



Idioms

# SOLVED IDIOMS FROM 1971 TO 2014

This document contains the complete solved idioms, which appeared from year 1971 to 2014. This document is intended to be correct and relevant to the subject, but cannot be guaranteed as 100% accurate. The CSS Point is not responsible for any fact/information mentioned in this booklet. This is a compiled work by The CSS Point. All material has been taken from different online sources.

Thank you

[www.thecsspoint.com](http://www.thecsspoint.com)

[support@thecsspoint.com](mailto:support@thecsspoint.com)



**THE CSS POINT**  
Yes We Can Do It!

[www.thecsspoint.com](http://www.thecsspoint.com)



*English (Precis &  
Composition)*

## 1971

### 1- Carry out

*Accomplish, bring to a conclusion*

They carried out the mission successfully. Shakespeare had this term in King Lear (5:1): "And hardly shall I carry out my side, her husband being alive *Put in practice or effect*, We will carry out the new policy. Please carry out my instructions.

### 2- Taken over

*Assume control, management, or possession of*

The pilot told his copilot to take over the controls. There's a secret bid to take over our company. [Late 1800s]

### 3- Bring about *cause*

She hopes to bring about a change in his attitude.

### 4- Beat out *Knock into shape by beating*

She managed to beat out all the dents in the fender. [c. 1600] *Surpass or defeat someone, be chosen over someone* He got to the head of the line, beating out all the others. **Beat out of Cheat someone of something** He was always trying to beat the conductor out of the full train fare.

### 5- Bear with

*Put up with, make allowance for*

He'll just have to bear with them until they decide.

Nicholas Udall used this term in Ralph Roister Doister (c. 1553):

"The heart of a man should more honour win by bearing with a woman."

It may also be used as an imperative.

Bear with me—I'm getting to the point.

---

## 1972

### 1- To fall back on something / fall back upon

*Rely on, have recourse to*

I fall back on old friends in time of need.

When he lost his job he had to fall back upon his savings

### 2- To fall through

*Fail, miscarry*

The proposed amendment fell through.

I hope our plans won't fall through. [Late 1700s]

### **3- On right earnest**

### **4- Vested interests**

*A personal stake in something*

She has a vested interest in keeping the house in her name.

This term, first recorded in 1818, uses vested in the sense of "established" or "secured."

### **5- Meaningful dialogue**

---

**1973**

### **1- Turn to account**

*Use for one's benefit*

He turned the delay to good account, using the time to finish correspondence.

This idiom, first recorded in 1878, uses account in the sense of "a reckoning."

### **2- To beat the air / beat the wind**

*Continue to make futile attempts, fight to no purpose*

The candidates for office were so much alike that we thought our vote amounted to beating the air.

These phrases call up a vivid image of someone flailing away at nothing. [Late 1300s]

### **3- To break a lance with**

*To engage in a tilt or contest*

### **4- To foul of, (foul play)**

*Unfair or treacherous action, especially involving violence*

The police suspected he had met with foul play.

This term originally was and still is applied to unfair conduct in a sport or game and was being used figuratively by the late 1500s.

Shakespeare used it in *The Tempest* (1:2):

"What foul play had we that we came from thence?"

### **5- To keep open house**

*To entertain friends at all times, to be hospitable*

**6- To put out of countenance**

**7- Got up to kill**

**8- To have a finger in the pie**

*Have an interest in or meddle in something*

When they nominated me for the board, I'm sure Bill had a finger in the pie.

Another form of this idiom is **have a finger in every pie**

*to have an interest in or be involved in everything*

She does a great deal for the town; she has a finger in every pie.

The precise origin of this metaphor, which presumably eludes either to tasting every pie or being involved in their concoction, has been lost. [Late 1500s]

---

**1974**

**1- When all is said and done / After all is said and done**

*In the end, nevertheless*

When all's said and done, the doctors did what they could for Gordon, but he was too ill to survive.

This term was first recorded in 1560.

**2- An axe to grind**

*A selfish aim or motive*

The article criticized the new software, but the author had an axe to grind, as its manufacturer had fired his son.

This frequently used idiom comes from a story by Charles Miner, published in 1811, about a boy who was flattered into turning the grindstone for a man sharpening his axe. He worked hard until the school bell rang, whereupon the man, instead of thanking the boy, began to scold him for being late and told him to hurry to school.

"Having an axe to grind" then came into figurative use for having a personal motive for some action. [Mid-1800s]

### 3- Turn a new leaf

*Make a fresh start, change one's conduct or attitude for the better*

He promised the teacher he would turn over a new leaf and behave himself in class.

This expression alludes to turning the page of a book to a new page. [Early 1500s]

### 4- Burn the candle at both ends

*Exhaust one's energies or resources by leading a hectic life*

Joseph's been burning the candle at both ends for weeks, working two jobs during the week and a third on weekends.

This metaphor originated in France and was translated into English in Randle Cotgrave's Dictionary (1611), where it referred to dissipating one's wealth. It soon acquired its present broader meaning.

### 5- Leave in the lurch

*Desert or leave alone and in trouble, refuse to help or support someone*

He left me in the lurch when he didn't come over to help me although he had promised to earlier in the day.

### 6- Goes without saying

*Be self-evident, a matter of course*

It goes without saying that success is the product of hard work.

This expression is a translation of the French *cela va sans dire*. [Second half of 1800s]

### 7- Like a red rag to a bull

*If something is a red rag to a bull, it is something that will inevitably make somebody angry or cross.*

### 8- Not a leg to stand on

*With no chance of success*

He tried to get the town to change the street lights, but because there was no money in the budget he found himself without a leg to stand on.

A related idiom is **not having a leg to stand on**

Once the detective exposed his false alibi, he didn't have a leg to stand on.

This metaphoric idiom transfers lack of physical support to arguments or theories. [Late 1500s]

## 9- Under the thumb of

*Controlled or dominated by someone*

He's been under his mother's thumb for years.

The allusion in this metaphoric idiom is unclear, that is, why a thumb rather than a fist or some other anatomic part should symbolize control. [Mid-1700s]

## 10- The writing on the wall / handwriting on the wall

*If the writing's on the wall for something, it is doomed to fail.*

*A warning or presentiment of danger*

The Company was losing money, and seeing the handwriting on the wall, she started to look for another job.

This expression comes from the Bible (Daniel 5:5-31), in which the prophet interprets some mysterious writing that a disembodied hand has inscribed on the palace wall, telling King Belshazzar that he will be overthrown

---

1975

## 1- To sow one's wild oats

*Behave foolishly, immoderately or promiscuously when young*

Brad has spent the last couple of years sowing his wild oats, but now he seems ready to settle down.

This expression alludes to sowing inferior wild oats instead of good cultivated grain, the verb sowing—that is, “planting seed”—in particular suggesting sexual promiscuity. [Mid-1500s]

## 2- Storm in a tea cup

*If someone exaggerates a problem or makes a small problem seem far greater than it really is, then they are making a storm in a teacup*

## 3- To keep late hours

*Stay awake until late at night*

Never call Ethel before noon; she keeps late hours and sleeps all morning.

## 4- To throw cold water on

*to discourage, to remove hope, deter*

Steve wanted to expand the business into China, but his boss threw cold water on the idea, and

told him to focus on the domestic business.  
Cutting my year-end bonus poured cold water on my loyalty to the company.  
Hearing about the outbreak of cholera threw cold water on our plans to visit Bolivia.

This term, with its image of putting out a fire with water, at one time meant “defame” or “slander”; the modern meaning dates from about 1800.

### **5- A cock and bull story**

*An unbelievable tale that is intended to deceive; a tall tale*  
Jack told us some cock and bull story about getting lost.

This expression may come from a folk tale involving these two animals, or from the name of an English inn where travellers told such tales.  
W.S. Gilbert used it in *The Yeomen of the Guard* (1888), where Jack Point and Wilfred the Jailer make up a story about the hero's fictitious death: "Tell a tale of cock and bull, of convincing detail full." [c. 1600]

### **6- To bear the brunt of**

*Put up with the worst of some bad circumstance*  
It was the secretary who had to bear the brunt of the doctor's anger.

This idiom uses brunt in the sense of "the main force of an enemy's attack," which was sustained by the front lines of the defenders. [Second half of 1700s]

### **7- Tied to apron-strings of**

*Wholly dependent on or controlled by a woman, especially one's mother or wife.*  
At 25, he was still too tied to her apron strings to get an apartment of his own.

This expression, dating from the early 1800s, probably alluded to apron-string tenure, a 17th-century law that allowed a husband to control his wife's and her family's property during her lifetime.

### **8- To move heaven and earth**

*Exert the utmost effort*  
I'd move heaven and earth to get an apartment here.  
This hyperbolic expression was first recorded in 1792.

### **9- To blow one's own trumpet / blow one's trumpet**

*Vast in a boastful, self-promoting manner, brag about oneself*  
Within two minutes of meeting someone new, Bill was blowing his own horn. [Late 1500s]

## 10- To rest on one's laurels

*Rely on one's past achievements, especially as a way of avoiding the work needed to advance one's status.*

Now that Julian's in his eighties, he's decided to rest on his laurels and let some of the younger agents do the work.

This term alludes to the crown of laurels awarded in ancient times for a spectacular achievement. [Late 1800s]

---

## 1976

### 1- Trudge along

### 2- Point-blank

*Close enough to go directly to a target*

### 3- In the doldrums

*Depressed, dull and listless*

Dean's in the doldrums for most of every winter.

This expression alludes to the maritime doldrums, a belt of calms and light winds north of the equator in which sailing ships were often becalmed. [Early 1800s]

### 4- Dole out / on the dole

*receiving payment from the government, as relief*

They couldn't afford any luxuries while living on the dole.

### 5- At cross purposes

*When people are at cross purposes, they misunderstand each other or have different or opposing objectives*

*With aims or goals that conflict or interfere with one another*

I'm afraid the two departments are working at cross purposes.

This idiom, first recorded in 1688, may have begun as a 17th-century parlor game called “cross-purposes,” in which a series of subjects (or questions) were divided from their explanations (or answers) and distributed around the room. Players then created absurdities by combining a subject taken from one person with an explanation taken from another.



## 6- Check by jowl

*in close intimacy, side by side*  
:a row of houses cheek by jowl

## 7- Succinctly

*Characterized by clear, precise expression in few words; concise and terse*  
a succinct reply; a succinct style.

## 8- Hilarious detract from

## 9- Plain sailing

*Easy going; straightforward, unobstructed progress*  
The first few months were difficult, but I think it's plain sailing from here on.

Alluding to navigating waters free of hazards, such as rocks or other obstructions, this term was transferred to other activities in the early 1800s.

---

**1977**

## 1- To bear the brunt of

*Put up with the worst of some bad circumstance*  
It was the secretary who had to bear the brunt of the doctor's anger.

This idiom uses brunt in the sense of "the main force of an enemy's attack", which was sustained by the front lines of the defenders. [Second half of 1700s]

## 2- To call a spade a spade

*A person who calls a spade a spade is one speaks frankly and makes little or no attempt to conceal their opinions or to spare the feelings of their audience.*

## 3- To fight shy of

*Avoid meeting or confronting someone*  
I have had to fight shy of invitations that would exhaust time and spirits"(Washington Irving, Life and Letters, 1821).

This usage may allude to a military reluctance to meet or engage with the enemy. [Late 1700s]

#### **4- To cry over the spilt milk**

*This idiom means that getting upset after something has gone wrong is pointless; it can't be changed so it should be accepted.*

#### **5- To burn the candle at both ends**

*Someone who burns the candle at both ends lives life at a hectic pace, doing things which are likely to affect their health badly.*

*Exhaust one's energies or resources by leading a hectic life.*

Joseph's been burning the candle at both ends for weeks, working two jobs during the week and a third on weekends.

This metaphor originated in France and was translated into English in Randle Cotgrave's Dictionary (1611), where it referred to dissipating one's wealth. It soon acquired its present broader meaning.

#### **6- To rob peter to pay Paul**

*If you rob Peter to pay Paul, you try to solve one problem, but create another in doing so, often through short-term planning*

#### **7- To take the bull by the horns**

*Taking a bull by its horns would be the most direct but also the most dangerous way to try to compete with such an animal.*

*When we use the phrase in everyday talk, we mean that the person we are talking about tackles their problems directly and is not worried about any risks involved.*

#### **8- Playing to the gallery**

*If someone plays to the gallery, they say or do things that will make them popular at the expense of more important issues*

#### **9- Holding out the olive branch**

*If you hold out or offer an olive branch, you make a gesture to indicate that you want peace.*

#### **10- To make out**

*Discern or see, especially with difficulty*

I can hardly make out the number on the door. [Mid-1700s]

*Manage, get along*

How did you make out with the accountant?

This usage was first recorded in 1820.

*Understand*

I can't make out what she is trying to say. [Mid-1600s]

*Establish or prove*

He made out that he was innocent. [Colloquial; mid-1600s]

*Amplify or suggest. This usage often occurs with an infinitive*

Are you making me out to be a liar? [Colloquial; mid-1600s]

*Write out, draw up; fill in a written form*

He made out the invoices, or Jane started making out job applications.

This usage was first recorded in 1465

---

## 1978

### 1- The acid test

*An acid test is something that proves whether something is good, effective, etc, or no*

### 2- A bad hat

*Someone who deliberately stirs up trouble*

### 3- In a blue funk

*In a state of panic or terror*

Just because the bride's mother is late, you needn't get in a blue funk.

This term originated in the mid-1700s as in a funk, the adjective blue, meaning "affected with fear or anxiety", being added a century later.

*In a state of dejection, sad*

Anne has been in a blue funk since her dog died.

This usage employs blue in the sense of "sad"—a meaning that first emerged in the late 1300s.

### 4- Set one's cap Down at heel

*Also, on someone's heels. Immediately behind, in close pursuit.*

Literal use

Jean's dog was always at her heels.

Figurative use

Although his company dominated the technology, he always felt that his competitors were on his heels.

This idiom appeared in the 14th-century romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

The expression is sometimes intensified as *hard on someone's heels* or *hot on someone's heels*

### **5- To die in harness**

*Expire while working, keep working to the end*

He'll never retire—he'll die with his boots on.

She knows she'll never get promoted, but she wants to die in harness.

Both phrases probably allude to soldiers who died on active duty. Until the early 1600s the noun *boot* denoted a piece of armor for the legs, which may have given rise to this usage.

Shakespeare used *harness* in the sense of armor when he wrote: "At least we'll die with harness on our back" (*Macbeth* 5:5).

### **6- Dead as doornail / dead as a dodo or herring**

*Totally or assuredly dead; also finished*

The cop announced that the body in the dumpster was dead as a doornail.

The radicalism she professed in her adolescence is now dead as a dodo.

The Equal Rights Amendment appears to be dead as a herring.

The first, oldest, and most common of these similes, all of which can be applied literally to persons or, more often today, to issues, involves *doornail*, dating from about 1350.

Its meaning is disputed but most likely it referred to the costly metal nails hammered into the outer doors of the wealthy (most people used the much cheaper wooden pegs), which were clinched on the inside of the door and therefore were "dead", that is, could not be used again.

*Dead as a herring* dates from the 16th century and no doubt alludes to the bad smell this dead fish gives off, making its death quite obvious.

*Dead as a dodo*, referring to the extinct bird, dates from the early 1900s.

**7- To raise coin**

**8- To strike one's colours**

**9. To carry the day**

*Win, prevail*

At auctions the wealthiest bidders usually carry the day. [Late 1600s]

---

**1979**

**1- Taken down at peg**

*If someone is taken down a peg (or taken down a peg or two), they lose status in the eyes of others because of something they have done wrong or badly.*

**2- To monkey with**

**3- In hot water**

*in trouble*

**4- Petticoat Government**

**5- To pull oneself together**

*Regain one's composure or self-control*

After that frightening episode, it took her a while to pull herself together. [Second half of 1800s]

**6- To rise from the ranks / come up through the ranks**

*Work one's way to the top*

He's risen through the ranks, starting as a copy boy and ending up as senior editor.

Originally this term was used for an officer who had worked his way up from the rank of private, a rare feat. It was being applied to non-military advances by the mid-1800s

## **7- To rub shoulders**

*If you rub shoulders with people, you meet and spend time with them, especially when they are powerful or famous.*

---

**1980**

b) Bring out the meaning of any five of the following in appropriate sentences:

### **1- Pocket the affront**

### **2- Thin end of the wedge**

*The thin end of the wedge is something small and seemingly unimportant that will lead to something much bigger and more serious.*

### **3- Flash in the pan**

*If something is a flash in the pan, it is very noticeable but doesn't last long, like most singers, who are very successful for a while, then forgotten*

### **4- To keep at**

*Persevere or persist at doing something.*  
If you keep at your Math, you'll soon master it.

It is also put as **keep at it**

He kept at it all day and finally finished the report. [Early 1800s]

### **Keep at someone**

*Nag, harass, or annoy someone*  
You have to keep at Carl if you want him to do the work.  
He keeps at Millie all the time.

### **5- At one's beck and call**

*Ready to comply with any wish or command*

### **6- Go against the grain**

*A person who does things in an unconventional manner, especially if their methods are not*

*generally approved of, is said to go against the grain. Such an individual can be called a maverick.*

### **7- Bring grist to the mill**

*Something that you can use to your advantage is grist for the mill.*

('Grist to the mill' is also used.)

### **8- Upset the apple cart**

*Spoil carefully laid plans*

Now don't upset the apple cart by revealing where we're going.

This expression started out as upset the cart, used since Roman times to mean "spoil everything". The precise idiom dates from the late 1700s.

### **9- Hoist on one's own petard**

*If you are hoist with your own petard, you get into trouble or caught in a trap that you had set for someone else.*

### **10- Live on the fat of the land**

*The best or richest of anything*

The tiny upper class lived off the fat of the land while many of the poor were starving.

This expression alludes to fat in the sense of "the best or richest part".

The Bible has it as eat the fat of the land (Genesis 45:18).

---

## **1981**

### **1- To have your cake and eat it too**

*If someone wants to have their cake and eat it too, they want everything their way, especially when their wishes are contradictory.*

### **2- Between the devil and the deep blue sea**

*If you are caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, you are in a dilemma; a difficult choice.*

### **3- To be in hot water**

*If you get into hot water, you get into trouble*

#### **4- To be on the carpet**

*Summoned before someone in authority for punishment*

#### **5- It never rains but it pours**

*when things go wrong, they go very wrong.*

#### **6- A miss is as good as a mile**

*Coming close to success but failing is no better than failing by a lot*  
He was beaten by just one vote, but a miss is as good as a mile.

This proverbial expression, first recorded in 1614, is a shortening of the older form, "An inch of a miss is as good [or bad] as a mile of a miss."

#### **7- To give oneself airs**

*Assume a haughty manner, pretend to be better than one is*  
I'm sick of Claire and the way she puts on airs.

Airs here means "a manner of superiority." [c. 1700]

#### **8- To have the courage of one's convictions**

*Behave according to one's beliefs*  
Carl wouldn't give his best friend any of the test answers; he had the courage of his convictions.

This expression is believed to have originated as a translation of the French *le courage de son opinion* ("the courage of his opinion"), dating from the mid-1800s and at first so used. By the late 1800s it had changed to the present form.

#### **9- The onlooker sees most of the game**

#### **10- Out of sight out of mind**

*It is used to suggest that someone will not think or worry about something if it isn't directly visible or available to them*



1982

### 1- To come to a dead end

*A passage that has no exit*

This street's a dead end, so turn back. [Late 1800s]

*An impasse or blind alley, allowing no progress to be made*

This job is a dead end; I'll never be able to advance. [c. 1920]

### 2- To turn a deaf ear

*If someone turns a deaf ear to you, they don't listen to you.*

### 3- Every dark cloud has a silver lining

*An element of hope or a redeeming quality in an otherwise bad situation*

The rally had a disappointing turnout, but the silver lining was that those who came pledged a great deal of money.

This metaphoric term is a shortening of Every cloud has a silver lining, in turn derived from John Milton's Comus (1634): "A sable cloud turns forth its silver lining on the night."

### 4- Blowing hot and cold together

*Change one's mind, vacillate*

Jean's been blowing hot and cold about taking a winter vacation.

This expression comes from Aesop's fable (c. 570 B.C.) about a man eating with a satyr on a winter day. At first the man blew on his hands to warm them and then blew on his soup to cool it. The satyr thereupon renounced the man's friendship because he blew hot and cold out of the same mouth.

The expression was repeated by many writers, most often signifying a person who could not be relied on.

William Chillingworth put it: "These men can blow hot and cold out of the same mouth to serve several purposes" (The Religion of Protestants, 1638).

### 5- To let the cat out of the bag

*If you accidentally reveal a secret, you let the cat out of the bag, Give away a secret*

Mom let the cat out of the bag and told us Karen was engaged.

This expression alludes to the dishonest practice of a merchant substituting a worthless cat for a valuable pig, which is discovered only when the buyer gets home and opens the bag. [Mid-1700s]

### **6- To put the cart before the horse**

*Reverse the proper order of things or events*

Don't put the cart before the horse and give away the punch line.

This expression has been used since antiquity but was first recorded in English in 1520.

### **7- To sail in the same boat**

*If people are in the same boat, they are in the same predicament or trouble.*

### **8- A Swan Song**

*A final accomplishment or performance, one's last work.*

I'm resigning tomorrow; this project was my swan song.

This term alludes to the old belief that swans normally are mute but burst into beautiful song moments before they die. Although the idea is much older, the term was first recorded in English only in 1890

---

**1984**

### **a) To look a gift horse in the mouth**

*Be critical or suspicious of something received at no cost*

Dad's old car is full of dents, but we shouldn't look a gift horse in the mouth.

This term, generally expressed as a cautionary proverb (Don't look a gift horse in the mouth), has been traced to the writings of the 4th-century cleric, St. Jerome, and has appeared in English since about 1500. It alludes to determining the age of a horse by looking at its teeth

### **b) To have an axe to grind**

*If you have an axe to grind with someone or about something, you have a grievance, resentment and you want to get revenge or sort it out. In American English, it is 'ax'*

### **c) To wash one's dirty linen in public / air one's dirty linen or laundry**

*Expose private matters to public view, especially unsavory secrets*

These metaphors are reworking of a French proverb, *IL faut laver son linge sale en famille* (“One should wash one's dirty linen at home”), which was quoted by Napoleon on his return from Elba (1815). It was first recorded in English in 1867.

**d) To pocket an insult**

**e) To take to one's heels**

*Run away*

When the burglar alarm went off they took to their heels.

This expression alludes to the fact that the heels are all one sees of a fugitive running away fast. Although similar expressions turned up from Shakespeare's time on, the exact idiom dates only from the first half of the 1800s

**f) To win laurels**

**g) A gentleman at large**

*Free, unconfined, especially not confined in prison*

To our distress, the housebreakers were still at large. [1300s]

*At length, fully; also, as a whole, in general*

The chairman talked at large about the company's plans for the coming year

Shakespeare wrote in *Love's Labour's Lost* (1:1): "So to the laws at large I write my name" (that is, I uphold the laws in general). This usage is somewhat less common. [1400s]

*Elected to represent an entire group of voters rather than those in a particular district or other segment*

Alderman at large, representing all the wards of a city instead of just one, or delegate at large to a labor union convention. [Mid-1700s]

---

1985

**a) By and by**

*After a while, soon*

She'll be along by and by.

The expression probably relies on the meaning of by as a succession of quantities (as in "two by two"). This adverbial phrase came to be used as a noun, denoting either procrastination or the future.

William Camden so used it for the former (Remains, 1605): "Two anons and a by and by is an hour and a half." And W.S. Gilbert used it in the latter sense when Lady Jane sings plaintively that little will be left of her "in the coming by and by," that is, as she grows old (Patience, 1881). [Early 1500s]

**b) The lion's share**

*The greater part or most of something*

Whenever they won a doubles match, Ethel claimed the lion's share of the credit.

As usual, Uncle Bob took the lion's share of the cake.

This expression alludes to Aesop's fable about a lion, who got all of a kill because its fellow hunters, an ass, fox, and wolf, were afraid to claim their share.

**c) In black and white**

*When it is very clear who or what is right and wrong, then the situation is black and white.*

**d) To bring to book**

*Call to account, investigate*

He was acquitted, but one day soon he'll be brought to book.

As for your records, the IRS is sure to bring you to book concerning your tax deductions.

This term uses book in the sense of "a written record," such as an account book or ledger. [c. 1800]

**e) To read between the lines**

*Perceive or detect a hidden meaning*

They say that everything is fine, but reading between the lines I suspect they have some marital problems.

This term comes from cryptography, where in one code reading every second line of a message gives a different meaning from that of the entire text. [Mid-1800s]

**f) To stick to one's guns**

*Hold fast to a statement, opinion, or course of action*

The witness stuck to her guns about the exact time she was there.

This expression, originally put as stand to one's guns, alluded to a gunner remaining by his post. Its figurative use dates from the mid-1800s.

**g) To be under a cloud**

*If someone is suspected of having done something wrong, they are under a cloud.*

**h) By fits and starts / in fits and starts**

*With irregular intervals of action and inaction, spasmodically*

The campaign is proceeding by fits and starts.

This expression began in the late 1500s as by fits, the noun fit meaning a "paroxysm" or "seizure"; starts was added about a century later.

---

**1987**

**1- To back out / back away / back out of something**

*Move or retreat backwards without turning, withdraw from a situation, or break an agreement or engagement.*

After the announcement appeared in the papers, Mary found it doubly difficult to back out of her engagement to Todd. [Early 1800s]

**2- To keep out of**

**3- Bang into**

*Crash noisily into, collide with*

A clumsy fellow, Bill was always banging into furniture. [Early 1700s]

*Strike heavily so as to drive in; also, persuade*

I've been banging nails into the siding all day.

I can't seem to bang it into his head that time is precious.

The literal usage dates from the mid-1500s, the figurative from the second half of the 1800s.

#### **4- To smell a rat**

*If you smell a rat, you know instinctively that something is wrong or that someone is lying to you.*

#### **5- To burn one's fingers**

*Harm oneself*

I'm staying away from risky stocks; I've burned my fingers often enough.

Some believe this expression came from a legend about a monkey who gets a cat to pull its chestnuts out of the fire (see cat's paw); others hold it is from an English proverb:

"Burn not thy fingers to snuff another's candle" (James Howell, English Proverbs, 1659)

#### **6- Null and void**

*Cancelled, invalid*

The lease is now null and void.

This phrase is actually redundant, since null means "void," that is, "ineffective." It was first recorded in 1669.

#### **7- To catch up with**

*Suddenly snatch or lift up*

The wind caught up the kite and sent it high above the trees. [First half of 1300s]

#### **catch up with**

*Come from behind, overtake*

literal:

You run so fast it's hard to catch up with you.

figurative:

The auditors finally caught up with the embezzler. [Mid-1800s]

*Become involved with, enthralled by*

We all were caught up in the magical mood of that evening. [Mid-1600s]

#### **catch up on or with**

*Bring or get up to date*

Let's get together soon and catch up on all the news.  
Tonight I have to catch up with my correspondence. [First half of 1900s]

### **8- To stand up for**

*Remain valid, sound, or durable*

His claim will not stand up in court.  
Our old car stood up well over time. [Mid-1900s]

*Fail to keep a date or appointment with*

Al stood her up twice in the past week, and that will be the end of their relationship. [Colloquial; c. 1900]

### **9- To skim through**

### **10- To narrow down**

---

**1988**

#### **a) As cool as a cucumber**

*If someone is as cool as a cucumber, they don't get worried by anything.*

#### **b) Have your cake and eat too**

*If someone wants to have their cake and eat it too, they want everything their way, especially when their wishes are contradictory*

#### **c) In a Pickle**

*If you are in a pickle, you are in some trouble or a mess.*

#### **d) Take a cake**

*Be the most outstanding in some respect, either the best or the worst.*

That advertising slogan really took the cake.  
What a mess they made of the concert—that takes the cake!

This expression alludes to a contest called a cakewalk, in which a cake is the prize. Its figurative use, for something either excellent or outrageously bad, dates from the 1880s.

**e) Sell like hot cakes**

*If something is selling like hotcakes, it is very popular and selling very well.*

**f) As flat as a Pancake**

*It is so flat that it is like a pancake- there is no head on that beer it is as flat as a pancake.*

**g) Take something with a grain of salt / pinch of salt**

*If you should take something with a grain of salt, you shouldn't necessarily believe it all.*

**h) Like two peas in a pod**

*Things that are like two peas in a pod are very similar or identical.*

---

**1989**

**a) Account for**

*Be the determining factor in; cause*

The heat wave accounts for all this food spoilage, or icy roads account for the increase in accidents.

*Explain or justify*

Jane was upset because her son couldn't account for the three hours between his last class and his arrival at home.

Both of these related usages are derived from the literal meaning of the phrase, that is, "make a reckoning of an account." [Second half of 1700s]

**b) Carry weight / carry authority or conviction**

*Exert influence, authority, or persuasion*

No matter what the President says, his words always carry weight. Shakespeare combined two of these expressions in Henry VIII (3:2):

"Words cannot carry authority so weighty." [c. 1600]

**c) To fall back upon**

*Rely on, have recourse to*

I fall back on old friends in time of need, or When he lost his job he had to fall back upon his



savings. [Mid-1800s]

**d) To be taken aback**

*Surprise, shock*

He was taken aback by her caustic remark.

This idiom comes from nautical terminology of the mid-1700s, when be taken aback referred to the stalling of a ship caused by a wind shift that made the sails lay back against the masts. Its figurative use was first recorded in 1829.

**e) A wild goose chase**

*A wild goose chase is a waste of time- time spent trying to do something unsuccessfully.*

**f) By leaps and bounds**

*Rapidly, or in fast progress*

The corn is growing by leaps and bounds

School enrollment is increasing by leaps and bounds.

This term is a redundancy, since leap and bound both mean "spring" or "jump," but the two words have been paired since Shakespeare's time and are still so used

**g) As cool as a cucumber**

*If someone is as cool as a cucumber, they don't get worried by anything.*

**h) To burn midnight oil**

*Stay up late working or studying*

The semester is almost over and we're all burning the midnight oil before exams.

This expression alludes to the oil in oil lamps. [Early 1600s]

---

**1990**

**a) White elephant**

*A white elephant is an expensive burden; something that costs far too much money to run, like the Millennium Dome in the UK.*

**b) Blue Blood**

*Someone with blue blood is royalty.*

**c) Cleanse the Augean stable**

**d) Apple of discord**

*Anything causing trouble, discord, or jealousy*

**e) In good books**

*If someone is in your good books, you are pleased with or think highly of them at the moment.*

**f) Between the devil and the deep sea**

*If you are caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, you are in a dilemma; a difficult choice.*

**g) Stare in the face / look in the face**

*Be glaringly obvious, although initially overlooked*

The solution to the problem had been staring me in the face all along.

I wouldn't know a Tibetan terrier if it looked me in the face. [Late 1600s]

**h) Make off with**

*Depart in haste, run away*

The cat took one look at Richard and made off. [c. 1700]

*Take something away; also, steal something*

I can't write it down; Tom made off with my pen.

The burglars made off with the stereo and computer as well as jewellery. [Early 1800s]

---

**1991**

**i) Damocles' sword**

*Impending disaster*

The likelihood of lay-offs has been a sword of Damocles over the department for months.

This expression alludes to the legend of Damocles, a servile courtier to King Dionysius I of

Syracuse. The king, weary of Damocles' obsequious flattery, invited him to a banquet and seated him under a sword hung by a single hair, so as to point out to him the precariousness of his position.

The idiom was first recorded in 1747. The same story gave rise to the expression hang by a thread.

## **ii) Every inch**

*Completely, wholly*

He was every inch a leader.

I had to argue this case every inch of the way.

## **iii) Spade a spade**

*Speak frankly and bluntly, be explicit*

You can always trust Mary to call a spade a spade.

This term comes from a Greek saying, call a bowl a bowl, that was mistranslated into Latin by Erasmus and came into English in the 1500s.

## **iv) On the sky**

### **v) Palm off**

*Pass off by deception, substitute with intent to deceive*

The salesman tried to palm off a zircon as a diamond.

The producer tried to palm her off as a star from the Metropolitan Opera.

This expression alludes to concealing something in the palm of one's hand. It replaced the earlier palm on in the early 1800s.

### **vi) Lip service**

*When people pay lip service to something, they express their respect, but they don't act on their words, so the respect is hollow and empty.*

### **vii) A turn coat**

*One who goes to work / fight / play for the opposing side, traitor*

### **viii) A wild goose chase**

*A futile search or pursuit*

I think she sent us on a wild goose chase looking for their beach house.

This idiom originally referred to a form of 16th-century horse racing requiring riders to follow a leader in a particular formation (presumably resembling a flock of geese in flight). Its figurative use dates from about 1600.

---

## 1992

### **i) Between the devil and the deep sea**

*If you are caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, you are in a dilemma; a difficult choice*

### **ii) A wild goose chase**

*A worthless hunt or chase; a futile pursuit*

### **iii) Over head and ears**

### **iv) Time and tide**

*One must not procrastinate or delay*

Let's get on with the voting; time and tide won't wait, you know.

This proverbial phrase, alluding to the fact that human events or concerns cannot stop the passage of time or the movement of the tides, first appeared about 1395 in Chaucer's Prologue to the Clerk's Tale.

The alliterative beginning, time and tide, was repeated in various contexts over the years but today survives only in the proverb, which is often shortened (as above).

### **v) To live from hand to mouth**

*With only the bare essentials, existing precariously*

After she lost her job she was living from hand to mouth.

This expression alludes to eating immediately whatever is at hand. [c. 1500]

### **vi) To beat about the bush**

*If someone doesn't say clearly what they mean and try to make it hard to understand, they are beating about (around) the bush.*

### **vii) To fish in troubled waters**

*Try to take advantage of a confused situation*

He often buys up stock in companies declaring bankruptcy; fishing in troubled waters generally pays off.

This term, first recorded in 1568, expresses the even older notion that fish bite more readily when seas are rough.

### **viii) A bird's eye-view**

*If you have a bird's eye view of something, you can see it perfectly clearly.*

---

## **1993**

### **a) Play truant**

*To stay away from school without permission*

### **b) Play down**

*Make little of, minimize the importance of*

A skillful salesman plays down the drawbacks of the product and emphasizes its good features. [First half of 1900s]

### **Play down to**

*Lower one's standards to meet the demands of someone*

Some stand-up comics deliberately play down to the vulgar taste of their audiences. [Late 1800s]

### **c) Turn turtle**

*Capsize, turn upside down*

When they collided, the car turned turtle.

This expression alludes to the helplessness of a turtle turned on its back, where its shell can no longer protect it. [First half of 1800s]

### **d) Turn the corner**

*Pass a milestone or critical point, begin to recover.*

Experts say the economy has turned the corner and is in the midst of an upturn.

The doctor believes he's turned the corner and is on the mend.

This expression alludes to passing around the corner in a race, particularly the last corner. [First half of 1800s]

**e) A fair weather friend**

*A fair-weather friend is the type who is always there when times are good but forgets about you when things get difficult or problems crop up.*

**f) Under a cloud**

*If someone is suspected of having done something wrong, they are under a cloud.*

**g) Burn one's boats / burn one's boats**

*Commit oneself to an irreversible course.*

Denouncing one's boss in a written resignation means one has burned one's bridges.

Turning down one job before you have another amounts to burning your boats.

Both versions of this idiom allude to ancient military tactics, when troops would cross a body of water and then burn the bridge or boats they had used both to prevent retreat and to foil a pursuing enemy. [Late 1800s]

**h) Horse-trading**

*Negotiation marked by hard bargaining and shrewd exchange*

The restaurant owner is famous for his horse trading; he's just exchanged a month of free dinners for a month of free television commercials.

This expression alludes to the notorious shrewdness of horse traders, who literally bought and sold horses. [c. 1820]

---

**1994**

**(i) Between Scylla and Charybdis**

*In a position where avoidance of one danger exposes one to another danger.*

**(ii) Hobson's choice**

*An apparently free choice that actually offers no alternative*

My dad said if I wanted the car I could have it tonight or not at all—that's Hobson's choice.

This expression alludes to Thomas Hobson of Cambridge, England, who rented horses and allowed each customer to take only the horse nearest the stable door. [Mid-1600s]

**(iii) Sting in the tail**

**(iv) With open arms**

*Enthusiastically, warmly*

They received their new daughter-in-law with open arms.

This term alludes to an embrace. [Mid-1600s]

**(v) Wash one's hand of (To)**

*Refuse to accept responsibility for; abandon or renounce*

I've done all I can for him, and now I'm washing my hands of him.

This expression alludes to Pontius Pilate's washing his hands before having Jesus put to death, saying "I am innocent of the blood of this just person" (Matthew 27:24).

**(vi) Count one's chickens (To)**

*Make plans based on events that may or may not happen*

You might not win the prize and you've already spent the money? Don't count your chickens before they hatch!

I know you have big plans for your consulting business, but don't count your chickens.

This expression comes from Aesop's fable about a milkmaid carrying a full pail on her head. She daydreams about buying chickens with the milk's proceeds and becoming so rich from selling eggs that she will toss her head at suitors; she then tosses her head and spills the milk.

Widely translated from the original Greek, the story was the source of a proverb and was used figuratively by the 16th century. Today it is still so well known that it often appears shortened and usually in negative cautionary form (don't count your chickens).

**(vii) Burn midnight oil (To)**

*Stay up late working or studying*

The semester is almost over and we're all burning the midnight oil before exams.

This expression alludes to the oil in oil lamps. [Early 1600s]

---

1996

### 1- Bear out

*Back up or confirm*

The results bear out what he predicted.  
His story bears me out exactly. [Late 1400s]

### 2- Back out / back out of something

*Move or retreat backwards without turning; same as back away; withdraw from a situation, or break an agreement or engagement*

After the announcement appeared in the papers, Mary found it doubly difficult to back out of her engagement to Todd. [Early 1800s]

### 3- Carry over

*To keep something, usually merchandise, for a subsequent period*

We'll carry over this summer's bathing suits for next winter's resort season.

*Persist from one time or situation to another*

His leadership in sports carried over to the classroom. [Late 1800s]

### 4- Come off

*Happen, occur*

The trip came off on schedule. [Early 1800s]

*Acquit oneself, reach the end*

This usage always includes a modifier

Whenever challenged he comes off badly.

This model is doomed to come off second-best. [Mid-1600s]

Succeed, as in Our dinner party really came off. [Mid-1800s]

### 5- Fall back

*Give ground, retreat*

The troops fell back before the relentless enemy assault.

He stuck to his argument, refusing to fall back. [c. 1600]

*Recede*

The waves fell back from the shore. [c. 1800]

### 6- Figure out



*Discover or determine*

Let's figure out a way to help. [Early 1900s]

*Solve or decipher*

Can you figure out this puzzle? [Early 1800s]

*To begin to comprehend someone or something; to come to understand someone or something better*

I just can't figure you out.

I can't figure out quiet people readily.

**7- learn to live with**

*Get used to or accustom oneself to something that is painful, annoying, or unpleasant*

The doctor said nothing more could be done about improving her sight; she'd just have to learn to live with it.

Pat decided she didn't like the new sofa but would have to learn to live with it.

**8- Set in**

*Insert, put in*

I still have to set in the sleeves and then the sweater will be done. [Late 1300s]

*Begin to happen or become apparent*

Darkness was setting in as I left. [c. 1700]

*Move toward the shore, said of wind or water*

The tide sets in very quickly here. [Early 1700s]

**9- Cover up**

*Wrap up or enfold in order to protect*

Be sure to cover up the outdoor furniture in case of rain.

It's cold, so be sure to cover up the baby. [Late 1800s]

*Conceal something, especially a crime*

The opposition accused the President of covering up his assistant's suicide. [c. 1920]

**10- Iron out**

*Work out, resolve, settle*

They managed to iron out all the problems with the new production process.

John and Mary finally ironed out their differences.

This expression uses ironing wrinkled fabric as a metaphor for smoothing differences. [Mid-1800s]

---

## 1997

### a) To beat the air / beat the wind

*Continue to make futile attempts, fight to no purpose*

The candidates for office were so much alike that we thought our vote amounted to beating the air.

These phrases call up a vivid image of someone flailing away at nothing. [Late 1300s]

### b) To beggar description

*Defy or outdo any possible description*

The stage set was so elaborate, it begged description.

This term, alluding to the idea that words are insufficient to do something justice, was already used by Shakespeare in Antony and Cleopatra (2:2):  
"For her own person It beggared all description."

### c) To bring to mind

*Cause to be remembered*

The film brought to mind the first time I ever climbed a mountain.

This idiom, first recorded in 1433, appears in Robert Burns's familiar "Auld Lang Syne" (1788), in which the poet asks if old times should never be brought to mind.

### d) To call in question / call into question

*Dispute, challenge; also, cast doubt on*

How can you call her honesty into question?

This usage was first recorded in John Lyly's Euphues (1579):  
"That ... I should call in question the demeanour of all."

### e) To cap it all / cap it all off

*Finish or complete something*

To cap it all off they served three kinds of dessert.

*Surpass or outdo something*

This last story of Henry's caps them all.

Both usages employ cap in the sense of “topping” something. [First half of 1800s]

**f) To clip one's wings**

*To end a person's privileges; to take away someone's power or freedom to do something*

My father said that if I didn't start behaving, he was going to clip my wings.

In ancient Rome thousands of years ago, people clipped the wings of pet birds so that they couldn't fly away. For centuries people have used the idiom "Clip one's wings" to mean brings a person under control.

**g) To cross the Rubicon**

*Irrevocably commit to a course of action, make a fateful and final decision.*

Once he submitted his resignation, he had crossed the Rubicon.

This phrase alludes to Julius Caesar's crossing the Rubicon River (between Italy and Gaul) in 49 B.C., thereby starting a war against Pompey and the Roman Senate. Recounted in Plutarch's Lives: Julius Caesar (c. A.D. 110), the crossing gave rise to the figurative English usage by the early 1600s.

**h) To feel the pulse / feel the pulse of**

*Try to determine the intentions or sentiments of a person or group*

These exit polls allegedly take the pulse of the voters, but I don't believe they're very meaningful. [First half of 1600s]

**i) To fly in the face of / fly in the teeth of**

*Act in direct opposition to or defiance of*

This decision flies in the face of all precedent.

They went out without permission, flying in the teeth of house rules.

This metaphoric expression alludes to a physical attack. [Mid-1500s]

**j) To rise like a phoenix from its ashes**

*In life we should all learn from the mistakes that we have made and try not to repeat them. We should not let sorrow overcome us and stand in our way. Learn to overcome hardships in life is all what life is worth living about. After all that's the definition of life. Hence the saying "rise like a phoenix from the ashes"*

Phoenix is supposed to be a mythological bird of fire that is believed to die in flames and turn to ash. But then it comes back to life from the same ash.

---

## 1998

### 1- The last ditch

*A desperate final attempt*

We're making a last-ditch effort to finish on time.

This expression alludes to the military sense of last ditch, "the last line of defence." Its figurative use dates from the early 1800s.

### 2- A square meal

*A substantial or complete meal*

These airlines never feed you; I haven't had a square meal on one yet. [Mid-1800s]

### 3- Go public

*Become a publicly held company, that is, issue ownership shares in the form of stock.*

As soon as the company grows a little bigger and begins to show a profit, we intend to go public. [Mid-1900s]

### 4- Run riot (wild)

*Behave in a frenzied, out-of-control, or unrestrained manner*

I was afraid that if I left the toddler alone she would run amok and have a hard time calming down.

The weeds are running riot in the lawn

The children were running wild in the playground.

Amok comes from a Malay word for "frenzied" and was adopted into English, and at first spelled amuck, in the second half of the 1600s.

Run riot dates from the early 1500s and derives from an earlier sense, that is, a hound's following an animal scent. Run wild alludes to an animal reverting to its natural, uncultivated state; its figurative use dates from the late 1700s.

### 5- The backroom boy

*Men who play poker and smoke in a room at the back of the store*

When the police raided Gino's they arrested four of the backroom boys.

## 6- Foot the bill

*The person who foots the bill pays the bill for everybody, settle the accounts*  
The bride's father was resigned to footing the bill for the wedding.

This expression uses foot in the sense of "add up and put the total at the foot, or bottom, of an account." [Colloquial; early 1800s]

## 7- Set the pace

*Establish a standard for others to follow*  
Jim has set the pace for the department, exceeding the monthly quota every time.

This expression comes from racing, where it is said of a horse that passes the others and leads the field. It was transferred to other activities in the early 1900s.

## 8- At times

*Occasionally, sometimes*  
Away from home for the first time, Mary was homesick at times. [Early 1500s]

## 9- Steal the show / steal the spotlight

*Be the center of attention*  
The speeches were interesting but Eliza's singing stole the show.

This idiom alludes to unexpectedly outshining the rest of the cast in a theatrical production. [First half of 1900s]

## 10- Grey matter

*Grey/gray matter is the human brain*

---

**1999**

### (a) A jaundiced eye

*The phrase "Jaundiced eye" means to look at something with a prejudiced view, usually in a rather negative or critical manner.*

### (b) A left-handed compliment / backhanded compliment

*An insult in the guise of an expression of praise*  
She said she liked my hair, but it turned out to be a left-handed compliment when she asked how

long I'd been dyeing it.

This expression uses left-handed in the sense of "questionable or doubtful," a usage dating from about 1600.

**(c) The ruling passion**

*An interest or concern that occupies a large part of someone's time and effort*

**(d) Tower of strength**

*Someone who can be relied on to provide support and comfort.*

**(e) Steal a march on someone**

*To get ahead of, especially by quiet enterprise.*

**(f) In one's bones**

*Have an intuition or hunch about something*

I'm sure he'll succeed—I can feel it in my bones.

This expression alludes to the age-old notion that persons with a healed broken bone or with arthritis experience bone pain before rain, due to a drop in barometric pressure, and therefore can predict a weather change.

**(g) Hang in the balance**

*Be in a precarious condition or in a state of suspense*

The doctor said her life was hanging in the balance.

This expression alludes to the suspended balance scale where an object is placed in one pan and weights are added one by one to the other pan until the two are balanced.

**(h) Fly in the ointment**

*A drawback or detrimental factor*

The new library is wonderful but there's a fly in the ointment. Their catalog isn't complete yet.

This term probably alludes to a biblical proverb (Ecclesiastes 10:1):

"Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour."

**(i) Close-fisted**

*Tightfisted; stingy or unwilling to part with money*

---

## 2000

### (i) Blow one's top / blow one's stack

*Fly into a rage; lose one's composure*

If she calls about this one more time I'm going to blow my top.

Warren is generally very easy-going, but today he blew his stack.

The top here has been likened to the top of an erupting volcano; the stack alludes to a smokestack.

*Go crazy; become insane*

When she regains consciousness, she just may blow her top.

### (ii) A cock-and-bull story

*A fanciful and unbelievable tale*

### (iii) Find one's feet

*To grow in confidence in a new situation as one gains experience.*

If you ask for help when you need it, you will soon find your feet.

### (iv) Call it a night

*To go to bed to sleep*

### (v) The tip of the iceberg

*The tip of the iceberg is the part of a problem that can be seen, with far more serious problems lying underneath*

### (vi) Below par / under par

*Not up to the average, normal, or desired standard*

I am feeling below par today, but I'm sure I'll recover by tomorrow.

This term employs par in the sense of "an average amount or quality," a usage dating from the late 1700s.

### (vii) From pillar to post

*If something is going from pillar to post, it is moving around in a meaningless way, from one disaster to another.*

**(viii) Hang up/ hang up on**

*Suspend on a hook or hanger, as in Let me hang up your coat for you. [c. 1300]*

*Replace a telephone receiver in its cradle; end a phone conversation*

She hung up the phone

He hung up on her. [Early 1900s]

*Delay or hinder; also, become halted or snagged*

Budget problems hung up the project for months.

Traffic was hung up for miles. [Second half of 1800s]

*Have or cause to have emotional difficulties*

Being robbed at gunpoint can hang one up for years to come. [Slang; early 1900s]

*Obsessed with*

For years the FBI was hung up on Communist spies. [First half of 1900s]

**hang up one's sword or gloves or fiddle**

*Quit, retire*

He's hanging up his sword next year and moving to Florida.

The noun in these expressions refers to the profession one is leaving—sword for the military, gloves for boxing, and fiddle for music—but they all are used quite loosely as well, as in the example.

**hang up one's hat**

*Settle somewhere, reside*

"Eight hundred a year, and as nice a house as any gentleman could wish to hang up his hat in" (Anthony Trollope, *The Warden*, 1855).

**(ix) Turn some one on**

*To create feeling of excitement, interest, lust, pleasure etc*

**(ix) Turn some one off**

*To create feelings of dislike, repulsion, disgust etc*

**(x) By and by**

*After a while, soon*

She'll be along by and by.



The expression probably relies on the meaning of by as a succession of quantities (as in "two by two").

This adverbial phrase came to be used as a noun, denoting either procrastination or the future.

William Camden so used it for the former (Remains, 1605):

"Two anons and a by and by is an hour and a half."

And W.S. Gilbert used it in the latter sense when Lady Jane sings plaintively that little will be left of her "in the coming by and by," that is, as she grows old (Patience, 1881). [Early 1500s]

---

## 2001

### (i) The teaming meanings

The teaming meanings ::: Present a number of meanings

example : During the lecture, the professor gave the teaming meanings on the topic.

### (ii) To kick the bucket

*When someone kicks the bucket, they die*

### (iii) To push to the walls

*To place in a desperate or extreme position*

### (iv) To read between the lines

*If you read between the lines, you find the real message in what you're reading or hearing, a meaning that is not available from a literal interpretation of the words.*

### (v) To be at daggers drawn

*If people are at daggers drawn, they are very angry and close to violence.*

### (vi) To throw down the gauntlet

*Declare or issue a challenge*

The senator threw down the gauntlet on the abortion issue.

This expression alludes to the medieval practice of a knight throwing down his gauntlet, or metal glove, as a challenge to combat.

Its figurative use dates from the second half of the 1700s, as does the less frequently heard take up the gauntlet, for accepting a challenge.

### (vii) To be a Greek / it's all Greek to me

*It is beyond my comprehension*

This new computer program is all Greek to me.

This expression was coined by Shakespeare, who used it literally in Julius Caesar (1:2), where Casca says of a speech by Seneca, deliberately given in Greek so that some would not understand it:

"For mine own part, it was Greek to me."

It soon was transferred to anything unintelligible.

**(viii) To stand on ceremony**

*Stand on ceremony, to behave in a formal or ceremonious manner.*

**(ix) From the horse's mouth**

*If you hear something from the horse's mouth, you hear it directly from the person concerned or responsible.*

**(x) To carry the cross**

---

**2002**

Make sentences with the given Idiomatic phrases so that their meaning become clear: (10)

**(1) take aback**

*Surprise, shock*

He was taken aback by her caustic remark.

This idiom comes from nautical terminology of the mid-1700s, when be taken aback referred to the stalling of a ship caused by a wind shift that made the sails lay back against the masts. Its figurative use was first recorded in 1829.

**(2) take after**

*Follow the example of; also, resemble in appearance, temperament, or character*

Bill took after his uncle and began working as a volunteer for the Red Cross. [Mid-1500s]

**(3) take for**

**(4) take ill (sick)**

*Become ill*

It's just my luck to get sick on vacation.

When was she taken ill? [Ninth century]

*Become disgusted*

We got sick as we learned how much money was wasted.

I get sick when I hear about his debts. [Early 1500s]

**make one sick.**

**get sick to one's stomach**

*be sick, become nauseated, vomit*

If you eat any more candy you'll get sick.

Sick to her stomach every morning? She must be pregnant. [Early 1600s]

**(5) take off**

*Remove*

Take off your coat and stay for a while.

I took my foot off the brake. [c. 1300]

*Deduct, decrease*

He took 20 percent off the original price.

I want you to trim my hair, but please don't take off too much. [c. 1700]

*Carry or take away*

The passengers were taken off one by one. [Late 1800s]

**take oneself off**

*Leave, go away*

I'm taking off now.

We take ourselves off for China next month

*as an imperative*

Take yourself off right now! [First half of 1800s]

*Move forward quickly*

The dog took off after the car.

*Become well known or popular, or achieve sudden growth*

That actor's career has really taken off.

Sales took off around the holidays. [Mid-1900s]

*Rise in flight*

The air plane took off on time. [Mid-1800s]

*Discontinue*

The rail road took off the commuter special. [Mid-1700s]

*Imitate humorously or satirically*

He had a way of taking off the governor that made us howl with laughter. [Mid-1700s]

*Withhold service*

I'm taking off from work today because of the funeral. [First half of 1900s]

**(6) take over**

*Assume control, management, or possession of*

The pilot told his copilot to take over the controls.

There's a secret bid to take over our company. [Late 1800s]

**(7) take for**

*To regard as*

Do you take me for a fool?

*To consider mistakenly*

Don't take silence for approval.

**(8) take in**

*To grant admittance to; receive as a guest or an employee*

*To reduce in size; make smaller or shorter*

took in the waist on the pair of pants.

*To include or constitute.*

*To understand*

Couldn't take in the meaning of the word.

*To deceive or swindle*

was taken in by a confidence artist.

*To look at thoroughly; view*

took in the sights.

*To accept (work) to be done in one's house for pay*

took in typing.

*To convey (a prisoner) to a police station.*

**(9) take to task**

*Upbraid, scold; blame or censure*

The teacher took Doris to task for turning in such a sloppy report.

This term, dating from the mid-1700s, at first meant either assigning or challenging someone to a task. Its current sense dates from the late 1800s.

**(10) take to One's heels**

*Run away*

When the burglar alarm went off they took to their heels.

This expression alludes to the fact that the heels are all one sees of a fugitive running away fast. Although similar expressions turned up from Shakespeare's time on, the exact idiom dates only from the first half of the 1800s

**(11) take with a grain or pinch of salt.**

*Skeptically, with reservations*

I always take Sandy's stories about illnesses with a grain of salt—she tends to exaggerate.

This expression is a translation of the Latin *cum grano salis*, which Pliny used in describing Pompey's discovery of an antidote for poison (to be taken with a grain of salt). It was soon adopted by English writers.

---

**2003**

**(1) Kick the bucket**

*To die*

**(2) Bolt from the blue**

*If something happens unexpectedly and suddenly, it is a bolt from the blue.*

**(3) Put your foot down**

*When someone puts their foot down, they make a firm stand and establish their authority on an issue.*

**(4) Worth your salt**

*Someone who is worth their salt deserves respect.*

**(5) Down the drain**

*On the way to being lost or wasted; disappearing*

Buying new furniture when they can't take it with them is just pouring money down the drain.  
During the Depression huge fortunes went down the drain.

This metaphoric term alludes to water going down a drain and being carried off.

**(6) All cars**

**(7) Swan song**

*A person's swansong is their final achievement or public appearance.*

**(8) Cheek by Jowl**

*If things or people are cheek by jowl, they are very close together.*

**(9) in a nutshell**

*Concisely, in a few words*

Here's our proposal—in a nutshell, we want to sell the business to you.

This hyperbolic expression alludes to the Roman writer Pliny's description of Homer's Iliad being copied in so tiny a hand that it could fit in a nutshell.

For a time it referred to anything compressed, but from the 1500s on it referred mainly to written or spoken words.

**(10) Give me five**

*If someone says this, they want to hit your open hand against theirs as a way of congratulation or greeting.*

---

**2004**

**1. To bring grist to the mill.**

*Something that you can use to your advantage is grist for the mill.*

## **2. Set one's cap at**

*Pursue someone romantically*

We all thought Anne had set her cap for Joe, but we were wrong.

In the 1700s this term, which may have alluded to donning one's best headgear, was applied to members of either sex, but by the early 1800s it generally described a woman chasing a man. It is probably obsolescent.

## **3. To draw the long bow**

*If someone draws a long bow, they lie or exaggerate.*

## **4. To send a person to Coventry**

*To ostracize, or systematically ignore someone*

## **5. Beer and skittles**

*People say that life is not all beer and skittles, meaning that it is not about self-indulgence and pleasure.*

## **6. The acid test**

*An acid test is something that proves whether something is good, effective, etc, or not.*

## **7. A skeleton in the cupboard.**

*If you have a skeleton in the cupboard, or in the closet, you have a secret in your past which could damage you if it became known.*

## **8. To discover a mare's nest**

---

**2005**

## **1). Keep ones nose to the grindstone**

*Stay hard at work*

We expect John to get good grades again, since he really keeps his nose to the grindstone.

This expression, first recorded in 1539, alludes to a tool that must be sharpened by being held to a grindstone.

## **2). Throw someone for a loop / throw for a loop**

*knock down or over with a feather; knock sideways, overcome with surprise or astonishment*

The news of his death knocked me for a loop.

Being fired without any warning threw me for a loop.

Jane was knocked sideways when she found out she won.

The first two of these hyperbolic colloquial usages, dating from the first half of the 1900s, allude to the comic-strip image of a person pushed hard enough to roll over in the shape of a loop.

The third hyperbolic term, often put as You could have knocked me down with a feather, intimating that something so light as a feather could knock one down, dates from the early 1800s; the fourth was first recorded in 1925.

### 3). Letter perfect

*The precise wording rather than the spirit or intent.*

Since it was the first time he'd broken the rules, the school decided to ignore the letter of the law and just give him a warning. [Late 1500s]

### 4). Off the wall

*Something that is off the wall is unconventional.*

### 5). Out to lunch

*If someone's out to lunch, they are crazy or out of touch.*

### 6). Salt something away

*Keep in reserve, store, save*

He salted away most of his earnings in a bank account.

This idiom alludes to using salt as a food preservative. [Mid-1800s]

### 7). Take someone to the cleaners

*Take or cheat one out of all of one's money or possessions*

Her divorce lawyer took him to the cleaners.

That broker has taken a number of clients to the cleaners. [Slang; early 1900s]

*Drub, beat up*

He didn't just push you—he took you to the cleaners. [Slang; early 1900s]

### 8). Wear the pants in the family

*Exercise controlling authority in a household*

Grandma or husband (incase of husband and wife) wears the pants at our house.



---

**2006**

**(1) Twiddle with**

*To play with something; to play with something, using one's fingers; to fiddle with something.*  
I asked Jason to stop twiddling with the pencils.  
Someone is twiddling with the stereo controls.

**(2) Vamp up**

*Make up*  
vamp up an excuse for not attending the meeting

**(3) Whittle away**

*cut away in small pieces, to cut or carve something away*  
The carver whittled the wood away until only a small figure was left.  
He whittled away the wood.

**(4) Winkle out**

*Force from a place or position*  
The committee winkled out the unqualified candidates.

**(5) Give someone the bum's rush**

*To eject (or be ejected) forcibly*

**(6) Loom large**

*Appear imminent in a threatening, magnified form*  
The possibility of civil war loomed large on the horizon.  
Martha wanted to take it easy for a week, but the bar exam loomed large.

This term employs loom in the sense of "come into view", a usage dating from the late 1500s.

**(7) Besetting sin**

*A sin which is habitually attending a person, a prevailing or predominant vice*  
We regret to say that apathy is the besetting sin of our rural population.

**(8) To hang fire**

### *Delay*

The advertising campaign is hanging fire until they decide how much to spend on it.

This expression originally referred to the 17th-century flintlock musket, where the priming powder ignited but often failed to explode the main charge, a result called hanging fire. [c. 1800]

---

## **2007**

### **1) To put the lid on / keep the lid on**

#### *Suppress*

I don't know how but we'll have to put the lid on that rumor about her.  
Let's keep the lid on our suspicions.

The word lid here is used in the sense of "a cover for a container." [Early 1900s]

### **2) Flavour if the mouth**

*Something that is prominent in the public eye for a short time then fades out of interest.*

Originally a term of approval for something that was up to the minute and desirable. It has been used ironically from the late 20th century to pass disdainful comment on things which pass out of fashion quickly. For example, the "one hit wonders" of the music business.

### **3) Zero hours**

*The time when something important is to begin is zero hour.*

### **4) Gloom and doom**

*the feeling that a situation is bad and is not likely to improve*  
Come on, it's not all doom and gloom, if we make a real effort we could still win.

### **5) To pig out**

*Eat ravenously, gorge oneself*

The kids pigged out on the candy they had collected on Halloween. [Slang; early 1970s]

### **6) Bag people**

## **7) Compassion fatigue**

*A weariness of and diminishing public response to frequent requests for charity.*

## **8) No matters**

*Some thing which is not important*

---

## **2008**

### **i. Blow one's top**

*To be very angry, Explode in anger, lose one's temper, go into a rage*

### **ii. A cock and bull story**

*An unbelievable tale that is intended to deceive; a tall tale*  
Jack told us some cock and bull story about getting lost.

This expression may come from a folk tale involving these two animals, or from the name of an English inn where travellers told such tales.

W.S. Gilbert used it in *The Yeomen of the Guard* (1888), where Jack Point and Wilfred the Jailer make up a story about the hero's fictitious death: "Tell a tale of cock and bull, Of convincing detail full." [c. 1600]

### **iii. Find one's feet**

*To be confident, become adjusted; become established*

### **iv. Call it a night**

*To stop what one has been doing, for the remainder of the night.*

### **v. The tip of the iceberg**

### **vi. Below par**

*Less than average, less than normal*

### **vii. From pillar to post**

*From one place or thing to another in rapid succession*

### **viii. Hang up**

*Hold on , suspend; end a telephone conversation*

**ix. Turn some one in**

**x. By and by**

*Pretty soon, it won't be long now; gradually, eventually*

---

**2009**

**(i) Leave in the lurch**

*Abandon or desert someone in difficult straits*

Jane was angry enough to quit without giving notice, leaving her boss in the lurch.  
Where were you Karman, you really left me in the lurch

This expression alludes to a 16th-century French dice game, *lourche*, where to incur a lurch meant to be far behind the other players. It later was used in cribbage and other games, as well as being used in its present figurative sense by about 1600.

**(ii) Hard and fast**

*Defined, fixed, invariable*

We have hard and fast rules for this procedure.  
There is no hard and fast rule to start a computer

This term originally was applied to a vessel that has come out of water, either by running aground or being put in dry dock, and is therefore unable to move. By the mid-1800s it was being used figuratively.

**(iii) Weather the storm**

*Survive difficulties*

If she can just weather the storm of that contract violation, she'll be fine.

This expression alludes to a ship coming safely through bad weather. [Mid-1600s]

**(iv) Bear the brunt**

*Put up with the worst of some bad circumstance*

It was the secretary who had to bear the brunt of the doctor's anger.  
I had to bear the brunt of her screaming and yelling

This idiom uses brunt in the sense of "the main force of an enemy's attack," which was sustained

by the front lines of the defenders. [Second half of 1700s]

**(v) Meet halfway**

*If you meet someone halfway, you accept some of their ideas and make concessions.*  
If you want to settle the issues you have to meet me halfway

**(vi) Turncoat**

*one who goes to work / fight / play for the opposing side, traitor*  
That turncoat! He went to work for the competition - Sears.  
Ahmed is Turncoat and we should not rely upon him

**(vii) Where the shoe pinches**

*The source of trouble, grief, difficulty, etc.*

**2010**

1. Make for (intr, preposition)

1. to head towards, esp in haste
2. to prepare to attack
3. to help to bring about

your cooperation will make for the success of our project  
This class will make for the Auditorium now.

2. Yeoman's service

Efficient, useful or loyal service; arduous work

Tipu sultan rendered yeoman service for the the Islam

3. Discretion is the better part of valour

:something that you say which means that it is better to be careful and think before you act than it is to be brave and take risks

She decided not to voice her opposition to the Chairman's remarks. Perhaps discretion was the better part of valour

4. Out of the woods

past a critical phase; out of the unknown.

When the patient got out of the woods, everyone relaxed.

I can give you a better prediction for your future health when you are out of the woods.

5. A casting vote  
decisive vote

The speaker used his casting vote in the favour of proposition

6. Look down upon  
think nothing of, be contemptuous of  
Do not look down upon the down and out

7. Iconoclast  
One who attacks and seeks to overthrow traditional or popular ideas or institutions.  
One who destroys sacred religious images.  
He was an iconoclast who refused to be bound by tradition.

8. A swan song  
A farewell or final appearance, action, or work.  
The beautiful legendary song sung only once by a swan in its lifetime, as it is dying.  
I'm resigning tomorrow; this project was my swan song.

## 2011

### **1. To eat one's words**

The idiom to eat one's words means to admit that you are or were mistaken, especially after a strong or public expression of opinion.

**Sentence:** I told everyone to invest in that company, and now it's bankrupt – I'll have to eat my words.

### **2. Dog on the manger**

Someone who keeps something that they do not really want in order to prevent anyone else from having it.

**Sentence:** Stop being such a dog in the manger and let your brother ride your bike if you're not using it.

### **3. A Close Shave**

A narrow escape.

**Sentence:** Wow, that was a close shave. I thought the guard would spot us.

### **4. A Freudian Slip**

A verbal mistake that is thought to reveal a repressed belief, thought, or emotion.

### **5. A Gordian Knot**

A Difficult Problem

**Sentence:** Homelessness in the inner cities has become a real Gordian knot.

### **6. A cog in the machine**

One part of a large system or organization.

**Sentence:** He was just a small cog in the large wheel of organised crime.

**7. A sugar daddy**

A wealthy, usually older man who gives expensive gifts to a young person in return for sexual favors or companionship.

**8. A wet blanket**

Someone who does or says something that stops other people from enjoying themselves.

**Sentence:** I don't want to be a wet blanket, but you really must play your music more quietly or you'll disturb the people next door.

**2012**

**1. Wool Gathering**

To engage in fanciful daydreaming.

**2. Under the harrow**

Subjected to actual torture with a toothed instrument, or to great affliction or oppression.

**3. Cold comfort**

No comfort or consolation at all.

**Sentence:** She knows there are others worse off than her, but that's cold comfort.

**4. A gold digger**

A woman who has relationships with rich men so that they will give her money.

**Sentence:** I'm not saying she's a gold digger, but how come all her boyfriends have been rich?

**5. To Walk with God**

To live in obedience to his commands, and have communion with him.

**6. On the thin ice**

In an uncertain condition.

**Sentence:** My brother was already on thin ice with the coach when he injured his knee.

**7. A queer fish**

A strange person.

**Sentence:** I knew his father and he was a queer fish too.

**8. Unearthly hour**

Not of this earth; preternatural; supernatural.

## 2013

### 1. The milk of human kidneys

Natural kindness and sympathy shown to others.

**Sentence:** Mary is completely hard and selfish—she doesn't have the milk of human kindness in her.

### 2. A rule of thumb

A way of calculating something which is not exact but which will help you to be correct enough.

**Sentence:** A good rule of thumb is to cook two handfuls of rice per person.

### 3. Out and out

Complete; thoroughgoing

**Sentence:** He is an out-and-out capitalist.

### 4. To wash ones's dirty lines in public.

To discuss private or embarrassing matters in public, especially when quarreling.

**Sentence:** They are arguing again. Why must they always air their dirty linen in public?

### 5. To Pay through the nose

To pay too much for something.

**Sentence:** If you bring a car into the city, you have to pay through the nose for parking it.

### 6. To lose face

To lose status; to become less respectable.

**Sentence:** John is more afraid of losing face than losing money.



## 2014

### 1. To bring grist to the mill

Something that you can use in order to help you to succeed.

**Sentence:** As an actor, all experience is grist to the mill.

### 2. To keep one's fingers crossed

To wish for luck for someone or something,

**Sentence:** I hope you win the race Saturday. I'm keeping my fingers crossed for you.

### 3. With one's tongue in one's cheek

If you say something tongue in cheek, what you have said is a joke, although it might seem to be serious.

**Sentence:** And we all know what a passionate love life I have!' he said, tongue in cheek.

### 4. A storm in the teacup

A situation where people get very angry or worried about something that is not important.

**Sentence:** I think it's all a storm in a teacup - there's probably no danger to public health at all.

### 5. To talk through one's hat

To be talking about a subject as if you know a lot about it when in fact you know very little.

**Sentence:** The man's talking through his hat. He doesn't know the first thing about banking.

### 6. Hum and hew

To pause a lot and avoid saying something directly.

**Sentence:** When asked what kind of woman he was looking for, he hemmed and hawed and finally admitted he was looking for a party girl.

### 7. Let the grass grow under one's feet

To waste time by delaying doing something.

**Sentence:** We can't let the grass grow under our feet - we've really got to get going with this project.

### 8. Penny wise and pound foolish

Unwise because doing something small now would prevent much more trouble later.

**Sentence:** Education budget cuts are penny wise and pound foolish – public education is an investment in our future.