

# ENGLISH IDIOMS

**A far cry from something:** very different, almost the opposite.

The movie was good, but it was `a far cry from` the book it was based on.

**About to:** on the point of doing something.  
Tom was `about to` leave when the telephone rang.

**A close call:** a situation in which something bad almost happened.

I had `a close call!` `A big truck almost hit me!

**All along:** all the time.

I knew `all along` that Jack wasn't telling us the whole story.

**All's well that ends well:** a successful outcome is worth the effort.

"I've completed writing my book after all painful work. All's well that ends well."

**All of a sudden:** something happening quickly, without advance warning.

It started out to be a beautiful day. Then, `all of a sudden`, it became cloudy and began to rain.

**All thumbs:** clumsy

"Look at Martin he broke the antique vase. He's all thumbs."

**As a rule:** usually, customarily.

`As a rule` I never stay out late on a week night, because I have to get up early the next morning

**As far as someone is concerned:** in one's opinion.

`As far as I'm concerned`, it's too cold to go swimming this afternoon.

**As long as:** because something else is happening at the same time.

`As long as` you're going to the drugstore anyway, buy me some aspirins.

**As luck would have it:** the way things happened.

I made good notes for my speech, but `as luck would have it`, I forgot to take them with me.

**At all:** used with negative expressions to give emphasis.

I've read that book, but I didn't like it `at all`.

**At the end of one's rope:** at the limit of one's ability to cope.

"Marry may decide to divorce John. She is at the end of her rope."

**Bark worse than one's bite:** not as bad tempered as one appears.

"Mr. Hopkins shouts harshly to his students but his students don't care. They know that his bark is worse than his bite."

**Be behind the times:** not be up-to-date, modern in one's thinking.

He's not a good teacher He's `behind the times` in his methods.

**Be bent on something:** have a strong desire to do something.

I told Harry not to drive his car in such bad weather, but he `was bent on` leaving right away.

**Be better off:** be better on a long-term basis.

Do you think I'd `be better off` quitting my present job and going to New York?

**Be broke:** be without money.

I'd like to go to the concert with you, but I'm broke.

**Be hard on something:** treat roughly.

My son is hard on shoes. Look at this pair. They were new a month ago.

**Be in keeping with something:** be appropriate.

I liked what Professor Thomas said to the International Club, because his words were in keeping with the purpose of the Club.

**Be in someone's shoes:** be in another person's positions.

I wish I were in John's shoes. He just won a free trip to Europe.

**Be on the safe side:** not to take any chances.

I don't think it's going to rain today, but I'm going to take my umbrella, just to be on the safe side.

**Be to blame:** be responsible for something bad or unfortunate.

Don't punish Billy for breaking the window. He's not to blame.

**Be up to one's ears:** have too much to do.

Helen would like to go with us but she can't. She's up to her ears in work.

**Be up to something:** doing something that one shouldn't do.

Henry's been smiling to himself all morning. I think he's up to something, but I don't know what it is.

**Beat around the bush:** speak indirectly, evasively.

I wish Albert would say what he really means and not always beat around the bush.

**Bend over backwards:** try very hard, make a real effort.

I bent over backwards to help Bertha find a job, but she didn't appreciate it.

**Bite off more than one can chew:** accept more responsibility than one can take care of.

When Jim accepted the presidency of the club, he bit off more than he could chew.

**Bite the bullet:** endure in a difficult situation.

"We got lost in the wilderness and had to bite the bullet until help arrived."

**Bite the dust:** go down in defeat.

"Andy did exceptionally well in all of the track events, but he bit the dust in the high jump competition."

**Blow it:** fail at something.

"I think I blew it on the history exam."

**Brush up on something:** review something to make it fresh again in one's mind.

I'm going to make a speech tomorrow, so I have to brush up on my notes.

**Bury the hatchet:** make peace.

"The defense ministers of two countries worked out the problem and decided to bury the hatchet."

**By all means:** definitely, certainly.

When Mary asked her husband if he wanted steak for dinner, he replied, "By all means!"

**By heart:** by memorizing.

In elementary school I learned several of Longfellow's poems by heart.

**Carry something out:** fulfill, see that something is done.

One good thing about Clarence: he not only has good ideas, but he carries them out, too.

**Cat got your tongue:** can't talk.

"Why don't you speak up? Cat got your tongue?"

**Catch cold:** to get a cold.

I enjoyed the football game, but it was such a wet, windy day that I caught cold.

**Catch one's breath:** rest for a moment.

When Mrs. Brewster reached the top of the hill, she was so tired she had to stop for a moment and catch her breath.

**Come alive:** brighten up and become active.

"When the band started playing all the latest rock hits, everybody came alive."

**Come down with something:** become ill with something.  
I don't feel very well I think I'm `coming down with` the flu

**Come near:** almost do something.  
I was so angry last night I `came near` telling George what I thought of him.

**Come to the point:** be definite, precise in telling something.  
Professor Johnson's stories are interesting but long, and he never seems to `come to the point`.

**Come up with:** suggest, contribute, introduce.  
When the teacher asked what the capital of California was, only one student could `come up with` the right city.

**Cough up:** give unwillingly.  
"My father said he'd cough up the money I need since I'm going to be using the computer for my school work."

**Cut corners:** economize.  
When you have six children, you have to learn how to `cut corners`.

**Different strokes for different folks:** every one has different interests and tastes.  
"Paul likes playing guitar while Susan hates it. You know, different strokes for different folks."

**Do one's best:** make the greatest effort that one can.  
I'm not sure I can be there tonight, but I'll `do my best`. It all depends on how much work I finish this afternoon.

**Do one's bit:** fulfill one's responsibility to; help accomplish something.  
If everyone who offered to help would come and `do his bit`, we could finish this job in an hour.

**Do someone good:** be beneficial for somebody.  
Go to the seashore for a few days. The fresh air will `do you good`.

**Do without:** live without something.  
If there's no butter for our bread, we'll `do without`.

**Draw the line:** refuse to go beyond a certain point in doing something.  
I'll pay for my wife's ticket to that lecture on modern art, but I `draw the line` at attending with her!

**Dress up:** put on one's best clothes.  
When Celia `dresses up`, she is more beautiful than a movie actress.

**Dressed to kill:** wear one's finest clothing.  
"The reception for the new Swedish ambassador was quite generous. Naturally, everybody was dressed to kill."

**Dressed to the teeth:** dressed elegantly.  
"Hilda was dressed to the teeth at the party last night."

**Drive someone up a wall:** annoy someone greatly.  
"Our neighbor drives us up a wall whenever they turn up the volume on his stereo."

**Duck soup:** easy, effortless.  
"With all your experience in electronics, I have no doubt that it will be duck soup for you to fix the radio."

**Early bird catches the worm:** arriving early gives one an advantage.  
"If you expect to get tickets for the match, remember; the early bird catches the worm."

**Eat one's words:** admit one is wrong in something one has said.  
Richard insisted the United States was larger than Brazil, but he had to `eat his words` when Elizabeth showed him the map.

**Eating someone:** bothering or worrying someone.  
"Hey Alice. What's been eating you lately? Don't you realize how rude and irritable you've become?"

**Every now and then:** occasionally.  
`Every now and then` I like to take a walk in the country.



**Every other:** alternate.

This class meets `every other` day, not every day.

**Eyes are bigger than one's stomach:** take more food than one can eat.

"Sometimes when I'm very hungry, I feel that my eyes are bigger than my stomach."

**Face the music:** accept the consequences.

"If you don't follow the doctor's advices, you will have to face the music."

**Feed someone a line:** deceive someone.

"Mr. Jones promised Lousie a promotion, but soon she discovered that he was feeding her a line when he gave the promotion to somebody else."

**Feel like a million dollars:** fell wonderful.

"Apparently the pain in my knee is all gone. I'm feeling like a million dollars."

**Feel up to:** feel able (health or ability) to do something.

I ought to go to Jane's party, but I just don't `feel up to` it now.

**Few and far between:** scarce, infrequent, rare.

Yes, I do hear from Roger, but his letters are `few and far between`.

**Firsthand:** without assistance from an intermediary, direct.

What I'm telling you is `firsthand` information. I didn't hear it from someone else.

**Fishy:** strange and suspicious.

"When the security guard saw a light in the store after closing hours, it seemed to him that there was something fishy going on."

**For a song:** for very little money.

"I got my red chair for a song at a little furniture store."

**For good:** forever, permanently.

Peter told me he's left Springfield `for good`. He'll never go back there to live again.

**For the birds:** uninteresting and meaningless.

"The Literature Club students went to a poetry reading but they got bored and restless. It was for the birds."

**For the time being:** for the present time.

I need a new car, but `for the time being` this one will have to do.

**Fork over:** hand over, give.

"I unexpectedly bumped into Ralph and he asked me to fork over the ten bucks I owed him."

**Frame of mind:** mental state.

Be sure, Edith, that your husband is in a good `frame of mind` before you show him your new hat.

**From now on:** from this moment forward.

I'm too fat. `From now on` I'm not going to eat so much.

**Get away clean:** escape punishment.

"After robbing the bank, the robbers sped off in a waiting car and got away clean."

**Get after someone:** tell someone to do something you feel he should do.

Every time Professor Jackson goes out into the rain, his wife has to `get after him` to carry his umbrella.

**Get away with something:** do something one shouldn't and not be caught at it.

Dave may have been successful in fooling the boss this time, but he can't `get away with it` every time.

**Get cold feet:** become very cautious, be afraid to do something.

John wanted to ask Vera to marry him, but he `got cold feet`.

**Get in someone's hair:** bother someone.

"Listen, Jim. Your children get in my hair when they are so noisy and messy."

**Get in touch with someone:** communicate with someone by phone, telegraph, mail, etc I can't talk with you now, but I'll `get in touch with you` this evening by phone.

**Get mixed up:** become confused.

Nancy has six children, and I always `get mixed up` on their names.

**Get off someone's back:** stop bothering someone.

"Mum! Look at Andrew! He doesn't get off my back. I can't study for my Math exam."

**Get on one's high horse:** become angry and superior in attitude toward someone else.

Vernon is a republican, and he `gets on his high horse` every time someone criticizes his party.

**Get rid of something:** destroy, throw away, sell.

When Ella told Frank she didn't like his hat, he `got rid of it`.

**Get right down to something:** begin working without hesitation.

After the chairman opened the meeting, the committee `got right down to` business.

**Get the ax:** be dismissed, fired.

"If you continue coming late to work, you may get the ax."

**Get the ball rolling:** initiate action.

"Look! You've been talking about repairing the roof for weeks now. Don't you think it's about time to get the ball rolling?"

**Get the jump on someone:** get the advantage over someone.

"I'd take Teresa out to dinner if Benito didn't get the jump over me."

**Get to the bottom of something:** learn all the facts about something.

I've made a mistake in my calculations, but I can't find it. Perhaps if I begin again and study each detail carefully, I'll `get to the bottom of it`.

**Get up on the wrong side of the bed:**

wake up in a bad mood.

"What's the matter with Bernard today? I guess he got up on the wrong side of the bed."

**Give it one's best shot:** try hard.

"Can you do anything about repairing this set?"

"I'm not much of an electrician, but I'll give it my best shot."

**Give someone a hand:** help someone.

I'll `give you a hand` when you move to your new apartment.

**Give someone the slip:** make a getaway.

"The police were chasing the thief through the streets of the city, but he managed to give them the slip."

**Go Dutch:** each person pay his own way to a movie, restaurant, etc

Thanks for asking me to go to lunch with you, but I insist we `go Dutch`.

**Go fly a kite:** Go away

"Hey kids, stop bothering me. Go fly a kite."

**Go from bad to worse:** become progressively worse.

After Joe became president of the club, we thought everything would be all right. Instead, things went `from bad to worse`.

**Go in for something:** like, have a strong interest in.

I like golf, but I don't `go in much for` tennis.

**Go to bat for someone:** help out and support someone.

"Is it true that Don got into some trouble at work last week?"

"Yes, but his secretary went to bat for him."

**Go to the dogs:** become rundown

"Have you seen their old house lately? It's really gone to the dogs."

**Goes without saying:** something is so obvious that it doesn't have to be mentioned.

Mary's an excellent student. It `goes without saying` that her parents are very proud of her.

**Grow on someone:** increase in favor with someone gradually.

I hated Kansas City at first, but I have to admit `it's grown on` me.

**Had better:** should do something, ought to do something.

`I'd better` go now or I'll be late for class.

**Hang on:** persevere.

"Although they almost lost their store, they managed to hang on until things got better."

**Have it in one:** have the capacity, ability, to do something.

I think Marie `has it in her` to be a great concert pianist.

**Have no business doing something:** have no right to do something.  
You `had no business` using my car without asking me first!

**Have one's heart set on smth:** want something very much.  
I don't know what to do. My wife `has her heart set on` a new coat for her birthday, but I don't have enough money to buy it.

**Have the heart:** have the courage to do something that will cause others' unhappiness or disappointment.  
Alfred failed his exam, but his teacher `doesn't have the heart` to tell him.

**Have the world by the tail:** be successful and happy.  
"Marc finished school at the top of his class and he was offered an excellent job. Now he feels he has the world by the tail."

**Have words with someone:** quarrel, argue with some person.  
I `had words with` the manager of that store, because he refused to refund my money for a TV set that wasn't operating properly.

**High and low:** everywhere, in every conceivable place.  
I've lost my passport I've looked `high and low` for it, but I can't find it.

**Hit the ceiling:** become very angry.  
"Don's father hit the ceiling when he was informed that his son had been detained by the police."

**Hit the hay:** go to bed.  
"Let's hit the hay and get a good night's sleep. It's going to be a long day."

**Hit upon something:** to discover something that will help make progress in a certain cause or situation.  
The scientist worked for a long time but couldn't solve his problem. Then, after many hours, he `hit upon` the right solution

**Hold one's horses:** wait patiently instead of going forward.  
When Betty insisted that they leave immediately, Jeff told her to `hold her horses`, since there was plenty of time before their plane left.

**Hold one's own:** to maintain oneself in, be equal to, a given situation. Bob's parents don't worry about him. They know he can `hold his own` in his university studies.

**Hold something against someone:** blame someone for something for a period of time.  
I was responsible for Fred's being late to class this morning, but he doesn't `hold it against me`.

**Horse around:** play around.  
"After the coach left the gym, all the kids decided to stay and horse around on the parallel bars."

**Horse of a different color:** quite a different matter.  
"Being playful is one thing, but hurting someone by one's jokes is a horse of a different color."

**Hot under the collar:** extremely angry.  
"Uncle David was hot under the collar when he stuck in slow-moving traffic."

**If the shoe fits wear it:** admit the truth.  
"I always say" if the shoe fits, wear it". Bryan is better than me at Math."

**Ill at ease:** not comfortable psychologically.  
David speaks easily in front of a small group but he seems `ill at ease` before a large audience.

**In advance:** before, ahead of time.  
If you want to see that play, you should buy your tickets `in advance`.

**In care of someone:** write to one person at the address of another person.  
When you write to Roy, be sure to put ""in care of` Mrs. John Briggs" on the envelope.

**In charge of something:** responsible for something, such as the department of a large company or an activity for which arrangements must be made.  
Alex is `in charge of` the publicity committee for the school dance.

**In fact:** actually, really.  
Yes, I know Robert Johnson `In fact`, he's my cousin.

**In one's element:** doing something one likes and is capable of doing very well.  
Look at Norman! He's `in his element` when he's arguing politics!

**In other words:** to say something in a different way.  
You say you're going to be late at the office? `In other words`, you'll be late for supper tonight.

**In stitches:** laughing very hard.  
"The comedian Danny was hilarious at the party the other night. He had us all in stitches."

**In the clear:** free from suspicion, blame, or obligation.  
The suspect's explanation to the police of why he was present at the scene of the crime was a very good one and put him `in the clear`.

**In the hole:** in dept.  
"Peter had to sell his hardware store because he was going in the hole lately."

**In the long run:** looking ahead to the distant future, not just the near future.  
You may get tired studying English every day, but `in the long run` you'll be glad that you did.

**In time to:** be at a place at the right time to do something.  
George couldn't come for dinner, but he arrived `in time to` have dessert and coffee with us.

**Just as soon:** prefer that one thing be done rather than another.  
My wife wants to attend that lecture, but I'd `just as soon` stay home.

**Jump down someone's throat:** become angry with someone.  
"If I don't arrive at home until 11:00 my father will jump down my throat."

**Jump the gun:** to be hasty.  
"I would tell my grandfather that I got the golden medal, but Anthony jumped the gun."

**Keep an eye on smth, someone:** watch in the sense of take care of.  
Will you `keep an eye on` my baby while I go to the store?

**Keep one's fingers crossed:** hope to have good results in an effort; hope that nothing will go wrong. I'm on my way to take my examination `Keep your fingers crossed` for me!

**Keep one's word:** be responsible and do what one says one will do. If Paul said he'd get that book for you, he'll do it He always `keeps his word`.

**Keep under one's hat:** keep something a secret.  
"Although the contestants were most anxious to know who won the prizes in the piano competition, the judges kept the results under their hands."

**Kick the bucket:** die.  
"The old man knew a buried treasure, but he kicked the bucket before telling anyone."

**Kick up one's heels:** celebrate.  
"The students who succeeded to enter the university kicked up their heels."

**Knock someone's socks off:** enthuse and excite.  
"You ought to see Susan's new car. It'll knock your socks off."

**Know the first thing about smth:** have knowledge of.  
I `don't know the first thing about` an automobile engine.

**Know the ropes:** be very familiar with routine procedures such as those of a; business, factory, or school.  
I'll enjoy my new job more as soon as I `know the ropes`.

**Lead someone on:** make someone believe something that isn't true.  
Alec gave me a long story about what a good student he was in college. Later I discovered none of it was true, he was just `leading me on`.

**Leave someone high and dry:** abandon someone.  
"I thought John was going to help me do the dishes tonight, but he left me high and dry."

**Leave word:** leave a message.

Ralph had to go, but he `left word` that you should meet him at the hotel.

**Lemon:** something defective.

"I've some problems with my new car. I guess I bought a lemon."

**Let bygones be bygones:** forget and forgive unpleasant happenings in the past.

I decided to `let bygones be bygones` and not say anything about the way Alice spoke to me last week.

**Let sleeping dogs lie:** do not agitate a potential source of trouble.

"You'd better not say anything to the owner of the building about painting your apartment. If I were you I'd let sleeping dogs lie."

**Let the cat out of the bag:** inform beforehand.

"Our teacher wasn't supposed to know about surprise birthday party, but someone let the cat out of the bag."

**Little by little:** gradually.

Frank broke his leg and couldn't walk for a long time, but `little by little` he began to use it again.

**Little does one think:** one cannot imagine.

When Bill asked Helen to go to the dance with him, `little did he think` that she already had a date.

**Look forward to something:** anticipate with pleasure.

I've been working hard I `look forward to` my vacation this year.

**Lose one's shirt:** lose a great deal of money.

"Doug has always liked to bet on the horses. I'm not surprised that he lost his shirt."

**Lose one's temper:** become angry.

When Sam's wife told him she'd had an accident with the car, he `lost his temper`.

**Lose one's way:** go in the wrong direction in trying to find a place and become lost.

I'm sorry to be late, but `I lost my way`. I went east instead of west.

**Lose track of someone, something:** cease having information about; not be informed currently about someone or something.

I've `lost track of` Mr. and Mrs. Brown. Where are they now?

**Make a point of something:** do or say something with a definite intention.

When Professor Gray greeted me, he `made a point of` asking how my parents were.

**Make a splash:** be successful and attract attention.

"Andre's novel was finally published and I understand that it made quite a splash."

**Make ends meet:** be able to live with the money one has.

The Smiths have seven children, and although Joe doesn't have a big salary, they seem to `make ends meet`.

**Make friends:** form friendships with people.

Alice is very lovely, and I think her problem is that she doesn't know how to `make friends`.

**Make fun of something, someone:** ridicule, laugh at.

I've decided that the reason Jim always `makes fun of others` is that he's so insecure himself.

**Make oneself at home:** be comfortable, as if in one's own home.

When people come to our house, we like them `to make themselves at home`.

**Make room for something, someone:** allow space for, arrange space for.

There were already three people on the sofa, but they moved over and `made room for me` to sit down.

**Make sense:** seem reasonable.

I think I'll vote for Wheeler. What he says in his interviews `makes sense`.

**Make short work of something:** do something quickly.

The thief `made short work of` robbing the bank.

**Make something do:** use what one has instead of getting something else that would be better.

If there isn't cream for our coffee, we'll have to make milk do.

**Make the most of something:** do the best one can in a situation; get as much as possible out of it.

You made the most of your three days in Paris. I think you saw everything there.

**Make up for something:** compensate for something, often an unkind or inconsiderate act.

Jim took my whole evening asking me questions about his physics exam. However, he made up for it the next afternoon by repairing my car.

**Make up one's mind:** decide.

When did you make up your mind to get a new car?

**Meet someone halfway:** to compromise with someone in a situation where the opinions differ.

Charles has very definite ideas but he's not unreasonable, he tries to meet you halfway.

**Might as well:** it is a good idea (to do something), although not of major importance.

If you're going to the library, I might as well go with you and return these books.

**Mind one's P's and Q's:** take care in speech and action.

"Listen, Larry. If you want an invitation to Clarissa's party you'd better mind your P's and Q's."

**Money talks:** money can influence people.

"You may buy which type of computer you want to buy. But you know, first money talks."

**Never mind:** don't worry. If you can't get that book for me at the library, never mind I'm going tomorrow, and I can get it then.

**No wonder:** it isn't surprising.

No wonder you're tired! You walked ten miles today!

**Not have a leg to stand on:** to have no good defense for one's opinion or action.

"Tom maintains that the firm owes him some back wages however; he won't have leg to stand on unless he can prove that."

**Not to mention:** omitting to say anything about something.

I can't go to Steve's party. I've got to do my homework, prepare a speech for tomorrow, and study for an exam, not to mention take my little brother to the dentist.

**On credit:** make regular payments; not pay cash for a purchase.

If you buy your car on credit, it's more expensive than if you pay cash.

**On edge:** nervous, irritable

What's the matter with Ray? He seems to be on edge about something.

**On hand:** available.

Do you have any aspirin on hand? I have a terrible headache.

**On ice:** set aside for future use.

"I'm kind of hungry. Let's put the report on ice awhile and have something to eat."

**On one's last legs:** sick and failing.

"Poor Mike. He was one of the greatest musicians I've ever known, but nowadays he is on his last legs."

**On one's toes:** alert.

I think Bert will get the job. He was really on his toes and made a good impression during the interview.

**On purpose:** intentionally.

Jimmy hit his little brother in the eye, but he didn't do it on purpose.

**On the other hand:** looking at the other side of the question.

Bert is extremely intelligent. On the other hand, he's a very lazy student.

**On the spur of the moment:** at that moment; without previous thought or plan.

I planned to study yesterday afternoon, but on the spur of the moment I changed my mind and went to the movies.

**On time:** at the hour designated, not before or after that hour.  
Bill's very punctual. He's always `on time` for everything.

**Once in a blue moon:** very infrequently, almost never.  
I seldom see Bill only once in a blue moon.

**On the line:** in danger of being lost.  
"Tom was warned that his job was on the line because of his lack of concern for his duties."

**Out of the question:** impossible, beyond consideration.  
Your suggestion that we go swimming is `out of the question` It's much too cold today.

**Out of the woods:** out of danger.  
"Eric is well on his way to recovering from his illness, but he is not out of the woods yet."

**Out on a limb:** in a risky position.  
"The manager is out on a limb. It seems to me that he will be fired."

**Paint the town red:** carouse and have a good time.  
"We painted the town red when we were in Rome."

**Pay attention:** look at or listen to with concentration.  
Now children, `pay attention`. I'm going to tell you something very important.

**Pay through the nose:** pay too high a price.  
"Real Madrid had to pay through the nose to transfer Beckham."

**People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones:** one should not criticize when one is equally at fault.  
"Paul thinks my car is old fashioned. People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. His car is completely rubbish."

**Play it by ear:** improvise as one goes along.  
"What'll we do after going to the movies?"  
"I don't know. Let's play it by ear."

**Pull strings:** exert influence.  
"Steve pulled some strings with the manager and got excellent seats for the concert."

**Pull the wool over someone's eyes:** deceive someone.

Ethel was sure that Robert was `pulling the wool over her eyes` when he said he'd been in the library studying all evening.

**Put in a word for someone, something:** say something positive for someone or something.

If you have a chance to `put in a word for me` when you speak to the mayor, I'll appreciate it.

**Put one's foot in it:** say or do the wrong thing:

Joe `put his foot in it` when he told Ethel she looked like Dora The two girls dislike each other.

**Put one's money where one's mouth is:** follow through with a stated intention.

"You have been promising to take us to Disneyland for the past two years. Since the kids are free, how about putting your money where your mouth is?"

**Pull someone's leg:** fool someone.  
"Oh, really? Come on, you're pulling my leg!"

**Put something off:** postpone.  
Because of the weather, we had to `put our picnic off` until next Sunday.

**Put something over on someone:** deceive someone.

I believed everything he said and then discovered none of it was true He really `put something over on me`.

**Quite a few:** many.  
I haven't any recordings by Tom Jones, but I have `quite a few` by the Beatles.

**Raise a stink:** protest strongly.  
"Listen! Don't try to use any of your sister's clothes without asking her first. She's liable to raise a stink if she finds something missing."

**Remember someone to someone else:** tell someone to say hello to another person for you.

`Remember me to` your brother when you see him.

**Right away:** immediately.

I'm sorry I forgot to get that medicine for you. I'll take care of it `right away`.

**Rub someone the wrong way:** irritate.

Henry isn't a very diplomatic person, he's always `rubbing people the wrong way`.

**Save face:** maintain one's pride and honor; not be disgraced.

Donald completely forgot Irene's party and tried to `save face` by sending her flowers the next morning.

**Scratch someone's back:** return a favor.

"How about helping me at my homework? If you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours."

**Scratch the surface:** study something superficially.

I don't know much about international politics, I've only `scratched the surface`.

**See about:** take the responsibility to do something; make arrangements for.

Let's have a picnic on Sunday. I'll `see about` the food.

**See eye to eye:** to agree.

I agree with the president on domestic matters, but I don't `see eye to eye` with him on foreign policy.

**Sell someone down the river:** betray someone.

"Paul's girlfriend sold him down the river when she said she wouldn't like to marry him."

**Sell someone short:** underestimate someone.

"Don't sell him short! Despite his injury Raul is a valuable player."

**Serve someone right:** get what someone deserves.

It `serves Albert right` that he missed the train. Maybe he'll learn to be on time after this.

**Serve someone's purpose:** be useful to someone for a certain purpose.

I prefer cream for this recipe, but milk will `serve my purpose`.

**Shake a leg:** hurry.

"Mary, you always take such a long time to put on your make up. Come on, shake a leg."

**Shape up or ship out:** behave properly or leave.

Al had been constantly warned for being careless on the job. Finally, in desperation his supervisor exclaimed, "Shape up or ship out!"

**Shoot of one's mouth:** express one's opinion loudly.

"Jim doesn't play tennis very much, but he is always shooting off his mouth about how good he is."

**Shoot the breeze:** chat informally.

"Why don't you come over my place? We can listen to some records and shoot the breeze."

**Show promise:** give the impression of having the ability to do something in the future. Betty has a beautiful voice and `shows promise` of being a great singer.

**Sitting pretty:** in a fortunate position.

"I heard that Michael and Jennifer got a good price when they sold their house. Now they are really sitting pretty."

**Smell a rat:** feel that something is wrong.

I smell a rat. We'd better call the police.

**Snow job:** insincere talk.

"No one was deceived by the salesman's snow job about the worth of his properties."

**So far:** until now.

I've been on a diet for two weeks, but `so far` I haven't lost any weight.

**So much the better:** that's even better.

Jeanne is delighted to come to our party. If she insists on bringing a cake, `so much the better`.

**Something is up to someone:** it is one's responsibility to take care of something; or to make a decision.

Tom said it was `up to` Anne to choose the movie they should see that evening.

**Spill the beans:** reveal a secret.  
"Yes, it's too bad that someone spilled the beans and ruined Harry's surprise."

**Spread oneself too thin:** become involved in too many activities.  
"Although Teresa has always been an excellent student, her marks have been going down lately because she is spreading herself too thin."

**Stand a chance:** have the possibility.  
Phillip wants a scholarship to Harvard but he doesn't `stand a chance` of getting one.

**Stands to reason:** be a logical conclusion.  
If he lied to you about one thing, it `stands to reason` that he'd lie about other things, too.

**Stick out one's neck:** take a risk.  
"The Jungle had danger lurking around every corner. So, Hansel didn't stick his neck out."

**Stick to one's gun:** maintain one's position.  
"Even though a number of parliamentarians tried to change his mind, the prime minister stuck to his gun."

**Straight from the horse's mouth:** from a reliable source.  
"You mean Jill told you so herself?"  
"That's right. I got it straight from the horse's mouth."

**Straight from the shoulder:** frankly.  
I prefer a person who speaks `straight from the shoulder`, because then I know exactly what he means.

**String someone along:** lead someone on dishonestly.  
"I don't believe that Liz will marry Dean. She is stringing him along."

**Take a dim view of something:** have a poor opinion of something; disapprove of something.  
Mrs. Wright `takes a dim view of` the way her sister is raising her family.

**Take a stand on something:** make a firm decision about something.  
I don't like the way Tom operates. One day he says one thing and another day he says the opposite. I wish he'd `take a stand on` something.

**Take advantage of something:** to use something for one's own benefit.  
Let's `take advantage of` this wonderful weather and go to the seashore.

**Take after someone:** resemble in appearance, personality, or character.  
Peter `takes after` his mother in personality and his father in appearance.

**Take hold of something:** take in one's hands.  
I burned my hand when I `took hold of` that hot frying pan.

**Take it easy:** relax.  
Steve, you're working too hard. Sit down and `take it easy` for a while.

**Take one's time do something:** slowly, not hurry.  
When you're eating, it's important to `take your time` and chew your food well.

**Take part in something:** participate in some activity.  
I enjoy seeing a play, but I've never `taken part in` one.

**Take something for granted:** assume, without giving it a thought, that something is a certain way.  
Excuse me for not introducing you to Bert I `took it for granted` that you two knew each other.

**Take something into account:** consider something.  
In considering Andy for the job, we must `take into account` that he has very bad eyesight.

**Take something with a grain of salt:** only half believe something someone has said.  
Jack is a very likable fellow, but I've learned to take everything he says `with a grain of salt`.

**Take steps:** prepare for something and put it into action.  
The crime in that city became a serious problem. The police had to `take steps` to correct it.

**Take the bull by the horns:** take decisive action in difficult situation.  
"My sister had been putting off taking guitar lessons, but finally she took the bull by the horns and went to a professional music center."

**Take turns:** do something alternately with other persons.

There was only one dictionary, so the students had to `take turns` using it.

**Talk something over:** discuss.

Jim always `talks things over` with his parents before he makes an important decision.

**Talk through one's hat:** make foolish statement.

"It is difficult to convince Fred that he talks ignorantly. He's got a reputation for talking through his hat."

**Tell something apart:** distinguish between two things.

I know that one stone is a diamond and the other is only glass, but frankly I can't `tell them apart`.

**The early bird catches the worm:** arriving early gives one an advantage.

If you expect to get tickets for the concert, remember; "The early bird catches the worm"

**The ins and outs:** all the facts about something.

In order to learn `the ins and outs` of the family business, Bill took a job as messenger boy in one of the offices.

**The last straw:** the point beyond which one can endure no more.

When I told him to pay me the money he owed me, he said he couldn't. Instead he asked to borrow an additional five dollars. That was `the last straw`!

**Think much of smth, someone:** have a good opinion of.

I liked the book very much, although I `didn't think much of` the ending.

**Think nothing of it:** forget it, don't worry about it; that's all right.

I'm sorry I forgot to bring your book - That's all right `Think nothing of it`.

**Till one is blue in the face:** until one can say no more in trying to convince someone of something.

Bob's father talked to him `till he was blue in the face`, but it did no good, the boy quit school anyway.

**To say the least:** to make the minimum comment about something or someone.

It's a boring novel, `to say the least`.

**Tongue-in-cheek:** not serious.

"Well, she thought you were serious. She had no idea that you were just saying that tongue in cheek."

**Toot one's own horn:** boast.

"Michael's last novel was a best seller. He has no need to toot his own horn about his literary accomplishments."

**Try one's hand at something:** see if one is able to do something that requires some skill; ability.

I've never driven a tractor before, but I'm willing to `try my hand at it`.

**Turn over a new leaf:** make a fresh start.

Every January first, many people `turn over a new leaf` and try to live better lives.

**Turn someone off:** disgust someone.

"My friend turned me off when he tried to talk with his mouth full at lunch."

**Under the weather:** not feeling well physically.

I'm feeling a little `under the weather` tonight, so I think I'll go to bed early.

**Up one's sleeve:** concealed.

All right, Sarah. We know that you're planning something big for Paul's birthday. Mind telling us just what you have up your sleeve?"

**Waste one's breath:** speak uselessly, to no purpose.

If you tell Jeff not to go, you'll just be `wasting your breath`, he'll go anyway.

**Watch one's step:** be careful in one's conduct.

`Watch your step`, young man! If you're late for work again, you'll lose your job.

**Wet blanket:** dull or boring person who spoils the happiness of others.

"James wasn't invited to the party because she is such a wet blanket."

**What's the matter?:** What is wrong?

`What's the matter` with Alice? She looks angry.

**Would rather:** prefer.

Would you like pancakes for breakfast? No, thank you `I'd rather` have bacon and eggs.

# IDIOMS ABOUT COLORS

## RED

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**Caught red-handed:** found in the very act of a crime, or in possession of self-incriminating evidence

**Red-eye:** a commercial airline flight between two distant points that departs late at night and arrives early in the morning

**Red-faced:** blushing or flushed with embarrassment, anger, etc.

**Red-carpet treatment:** the kind of courtesy or deference shown to persons of high station

**In the red:** operating at a loss or being in debt

**Paint the town red:** celebrate boisterously, especially by making a round of stops at bars and nightclubs

**See red:** become very angry

**Red-hot:** very hot; creating much excitement or demand; violent; intensely excited or enthusiastic; very fresh or new

**Red tape:** excessive formality and routine required before official action can be taken

**Red-letter day:** a memorable, especially important or happy day

**Redcap:** a baggage porter at a railroad station

**Redneck:** a bigot or reactionary, especially from the rural working class

## BLUE

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**Out of the blue:** suddenly and unexpectedly

**Talk a blue streak:** talk continuously, rapidly, or interminably

**Blue-pencil:** alter, abridge, or cancel, as in editing a manuscript

**True-blue:** unwaveringly loyal or faithful

**Bluegrass music:** country music that is polyphonic in character and is played on unamplified string instruments, with emphasis especially on the solo banjo

**Blue-ribbon:** of superior quality or prominence

## WHITE

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**White heat:** intense heat; a stage of intense activity, excitement, feeling, etc.

**White hot:** in a state of white heat

**White lie:** a minor, polite, or harmless lie

**Wave the white flag:** give up; surrender; yield

**White-tie:** requiring that guests wear formal attire, especially that men wear white bow ties with formal evening dress

**Whitewash:** (noun) anything such as deceptive words or actions, used to cover up or gloss over faults, errors, or wrongdoing; (verb) conduct such a cover-up

## PURPLE

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**Purple prose:** writing that calls attention to itself because of its obvious use of certain effects, as exaggerated sentiment or pathos

## BLACK

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**Blacklist:** (noun) a list of persons under suspicion or disfavor; (verb) put a person on such a list

**Blackmail:** (noun) payment extorted by intimidation, such as threats of injurious revelations; (verb) extort money by the use of threats

**Black-tie:** requiring that guests wear semi-formal attire, especially that men wear black bow ties with tuxedos or dinner jackets

**Black market:** the buying and selling of goods in violation of legal price controls; also, the place where such buying and selling is done

**Black sheep (of the family):** a person who causes shame or embarrassment because of his/her deviation from the standards of the group

**Blackball:** exclude socially; vote against or reject a candidate

**Black box:** an electronic device, such as a flight recorder, that can be removed from an aircraft as a single package

## ROSE

**Rose-colored glasses:** a cheerful or optimistic view of things, usually without valid basis

**Rosy:** bright or promising; cheerful or optimistic

## GREEN

**Greenhorn:** an untrained, inexperienced, or naive person

**Green around the gills:** having a sickly appearance; pale

**Get the green light:** receive permission or authorization to do something

**Green with envy:** very jealous

**Green-eyed monster:** jealousy

**Green thumb:** an exceptional aptitude for gardening or for growing plants successfully

## PINK

**Tickled pink:** greatly pleased

**Pink slip:** a notice of dismissal from one's job

**In the pink:** healthy; in very good condition

**Pinkie:** the little finger

## YELLOW

**Have a yellow streak:** be cowardly

# IDIOMS ABOUT FOOD



**In apple-pie order:** very well organized; in very good order (informal). "Her desk is so neat; everything's always in apple-pie order."

**Bring home the bacon:** to earn a salary (informal). "I need to get a job; now I'm the one who has to bring home the bacon."

**Full of beans:** full of nonsense; talking nonsense (slang). "Don't pay any attention to what Frank says; he's full of beans."

**Not know beans (about something):** to know nothing about something (slang). "Sam doesn't know beans about using a computer."

**Not worth a hill of beans:** worthless (informal). "Their advice isn't worth a hill of beans."

**Spill the beans:** to reveal a secret or a surprise by accident ( cliché). "We wanted the party to be a surprise, but William spilled the beans and spoiled it."

**Beef something up:** to make something stronger (informal or slang). "We should beef up the program by adding an advanced course."

**Bread and butter:** (a person's) livelihood or income. "I don't especially like doing this job, but it's my bread and butter."

**Know which side one's bread is buttered on:** to know what is most advantageous for one ( cliché). "Richard will do anything to

**Too many cooks spoil the soup/broth/stew:** a proverb meaning that too many people trying to manage something simply spoil it. "Several people were trying to manage that program, and it didn't turn out well. I guess too many cooks spoiled the soup."

**Chew the fat:** to chat informally with close friends (slang). "We didn't get much done this morning. An old friend came by, and we spent a lot of time chewing the fat."

**The fat is in the fire:** a proverb meaning that serious trouble has broken out. "The boss found out that the reports weren't turned in on time. Now the fat's in the fire!"

**Half a loaf is better than none:** a proverb meaning that having part of something is better than having nothing. "I was hoping they would pay me more than that, but at least I have a job now; I guess half a loaf is better than none."

**Know one's onions:** to have a good knowledge about something one is supposed to know (informal or slang). "I think Mary will do a good job; she really knows her onions."

**Salt something away:** to store something for future use (originally referred to preserving food and storing it). "Mr. Smith is saving money to use after he retires from work; he salts away \$50 every week."

**Worth one's salt:** worth one's salary. "Any worker worth his salt would do a better job than that."

**In a stew (about someone or something):** bothered or upset about someone or something (informal). "What's Bill in a stew about this morning? Did the boss find mistakes in his work again?"

**Out of the frying pan into the fire:** from a bad situation to a worse situation (cliché). "Kim's situation is bad enough now, but if he quits his job, he'll go from the frying pan into the fire."

**Have other fish to fry:** to have other, or more important, things to do. "I just can't be bothered dealing with these details; I have other fish to fry."

**Hash something over:** to discuss something in great detail (informal). "We've already talked about that matter several times; there's no point in hashing it all over again."

**Fine kettle of fish:** a mess; a very unsatisfactory situation (cliché). "Our guests would arrive at any minute and all the electricity had gone off; that was a fine kettle of fish!"

**The pot calling the kettle black:** (an instance of) someone with a fault accusing someone else of having the same fault (cliché). "How can Jim accuse Lisa of laziness? That's the pot calling the kettle black."

**Simmer down:** to become calmer and quieter (informal). "Things have been so hectic here this week; we hope they'll simmer down after the holidays."

**(As) cool as a cucumber:** calm; not agitated "Even in the pressure of the competition, Herbert remained as cool as a cucumber."

**Have your cake and eat it too:** to have the advantage of both alternatives. "You'll have to decide whether you want to go the party or study to pass the exam. You can't have your cake and eat it too."

**Go bananas:** (slang) to go crazy or become silly "We were going along all right until all these changes came upon us. When the last one happened, we just went bananas."

**(As) slow as molasses (in January):** extremely slow "When Ralph is doing something he likes, he's pretty quick, but in doing these other things he's slow as molasses in January."

**In a pickle:** in trouble; in a mess "Now Sarah has really got herself in a pickle. She accepted two invitations for the same evening."

**A lemon:** (slang) something defective or unsatisfactory "Paul thought he was getting a bargain when he bought that car, but it turned out to be a lemon."

**(As) sweet as sugar:** very sweet or good-natured "Melinda has a pretty disagreeable disposition most of the time, but she can be as sweet as sugar when she wants to be."

**Take the cake:** to surpass all others, especially in some undesirable quality "Now that really takes the cake. I've never heard such an impossible demand!"

**Piece of cake:** (slang) very easy "Oh, that's a piece of cake. I can do it without even trying."

**Like (two) peas in a pod:** very much alike; almost identical "Bill and Steve have all the same likes and dislikes and ways of doing things. They're just like two peas in a pod."

**Take something with a grain of salt:** to listen to a story or an explanation with considerable doubt "Walter has a very persuasive way of talking, but you'd better take what he says with a grain of salt."

**(As) easy as pie:** very easy; simple "Making that dress with my new sewing machine was as easy as pie."

**Cut the mustard:** to achieve the standard of performance necessary for success (usually used in the negative) "Henry hoped he'd be able to succeed in that job, but he just couldn't cut the mustard."

**Apple of someone's eye:** someone's favorite person or thing "Little Audrey's grandfather talks about her all the time. She's the apple of his eye."

**Sell like hotcakes:** to be very popular and sought after (cliché) "Gerald should be happy about the success of his new book. It's selling like hotcakes."

**Packed (in) like sardines:** packed very tightly (cliché) "The tour bus was so crowded we could hardly breathe. We were packed like sardines."

**(As) flat as a pancake:** very flat. Linda was late to the meeting because she couldn't drive her car. One of the front tires had a puncture and was as flat as a pancake.

**Put all one's eggs in one basket:** to risk everything at once (cliché) "If you want to be sure of being accepted by a university, you'd better apply to several different ones. Don't put all your eggs in one basket."

## IDIOMS ABOUT ANIMALS



busy as a bee,  
blind as a bat,  
hungry as a bear,  
busy as a beaver,  
free as a bird,  
happy as a clam,  
sick as a dog, smart as a fox, innocent as a lamb, happy as a lark, quiet as a mouse, stubborn as a mule, wise as an owl, strong as an ox, proud as a peacock

**Go ape over something:** (slang) to be extremely enthusiastic about something

**Eager beaver:** a person who is excessively diligent or overly zealous

**For the birds:** (slang) useless or worthless; not to be taken seriously

**Like a bull in a china shop:** very awkward or clumsy

**Rain cats and dogs:** to rain very hard

**Chicken out:** (slang) to lose one's courage and avoid doing something because one is afraid

**Clam up:** (slang) to refuse to talk or reply; refrain from divulging information

**Shed crocodile tears:** to seem, hypocritically and insincerely, to be sad about something when one is not

**As the crow flies:** in a straight line; by the most direct route (used in seating the distance between two points)

**Eat crow:** (informal) to be forced to admit to having made a mistake; to have to retract a statement, humiliatingly

**Like water off a duck's back:** having little or no effect

## IDIOMS ABOUT MUSIC



**White elephant:** a possession unwanted by the owner but difficult to dispose of; something disproportionately expensive with regard to its usefulness or value

**Ferret something out:** to search out, discover, or bring to light

**Like a fish out of water:** out of one's proper or accustomed environment

**A big frog in a small pond:** someone who is important or outstanding within a small or unimportant group

**Wild-goose chase:** an absurd or hopeless search for something nonexistent or unobtainable

**Eat like a horse:** to eat a large quantity of food

**Straight from the horse's mouth:** (informal) from the original or a trustworthy source

**Packed in like sardines:** many people (or things) being enclosed in a space, like a can (tin) of sardines

**At a snail's pace:** very slowly

**Swan song:** farewell appearance; the last act of someone or something

**Weasel out of something:** to evade an obligation or duty

**Cry wolf:** to tell people there is great danger when there is not

**Wolf in sheep's clothing:** a person who conceals his evil intentions or character behind an innocent exterior



**Sing the blues:** to be disappointed or disillusioned. "Jim is singing the blues since he broke up with Elizabeth."

**Play second fiddle to someone:** to be subordinate to someone. "Carol resigned from the company because she was tired of playing second fiddle to George."

**Play by ear:** to play a piece of music without looking at the notes. "I can play all the popular songs by ear."  
to perform without prior preparation. "We haven't had time to prepare for the meeting. We'll have to play it by ear."

**Music to my ears:** good news; information that makes someone happy. "When my boss told me about my promotion, it was music to my ears."

**Blow one's own horn:** to praise oneself; to brag. "Mary is always tooting (blowing) her own horn. She forgets that other people have a role in our company's success."

**Jazz something up:** to make something more interesting or lively. "Tom jazzed up his gray suit with a red tie."

**Soap opera:** an overly dramatic and emotional story broadcast regularly on the radio or television. "Mary's day was not complete unless she saw her favorite soap opera."

**It's not over till the fat lady sings:** to not speculate about something until it is completed. "Though her policies were criticized, and her election in doubt, the candidate reminded the news correspondents that it's not over till the fat lady sings."

**Change one's tune:** to change one's opinions or manner. "John was critical of Anne's judgment until she was made his supervisor. Now he has changed his tune and agrees with everything she does."

**Out of tune:** not in agreement. "His suggestions were out of tune with reality."

**Call the tune:** make decisions; decide what is to be done. "A lot of people do not get along with Carol. She always wants to call the tune." The person who is in charge is the one who makes the final decision. "She who pays the piper calls the tune."

**March to a different drummer:** to follow one's own ideas rather than being influenced by the group. "Dick isn't going to support us; he always marches to a different drummer."

**Drum up business:** influence people to buy something. "The big advertisement in today's newspaper should drum up business."

**Off-beat:** unusual, not typical. "He dressed in an off-beat manner."

**Tune out:** ignore someone or something. "I tuned out when the speaker started quoting statistics."

**Tune in:** set the television control to receive a program. "I tune in to the news every evening."

**Tune up:** adjust an engine so that it runs correctly. "I needed a mechanic to tune up my car". To adjust instruments in an orchestra so that each musician is in harmony with one another. "The orchestra tuned up before the concert began."

**To beat the band:** very much; very fast. "The police car was speeding down the highway to beat the band."

**Jump on the bandwagon:** take a popular position; join the group that has the greatest popularity. "The politicians jumped on the bandwagon when they saw the governor was so popular."

**Face the music:** accept the unpleasant consequences for one's actions. "Jimmy broke his neighbor's window with his baseball. Now he's got to face the music."

**Jazzy:** lively; active. "Phil and Mary throw jazzy parties. Hours pass like minutes of their house."

