieces of bread): "She made a few rounds of cheese sandwiches."

a round of golf = a game of golf: "Fancy a round of golf this evening?"

a round of drinks = a drink for everyone: "It's my turn to buy a round of drinks. What does everyone want?"

Food idioms

All these idioms use food items in some way.

be the apple of someone's eye = be someone's favourite person: "She's the apple of her father's eye."

in apple-pie order = in perfect order: "Her house was in apple-pie order, with nothing out of place."

be as nice as pie = be extremely nice and charming, so that you can fool people: "She can be as nice as pie, but don't trust her!"

eat humble pie = have to take back what you said, because you have been proved wrong: "He'll have to eat humble pie now. Serve him right – he tried to make us all look bad."

have your fingers in every pie = be involved in many different things: "You can't do anything without him knowing – he has his fingers in every pie."

a piece of cake = be extremely simple: "This program is a piece of cake to use."

sell like hot cakes = sell quickly in large quantities: "His book is selling like hot cakes."

full of beans = be full of energy: "You're full of beans today – it's nice to see you so lively!"

beef about something = complain about something: "He's always beefing about the pay."

beef something up = give something extra appeal: "If we beef up the window display, more people might come into the shop."

be your bread and butter = be your main source of income: "Although they run a taxi service, car sales are their bread and butter."

be like chalk and cheese = be completely different: "I don't know why they got married – they're like chalk and cheese."

be like peas in a pod = be identical to someone: "Those two are like peas in a pod."

cheesy = predictable and unimaginative: "I don't want to see that film again – it's really cheesy."

sour grapes = say something bad because you didn't get what you wanted: "Don't listen to him complain – it's only sour grapes because you got the job and he didn't."

play gooseberry = go somewhere with a couple who would prefer to be on their own: "I'd rather not come to the cinema with you two – I'd just feel I was playing gooseberry."

a couch-potato = someone who never goes out or exercises: "He watches TV all day – what a couch-potato!"

like butter wouldn't melt in your mouth = appear innocent: "When I asked her about the missing money, she tried to look like butter wouldn't melt in her mouth."

bring home the bacon = earn money for necessary things, like food: "He brings home the bacon in that family."

the way the cookie crumbles = the way things are: "I'm sorry I didn't get the promotion, but that's the way the cookie crumbles."

have someone eat out of your hand = have control over someone: "He has her eating out of his hand – it's sad."

eat someone out of house and home = eat a lot of food: "Her children eat her out of house and home."

eat into your savings = spend some of your savings: "We can't afford a new car, unless we eat into our savings."

eating for two = be pregnant and so eating more: "Good news, darling. The doctor says I'm eating for two now."

eat your heart out! = telling someone they should be jealous of you: "I'm going on holiday to Jamaica – eat your heart out!"

not your cup of tea = something that you don't like much: "Football isn't my cup of tea."

a square meal = a filling meal: "You need a square meal after all that exercise."

it smells fishy = something that is suspicious: "He wants to do all the housework for you? That smells fishy to me!"

small fry / small beer = something or someone unimportant: "Sales last year are small fry compared to now – we're doing really well."

roll out the barrel = prepare to have a good time: "Roll out the barrel – we're celebrating our exam results."

rhubarb, rhubarb = saying something completely unimportant: "There's that politician again on televison – rhubarb, rhubarb."

Love idioms

Falling in love

catch someone's eye = to be attractive to someone: "The shy man at the back of the class caught my eye."

to fancy someone (British English) = to find someone attractive: "My friend fancies you!"

to have a crush on someone = to only be able to think about one person: "When I was at school, I had a crush on a film star."

to have a soft spot for someone = to have a weakness for someone: "She has a soft spot for Richard – he can do anything!"

to have the hots for someone = to find someone very attractive: "She's got the hots for the new office manager."

to go out with someone (British English) = to date someone: "They've been going out together for years!"

to go steady = to go out with someone: "They've been going steady since their first year at university."

to fall for someone = to fall in love: "He always falls for the wrong types!"

to fall head over heels for someone = to completely fall in love: "He fell head over heels for her."

to be lovey-dovey = for a couple to show everyone how much they are in love: "They're so lovey-dovey, always whispering to each other and looking into each other's eyes."

to have eyes only for = to be attracted to one person only: "He's dropped all his old friends, now that he has eyes only for Susie."

to be the apple of someone's eye = to be loved by someone, normally an older relative: "She's the apple of her father's eye."

to be smitten by someone = to be in love with someone: "I first met him at a party and from that evening on, I was smitten."

a love-nest = the place where two lovers live: "They made a love-nest in the old basement flat."

to be loved-up (British English) = to exist in a warm feeling of love: "They are one loved-up couple!"

to be the love of someone's life = to be loved by a person: "He has always been the love of her life."

Types of love

puppy love = love between teenagers: "It's just puppy love – you'll grow out of it!"

cupboard love = love for someone because they give you food: "I think my cat loves me, but it's only cupboard love!"

Getting married

to get hitched: "They're getting hitched next Saturday."

to tie the knot: "So when are you two tying the knot?"

If it goes wrong…

to go through a bit of a rough patch = when things are not going well: "Since the argument, they've been going through a bit of a rough patch."

to have blazing rows = to have big arguments: "We had a blazing row last night."

can't stand the sight of someone = to not like someone: "She can't stand the sight of him any more!"

to call it a day = to agree that the relationship has ended: "We decided to call it a day."

to be on the rocks = a relationship that is in difficulty: "Once she moved out, it was clear their marriage was on the rocks."

to have a stormy relationship = a relationship with many arguments: "I'm glad we don't have a stormy relationship."

a love-rat = a man who betrays his girlfriend / wife: "He's had affairs with three different women – he's a complete love-rat."

Sayings

Marry in haste, repent at leisure = if you marry too quickly, you have the rest of your life to regret it!

Love is blind = when you love someone, you can't see their faults

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder = beauty is subjective

Let your heart rule your head = allow your emotions to control your rational side

Wear your heart on your sleeve = show other people how you are feeling

Animal idioms

cat's whiskers = to think you are the best: "He thinks he's the cat's whiskers!"

like the cat that's got the cream = look very pleased with yourself: "He looks like the cat that's got the cream!"

cat got your tongue? = a question we ask when we think someone is guilty of something: "Why don't you say something? Cat got your tongue?"

let the cat out of the bag = tell a secret: "He shouldn't have told her about the party – he's let the cat out of the bag now."

put the cat among the pigeons = cause trouble: "Don't tell her about your promotion – that will really put the cat among the pigeons."

have kittens = panic: "The way he was driving, I was having kittens."

the bee's knees = think you're the best: "He thinks he's the bee's knees."

have a bee in your bonnet = be obsessed by something: "He's got a real bee in his bonnet about buying a new car."

from the horse's mouth = get information from the original source: "I know they're getting married – I got it from the horse's mouth."

a white elephant = something that is expensive, but has no use: "People say the stadium is a white elephant and a waste of money."

a memory like an elephant = have an excellent memory: "She won't forget, you know. She has a memory like an elephant."

play piggy in the middle = be caught between two sides of an argument: "Because they aren't talking, I've been playing piggy in the middle."

make a pig's ear of something = make a complete mess of something: "You've made a right pig's ear of this. Let me do it!"

in hog heaven = be very happy: "We gave him flying lessons for his birthday – he was in hog heaven!"

pigs might fly! = something is as unlikely as pigs being able to fly: "Do you think the government will cut taxes?" "Pigs might fly!"

have butterflies in your stomach = be very nervous about something: "She's got butterflies in her stomach – it's her driving test today."

til the cows come home = do something for ever: "I can tell him til the cows come home not to be late, but he never listens."

take the bull by the horns = face a problem and take action: "I'm going to take the bull by the horns and tell him I've changed my mind."

get someone's goat = annoy someone: "It really gets my goat when she criticises him – it's not as if she's perfect herself."

a loan-shark = someone who lends money at high interest rates: "Don't borrow money from him – he's a complete loan-shark."

have a whale of a time = really enjoy yourself: "They went out and had a whale of a time."

like a fish out of water = feel very uncomfortable in a particular situation: "He feels like a fish out of water in a suit – he much prefers wearing jeans."

with your tail between your legs = feel guilty or ashamed: "He told us all that he was leaving, then he came back ten minutes later with his tail between his legs."

in the dog-house = when you know that someone is angry with you: "I'm in the dog-house – I forgot to do the shopping."

the lion's share = most of something: "She did the lion's share of the housework."

in the lion's den = in a dangerous place: "The interview was like going into the lion's den – they asked some very difficult questions."

a snake in the grass = someone who can't be trusted: "Don't tell him any secrets – he's a snake in the grass."

bug someone = irritate someone: "He's really bugging me about the holiday! I wish he'd just go away and leave me alone."

worm your way in = be nice to people so that gradually you get yourself into a good position with them: "He wormed his way into the finance department to get a job."

monkey about = play and not work: "Stop monkeying about, will you? We've got loads of work to do!"

make a mountain out of a molehill = make a big issue out of something small: "Don't worry about it – it's not important at all. You're making a mountain out of a molehill."

Money idioms

Idioms used in English that involve money.

To cost a lot of money

to break the bank: "I can't afford a skiing holiday this winter – it would break the bank."

to cost an arm and a leg: "It costs an arm and a leg to buy all these Christmas presents."

to pay through the nose: "They had to pay through the nose to get their son insured to drive."

to splash out on something = to pay a lot for an important event: "They're splashing out on their anniversary this year."

To be rich

to be loaded: "He works in the City and he's loaded!"

to be sitting on a small fortune / goldmine: "She will inherit everything. She's sitting on a goldmine!"

to have money to burn: "I've just received a bonus and I have money to burn!"

To be poor

to not have a bean to rub together: "Those two don't earn enough money. They don't have a bean to rub together."

to be as poor as church mice: "His family have always been as poor as church mice."

to be skint = British slang that means having no money: "Can you lend me some money until next Friday? I'm skint!"

to be broke: "She's always broke at the end of the month."

to scrimp and save = to make as many economies as you can to save money: "His parents scrimped and saved to send him to university."

To not want to spend money

a scrooge = Scrooge was a Dickens character, famous for being mean: "Why don't you want to buy her a leaving present? You're such a scrooge."

a skinflint = someone who doesn't want to spend money: "She reuses tea bags – she's such a skinflint!"

tight-fisted: "One reason he has so much money is that he's so tight-fisted!"

Other idioms

to have more money than sense = to have a lot of money which you waste rather than spend carefully: "He just bought another camera – he has more money than sense."

to burn a hole in your pocket = to not be able to stop spending money: "He can't just go out window-shopping. Money burns a hole in his pocket."

Money for old rope = an easy source of income: "He sells bunches of flowers he has grown himself. It's money for old rope."

make a fast buck = to make money quickly and sometimes dishonestly: "He made a fast buck selling those shares. I wonder if he had insider knowledge."

Ten a penny = very common: "These scarves are ten a penny in the markets here."

Weather idioms

English idioms that use the weather.

a face like thunder = to look very angry: "What's up with him today? He has a face like thunder!"

a fair-weather friend = a friend who doesn't support you in bad times: "I'm a bit disappointed in John and

David. It turned out they were only fair-weather friends."

a snowball's chance = very little chance (as much chance as a snowball has in hell): "We don't have a snowball's chance of winning that contract!"

a storm in a teacup = a lot of fuss over something small: "Don't worry about those two arguing. it's just a storm in a teacup."

be a breeze = to be easy: "The exam was a breeze."

be snowed under = to be very busy: "We're snowed under at work."

blow hot and cold = to keep changing your attitude: "They're blowing hot and cold over this issue. It's impossible to know what they want!"

brass-monkey weather = very cold weather: "It's brass-monkey weather today. You'd better wrap up warm!"

come rain or shine = whatever happens: "He's always working in his garden – come rain or shine."

the lull before the storm = a quiet time before a busy or difficult time: "It's going to get very busy on Thursday. Today and tomorrow are just the lull before the storm."

save up for a rainy day = put money aside for when you might need it later: "I don't want to spend this extra money. I'll save it up for a rainy day."

see which way the wind blows = to analyse a situation before doing something: "I'm going to see which way the wind blows before asking her about a raise."

steal someone's thunder = do what someone else was going to do and get all the praise: "You'll steal her thunder if you wear that dress tonight!"

take a rain check = postpone something: "I don't really want to go the cinema tonight. Can we take a rain-check on it?"

under the weather = not feel very well: "I'm feeling a bit under the weather at the moment."

weather the storm = to survive a difficult situation: "This recession is quite serious and it's becoming difficult to weather the storm."

English phrasal verbs with "down"

Some common business English phrasal verbs that use "down".

Back down (or climb down) = to no longer stick to your original ideas or position: "After weeks of negotiating, she backed down and accepted their conditions."

Break down (1) = examine the different parts of something: "The profits break down in the following way – 50% profit in European sales, a 20% profit in North American sales and a 30% profit in Asian sales."

Break down (2) = when communication stops between two parties: "The negotiations broke down after two days."

Bring down = destroy something: "A series of disastrous investments brought down the company."

Cut back on = reduce something: "The government has cut back on its defence budget."

Drive down = work hard to reduce prices or costs: "Over the last year we have driven down the distribution costs."

Live down = when other people can forget a bad reputation: "I was two hours late for the meeting and now my colleagues will never let me live it down."

Play down = minimise the importance of something: "She played down the fact that her father was the boss."

Set down = put something in writing: "The conditions are set down in the contract."

Stand down = resign: "After ten years at the head of the company, the chairman has decided to stand down."

Take down = write notes in a meeting: "Can someone take down the minutes?"

Wear down = argue so much that the other person abandons their position: "The unions finally wore the management down on the issue of overtime pay."

Write down (or note down) = write something: "Could you write down your mobile phone number?"

English phrasal Verbs using "in"

There are many English phrasal verbs that use 'in'. Here is a selection of some of the more common.

break in (1) = interrupt: "He broke in to their conversation to add that he couldn't work overtime."

break in / into (2) = burgle / steal: "Thieves broke into the warehouse and stole 100 computers."

bring in (1) = introduce: "She has brought in some changes to the company."

bring in (2) = receive income: "He brings in a lot of money as a computer programmer."

cave in = accept someone's idea or decision: "The unions finally caved in and accepted the new contracts."

chip in = contribute: "We're all chipping in for Maria's birthday present."

fill in (1) = complete: "You need to fill in this form."

fill in (2) = act as a substitute: "As Robert is on holiday, you'll have to fill in for him this week."

fill in (3) = bring someone up to date: "Can you fill me in on the new project?"

fit in = be accepted by a group: "He doesn't really fit in at work. He's very different from us."

give in = finally accept something: "She gave in to her children's demands for sweets."

hand in = give something to someone: "They handed in their assignment early."

kick in = start to have an effect: "The painkillers have finally kicked in. I feel much better."

lead in = start with something: "In our presentation, we are going to lead in with our vision for the future."

move in = occupy a house: "Some new neighbours have moved in next door."

take in (1) = understand: "I still can't take in the news."

take in (2) = deceive someone: "He really took me in with his hard-luck story."

take in (3) = provide refuge: "She took the old couple in."

work in = incorporate: "Is there any way of working in this paragraph? The text is a little unclear otherwise."

English phrasal verbs with "off"

There are many phrasal verbs in English that use the word "off". Here are some of the more common.

Break off= end: "Talks have broken off between the union and management."

Bring off = succeed in something difficult: "The new management brought off an amazing recovery in the company's fortunes."

Call off = cancel: "The proposed merger has been called off."

Cut off = disconnect: "Their electricity was cut off when they didn't pay the bill."

Lay off = make workers redundant: "The car manufacturer laid off 5000 workers."

Live off = get money from another source: "He invested the money and lived off the interest."

Pay off = settle your debt: "She saved money every month and finally managed to pay off her student loan."

Put off = (1) postpone: "They put off the decision for another month." (2) dissuade: "Falling prices put me off investing in the English property market."

Take off = do well: "Business has really taken off!"

Write off = accept a loss: "We'll never get the money back – I think we should write it off."

English phrasal verbs with "on"

Some common business English phrasal verbs that use "on".

Get on = (1) have a good relationship with someone: "She gets on well with the Accounts Director" (2) to progress: "How are you getting on with the launch?"

Take on = employ people: "We aren't taking on any more staff this year."

Go on = continue: "Please go on. I'd like to hear more about your plans for the new office."

Sit on = to stall or delay something: "We proposed this some time ago, but the Chairman has been sitting on the plans and we're no further forward."

Build on = use your successes to go further: "They built on their early success and soon expanded to become the biggest catering firm in the South East."

Crack on = work fast: "I'm sorry I can't stop and talk – I need to crack on with some work."

Work on = use your influence with someone: "Leave it with me – I'll work on the boss over the next fortnight."

Pick on = bully: "She feels that her colleagues are picking on her because she is so popular with management."

Decide on = choose: "What colour have you decided on for the staff canteen?"

Hold on = wait: "Please hold on and I will see if Mr Harris is available."

Pass on = give a message to someone: "I'll pass your message on to her when she returns."

Try on = test someone's authority: "Don't take any notice of his behaviour – he's just trying it on with you!"

English phrasal Verbs using "out"

There are many phrasal verbs in English that use 'out'. Here is a small selection of some of the more common ones.

back out = decide not to do something you first intended to do: "We can't back out of the holiday now – we've already paid for it!"

break out = escape: "The prisoners managed to break out."

bring out = make more noticeable: "The lemon brings out the taste of the strawberries."

check out (1) = look at: "You've got to check out this new website – it's really useful."

check out (2) = investigate: "The police are checking out his story."

cut out = eliminate: "He's cut out all the fat from his diet and he's a lot slimmer."

eat out = eat in a restaurant: "Do you fancy eating out tonight?"

hand out = distribute: "The teacher handed out the English books to the students."

fill out = complete a form: "You need to fill out all the sections on this form."

make out = see well: "I can't make out the name on this envelope. Is it Jones or James?"

pass out = faint: "It was so hot in the room that she passed out."

put out = inconvenience someone: "Thanks for your offer of letting us stay. Are you sure that we won't be putting you out?"

stand out = be easily distinguishable: "With the way he dresses, he always manages to stand out!"

take out = withdraw money: "I've taken out a lot of money from my account recently."

work out (1) = calculate: "We've worked out our profit margin." (2) = get better: "Everything worked out well in the end." (3) = understand: "I really can't work it out. Why did she leave such a well-paid job?"

English phrasal verbs with "up"

Here are some common English phrasal verbs that you can use in business situations. All these phrasal verbs use "up".

Build up = to make a business bigger, to develop contacts or a presence in the market: "We have built up the business over the years and it now employs over 20 people."

Come up = happen unexpectedly: "I'm afraid I can't make the meeting tomorrow. Something has come up."

Divide up = distribute : "We can divide up the commission among the sales staff."

Drive up = force up the prices or costs: "The uncertainty in the markets is driving up labour costs."

Meet up = make an arrangement to meet: "What time should we meet up on Wednesday?"

Open up = make a new market accessible: "The new laws have opened up trade in many markets."

Pass up = to not take an opportunity: "We can't pass up this chance of increasing productivity."

Set up = (1) establish a company or arrange a meeting: "They set up the company in 1999." (2) "I've set up a meeting between you and the suppliers for 11 am tomorrow."

Start up = to start something new: "They've started up a new division in Southern Europe."

(A start up is a new company, often internet-based.)

Write up = write a report or minutes: "It'll take him at least a week to write up his findings."

Three-part phrasal verbs in English

Some English phrasal verbs contain two particles, such as "put up with". With these phrasal verbs, you cannot generally separate the particles. So we say "put up with someone" (with "someone" at the end) and not, for example, "put up someone with".

come up with = to find or produce: "We need to come up with a solution soon."

get away with = to escape punishment: "He robbed a bank and got away with it."

get on to = make contact with someone: "Can you get on to the suppliers and chase up our order?"

go in for = to do something because you enjoy it: "I don't really go in for playing football."

get round to = to find the time to do something: "I never seem to be able to get round to tidying up this room!"

go down with = to become ill: "So many people have gone down with the flu this year."

go through with = to do something you promised to do, even though you don't really want to do it: "She went through with the wedding, even though she had doubts."

live up to = to do or behave as expected: "She's living up to her reputation as a hard boss."

look down on = to behave as if you are superior to others: "He really looks down on teachers."

look up to = to admire and respect someone: "She looks up to her father."

put down to = to think something is caused by a factor: "The failure can be put down to a lack of preparation."

put up with = to tolerate: "She puts up with a lot from her husband."

stand up for = to defend someone or something: "You need to stand up for your rights!"

Appendix

ENGLISH IDIOMS

Terms entered in non-standard forms should have the standard form listed after them to 1) Make sure the standard form gets entered and 2) Make sure that an indirect gets added for the non-standard form, which was interesting enough to get listed in the first place.

a man's home is his castle

English

Etymology

Traditional; the sentiment dates back to Roman times:

> *quid enim sanctius, quid omni religione munitius, quam domus unusquisque civium?*
>
> *What more sacred, what more strongly guarded by every holy feeling, than a man's own home?*
>
> —Cicero

In English, see Book 4, Chapter 16 of William Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England:

> *And the law of England has so particular and tender a regard to the immunity of a man's house, that it stiles it his castle, and will never suffer it to be violated with immunity: agreeing herein with the sentiments of ancient Rome, as expressed in the works of Tully; quid enim sanctius, quid omni religione munitius, quam domus unusquisque civium?*

Proverb

a man's home is his castle

1. (*US*) a proverbial expression of personal privacy and security

Related Terms

- an English man's home is his castle

penny for your thoughts

English

Phrase

a penny for your thoughts

1. (*idiomatic*) *Used to inquire into the thoughts and feelings of another, especially when the person appears pensive or conflicted.*

account for

English

Verb

to account for (*phrasal verb*)

1. (*transitive*) To explain by relating circumstances; to show that some one, thing or members of a group are present or have been processed.

   The storekeeper was expected to account for any material removed.

   o *a.* 1905, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Dancing Men", in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, W. R. Caldwell & Co. (1905), page 78:

   "[…] But there are still four cartridges in the revolver. Two have been fired and two wounds inflicted, so that each bullet can be accounted for."

2. (*transitive*) To be the primary cause of

   The torrential downpour would account for the saturated state of the land.

3. (*transitive*) To destroy or put out of action.

    - 1942 Oct 11, "Check of Fortress, Liberator Raid At Lille Reveals High Enemy Loss", *Hartford Courant*:

      Allied Air Forces Account for 34 Axis Aircraft

    - 1972 Feb 22, "Jet Missile Downs Mig In Dogfight", *The Bulletin*:

      South Vietnamese counter-attacks helped account for 239 guerrillas reported killed in the 24 hours ending at 6 today, 86 of them in allied air attacks

    - 1992 Nov 15, "Scientists monitoring return of wolves to Upper Pennisula", *Chicago Tribune*:

      ... and car strikes account for more than 50000, it's obvious the wolves' effect on the state's deer herd is so small as to be meaningless.

4. (*transitive*) To constitute in amount or portion.

    German speakers accounted for 37% of the population.

across the pond

English

Prepositional Phrase

across the pond

1. (*idiomatic*) From one side of the Atlantic Ocean to the other.

    We flew across the pond.

Usage Notes

- The phrase usually implies the North Atlantic Ocean between North America and Europe, and is most

often used to describe travel between the United Kingdom and the United States or Canada.

age before beauty

English

Phrase

age before beauty

1. (*idiomatic*) A phrase said to allow older people to go before younger ones.

all and sundry

English

Noun

all and sundry (*uncountable*)

1. (collectively) all, everyone
2. (separately) each one

Synonyms

- one and all

Translations

- Catalan: propis i estranys ca(ca)
- Danish: alle og enhver, Gud og hvermand
- French: tous sans exception
- Italian: tutti quanti it(it)
- Norwegian:
  Bokmål: alle og enhver, Gud og hvermann
- Swedish: alla och envar

all eyes

English

Etymology

all + eyes

Adjective

all eyes (*not comparable*)

1. (*idiomatic*) Watching alertly or attentively.
2. (*idiomatic*) Having prominent eyes.
3. (*idiomatic*, *with for*) Gazing at devotedly.

He was all eyes for her.

that's all she wrote

English

Etymology

Origins Unknown; circa 1940s; thought to be a reference to Dear John letters

Phrase

that's all she wrote

1. (*idiomatic*, *US*) Indicating an abrupt termination of a project, or of one's hopes or plans

all sizzle and no steak

English

Noun

all sizzle and no steak

1. (*idiomatic*) A thing or person which fails to measure up to its description or advanced promotion.

Her latest novel is all sizzle and no steak.

1999, "Nonprofit community increasing nervousness about Year 2000" by Gary M. Grobman. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing,* vol 4 issue 2.Y2K may be the equivalent of the Kohotek comet—all sizzle and no steak.

Synonyms

- all hat and no cattle
- all talk and no action

washed up

English

Adjective

washed up (*comparative* more washed up, *superlative* most washed up)

1. (*idiomatic*) Finished; having no future in a particular role.

    Pavarotti's washed up as a singer, in my view.

Verb

washed up

1. *Simple past tense and past participle of* wash up.

all wet

English

Adjective

all wet (*not comparable*)

1. (*literally*) Thoroughly soaked; drenched.
    - 1852, Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, ch. 59,

    When I came home, I found a common-looking person, all wet and muddy.

2. (*idiomatic*) Utterly incorrect; erroneous; uninformed.1965, "The Lull That Lapsed," *Time*, 28 May,

    he lull gave Johnson a chance to show such critics as Canada's Prime Minister Lester Pearson and Senate Foreign Relations

Committee Chairman J. William Fulbright that they were all wet in arguing that a halt in the bombing might open the way to negotiations.

Anagrams

- wallet

go along for the ride

English

Verb

to go along for the ride

1. (*idiomatic*) To accompany someone in a passive manner, or to take a relatively passive or detached role in a project or group activity.

American as apple pie

English

Adjective

American as apple pie

1. (*US*, *simile*) Having characteristics considered quintessential to American life; very American.

earful

English

Pronunciation

- Rhymes

Noun

earful (*plural* earfuls *or* earsful)

1. (*informal*) a reprimand, castigation or telling off
2. (*informal*) intimate gossip

easy mark

English

Noun

easy mark (*plural* easy marks)

1. someone who is easily fooled or victimised
2. an easy target

Synonyms

- easy target
- sitting duck

even keel

English

Alternative forms

- even-keel

Etymology

From even + keel.

Noun

even keel (*uncountable*)

1. (*nautical*) A situation in which the boat is level and balanced for a smooth ride.
2. (*idiomatic*) A state of having one's emotions under control and balanced.
3. (*idiomatic*) Of a business or other activity which is under control and running smoothly.

ante up

English

Verb

ante up (*third-person singular simple present* antes up, *present participle* anteing up, *simple past and past*

participle anted up)

1. To contribute one's share of a payment, or to pay what is due
2. To pay a fee necessary to play a game, typically a card game

Anagrams

- pea-nut, peanut

any old thing

English

Pronoun

any old thing

1. (*idiomatic*) anything at all

anything goes

English

Phrase

anything goes

1. (*idiomatic*) There are no rules or restrictions.

    o 1934 Cole Porter - *Anything Goes*

    In olden days a glimpse of stocking / Was looked on as something shocking / But now, Heaven knows, / Anything goes.

    o 1987, Guns N' Roses - *Anything Goes*

    My way, your way, anything goes tonight!

around the bend

English

Adjective

around the bend (*not comparable*)

1. (*idiomatic*) Crazy, insane.

    o "Judge John Pickering had clearly gone around the bend, often presiding over his court while drunk." — *(Can we* date *this quote?) Joyce Oldham Appleby, Arthur Meier Schlesinger,* Thomas Jefferson*, Times Books, page 208*:

as a matter of fact

English

Adverb

as a matter of fact

1. (*modal*) actually, in fact

as far as one knows

English

Adverb

as far as one knows

1. (*idiomatic*) To the best of one's knowledge.
    John could be dead as far as I know.

Abbreviations

- AFAIK (as far as I know)

ask for the moon

English

Verb

ask for the moon (*third-person singular simple present* asks for the moon, *present participle* asking for the moon, *simple past and past participle* asked for the moon)

1. (*idiomatic*) To claim or desire something that one cannot have.

asleep at the switch

English

Etymology

Probably an allusion to the important responsibilities of a railway switchman.

Adjective

asleep at the switch

1. (*idiomatic*) Neglectful of an important task, responsibility, or opportunity.
   - o 1909, Clinton Rogers Woodruff, "Municipal Review 1907-1908," *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 14, no. 4, p. 488:

     His vote demonstrates that the people of Philadelphia are not asleep at the switch, are not indifferent to their political duties.
   - o 1922, P. G. Wodehouse, *Right Ho, Jeeves*, ch. 10:

     My guardian angel had not been asleep at the switch.
   - o 1974, S. D. Isard, "Review of *Computer Models of Thought and Language*," *Science*, New Series, vol. 186, no. 4164 (15 Nov.), p. 625:

     It is sometimes difficult to guess whether a sentence has been garbled by the author or the typesetter. . . . In either case, the editors were asleep at the switch.
   - o 2003, Donald Bartlett and James Steele, "Asleep at the Switch," *Time*, 13 Oct.:

     Why America (but not Canada) failed to set up a needed synfuels industry.

at first glance

English

Adverb

at first glance (*not comparable*)

1. (*modal*) After only a superficial examination or review

   At first glance it seems to be a reasonable idea. But we'll see.

at first blush

English

Adverb

at first blush (*not comparable*)

1. (*ra*emingly, apparently, ostensibly

back at you

English

Phrase

back at you

1. (*idiomatic*, *US*) *Used to return a greeting*.

   "Hey, good luck with that, Buddy!" / "Right back at you, man!"

Synonyms

- (*return of greeting*): same to you

back down

English

Verb

to back down (*phrasal verb*)

1. (*idiomatic*) To take a less aggressive position in a conflict than one previously has or has planned to.

I was about to sue them, but I had to back down.

I was going to sue them, but now I'm going to have to back down.

back off

English

Verb

to back off (*phrasal verb*)

1. (*literally*) To move backwards away from something.
   I tried to back off slowly from the tiger in my path.
2. (*idiomatic*) To become less aggressive, particularly when one had appeared committed to act.
   You need to back off, or the situation could turn ugly.
   I was going to sue, until my legal advisors told me to back off.
3. (*idiomatic*) To lower the setting of.
   Could you back off the volume a bit? It's really loud.

my back teeth are floating

English

Phrase

my back teeth are floating

1. (*informal*) I have a strong need to urinate.
   Where's the restroom? My back teeth are floating!

back to the drawing board

English

Etymology

Coined as "Well, back to the old drawing board." as the

caption of a Peter Arno cartoon of The New Yorker of March 1, 1941, depicting an engineer walking away from a crashed plane. (cartoon)

Adverb

back to the drawing board

1. (*idiomatic*) Back to the beginning following an unsuccessful attempt.

    Well, that didn't work at all, so it's back to the drawing board, I guess.

back

English

Etymology

Middle English *bak*, from Old English *bæc*, from Proto-Germanic *bakan* (cf. West Frisian *bek*ling 'chair back', Old High German *bah*, Swedish *bak*), possibly from Proto-Indo-European *bogo* 'bending'. The adverb represents an aphetic form of *aback*.

Pronunciation

- (*UK*, *US*) IPA: /bæk/, SAMPA: /b{k/
-
- Rhymes: -æk

Adjective

back (*not comparable*)

1. Near the rear.

    Go in the back door of the house.

2. Not current.

    I'd like to find a back issue of that magazine.

3. Far from the main area.

    They took a back road.

That chore has been in the back of my mind for weeks.

4. (*comparable*) (*phonetics*) Produced in the back of the mouth.

"U" in "rude" is a back vowel.

Synonyms

- (*near the rear*): rear
- (*not current*): former, previous
- (*far from the main area*): remote

Antonyms

- (*near the rear*): front
- (*not current*): current
- (*far from the main area*): main

Adverb

back (*comparative* further back, *superlative* furthest back)

1. (Not comparable) To or in a previous condition or place.

He gave back the money.

He needs his money back

He was on vacation, but now he's back.

The office fell into chaos when you left, but now order is back.

2. Away from the front or from an edge.

Sit all the way back in your chair.

Step back from the curb.

3. In a manner that impedes.

Fear held him back.

Noun

back (*plural* backs)

1. The rear of body, especially the part between the neck and the end of the spine and opposite the chest and belly.

   Could you please scratch my back?

2. The spine and associated tissues.

   I hurt my back lifting that dictionary.

3. The side of any object which is opposite the front or useful side.

   Turn the book over and look at the back.

4. The reverse side; the side that is not normally seen.

   I hung the clothes on the back of the door.

5. That which is farthest away from the front.

   He sat in the back of the room.

6. Area behind, such as the backyard of a house

   We'll meet out in the back of the library.

7. The part of something that goes last.

   The car was near the back of the train.

8. The side of a blade opposite the side used for cutting.

   Tap it with the back of your knife.

9. The part of a piece of clothing which covers the back.

   I still need to finish the back of your dress.

10. The edge of a book which is bound.

    The titles are printed on the backs of the books.

11. The backrest, the part of a piece of furniture which receives the human back.

Can you fix the back of this chair?

12. (*figuratively*) Upper part of a natural object which is considered to resemble an animal's back.

    The small boat raced over the backs of the waves.

13. (*obsolete*) That part of the body that bears clothing.

    o *1604,* William Shakespeare*, Measure for Measure*:

    Do thou but think / What 'tis to cram a maw or clothe a back / From such a filthy vice

14. (*sports*) In some team sports, a position behind most players on the team.

    The backs were lined up in an I formation.

    o 2010 December 28, Kevin Darlin, "West Brom 1 - 3 Blackburn", *BBC*:

    ...Rovers were also aided by some poor defending from West Brom, whose lapses at the back undid their excellent work on the ball and condemned Roberto di Matteo's Baggies side to a third straight defeat.

15. (*nautical*) The keel and keelson of a ship.

    The ship's back broke in the pounding surf.

16. (*printing*) The inside margin of a page.

    o *1841, William Savage,* A Dictionary of the Art of Printing*, edition 1965 Ayer Publishing ed.,* ISBN 0833731289*, page 472*:

    Convenience and custom have familiarised us to the printed page being a little higher than the middle of the leaf, and to its having a little more margin at the fore edge than in the back.

17. (*mining*) The roof of a horizontal underground passage.
    - o *1911, Robert Bruce Brinsmade,* Mining Without Timber*, page 161*:

      The stope is kept full of broken ore, sufficient only being drawn to leave a working space between the floor of broken ore and the back of the stope.

18. (*slang*, *uncountable*) Effort, usually physical.

    Put some back into it!

19. (*slang*, *uncountable*) Large and attractive buttocks.
    - o *2002,* George Pelecanos*,* Right as Rain: A Novel*,* ISBN 0446610798*, page 123*:

      He got his hand on her behind and caressed her firm, ample flesh. […] "You got some back on you, girl."

20. A non-alcoholic drink (often water or a soft drink), to go with hard liquor or a cocktail.

Synonyms

- (*side opposite the visible side*): reverse
- (*rear of the body*): rear, backside

Antonyms

- (*side opposite the front or useful side*): front
- (*that which is farthest away from the front*): front

Coordinate terms

- (*non-alcoholic drink*): chaser

Verb

back (*third-person singular simple present* backs, *present participle* backing, *simple past and past participle* backed)

1. To go in the reverse direction.

   The train backed into the station.

2. To support.

   I back you all the way.

3. (*nautical*, *of the wind*) to change direction contrary to its normal pattern (anticlockwise in the northern hemisphere, clockwise in the southern)
4. (*nautical*, *of a square sail*) to brace the yards so that the wind presses on the front of the sail, to slow the ship
5. (*nautical*, *of an anchor*) to lay out a second, smaller anchor to provide additional holding power

Antonyms

- (*nautical*, *of the wind*): veer

Statistics

- Most common English words before 1923: think · life · went · #132: back · under · same · take

paint oneself into a corner

English

Verb

paint oneself into a corner

1. (*idiomatic*) To create a predicament or problem for oneself; to do something that leaves one with no good alternatives or solutions.

backroom boy

English

Noun

backroom boy (*plural* backroom boys)

1. (*chiefly UK*) Someone who has an anonymous support role in an organization, especially a technician or scientist; a boffin

bad breath

English

Noun

bad breath

1.unpleasant smelling breath

bang for the buck

English

Noun

bang for the buck (*uncountable*)

1. (*idiomatic*) Efficiency; cost-effectiveness; value.

Do you think he would get as much bang for the buck out of a fancier, more expensive car?

Usage notes

[Vulgar] — World War II GI slang for "liberty activities" of a sexual nature. Seeking the best bang for the buck, i.e., maximizing sexual gratification for the least amount of money, thereby saving his money for other purchases (drink/food)

bang on

English

Preposition

bang on

1. (*idiomatic*, *UK*) Exactly at

I managed to arrive bang on five o'clock.

She's bang on the dot, as usual.

Verb

bang on (*third-person singular simple present* bangs on, *present participle* banging on, *simple past and past participle* banged on)

1. (*idiomatic*, *UK*) To constantly talk about
   I started recycling, just so she'd stop banging on about it to me.

bar hop

English

Verb

bar hop

1. *Alternative spelling of* barhop.

bar none

English

Etymology

Possibly a shortened form of "to bar none" or "barring none".

Adverb

bar none

1. (*idiomatic*) Without exception; excluding nothing else of the same kind.

Usage notes

- Follows a superlative-modified noun.

one's bark is worse than one's bite

English

Phrase

one's bark is worse than one's bite

1. (*idiomatic*) The individual acts threatening but is relatively harmless.

    Her bark is worse than her bite.

    His bark is worse than his bite.

    Its bark is worse than its bite.

bat a thousand

English

Etymology

From the practice of reckoning the batting average of a hitter in thousandths.

Verb

to bat a thousand

1. (*baseball*, *idiomatic*) To reach first base on every at-bat.
2. (*idiomatic*) To achieve success at each attempt.

    He's batting a thousand so far with the new boss.

3. (*idiomatic*) To achieve perfection.

    No one can bat a thousand for the whole season.

Synonyms

The terms below need to be checked and allocated to the definitions (senses) of the headword above. Each term should appear in the sense for which it is appropriate. Use the template {{sense|"gloss"}}, substituting a short version of the definition for "gloss".

bat an eyelash

English

Alternative forms

- bat an eyelid

Verb

to bat an eyelash

1. (*idiomatic*) To react in any slight way; to respond.

   When cellular phones first came out they were something of a novelty. These days, nobody bats an eyelash.

Usage notes

- Most frequently negative, as in the example.

with bated breath

English

Etymology

From the verb *bate*, alteration by aphesis of the verb *abate*, meaning 'to reduce' or 'lessen'.

Pronunciation

- (*RP*, *US*) IPA: /wjð Èbejtjd Èbr[è/, SAMPA: /wID "beItId "brET/

Adverb

with bated breath (*not comparable*)

1. *Used other than as an idiom: holding one's breath.*
   - 1598, William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, Act I Scene 3

     Or | Shall I bend low and in a bondman's key, | With bated breath and whispering humbleness, Say this;
2. (*idiomatic*) Eagerly; with great anticipation.

   We are waiting with bated breath for the release of the new version.

bawl out

English

Verb

to bawl out (*phrasal verb*)

1. (*idiomatic*) To deliver a loud, hard scolding or lecture; to reprimand.

   After a mistake like that, there wasn't much to do besides bawl out the offender and clean up.

2. (*idiomatic*) To have a serious argument accompanied with shouting.

Synonyms

- See also Wikisaurus:argument

be my guest

English

Verb

be my guest

1. (*idiomatic*) Do as you wish; go ahead; help yourself; go for it!

   If you want to give it a try, be my guest!

Quotations

- 2001 July 10, Robert Chin, "Re: Manila Girl in Chitown", soc.culture.filipino, *Usenet*

  If you want to think you're smart because you and your stupid family elected to live in a cesspool...Hey, be my guest, ASSHOLE!
- 2002 October 11, Luc Besson and Robert Mark Kamen, *The Transporter*, 20th Century Fox

  Lai: Can I leave?

  Frank: Be my guest.

be off

English

Etymology

to be + off

Verb

to be off

1. To leave.

   I'll be off in a minute.

   I'm off — see you later!

2. To be working against a present or former addiction to (something.)

   I've been off drugs for almost a month.

3. To be away from (something.)

   She's on vacation, so she'll be off the net for another week.

Antonyms

- to be on

Derived terms

- off duty
- off one's game

be there for

English

Verb

to be there for

1. to be available to provide comfort and support for someone, especially in a period of difficulty

   She knows that I'll always be there for her.

be there or be square

English

Phrase

be there or be square

1. (*idiomatic*, *US*, *UK*, *humorous*) *Used to encourage someone to go somewhere.*

   There's a huge party on Saturday night; be there or be square.

be oneself

English

Verb

to be oneself

1. (*idiomatic*) To behave or act naturally, without regard to how this behavior is perceived by others.

Usage notes

- This is most commonly used in the imperative *be yourself* as advice.

be-all and end-all

English

Alternative forms

- end-all and be-all

Noun

be-all and end-all

1. (*idiomatic*) Something considered to be of the utmost importance; something essential or ultimate.

   He thought that cars were the be-all and end-all of life.

   Profit is the be-all and end-all of business.

bean pole

English

Noun

bean pole (*plural* bean poles)

1. *Alternative spelling of* beanpole.

Anagrams

- openable

beat it

English

Pronunciation

- (*US*) IPA

Verb

to beat it

1. *Used other than as an idiom: see beat,ý it.*
2. (*idiomatic*, *chiefly pejorative*, *colloquial*, *dismissal*) To leave; to go away.
   - *1916, United States. Commission on Industrial Relations, Francis Patrick Walsh, Basil Maxwell Manly,* Industrial relations: Final report and testimony*, page 10986*:

     ... and he said, "You beat it." So I beat it two squares up to Seventeenth Street and went into a saloon.
3. (*idiomatic*, *US*, *Canada*, *vulgar*, *colloquial*) To masturbate, usually a man of himself.

   1993, Wilson Bryan Key, The age of manipulation: the con in confidence, the sin in sincere*, page 20*:

   For the past fifty years, "beat it" has been a euphemism for male masturbation.

Synonyms

- (*go away*): beat a retreat
- (*masturbate*): beat off
- See also Wikisaurus:go away

beat the rap

English

Verb

to beat the rap

1. (*slang*) To escape legal conviction and punishment for a crime which one has been been charged with committing; to be acquitted.

beat up

English

Verb

to beat up (*phrasal verb*)

1. (*transitive*) To give a severe beating to.

   I got beaten up by thugs on my way home.

2. To attack suddenly; to alarm.

   o 1770, John Belfour, *A New History of Scotland*, page 137–138:

   > On this occasion, the diligent prior o St. Andrews assembled 600 horse, with which he assailed the French, beat up their quarters, intercepted their provisions, and cut off their straggling parties.

   o Anthony Wayne, in a letter *to Sharp Delany* from the *Camp at Mount Prospect 7th June 1777*, published on page 6 of *Major-General Anthony Wayne and the Pennsylvania Line in he Continental Army* by Charles Stillé in 1893:

> Our people are daily gaining Health Spirits and Discipline — the spade & pick axe throw'd aside — for the British Rebels to take up — they notwithstanding affect to hold us cheap and threaten to beat up our Quarters — *if we don't* beat up theirs first which is in Contemplation, *this in time*.

- Thomas Johnes' 1839 translation of Jean Froissart's *Chroniques*, published as *Chronicles of England, France, Spain, and The adjoining Countries*; chapter CXXVI, page 367:

  > "We know for certain that their army does not consist of more than three thousand men, including all sorts." Sir Henry Percy, on hearing this, was greatly rejoiced, and cried out, "To horse! to horse! for by the faith I owe my God, and to my lord and father, I will seek to recover my pennon, and to beat up their quarters this night."

- 2003, F. Spencer Chapman, *The Jungle Is Neutral*, page 272–275:

  > Pa Blanken tells me that the Japs beat up our camp a month ago and we have lost all our heavy gear and moved up into the hills - he does not know where. Hell! No casualties, however. [...] Our material losses were very serious. The Japs had found a rucksack containing all our money, our medicines, including all our vital quinine, a copy of our signals plan, and a number of maps. [...] It seems probable that the Japs spotted our camp from the air. They certainly knew its exact position and came straight to it.

3. To cause by some other means, injuries comparable to the result of being beaten up
    - 2008 October 29, on *Real Rescues* (a British TV program):

        He [= a paraglider pilot] flew into a hill and beat himself up pretty badly.
4. (*reflexive*) To feel badly guilty and accuse oneself over something. Usually followed by over.
    - *Don't beat yourself up over such a minor mistake.*
5. (WW2 air pilots' usage) Repeatedly bomb a military target or targets.
6. To get something done, derived from the idea of beating for game
7. (*intransitive*, *nautical*) To sail to windward using a series of alternate tacks across the wind.

Synonyms

The terms below need to be checked and allocated to the definitions (senses) of the headword above. Each term should appear in the sense for which it is appropriate. Use the template {{sense|"gloss"}}, substituting a short version of the definition for "gloss".

- work over
- do over
- rough up
- process

Derived Terms

- beat 'em up
- beat-up

beat one's head against a stone wall

English

Verb

to beat one's head against a stone wall

1. (*intransitive*, *idiomatic*) To waste effort on a futile project.

beauty is in the eye of the beholder

English

Proverb

beauty is in the eye of the beholder

1. Individuals have different inclinations on what is beautiful. Individuals have different beauty standards.

beauty is only skin deep

English

Proverb

beauty is only skin deep

1. What matters is a person's character, rather than his/her appearance.

become

English

Etymology

Old English *becuman*, from Proto-Germanic. Cognate with German *bekommen*, Dutch *bekomen*.

Verb

become (*third-person singular simple present* becomes, *present participle* becoming, *simple past* became, *past participle* become)

1. (*intransitive*, *obsolete*) To arrive, come (to a place). [9th-18th c.]
    - 1485, Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, Book VII:

      And than Sir Launcelot departed suddeynly, and no creature wyst where he was becom but Sir Bors.
2. (*copulative*) To begin to be; to come to be; to turn into. [from 12th c.]

    She became a doctor when she was 25.

    The weather will become cold after the sun goes down.
3. (*transitive*) To look attractive on, be suitable for. [from 14th c.]

    That dress really becomes you.

Synonyms

- (*to be suitable for*): befit, suit

bed down

English

Verb

bed down

1. (*intransitive*) To lie down to sleep for the night, usually of livestock or machinery.
    - 2006,Temple Grandin, Jennifer Lanier and Mark Deesing, *Low Stress Methods for Moving and Herding Cattle on Pastures, Paddocks and Large Feedlot Pens*, Department of Animal Sciences, Colorado State University

      The herd will tend to stay where the calves bed down.

- 2004, Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, *Spell*

  Through the woods, and frosted moors
  Past the snow-caked hedgerows I
  Bed down upon the drifting snow
  Sleep beneath the melting sky.

2. (*transitive*) To put an animal to rest for the night.

beef up

English

Verb

to beef up

1. (*idiomatic*) to strengthen or reinforce, especially by adding material (or meat)

   Let's beef up the hinge, in case anybody leans on the door.

have been around

English

Alternative forms

- have been around the block

Verb

to have been around

1. (*idiomatic*) To be experienced in worldly matters; to be seasoned, not naive.
   - 1900, Edward Stratemeyer, *The Rover Boys Out West*, ch. 17:

     "Oh, I've been around a little before," said Tom coolly.

     "Yes, you look like a lad who has seen something of the world."

- 2008, "'Special Report' Panel on Hillary Clinton's New Campaign Advertisement," *foxnews.com* (US), 3 Mar. (retrieved 1 Jan. 2009):

  Barnes: John McCain has been tested. He has been tested in war, and he passed that test. When has Hillary been tested? She has been tested in her marriage. That's about it.

  Williams: You're being very mean.

  Barnes: No I'm not. I'm being honest.

  Williams: She has been around. She has met world leaders.

be had

English

Verb

to be had

1. To be deceived.

   You've been had!

2. To be obtained.

   The substance you describe can't be had at any price.

before you can say Jack Robinson

English

Adverb

before you can say Jack Robinson (*not comparable*)

1. (*idiomatic*) Very quickly. Quicker than you expect.

   You have to be careful in that area. They'll have your wallet before you can say Jack Robinson.

Synonyms

- in the twinkling of an eye

- quick as a flash

beg off

English

Etymology

beg + off

Verb

beg off (*third-person singular simple present* begs off, *present participle* begging off, *simple past and past participle* begged off)

1. (*idiomatic*) To avoid, or cancel some event that one has previously arranged with someone.

   I wonder if I can beg off going to the meeting that day, since it will take me an extra 2 hours out of my way.

Synonyms

- cry off

Retrieved from "http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/beg_off"

beg to differ

English

Verb

to beg to differ

1. (*idiomatic*) To differ strongly in opinion or interpretation.
2. (*idiomatic*) To offer an opposing opinion humbly.

Synonyms

- disagree

Retrieved from "http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/beg_to_differ"

beggars can't be choosers

English

Phrase

beggars can't be choosers

1. (*proverb*) When resources are limited, one must accept even substandard gifts.

beg the question

English

Etymology

- Latin petitio principii.

Verb

to beg the question (*third-person singular simple present* begs the question, *present participle* begging the question, *simple past and past participle* begged the question)

1. (*philosophy*, *logic*) To engage in the logical fallacy of begging the question (petitio principii).
   - 1994, D. N. Walton, "Begging the question as a pragmatic fallacy." *Synthese*, vol 100, no 1.

     The objection is that the argument begs the question, meaning that the premise, that God has all the virtues, assumes the conclusion, that God is benevolent.
2. To raise or prompt a question.

   Three people were hurt in the fire at the warehouse last night, which begs the question: what were they doing there in the first place?

Usage Notes

The sense "raise or prompt a question" came about by misunderstanding of the meaning of the expression, possibly by confusion with beg to differ, and is proscribed (denounced)

by some usage guides.

Related Terms

- begging the question

behind the curve

English

Adverb

behind the curve

1. Out of date.

    o 2010ý Feb 4, Alan Ohnsman, "Toyota Plans Media Blitz as Stock Loses $21 Billion", *BusinessWeek*:

    > Toyota used to be a company with foresight, always ready to take action, but now they have fallen very far behind the curve.

Usage notes

- May also be used as an adjective.

Antonyms

- (*out of date*): ahead of the curve

behind the eight ball

English

Adjective

behind the eight ball

1. *Alternative spelling of* behind the eight-ball.

behind someone's back

English

Adverb

behind (someone's) back

1. (*idiomatic*) Without somebody's knowledge; secretly.

   The employees talked about their boss behind his back.

belly up

English

Alternative forms

- belly-up

Adjective

belly up (*not comparable*)

1. (*idiomatic*) Dead or defunct.

   After several financial failures, the organization went belly up.

Usage notes

- Often used with *go*, *went*, or *turn*.

Related terms

- go belly-up

Verb

to belly up (*third-person singular simple present* bellies up, *present participle* bellying up, *simple past and past participle* bellied up)

1. (*idiomatic*) To gather close to, or approach eagerly or assertively, as a bar for ordering alcoholic drinks.

   He bellied up to the bar as soon as he saw a free stool.

go belly-up

English

Verb

go belly-up (*third-person singular simple present* goes

belly-up, *present participle* going belly-up, *simple past and past participle* went belly-up)

1. (*idiomatic*) To die.
2. (*idiomatic*) To fail or fold; especially, to close or shut down a business; to go out of business.

   I was sorry to hear that my favorite little restaurant went belly-up.

poverty line

English

Noun

poverty line (*plural* poverty lines)

1. The threshold of poverty, below which one's income does not cover necessities.

belt

English

Etymology

From Middle English, from Old English *belt* ("belt, girdle"), from Proto-Germanic *baltijaz* ("girdle, belt"), from Latin *balteus* ("belt, sword-belt"), of Etruscan origin. Cognate with Danish *belte* ("belt"), Swedish *balte* ("belt, cincture, girdle, zone"), Icelandic *belti* ("belt").

Noun

belt (*plural* belts)

1. A band worn around the waist to hold clothing to one's body (usually pants), hold weapons (such as a gun or sword), or serve as a decorative piece of clothing.

   As part of the act, the fat clown's belt broke, causing his pants to fall down.

2. A band used as a restraint for safety purposes, such as a seat belt.

   Keep your belt fastened; this is going to be quite a bumpy ride.

3. A band that is used in a machine to help transfer motion or power.

   The motor had a single belt that snaked its way back and forth around a variety of wheels.

4. A powerful blow, often made with a fist or heavy object.

   After the bouncer gave him a solid belt to the gut, Simon had suddenly had enough of barfighting.

5. A quick drink of liquor.

   Care to join me in a belt of scotch?

6. (*usually capitalized*) A geographical region known for a particular product or feature (*Corn Belt*, *Bible Belt*).

7. (baseball) The lower boundary of the strike zone.

   That umpire called that pitch a strike at the belt.

Synonyms

- (*band worn around waist*): girdle, waistband, sash, strap
- (*band used as safety restraint*): restraint, safety belt, seat belt
- (*powerful blow*): blow, punch, sock, wallop

Verb

belt (*third-person singular simple present* belts, *present participle* belting, *simple past and past participle* belted)

1. (*transitive*) To encircle.

   The small town was belted by cornfields in all directions.

2. (*transitive*) To fasten a belt.

   Edgar belted himself in and turned the car's ignition.

   The rotund man had difficulty belting his pants, and generally wore suspenders to avoid the issue.

3. (*transitive*) To hit with a belt.

   The child was remanded to state custody when the lacerations on her back where her parents had belted her in punishment were revealed.

4. (*transitive*) and intransitive To scream or sing in a loud manner.

   He belted out the national anthem.

5. (*transitive*) To drink quickly, often in gulps.

   He belted down a shot of whisky.

6. (*transitive*, *slang*) To hit someone or something.

   The angry player belted the official across the face, and as a result was ejected from the game.

7. (*transitive*, *baseball*) To hit a pitched ball a long distance, usually for a home run.

   He belted that pitch over the grandstand.

8. (*intransitive*) To move very fast

   He was really belting along.

Synonyms

- (*to encircle*): circle, girdle, surround
- (*to fasten a belt*): buckle, fasten, strap
- (*to hit with a belt*): strap, whip
- (*to drink quickly*): gulp, pound, slurp

- (*to hit someone or something*): bash, clobber, smack, wallop
- (*to move quickly*): book, speed, whiz, zoom

Derived terms

- belt out
- belt up

Anagrams

- blet

Dutch

Etymology

Probably a variant of *bult*.

Noun

belt (*plural* belten, *diminutive* beltje, *diminutive plural* beltjes)

1. (*archaic*) heap, hill

Derived terms

- vuilnisbelt

Verb

belt

1. *second- and third-person singular present indicative of* bellen.
2. *plural imperative of* bellen.

Maltese

Etymology

From Arabic ÈáÏ (*bálad*).

Noun

belt *f.*

1. city, town

Old English

Etymology

Proto-Germanic *baltijaz*. Cognate with Old High German *balz*, Old Norse *belti*.

Pronunciation

- IPA: /belt/

Noun

belt *m*.

1. belt

bend somebody's ear

English

Verb

to bend somebody's ear

1. (*idiomatic*) To bore; to talk too long, especially to one particular person.

   Sorry to bend your ear with the whole story, but I think you ought to know.

bend one's elbow

English

Verb

to bend (one's) elbow

1. (*idiomatic*) To drink alcoholic beverages, especially at a public house or bar.

beside oneself

English

Adjective

beside oneself

1. (*idiomatic*) Overcome; consumed by an emotion.
   His widow was beside herself with grief.

beside the point

English

Adjective

beside the point (*not comparable*)

1. (*idiomatic*) Irrelevant, moot.
   His many charitable donations are beside the point. They do not make up for the fact that he stole the money to begin with.

Translations

- Icelandic: óviðkomandi is(is) *m.*, utan við efnið is(is), sem kemur málinu ekki við is(is)

Adverb

beside the point (*not comparable*)

1. (*idiomatic*) Irrelevantly, off the topic.
   - 1944, George Stimpson, *A Book about a Thousand Things*, quoted in Marcus A.J. Smith and Julian Wasserman, "In the Sheriff's Court: […] ", in Thomas G. Hahn (editor), *Robin Hood in Popular Culture*, Boydell & Brewer (2000), ISBN 978-0-85991-564-9, page 229:

     Judges in the British law courts used to tell lawyers who spoke beside the point or quoted irrelevant cases that they might as well say that Robin Hood in Barnsdale stood.

best laid plans

English

Etymology

Shortened form of "the best laid plans of mice and men

often go awry", translated from Scots "The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men, / Gang aft agley," from To A Mouse, On Turning Her Up In Her Nest With The Plough by Robert Burns (text and reading of poem).

Noun

best laid plans (*singular* best laid plan)

1. (*idiomatic*) A proverbial expression used to signify the futility of making detailed plans when the outcome is uncertain.

bet dollars to donuts

English

Verb

bet dollars to donuts

1. (*idiomatic*) To suggest that something is very likely to be true or that one has a strong hunch about something. Related to the earlier 'bet dollars-to-buttons' and 'bet dollars-to-dumplings' that appeared in the 1880s, meaning 'almost certain' because the dollars are bet against something near worthless, and perhaps zero shaped.
1. 1996. "Now I'm willing to bet you dollars to donuts that out of every twenty stills in the county, the ATF boys know, personally, at least nineteen operators." Virginia Lanier, *Death in Bloodhound Red*, p. 38.

better late than never

English

Etymology

Perhaps a calque of the Latin phrase potiusque sero quam nunquam from the 4th book of *Ab Urbe condita* (*History of Rome*) by Titus Livius, around 27 BC.

Adverb

better late than never

1. It's better to do something late, than to never do it at all.
    - 1996. Titus Livius (translation). *Livy's History of Rome* (in English):

        Their insolence and recklessness must be opposed, and better late than never.

better off

English

Alternative Forms

- better-off

Adjective

better off

1. *comparative form of* well off: more well off

I think it would be better off in the bag.

better than sex

English

Adjective

better than sex

1. (*idiomatic*) superlative; wonderful

at sixes and sevens

English

Etymology

Unknown, though it may have originated from the game of hazard and the Old French cinque (five) and sice (six), the riskiest numbers to shoot for, which were misheard and folk-etymologized into English as "six" and "seven".

Adjective

at sixes and sevens

1. (*idiomatic*) In a state of confusion.
    - o 1912, Arthur Quiller-Couch, *Poison Island*, ch. 23:

      Oh, what a racket! And everything on deck apparently at sixes and sevens. Mail-bags and passengers mixed up in every direction.
2. (*idiomatic*, *of people or groups*) In a state of dispute or disagreement.
    - o 1911, Jack London, *Adventure*, ch. 6:

      Her outlook on life was so different from what he conceived a woman's outlook should be, that he was more often than not at sixes and sevens with her.
    - o 1976, Tim Rice, "Don't Cry For Me Argentina":

      All you will see is a girl you once knew, although she's dressed up to the nines, at sixes and sevens with you.

Synonyms

- (*in a state of dispute or disagreement*): at loggerheads

caught between the devil and the deep blue sea

English

Alternative forms

- between the devil and the deep sea

Adjective

caught between the devil and the deep blue sea

1. (*idiomatic*) Having a choice between two alternatives, both undesirable.

betwixt and between

English

Adjective

betwixt and between (*comparative* more betwixt and between, *superlative* most betwixt and between)

1. (*idiomatic*) Neither one thing nor the other.

Adverb

betwixt and between (*comparative* more betwixt and between, *superlative* most betwixt and between)

1. (*idiomatic*) Neither here nor there.

beyond

English

Etymology

Old English *be!eondan*

Preposition

beyond

1. Further away than.
2. On the far side of.
3. Later than; after.
4. Greater than.
5. In addition to.

Synonyms

- ayond
- ayont

Antonyms

- before
- earlier

Derived Terms

- beyond a reasonable doubt
- beyond doubt
- beyond one's ken
- beyond question
- beyond recognition
- beyond the black stump
- beyond the pale

Adverb

beyond (*not comparable*)

1. Farther along or away.
2. In addition; more.

Synonyms

- ayond, ayont (*obsolete*)

Noun

beyond (*uncountable*)

1. The unknown.
2. The hereafter.

Derived Terms

- back of beyond

Statistics

- Most common English words before 1923: toward · feeling · later · #488: beyond · rose · age · nearly

big boys

English

Noun

big boys

1. (*idiomatic*, *plurale tantum*) The people or bodies with the most influence and/or power.

    If you think you can do better than the big boys of electronic engineering, then good luck.

2. *plural form of* big boy

big break

English

Noun

big break (*plural* big breaks)

1. (*entertainment*, *idiomatic*) A breakthrough, especially the first big hit of a previously unknown performer or performers in the entertainment industry.

big bucks

English

Noun

big bucks *(always plural)*

1. (*idiomatic*) Lots of money.

    The new managing director must be making big bucks after his promotion.

    - *1999, Dale Brown,* The Tin Maný, *page 96*:

        But he was unable to get a gun permit and make the big bucks of an armed security guard, so he made minimum wage as a seasonal-hire watchman

    - 2006, Ann Coulter, *Godless*,

        After all the carping about how little teachers are paid, if someone enters the teaching profession for the big bucks aren't they too stupid to be teaching our kids?

Synonyms

- megabucks

big deal

English

Noun

big deal (*plural* big deals)

1. (*idiomatic*) Something very important, difficult, or of concern.

   It's a big deal to him to get this promotion.

   It's no big deal if you don't finish.

Interjection

big deal

1. (*idiomatic*) (ironically) Indicates that something is not important or impressive; so what.

   He can run a mile in 15 minutes? Big deal! Some people can do it in four.

Translations

- Finnish: ei se ole/oo niin justiinsa
- French: la belle affaire
- Russian: podúmaješ

big picture

English

Etymology

This definition is lacking an etymology or has an incomplete etymology. You can help Wiktionary by giving it a proper etymology.

Noun

big picture (*uncountable*)

1. (*idiomatic*) The totality of a situation.
    - *1941, United States House Merchant Marine and Fisheries,* Merchant-marine inquiry forwarders: Executive hearings*, page 35*:

      I do not care whether it is placed or not, if I get my stuff to that ship. Now, it is my job to look at the big picture.
    - *1951, US Senate Committee on Armed Services,* Military situation in the Far Eastý*, page 3089*:

      We need somebody who will overlook the petty details, look at the big picture, decide what is necessary to end the war, make a plan,
    - *1993, Bill Clinton, Presidential Radio Address - 31 July 1993*:

      I met an executive from Missouri who turned around a failing plant by sharing information with employees about the company's performance. When the employees understood the big picture, they did even better at their jobs.
    - *2002, Kate Chynoweth, Neryl Walker,* The Bridesmaid Guide:

      In the prewedding whirlwind of bridal showers, dress shopping, and parties, even the most budget savvy bridesmaids can overspend by mistake. Because the events span several months, it can be easy to lose track of the big picture and splurge at each event.
2. (*UK*, *dated*) The main film in a double feature.

big rig

English

Noun

big rig (*plural* big rigs)

1. (*informal*) A large truck, an 18-wheeler.

   Driving on the interstate at night, you will see less traffic, but more big rigs.

big wheel

English

Noun

big wheel (*plural* big wheels)

1. (*idiomatic*) A person with a great deal of power or influence, especially a high-ranking person in an organization.

   She's a big wheel at IBM.

2. (UK) Ferris wheel

Synonyms

- big cheese
- big enchilada
- big kahuna
- bigwig
- grand poobah
- head honcho
- kingpin
- muckety muck
- top banana
- top dog

big wigs

English

Noun

big wigs

1. *plural form of* big wig

call it even

English

Verb

to call it even

1. (*idiomatic*) To declare debts resolved or favors or other exchange equitable.

   Since you paid for dinner last time, I'll pay this time, and we'll call it even.

call off the dogs

English

Verb

call off the dogs (*third-person singular simple present* calls off the dogs, *present participle* calling off the dogs, *simple past and past participle* called off the dogs)

1. (*idiomatic*) To ease up on after inflicting great punishment.
2. (*sports*, *idiomatic*) During a one-sided sports contest, to remove the first-string unit of a team from the game after dominating the opponent.

   Doing the opponents an obvious favor, the football coach decided to call off the dogs early after his team was up 56-0.

call off

English

Verb

to call off (*third-person singular simple present* calls off, *present participle* calling off, *simple past and past participle* called off)

1. (*transitive*) To recall; to cancel or call a halt to.

   If you want me to call off the dog, then get off my land.

   The police called off the search for the missing boy.

call on

English

Verb

to call on (*third-person singular simple present* calls on, *present participle* calling on, *simple past and past participle* called on)

1. (*idiomatic*, *transitive*) To visit (a person); to pay a call to.

   I really should call on my aunt more often.

2. (*idiomatic*, *transitive*, *in a classroom*) To select (a student).

   He sat there, baffled, hoping nobody would call on him.

   o 2007, Barbara Seranella, *Deadman's Switch*, Thomas Dunne Books, ISBN 978-0-312-36170-9, pages 33–4:

   "Mr. Rayney, Mr. Rayney," the reporters clamored, and hands shot up. ¶ Charlotte called on the reporter from the *L.A. Times*,

promising herself that she would lead with the *OC Register* reporter next time.

3. (*idiomatic*, *transitive*) To request or ask something of (a person); to select for a task.
    - 1909 October 14, Edward Kimball Hall, speech, in *The Inauguration of Ernest Fox Nichols, D.Sc., LL.D., as president of Dartmouth College*, The Rumford Press, page 88:

      The *alma mater* had again called on her sons in her hour of need and again they had responded.
    - 1974, Bruce Thordarson, *Lester Pearson: Diplomat and Politician*, Oxford University Press, ISBN 9780195402254, page 120:

      President Kennedy imposed a naval blockade on Cuba to prevent delivery of the missiles and called on his allies for support.
    - 2002, Bruno Coppieters, "Legitimate Authority", chapter 2 of Bruno Coppieters and Nick Fotion (editors), *Moral Constraints on War: Principles and Cases*, Lexington Books, ISBN 978-0-7391-0437-8, page 46:

      De Gaulle called on the military to break with their hierarchical superiors and on the other French citizens to distance themselves from their government.
4. (*idiomatic*) To correct; to point out an error or untruth.

    The salesman persisted in quoting a rate higher than was listed, until we called him on it.

Anagrams

- clonal, NoCall, on call

call the shots

English

Verb

to call the shots

1. (*idiomatic*, *chiefly US*) To make the decisions; to be in charge; to give orders.

    You may know all about glassblowing, but here in the gym I call the shots.

Synonyms

- call the tune

call up

English

Noun

call up (*plural* call ups)

1. An order to report for military service.

Verb

call up (*third-person singular simple present* calls up, *present participle* calling up, *simple past and past participle* called up)

1. To retrieve from personal or computer memory.
2. (*idiomatic*) To call on the telephone.
3. To select e.g. to a sports squad.
    - *Dean Ashton was called up to the England squad for the first time.*

Synonyms

- ring up (to call on the telephone)

Anagrams

- upcall

calm before the storm

English

Noun

calm before the storm

1. (*idiomatic*) A period of peace before a disturbance or crisis; an unnatural or false calm before a storm.

   The meeting may be peaceful now, but this is only the calm before the storm.

Canada goose

English

Noun

Canada goose (*plural* Canada geese)

1. A large goose, *Branta canadensis*.

carry a tune

English

Verb

to carry a tune

1. (*idiomatic*) To produce music, especially to sing, with accurate pitch.

carry on

English

Pronunciation

- (*US*) IPA

Verb

carry on

1. (*idiomatic*) To continue or proceed as before.

   I'll be gone for a few days, but I hope you will carry on in my absence.

2. To take baggage or luggage onto an airplane, rather than check it.

   You may only carry on items that are smaller than a certain size.

3. (*idiomatic*) To have or maintain.

   It is difficult to carry on a conversation with so many distractions.

4. (*idiomatic*) To act or behave; especially to act or behave so as to attract attention.

   I really wish you wouldn't carry on like that in public!

5. (*idiomatic*) To have an illicit sexual liaison

damaged goods
English
Noun

damaged goods (*uncountable*)

1. Items that were expected to be in good (if not brand new) condition, but were discovered eventually that they weren't.
2. A person who has an unresolved conflict of emotions after a traumatic event.
3. A person who is no longer deemed to be fit for purpose; especially an unmarried woman who is no longer a virgin.

damned if one does and damned if one doesn't
English
Adjective

damned if one does and damned if one doesn't

1. (*idiomatic*) A dilemma where either choice results in a negative outcome.

If John leaves for New York to follow his career, his father will disinherit him. He's damned if he does and damned if he doesn't.

Damned if I do and damned if I don't.

Damned if you do and damned if you don't.

Synonyms

- no-win situation
- catch-22
- inevitability

dark horse

English

Etymology

Originally an allusion to an unknown horse winning a race, as used in an 1831 novel *The Young Duke* by Benjamin Disraeli.

Noun

dark horse (*plural* dark horses)

1. (*idiomatic*, *politics*) A candidate who is nominated unexpectedly, without previously having been discussed or considered as a likely choice.
2. (*rare*) An unexpected success.

Everyone was expecting the red team to win, but the greens were the dark horse in the event.

dime a dozen

English

Etymology

As though twelve (a dozen) could be purchased for one dime.

Adjective

a dime a dozen

1. (*US*, *idiomatic*) So common as to be practically worthless.

   People with your skills are a dime a dozen these days.

dirt cheap

English

Adjective

dirt cheap (*not comparable*)

1. Easily affordable

dirty laundry

English

Noun

dirty laundry (*uncountable*)

1. (*idiomatic*) Unflattering facts or questionable activities that one wants to remain secret, but which some other may use to blackmail with.

   If you don't tell me why you did it, I'll air all your dirty laundry to your boss.

2. Laundry that is unclean or soiled

   If you bring your dirty laundry round on Saturday, I'll wash it for you.

3. (*slang*) A clothes hamper or other container used to place unclean or soiled laundry in.

   Place your dirty clothes in the dirty laundry.

dirty money

English

Noun

dirty money (*uncountable*)

1. (*idiomatic*) Money that is illegally gained, illegally

transferred or illegally utilized. Especially money gained through forgery, bribery, or thievery.

down the tubes

English

Alternative forms

- down the tube

Adverb

down the tubes

1. (*idiomatic*) Into a state of collapse or failure.

Usage notes

- Sometimes used as an adjective.

Synonyms

- down the drain

get down to brass tacks

English

Etymology

Unknown Earliest attestation in 1863 US, specifically Texas. A theory is that it comes from the brass tacks in the counter of a hardware store or draper's shop used to measure cloth in precise units (rather than holding one end to the nose and stretching out the arm to approximately one yard).

Verb

to get down to brass tacks

1. (*idiomatic*) Deal with the important details.

Synonyms

- get down to the nitty-gritty

- get down to nuts and bolts
- roll up one's sleeves

Translations

Quotations

1863 1994

- 1863, January 21, 1863, *The Tri-Weekly Telegraph,* newspaper of Houston, Texas

  When you come down to brass tacks – if we may be allowed the expression – everybody is governed by selfishness.

- 1972, Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*

  Let's get down to brass tacks. How much for the ape?

- 1994, Quentin Tarantino and Roger Avary, *Pulp Fiction*

  You must be Jules, which would make you Vincent. Let's get down to brass tacks, gentlemen. If I was informed correctly, the clock is ticking. Is that right, Jimmie?

each to his own

English

Alternative forms

- to each his own
- to each their own

Proverb

each to his own

1. Everyone is entitled to their own opinion or tastes.

My housemate is a strict vegan. I personally could never not eat meat, but each to his own.

ears are burning

English

Phrase

ears are burning

1. (*idiomatic*, *colloquial*) Being the topic of discussion in another place; or sensing that this is happening.
   His ears are burning.

have one's ears lowered

English

Verb

to have one's ears lowered

1. (*idiomatic*, *humorous*, *dated*) To get a haircut.
   - 2006, "Cutting to the Chase at Barber Shop," *New York Daily News*, 25 Jun.,

     When you need a haircut, you go to a barber, so here I am at Tommy's Bronxville's tonsorial prepared to get clipped. Or, as we said as kids, have my ears lowered.

ease up

English

Verb

to ease up (*phrasal verb*)

1. To become more relaxed

   I suggest that you ease up a bit at work. You're getting stressed out.

   You should ease up on your son. You're putting too much pressure on him.

2. To reduce the speed

He came hurtling round the corner, but quickly eased up when he saw Jane standing there.

easy as pie

English

Adjective

easy as pie

1. (*simile*, *colloquial*) Very easy.
   - o 1910, Zane Grey, *The Young Forester*,
     "Easy as pie," replied he, eagerly. [..] What Dick called easy as pie was the hardest work I ever did. I lay flat on my back, bound hand and foot, and it was necessary to jerk my body along the log till my hands should be under the knife.
   - o 2004, Girls Aloud, *Love Machine*,
     Come make my dreams, honey hard as it seems, loving me is as easy as pie.

easy come, easy go

English

Proverb

easy come, easy go

1. Easily won and easily lost; usually said when resigned to a loss.

They took $200 with them into the casino, and regarded their winnings as easy come, easy go.

eat someone out of house and home

English

Etymology

From Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part 2*

Verb

to eat (someone) out of house and home

1. (*idiomatic*) To consume such a portion of one's store of food that little is left for the owner.
    - *c.* 1598, William Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part 2*, Act II Scene I

      He hath eaten me out of house and home; he hath put all my substance

      into that fat belly of his: but I will have some of it out again,

      or I will ride thee o' nights like the mare.

Related terms

- out of house and home

face the facts
English
Alternative forms

- face facts

Verb

to face the facts

1. To accept what is true, especially when it is undesirable.

face the music
English
Verb

to face the music

1. (*idiomatic*) to accept or confront the unpleasant consequences of one's actions

faint of heart

English

Adjective

faint of heart

1. faint-hearted

Noun

faint of heart (*uncountable*) *plural*

1. timid people considered as a group

fair game

English

Noun

fair game (*uncountable*)

1. (*idiomatic*) Actions permissible by the rules.

   Pretending to be slow is fair game. Pretending to be injured is not.

   The referee ruled the unprecedented play fair game.

2. (*idiomatic*) An goal or object that may legitimately be sought.

   After the middle sister's call from a friend's house, her slice of cake was fair game.

3. *Used other than as an idiom: see fair,ý game.*: a game that is fair, that does not involve cheating, etc.

fair to middling

English

Adjective

fair to middling

1. (*idiomatic*, *informal*) only tolerably good

fall behind

English

Verb

fall behind

1. (*idiomatic*, *intransitive*) To be late (for a regular event)

   You're falling behind with the rent.

2. To be progressively below average in performance.

   You could lose your job if you keep falling behind with your work.

   It's not like John to fall behind in maths.

fall on one's sword

English

Verb

to fall on one's sword

1. *Used other than as an idiom: To commit suicide by allowing one's body to drop onto the point of one's sword.*
2. (*idiomatic*, *by extension*) To resign from a job or other position of responsibility, especially when pressured to do so.
   - 1992, Paul A. Witteman, "Roger's Painful Legacy," *Time*, 9 November:

     Stempel was laboring to undo the damage when GM's board forced him to fall on his sword after little more than two years on the job.

   - 2009, Glen Owen & Brendan Carlin, "Even Darling thinks his Budget doesn't add up as relations with Brown hit all-time low", *Daily*

Mail (UK), 26 April (retrieved 2 May 2009):

"There is no sympathy for her. . .," one Minister said. "She may just fall on her sword, or Gordon might humiliate her with a demotion."

3. (*idiomatic*) Voluntarily to take the blame for a situation.
   - o 1987, Ed Magnuson, "The "Fall Guy" Fights Back," *Time*, 20 Jul.:

     The bemedaled Marine refused to fall on his sword and take full blame for the scandal.
   - o *1996, Chip R. Bell,* Managers as mentors: building partnerships for learning*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers,* ISBN 1881052923*, page 81*:

     Humility does not require you to fall on your sword.
   - o 2006, L. Woellert and P. Burrows, "HP's Showdown: Hurd vs. Dunn," *BusinessWeek*, 28 Sep.:

     In written testimony given to Congress and made public the day before the hearing, Hurd falls on his sword, apologizing for HP's spying on its own directors and invading the privacy of journalists.

game over

English

Phrase

game over (*uncountable*)

1. (*video games*) A message that appears on the screen of a computer or video game when all of the player's

lives have been lost and the game must be started again from a checkpoint, the time runs out, or save point, or when the game has been successfully completed.

2. (*by extension*) The end of some ongoing situation due to either failure or success.

Quotations

- 1984 Robert Maxxe - Arcade

  Before I could figure out what the hell was the object of the game, I hear the thing go boom-boom, and the screen lights up with a sign: game over.

- 2004 Ryan Russell - Stealing the Network: How to Own a Continent

  Once we started attacking that network from the inside, it was pretty much game over.

Gang of Four

English

Etymology

From Mandarin *ÛV°Nk^*

Proper noun

Gang of Four

1. A leftist political faction composed of four Chinese Communist Party officials that came to prominence during the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

gang up on

English

Verb

to gang up on (*third-person singular simple present*

gangs up on, *present participle* ganging up on, *simple past and past participle* ganged up on)

1. (*transitive*, *idiomatic*) To join together in a group in order to overpower someone else.

Related terms

- gang up

get the lead out

English

Etymology

Shortened form of "get the lead out of one's shoes" (or one's pants). Here, "lead" refers to the metal that is very heavy, thus the expression means roughly "get rid of whatever is slowing you down and hurry up".

Verb

to get the lead out

1. (*idiomatic*, *dated*) to go faster; to hurry up

get the picture

English

Verb

to get the picture

1. (*idiomatic*) To understand or comprehend; to interpret correctly.

   I hung a "no solicitors" sign by my door. One of these days, I hope they'll get the picture and quit ringing the bell.

get the point

English

Verb

get the point

1. (*idiomatic*) To understand; to interpret correctly.

   He just doesn't get the point that this is not a race.

have had it up to here

English

Verb

to have had it up to here

1. (*idiomatic*) to have become very frustrated or angry; to have reached the limit of one's patience or forbearance

   I have had it up to here with your nonsense!

Usage notes

- Takes *with* if an object is given.
- When spoken, often accompanied by a hand gesture where the hand is held parallel to the ground near the neck or head, as though indicating a high level.
- Rarely used in other tenses, e.g. have-, has- or having it up to here.

ham it up

English

Verb

ham it up

1. (*idiomatic*, *performing arts*) To deliberately exaggerate one's emotions or movements, or to overact or act badly.

   You can count on him to ham it up for the camera.

hang in

English

Verb

to hang in (*third-person singular simple present* hangs

in, *present participle* hanging in, *simple past and past participle* hung in)

1. (*intransitive*) To remain in a particular place or status.

Usage notes

- *Hang in there* is frequently used as an imperative, encouraging someone to persist despite adverse conditions.

hang on every word

English

Verb

to hang on every word

1. (*idiomatic*) To be completely attentive to what another person is saying.

Usage notes

Usually in the form "hang on *someone's* every word"

hard done by

English

Adjective

hard done by

1. (*idiomatic*) used, cheated, dejected

   King should feel a bit hard done by after being replaced in the team.

hit the bricks

English

Verb

to hit the bricks

1. (*idiomatic*) To travel about, especially on foot.
    - o 1949, Victor Riesel, "Inside Labor," *St. Petersburg Times*, 18 June, p. 30 (retrieved 24 June 2009):

        > [T]housands of brewers, waiters and waitresses, bartenders, cooks, checkers, cashiers, dishwashers, hotel maids and bellmen, too, would be forced to hit the bricks in search of other work.

    - o 2002, Jeff Larsen, "Short Trips: Shoreside walks in green and glittering Vancouver," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 17 Oct. (retrieved 24 June 2009):

        > [H]undreds of joggers and walkers from the condos hit the bricks of the Coal Harbor Seawalk starting at 6 a.m. for their morning constitution around Stanley Park.

2. (*idiomatic*) To leave or depart; to get out.
    - o 2004, "No NHL? No NHL!," *Washington Post*, 20 Sept., p. D02 (retrieved 24 June 2009):

        > Alas, Hancock did not have his receipt, so the shop owner told him to hit the bricks.

    - o 2009, Tom Horgen, "Nightlife: Bingo is the game-o," *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, 3 Apr. (retrieved 24 June 2009):

        > On Friday and Saturday nights, the old-timers who usually populate the enormous room hit the bricks as an army of young people storm the hall to play "Cosmic Bingo."

3. (*idiomatic*) To participate in a workplace strike or other job action; to participate in a public protest, especially one involving picketing.
    - o 1947, "National Affairs: Waterfront Conchie," *Time*, 31 March:

When Harry Bridges told his boys to hit the bricks, Charley was always up front in the longshoremen's wall of flesh. His picketing record in the bloody dockside strife of 1934 and in the all-out strike of 1937 was perfect.

- 2002, Pete Donohue *et al.*, "MTA and union push against strike deadline," *New York Daily News*, 16 Dec. (retrieved 24 June 2009):

  Queens bus driver Mousie Garcia, 30, said she doesn't want a strike but will hit the bricks if the MTA doesn't come through with no-strings-attached raises.

Synonyms

- (*travel or search about*): perambulate, pound the pavement, ramble
- (*leave or depart*): hit the road, hit the trail
- (*participate in a job action or public protest*): picket, protest, strike

how do you like them apples

English

Phrase

how do you like them apples?

1. (*colloquial*, *rhetorical question*) directed jestingly or mockingly at someone who has received surprising information, ridiculing the situation

   "Our governor has just vetoed a bill that would offer more money to our schools. How do you like them apples?"

2. (*colloquial*, *rhetorical question*, *Irish*, *Irish-American*) Used after an actual or proposed action with which the listener might be displeased. Also used after refuting an argument.

> *"I can't give you a raise now; if I did, this whole company would go bankrupt, and you wouldn't have a job at all. Now how do you like them apples?"*

I'll be a monkey's uncle

English

Etymology

"I'll be a monkey's uncle" dates from after 1926, the date of the widely publicized Scopes Trial in the United States, where the term first appears. It appears in print starting in the 1930s.

Phrase

I'll be a monkey's uncle!

1. (*idiomatic*) (*often preceded by* well) expressing complete surprise or disbelief

   > *Well I'll be a monkey's uncle! I would never have thought that tourists would go into space!*

Synonyms

- Fuck me running! (*taboo slang*)
- blimey! (*UK*)
- bloody hell! (*coarse UK slang*)
- bugger me! (*taboo UK slang*)
- Christ!, Christ almighty!
- crikey!, (*Australian slang*)
- damn!
- fancy that!
- fucking hell! (*taboo slang*)
- fuck me! (*taboo slang*)
- get out of town!
- God!
- good God!

- good gracious!
- goodness me!
- I'll be!
- I'll be damned!
- I'll be dipped in shit!
- Jesus!, Jesus Christ!
- my God!
- my goodness!
- stone me!
- stone the crows!
- strike me pink!
- what do you know!
- you don't say?
- great Scott!

I'm afraid so

English

Alternative forms

- I am afraid so; 'fraid so (*informal*)

Phrase

I'm afraid so

1. Unfortunately, yes; I regret that that is so.

   Do we really have to do every one by hand? Yes, I'm afraid so.

Antonyms

- I'm afraid not

the icing on the cake

English

Noun

the icing on the cake

1. (*idiomatic*) Something wonderful at the end of something good.

    I managed to win the marathon, but the icing on the cake was when my boyfriend proposed to me as soon as I crossed the finish line.

in good hands

English

Adverb

in good hands (*not comparable*)

1. Under the guidance of a capable being.

in hand

English

Adverb

in hand

1. under control

Adjective

in hand

1. In the physical possession of the owner
2. Forthcoming
3. Under consideration

Anagrams

- hand in

in hot water

English

Adjective

in hot water

1. (*idiomatic*) In trouble; in the position of arousing somebody's anger or displeasure.

He's going to be in hot water with his wife if he keeps staying out so late.

jack of all trades

English

Alternative forms

- Jack of all trades, Jack of all Trades, Jack-of-all-trades, jack-of-all-trades

Etymology

1610s, from sense *Jack* ("man (generic term)"). Originally a term of praise (competent in many endeavors), today generally used disparagingly, with emphasis on (implied or stated) "master of none", as in later longer form *jack of all trades, master of none*.

First attested in *Essayes and characters of a prison and prisoners,* by Geffray Minshull, published 1618 (written 1612), p. 50, as *Jack-of-all-trades*.

Noun

jack of all trades (*plural* jacks of all trades)

1. (*idiomatic*) One competent in many endeavors, especially one who excels in none of them.
    - 1618, Geffray Minshull, *Essayes and characters of a prison and prisoners,* p. 50:

      Now for the most part your porter is either some broken cittizen, who hath plaid Jack-of-all-trades, some pander, broker, or hangman, that hath plaid the knaue with all men, and for the more certainty his embleme is a red beard, to which facke hath made his nose cousin german.

- 1861, Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, ch. 25:

  > "I am my own engineer, and my own carpenter, and my own plumber, and my own gardener, and my own Jack of all Trades," said Wemmick.

- 1912, Mary Roberts Rinehart, *Where There's A Will*, Ch. 5:

  > A fellow can always get some sort of a job—I was coming up here to see if they needed an extra clerk or a waiter, or chauffeur, or anything that meant a roof and something to eat—but I suppose they don't need a jack-of-all-trades.

Synonyms

- factotum, handyman, sciolist

jam session

English

Noun

jam session (*plural* jam sessions)

1. (*music*) An informal gathering of musicians to play music, especially improvised jazz or a similar genre.

jam tart

English

Noun

jam tart (*plural* jam tarts)

1. An open tartlet filled with jam
2. (*rare*, *rhyming slang*) Heart

Usage notes

- There is some evidence that this is used as an intensified version of *tart* (promiscuous woman)

jazz up

English

Verb

jazz up (*third-person singular simple present* jazzes up, *present participle* jazzing up, *simple past and past participle* jazzed up)

1. To make gaudy and bright.

   I jazzed up my room with some new posters.

2. To give a rhythm/melody reminiscent of jazz.

   They played a jazzed-up version of the original song.

je ne sais quoi

English

Etymology

From French je ne sais quoi, literally 'I don't know what'.

Noun

je ne sais quoi (*uncountable*)

1. An intangible quality that makes something distinctive or attractive.

   She has a certain je ne sais quoi about her.

jump for joy

English

[Verb

jump for joy

1. (*idiomatic*) exalt, rejoice, feel elation.

Synonyms

- leap for joy

jump ship

English

Verb

jump ship

1. To part from a ship

   As soon as the battleship docked in Singapore, Roger jumped ship, never to return.

2. (*idiomatic*) To depart a project without warning.

   I couldn't hack it as a teacher, so I jumped ship and flew back to Australia.

keep an eye on

English

Verb

keep an eye on

1. (*idiomatic*) To watch and pay attention to.

   I must keep an eye on this sauce in case it curdles.

keep an eye open

English

Verb

to keep an eye open

1. (*idiomatic*) To maintain vigilance for someone or something.
2. (*idiomatic*) To maintain vigilance for a possibly dangerous situation.

Synonyms

- keep a lookout

keep someone in the loop

English

Verb

to keep (someone) in the loop

1. (*idiomatic*) To furnish someone with sufficient relevant information and include them in the decision-making process.

Antonyms

- keep someone in the dark

in touch

English

Adverb

in touch (*comparative* more in touch, *superlative* most in touch)

1. (*idiomatic*) In contact, or in communication.
   Let's stay in touch.
   I'm not reachable over the weekend, but I'll be in touch early in the week.
   How can I get in touch with her? It's urgent.
   Don't be a stranger. Keep in touch.
2. (*rugby*) The ball, or a player, is in touch when it, or he, is outside the playing area or touching the touchlines of the playing area

keep it down

English

Verb

keep it down (*third-person singular simple present* keeps

it down, *present participle* keeping it down, *simple past and past participle* kept it down)

1. (*idiomatic*) To be quiet

   Would you guys keep it down in there? I'm trying to sleep.

keep on

English

Verb

to keep on (*third-person singular simple present* keeps on, *present participle* keeping on, *simple past and past participle* kept on)

1. (*idiomatic*) persist or continue

   Keep on trucking!

   Mum, Jimmy keeps on poking me!

2. (*idiomatic*) To remain in an existing position.

   The new boss would like to keep on the present secretary.

keep out

English

Verb

to keep out

1. (*intransitive*) To refrain from entering a place or condition.
   - After being warned, he kept out.
2. (*transitive*) To restrain someone or something from entering a place or condition.
   - The warning kept him out.

Usage notes

Often seen, as imperative, on a sign posted as an attempt to prevent entry or access to a place.

laid back

English

Adjective

laid back (*comparative* more laid back, *superlative* most laid back)

1. *Alternative spelling of* laid-back.

laid bare

English

Verb

laid bare

1. *Simple past tense and past participle of* lay bare.

Anagrams

- radiable

laid off

English

Verb

laid off

1. *Simple past tense and past participle of* lay off.

laid up

English

Adjective

laid up (*comparative* more laid up, *superlative* most laid up)

1. Unable to move about normally due to illness or injury, especially when confined to bed.

- 2000, Arthur Michael Saltzman, *This Mad "instead": Governing Metaphors in Contemporary American Fiction*, ISBN 9781570033261, p. 12,

  Flesh occasionally feels stalemated, more laid up than at home.

- 2003, Walter Isaacson, "How They Chose These Words," *Time*, 7 Jul.,

  He was still laid up in bed with boils and gout when the committee first met.

2. Stored at a dock or other place of safety, as with a ship.

Verb

laid up

1. *Simple past tense and past participle of* lay up.

Anagrams

- dialup, dial-up

lame duck

English

Noun

lame duck (*plural* lame ducks)

1. (*colloquial*) A person or thing that is helpless, inefficient or disabled.
2. (*US*, *politics*) An elected official who has lost the recent election or is not eligible for reelection and is marking time until leaving office.

   Congressman Jones was a lame duck and did not vote on many issues that were important to his constituents.

Translations

- Finnish: siipirikko
- French: canard boiteux

lap of luxury

English

Noun

lap of luxury (*singular only*)

1. (*idiomatic*) A position or situation in which one is spoiled and indulged.

lap up

English

Verb

lap up (*third-person singular simple present* laps up, *present participle* lapping up, *simple past and past participle* lapped up)

1. To consume by lapping

   The cat's lapping up the milk in its bowl

2. (*idiomatic*) To revel in, to overtly enjoy

   You could see she was pleased, she was lapping up the applause.

Anagrams

- pal up, pupal

larger than life

English

Adjective

larger than life (*not comparable*)

1. *Alternative spelling of* larger-than-life.

lay it on the line

English

Verb

to lay it on the line

1. (*idiomatic*) To state something, for example an ultimatum, strongly and clearly.

mad as a hatter

English

Etymology

Disputed. Possibly from Old English *âtor* ("poison"), and thus related to English *atter*. Alternatively from hat-makers suffering from Korsakoff's syndrome due to handling mercury-contaminated felt.

Adjective

mad as a hatter (*not comparable*)

1. Demented or crazy.
    - 1857, Thomas Hughes, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, Part II, chapter 3,

      > He's a very good fellow, but as mad as a hatter. He's called Madman, you know. And never was such a fellow for getting all sorts of rum things about him. He tamed two snakes last half, and used to carry them about in his pocket; and I'll be bound he's got some hedgehogs and rats in his cupboard now, and no one knows what besides.

    - 1895, John Kendrick Bangs, *A House-Boat on the Styx*, chapter 7,

      > "I think he'd be as mad as a hatter at your insinuation that he would invite any of his

wives, if all I hear of him is true; and what I've heard, Wolsey has told me."

- o 1904, G. K. Chesterton, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, Book III, chapter 3,

  I think Adam Wayne, who is as mad as a hatter, worth more than a million of you. But you have the force, and, I admit, the common sense, and he is lost.

- o 1920, Agatha Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, chapter 10,

  Sometimes, I feel sure he is as mad as a hatter; and then, just as he is at his maddest, I find there is method in his madness.

- o 1939,Agatha Christie, *And Then There Were None*, chapter 11,

  If you ask me that woman's as mad as a hatter.

Synonyms

- disturbed, insane, loopy, nutty

Related Terms

- hatter
- Mad Hatter

make a face

English

Verb

to make a face (*phrasal verb*)

1. (*colloquial*) To make a facial expression, often for humor, as a taunt, or to indicate distaste.
   - o *1849, "Mr. Jolly Green's Account Of The Great Paris Excursion",* The New monthly magazine*, volume 86,* page 98:

> I looked at Tomkins to see whether, by chance, he had made a face at his lordship, ...

Synonyms

- pull a face

make a go of it

English

Verb

to make a go of it

1. (*idiomatic*) To attempt to make a success of it; especially, to attempt to make a living.

   He quit his regular job and tried to make a go of it as an artist.

make a killing

English

Verb

to make a killing

1. (*idiomatic*) To win or earn a large amount of money.
   - 1913, Rex Ellingwood Beach, *The Iron Trail: An Alaskan Romance*, ch. 5:

     "Now if they were playing faro I could make a killing."
   - 2009, Tom Huddleston, "What's all the fuss about 'Slumdog Millionaire'?," *Time*, 17 Jan.:

     Danny Boyle's critical darling 'Slumdog Millionaire' has made a killing at the box office and is now being lavished with awards.

Usage notes

- The term was used in the literal sense by American

bison hunters to describe the act of shooting a large number of buffalo in a short period of time:

1907, John R. Cook, *The Border and the Buffalo*, Citadel Press (1967), page 118 (describing events occurring in the 1870s):

> Buck said if I would stay with him he would make a killing as long as it would pay to stay; said he would give me 30 cents apiece for all the buffaloes I would skin and peg out.

make a mistake

English

Verb

to make a mistake

1. To err, to be wrong.

Synonyms

- See also Wikisaurus:make a mistake

make a mountain out of a molehill

English

Verb

to make a mountain out of a molehill

1. (*idiomatic*) To treat a problem as greater than it is; to blow something out of proportion; to exaggerate the importance of something trivial

> *If you're stuck in traffic, try not to make a mountain out of a molehill worrying about it too much. It could be much worse.*

new wave

English

Adjective

new wave (*comparative* more new wave, *superlative* most new wave)

Representing the latest and most advanced style; trendy; faddish.

Noun

new wave (*uncountable*)

A pop and rock music genre that existed during the late 1970s and the early-to-mid 1980s, incorporating punk beats and synthesized sounds.

next of kin

English

Noun

next of kin (*uncountable*)

Closest blood relative, heir to inheritance.

Lord Bentley has passed away; notify the next of kin.

Shall we inform the next of kin of his passing?

Synonyms

near relative

no hard feelings

English

Etymology

no + hard feelings

Phrase

no hard feelings

(idiomatic) (I, etc.) hold no lingering anger or resentment toward (you, etc.); There's no bad blood between (us, etc.).

nip and tuck

English

Adjective

nip and tuck

(idiomatic) so evenly matched that the advantage shifts from one to the other, and the outcome is uncertain

no can do

English

Interjection

no can do

It's not possible.

no dice

English

Etymology

A term used in the game craps when the dice bounce over the walls of the table, invalidating the throw.

Noun

no dice (*uncountable*)

(idiomatic) an unacceptable alternative
(idiomatic) an unfavorable result

no questions asked

English

Adjective

no questions asked

(often hyphenated) Characterized by a pledge to make no inquiries concerning the motives, circumstances, or identity of the person receiving

an agreed benefit or performing a proposed action. [quotations ¼%]

- 2010,
- The End of Switzerland," *Newsweek*, 4 Feb. (retrieved 21 Sep 2010):

> The country quickly became famous for its no-questions-asked depositories.

Synonyms

no-strings-attached,

unconditional

Adverb

no questions asked

(of an agreement, promise, etc.) Without inquiring into the motives, circumstances, or identity of the person receiving a benefit or performing a proposed action.

Synonyms

- no strings attached,
- unconditionally

odds and ends

English

Noun

odds and ends

(idiomatic) Miscellaneous things.

The garage was filled with a random assortment of odds and ends.

off the bat

English

Alternative forms

- right off the bat

Adverb

off the bat

(idiomatic) From the start; immediately; right away.

Right off the bat, I can see that you need to save your work more often.

off the beaten track

English

Adjective

off the beaten track

(idiomatic) In a place or places not commonly visited.

- 1881,
- Annual Register,
- p. 417,

  From Nikko northwards my route was altogether off the beaten track, and had never been traversed in its entirety by any European. I lived among the Japanese, and saw their mode of living in regions unaffected by European contact.

Adverb

off the beaten track

(idiomatic) To a place or places not commonly visited.

- 1970, Bohdan S. Wynar and Anna Grace Patterson,
- *American Reference Books Annual*, D. A Rothschild, Libraries Unlimited Inc., p. 235,

It is not the author's purpose to dwell on famous attractions, but rather to go off the beaten track, and frequently the tourist is encouraged to leave

the car and explore the surrounding country on foot.

- 2004, Greg Richards and Julie Wilson,
- *The Global Nomad: Backpacker Travel in Theory and Practice*,
- p. 140,

> The search for authenticity arguably motivates backpackers to travel off the beaten track in search of areas not yet contaminated by tourists or other backpackers.

Synonyms

- off the beaten path

off the cuff

English

Prepositional phrase

off the cuff (-)

In an off-the-cuff manner.

Derived terms

- off-the-cuff, adjective.

off the deep end

English

Adjective

off the deep end

(idiomatic) Crazy, erratic, or irrational.

It used to be a funny comic, but lately it has gone off the deep end.

off the hook

English

Adjective

off the hook (*not comparable*)

(idiomatic) Relieved of a duty, burden, responsibility, or pressure.

When the boss assigned the project to Tom, the rest of us were relieved to be off the hook.

Without any evidence, the police had to let the suspect off the hook.

(idiomatic, sports) Performing extraordinarily well.

That's five three-pointers in a row! Smith is off the hook!

Of a telephone, having an open connection; not hung up.

I think he left the phone off the hook so that nobody would call him.

pack a punch

English

Verb

to pack a punch

(idiomatic) To be capable of throwing a strong punch. [quotations ¼%]

- 1930 Victor R. Daly, "Private Walker Goes Patrolling," *The Crisis,* Vol. 37, No. 6 (June 1930), p199

Memphis Bill was known to pack a punch.

- 2009 Mary Fitzpatrick, *Lonely Planet East Africa,* Lonely Planet, p77

If gorillas do fight, injuries can be very serious as these animals have long canine teeth and silverbacks pack a punch estimated at eight times stronger than a heavyweight boxer.

(idiomatic) To have a swift and powerful effect or to be capable of having such an effect. [quotations ¼%]

- 1942 Robert Allen Griffin, *School of the citizen soldier: adapted from the educational program of the Second Army, Lieutenant General Ben Lear, commanding,* D. Appleton-Century Company, Incorporated, p500

They go in for statements, slogans, cartoons, pictures, and posters that "pack a punch."

- 2003 Ronald A. Berk, *Professors are from Mars, students are from Snickers: how to write and deliver humor in the classroom and in professional presentations,* Stylus Publishing, LLC., p30

Second, prepare the choices as one-liners. Each one should pack a punch and be so polished that it will jump off the screen into the minds of the audience and create a funny picture.

Usage notes

- Various adjectives may be used before
- punch to serve as intensifiers; for example, the forms pack a powerful punch, pack a serious punch, and pack a hefty punch are all well attested.

Synonyms

- (able to throw a punch): pack a wallop
- (have a powerful effect): pack a wallop

pack in
English
Verb

to pack in (*third-person singular simple present* packs in, *present participle* packing in, *simple past and past participle* packed in)

(idiomatic, transitive) to give up, to quit

January 1989, American Motorcyclist

I rode 700 miles one day before packing it in for the night, yet after 15 minutes of rest in my hotel room, I realized that I could have gone farther.

6 Febraury 2009, Yahoo! News - *At Dem retreat, a partisan love fest*

As the Senate deliberated in Washington – and packed it in for the night without finalizing a deal — Obama brushed pressed House Democrats to finalize

7 November 2009, The Sun - *Captain Crunch compares 'greener' light bulbs*

LAST year I was diagnosed with cervical cancer and had to pack in my job as a full-time cleaner as I needed chemo and radiotherapy

(idiomatic) to include (especially of a large amount)

13 June 1997, Los Angeles Times - *MOVIE REVIEW Speed 2: Cruise Control*

Though co-star Keanu Reeves considered this new trip unnecessary, the "Speed 2" crew has packed in lots of references from the original.

(American football) *This word needs a definition. Please help out and add a definition, then remove the text {{rfdef}}.*

paint the town red

English

Alternative forms

- paint the town

Verb

to paint the town red

(idiomatic) To party or celebrate in a rowdy, wild manner, especially in a public place.

pan out

English

Verb

to pan out

(usually transitive) To separate and recover (valuable minerals) by swirling dirt or crushed rock in a pan of water, in the manner of a traditional prospector seeking gold.

- 1907,
- Mark Twain, *Chapters from My Autobiography*, ch. 26:

  On the Saturday holidays in summer-time we used to borrow skiffs whose owners were not present and go down the river three miles to the cave hollow (Missourian for "valley"), and there we staked out claims and pretended to dig gold, panning out half a dollar a day at first.

- 1919,
- Gertrude Franklin Horn Atherton, *The Avalanche*, ch. 11:

  His father came out in '49 with the gold

rush crowd, panned out a good pile, and then, liking the life—San Francisco was a gay little burg those days—opened one of the crack gambling houses down on the Old Plaza.

(idiomatic, usually intransitive) To succeed; to proceed according to plan; to result or end up.

- 1917,
- Mary Roberts Rinehart, *Bab: A Sub-Deb*, ch. 3:

  Many a pretty girl I have seen in my time, who didn't pan out according to specifications when I finally met her.
- 2004, Matthew Forney, "
- Who's Getting It Right?," *Time*, 17 Oct.:

  The China market is finally panning out, thanks to the voracious consumerism of the middle class.

Synonyms

- (succeed; proceed according to plan):
- shape up

paper trail

English

Noun

paper trail (*plural* paper trails)

(idiomatic) A written record, history, or collection of evidence.

Keep a good paper trail in case anyone asks you why you arrived at that conclusion.

(idiomatic) the records left by a person or organization in the course of activities.

Related terms

- audit trail

Usage notes

This term is used most often by lawyers and investigative journalists.

rabbit food

English

Noun

rabbit food (*uncountable*)

A type of food specially formulated for the feeding of rabbits

The bunny ate the rabbit food.

(informal) salad vegetables, such as carrots, celery or lettuce.

Are you on a diet? Why are you eating that rabbit food?

rags to riches

English

Etymology

From from rags to riches

Noun

rags to riches

(idiomatic) In a biographical context, from poverty to exceptional wealth.

Usage notes

- Usually used attributively, as an adjective.

rain cats and dogs

English

Etymology

Unknown. Perhaps from Ancient Greek cata, "against" and ´doxa, "opinion, expectation", but see Etymology in Citations

Verb

rain cats and dogs (*third-person singular simple present* rains cats and dogs, *present participle* raining cats and dogs, *simple past and past participle* rained cats and dogs)

(idiomatic) To rain very heavily.

Synonyms

- (to rain very heavily):
- bucket,
- bucket down,
- chuck it down,
- rain buckets,
- rain pitchforks,
- pelt,
- piss down (coarse slang),
- pour,
- stream,
- teem

rat fink

English

Noun

rat fink (*plural* rat finks)

Alternative spelling of ratfink.

Retrieved from "http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/rat_fink"

rat on

English

Verb

rat on (*third-person singular simple present* rats on, *present participle* ratting on, *simple past and past participle* ratted on)

To tattle, squeal

Synonyms

- tell on

reap what one sows

English

Etymology

With reference to the Bible, Epistle to the Galatians, ch. 6, v.7 Gal.6.7

Verb

to reap what one sows

(idiomatic) To receive as a reward or harvest in the same measure as one's exertions, in a good or a bad sense. To receive justice.

For whatever a man is sowing, this he will also reap.

rob the cradle

English

Verb

rob the cradle

<span class="ib

rest assured

English

Verb

to rest assured

(intransitive, idiomatic) Be sure; no need to worry; trust.

You may rest assured that our best efforts will be put forth to give you entire satisfaction.

right as rain

WOTD - 13 July 2009

English

Adjective

right as rain (*comparative* righter than rain, *superlative* -)

(simile, colloquial) Very good; healthy.

- 1894,
- George Augustus Sala, *Things I Have Seen and People I Have Known*:

  So I went to him [Thackeray d. 1863] while he was at breakfast in Onslow Square, on the morning of the banquet, and asked him if the speech was " all right." "As right as rain," he replied.

- 1999,
- Frank McCourt, *Tis: A Memoir*, p. 322:

  Malachy brought me aspirins and vitamins and told me I'd be as right as rain in the morning and I wondered what that meant, right as rain.

(simile, colloquial) Correct; factually accurate.

right away

English

Adverb

right away

(idiomatic) Very soon; quickly; immediately.

This item is urgent, so please start on it right away.

Synonyms

- at once
- forthwith
- immediately
- instantly
- now
- straight away
- *tout de suite*
- without delay

sad sack

English

Etymology

US 1920s. Popularized by Sad Sack, a cartoon character and eponymous comic strip published originally June 1942 in *Yank, the Army Weekly*, a US Army publication for soldiers, and later syndicated in the US 1940s and 1950s. Presumably from vulgar "sad sack of shit"; Cartoonist Sgt. George Baker said he took from a "longer phrase, of a derogatory nature". The term originally referred to a well-meaning but inept soldier.

Noun

sad sack (*plural* sad sacks)

(informal) An incompetent or inept person.

(informal) A perennial victim of misfortune.

sack out

English

Etymology

Outgrowth of the earlier idiom, to *hit the sack*, with possible influences from other senses of *to sack* (tackle, pillage), and *to sock* (hit, slam), providing an implication that sleep has been thrust upon a person.

Verb

to sack out (*third-person singular simple present* sacks out, *present participle* sacking out, *simple past and past participle* sacked out)

1. (*idiomatic*) To fall asleep, usually from implied exhaustion.

   The kids sacked out in the back seat before we made it home.

sacred cow

English

Noun

sacred cow (*plural* sacred cows)

1. (*idiomatic*) Something which cannot be tampered with, or criticized, for fear of public outcry. A person, institution, belief system, etc. which, for no reason other than the demands of established social etiquette or popular opinion, should be accorded respect or reverence, and not touched, handled or examined too closely.

   o 1967, Paul Krassner, *The Realist, issue 74*, May 1967, front page tagline:

Irreverence is our only sacred cow.

- o 1990, Reshad Feild, *East west journal, Volume 20*, p.94:

  Many people say that I am able to turn sacred cows into hamburgers.

same here

English

Phrase

same here

1. I agree; I have the same opinion.

   Jack: *I can't come to the picnic this weekend, because I'm looking after the kids.*

   Bob: *Same here. We're going to the reservoir.*

scared stiff

English

Adjective

scared stiff (*not comparable*)

1. Describes the fear-induced state (literal or figurative) where an person seems incapable of movement.

   He was scared stiff, like a deer in the headlights, by the vampire walking toward him. The vampire had to say "Boo!" to make him get out of the way.

scared to death

English

Adjective

scared to death (*not comparable*)

1. (*idiomatic*) Extremely frightened

scaredy cat

English

Alternative forms

- scaredy-cat

Noun

scaredy cat (*plural* scaredy cats)

1. (*childish*) A coward.

Synonyms

- See also Wikisaurus:coward

tail between one's legs

English

Adverb

tail between one's legs (*not comparable*)

1. (*idiomatic*) A reaction to a confrontation, specifically one with excessive shame and hurt pride.
   He retreated from the fight with his tail between his legs.

tail wagging the dog

English

Noun

tail wagging the dog

1. (*idiomatic*) A minor or secondary part of something controlling the whole.

take a back seat

English

Etymology

From *take a seat* and *back seat*

Verb

to take a back seat

1. (*idiomatic*) To be second to someone or something; to be less important or have a lower priority.

   "But as with most kids, politics took a backseat to daily life." — My Life by Bill Clinton

take a bow

English

Verb

to take a bow (*third-person singular simple present* takes a bow, *present participle* taking a bow, *simple past* took a bow, *past participle* taken a bow)

1. (*idiomatic*) To accept applause at the end of a performance in a theatre. Often this includes actually bowing to the audience.

test drive

English

Noun

test drive (*plural* test drives)

1. A sample use of a motor vehicle done in order to assess its quality before purchase.
2. (*figuratively*) Any preliminary assessment of something through use.

Verb

to test drive (*third-person singular simple present* test drives, *present participle* test driving, *simple past* test drove, *past participle* test driven)

1. To take a motor vehicle on the road to assess its quality before purchase.

2. (*figuratively*) To make a preliminary assessment of something through its use.

test the water

English

Verb

to test the water

1. *Alternative form of* test the waters.

thank one's lucky stars

English

Etymology

Ancient religions believed that fortune would come when stars are in the right alignment, so when the fortunes indeed came, the primitive people would "thank their lucky stars" for this.

Verb

to thank one's lucky stars

To be grateful, feel oneself fortunate

Translations

- Swedish:
- tacka sin lyckliga stjarna

take advantage of

English

Verb

to take advantage of

To make use of.
He took advantage of the swimming pool every day of his visit.

To exploit.

She took advantage of his desparation.

time and again

English

Adverb

time and again (*not comparable*)

often; repeatedly

the pits

English

Noun

the pits

(idiomatic) Something miserable or unpleasant.

Doing it once is no fun, but doing it over because you lost your work is the pits.

tooth and nail

English

Adverb

tooth and nail

(idiomatic) Viciously; with all one's strength or power; without holding back.

For a century, the two families fought tooth and nail over control of the land.

turn in

English

Verb

turn in (*third-person singular simple present* turns in, *present participle* turning in, *simple past and past participle* turned in)

(transitive, idiomatic) to submit something; to give

He turned in his paperwork to the main office.

(transitive, idiomatic) to relinquish; give up; to tell on someone to the authorities (especially to *turn someone in*)

The thief finally turned himself in at the police station.

He turned his brother-in-law in for seeing him assault a customer.

My nosey next door neighbor turned me in for building my garage without a permit.

(intransitive, idiomatic) to go to sleep; retire to bed

I'm tired, so I think I'll turn in early tonight.

(soccer) To convert a goal using a turning motion of the body. [quotations ¼%]

- 2011 January 18, Daniel Taylor, "
- Manchester City 4 Leicester City 2", *Guardian Online*:

  At that point Leicester were playing with drive and ambition but they were undone by two goals in three minutes. First, Vieira turned in a rebound after the defender Souleymane Bamba had blocked David Silva's shot on the line.

Synonyms

- (submit, give): hand in

under a spell

English

Adjective

under a spell

(idiomatic) Bewitched, held by the power of a magical spell.

under arrest

English

Adjective

under arrest

Arrested or being arrested.

under control

English

Adjective

under control (*comparative* more under control, *superlative* most under control)

Of something being taken care of or being addressed.

under fire

English

Adjective

under fire (*comparative* more under fire, *superlative* most under fire)

subjected to enemy attack
(idiomatic) criticized or held responsible for something

under one's belt

English

Adjective

under one's belt

(idiomatic) Already done; within one's experience; practiced.

He got off to a shaky start, but with a few months of experience under his belt, he kept up handily with the veteran employees.

Usage notes

- Also used as an adverb.

under one's wing

English

Adjective

under one's wing (*comparative* more under one's wing, *superlative* most under one's wing)

(idiomatic) Under one's protection, sponsorship, or tutelage.

He took the promising student under his wing.

The promising student came under the professor's wing.

He remained under the great man's wing after graduation.

Now a professor himself he has young students under his wing.

under pressure

English

Adjective

under pressure

Being subjected to physical pressure

Concrete is pretty strong, but will break under pressure.

(idiomatic) Subjected to pressure.

We need people who can work under pressure in the army.

under the gun

English

Adjective

under the gun

(idiomatic) Under great pressure to perform.

He was under the gun to finish the project quickly.

(poker) The first player to act on the first round of betting in Texas hold 'em.

(obsolete, military) Too close to be subject to artillery fire.

Usage notes

- Also used as an adverb.

Synonyms

- under the pump

up a storm

English

Adverb

up a storm (*not comparable*)

(idiomatic) In a remarkable and exciting manner.

They cooked up a storm on the new cooking show.

They were dancing up a storm at the new night club.

They talked up a storm at the leader's debate.

up to par

English

Adverb

up to par (*comparative* more up to par, *superlative* most up to par)

(idiomatic) At the usual or expected level.

The engine is working up to par now.

His work isn't up to par. Is he not well?

variety is the spice of life

English

Proverb

variety is the spice of life

Variety is what makes life interesting.

wait for the other shoe to drop

English

Etymology

Apparently from early 20th century usage evoking a person in bed awoken by the loud sound of a neighbor dropping a shoe onto the floor and thereafter waiting for the second shoe of the pair to be dropped.[1]

Verb

to wait for the other shoe to drop

(idiomatic) To defer action or decision until another matter is finished or resolved.

(idiomatic) To await a seemingly inevitable event, especially one which is not desirable.

wait up

English

Verb

to wait up

(idiomatic) To stay awake waiting for somebody to return.

I'll probably be out very late tonight, so don't wait up for me.

Wait.

Hey, wait up a minute! I forgot my umbrella.

wake up and smell the coffee

English

Verb

to wake up and smell the coffee

(idiomatic) To face reality and stop deluding oneself.

wake up

English

Etymology

wake + up

Verb

wake up (*third-person singular simple present* wakes up, *present participle* waking up, *simple past* woke up or waked up, *past participle* woken up or waked up)

(intransitive) To awake. [quotations ¼%]

- "Woke up, fell out of bed, dragged a comb across my head" — Lennon/McCartney, *A Day in the Life*

(transitive) To awaken somebody.

- "Wake your brother up, it's time for school.

(intransitive) To become more aware of a real-life situation; to concentrate on the matter in hand.

wake-up call

English

Etymology

wake-up + call

Noun

wake-up call (*plural* wake-up calls)

A telephone call to awaken someone at a certain time, especially one requested by the person while staying at a hotel.

She requested a five a.m. wake-up call from the front desk.

(figuratively) An alert, reminder, or call to action caused by a dramatic event.

The recent deaths should serve as a wake-up call to others at risk.

well off

English

Alternative forms

- well-off

Adjective

well off (*comparative* better off *or* more well off, *superlative* best off *or* most well off)

Of a person, being in fortunate circumstances, especially having financial security.

He is very well off as a result of his illegal money-making activities.

Of any item, in a good position or circumstance.

The house was well off for spectacular views over the surrounding countryside.

Antonyms

- badly off
- ill off
- poor

went under

English

Verb

went under

Simple past of go under.

went wild

English

Verb

went wild

Simple past of go wild.

X marks the spot

English

Etymology

From a traditional crosslike mark to indicate buried treasure.

Phrase

X marks the spot

(idiomatic) You'll find what you're looking for under an obvious sign for it

yellow belly

English

Noun

yellow belly (*plural* yellow bellies)

Alternative spelling of yellowbelly.

one can run but one can't hide

English

Proverb

(one) can run but (one) can't hide

There is nothing someone can do to evade something.

You can run but you can't hide.

you can't make a silk purse of a sow's ear

English

Proverb

you can't make a silk purse of a sow's ear

It is not possible to produce something refined, admirable, or valuable from something which is unrefined, unpleasant, or of little or no value.

you can't tell a book by its cover

English

Proverb

you can't tell a book by its cover

Alternative form of you can't judge a book by its cover.

you had to be there

English

Phrase

you had to be there

Used to indicate to the interlocutor that the situation being talked about could only be properly understood if that person had been present.

What he did was so hilarious, the way he was dancing... well, you had to be there.

you snooze you lose

English

Proverb

you snooze you lose

If you are not alert and attentive, you will not be successful.

you're on

English

Phrase

you're on

(informal) Used to indicate acceptance by the speaker of a proposal or challenge, especially a competitive one.

Let's play a game of chess. You're on!

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Contents

Preface

An idiom is a phrase where the words together have a meaning that is different from the dictionary definitions of the individual words, which can make idioms hard for English as Second Language students and learners to understand. In linguistics, idioms are usually presumed to be figures of speech contradicting the principle of compositionality; yet the matter remains debated. John Saeed defines an "idiom" as words collocated that became affixed to each other until metamorphosing into a fossilized term. This collocation — words commonly used in a group — redefines each component word in the word-group and becomes an *idiomatic expression*. The words develop a specialized meaning as an entity, as an *idiom*. Moreover, an idiom is an expression, word, or phrase whose sense means something different from what the words literally imply. When a speaker uses an idiom, the listener might mistake its actual meaning, if he or she has not heard this figure of speech before. Idioms usually do not translate well; in some cases, when an idiom is translated into another language, either its meaning is changed or it is meaningless. In the English expression *to kick the bucket*, a listener knowing only the meanings of *kick* and *bucket* would be unable to deduce the expression's true meaning: *to die*. Although this idiomatic phrase can, in fact, actually refer to kicking a bucket, native speakers of English rarely use it so. Cases like this are "opaque idioms". We use idioms to express something that other words do not express as clearly or as cleverly. We often use an image or symbol

to describe something as clearly as possible and thus make our point as effectively as possible. For example, "*in a nutshell*" suggests the idea of having all the information contained within very few words. Idioms tend to be informal and are best used in spoken rather than written English. Sometimes idioms are very easy for learners to understand because there are similar expressions in the speakers' mother tongue.

This publication titled, "English Idioms in Use" provides readers with an introductory overview of English language idioms. Focus lies on related aspects, such as, adage, cliché and collocation. Additional focus lies on double negative and figure of speech. Attempts are made towards understanding set phrase, euphemism and stylistic device. Efforts are also made towards understanding relationship between English idioms and proverbs. This publication titled, "English Idioms in Use" is completely user-friendly as it also gives readers a glossary, bibliography and index.

—Editor

English Idioms in Use

This publication titled, “English Idioms in Use” provides readers with an introductory overview of English language idioms. Focus lies on related aspects, such as, adage, cliché and collocation. Additional focus lies on double negative and figure of speech. Attempts are made towards understanding set phrase, euphemism and stylistic device. Efforts are also made towards understanding relationship between English idioms and proverbs.

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