

COLLINS

Dictionary of English Idioms

Michael J. Wallace



Over 3000 common idioms
Recommended for learners of English

Dictionary of English Idioms

For Eileen and Brendan

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Introduction

About the dictionary

In this dictionary you will find clearly explained the meanings of over 3000 common English idioms. To make the meaning even clearer, each idiom has an example sentence, which also helps to show you how the idiom can be used.

With any dictionary of idioms there is always a problem of selecting what will go into such a dictionary, since there is a sense in which all language is idiomatic. By this we mean that certain words tend to be used together more often, or more naturally, than others.

In this dictionary, the emphasis is on true idioms, i.e. expressions whose meanings cannot be easily worked out from the words they contain. When it comes to understanding English it is these expressions which cause most difficulty to the foreign learner. An example of a true idiom is the expression *let the cat out of the bag* in the sentence: "In spite of all our warnings, Helen started chatting to John and let the cat out of the bag." The real meaning of this sentence has nothing to do with a cat or a bag in the usual sense of those words: it means that Helen revealed something to John that was supposed to be kept secret from him. Not all idioms, of course, are so difficult to work out.

There are great variations in the way that idioms are used: many of the variations are to be found in this dictionary. The main emphasis, however, is on the *understanding of the meaning* of idioms, rather than attempting to be a complete guide to idiomatic usage: an attempt which would certainly have made the dictionary more complicated to use, without any guarantee of success on the part of the user.

More informal expressions and those which might be impolite in use have been marked.

Many people confuse idioms with slang and colloquial language. Slang and colloquial language are both informal kinds of speech. Slang is language which is typical of one particular group of people: young people, for example, often use slang expressions which would sound odd or affected if used by an older person. Colloquial expressions can be used by anyone, but not usually in formal situations. One of the famous remarks attributed to the former British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan is "You have never had it so good," i.e. Britain has never been as rich, prosperous as it is now. Probably this remark made such an impression because it was a colloquial expression used by a Prime Minister speaking on a formal occasion.

There is a very large number of idioms which are not slang or colloquial; and not all slang or colloquial language consists of idioms: very often it consists of single words (e.g. the slang word *fuzz* meaning "police", etc.). This dictionary includes slang and colloquial language only in the *idioms* which are in common use.

Valuable space has been saved for true idioms useful to the foreign learner by excluding the following items:

- (a) the meanings of single words;

- (b) obsolete or archaic (i.e. out-of-date and old-fashioned) expressions;
- (c) information about the history and derivation of idioms;
- (d) foreign expressions (e.g. expressions in French or Latin);
- (e) idiomatic expressions, the meanings of which are obvious.

There is also no attempt to deal systematically with multi-word verbs which are best treated separately (see, for example, Tom McArthur and Beryl Atkins: *Dictionary of English Phrasal Verbs and their Idioms*, Collins, 1974). However, idioms based on multi-word verbs are included (e.g. *have it out (with someone)*; *come off it*, etc.)

How to use the dictionary

Idioms are listed according to the first word of the idiom (the "key-word"), so *ace in the hole* is listed under *ace* and *after one's own heart* is listed under *after*.

To help you further, many idioms are also cross-referred. So if you happen to check *pull the wool over someone's eyes* under *wool*, the dictionary will cross-refer you to *pull*, so that you will still find the idiom you are looking for.

Under each key-word the idioms are listed in strict alphabetical order: so *across the board* comes before *across the way*, etc. Please note that the following do not count for alphabetical listing:

1. pronouns like *one*, *someone* and *something*, which are used to stand for any noun or pronoun;
2. any word or phrase which is printed inside brackets.

Sometimes when there is more than one form of an idiom it is shown like this:

mind/watch one's p's and q's

This means that you may sometimes see a sentence like *You'll have to watch your p's and q's* or you may see *You'll have to mind your p's and q's*.

When a word or phrase is very often used with an idiom, but not always, it is put in brackets; so in the idiom *by no (manner of) means*, the words *(manner of)* are put in brackets to show that they can be left out.

Brackets are also used to make a cross-reference clearer and more meaningful. For example, if someone checks up the idiom *have a word with* under *word* instead of *have*, he will find this:

(have a) word with [See HAVE A WORD WITH.]

American usage is indicated by the letters US, thus: **touch wood** (US **knock on wood**).

Thanks

I should like to thank my editor, Gordon Jarvie, for initiating this book, and for his patience and helpfulness with the work as it proceeded. I should also like to thank Kathleen McGeorge for her meticulous typing, and the many helpful suggestions she made.

A

ABC. [See AS EASY/SIMPLE AS ABC; THE ABC OF SOMETHING.]

ABOUT. (fall) **about/around one's ears** (come to be) in a state of complete chaos or destruction. *George has been planning the exhibition for months but, because of the workmen's strike, the whole thing has fallen about his ears.*

about time (used to express the idea that something should have already happened). *It's about time Henry cleaned his car – see how dirty it is! "Jack has returned this book." – "And about time, too: he borrowed it six months ago."*

ABOVE. **above board** fair, lawful, honest. *They say that he accepts bribes but I have always found him to be honest and above board.*

above water [See (KEEP ONE'S) HEAD ABOVE WATER.]

ACCOUNTING. (there's no) **accounting for taste(s)** (there is no way of) explaining why certain people like certain things (especially in art, design, books, etc.). *John has painted all the rooms in his house bright yellow: it just proves that there's no accounting for taste.*

ACE. **ace in the hole** advantage which other people (especially enemies or competitors) do not know about which can be revealed at the right time to get what one wants. *The defence lawyer had a photograph which showed that his client was overseas when the crime had been committed: it was his ace in the hole.*

(within an) **ace of** [See WITHIN AN ACE OF.]

(have/keep an) **ace up one's sleeve** [See under UP ONE'S SLEEVE.]

ACHILLES. **Achilles' heel** weak point. *John started off as a prosperous businessman but was soon heavily in debt: a love of gambling was his Achilles' heel.*

ACQUIRED. (an) **acquired taste** (a) liking for something which comes only after trying it for some time. *Some people do not like dry wine at first: for them it is an acquired taste.*

ACROSS. **across the board** completely, without exception. *The wages of everyone in the factory were raised by ten percent across the board.*

across the way on the opposite side of a street, etc. *We always invite the people across the way in for a drink on Saturday evening.*

ACT. **act/be one's age** behave responsibly, sensibly. *Don't behave in that childish way: act your age!*

act a part pretend to be someone or something one is not. *I don't think that John is ill at all: he is just acting a part.*

ADD. **add insult to injury** offend someone still further; treat someone badly for a second time. *"We shall never invite the Smiths to dinner again. – First, they turned up late and then, to add insult to injury, they criticised the food!"*

ADDLE. **addle someone's wits** cause someone to behave in a stupid way. *Being alone in the house so much seems to have addled my wits: I keep making the most stupid mistakes.*

AFTER. **after a fashion** not perfectly or completely. *"Has the new secretary typed the report?" - "Well, after a fashion: I'll have to have some parts typed again."*

after all's said and done [See WHEN ALL'S SAID AND DONE.]

after someone's blood anxious to punish, quarrel with someone. *Mary is after your blood because you didn't keep your appointment with her.*

after one's own heart with the same tastes and interests as oneself. *My new neighbour is a man after my own heart: he also likes walking and fishing, so we often go away at the weekend together.*

AGAIN. **again and again/time and (time) again** repeatedly, many times. *I've told these children again and again not to play football near the main road.*

AGAINST. **against the clock** [See AGAINST TIME.]

(go) against the grain (be) different from the way in which one normally acts or would like to act. *I'm afraid I'll have to speak firmly to Miss Jones for coming in late, although it goes against the grain.*

against time/the clock up to a certain time, within a limited amount of time (by which something must be done or finished). *We were working against time: the job had to be finished by midnight.* Also

(a) fight/race against time (a) determined effort to get something finished within a limited period of time. *Saving the patient's life was a race against time: he had only three hours to live.* Also **(to) fight/race against time** (to) try to get something finished within a limited period of time. *The doctors are fighting against time to save the patient's life.*

against one's will unwillingly, not wanting to do something. *Students should never be forced to study a subject against their will.*

AGOG. [See ALL AGOG.]

AHEAD. **(be) ahead of the game** (be) in a situation where one has made more progress than one expected. *I've finished all the work for today, and I've actually done some of the jobs for tomorrow: it's nice to be ahead of the game for a change.*

ahead of time before the time expected, or planned. *He must have arrived ahead of time: he was not expected until this evening.*

ahead of one's time [See BEFORE ONE'S TIME.]

AIR. **air a/one's grievance(s)** complain about something that is annoying or bothering one. *The factory manager called a meeting of all the workers, so that they would have a chance to air their grievances.*

ALIVE. **alive and kicking** (informal) alive and in good health. *I was glad to hear that your grandmother is still alive and kicking.*

alive with crowded, packed with. *When the winning team returned to their hotel, they discovered that it was alive with reporters.*

ALL. **all agog (with excitement)** excited, very interested. *When they discovered that a famous film star was in town, the children were all agog with excitement.*

all along during all that time. *We thought he was our friend, but he was betraying us all along.*

all/right along/down the line completely, in every respect. *The speaker defended the government's policies all along the line.*

all and sundry everyone, without making a choice. *The Smiths invite all and sundry to their parties, i.e. anyone who is available.*

all but almost, nearly. *I thought he was lying, and I all but told him so.*

all day/night long for the whole day/night. *The rescuers worked all night long to save the trapped miners.*

all ears listening with great attention. *He was all ears when he heard his name being mentioned by the woman at the next table.*

all ends up totally, completely. *In the championship fight, the defending champion was beaten all ends up by the young contender.*

all fingers and thumbs [See FINGERS ARE ALL THUMBS.]

(be) all for the best [See FOR THE BEST.]

all found (with reference to payment) with all the necessary things (e.g. food and accommodation) added on. *His army pay was twelve pounds a week all found, i.e. he did not have to pay for his accommodation, meals, heating, etc.*

all grist to the/one's mill [See GRIST TO THE/ONE'S MILL.]

all hell breaks/is let loose (informal) there is great confusion or anger. *When the passengers discovered that the plane had been delayed by another ten hours, all hell broke loose, i.e. there were very angry scenes.*

all hours very late. *When I was younger I could stay up to all hours without feeling tired.*

all in exhausted, very tired. *After a day's teaching, I go home feeling all in*

all in all taking everything into consideration. *Some people don't like Jim as a boss but, all in all, I think he does a good job.*

all my eye (informal) complete nonsense; completely untrue. *John's excuse for being late was that his car broke down: I think that is all my eye – he probably just overslept!* [See also MY EYE!]

all of a flutter (informal) excited; anxious. *She's all of a flutter because her husband's boss is coming to dinner.*

all of a heap [See STRIKE ALL OF A HEAP.]

all of a piece all of the same kind; consistent. *John's views on this matter are all of a piece with the views he has expressed before.*

all of a sudden (informal) quickly, without warning. *All of a sudden the door swung open and the girls screamed with fright.*

all one just the same. *It is all one to me whether he stays or goes, i.e. I don't care.*

all out (with reference to cricket) with no more batsmen left to play. *The home team was all out for 27 runs.*

(go) all out (try) with all one's effort or strength. *Our team is going*

all out to win the championship. Also all-out very determined. We are going to make an all-out effort.

all over 1. finished (often in the sense that something is hopeless, nothing more can be done). *The firemen tried to fight the blaze, but by midnight it was all over: the house was completely burnt down.* 2. in every respect (as a person). *That is John all over: he always gives you help when you need it, i.e. that is the sort of person he is.* 3. everywhere (in). *This kind of tree is found all over Europe.* 4. (with reference to sport) much better than; beating (one's opponent) easily. *In the second half our team was all over the visiting team.*

all over bar/but the shouting finished, or almost finished (often used when the end of something can be predicted). *When we saw Jack's wonderful performance in the early rounds, we knew the contest was all over bar the shouting: he was certain to win.*

(be) all over someone [See under FALL ALL OVER SOMEONE.]

(fall) all over someone [See FALL ALL OVER SOMEONE.]

all over the place/shop (informal) everywhere (often used to suggest untidiness or disorder). *When you go into Frank's study, you will find his books all over the place. It is a big company: it has branches all over the shop.*

all pins and needles [See PINS AND NEEDLES.]

all's fair in love and war in situations where there are strong feelings the ordinary rules of behaviour or morality do not apply. *Mary should not have gone out with her sister's boyfriend, but all's fair in love and war, I suppose.*

all square 1. (with reference to sports and games) even; having the same score. *After fifty minutes' play, the teams were still all square.* 2. (often with reference to money) with nothing more to be settled. *If you give me £5, we shall be all square, i.e. neither of us will be in debt to the other.*

all the best (I wish you) good luck. *His former colleagues wished him all the best in his new job.* - -

all the better the situation is improved or better than it was. *"Bill says he can't come." - "All the better, it will give more room in the car."*

all the dodges [See UP TO ALL THE DODGES.]

all the go/rage (informal) fashionable. *It was that time in the sixties when mini-skirts were all the go.*

all there sane, completely sensible. *That old man is behaving strangely - do you think he is all there?*

(be) all the same 1. (make) no difference. *Do what you like - it's all the same to me, i.e. I don't care.* 2. nevertheless. *I know he's very strict but, all the same, he's also very efficient.*

all the time 1. during that period (often used to show contrast). *He said he loved her and all the time he was going out with someone else.* 2. continuously. *I wish he would stop whistling: he does it all the time.*

all the way completely. *If you want to try some new ideas, I'm with you all the way, i.e. I support you completely.*

all thumbs very clumsy (with one's hands). *"Could you fix this brooch for me? I seem to be all thumbs today."*

all told with everyone (or everything) included. *There were twenty people in the boat, all told.*

all to the good [See TO THE GOOD.]

(be) all up with (be) finished, destroyed; be the end for. *This scandal means that it is all up with Jim: he will never be allowed to practise law again, i.e. his career is destroyed.*

(be) all very well (be) suitable, convenient for someone else (used to show that one is not happy with a situation). *It's all very well for Bob to say he can't come, but what about the rest of us? i.e. it is convenient for him but not for us.*

all water under the bridge [See WATER UNDER THE BRIDGE.]

ALONG. **along for the ride** (informal) not taking any active part. *Don't expect Mary to do anything – she's just along for the ride.*

along the line [See ALL ALONG/DOWN THE LINE.]

ANCIENT. **ancient history** (informal) something that everyone knows; something which does not affect the present situation. *I was quite a good singer when I was younger, but that's all ancient history now.*

AND. **and I don't think** [See I DON'T THINK.]

and no mistake (informal) really, truly (used for emphasis). *John spoke out about our problems and no mistake!*

and that's for sure [See under FOR SURE.]

and then some (informal) and more as well (used for emphasis). *He's the hardest working person in the department, and then some, i.e. he is easily the hardest working person.*

ANOTHER. **another string to one's bow** [See under TWO STRINGS TO ONE'S BOW.]

ANSWER. **answer back** (often with reference to children) reply in an insolent way. *When we were young, we never dared to answer back to our parents.*

answer one's purpose(s) [See under SERVE ITS/ONE'S/THE PURPOSE.]

ANSWERABLE. **(be) answerable for** (be) responsible for. *If anything happens to this radio, you will be answerable for it.*

ANY. **any number** a large number. *You won't have any difficulty in selling your house: I'm sure that any number of people will want to buy it.*

ANYTHING. **anything but** not at all, not in the least. *He was anything but mean: in fact, he gave most of his money away to charity.*

APOLOGY. **apology for** (informal) very poor example of. *What I didn't like about the house was that it had an apology for a garden: it was so small that there was hardly any room for the children to play.*

APPLE. **apple of one's eye** person or thing that one loves greatly or most. *Her youngest son was the apple of her eye.*

(in) apple-pie order (in) a very neat and tidy condition. *We were*

pleased to see that the previous occupants had left the house in apple-pie order.

APPLY. **apply one's mind to** [See SET ONE'S MIND TO.]

AROUND. **(fall) around one's ears** [See ABOUT ONE'S EARS.]

(all) around/round the clock all the time; day and night without interruption. *Doctors attended the sick President around the clock.*

(just) around the corner coming soon; about to happen. *The politician told the meeting that prosperity was just around the corner.*

ARRIVE. **arrive at the truth** find out what actually happened. *Even after long investigation, the police never arrived at the truth.*

AS. **as a rule** normally, usually. *As a rule, he was always home by seven p.m.*

as black as thunder furious, angry. *When the manager found out that the money had been stolen, he looked as black as thunder.* [See also FACE LIKE THUNDER/LOOK LIKE THUNDER.]

as easy/simple as ABC very easy. *You will quickly learn how to use this machine: it's as simple as ABC.*

as good as almost; nearly. *When the search-party found him, he was as good as dead from hunger and exposure.*

as good as one's word faithful to one's promises. *He said he would be there by midnight, and he was as good as his word, i.e. he kept his promise.*

as it were (used in making comparisons) in a way; one might say. *Everyone loved the President: he was, as it were, a father to his people.*

as large as life (used with reference to people one does not expect to see) really present. *I thought that Jack was in America, but last night I saw him in London, as large as life.*

as luck would have it as decided by chance (luckily or unluckily). *I was ten minutes late for school and, as luck would have it, the headmaster was standing at the entrance.*

as nutty as a fruitcake [See NUTTY AS A FRUITCAKE.]

as of from a certain date. *The price for admission doubled as of yesterday.*

as regular as clockwork [See REGULAR AS CLOCKWORK.]

as simple as ABC [See AS EASY/SIMPLE AS ABC.]

as soon as/when/whenever someone's back is turned as soon as/when/whenever someone is not looking, or not present. *That class is very difficult to control; as soon as your back is turned they start misbehaving.*

as the case may/might be whichever is correct in this particular situation. *You will be given back the money you paid for a hotel or for lodgings, as the case may be.*

as the crow flies directly, not allowing for changes in direction. *The distance between the two villages is only ten miles as the crow flies, but it is over twice that distance by road because of the river between.*

as the saying goes (usually used to introduce a saying or proverb). *I was going to argue, but as the saying goes, "Least said, soonest*

mended", i.e. quarrels are made up more quickly if people involved say little.

as thick as thieves (informal) very friendly. *Jack and Jim were always quarrelling until recently, but now they are as thick as thieves.*

as to with regard to; on the matter of. *He didn't say anything as to his future intentions. As to your essay, we shall speak about that later.*

as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb one might as well be blamed or punished for a serious matter as for a less important one, if the punishment is going to be the same anyway. *Since she was already disobeying her parents by going out with Jim, Mary decided to go to the dance with him, on the grounds that one might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb, i.e. she had been forbidden to do either.*

as white as a sheet [See WHITE AS A SHEET.]

as yet until now; so far. *We are waiting patiently, but we have not received any news from him as yet.*

ASK. ask for it/trouble (informal) do something that deserves punishment or blame. *You're really asking for it if you come in late again. All right, you asked for it, i.e. you deserve the punishment, etc. you are going to receive.* [See also LOOK FOR TROUBLE.]

ask/cry for the moon request something which is clearly impossible to give. *When I requested breakfast in bed, the receptionist looked at me as if I was asking for the moon.*

AT. at a blow/single stroke/one stroke quickly, with one action. *The politician promised that prices would be reduced at a stroke if he were returned to power.*

at a distance [See KEEP SOMEONE AT A DISTANCE/AT ARM'S LENGTH.]

at all costs without fail, no matter what sacrifice has to be made. *You must at all costs get a visa: otherwise you will not be allowed to land in the country.*

at all events [See IN ANY CASE/EVENT.]

at a loose end with nothing to do. *The match was cancelled, so we were at a loose end all afternoon.*

at a loss not knowing what to say or do. *When Mary was accused of stealing, she was at a loss for words, i.e. she did not know what to say.*

at any rate nevertheless; at least. *I know he failed: but, at any rate, he did his best, i.e. at least he tried hard.*

at a pinch if necessary; if there is no alternative. *At a pinch, you can always try to make a fire by rubbing two sticks together.*

at arm's length [See KEEP SOMEONE AT A DISTANCE/AT ARM'S LENGTH.]

at a standstill not moving; not working. *Most of the traffic was at a standstill because of the accident.*

at a stretch 1. continuously, without interruption. *Jim had marvellous powers of concentration: he could study for six hours at a stretch.*
2. by making a special effort; with difficulty. *We can accommodate two more people at a stretch, but certainly no more than that.*

at a stroke [See AT A BLOW.]

at bay in a desperate situation where one cannot retreat further. *The criminals were at bay, and willing to take any risk.*

(be) at someone's beck and call (be) in a position where one has to obey someone's commands. *He seems to think that all I have to do is be at his beck and call all day.*

at (the) best according to the best result that one can imagine. *I think that I might sell my old car for around £500 – perhaps £550, at best.*

at close quarters from only a short distance away. *I've never seen a lion at close quarters before.*

at cross purposes in a situation where two or more people each misunderstand what the other is saying or doing. *When Mr. Smith answered the phone, I thought he was Mr. Brown, so we talked at cross purposes for about ten minutes.*

at daggers drawn very unfriendly; hostile. *Jones and I have been at daggers drawn ever since I accidentally damaged his car.*

at death's door seriously ill; about to die. *When I heard that Jim was at death's door, I immediately rushed to see him.*

at ease/at one's ease in a relaxed state, not rushing or working. *We'll leave you free this afternoon, so you can explore the village at your ease. The sergeant told his men to stand at ease, i.e. not to attention.*

at every turn all the time; in everything one attempts to do. *When I started my career I met difficulties at every turn.*

at fault to blame. *We shall have to find out who is at fault in this matter.*

at one's feet ready to serve one or be used by one; at one's disposal. *After his successful book, the world was at his feet. i.e. he could do anything he wanted.*

at one's fingertips within one's abilities; easily done. *He has an amazing number of skills at his fingertips, i.e. he is capable of doing an amazing number of things.*

at first blush/glance/sight going by one's first impressions. *At first glance the offer seemed most attractive, but we later found some drawbacks.*

at full tilt [See FULL TILT.]

at heart according to what one really feels or believes. *He may appear a bit rude, but at heart he is a very kind man. Your father is strict with you, but he has your best interests at heart, i.e. he really wants what is good for you.*

at one's heels (with reference to a person who is being followed or pursued) very close, near. *He had to leave very quickly because the police were at his heels.*

at issue in dispute; to be decided on. *I wish he would stick to the point at issue, and not go on talking about irrelevant things.*

(hard) at it working (hard) at something; doing something. *The building is almost complete: the workmen have been hard at it since early this morning.*

at large 1. including a number of topics, people, etc. without distinction. *He has been telling his troubles to the world at large, i.e. to anyone who will listen. He talked at large on the problems of mankind, i.e. he talked at length on a large number of problems affecting people gener-*

ally. 2. free, not under control. *They say there's a wild animal at large.*
at length 1. for a long time. *We discussed the problem at great length before making a decision.* 2. eventually. *We waited for hours, but at length they arrived.*

at liberty free. *You are at liberty to come or go, as you please.*

at loggerheads in dispute; quarrelling. *They are at loggerheads on the problem of where the students' cars should be parked.*

at odds in a state of disagreement; in dispute. *The two lecturers were at odds over the best way of teaching the students.*

at/in one fell swoop all at once; with one action. *At one fell swoop, he had taken his revenge on his enemies and also made himself rich.*

at one's own sweet will (informal) doing what one wishes; doing something in the way that one wishes. *You are completely free to do the job at your own sweet will.*

at one's post ready, where one is supposed to be. *When the general comes, make sure everyone is at his post.*

at random by chance; without making a deliberate choice. *They chose the committee members by picking some names at random from a list.*

at sea 1. in a ship; in the navy; on the sea. *They were at sea for five months before they saw land again. The ship is still at sea: it will be coming into dock on Saturday.* 2. confused. *After the professor's lecture, we were (all) at sea: we had no idea (at all) of what he had been talking about.*

at short notice with little warning; with only a short time to do something. *The students had to prepare for the examination at very short notice.*

at sixes and sevens (informal) confused; muddled. *When we heard that the office was to be inspected, we were all at sixes and sevens: we could not agree on what to do about it.*

at that even taking that into consideration (often used in criticising someone or something). *He is not a manager: he is only a trainee, and a very poor one at that, i.e. even for someone being trained he is not good.*

at the bottom of responsible for something (especially something secret or criminal, etc.). *"There has been a lot of theft in the village recently – I wonder who's at the bottom of it?"*

at the drop of a hat immediately; willingly; without preparation. *If you ask him to sing, he'll do it at the drop of a hat.*

at the eleventh hour when it is almost too late. *The condemned man was pardoned at the eleventh hour, just as he was about to be executed.* Also **eleventh hour** almost too late: *an eleventh hour pardon.*

at the most according to the highest estimate. *I should say there were about 1500 people present, or 2000 at the most.*

at the stroke of [See ON THE STROKE OF.]

at this point in time now. *The Ministry official says it is impossible to make a statement at this point in time.*

at this/that stage of the game at this/that point (of some enterprise or development). *You must make the right decisions at this stage of the game or you will regret it later.*

at variance (with) different (from). *The information you have given is at variance with what I have been told by other people.*

at will whenever one wants to. *The sergeant gave the command for the soldiers to fire at will.*

at one's wits' end in a state where one does not know what to do. *I shall have to find some money to pay my rent on Friday: I'm almost at my wits' end.*

at (the) worst according to the worst result that one can imagine. *It's not a serious offence: he'll probably just get a warning or, at worst, a light fine.* [See also AT BEST.]

ATTAIN. **attain one's majority** become twenty-one years of age. *When he attains his majority next year he can do what he likes.*

ATTITUDE. **attitude of mind** way of thinking or feeling. *If he wants to succeed, he has got the wrong attitude of mind: he will have to be more willing to work hard.*

AUNT. **Aunt Sally** someone or something that is always being blamed, criticised. *Education is the Aunt Sally of modern civilisation: whenever young people do something wrong, it is blamed on the schools.*

AVENUE. [See LEAVE NO AVENUE UNEXPLORED.]

AXE. **axe to grind** 1. something (especially a belief or personal problem) which one always brings into conversations or discussions. *I think you'll find it quite relaxing to talk to Jones: he has no particular axe to grind.* 2. selfish, secret purpose. *When you are looking for advice, try to find someone who doesn't have an axe to grind.*

B

BACK. **back and forth** between two places or positions. *He travels back and forth to the United States at least once a week.*

(put one's) back into it [See PUT ONE'S BACK INTO (IT).]

(someone's) back is turned [See AS SOON AS SOMEONE'S BACK IS TURNED.]

(the) back of beyond very remote place, far from civilisation. *He used to live in London, but now he lives somewhere in the country, in the back of beyond.*

back on his/her, etc. heels [See SET SOMEONE/SOMETHING BACK ON HIS/HER, ETC. HEELS.]

back seat [See TAKE A BACK SEAT.]

back seat driver 1. passenger in a car who is always giving advice to the driver. *I hate taking my mother-in-law out for a trip: she is the most terrible back-seat driver.* 2. anyone who gives advice on, or interferes in, other people's business. *Don't be a back seat driver: this matter has nothing to do with you.*

back to square one back to the situation at which one started. *He*

made a fortune in oil, but gambled it all away, so it was back to square one for him.

back to/against the wall [See HAVE ONE'S BACK TO/AGAINST THE WALL.]

BACKHANDED. **backhanded compliment** statement about something, which can be understood either in a good or in a bad sense. *The travel agent said that the wonderful thing about London was that it was so easy to get out of, which seemed to me to be a rather backhanded compliment, i.e. he could have been praising London's travel system or saying that it was a place one would be glad to leave.*

BACKWARD. **backward at/in coming forward** (informal) shy; not wishing to draw attention to oneself. *You must encourage Jim to speak up at our meetings: he's a bit backward in coming forward.*

BAD. **bad blood** unfriendly feelings. *There has been bad blood between those two families for generations.*

bad egg (informal) evil person. *I would never trust Brown: he's a bad egg.*

(in) bad faith (in a) dishonest state of mind. *We think that the dealer who sold us that car was acting in bad faith, i.e. he intended to cheat us.*

bad/poor form rude; impolite; something one should not do. *He should not have kept his guests waiting: it's very bad form.*

bad grace [See WITH (A) BAD GRACE.]

(hit a) bad patch (have a) difficult time; period of bad luck. *I had to lend Bill some money: he's hit a bad patch recently.* [See also (HIT A) GOOD PATCH.]

bad taste in one's mouth [See LEAVE A BAD TASTE IN ONE'S MOUTH.]

bad turn [See TAKE A BAD TURN.]

BAG. **bag and baggage** with all one's possessions. *He didn't pay his rent, so he was thrown out, bag and baggage.*

(whole) bag of tricks everything; with nothing omitted. *When he put the contents of his house up for sale, one man bought the whole bag of tricks, every single thing.*

BALL. **ball of fire** person with great energy. *The new manager will soon get the business going again: he's a real ball of fire.*

BALLOON. **(the) balloon goes up** time of crisis, action, danger, etc. occurs. *The officer told us to remain fully dressed so that we would be ready for action when the balloon went up.*

BANG. **bang one's head against a (brick) wall** try to do something which is impossible. *Don't try to persuade him - you'll just be banging your head against a brick wall: he'll never change.*

bang on time (informal) very punctual; exactly on time. *We thought that Jack might be late, but he was bang on time.*

BAR. **bar the door (to)** keep out. *The club decided to bar the door to anyone who did not live locally.*

bar the shouting [See ALL OVER BAR/BUT THE SHOUTING.]

BARK. **bark up the wrong tree** be mistaken; have the wrong idea. *If you think that I was responsible, then you are barking up the wrong tree: I am completely innocent.*

bark worse than one's bite what one says makes one sound more frightening than one really is. *Don't be put off by what my father says: his bark is worse than his bite, and he is quite a kindly man, really.*

BASH. **bash one's head against a (brick) wall** [See BANG ONE'S HEAD AGAINST A (BRICK) WALL.]

BAT. (not) **bat an eye/eyelash/eyelid** (usually with negative) (not) show any sign of emotion. *When I told him that his wife had decided to leave him, he didn't bat an eyelid.*

bat out of hell [See LIKE A BAT OUT OF HELL.]

BE. **be a devil** (informal and humorous) be bold, brave. *"My mother would be furious if she found out that I'd smoked a cigarette." - "Go on! Be a devil!"* i.e. be brave enough to go against your mother's wishes.

be one's age [See ACT ONE'S AGE.]

be all over someone [See FALL ALL OVER SOMEONE.]

be an angel (informal: used by women) please be kind, helpful. *"Be an angel and help me with this heavy case, will you?" she said.*

(not) **be one's day** (informal: often with negative) (not) be a lucky, or successful day. *This has not been my day: my car broke down twice, and then I discovered that I'd mislaid my house-key.*

be down on someone like a ton of bricks [See COME DOWN ON SOMEONE LIKE A TON OF BRICKS.]

be in a scrape [See GET INTO A SCRAPE.]

be of age [See COME OF AGE.]

BEANS. [See KNOW HOW MANY BEANS MAKE FIVE.]

BEAR. **bear/keep in mind someone/something** remember someone/something. *Keep in mind that you must be back home by nine o'clock.* Also **bear/keep someone/something in mind** (same meaning).

bear malice/a grudge (against someone) dislike someone because of something that has happened in the past. *I once beat him in a competition and he's borne a grudge against me ever since.* Also **bear someone malice/a grudge** (same meaning).

bear witness give proof of; confirm. *I did my best for him, and you can bear witness to that.*

BEARING. (no) **bearing on** (often with negative) (nothing) to do with. *What you are saying has no bearing on the discussion, i.e. it is irrelevant. They have discovered something which may have a bearing on your research, i.e. it may be connected with your research.*

BEAT. **beat about/around the bush** not say directly what one means; avoid mentioning what one is really concerned with. *Stop beating about the bush: tell me directly why you have come to see me.*
beat hollow (informal) defeat completely. *We thought it would be a close match, but, in fact, the challenger was beaten hollow.*

beat a (hasty/swift) retreat leave hurriedly. *When he saw that his former girl-friend was at the party, he beat a swift retreat.*

beat one's head against a wall [See BANG ONE'S HEAD AGAINST A WALL.]

beat into a cocked hat [See KNOCK INTO A COCKED HAT.]

beat it/hop it! (informal) go away. *"Beat it - we have private things to talk about!"* [See also CAN YOU BEAT IT.]

beat the (living) daylights out of (informal) beat up; hit, punch, etc. *"I'm warning you: if you come here again, I'll beat the living daylights out of you."*

beat time do something that shows that one is keeping time with the rhythm of music. *The teacher played the tune, while the children beat time with their pencils on the desks.*

beat to the draw 1. (usually with reference to cowboys) pull one's gun out faster than one's enemy. *The new sheriff kept law and order because no-one could beat him to the draw.* 2. (informal) do something before one's competitors, rivals, etc. *They thought that they would get to the house first, but we beat them to the draw.*

BECK. [See AT SOMEONE'S BECK AND CALL.]

BED. bed and board (usually with reference to a guest-house or hotel) room to sleep in and food. *It used to cost only a few pounds a night for bed and board.*

(not a) bed of roses (often with negative) (not a) pleasant, easy situation. *We had a terrible struggle to survive when we were young: life certainly wasn't a bed of roses then.*

BEE. bee in one's bonnet (informal) idea that dominates one's thoughts and actions; something one is always thinking or talking about. *He runs for ten miles every day: he has a bee in his bonnet about physical fitness.*

bee's knees (informal) marvellous; wonderful. *She is so proud of herself: she thinks that she's the bee's knees.*

BEEN. been and gone and done/said it (informal) (have) done/said something foolish or dangerous. *Now he's been and gone and done it: he's left his job, and I don't think he'll find another one.*

BEFORE. before one can say Jack Robinson (informal) very quickly. *I mentioned to the boys that there was a bag of sweets on the table, and, before you could say Jack Robinson, they were all eaten.*

before one's time/ahead of one's time with very advanced and forward-looking ideas. *Although he lived a long time ago, it is only recently that many of Robert Owen's ideas have been accepted: he was really before his time.*

BEG. beg the question 1. in an argument, assume what one is trying to prove. *The reply given by the last speaker really begs the question.* 2. (informal) avoid answering a question directly. *I tried to find out where she had been all evening, but she managed to beg the question.*

(I) **beg to differ** (formal) (I) disagree. *You say it is impossible to have a classless society, but I beg to differ: I think it can be done.*

BEGGAR. **beggar description** be impossible to describe properly. *The scene at the reception was so impressive that it completely beggars description.*

BEGGARS. **beggars can't be choosers** people who are asking for help should not decide what form the help has to take. *The people made homeless by the floods will have to take whatever accommodation is offered to them: beggars can't be choosers.*

BEHIND. **behind someone's back** secretly; without someone knowing. *"Don't trust him: he will be pleasant to you face-to-face, and then criticise you behind your back."*

behind bars in prison. *The criminal spent twenty years behind bars.*

behind closed doors in secrecy. *We don't know what they are planning: all the meetings have taken place behind closed doors.*

(dry) **behind the ears** [See DRY BEHIND THE EARS.]

behind the scenes not in public view. *The chairman thanked especially all those people who had worked behind the scenes to make the party a success.*

behind the times old-fashioned; out-of-date. *We shall have to introduce some new methods: we are very much behind the times.*

BELIEVE. (not) **believe one's ears/eyes** (usually with negative) (not) accept what one hears/sees as true. *I could hardly believe my ears when I heard that he had married again.*

BELOW. **below/beneath/under one's breath** (said) quietly, so that no-one can hear. *When the workman was told the small amount that he was to be paid, he muttered something below his breath.*

below par 1. not quite well; not up to the usual standard. *I haven't been able to do much work today: I've been feeling a little bit below par.* Also **up to par** up to the usual standard. *They said that Jack might not play so well today, but he has been up to par so far.* 2. (with reference to stocks or shares) below the face value. [See also ON A PAR WITH.]

below the belt unfair. *I think that dismissing Jones from his job when he was ill was a bit below the belt.*

BEND. **bend over backwards** [See FALL OVER BACKWARDS.]

BENEATH. **beneath one's breath** [See BELOW ONE'S BREATH.]

beneath contempt very low and contemptible; disgraceful. *Anyone who steals money from a friend is beneath contempt.*

BENEFIT. [See GIVE SOMEONE THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT.]

BENT. **bent on/upon** anxious, determined (to do something). *He takes up one dangerous sport after another: he seems bent on self-destruction, i.e. he seems to want to kill himself.*

BESIDE. **beside oneself** very excited, angry, worried, etc. *When Jack discovered that his new car had been damaged, he was beside himself with rage, i.e. extremely angry.*

beside the point nothing to do with the subject being discussed; irrelevant. *His comments were quite beside the point: the discussion was about wages, but he kept talking about prices.*

BEST. best bib and tucker (informal and rather old-fashioned) best clothes. *He turned up to the meeting in his best bib and tucker.*

best card [See PLAY ONE'S TRUMP/BEST CARD.]

best man man (usually a friend or relative) who helps the bridegroom in a wedding ceremony, by performing certain duties. *Jack was best man at his brother's wedding.*

best of a bad bargain [See MAKE THE BEST OF (A BAD BARGAIN/JOB).]

best of both worlds [See HAVE THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS.]

best of the bargain [See GET THE BEST OF THE BARGAIN.]

best thing since sliced bread (informal) very good; wonderful. *The new way of organising our holidays is the best thing since sliced bread; we think it's marvellous.*

BET. [See I'LL/TD BET YOU MY BOTTOM DOLLAR; YOU BET (YOUR BOOTS/YOUR LIFE).]

BETTER. better late than never (phrase often used when someone arrives late for an appointment) it is better to be/arrive/happen late than not to arrive/happen at all. *The manager was not pleased when John turned up late, but all he said was, "Better late than never."*

(be) better off gain in some way (e.g. by being happier, wealthier, in a more convenient situation, etc.). *If your teeth are not good you would be better off going to a dentist now, rather than waiting until you have toothache.*

better part of valour [See DISCRETION IS THE BETTER PART OF VALOUR.]

BETWEEN. between ourselves/between you and me/between you, me and the bed-/gate-/lamp-post (expression used when something is being said in confidence, not to be repeated to others). *Between you and me, I think this matter has been very badly handled.*

between the devil and the deep blue sea having to choose between two alternatives, neither of which is good. *If the explorers went forward, they faced new dangers; if they went back, their mission had failed: they were between the devil and the deep blue sea.*

between two stools [See FALL BETWEEN TWO STOOLS.]

BEYOND. beyond belief unbelievable; incredible. *His behaviour is outrageous: some of the things he has done are beyond belief.*

beyond measure (formal) in a way that cannot be counted or measured. *My friends and I are grateful to you beyond measure for your kindness.*

beyond question [See WITHOUT QUESTION.]

beyond the bounds of outside. *Your behaviour has been beyond the bounds of what is acceptable, i.e. it is completely unacceptable.*

(put someone) beyond the pale (make someone) not acceptable in good or polite society. *Harry's rude behaviour at dinner last night was beyond the pale.*

BIB. [See BEST BIB AND TUCKER.]

BID. **bid fair** look as if it (one) is going to (do something). *This year's meeting bids fair to be the largest we've ever held.*

BIDE. **bide one's time** wait for suitable opportunity to do something. *We have decided not to start the expedition yet: we shall bide our time until the weather conditions are right.*

BIG. **big brother (is watching you)** (informal) someone in authority (is watching you). *You never get a chance to relax in this office: big brother is always watching you, i.e. the workers are always being supervised by someone.*

big cheese/shot/wheel/wig (informal) important person. *Make sure you keep friendly with that chap: he's a big shot in the Civil Service.*

big/large fish/frog in a small pond person who is important in a small organisation or community. *He has chosen to be a member of local government rather than national government: he prefers to be a big fish in a small pond.* [See also LITTLE FISH/FROG IN A BIG POND.]

big for one's boots [See TOO BIG FOR ONE'S BOOTS.]

big head (informal) person who is very conceited, proud. *I get tired listening to that big head talking: he is always boasting about the wonderful things he has done.*

(the) big time (informal) the highest, most successful level (of an occupation, especially in the entertainment world). *He started off as just a children's entertainer but he's in the big time now: he's made two films and appears regularly on T.V.* Also **big-time** highly successful: *a big-time entertainer.*

big top circus; travelling show. *He first became famous as an acrobat in the big top.*

BIRD. **(early) bird catches/gets the worm** [See EARLY BIRD CATCHES/GETS THE WORM.]

(a) bird in the hand (is worth two in the bush) something which one actually possesses is worth more than something else which is only promised or hoped for. *You should take the job you have been offered now, rather than wait for something better to turn up: a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.*

bird's-eye view broad survey of the main points of a situation, subject, etc.; summary. *In his first lecture, the professor gave the students a bird's eye view of the topic.*

BIRDS. **birds and bees** (informal) facts about sex and childbirth. *Many parents avoid telling their children about the birds and bees, because they find it too embarrassing.*

birds of a feather (flock together) people who have the same attitudes, interests, etc. (tend to meet together). *It's only natural that Martin, being lazy, should mix with the other lazy students: birds of a feather flock together.*

(kill two) birds with one stone [See KILL TWO BIRDS WITH ONE STONE.]

BIRTHDAY. [See IN ONE'S BIRTHDAY SUIT.]

BIT. **bit between one's teeth** [See TAKE THE BIT BETWEEN ONE'S TEETH.]

(a) **bit thick** (informal) (usually with reference to someone else's behaviour) difficult to accept or tolerate. *Bill has done hardly any work on this assignment, and now he has asked me to finish it for him: it's a bit thick.*

BITE. **bite/snap someone's head off** speak angrily to someone. *I was only asking you a question: there's no need to bite my head off.*

bite off more than one can chew attempt to do more than one is able to. *I'm trying to study for a degree while doing my normal work, and I'm afraid I may have bitten off more than I can chew.*

bite/kiss the dust (informal) 1. fail; end unsuccessfully. *It looks as if the plan to build a new college library has bitten the dust.* 2. die (violently). *There was some shooting and two men bit the dust.*

bite the hand that feeds one be ungrateful; turn against someone who has been helpful. *I started Jones off on his career and now that he is successful, he won't even speak to me: talk about biting the hand that feeds you! i.e. that is a good example of how ungrateful people can be.*

BITES [See TWO BITES AT THE CHERRY.]

BITTER. **bitter pill (to swallow)** an unpleasant fact (that has to be accepted). *Poor old Morgan: he has been dismissed to make room for a younger man - it's a bitter pill for him to swallow.*

BLACK. **black and blue** full of bruises. *His father lost his temper and beat the boy black and blue.*

(in) **black and white** 1. in print; in a newspaper, book, etc. *He refused to believe the news about the accident until he saw it in black and white.* 2. completely right or completely wrong. *There is no compromise with him: he sees every issue in terms of black and white.*

black as he/she etc. is painted [See NOT BE AS/SO BLACK AS HE/SHE IS PAINTED.]

black as thunder [See AS BLACK AS THUNDER.]

black/dirty look unfriendly look. *When he started eating an apple during the last act, he got some dirty looks from the other members of the audience.*

black sheep person who brings dishonour on his family or friends. *My Uncle Arthur was the black sheep of the family: he was always in some kind of trouble.*

BLANK. **blank cheque** permission to spend an unlimited amount of money. *When the millionaire was building his new house, he practically gave the architect a blank cheque.*

BLAZE. **blaze a trail** do something for the first time which others can imitate. *By using revolutionary new methods, the young engineer blazed a trail which others could follow.*

BLEW. **blew it** [See BLOW IT.]

BLIND. **blind alley** job which does not lead to promotion; any course of action which does not lead to a positive result. *I was in the job five years before I realised that it was just a blind alley. Thinking that the motive was robbery led the police up a blind alley; the crime had really been committed as an act of revenge.*

blind date occasion when a boy and a girl arrange to go out together without having met before; person one goes out with on such an occasion. *John wondered if his blind date would be an attractive girl.*

(turn a) blind eye to [See TURN A BLIND EYE TO.]

blind impulse sudden desire to do something for no special reason. *Acting on a blind impulse, he suddenly decided to run away from home.*

blind leading the blind people who do not know being guided or taught by others who are just as ignorant. *When Harry was teaching Tom to play tennis, it was a case of the blind leading the blind: they are both terrible at sports.*

blind side direction in which one cannot see, or in which it is difficult to see. *In this car it is easy to see to the right, but very difficult to see to the left: sometimes cyclists come up on my blind side, so I have to be very careful when turning left.*

blind with science deliberately confuse someone by using difficult technical words. *When I complained to the mechanic, he just blinded me with science, so that I had no idea of what he was talking about.*

BLOOD. **blood and thunder** violent action (in a film, book, etc.). *He enjoys watching some blood and thunder on television in the evenings.* Also a **blood-and-thunder movie**, etc.

blood is thicker than water one feels more for blood-relatives (e.g. brother, son, etc.) than others; one has certain duties to blood-relatives. *I appointed my brother Jack to the post: after all, blood is thicker than water.*

(one's) blood is up (one) is very angry. *Don't anger him: he becomes violent when his blood is up.*

blood out of a stone [See GET BLOOD OUT OF A STONE.]

(one's) blood runs cold (one) is very afraid. *As the boy listened to the old man's frightening tale, his blood ran cold.*

BLOT. **blot one's copy book** do something wrong or make a mistake which may be held against one later. *Jim has blotted his copy book by making that blunder: it may prevent him from being promoted.*

BLOW. **blow a fuse/a gasket/one's top/one's stack** (informal) become extremely angry. *When the boss finds out that Harry is late again, he'll blow a fuse.*

blow one's brains out kill oneself by shooting oneself in the head. *The unlucky gambler left the casino and blew his brains out.*

blow one's (own) horn/trumpet boast; praise oneself. *That chap is very boring: he's always blowing his own horn.*

blow hot and cold continually change one's mind about something, first being for it, then against it. *I don't know whether Joe is coming with us on the trip or not: he keeps blowing hot and cold about it.*

blow it (informal: usually past tense) lose an opportunity; handle a

situation badly. *He had a chance of making £20,000, but he blew it.*
blow the gaff (informal) reveal the facts/truth about something. *We were trying to keep the party for Jim as a surprise, but someone blew the gaff, and now Jim knows about it.*

BLUE. blue blood (of) noble birth. *The wealthy businessman was looking for a wife with blue blood in her veins, i.e. of aristocratic birth.*

blue-eyed boy favourite. *Ever since his class did so well in the exams, Mr. Smith has been the headmaster's blue-eyed boy, i.e. the headmaster has a very high opinion of him.*

blue in the face (do something until one is) completely exhausted. *You can argue until you are blue in the face, but I still won't believe what you say.*

blue moon [See ONCE IN A BLUE MOON.]

blue murder [See YELL BLUE MURDER.]

BLUES. (have) the blues (informal) (be in) a state of sadness or depression. *She's had the blues since her husband left her.*

BOB. Bob's your uncle (informal) everything is done, complete, satisfactory. *It's very easy to operate this machine: you simply push this button, and Bob's your uncle.*

BODY. body and soul together [See KEEP BODY AND SOUL TOGETHER.]

body blow severe blow. *Failing the examination was a body blow to his hopes of a successful academic career.*

BOILING. boiling point point where a person shows that he/she is excited, very angry, etc. *As one thing after another went wrong, his temper reached boiling point.*

BOLT. bolt from/out of the blue sudden, unexpected event. *When Frank suddenly came home from Australia, it was a bolt from the blue.*

bolt upright with one's back very stiff and straight. *When he heard the news, he sat bolt upright with astonishment.*

BONE. bone of contention something which causes people to quarrel (usually over a period of time). *The boundary line between their farms has been a bone of contention between the two families for years.*

bone to pick with someone [See HAVE A BONE TO PICK WITH SOMEONE.]

BOO. [See (NOT) SAY BOO TO A GOOSE.]

BOOT. the boot/shoe is on the other foot the situation has been completely changed; someone who had a disadvantage now has an advantage. *Jack used to be rich and Jim was the poor one; but now the boot is on the other foot, i.e. Jim is rich and Jack is poor.*

BORN. born before one's time with ideas or abilities which are too advanced. *Some artists are born before their time: their genius is not recognised until long after their deaths.*

born with a silver spoon in one's mouth born into a rich family.

He has never had to work hard in his life: he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth.

born yesterday (informal) inexperienced; foolish. *Don't try to trick me: I wasn't born yesterday, you know.*

BORNE. (something is) **borne in upon one** one is forced to realise (something). *It was gradually borne in upon him that his job was leading nowhere and that he had better change it.*

BOTTOM. **bottom drop/fall out (of something)** (something) collapses or fails. *He lost all his money when the bottom dropped out of the stock-market, i.e. the value of stocks and shares went right down.*

bottom of the barrel [See SCRAPE (THE BOTTOM OF) THE BARREL.]

BOUNDS. [See WITHIN THE BOUNDS OF POSSIBILITY.]

BOW. **bow and scrape** behave in a very humble way. *I'm not going to go bowing and scraping to the new manager for special favours.*

bow to the inevitable admit that something which one does not like or want must happen. *We must realise that the new airport is going to be built in our area: we must bow to the inevitable, and give up our campaign against it.*

BOX. **box on the ears** blow on the head. *She gave the impolite boy a box on the ears.* Also **box someone's ears** hit someone on the head. *She boxed the impolite boy's ears.*

BOYS. **boys will be boys** (expression used when boys misbehave) you cannot expect boys to be well-behaved all the time. *The children had left her living-room in a mess, but she simply shrugged and said, "Boys will be boys."*

BRAND. **brand-new** completely new. *We've sold our old cooker and bought a brand-new one.*

BRASS. [See GET DOWN TO BRASS TACKS.]

BRAZEN. **brazen it out** show no signs of being ashamed or sorry when one is discovered doing something wrong. *She must have known that the failure of the plan was all her fault, but she just brazened it out, blaming everyone else.*

BREAD. **bread and butter** what one does to earn a living. *As a photographer, taking wedding photographs is my bread and butter; I do other kinds of photography only when I have time.*

(know which side one's) bread is buttered on [See KNOW WHICH SIDE ONE'S BREAD IS BUTTERED ON.]

BREAK. **break/come/fall apart at the seams** be ruined, destroyed. *Be careful of that old book if you don't want it to come apart at the seams.*

break camp leave where one has pitched one's tents and move on to somewhere else. *The regiment broke camp at dawn, and moved on.*

break even receive as much as one has spent. *We had to invest a lot of*

money in the factory, but the profits were high, so that we broke even within a year.

break one's heart make one suffer such great sorrow that one never completely recovers from it. *When his wife died, it just about broke his heart.*

break one's journey make a short stop in the course of a journey. *On his way from Paris to Moscow, he broke his journey at Berlin.*

break new ground do something that has not been done before; make a new discovery. *The professor's work broke new ground in the treatment of cancer.*

break ranks 1. (with reference to soldiers) leave one's position in the line. *When the soldiers realised that the battle was won, they broke ranks and stormed into the town.* 2. abandon one's friends or allies. *When they were threatened with being dismissed, some of the strikers broke ranks and returned to work.* [See also CLOSE RANKS.]

break the back of do the longest or hardest part of something. *Moving the stones from the garden was hard work, but we had broken the back of it by lunchtime.*

break the ice make the atmosphere more relaxed and friendly. *Playing party-games sometimes helps to break the ice at a party, especially if the guests have never met before.*

break the news tell news to someone (usually bad news). *I had to break the news of his father's death to him.*

break the thread interrupt (usually what someone is saying or thinking). *The fact that some students came late broke the thread of the professor's argument, so he had to start again.*

break one's word not keep a promise. *If you say you are going to do something, do it: never break your word.*

BREATHE. breathe down someone's neck 1. follow someone very closely; be close to someone. *Tom is top of the class, but there are two other students breathing down his neck, i.e. they are almost as good as he is.* 2. watch over someone, supervise someone. *You won't get a chance to relax here: the boss is always breathing down our necks.*

breathe easily/freely be relaxed. *It was a dangerous journey, but after we had crossed the river we were able to breathe more easily.*

BRIEF. [See (NOT) HOLD A BRIEF FOR.]

BRING. bring a lump to one's throat make one feel very emotional (as if about to weep). *Waving goodbye to him brought a lump to my throat.* [See also LUMP IN ONE'S THROAT.]

bring someone down a notch/peg (or two) [See TAKE SOMEONE DOWN A NOTCH/PEG (OR TWO).]

bring someone (back) down to earth make someone face reality, give up unrealistic ideas. *He is not at all a practical person: perhaps having to earn his living will bring him down to earth.* [See also COME DOWN TO EARTH.]

bring home to one make one realise. *My cousin's death from cancer brought home to me the dangers of being a heavy smoker.*

bring/come into being cause/start to exist. *The new government*

brought into being a completely new system of education. I don't know how the new arrangement came into being.

bring/come into question make/become a matter that has to be discussed. *The scientist's discoveries brought into question all the previous ideas about the beginnings of life on Earth.* [See also CALL IN/INTO QUESTION/DOUBT.]

bring the house down cause an audience to show that it is very amused, or pleased (by laughing, applauding, etc.). *The young singer's performance brought the house down: the applause lasted for about twenty minutes.*

bring/come to a close end something. *The service was brought to a close with a hymn.*

bring to bay continue a hunt until the victim has nowhere to escape to. *The police at last brought the criminals to bay in an old disused warehouse.*

bring (one's attention, etc.) to bear on direct (one's attention, etc.) to. *Instead of studying useless things, professors should bring their intelligence to bear on the problems of world poverty and world peace.*

bring to heel [See under TO HEEL.]

bring to light discover; cause to be known. *The young researcher had brought to light some interesting facts about how diseases are spread.* [See also COME TO LIGHT.]

bring to mind cause to remember. *Seeing the child reading brought to mind the books I read when I was a boy.* Also **come to mind** occur to one; be thought of. *I'm trying to think of another way to the village, but nothing comes to mind.*

bring to pass cause to happen. *The new government promised a more equal society, but they never brought it to pass.* Also **come to pass** (rather old fashioned) happen. *I don't know how it came to pass that John was so late.*

bring one up short [See PULL ONE UP SHORT.]

bring up the rear (often with reference to soldiers) follow at the end. *The mounted soldiers went at the front, and the foot-soldiers brought up the rear.*

BROAD. **broad as it's long** the same one way or another; no difference. *Going there by car takes ten minutes, and by train it's about the same: it's as broad as it's long.*

(in) **broad daylight** (in) the full light of day. *Criminals used to rob people only when it was dark, but now they are doing it in broad daylight.*

BROADLY. **broadly speaking** in general terms; on the whole. *Broadly speaking, in our society, doctors tend to be male, and nurses female: but of course, there are exceptions.*

BROWNEED. **browneed/cheesed off** (informal) bored; fed up; annoyed. *We've been kept waiting for over an hour, and we're getting a bit browneed off. I'm cheesed off with him always being late.*

BUILD. **build castles in the air** daydream; imagine impossible

things. *You should give yourself aims that you know you can achieve: there is no point in building castles in the air.*

BULL. bull by the horns [See TAKE THE BULL BY THE HORNS.]
(like a) bull in a china-shop (used with reference to a) person who is clumsy, or insensitive to other people's feelings. *I think Jim offended every single person at the party: he is just like a bull in a china-shop.*
bull session occasion when people talk together in a relaxed way. *We used to have a bull session every Friday, when the week's work was done.*

BURN. burn one's boats/bridges leave oneself with only one course of action; make it impossible for oneself to retreat or go back. *I've burnt my bridges as far as my last job is concerned: I quarrelled with the manager before I left, so I can't go back.*

burn one's fingers [See GET ONE'S FINGERS BURNT.]

(money) burns a hole in one's pocket [See MONEY BURNS A HOLE IN ONE'S POCKET.]

burn the candle at both ends work hard during the day and stay up late at night enjoying oneself. *Jack has got a difficult job and yet he also goes to parties almost every night: I wonder how long he can go on burning the candle at both ends.*

burn the midnight oil work or study late into the night. *I've got three exams next month: I'm afraid I shall have to start burning the midnight oil.*

burn up the road (informal) drive very fast. *You should see Jim's new sports car: it can really burn up the road.*

BURNT. burnt to a frazzle [See DONE TO A FRAZZLE.]

BURST. burst (apart) at the seams be very overcrowded. *I'm afraid that there is no room for your brother to stay with us: we are bursting at the seams as it is.* [See also BREAK/COME/FALL APART AT THE SEAMS.]

burst one's sides (laughing) [See SPLIT ONE'S SIDES (LAUGHING).]

BURY. bury one's head in the sand [See HIDE ONE'S HEAD IN THE SAND.]

bury the hatchet become friendly again. *Jack and Jim are quite friendly now: they've decided to bury the hatchet.*

BUT. [See ALL OVER BAR/BUT THE SHOUTING.]

BUTTER. (look as if) butter wouldn't melt in one's mouth apparently, but not really, very innocent or well-behaved. *The little girl looked as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth, but she was actually very mischievous.*

BUTTERFLIES. [See HAVE BUTTERFLIES (IN ONE'S STOMACH).]

BUY. [See (BUY A) PIG IN A POKE.]

BY. by all appearances [See TO ALL APPEARANCES.]

by all means certainly; please do. *"May I go out first?" - "By all means."*

by a long chalk/shot [See LONG SHOT.]

by and by (informal) later on. *He said that he would meet me at the pub by and by.*

by and large on the whole; speaking generally. *The students are well-behaved, by and large, although there are a few exceptions.*

by choice if one could choose. *I may have to study for another year, but by choice, I would like to start working now.*

by default because of a lack of other possibilities. *Jim was the only person who applied for the job, so it went to him by default.*

by dint of because of; owing to. *He was not very clever but, by dint of sheer hard work, he eventually succeeded.*

by dribs and drabs [See IN DRIBS AND DRABS.]

by ear [See PLAY IT/SOMETHING BY EAR.]

by far by a great amount; easily. *John is by far the cleverest boy in the class.*

by/in fits and starts frequently stopping and starting again. *I can only work at the project in my spare time, so it is being done by fits and starts.*

by force of circumstances because the situation forces or compels one. *He had gambled away all his money so, by force of circumstances, he had to start working again.*

(off) by heart [See LEARN (OFF) BY HEART.]

by hook or by crook by one means or another; by fair or unfair means. *He owes me some money, and I intend to get it back by hook or by crook.*

by/in leaps and bounds very quickly or greatly; at a great rate. *You will be pleased to know that your son's English is improving by leaps and bounds.*

by means of by making use of; with the help of. *They got rid of the stones by means of a truck which they hired.*

by no (manner of) means/not by any (manner of) means not at all. *"Is Jim's lack of progress due to laziness?" – "Not by any manner of means: he is actually trying quite hard."*

by rights legally; rightly. *My father's house should be mine, by rights, after his death, since I am his eldest son.*

by rule of thumb [See RULE OF THUMB.]

by the bye [See BY THE WAY.]

by the same token in the same way, similarly. *This rule applies to all your colleagues and, by the same token, it should also apply to you.*

by the skin of one's teeth (informal) narrowly; by a small margin. *I didn't do well in the exam: in fact, I just got through by the skin of my teeth.* Also **escape by the skin of one's teeth** have a narrow escape. *Our car overturned and went on fire: we escaped by the skin of our teeth.*

by the sweat of one's brow by working very hard. *The poor farmer earned his living by the sweat of his brow.*

by the way (expression used to show that an idea or thought has just occurred to one and is not closely or logically connected to what has been talked of before). *I had a long talk with Jack Smith tonight – by the way, do you happen to know his address?*

by turns first one and then the other. *My wife and I take it by turns to*

make the breakfast, i.e. one day she makes it and the following day I make it.

by/in virtue of because of (usually some good or positive thing); owing to. *He is entitled to free drinks by virtue of the fact that he is President of the club.*

by way of as a means of; signifying. *I think his offer to drive you home was by way of an apology for his behaviour last night, i.e. he wanted to show he was sorry for his behaviour.*

by word of mouth spoken, not written. *Jones got his invitation to join the company by word of mouth, but said he couldn't reach a decision unless he had it in writing too.*

by-your-leave [See (WITHOUT) SO MUCH AS (A BY-YOUR-LEAVE).]

BYGONES. [See LET BYGONES BE BYGONES.]

C

CAKE. [See EAT ONE'S CAKE AND HAVE IT TOO.]

CALCULATED. (**take a**) **calculated risk** do something that is risky (dangerous) knowing exactly how risky it is. *Buying that business was a calculated risk: I could lose my money; on the other hand, I might make a fortune.*

CALL. **call a halt (to something)** stop doing (something). *After we had walked eight miles, we decided to call a halt.*

call a spade a spade speak frankly and directly. *If you think the design is ridiculous, say so: don't be afraid to call a spade a spade.*

call attention to draw someone's notice to. *We shall have to call the local authority's attention to the poor state of the roads.*

call someone's bluff find out if someone can or will do what he says he will do, by challenging or defying him. *The landlord said he would throw us out if we did not pay our rent: we decided to call his bluff and refused to pay.*

call in/into question/doubt argue that something is not, or may not, be true. *From the sixteenth century onwards, learned men began to call into doubt the idea that the Earth was the centre of the Universe.* [See also BRING/COME INTO QUESTION.]

call it a day (informal) stop doing something, at least for a time. *We searched for the ring everywhere, but eventually we had to call it a day.*

call it quits (used when rivals, competitors, etc. agree that they are level, neither side being the winner). *The chess-players drew every game until they finally decided to call it quits.* [See also QUILTS WITH.]

(unable to) call one's soul one's own (usually with negative) (not be) free, independent. *There are so many regulations these days, a person is not able to call his soul his own.*

call the shots (informal) decide what has to be done. *You are paying their wages, so you ought to be the one who calls the shots.*

(he who pays the piper should) call the tune (the person who pays

someone, or for something, should) decide what is to be done. *I paid for the holiday, so I should call the tune.*

call to account make someone explain something that he has done or is responsible for. *Jim was in charge when the accident happened, so he will have to be called to account.*

call to mind remember. *I've seen that man somewhere before: I'm trying to call to mind where it was.*

call to the bar (with reference to a lawyer) officially allow someone to practise as a barrister, i.e. a lawyer who can defend cases in the high court. *After many years of study, John was called to the bar at the age of thirty.*

CAMEL. [See STRAW THAT BREAKS THE CAMEL'S BACK.]

CAN. **can make nothing of** not be able to understand. *His behaviour is very strange; I can make nothing of it.*

can't help (usually with negative) not be able to prevent or stop (something). *I couldn't help laughing when I saw what a state he was in.*

can't help but (always negative) be forced to (do something). *You may not like him, but you can't help but admire his courage.*

can't say boo to a goose [See (NOT) SAY BOO TO A GOOSE.]

can't see the wood for the trees (always negative) not be able to separate unimportant details from the really important things. *Charles keeps getting excited about details and misses the main point: his trouble is that he can't see the wood for the trees.*

can't take it with one (usually with negative) not be able to use money, possessions, etc. when one is dead. *You're better to enjoy your wealth just now - after all, you can't take it with you!*

can you beat it? (informal) would you believe it; isn't that surprising? *Can you beat it? That stupid boy Jones has won a scholarship.*

CANDLE. [See (NOT) HOLD A CANDLE TO.]

CARD. **card up one's sleeve** [See under UP ONE'S SLEEVE.]

CARDS. [See HAVE THE CARDS STACKED IN ONE'S FAVOUR; LAY/PUT ONE'S CARDS ON THE TABLE.]

CARE. (not) **care/give a rap (for)** (informal) (not) be concerned, worried (about) or interested (in). *I don't give a rap for what he thinks of me.* [See also NOT WORTH A RAP.]

CARROT. **carrot and stick** reward and punishment. *We are using both the carrot and the stick to make our son work for his exams: if he passes, he gets a bicycle; if he fails, he won't be allowed to go on holiday with his friends.*

CARRY. **carry/sweep all before one** win everything. *Tom carried all before him at the athletics, winning every event he entered for.*

carry coals to Newcastle do something that is not necessary.

Building another restaurant in this district would be carrying coals to Newcastle: the place is full of restaurants already.

carry the can (informal) take the responsibility. *I think we should do what Bob says: he is in charge and he is the one who has to carry the can if anything goes wrong.*

carry the day win; be successful. *The committee had a long discussion about the new regulations, but finally the people who supported them carried the day.*

CART. **cart before the horse** [See PUT/SET THE CART BEFORE THE HORSE.]

CASE. **case in point** example (of what one is talking about). *There are too many lazy people in this office, and Jim is a case in point: he hardly ever does any work.*

case may be [See AS THE CASE MAY/MIGHT BE.]

CASH. [See (PAY/CASH) ON THE NAIL.]

CAST. **cast a spell over** fascinate; hold someone's complete attention. *The fiery young politician cast a spell over his audience.*

cast a veil/curtain over [See DRAW A VEIL/CURTAIN OVER.]

cast in one's lot with [See THROW IN ONE'S LOT WITH.]

cast something in someone's teeth [See THROW/CAST/FLING SOMETHING IN SOMEONE'S FACE/TEETH.]

cast someone/something into the shade [See PUT SOMEONE/SOMETHING IN/INTO THE SHADE.]

cast light on/upon [See THROW LIGHT ON/UPON.]

cast one's mind back (formal) try to remember an occasion in the past. *Cast your mind back to the last time you saw Bill Jones: did he seem worried or depressed at all?*

cast (one's) pearls before swine do something for, or offer something to, people who can't appreciate it. *I gave a series of lessons on Shakespeare to the sixth form, but it was really a case of casting pearls before swine: they were too lazy or too stupid to appreciate them.*

cast the first stone be the first person to accuse someone. *The case against Mr. Brown had to be dropped because none of his neighbours wanted to be the one to cast the first stone.*

CASTLES. [See BUILD CASTLES IN THE AIR.]

CAT. **cat and mouse game** [See under PLAY CAT AND MOUSE WITH SOMEONE.]

cat got one's tongue (informal) (expression used when someone is silent, to someone else's surprise or annoyance). *What's been wrong with you this morning - has the cat got your tongue?*

cat in hell's chance [See under STAND A CHANCE.]

cat out of the bag [See LET THE CAT OUT OF THE BAG.]

cat's paw person who is used by someone who is more clever or more powerful to get what the clever/powerful person wants. *The ambitious young politician did not realise that he was being used as a cat's paw by the President.*

CATCH. **catch someone bang/dead to rights** (informal) catch someone as he is actually doing something wrong or illegal. *The thief had to admit he was guilty since he had been caught bang to rights.* [See also CATCH IN THE ACT.]

catch one's breath 1. be so frightened, amazed, etc. that one stops breathing for a few moments. *The people in the crowd caught their breath when the man fell from the window.* [See also HOLD ONE'S BREATH; TAKE SOMEONE'S BREATH AWAY.] 2. rest for a time until one is able to breathe normally again (usually after some unusual effort). *I'm not used to climbing hills: let's stop for a few minutes while I catch my breath.*

catch (one's death of) cold be seriously chilled. *Don't go out without your coat on: otherwise, you'll catch your death of cold.*

(not) catch someone dead (informal) (not) find someone doing something which they find embarrassing or unpleasant. *That dance-hall is a terrible place: you wouldn't catch me dead in there.*

catch someone's eye be noticed by someone. *I was just looking at the shop-window when this very nice watch caught my eye, and I bought it.*

catch one's fancy [See TICKLE/CATCH/TAKE SOMEONE'S FANCY.]

catch fire go on fire. *Don't leave your coat too near the heater: it may catch fire.*

catch in the act find someone doing something wrong or bad. *The criminals had been caught in the act.* [See also CATCH SOMEONE BANG/DEAD TO RIGHTS; CATCH/NAB SOMEONE RED-HANDED.]

catch it (informal) be punished. *You'll catch it if the headmaster discovers you've been coming in late.*

catch someone napping take advantage of the fact that someone is not paying proper attention. *In the football match, the striker caught the whole defence napping and scored a goal.*

catch/nab someone red-handed catch someone in the act of doing wrong. *The thieves had no defence in the trial: they had been caught red-handed inside the bank they were robbing.*

catch sight of (manage or happen to) see. *I was just passing by when I caught sight of my brother in the crowd.*

catch the drift [See GET THE DRIFT.]

catch someone with his/her pants /trousers down find someone in an embarrassing and undignified position; find someone out when he/she least expects it. *The reporting of the scandal caught the committee with their pants down: they had not expected that it would become public so soon.*

CATS. [See RAIN BUCKETS/CATS AND DOGS.]

CAUTION. [See THROW CAUTION TO THE WINDS.]

CHALK. [See DIFFERENT AS CHALK FROM CHEESE.]

CHAFE. [See CHAMP.]

CHAMP. **champ/chafe at the bit** be impatient, anxious to do some-

thing. *We shall have to start our trip soon: some of the younger people are champing at the bit already.*

CHANCE. **chance one's arm** try to do something, even if there is not much chance of it succeeding. *I know that the concert has been very popular, and I don't have a ticket, but I'll just go along to the theatre anyway and chance my arm, i.e. hope that I am lucky enough to get in.*

CHANCES. **chances are** it is likely that. *You could try phoning him, but the chances are that he won't be home yet.*

CHANGE. **change colour** become pale through fear, anger, etc. *The thief changed colour when he saw that the policeman was pointing a gun at him.*

change hands go from one owner to another. *This house has changed hands several times in the last five years.*

change the face of change the appearance of; change completely. *These new inventions will change the face of offices and factories over the next thirty years.*

change the subject talk about something else, especially to avoid embarrassment, etc. *The two teachers had been criticising the head-master but, when they saw him coming, they quickly changed the subject.*

change one's tune behave in a different way; adopt a different course of action. *The boss said we would have to accept a cut in our salaries, but when he saw how angry we were, he quickly changed his tune.* [See also WHISTLE A DIFFERENT/ANOTHER TUNE.]

CHAPTER. **chapter and verse** giving all the reasons for something, or sources of something; full information. *He was able to give the lawyer chapter and verse for everything that had happened since the beginning of the dispute.*

chapter of accidents series of things going wrong one after another. *The result of this incredible chapter of accidents was that Jim's car was in the garage for a week, being repaired.*

CHARITY. **charity begins at home** one should look after oneself, or one's family, friends, etc. first. *You should offer the job to your son first, before offering it to others: after all, charity begins at home.*

CHASE. **(go) chase oneself** (informal) go away. *He tried to borrow some money from me but I told him to go chase himself.*

CHEEK. **cheek by jowl (with)** (often with reference to contrasting things) very close (to); close beside. *It is a city of contrasts: luxury hotels stand cheek by jowl with terrible slums.*

CHEER. **cheer up** be cheerful; don't be sad. *You look so sad today: cheer up, it may never happen! i.e. you look as if you are expecting something terrible to happen; but it may not.*

CHEESED. **cheesed off** [See BROWNE OFF.]

CHEW. **chew the fat/rag** (informal) have an informal conversation;

chat. *I met my old friend Bill in town yesterday; we chewed the fat for about an hour.*

CHICKEN. **chicken feed** small amount of money; anything of little importance. *I used to correct papers for public examinations, but I've stopped now: the money they pay is chicken feed.*

CHICKENS. (count one's) **chickens before they are hatched** [See COUNT ONE'S CHICKENS BEFORE THEY ARE HATCHED.]
chickens come home to roost one pays the penalty for something done earlier. *That student went to parties almost every night last term, but now his chickens have come home to roost: he has failed all his exams.*

CHIEF. **chief cook and bottle-washer** (informal) person who does all the jobs. *Now that my wife is ill I am the chief cook and bottle-washer, i.e. I do all the jobs around the house.*

CHILD. **child's play** very easy. *You'll learn this job very easily: it's just child's play, actually.*

CHIP. **chip off the old block** (usually with reference to a child who is like one of his/her parents in some way). *If you knew Jim's father, then you will find Jim very like him: Jim's a real chip off the old block.*

(have a) **chip on one's/the shoulder** (bear a) grievance, sense of injustice. *He applied for a promoted post and did not get it: ever since then he has had a chip on his shoulder.*

CHIPS. [See LET THE CHIPS FALL WHERE THEY MAY; WHEN THE CHIPS ARE DOWN.]

CHORUS. **chorus of approval** things said by a group of people which show that some action, decision, etc. is popular with them. *The manager's decision to let everyone home early met with a chorus of approval from the workers.*

CIRCUMSTANCES. **circumstances alter cases** what is done has to depend on the situation at the time. *It is true that the previous person in your job earned more than you, but circumstances alter cases: then the company was making a profit, now it is making a loss.*

CIVIL. [See KEEP A CIVIL TONGUE IN ONE'S HEAD.]

CLAP. **clap/lay/set eyes on** (informal; usually with negative) see. *I've never clapped eyes on him in my life before.*

CLEAN. (give someone a) **clean bill of health** (say that someone is) perfectly well and healthy. *After a thorough examination, the doctors gave James a clean bill of health.*

clean slate situation where what has previously happened or been done is not taken into account. *I suggest that we ignore everything that has happened until now and start with a clean slate.*

(make a) **clean sweep** 1. (have/organise a) complete removal. *We shall have to make a clean sweep of all these old books and papers.*

2. (have/achieve a) complete victory, winning every prize. *Our college made a clean sweep in all the competitions this year.*

CLEAR. **clear the decks (for action)** make everything ready so that things can be done. *We are going to have our rehearsals for the play in this room: so we had better clear the decks for action by moving the furniture out.*

clear the way make it possible for something to happen or be done. *Let us find out what our members want now, and that will clear the way for immediate action later on.*

clear up loose ends [See LOOSE ENDS.]

CLIMB. **climb on/aboard a/the bandwagon.** [See JUMP ON THE BANDWAGON.]

CLIP. **clip someone's wings** prevent someone from acting as freely as he did before. *David wanted to run the whole thing himself, but the committee clipped his wings: he has to report to them.*

CLOAK. **cloak-and-dagger** connected with secret service work (spying, etc.). *He took part in some cloak-and-dagger exploits during the Second World War.*

CLOSE. (adj.) **close call/shave** narrow escape. *I had a very close shave while driving to work yesterday: I was almost involved in a serious accident.*

close thing [See NEAR THING.]

CLOSE. (verb) **close/shut one's eyes (to)** pretend that one is not aware of something. *There is a certain amount of stealing from the shop going on, but the shopkeeper just closes his eyes to it.*

close ranks 1. (with reference to soldiers) come together; keep discipline (especially when under attack). 2. (with reference to any group of people) unite in supporting someone, or one another. *When one of the doctors was criticised, his colleagues in the hospital closed ranks behind him.* [See also BREAK RANKS.]

close the door (to) prevent something happening in future. *The government has closed the door to any more wage increases for the time being.*

close the stable door after the horse has bolted [See LOCK THE STABLE DOOR (AFTER THE HORSE HAS BOLTED).]

CLOSED. **closed book** 1. something that is difficult to understand or know well. *I always have to call in a mechanic when something goes wrong with my car: motor-car engines are a closed book to me.* 2. something that is finished and must not be returned to. *As far as I am concerned, our quarrel last night is a closed book: I don't want to discuss it.*

CLOUD. [See EVERY CLOUD HAS A SILVER LINING.]

CLUTCH. **clutch at straws/a straw** use anything to continue hoping in a desperate situation; try anything, however unlikely it is to suc-

ceed. *Every time Peter heard a noise he thought it was someone coming to rescue him: he was clutching at straws.*

COACH. [See DRIVE A COACH AND HORSES THROUGH.]

COALS. [See CARRY COALS TO NEWCASTLE.]

COAST. **coast is clear** there is no danger. *One of the thieves went into the house first to see if the coast was clear.*

COAT. [See CUT ONE'S COAT ACCORDING TO ONE'S CLOTH.]

COCK. **cock-and-bull story** unbelievable story. *As an excuse for being late, he told some cock-and-bull story about being involved in an accident.*

cock a snook at show one's disrespect for. *The students took every opportunity to cock a snook at authority.*

cock of the walk (usually a vain or boastful) person who is in charge, or is the best, most successful, etc. *After winning the competition, Fred was cock of the walk.*

COCKLES. [See WARM THE COCKLES OF ONE'S HEART.]

COIN. **coin it (in)/coin money** make a lot of money. *His garage is only a small one, but he is still coining money/coining it (in).*

COLD. **cold-blooded** [See IN COLD BLOOD.]

cold comfort not much consolation. *The person who beat Jim into second place was his own brother, but that was cold comfort for Jim, i.e., it didn't make Jim feel any happier.*

(get/have/take) cold feet (be in a) state of fear. *The soldier was going to complain to the general, but he had cold feet at the last minute.*

cold fish person who does not show much feeling or emotion. *I find Frank's company boring: he's a bit of a cold fish.*

(give someone/get the) cold shoulder (give/get) unfriendly treatment; (verb) treat in an unfriendly way. *After Jack's rude behaviour in the meeting, several people gave him the cold shoulder/cold-shouldered him.*

COLOURS. [See NAIL ONE'S COLOURS TO THE MAST.]

COME. **come a cropper** (informal) 1. fail completely; have a serious setback. *George's plans for a big party last week came a cropper: hardly anyone turned up.* 2. fall down. *Jim came a cropper when he was climbing over the garden gate.*

come again? would you repeat that? (often used when one cannot believe what one has heard). *"He sold his house for £100,000." - "Come again?" (i.e. I can hardly believe it was worth so much).*

come alive [See COME TO LIFE.]

come a long way make a lot of progress; become richer, of higher social status. *Our new President has come a long way: he started off life as an ordinary working man.*

come apart at the seams [See BREAK APART AT THE SEAMS.]

come clean make a full confession; state the true facts. *After being*

questioned for three hours, the criminal finally came clean and admitted his part in the robbery.

come down hard on be severe, strict with. *The headmaster is going to come down hard on students who leave litter lying about.*

come down in buckets [See RAIN BUCKETS.]

come down in the world become poorer, of lower social status. *Mr. Jones has really come down in the world: he only works in a shop now, but at one time he owned several shops himself.*

come/be down on someone like a ton of bricks be very angry with someone; punish someone. *If Mr. Brown finds out that you have been leaving the office early, he'll come down on you like a ton of bricks.*

come down to earth (with a bump/suddenly) face reality, give up unrealistic ideas. *Mary has all sorts of ideas at the moment about becoming a film star: sooner or later she will have to come down to earth and start earning some money.* [See also BRING DOWN TO EARTH.]

come hell or high water (informal) no matter what happens. *I promised to visit Jim in Paris and, come hell or high water, I intend to keep my promise.*

come in handy be useful. *You should always carry a torch in the boot of your car; it sometimes comes in handy.*

come into being [See BRING INTO BEING.]

come into effect [See INTO EFFECT.]

come into force be applied. *The new regulations come into force from next January.*

come into one's own be in a situation where one can use one's special abilities. *George was quiet for most of the evening, but when the conversation switched to sport, he came into his own: he is a great sportsman.*

come into question [See INTO QUESTION.]

come it with/over someone (informal) be rude, disobedient to someone. *If those cheeky schoolboys try to come it with me, they will be sorry for it.*

come/be of age 1. reach twenty-one years of age. *Jim comes of age on Tuesday: it's his twenty-first birthday.* 2. reach maturity; reach a developed stage. *We might say that space travel came of age in 1969, when Man first landed on the surface of the moon.* Also **coming-of-age (party, etc.):** twenty-first birthday (party, etc.).

come off it (informal and sometimes impolite) stop pretending; stop saying something which one knows is not true. *"I still say that our team is the best in the league." – "Come off it, Bill: you know that they have been beaten several times recently."*

come off second best [See SECOND BEST.]

come on the market [See ON THE MARKET.]

come out of one's shell [See OUT OF ONE'S SHELL.]

come rain or come shine [See RAIN OR SHINE.]

come short [See FALL SHORT.]

come to a close [See under BRING TO A CLOSE.]

come to an arrangement/understanding agree about something.

My wife and I have come to an understanding about the use of the car: I shall use it for going to work and she can have it at the weekends.

come to a fine/pretty pass be in a mess; be disgraceful. *Things have come to a pretty pass when an old lady can be robbed in the street, and not one person will go to help her, i.e. it is very bad that such things can happen.*

come to blows fight. *The quarrel between Fred and Bill was very serious: they almost came to blows, i.e. they almost hit each other.*

come to grief fail; be destroyed. *All our plans for success in the competition came to grief: we were defeated in the very first round.*

come/get to grips with deal with; cope with. *We have at last managed to come to grips with the problem of things being stolen from the school, i.e. we have reduced or stopped theft from the school.*

come to hand be available for use. *For stuffing the cushion, you can use anything that comes to hand, e.g. old rags, etc.*

come to heel [See TO HEEL.]

come to life/come alive show interest. *The class suddenly came to life when the professor said that what they were doing would be tested the next day.*

come to light be discovered, made known. *His crimes did not come to light until many years after his death.* [See also BRING TO LIGHT.]

come to mind [See under BRING TO MIND.]

come to nothing fail, be useless. *All his years of hard work on the house came to nothing when it was destroyed by fire.*

come to pass [See BRING TO PASS.]

come to one's senses 1. recover from unconsciousness. *After his heavy fall, it was fully thirty minutes before he came to his senses.* 2. start behaving sensibly. *At the age of forty he came to his senses and abandoned his life of crime.*

come to terms (with) 1. accept. *The famous footballer finally came to terms with his injury and gave up playing.* 2. reach an agreement (with someone). *After many hours of discussion the two sides finally came to terms.*

come to the crunch [See (THE) CRUNCH COMES.]

come to the point [See GET TO THE POINT.]

come to think of it (expression used when an idea suddenly occurs to someone who is speaking). *I saw Jim Brown yesterday: come to think of it, did he ever pay you the money that he owed you?*

come up from/through the ranks [See under RISE FROM/THROUGH THE RANKS.]

come what may no matter what happens. *That's agreed then: we play on Saturday, come what may.*

COMMON. common ground area that people agree on or share. *The judge tried to solve the dispute by looking for some common ground between the two sides.*

common touch ability to be liked by ordinary people. *In spite of his aristocratic background, the new managing director was well-liked by the workers: he had the common touch.*

COMPARE. **compare notes** exchange experiences, impressions, etc. *I was interested to hear that you are going to Germany: I was there last year - when you come back, we can compare notes, i.e. see if your impressions are the same as mine.*

COMPLIMENTS. **compliments of the season** good wishes which go with a particular time, especially Christmas. *I sent a card to my old teacher, wishing him the compliments of the season.*

COMMIT. **commit to paper** write down something one has been talking or thinking about. *Peter is such a brilliant talker: I wish he would commit some of his ideas to paper.*

CONTRADICTION. **contradiction in terms** expression in which one part contradicts (does not fit in with) the other. *For me, to talk about "an honest and successful businessman" is a contradiction in terms: you can't be both successful and honest in business.*

CONVERSATION. **conversation piece** object (e.g. piece of furniture, painting, etc.) which people can talk about. *When you go into his living-room, the first thing you see is a huge African shield: it's quite a conversation piece.*

COOK. **cook one's goose** (informal) cause something bad to happen to one. *Did you know that I was in the room when the ceiling fell in - it just about cooked my goose, i.e. I was almost killed. In the history exam, it was the last question that cooked my goose, i.e. caused me to fail.*
cook the books commit a fraud by changing records, etc. *Our last accountant is in jail now: the police discovered that he was cooking the books.*

COOKED. **cooked to a turn** [See DONE TO A TURN.]

COOKS. [See TOO MANY COOKS (SPOIL THE BROTH).]

COOL. **cool as a cucumber** calm, relaxed, especially in a dangerous situation. *When the burglar found a lady in the bedroom, he simply walked out past her, cool as a cucumber.*

cool/kick one's heels be forced to wait (especially deliberately or unnecessarily). *The headmaster decided to let the two mischievous boys cool their heels outside his study for ten minutes.*

cool it (informal) be calm; relax. *The crowd started to get angry and the police-captain told them to cool it.*

CORNER. [See OUT OF THE CORNER OF ONE'S EYE.]

COST. **cost a bomb** [See MAKE A BOMB.]

COULDN'T. **couldn't say boo to a goose** [See (NOT) SAY BOO TO A GOOSE.]

COUNT. **count one's chickens before they are hatched** anticipate (look forward to) the results of something before it happens. *"If I get the new job, the first thing I shall buy is a car." - "Don't count your chickens before they are hatched: you haven't even been interviewed yet."*

count the cost think about what one has to pay or suffer for something. *After the war, people began to count the cost in terms of the number of young people killed and injured.*

COURAGE. [See HAVE THE COURAGE OF ONE'S CONVICTIONS.]

COURSE. **course of events** way in which things happen. *In the normal course of events, someone so young would not be admitted into the university.*

COVER. **cover the ground** do the required amount of work; deal satisfactorily with what has to be done. *The teacher will have to go much faster if he is to cover the ground for the exam.*

cover up one's tracks hide where one has been or what one has done. *The police are still searching for the murderer: he has been very clever at covering up his tracks.*

COWS. [See TILL THE COWS COME HOME.]

CRACK. **crack a joke** tell a funny story; make a witty remark. *John's great fun at a party: he's forever cracking jokes.*

CRACKED. **(not what it is) cracked up to be** (usually with negative) (not as good as it is) supposed to be. *Don't bother going to the new film: it's not what it's cracked up to be.*

CRAMP. **cramp one's style** prevent one from acting the way one would like to, or the way one normally does. *He hates playing golf in rainy weather: it cramps his style.*

CREATE. **create a scene** cause a commotion, uproar, etc. *He created a terrible scene when the shopkeeper refused to give him his money back.*

create a sensation make a great impression. *This play created a sensation when it was first produced.*

CREATURE. **creature comforts** physical needs of a person; physical things which make one comfortable, relaxed, etc. *Old Mr. Jones is very fortunate: he has a large family who attend to all his creature comforts.*

CREDIT. **(be a) credit to** [See DO CREDIT TO.]

CRIMES. [See VISIT ONE'S CRIMES, SINS, ETC. ON.]

CROCODILE. **(shed/weep) crocodile tears** (pretend) sorrow or sympathy which one does not feel. *I think that Smith was shedding crocodile tears when he said how sorry he was to see Jones go: everyone knows that they hated each other.*

CROSS. **cross a bridge/one's bridges before one comes to it/them** (often with negative) try to solve a problem or deal with a difficulty too soon. *I suggest that we make our decision later: let's not cross that bridge before we come to it. Don't cross your bridges before you come to them.*

cross a bridge/one's bridges when one comes to it/them at-

tempt to solve a problem or deal with a difficulty only when one has to. *I suggest that we make our decision later: we'll cross that bridge when we come to it.*

cross one's fingers wish that one will be lucky (sometimes two fingers on one hand are actually crossed when this expression is used). *The team stands a reasonable chance of winning, so keep your fingers crossed!*

cross one's mind occur to one. *I'm afraid I only bought tickets for two: it never crossed my mind that your wife might want to come too.*

cross swords (with) have a dispute or quarrel (with). *Brown and I are not on friendly terms: we've crossed swords twice this week already.*

cross the t's and dot the i's do everything to the last detail; make everything completely clear. *The sales manager went over the whole programme crossing the t's and dotting the i's, so that every salesman knew exactly what was to be done.*

CROW. [See AS THE CROW FLIES.]

CROWN. **crown everything** be worst (or best) thing in a list of things. *He arrived late, accidentally knocked over a lamp, and then to crown everything, he broke a valuable crystal vase.*

CRUNCH. (the) **crunch comes/it comes to the crunch** the important, vital point comes for decision, action, etc. *We are not selling enough of our goods: if it comes to the crunch, then some of the men will have to be sacked.*

CRY. **cry for the moon** [See ASK FOR THE MOON.]

cry over spilt milk (often in phrase – **it's/there's no use crying over spilt milk**) be concerned or sorry over a situation which cannot be helped or remedied. *There's no use crying over spilt milk: you have failed the test, so the best thing is to start working now for the next one.*

cry wolf warn people about a danger that does not exist. *The employer had cried wolf so many times about the danger of high wage increases, that the workmen began to ignore his warnings.*

CUP. **cup of tea** (informal) the sort of thing or person one likes. *I've never been to the opera; it's not my cup of tea, i.e. it does not appeal to me.*

CURIOSITY. **curiosity killed the cat** (expression used when people are inquisitive, want to know too much) being inquisitive can be dangerous. *I wouldn't ask him any more questions if I were you: remember, curiosity killed the cat.*

CURRY. **curry favour** try to make oneself liked by someone (especially someone in authority, etc.). *He tried to curry favour with the police by spying on his friends.*

CURTAIN. [See DRAW A VEIL/CURTAIN OVER.]

CUT. (a) **cut above** a bit better than. *This wine is a cut above the stuff they usually serve here.*

cut-and-dried very clear and definite. *There are no more arrange-*

ments to be made for the ceremony: the whole thing is cut-and-dried.
cut and thrust attack and counter-attack. *The new MP was not used to the cut and thrust of parliamentary debates, i.e. the way the other MPs quickly exchanged remarks, comments, etc.*

cut one's coat according to one's cloth try to do only what is possible with the resources available. *Now that he is earning less than he used to, he will have to take a shorter holiday: he must cut his coat according to his cloth.*

cut corners do something less well in order to save money, time, etc. *If you want the job done quickly, then we shall have to cut some corners while we are doing it.*

cut someone down to size humble someone who is too proud. *He tried to impress his former schoolteacher, but she soon cut him down to size by reminding him that he had always been the laziest boy in the class.*

cut no ice (with) have no effect (on). *If you are late there is no use giving excuses to Mr. Brown: they cut no ice with him.*

cut off one's nose to spite one's face do something to hurt someone else, even if it means also hurting oneself. *He showed his displeasure with his boss by resigning: but he was really only cutting off his nose to spite his face, because he had no other job to go to.*

cut short stop; put an end to. *The chairman cut short the final speech by announcing that there was no time left.*

cut one's teeth (on) start to learn a job or skill; do something when one is young. *He teaches in a university now, but he cut his teeth on teaching at primary-school level.*

cut the cackle (informal) stop talking, chatting. *The job was several days behind schedule, so the foreman told his men to cut the cackle and get on with it.*

cut the ground from under someone suddenly put someone in a position where he cannot argue or resist. *The thief denied that he had ever been in the shop, but the police inspector cut the ground from under him by showing him a photograph as proof.*

cut to the quick badly offended; made very angry. *The student was cut to the quick by the lecturer's sarcastic remark.*

cut up rough become violent, extremely angry. *I am afraid that some of the customers might cut up rough when they find out that they are not getting their money back.*

D

DADDY. **daddy of them all** (informal) first or greatest example of something. *I thought I had seen large spiders in the tropics, but this one was the daddy of them all, i.e. larger than any I had seen.* [See also MOTHER AND FATHER OF.]

DAILY. **daily dozen** regular exercise. *Jim gets up every morning at six o'clock and does his daily dozen.*

- DAMN.** **damn with faint praise** praise someone or something, but in a way which shows that one does not like him/her/it much. *The critic damned the painting with faint praise: he obviously did not like it, and was merely being polite.*
- DAMP.** **damp squib** something eagerly expected which turns out to be disappointing. *John's birthday party was something of a damp squib.* Also **go off like a damp squib** go badly; not be as good as expected. *His party went off like a damp squib.*
- DANCE.** **dance attendance (on)** (often used as a kind of criticism) be present to help or serve someone; pay (too much) attention to someone's wishes. *John must be hoping for some favours from his new boss: he is always dancing attendance on him.*
dance to a different/another tune [See under WHISTLE A DIFFERENT/ ANOTHER TUNE.]
- DARBY.** **Darby and Joan** old married couple living contentedly together. *It was very pleasant to meet Mary's parents: they are a real Darby and Joan couple, aren't they?*
- DARE.** **(I) dare say** (I) suppose. *I think that Jim did badly in his studies because he was lazy, but I dare say there may have been other reasons.*
- DASH.** **dash one's hopes** cause one to lose hope. *The first runner's poor performance dashed our hopes of winning the relay.*
- DAVY.** **Davy Jones' locker** (informal) the bottom of the sea. *I am sorry to say that my new cine-camera is in Davy Jones' locker now: it fell over the side of the ship while I was filming.*
- DAY.** **day in, day out** every day, without exception. *I have to spend about three hours travelling in the train, day in, day out.*
- DAYLIGHT.** **daylight/highway robbery** much more expensive than it should be. *I'm not going to the show: at the prices they are charging it's daylight robbery.*
- DAYLIGHTS.** [See BEAT THE (LIVING) DAYLIGHTS OUT OF; SCARE THE (LIVING) DAYLIGHTS OUT OF.]
- DAYS.** **(someone's/something's) days are numbered** something must come to an end soon; someone must soon suffer some kind of loss; someone will soon die. *I think that the present Prime Minister's days are numbered: he is bound to be voted out at the next election. When he saw the expression on the doctor's face, the seriously-ill patient knew that his days were numbered.*
- DEAD.** **dead ahead** straight ahead. *The car skidded to a halt a few inches from the kerb with a lamp-post dead ahead of it.*
dead beat (informal) very tired. *"Help me to carry this case, will you? - I'm dead beat."*
dead duck someone who is sure to be a victim, to suffer something

bad. *Anyone who is caught up in those mountains in bad weather is a dead duck, i.e. will not survive.*

dead loss (informal) useless. *Jane is a dead loss at parties: she never joins in the fun.*

dead spit of (informal) [See under SPITTING IMAGE.]

dead tired [See DEAD BEAT.]

dead to the world fast asleep. *I have just been up to the children's bedroom and they are all dead to the world.*

DEAF. [See TURN A DEAF EAR TO.]

DEATH. [See CATCH (ONE'S DEATH OF) COLD; LOOK/FEEL LIKE DEATH WARMED UP.]

DECKS. [See CLEAR THE DECKS FOR ACTION.]

DEEP. **deep water** [See IN/INTO DEEP WATER(S).]

DELIVER. **deliver/produce the goods** do what one has promised to do. *Don't worry about Jack: if he says he will help you, then you can be sure he will deliver the goods.*

DEPEND. **depend (up)on it** one can be sure of something. *Jack will be on time, depend upon it.*

DEVIL. **(when the) devil drives** [See NEEDS MUST (WHEN THE DEVIL DRIVES).]

devil his due [See GIVE THE DEVIL HIS DUE.]

devil-may-care carefree; reckless. *I don't like being a passenger in John's car: he has a very devil-may-care attitude to driving.*

devil to pay [See HELL TO PAY.]

DIABOLICAL. **diabolical liberty** (informal) great injustice. *The headmaster made everyone in the school stay on for an extra hour: it was a diabolical liberty, i.e. unfair, unjust.*

DICE. **dice with death** run the risk of killing oneself. *People who drive very fast in these bad conditions are dicing with death.*

DIE. **die is cast** one cannot retreat or change one's plans. *Since I have entered for the exam, the die is cast: I shall have to sit it.*

die with one's boots on die a violent death. *Most of the pirate captains in the old days died with their boots on.*

DIFFERENT. **different as chalk from cheese** very different. *You would never believe that John and Michael are brothers: they are as different as chalk from cheese.*

DIM. [See TAKE A DIM VIEW OF.]

DIRTY. **dirty/soil one's hands** do manual work. *Jack never dirties his hands doing jobs around the house: he always calls in tradesmen to do them.*

dirty linen [See WASH ONE'S DIRTY LINEN IN PUBLIC.]

dirty look [See BLACK LOOK.]

DISAPPEAR. **disappear/melt/vanish into thin air** disappear completely without trace. *My notebook was on the table a few minutes ago, but now it seems to have vanished into thin air.*

DISCRETION. **discretion is the better part of valour** it is better to run away when one is in a dangerous situation. *When the soldiers saw how heavily they were outnumbered, they obviously decided that discretion was the better part of valour, and fled.*

DO. [See also DONE, DON'T.]

do someone a bad turn do harm to someone. *Don't trust that man: he will do you a bad turn, if he can.*

do a double take (informal) look twice at someone or something (that is surprising, interesting, attractive, etc.). *The two children look so alike that most people who see them together do a double take.*

do someone a good turn do good to someone. *If you want to do me a good turn on your trip abroad, could you bring me back some duty-free whisky?*

do a slow burn [See SLOW BURN.]

do credit to add to someone's good reputation. *The amount of time that he devotes to less fortunate people does credit to him/does him credit.* Also **be a credit to**. *He is a credit to his family, i.e. his good behaviour, etc. adds to his family's reputation.*

do duty for act in the place of. *This saucer will have to do duty for an ashtray until I get around to buying one.*

do justice to treat someone/something with the respect he/she/it deserves. *She cooked a beautiful meal, and the guests did justice to it, i.e. they showed their appreciation by eating it all up. They did the meal justice.*

do one's level best do something as well as one can. *It is not Jack's fault that he came second in the race: he did his level best.*

(just about) do one's nut (informal) be extremely angry. *When he saw what a mess the children had made of his car, he did his nut.*

do-or-die (expression used to refer to one's final, greatest effort). *This is our last attempt to climb the mountain: it's a case of do-or-die.*

do one proud/handsome give one reason to feel proud. *I saw your son's performance in the play last night: I thought he did you proud.*

do the honours (often used when someone is requested to) perform the duties of a host or hostess. *We need someone to carve the meat – would you mind doing the honours?*

do the rounds [See GO THE ROUNDS.]

do the trick achieve what has to be achieved. *After you have put the glue on the broken toy, you will need to put a weight on it until the glue sets: a heavy book would do the trick.*

do something to death (informal) repeat something too many times. *Whenever he hears a good joke, he does it to death, i.e. he keeps telling it to people.* [See also DONE TO DEATH.]

do wonders (for) [See WORK WONDERS (FOR).]

do yeoman service [See YEOMAN SERVICE.]

DOCTOR. [See JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED.]

DOG. dog-eat-dog (situation) where one has to struggle against others to survive; very competitive (situation). *He left his job because he couldn't stand the dog-eat-dog conditions in which he had to work. (every) dog has his day* [See EVERY DOG HAS HIS DAY.]

dog in the manger someone who, because he/she cannot have a certain thing, does not want anyone else to have it either. *Because Jim was not invited to the party, he tried to prevent it being held at all: he's a real dog in the manger.* Also **dog-in-the-manger**. *It's typical of his dog-in-the-manger attitude.*

(not have/stand a) dog's chance [See under STAND A CHANCE.]

(lead/have a) dog's life (have a) miserable, unhappy existence. *I had a dog's life at school: I was always being beaten.* Also **lead/give someone a dog's life** cause someone to be miserable and unhappy. *His wife leads him a dog's life.*

DONE. done for (informal) 1. in trouble. *If I don't get this essay in on time, then I'm done for.* 2. certain to die. *Anyone who doesn't get down from that mountain before nightfall is done for.*

(not the) done thing/(not) done (not) allowed in polite society. *You can't leave without saying goodbye to your host: it's just not done.* [See also QUITE THE THING.]

done/burnt to a frazzle (informal) overcooked; burnt. *We couldn't eat the meat: it was done to a frazzle.* [See also WORN TO A FRAZZLE.]

done/cooked to a turn done or made perfectly. *This meat is delicious: it's been done to a turn.*

done to death done, used, made, etc. too many times. *That is about the twentieth time today I've heard that record being played: it's being done to death, i.e. played too often.*

DONKEY. (do the) donkey work do the hard, real work. *His boss takes all the credit, but it is John who does all the donkey work.*

donkey's years (informal) a very long time. *I can hardly remember him: it's donkey's years since I last saw him.*

DON'T. don't mention it (expression used when one is thanked. Now thought to be rather formal, and often replaced by **US you're welcome**). *"Thanks very much for helping me tidy up." - "Oh, don't mention it."*

DOSE. dose/taste of one's own medicine the same kind of unpleasant treatment which one has given to others. *They say that the Head of the Secret Police has been thrown into prison: he's getting a dose of his own medicine.*

DOT. [See CROSS THE T'S AND DOT THE I'S.]

DOUBLE. double Dutch language that is impossible to understand. *I could not understand a word that he was saying: it was just double Dutch to me.*

double-quick (informal) very quick; very quickly. *That's the fire alarm: we'll have to get out of here double-quick.*

double take [See DO A DOUBLE TAKE.]

double talk saying one thing but meaning another. *State clearly what you mean: I'm confused by all this double talk.*

double time period of work outside one's normal working hours for which one is paid at twice the normal rate. *In this job you get paid double time for Sunday work.*

DOWN. (right) down one's alley/street (informal) (exactly) what one likes to do, or what one can do well. *If your television needs to be fixed, ask Joe to do it: that sort of thing is right down his alley.* Also **(right) up one's alley/street** (same meaning).

down-at-heel poorly dressed; giving the appearance of being poor. *After some months without a job, he began to look a bit down-at-heel.*

down in the dumps/mouth sad; depressed. *My son has been down in the dumps ever since his team was knocked out of the cup.*

(come) down in the world [See COME DOWN IN THE WORLD.]

down on someone like a ton of bricks [See COME DOWN ON SOMEONE LIKE A TON OF BRICKS.]

down on one's luck having a period in which things are going badly for one. *I visit Mary regularly these days: she's been down on her luck recently and needs cheering up.*

down on one's uppers [See ON ONE'S UPpers.]

(right) down one's street [See DOWN ONE'S ALLEY.]

down the drain lost; wasted. *I don't know why Jack gambles so much on horses: it's just money down the drain.*

down the line [See ALL/RIGHT ALONG/DOWN THE LINE.]

(sell) down the river [See SELL SOMEONE/SOMETHING DOWN THE RIVER.]

down-to-earth realistic; not fanciful in any way. *Jim will give you good advice: he's a very down-to-earth kind of person.* [See also COME DOWN TO EARTH.]

DRAG. drag one's feet/heels do something reluctantly; show no enthusiasm. *The manager is dragging his heels over making these improvements we suggested: I think we shall have to speak to him again.*

DRAW. draw a (complete) blank be (totally) unsuccessful; not find (at all) what one is looking for. *The detectives checked at every house to ask if anyone had seen anything suspicious, but they drew a complete blank.*

draw a parallel show how two things resemble each other. *The history teacher drew a parallel between the French and Russian Revolutions.*

draw/cast/throw a veil/curtain over keep hidden or private. *The headmaster was very angry, but I think I had better draw a veil over what he actually said.*

draw blood hurt or anger someone by what one says or does. *Jane looks furious: I think that that last remark of Mary's about her drew blood.*

draw the line (at) 1. decide that one will not allow matters to go beyond a certain point. *I insist that all my children have to be home*

before midnight: you've got to draw the line somewhere, i.e. one has to make some kind of rule about this. 2. refuse to do. I'll do what I can to help, but I draw the line at working on Sundays.

DRESSED. **dressed to kill** wearing one's very best clothes. *John must be trying to impress someone: he's dressed to kill.*
dressed up to the nines [See UP TO THE NINES.]

DRESSING. **dressing down** row. *The boss gave Jack a good dressing down for being late, i.e. he gave him a serious row.*

DRIBS. **dribs and drabs** [See IN/BY DRIBS AND DRABS.]

DRIVE. **drive a bargain** come to a business agreement. *I'll drive a bargain with you: if you let me stay here rent-free, I'll look after the house for you.* Also **drive a hard bargain** make a business agreement which is unfair or unfavourable to the other person. *Try not to do business with him: he drives a hard bargain.*

drive a coach and horses through (usually with reference to laws or regulations) easily avoid (perhaps because they have been loosely or badly worded). *Those new rules are not effective at all: you could drive a coach and horses through them.*

drive someone/something to the wall [See under GO TO THE WALL.]

DROP. **drop a brick/clanger** say something that causes embarrassment. *I dropped a brick when I mentioned seeing Jack at the bar: his wife had thought that he was working in the office, and she was furious.*

drop (someone) a hint suggest something (to someone) without stating it directly, or in full. *I always go to Professor Brown's lectures: he often drops a hint about what topics will come up in the exam.*

drop (someone) a line send a letter or note (to someone). *Drop me a line to let me know that you have arrived safely.*

drop dead 1. fall down dead. *He dropped dead from a heart-attack.* 2. (informal and impolite way of contradicting someone, refusing to do something, etc.). *"Would you mind writing this essay for me, and handing it in under my name?" - "Drop dead!"*

drop in the bucket/ocean very small amount, compared to some much larger amount. *They are a big company with very big outlays of money: the amount they pay for your salary is only a drop in the ocean.*

drop of a hat [See AT THE DROP OF A HAT.]

drop of the hard stuff (informal) small amount of whisky. *A couple of us were in the bar, having a drop of the hard stuff.*

DROWN. **drown one's sorrows/troubles** get drunk to forget one's sorrows or troubles. *If his team loses, he usually goes to the pub to drown his sorrows.*

DRY. (not) **dry behind the ears** (informal; usually with negative) (not) experienced; (not) mature. *I don't think that the new officer will be able to handle this situation: he isn't dry behind the ears yet, i.e. he doesn't have enough experience.* [See also WET BEHIND THE EARS.]

dry run trial attempt; rehearsal to find out things that may go

wrong. *The ceremony is on Friday, but we are having a dry run tomorrow to discover any snags (problems).*

DUCKS. [See PLAY DUCKS AND DRAKES WITH.]

DUTCH. **Dutch courage** false sense of bravery brought about by drinking alcohol. *Before going to his boss to ask for an increase in wages, he gave himself some Dutch courage by having a quick drink of whisky.*

Dutch uncle [See TALK TO SOMEONE LIKE A DUTCH UNCLE.]

DUTY. **(in) duty bound** required by one's duty. *You must understand that, if I discover anyone cheating, I am duty bound to report it to the chief examiner.*

DYED. **dyed-in-the-wool** unchanging from one's old ways or beliefs; thorough; committed. *There's no use arguing against the monarchy with Bill: he's a dyed-in-the-wool royalist.*

E

EAGER. **eager beaver** someone who is very enthusiastic, or who works hard. *Susan will do well in her new job: she is a real eager beaver.*

EAR. [See HAVE ONE'S EAR TO THE GROUND.]

EARLY. **early bird** person who gets up early in the morning; someone who arrives ahead of time. *My husband always gets up first to make breakfast: he's an early bird.*

early bird catches/gets the worm person who is first to start doing something, or who starts something early, will be the one to be successful. *If you want to be sure of a ticket for next week's performance, buy it now: the early bird catches the worm.*

EARN. **earn a bomb** [See MAKE A BOMB.]

earn money hand over fist [See HAND OVER FIST.]

EARS. **ears burn** feel embarrassed because other people are talking about one. *John's ears were burning as he listened to his classmates discussing the mistakes he had made in the physics lesson.*

EASY. **easy come, easy go** if money is easily gained, it is quickly spent. *Within a year she had spent the fortune she had won by gambling: as they say, easy come, easy go.*

EAT. **eat one's cake and have it too** make a choice between one of two things, and still want the benefits of the second thing. *The Prime Minister said that if people had higher wages then they couldn't expect lower prices: they couldn't eat their cake and have it too.* Also **have one's cake and eat it too.**

eat one's hat [See I'LL EAT MY HAT.]

eat one's heart out be unhappy and miserable, usually for a long

period of time. *During the whole time that her father was away the little girl ate her heart out.*

eat humble pie behave humbly, meekly, especially after a defeat or setback of some kind. *He boasted about what he was going to do when he won, but after his defeat he had to eat humble pie.*

eat like a horse eat a large amount of food. *Jack has a very good appetite; he eats like a horse.*

eat out of someone's hand be completely under someone's control. *The audience gave the speaker a cool reception at first, but after ten minutes they were eating out of his hand, i.e. they were completely under his influence.* [See also HAVE SOMEONE EATING OUT OF ONE'S HAND.]

eat someone out of house and home eat so much that the person providing the food can hardly afford it. *I used to own two large dogs, but they were eating me out of house and home, so I had to give them away.*

eat one's words contradict what one has said earlier; admit that one was wrong. *My brother said that I would never pass the exam, but he has had to eat his words.*

EGGS. [See PUT ALL ONE'S EGGS IN ONE BASKET.]

ELEVENTH. (the) eleventh hour [See AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR.]

END. (be at the/reach the) end of one's rope/tether (be at the/or reach the) point where one cannot endure something any longer. *The children misbehaved all day, so that by dinner time she was at the end of her tether.*

end of the line/road point where one cannot go on any longer. *It was his tenth defeat, and the boxer realised that it was the end of the road: he would have to give up boxing and try something else.*

ENOUGH. enough is enough (expression used to show that one will not endure an unsatisfactory situation any more). *The teacher said "Sit down all of you and be quiet; enough is enough," i.e. he would not endure any more noise.*

enough to wake the dead [See FIT TO WAKE THE DEAD.]

ESCAPE. escape by the skin of one's teeth [See under BY THE SKIN OF ONE'S TEETH.]

EVEN. even so allowing for that; in spite of that. *His son had been very ungrateful, but, even so, he still forgave him.*

EVERY. every cloud has a silver lining nothing is completely bad, there is always some good will come from it or after it. *John was most upset at his uncle's death, but every cloud has a silver lining: his uncle had left him all his money.*

every dog has his/its day every person, however unfortunate, has his time of happiness or glory. *After years of neglect, the old artist's work was recognised and honoured: every dog has his day.*

every hour on the hour [See ON THE HOUR.]

every last all, without exception. *I've no money left: I've spent every last penny.*

every last man/every man jack (informal) everyone, without exception. *When it became known that the ship was in danger, every last man in the fishing village went out in his boat to help. They all went to help, every man jack of them.*

every now and then/again from time to time; occasionally. *Every now and then, his mother went to John's room to check that he was still sleeping.*

every once in a while [See ONCE IN A WHILE.]

every other every second. *This magazine appears every other week, i.e. once in two weeks, fortnightly.*

every so often occasionally. *Every so often, the manager comes along to check that everyone is working.*

every time one turns around/round (informal) all the time; continuously. *That chap is always hanging about the shop; every time I turn round he's there.*

EXCEPTION. **exception proves the rule** when something unusual happens it contrasts with what normally happens. *Jim was on time today, but it's just a case of the exception proving the rule, I'm afraid, i.e. he is normally late.*

EYE. (an) eye for [See HAVE AN EYE FOR.]

eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth an offence should be punished or revenged in the same way as the offence which was committed. *Anyone who commits a murder should be executed; you know the old saying: an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.*

(an/one's) eye on [See HAVE ONE'S EYE ON/AN EYE ON.]

eye on the ball [See KEEP ONE'S EYE ON THE BALL.]

eye to eye with [See (NOT) SEE EYE TO EYE WITH.]

eye to the main chance [See HAVE AN EYE TO THE MAIN CHANCE.]

EYES. (have) **eyes in the back of one's head** (have) the power to see what is behind one. *That is a very tough class: you would really need eyes in the back of your head to control it properly.*

eyes only for [See HAVE EYES ONLY FOR.]

eyes open fully aware of what one is doing. *I already knew what the hardships of army life were, so I joined up with my eyes open.*

F

FACE. **face like thunder** very angry expression on one's face. *Something must have annoyed John: he's got a face like thunder.* Also **look like thunder** look very angry. *He came in looking like thunder.* [See also AS BLACK AS THUNDER.]

face the music go through an unpleasant experience, especially one brought about by one's own actions. *He has been caught stealing, and he will have to face the music today in court.*

(take someone/something at) face value (judge someone/something by his/her/its) surface appearance. *He was dressed like a post-*

man so I took him at face value; it was only later that I discovered him to be a thief in disguise.

FACTS. facts of life information about sex and childbirth. *Many parents find it embarrassing to tell their children the facts of life.*

FAIR. fair and square (informal) fairly, without dispute. *He beat his opponent fair and square in the second round.*

(a) fair cop (informal) act of being caught while one is doing something wrong. *The thief could not deny the charge: it was a fair cop.*

fair in love and war [See ALL'S FAIR IN LOVE AND WAR.]

(see) fair play (make sure that) fairness and justice (are observed). *Whenever we had a game with a team from another class, one of the teachers would be there to see fair play.*

fair wear and tear damage to goods brought about by normal use. *We will take back the goods if you are not satisfied, but they must be in good condition, allowing for fair wear and tear.*

fair-weather friend someone who is friendly with a person only while things are going well for that person. *I discovered that Alan was a fair-weather friend: when I lost my money, he refused to have anything to do with me.*

FAIRY. (a/one's) fairy godmother someone who turns up to get one out of a difficulty, usually unexpectedly. *My car had broken down miles from anywhere, when Jane turned up like a fairy godmother to rescue me.*

FALL. fall about one's ears [See ABOUT ONE'S EARS.]

fall/be all over (someone) welcome someone in an extremely friendly or admiring way. *When Jane invited her handsome brother to the party, the girls fell (were) all over him.*

fall apart at the seams [See BREAK APART AT THE SEAMS.]

fall between two stools come somewhere in between two things, situations, etc., so that it is neither one thing nor the other. *The publisher told the author that his story fell between two stools: it was too long to be published as a short story and too short to be published as a novel.*

fall by the wayside not persevere, fail to continue (especially with reference to good behaviour). *The whole group made a resolution never to smoke again: within a week most of them had fallen by the wayside.*

fall down on the job fail to do something properly; fail to complete some task. *He said he would have the whole house decorated by Christmas, but he fell down on the job.*

fall flat (on its/one's face) fail completely in an attempt to do something (especially to entertain or to amuse). *The speaker tried to liven up his speech with a joke, but it fell flat.*

fall for something hook, line and sinker [See HOOK, LINE AND SINKER.]

fall from grace start behaving badly. *Your son behaved very well for a week, but I'm afraid he's fallen from grace.*

fall head over heels (in love) fall deeply (in love). *He fell head over heels in love with her and immediately asked her to marry him.*

fall into arrears not keep up one's payment of a debt, or of rent, etc. *The landlord said that all tenants who had fallen into arrears would be evicted.*

fall on evil days become poor. *At one time they were a very wealthy family, but they've fallen on evil days.*

fall on one's feet [See LAND ON ONE'S FEET/BOTH FEET.]

fall/bend/lean over backwards/oneself be very eager (to do something, please someone, etc.); do everything one can. *We've fallen over backwards to make her welcome, but she's still homesick.*

fall/come short not be enough (either in quantity or quality). *Unfortunately the supply of spare parts has fallen short of our requirements,* i.e. we cannot get enough of them.

FALSE. **false alarm** warning of danger which turns out to be untrue. *People were saying that the river had flooded its banks, but it turned out to be a false alarm.*

FANCY. **fancy (meeting you)** (informal) how strange (to meet you); what a surprise (to meet you). *Fancy meeting you here: I thought that you never went to parties.*

fancy price very high price. *You can pay some fancy prices for children's toys, especially around Christmas time.*

FAR. **far and away** easily; by a wide margin. *John is far and away the best athlete in his class.*

(from) far and near (from) distant places and also from places nearby. *People came from far and near to see the show.*

far and wide over a large area; almost everywhere. *They searched far and wide for a suitable place, but could not find one.*

(a) far cry (a) very different thing. *Being president of a country is a far cry from being a peasant farmer, which is how he started out in life.*

far-fetched unlikely to be true; unbelievable. *I thought that his story of how he beat up the four men who tried to rob him was a bit far-fetched.*

far out (informal) 1. very unusual. *Some of his books are really far out; I can't understand them.* 2. excellent. *You should see his paintings: they're far out.* 3. (exclamation to show that one is surprised or impressed by something). *"Jack's having another party tonight - that's the third this week." - "Far out, man!"*

FAT. **fat chance** (informal) very little likelihood. *A fat chance he has of winning a prize in the music contest: he hardly knows one note from another.*

fat is in the fire something has happened which will bring trouble. *The fat is really in the fire now: your boss has discovered that you have not been coming into the office.*

(live off/on the) fat of the land (live in the) very best, most comfortable circumstances. *He has plenty of money: he has been living off the fat of the land for years.*

FEAST. **feast one's eyes on/upon** look at something which one finds very attractive. *The visitors feasted their eyes on the beautiful display of paintings.*

FEATHER. **(birds of a) feather** [See BIRDS OF A FEATHER (FLOCK TOGETHER).]

feather in one's cap something which will bring one credit or honour. *The young salesman knew that, if he could get the valuable contract, it would be quite a feather in his cap.*

feather one's nest make oneself rich, usually in an illegal or underhand way. *The former finance minister was accused of using state funds to feather his nest.*

FEATHERS. [See FINE FEATHERS DO NOT MAKE FINE BIRDS.]

FED. **fed up (to the (back) teeth)** (informal) (very) bored; (very) annoyed. *I have been waiting here for thirty minutes and I'm fed up to the back teeth.*

FEEL. **feel in one's bones** be sure that something is true, without being able to give a reason for it. *I feel it in my bones that our lawyer is cheating us, but I can't give you any proof.*

feel like a fish out of water [See FISH OUT OF WATER.]

feel like a million dollars (informal) feel very healthy; feel very happy. *He has completely recovered from his operation; he says he feels like a million dollars.*

feel like death warmed up [See LOOK LIKE DEATH WARMED UP.]

feel the draught (US draft)/pinch suffer the effects of something, especially shortage of money. *If the price of oil continues to rise, then the car-manufacturers may begin to feel the draught, i.e. they may suffer because they will sell fewer cars.*

FEET. **feet first/foremost** (informal) dead. *I'm not leaving here until they carry me out feet first, i.e. I shall only leave here when I am dead.*

feet of clay hidden weaknesses or vices. *When the famous man's private diaries were published, his followers discovered that their great hero had feet of clay, i.e. he was not so wonderful as they had thought.*

feet (planted) (firmly) on the ground [See KEEP ONE'S FEET (PLANTED) (FIRMLY) ON THE GROUND.]

FEW. **few and far between** very rare, unusual. *While we were touring, we tried to stay only at good hotels; but we discovered that they were few and far between.*

FIFTY. **fifty-fifty** even; as much one way as the other. *The doctor said that the injured man had only a fifty-fifty chance of surviving.*

FIGHT. **fight against time/the clock** [See under AGAINST TIME.]

fight shy of avoid. *Jack is rather lazy, and fights shy of any situation which will involve him in a lot of work.*

fight to a standstill go on fighting until neither side has the strength to continue. *Although we had only a small army, we fought the invaders to a standstill.*

fight someone/something tooth and nail fight someone/something fiercely, with all one's power. *The government will find it difficult to get the new airport built in that area: the local people will fight it tooth and nail.*

FIGHTING. fighting fit in good health. *I have to rest just now, but I hope to be fighting fit in a few days.* [See also AS FIT AS A FIDDLE/FLEA.]

FILL. fill someone's shoes take someone's place/job and be as good as he/she was. *Bill was a wonderful head of department; it will be very difficult for them to find someone to fill his shoes.* [See also STEP INTO SOMEONE'S SHOES.]

fill/fit the bill meet certain requirements; be good enough. *We are looking for someone to be in charge of the office; we thought that Miss Jones might fill the bill.*

fill the breach [See STEP INTO THE BREACH.]

FIND. find fault say that certain things are wrong, not good enough, etc. *No matter how carefully I prepare work for Professor Smith, he always finds fault with it.*

(not) find it in one's heart (often with negative) (not) be able to do something because it seems too cruel. *He had worked so hard that I couldn't find it in my heart to tell him that he had failed.*

find out which way/how the wind blows/is blowing [See WAY THE WIND BLOWS/IS BLOWING.]

find one's tongue speak after a period of being silent. *Peter was rather shy and did not say anything at first; but eventually he found his tongue and spoke up.*

FINDERS. finders keepers (losers weepers) (expression often used by children when they find something) the person who finds something is entitled to keep it. *Johnny saw the coin first and picked it up, shouting, "Finders keepers!"*

FINE. fine feathers do not make fine birds the fact that a person dresses well does not mean that he is a good or admirable person. *Do not be influenced too much by his smart appearance: remember that fine feathers don't make fine birds.*

fine pass [See COME TO A FINE/PRETTY PASS.]

fine-tooth(ed) comb [See GO OVER/THROUGH WITH A FINE-TOOTH(ED) COMB.]

FINGER. (have a/one's) finger in the pie (have a) connection with something that is going on or being planned. *Jones is a very important man in our town: whenever anything is being planned you can be sure he will have a finger in the pie.* Also **with a finger in the pie** having a connection with something that is going on or being planned. *You can be sure that there will be lots of people with a finger in the pie.*

(pull one's) finger out [See PULL ONE'S FINGER OUT.]

FINGERS. fingers are all thumbs/all fingers and thumbs (used with reference to a person who is very clumsy). *I'm no good at doing*

practical work: when I attempt to mend something, my fingers are all thumbs/I'm all fingers and thumbs.

(keep one's) fingers crossed [See KEEP ONE'S FINGERS CROSSED.]

fingers in the till [See HAVE ONE'S HAND/FINGERS IN THE TILL.]

FIRST. first and foremost firstly; most importantly. *You've been soaked through by the rain: first and foremost, we'll get these wet clothes off, and then we'll give you something hot to eat.*

first come, first served those who arrive first will be attended to first. *In the dining-hall, it's a case of first come, first served; so if you're late there may not be much left.*

(give someone the) first refusal (give someone the) first opportunity of deciding whether to get or buy something. *If you decide to sell your car, will you give me the first refusal?*

first things first the most important things must be attended to first. *Although he was not feeling well, John wanted to go on working, but the doctor said it was a case of first things first: John's health was more important than his work.*

FISH. fish in a large pond [See LITTLE FISH/FROG IN A LARGE POND.]

fish in a small pond [See BIG/LARGE FISH/FROG IN A SMALL POND.]

fish in muddy/troubled waters try to gain an advantage in a dangerous or confused situation. *When a civil war breaks out within a small country, the danger is that one of the bigger powers will try to fish in these troubled waters, i.e. seek its own advantage by supporting one side or the other.*

fish (flesh) nor fowl [See NEITHER FISH (FLESH) NOR FOWL.]

(feel like a) fish out of water (feel like) someone who feels strange or uncomfortable because he is not in his usual surroundings. *He became rich very quickly, and bought an expensive house, but he felt like a fish out of water among his wealthy neighbours.*

(other) fish to fry [See OTHER FISH TO FRY.]

FIT. fit as a fiddle/flea (informal) very fit and healthy. *I wasn't very well for a while but now I am as fit as a fiddle again.* [See also FIGHTING FIT.]

fit like a glove fit one very well or exactly. *Mary and Jane are almost exactly the same size: when Mary wears one of Jane's dresses it usually fits her like a glove.*

fit the bill [See FILL THE BILL.]

fit to be tied (informal) very angry. *When he saw the mess that the children had made, he was fit to be tied.*

(not) fit to hold a candle to (not nearly) as good as. *As a footballer, Jim is quite good, but he's not fit to hold a candle to his brother Jack, who has played for his country several times.*

fit/enough to wake the dead very loudly indeed. *I was wakened up on Sunday morning by the bells, which were being rung fit to wake the dead.*

FITS. [See BY FITS AND STARTS.]

FLASH. flash in the pan achievement which is not typical, and which

will not be repeated. *Jack is really not a very good runner: his victory in the trials was probably just a flash in the pan.*

FLAT. (be) flat out (on one's feet) be very tired, exhausted. *After my first day of working in the shop, I was flat out on my feet.*

(go) flat out (try to do something) with all one's power. *The ambitious young senator went flat out to become president.*

FLEA. flea in one's ear [See SEND SOMEONE OFF WITH A FLEA IN HIS/HER EAR.]

FLESH. flesh and blood 1. a normal human being. *I can't stay here and listen to such nonsense: it is more than flesh and blood can stand.* 2. people who are related to one. *He ran away and left his family: how could he treat his own flesh and blood so badly?*

(make one's) flesh creep [See MAKE ONE'S FLESH CRAWL/CREEP.]

FLING. fling caution to the winds [See THROW CAUTION TO THE WINDS.]

fling something in someone's teeth [See THROW/CAST/FLING SOMETHING IN SOMEONE'S FACE/TEETH.]

FLIP. flip one's lid (informal) become extremely emotional (e.g. angry, enthusiastic, etc.); behave as if one has lost one's reason. *When our boss discovered that the money had been stolen, he just about flipped his lid, i.e. became very angry. When he saw the beautiful young secretary, Jack flipped his lid, i.e. fell in love with her.*

FLOCK. [See BIRDS OF A FEATHER FLOCK TOGETHER.]

FLOG. flog a dead horse go on trying to do something when it is no longer possible. *Jim is still trying to arrange a picnic on Saturday, but he is flogging a dead horse: no-one is interested.*

FLOWING. (a land) flowing with milk and honey rich and pleasant (land). *The early explorers in America imagined that the new continent would be a land flowing with milk and honey.*

FLY. fly a kite propose something to see whether it is acceptable (especially when one is not sure about it). *The group decided to fly a kite at the conference: they put forward their ideas for discussion.*

(go) fly a kite [See GO FLY A KITE.]

fly at someone's throat attack someone (either physically or in words). *The angry crowd flew at his throat, i.e. attacked him. Don't mention his failure in the exam: he'll fly at your throat, i.e. he'll be very angry with you.* [See also JUMP DOWN SOMEONE'S THROAT.]

fly blind 1. fly a plane without being able to see where one is going. *The fog was so thick that the pilot had to make the landing by flying blind, i.e. using only his instruments.* 2. perform a task by instinct, without really knowing much about it. *For the first two weeks in my new job I was really flying blind, since there was no-one to teach me.*

fly-by-night not reliable; not to be trusted. *He lost all his money when he invested it in a fly-by-night business.*

fly by the seat of one's pants do something by instinct, without

reasoning it out. *My boss said he could not give me any advice on how to handle the situation: I would just have to fly by the seat of my pants.*
fly in the face of deliberately ignore; deliberately act against. *He was obviously guilty, but the jury decided to fly in the face of the evidence, and acquitted him.* [See also IN THE TEETH OF.]

fly in the ointment problem in a situation which is otherwise fine. *I quite like my new job; the only fly in the ointment is my boss, Miss Pringle: she is always finding new things for me to do.*

fly off the handle (informal) lose one's temper. *Every time I ask him for permission to leave early, he flies off the handle.*

fly the coop (informal) run away; escape. *When the police returned to the room, they discovered that their prisoner had flown the coop.*

FLYING. flying high very successful, prosperous. *After her appearance on television, the young actress was flying high.*

FOAM. foam at the mouth be very angry, upset. *Don't go near Brown: he's foaming at the mouth because you did not turn up for work yesterday.*

FOLLOW. follow in someone's footsteps do the same sort of thing as someone else has done. *John is going to follow in his father's footsteps and become a doctor also.*

follow one's nose 1. go straight ahead. *When you get to the main street, just follow your nose: your hotel is at the end of the street.* 2. wander about, not following a map or guide. *I used to wander about the city for hours, just following my nose.*

follow suit do the same as someone else has done. *Jim decided to go for a swim and Jack followed suit.*

FOOD. food for thought something to think about, especially a problem or difficulty. *The teacher warned John that he would fail if he did not work harder and this gave John some food for thought.*

FOOL. fool and his money are soon parted (phrase used when someone wastes his money foolishly). *Within a few months the young man had spent all his father's money: a fool and his money are soon parted.*

(live in a) fool's paradise (be in a) state when one imagines that things are fine when they actually are not. *Anyone who thinks that the world's supply of oil will last forever is living in a fool's paradise.*

FOOLS. fools rush in (where angels fear to tread) foolish people attempt to do things which wiser people avoid. *Mr. Smith volunteered to lead the rescue party, although he was the least experienced: another case of fools rushing in, I suppose.*

FOOT. foot in the door opportunity which may be taken advantage of, leading to other things. *The sales-manager said that the company had its foot in the door of some overseas markets, which could lead to very good sales.*

foot the bill pay the bill. *We can have a party if you like, but who's going to foot the bill?*

- FOR.** **for all one is worth** as hard as one can. *When I say "Pull!", pull the rope for all you're worth.*
- for all that** in spite of that. *Mr. Jones was a rather lazy teacher but, for all that, he was still quite popular with his students.*
- for a rainy day** [See RAINY DAY.]
- for a song** very cheaply. *I had to sell the house at a very bad time, and so it went for a song, i.e. it was sold very cheaply.*
- for crying out loud** (informal) (exclamation showing surprise or annoyance). *When his wife suggested that they should go out shopping, he exclaimed, "For crying out loud, we've done that every day this week!"*
- for dear life** with great determination. *When the mountaineer felt himself slipping, he clung on to the ledge for dear life.*
- for good (and all)** for ever. *They had a terrible quarrel and, after that, she left him for good.*
- for good measure** in addition. *When we were buying the drinks for the party we bought ten bottles of red wine and, for good measure, ten bottles of champagne.*
- for goodness'/heaven's/Pete's sake** (exclamation to show surprise or annoyance). *On meeting his friend again, Jack exclaimed: "For Pete's sake, I hardly recognised you after all these years!"*
- for keeps** (informal) for ever. *When the famous film-star married for the fifth time, she said, "This time it's for keeps," i.e. she intended that this marriage would last.*
- (not) for love or money** (not) for any reason. *I grew up in this house and I would not part with it for love or money, i.e. I would not sell it for any reason.*
- for one thing** to give one reason. *There are lots of reasons for choosing Jim as chairman of the company: for one thing, he's worked harder than anyone else.*
- for one's part** in one's opinion, speaking for oneself. *Many people criticise Jim but, for my part, I think he has done very well.*
- for short** a shorter, quicker way of naming someone or something. *Her name is Philippa, but she's called "Phil" for short.*
- for sure** without any doubt; with certainty. *I don't know his age for sure, but I think he's about thirty, i.e. I am not certain of his age. . . . Also (and that's) for sure! (and) you can be certain of that! If there is supposed to be a ghost in that house, I'm not going to stay there, and that's for sure!*
- for that matter** in connection with that. *I don't know how old he is and, for that matter, I don't care.*
- for the asking/taking** if you want to ask for (/take) it. *If you would like to borrow any of this equipment, it's yours for the asking.*
- (be) (all) for the best** (be) a good thing, even though it does not appear to be so. *I lost my job, but it was really (all) for the best, because now I have a much better one.*
- (strictly) for the birds** (informal) not true (at all); believed only by foolish people. *He acts as if he has a lot of money, but that is strictly for the birds: he is no wealthier than you or I.*

for the high jump (informal) going to be punished in some way. *You are for the high jump: the headmaster knows that you cheated in the exam.*

for the life of one (used for emphasis) really. *I can't for the life of me think why he should want to give up his studies just a few weeks before his final exams.*

for the most part mostly, largely. *It is a very exclusive club: the members are wealthy businessmen and professional people, for the most part.*

for the time being meanwhile, in the meantime. *Your flat will be ready next month; you can stay with us for the time being.*

(not) for (all) the world (not) for any reason. *I hope that I have not offended Miss Jones: I wouldn't do that for all the world.*

for want of owing to the lack of. *The plant died for want of watering, i.e. because no-one watered it.*

FORCE. force someone's hand make someone do something he/she doesn't want to do. *The teacher said that he did not want to punish the students, but they would force his hand if they did not behave.*

force of circumstances [See BY FORCE OF CIRCUMSTANCES.]

FOREGONE. foregone conclusion result that can be certainly predicted. *I am not going to the match because the result is a foregone conclusion: the home team is sure to win.*

FORGET. forget it [See SKIP IT.]

FORLORN. forlorn hope hope that is not likely to come true; attempt that is not likely to be successful. *The young man thinks he may get a job here, but it is a pretty forlorn hope: there is a lot of unemployment.*

FORTY. forty winks short sleep; nap. *I sometimes take forty winks after lunch on Sunday.*

FREE. free agent someone who can do what he/she likes. *Consider yourself a free agent: you can do the job any way you like.*

free and easy not following rules or regulations. *It was a very relaxing holiday: there was a very free and easy atmosphere.*

(give someone a) free hand (allow someone) freedom to do what he/she likes. *The architect was given a free hand to design the house any way he liked. The architect had a free hand in the design of the house.*

free/full rein [See GIVE (A) (FREE/FULL) REIN TO.]

FROG. [See BIG/LARGE FISH/FROG IN A SMALL POND; LITTLE FISH/FROG IN A LARGE POND.]

FROM. from all appearances [See TO/FROM/BY ALL APPEARANCES.]

from cover to cover (with reference to a book, etc.) from the beginning to the end. *He always reads the Sunday newspapers from cover to cover.*

from far and near [See FAR AND NEAR.]

from nowhere [See OUT OF NOWHERE.]

from pillar to post from one place to another. *The escaped prisoner was hunted from pillar to post.*

from scratch from the beginning. *I don't know any French at all: I shall have to learn it from scratch.*

(straight) from the shoulder fully and frankly, without any attempt to be polite or sympathetic. *I gave them my opinion straight from the shoulder: I didn't care whether it made them angry or not.*

from the year dot [See THE YEAR DOT.]

from/since time immemorial for a very long time, further back than anyone can remember. *This is a very ancient custom, which has been practised here from time immemorial.*

from top to toe completely (with reference to a person). *He was dressed in black from top to toe.*

from way back (informal) from a long time ago. *I'd like you to meet Joe: he's an old friend of mine from way back.*

FRYING. [See OUT OF THE FRYING PAN INTO THE FIRE.]

FULFIL. **fulfil its/one's/the purpose** [See SERVE ONE'S/ITS/THE PURPOSE.]

FULL. **full of oneself** proud, vain. *I can't stand that man, he's so full of himself, always boasting and so on.*

full of beans active; lively, in good spirits. *John seems to have fully recovered from his illness: when I saw him, he was full of beans.*

full rein [See GIVE ((A) (FULL/FREE) REIN TO.)]

(at) full tilt at full speed and with all one's force. *He did not see the door and ran full tilt into it.*

FUN. **fun and games** 1. lively behaviour (especially when such behaviour is not appropriate). *These children must get up to all sorts of fun and games when their parents are out.* 2. (used ironically with the opposite meaning) difficulties. *We had some fun and games trying to separate the ropes which the children had tied together.*

FUNNY. **funny business** [See MONKEY BUSINESS.]

G

GAIN. **gain ground** advance; make progress. *The story that the president is ill seems to be gaining ground, i.e. more people are believing it.* [See also GIVE/LOSE GROUND.]

gain one's spurs [See WIN ONE'S SPURS.]

GAME. **game is not worth the candle** something is not worth doing because of the cost, or the amount of trouble involved. *We thought of smuggling some extra cigarettes in, but when we saw the penalties for smuggling, we decided that the game was not worth the candle.*

(the) game is up (the) situation is hopeless. *As soon as the police came through the door, the thief realised that the game was up.*

game that two can play (at) (expression used when a bad action done by one person can also be done by his victim). *John has been going around criticising me, but he will soon find out that that's a game that two can play at, i.e. I can do the same to him.* Also **two can play at that game** (same meaning). *John has been going around criticising me, but two can play at that game.*

GATHER. gather up the threads [See PICK/TAKE/GATHER UP THE THREADS.]

GEE. gee whiz (exclamation of surprise). *Gee whiz, did you see the speed of that car?*

GET. get ahead become more successful than other people. *If you want to get ahead in life, you will have to work hard.*

get a load of (informal) look at (something surprising, ridiculous, interesting, etc.). *Get a load of that chap just by the door: have you ever seen such strange clothes?* Also **get a load of this!** (informal) listen to, look at this (ridiculous, surprising, interesting thing). *Get a load of this: it says here that if we don't accept a cut in salary we shall all lose our jobs!*

get a move on hurry up. *Tell Jack to get a move on: we're going to be late.*

get a rise out of [See TAKE A RISE OUT OF.]

get a thing about [See HAVE A THING ABOUT.]

get away with murder do something wrong without being punished. *That child is very badly behaved: her parents let her get away with murder.*

get away/along/off/on with you (always used in a friendly way) stop trying to make me believe that; stop misbehaving. *I told her that she looked younger than her daughter: "Get away with you!" she said, laughing.*

(not) get a word in (edgeways/edgewise) (often with negative) (not) manage to say anything because others are talking continuously. *My wife and her sister both talk too much; when they get together, I can't get a word in edgeways.*

get/put someone's back up make one feel annoyed. *Let's avoid arguing with Peter: he always gets my back up with his strange ideas.*

get blood from/out of a stone try to do something that is impossible (often used with reference to someone who is mean or hard-hearted). *Trying to borrow money from Jim is like getting blood out of a stone.*

get cracking (informal) start doing something quickly, with enthusiasm. *Let's get cracking: we have ten miles to walk before lunch.*

get down to brass tacks discuss something, (e.g. a business deal) seriously; get down to the real point of a discussion. *We had a few minutes of polite conversation, but then he got down to brass tacks, and asked me what salary I would want if I worked for him.*

get/be even (with) have one's revenge (on). *The prisoner swore that he would get even with the judge who had sentenced him.* [See also GET ONE'S OWN BACK.]

get one's finger out [See PULL ONE'S FINGER OUT.]

get one's fingers burnt/burn one's fingers do something which causes one to suffer pain, loss or hardship. *The last time I invested in the stock-market, I got my fingers burnt: I lost all my savings.*

get for one's pains receive for one's reward (usually with reference to a reward that is not enough). *The porter carried the rich lady's bags right across the station, but all he got for his pains was a polite "Thank you."*

get fresh (informal) become too bold, cheeky, insolent. *The teacher punished a few of the pupils who had tried to get fresh.*

get one's goat (informal) annoy one. *I wish that Jack would not treat his wife so rudely: it really gets my goat.*

get going start doing something; start a journey; start working. *If we want to arrive on time, we'd better get going.*

get one's hand in [See KEEP ONE'S HAND IN.]

get hold of 1. grasp; hold in one's hand. *Get hold of one end of this string, will you?* 2. contact, get in touch with. *"Where have you been? - I've been trying to get hold of you all day."* 3. pick up; become possessed of. *Where did you get hold of the idea that I came from London?*

get (hold of) the wrong end of the stick (informal) have the wrong idea, information. *I'm afraid you've got hold of the wrong end of the stick: that man over there is not my brother.*

get in a dig at someone make a remark that is intended to hurt or criticise someone. *She does not like her boss: she is always getting in digs at him.*

get in/into someone's hair continually annoy someone. *Harry gets in my hair: he's always interrupting me.* [See also GET/KEEP OUT OF SOMEONE'S HAIR.]

get in on the/someone's act (informal) make oneself a part of something started by others so as to get some of the praise. *She didn't want anything to do with organising the party until she saw it would be a success: now she is trying to get in on the act.*

get into/be in a scrape get into trouble through one's own fault. *The young man confessed to his father that he had got into a bit of a scrape: he had lost a lot of money through gambling.*

get something into one's head have a fixed idea in one's mind, which one won't change. *He's got it into his head that flying is dangerous, so he never travels by plane now.*

get into shape make oneself fit enough to do something. *We're getting into shape for the athletics season.* Also **get someone/something into shape** [See LICK SOMEONE/SOMETHING INTO SHAPE.]

get into one's stride [See HIT ONE'S STRIDE.]

get into the way of master the method of (doing something); accustom oneself to. *Driving a car is easy once you've got into the way of it, i.e. once you have got used to it.*

get it (informal) be punished, scolded, etc. *You'll get it if your father finds you still not in bed at this time.*

get it all together (informal) get things working the way they

should; be properly organised. *The producer of the play said to the actors, "Right, let's see if we can get it all together this time."*

get it into someone's head make someone understand. *I can't get it into my son's head that he will have to work harder if he is to succeed in life.*

get it over with [See (GET IT) OVER (AND DONE) WITH.]

get one's knickers in a twist (informal) become too anxious; become annoyed. *You must always let the people in the main office know what you're doing: they tend to get their knickers in a twist if they are not kept fully informed.*

get little change out of [See under (NOT) GET MUCH/ANY CHANGE OUT OF.]

get lost (informal and impolite) go away. *The foreman told us to work through our lunch break, but we told him to get lost, i.e. we refused.*

(not) get much/any change out of someone (informal: usually with negative) (not) get much information from someone. *There is no use asking him: you'll never get any change out of him.* Also **get little/no change out of someone** (similar meaning).

get off someone's back not bother or annoy one. *The geography teacher is always criticising me: I wish he would get off my back, i.e. leave me alone.* [See also ON SOMEONE'S BACK.]

get something off one's chest get rid of one's worries or problems by talking about them. *If you have any complaints, get them off your chest now.*

get off easy not to be punished as much as one deserves or expects. *Those ill-behaved students got off easy: the headmaster just gave them a warning.*

get/start off on the wrong foot start something (especially a relationship) in a bad way. *Sally and I got off on the wrong foot: I said that I hated dogs, not realising that she was a dog lover, i.e. that remark made things difficult from the beginning.* Also **get/start off on the right foot** start something well. *She was always worried about her health so our relationship started off on the right foot when she discovered that I was a doctor.*

get off scot free [See SCOT FREE.]

get off the ground (especially with reference to a project or idea) start to operate; come into existence. *John has an idea for a new tennis club, but I don't know if it will ever get off the ground.*

get off with you [See GET AWAY WITH YOU.]

get on/aboard a/the bandwagon [See JUMP ON A/THE BANDWAGON.]

get on one's nerves annoy one. *I wish that woman wouldn't talk so loudly: her voice is getting on my nerves.*

get on with you [See GET AWAY WITH YOU.]

get out from under [See OUT FROM UNDER.]

get/keep out of someone's hair stop annoying or bothering someone. *That woman has been phoning me every five minutes: I wish she would keep out of my hair.* [See also GET IN/INTO SOMEONE'S HAIR.]

get out of hand [See (GET) OUT OF HAND.]

(not) get something out of one's mind (be unable to) stop thinking

of something. *I saw a serious road-accident on my way to work this morning and I can't get it out of my mind.*

get one's own back have one's revenge. *That is the man who dismissed me from my job: some day I'm going to get my own back on him.* [See also GET EVEN WITH.]

get rid of dispose of, remove someone or something (especially when considered undesirable or worthless). *Some day we shall have to get rid of all that rubbish in the back garden.*

get set make oneself ready to start. *The starter told the runners to get set, i.e. be prepared to go.*

get short shrift (from someone) [See (GIVE SOMEONE) SHORT SHRIFT.]

get someone taped [See HAVE SOMEONE TAPED.]

get one's teeth into become keenly involved in. *Most actors like the part of Hamlet, because it is a part you can get your teeth into, i.e. it is interesting, challenging.*

get the ball rolling [See START THE BALL ROLLING.]

get the best of the bargain come out best in a deal, or any other kind of exchange. *I gave my concert-ticket to Jim, but it seems that it was a very poor concert, so I got the best of the bargain.*

get the better of defeat, outwit. *In the boxing match, John got the better of Jim, probably because John was stronger.*

get the bird (informal) be badly received, criticised. *It was a poor performance and the actors got the bird, i.e. the audience showed that it was displeased.*

get the bit between one's teeth [See TAKE THE BIT BETWEEN ONE'S TEETH.]

get the boot/heave (informal) lose one's job; be dismissed. *It's no wonder he got the boot: he was always turning up for work drunk.*

get the brush off (informal) be rejected, dismissed. *Jack tried to be friendly with that pretty girl over there, but he got the brush off.* [See also GIVE SOMEONE THE BRUSH OFF.]

get the cold shoulder [See (GIVE SOMEONE/GET THE) COLD SHOULDER.]

get/catch the drift (informal) understand the general sense of something. *When my British friends are speaking to one another, I can usually get the drift of what they are saying, though I can't understand every word.*

get the feel of become used or accustomed to; feel at ease with. *He drove the car carefully at first until he got the feel of the controls.*

get/have the hang of understand (how something works). *This machine looks very complicated, but you'll soon get the hang of it.* [See also LOSE THE HANG OF.]

get the heave [See GET THE BOOT.]

get the last laugh [See HAVE THE LAST LAUGH.]

get the last/final word [See HAVE THE LAST/FINAL WORD.]

get the measure of someone [See TAKE THE MEASURE OF SOMEONE.]

get the message (informal) know, understand something. *When they saw their host appearing in his pyjamas, the guests who had stayed too long finally got the message, i.e. they understood that he wanted them to leave.*

get the sack (informal) be dismissed from one's job. *When the big company went bankrupt, thousands of workers got the sack.*

get the short end of the deal/stick (informal) be the loser in a deal or bargain. *My partner cheated me, but it was only later that I found I'd got the short end of the deal.* Also **give someone the short end of the deal/stick** treat someone unfairly. *I've been given the short end of the stick, and treated very unfairly.*

get/have the wind up (informal) be afraid. *When he saw the height of the mountain, one of the party got the wind up and went home.* [See also PUT THE WIND UP.]

get to grips with [See COME TO GRIPS WITH.]

get to the bottom of solve (a mystery). *Some very strange things have been happening in this house, and I'm going to get to the bottom of it before I leave.*

get/come to the point come to the really important part of what one is saying. *Peter is a very boring person to listen to: it always takes him so long to get to the point.*

get under someone's skin annoy someone, especially over a long period. *I finally had to stop working with Peter: he just got under my skin.*

get-up-and-go enthusiasm, vitality. *You will find that Jane is a very good worker: she has lots of get-up-and-go.*

get up on one's high horse [See ON ONE'S HIGH HORSE.]

get up on the wrong side of the bed (expression used to suggest that someone is in a bad temper for no reason). *Bill must have got up on the wrong side of the bed today: he has been very nasty to me all day.*

get up steam start working hard at something; start making good progress. *Don't let's stop now, when we are just getting up steam.*

get up/have the nerve (to) be brave enough (to do something). *He really should leave his present job and try something else, but I don't think he'll ever get up the nerve.* [See also LOSE ONE'S NERVE; WHAT A NERVE!]

get what for [See under (GIVE SOMEONE) WHAT FOR.]

get what's coming to one [See (GET/HAVE) WHAT IS COMING TO ONE.]

get wind of find out about (especially something that is to be kept secret). *The students were going to have a demonstration, but the authorities somehow got wind of it and brought in the police.*

get with it (informal) become up-to-date; make oneself more fashionable, modern. *Jane wears very old-fashioned clothes: someone should tell her to get with it.* [See also WITH IT.]

GHOST. (not a) **ghost of a chance** (not even) the slightest chance, possibility. *I don't know why Jack has entered the race: he hasn't a ghost of a chance of winning.*

GIFT. (look a) **gift horse in the mouth** [See LOOK A GIFT HORSE IN THE MOUTH.]

gift of the gab (informal) ability to talk well. *He should make a good salesman: he certainly has the gift of the gab.*

GILT. [See TAKE THE GILT OFF THE GINGERBREAD.]

GIRL. **girl Friday** secretary who is also a general assistant. *What we need in this office is a girl Friday who will take care of all these routine jobs.* [See also **MAN FRIDAY**.]

GIVE. **give something a bash/have a bash at something** (informal) try something; attempt something. *I've never played golf before, but I'd like to give it a bash/have a bash at it.*

give something a (quick) butcher's (informal) look at something quickly; glance at something. *When I showed him the ring, he gave it a butcher's and said it was worthless.*

give someone/something a clean bill of health [See (GIVE SOMEONE A) **CLEAN BILL OF HEALTH**.]

give someone a free hand [See **FREE HAND**.]

give a good account of oneself perform well in a particular situation. *Although he is quite small, John gave a good account of himself when he was attacked by those hooligans, i.e. he fought back well.* [See also **GIVE A POOR ACCOUNT OF ONESELF**.]

give someone a good run for his/her (etc.) money put up a strong resistance to someone; not give in easily. *I think you will find it difficult to beat the other team: they will give you a good run for your money.*

give/lend someone a hand help (someone). *Would you mind giving me a hand with this case? i.e. Could you help me carry it?*

(not) give a hang (not) care in the least. *I'm disappointed in Peter: he doesn't seem to give a hang for his school-work.*

give someone a hard time make someone unhappy (by ill-treating him/her, making him/her work very hard, etc.). *When I first arrived in England as a child, the other children gave me a hard time because I was a foreigner.*

give oneself airs/put on airs pretend to be better than one really is. *Sally annoys a lot of people because of the way that she gives herself airs/she puts on airs.*

give someone a lesson [See **TEACH SOMEONE A LESSON**.]

give and take co-operate with others. *The headmaster told Mary that she could not expect everything to be arranged for her convenience: she would have to learn to give and take, i.e. to be able to live with others, helping them as well as being helped.* Also **give-and-take** co-operation with others. *She must learn some give-and-take.*

give someone an inch (and he will take a mile) allow someone a privilege and he will take many more. *"Jane asked me if she could use our phone occasionally." - "I wouldn't advise it: give that woman an inch and she'll take a mile," i.e. if you allow her to use the phone a little, she will eventually want to use it a lot.*

give one a pain (informal) annoy. *I'm going to try to avoid speaking to Jones: he gives me a pain.*

give someone a piece of one's mind (informal) give someone a row; quarrel with someone. *My son, Jack, drove my car yesterday without my permission: I'm going to give him a piece of my mind when I see him.*

give a poor account of oneself perform badly in a particular situation. *I'm afraid he gave a rather poor account of himself and failed his exam.* [See also GIVE A GOOD ACCOUNT OF ONESELF.]

(not) give a rap [See (NOT) CARE/GIVE A RAP (FOR).]

give someone a rap on/over the knuckles [See RAP OVER THE KNUCKLES.]

give as good as one gets defend oneself well; look after oneself. *John's mother was afraid that he would be bullied by the bigger boys, but his father said, "Don't worry, John can give as good as he gets."*

give someone a taste of his own medicine [See DOSE/TASTE OF ONE'S OWN MEDICINE.]

give someone/something a wide berth avoid someone/something completely. *I think that Brown is a complete bore: I always give him a wide berth when I see him at parties.*

give chase run after (someone). *Someone cried, "Stop thief!" and immediately everyone gave chase.*

give colour to lead one to believe that something is true. *His expensive way of life gave colour to the story that he was a millionaire.*

give someone enough rope and he will hang himself/give someone plenty of rope allow someone to go on doing something so that he eventually causes his own destruction. *The police let the suspect go free: they believed that if he was given enough rope he would hang himself, i.e. he would do something to prove that he was guilty. The police gave the suspect plenty of rope.*

give someone grey hair cause someone to worry, be anxious. *That boy is enough to give you grey hair: he's always getting into mischief.*

give/lose ground retreat (from one's position, what one believes in, etc.). *The soldiers' position was under constant attack, but they refused to give ground.* [See also GAIN GROUND.]

give someone his due to be fair and just to someone. *I don't like Peter but, give him his due, he is generous to his friends.*

give it to (someone) (informal) quarrel with; attack; beat up. *He was very rude to me: I'll give it to him if I ever see him again.*

give lip service [See LIP SERVICE.]

give of oneself put a lot of effort into something; show that one is involved and interested. *If you are going to succeed in this job, you will have to give more of yourself.*

give over (informal) stop; not to bother one. *My younger brother kept annoying me, until I eventually told him to give over.*

give someone pause make someone stop and think. *He may say that he is not interested, but when he hears how high the salary is, it may give him pause.*

give (a) (full/free) rein to allow to act freely, without control (of any kind). *The millionaire invited the architect to give free rein to his imagination when designing the house, i.e. he could design it in any way that he could imagine.*

give rise to cause. *The fact that the president was not present at the parade gave rise to rumours that he was ill.*

give the alarm give public warning that something is wrong. *When*

the sentries discovered that the prisoner had escaped, they gave the alarm.

give someone the benefit of the doubt be kind in one's judgment of someone when one is not certain. *The magistrate was not entirely certain that the accused man was guilty, so he gave him the benefit of the doubt and set him free.*

give someone the brush off (informal) reject or dismiss someone. *I tried to speak to her, but she gave me the brush off.* [See also GET THE BRUSH OFF.]

give someone the cold shoulder [See COLD SHOULDER.]

give the devil his due (one must) admit that someone has some good qualities even if one does not like him. *I don't trust Jack but, give the devil his due, he has a very good sense of humour.*

give someone the first refusal [See FIRST REFUSAL.]

give/be given the floor [See under TAKE THE FLOOR.]

give the game away break a confidence, reveal a secret. *It was supposed to be a surprise party, but I gave the game away and now everyone knows about it.*

give someone the glad eye (informal) show someone of the opposite sex, by one's expression, that one is attracted by him/her. *I think that the blonde girl over there fancies you: she's giving you the glad eye.*

give someone/something the go-by (informal) avoid someone or something. *I don't feel like going out to the pub tonight: I'll give it the go-by this time.*

give the lie to show that something is not true. *David's excellent performance in the game tonight has given the lie to the story that he's too old to play.*

give someone the red-carpet treatment [See under ROLL OUT THE RED CARPET (FOR SOMEONE).]

give someone the short end of the deal/stick [See under GET THE SHORT END OF THE DEAL/STICK.]

give someone short shrift [See SHORT SHRIFT.]

give someone the slip (informal) escape from someone. *The hunters finally had to admit that the fox they were hunting had given them the slip.*

(not) give one the time of day (usually with negative) (not) be polite to one; (not even) be polite enough to say "Hello". *We have the rudest neighbour: he wouldn't even give you the time of day.*

give someone/something the (whole/entire) works (informal) 1. treat someone as well as one can; do something as well as one can. *They gave Jane the whole works at the hairdressing salon: she looked terrific! When Jim's turn in the dance competition came, he gave it the works and won first prize.* 2. beat someone up. *He's bleeding: someone has given him the works.* Also **get the (whole/entire) works** 1. be treated or done extremely well. 2. be beaten up.

give someone to the dogs/lions/wolves [See THROW SOMEONE TO THE DOGS/LIONS/WOLVES.]

give someone to understand cause someone to believe something.

I lent him the money because ne gave me to understand that I could have it back next week.

give something up as a bad job (informal) abandon something; stop attempting to do something. *Every time we tried to put the tent up, it was blown down: finally we gave it up as a bad job.*

give up the ghost (informal) die; stop working; stop doing something. *When he finally gave up the ghost, he was over one hundred years old. We searched until evening, but when it got dark we gave up the ghost, i.e. we abandoned the search.*

give vent to express; show. *He gave vent to his anger by smashing his glass on the wall.*

give what for [See (GIVE SOMEONE) WHAT FOR.]

give one's word promise. *If you lend me your notes, I'll return them before the exam: I give you my word.*

GLAD. **glad hand** friendly handshake. *Politicians feel that they must give everyone the glad hand, i.e. shake hands with everyone in a friendly way.*

glad rags (informal) best clothes. *We'll have to put on our glad rags tonight: we're going to a big party.*

GLASS. [See PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN GLASS HOUSES SHOULD NOT THROW STONES.]

GO. **go a bundle on** (informal) like very much. *I listen to jazz whenever I can: I really go a bundle on that kind of music.*

go against the current/stream/tide [See under SWIM AGAINST THE CURRENT/STREAM/TIDE.]

go against the grain [See AGAINST THE GRAIN.]

go-ahead permission to do something. *We're all ready to start on the new project: we're just waiting on the go-ahead from the ministry.*

go all out [See ALL OUT.]

go astray 1. be missing. *I can't find the book I was reading last night: it seems to have gone astray.* 2. do something wrong. *I thought I had the correct solution, but I seem to have gone astray somewhere.* 3. lead an immoral life. *Young people are more likely to go astray if they live in big cities.*

go at it hammer and tongs [See HAMMER AND TONGS.]

go begging be available but not taken or made use of by anybody. *Please take any of those tools which you think might be useful to you: they are going begging, because I have bought some new ones.*

go broke become completely poor, without any money. *He gambled very heavily and eventually he went broke.*

go by the board not be considered or taken into account. *After he took up golf, all his other sports went by the board, i.e. he played only golf.*

go by the book do things according to the rules. *Some of the managers allow us to leave early, but Jones goes strictly by the book, i.e. he sticks to the rules.*

go cap in hand request something in a very humble way. *The*

workers feel that they should get regular increases in salary without having to go cap in hand to their employers every time.

go chase oneself [See CHASE ONESELF.]

go Dutch (used especially when a man and woman go out together) each person pays his or her own share. *Since Mary and John are both earning the same salary, they always go Dutch when they dine out together.*

go flat out [See FLAT OUT.]

go fly a kite (informal) go away; don't bother me. *When Smith offered me only £50 for my car, I told him to go fly a kite.*

go for broke risk the money, property, etc. that one has left. *The desperate gambler decided to go for broke by risking everything on one last throw of the dice.*

go for nothing be of no use; be wasted. *Because he turned up late for the exam, all the studying he had done went for nothing.*

go from bad to worse get worse and worse. *We are afraid that the shop may have to close soon: the business situation is going from bad to worse.*

go halfway (to meet someone) show that one is willing to reach an agreement with someone by giving up certain things. *The owner of the company said he was willing to go halfway to meet the strikers' demands. Also meet someone halfway. The owner said that he was prepared to meet the strikers halfway.*

go halves share something by halving it. *The two partners agreed to go halves in the profits.*

go hard for/with (someone) cause (someone) to endure hardships. *I'm sorry for Paul: things have gone hard with him these last few years, i.e. he has experienced many difficulties and hardships.*

go haywire go seriously wrong; not work properly. *This television receiver has gone haywire: I can't get any proper pictures.*

go/ride hell for leather go, ride very quickly, as fast as one can. *The two motor-cyclists went hell for leather round the racetrack.*

go in one ear and out the other not make any impression on whoever is listening; not be noticed. *I gave the candidates instructions to print their names clearly: but it seems to have gone in one ear and out the other, i.e. they have ignored the instructions.*

go into orbit become very successful. *After he appeared on television, the actor's career went into orbit.*

go it (informal) try, work very hard. *You'll really have to go it if you're going to finish the job in time: you have only ten minutes left.*

go jump in the lake/ocean/river/sea! (informal) go away and don't bother me! *If anyone threatens you, tell him to go jump in the lake!*

go like clockwork work very smoothly, without anything going wrong. *All the arrangements for the wedding went like clockwork.*

go off at half-cock not work or go completely as planned. *Because so few people turned up, the whole meeting went off at half-cock.*

go off like a damp squib [See under DAMP SQUIB.]

go off (at) the deep-end (informal) become very angry. *When the*

teacher saw how badly the homework had been done, he just about went off the deep end.

go off the rails (with reference to a person) behave strangely; become mentally ill. *I think that Jim went off the rails because of the strain of overwork.* [See also ON THE RAILS.]

go (someone) one better do what someone else does but better or to a greater degree. *Jones and Smith are always showing off their wealth; when Smith gave £20,000 to charity, Jones went him one better and gave £40,000!*

go out of business give up one's business. *Because of the number of people leaving the town, quite a few of the shopkeepers there have had to go out of business.*

go out of one's mind 1. go mad; lose one's senses. *When he heard how much his wife had paid for the furniture, her husband said, "Have you gone out of your mind? We have hardly any money left."* 2. go from one's memory. *"I should know his name but it's just gone out of my mind for the moment."*

go out of one's way make a special effort. *The people in this village are very helpful: if you are ever in trouble, they will go out of their way to help you.*

go overboard (for) be very fond of or enthusiastic about. *I like pop music, but I don't go overboard for classical music.*

go over/through with a fine-tooth(ed) comb examine with great care and very thoroughly. *The police went over the murdered man's flat with a fine-tooth comb, but they didn't find any clues.*

go/take one's own way do what one wants to do, ignoring others. *Don't waste your time giving Peter advice: he always goes his own way.*

go round in circles keep attempting to do something, but without making any progress. *We have been trying all day to find a solution to this problem, but we just keep going round in circles.*

go steady (with reference to a young unmarried couple) meet each other regularly. *Philip and Mary may be engaged soon: they have been going steady for about a year.*

go straight lead a life in which one does not break the law. *Sam was released from prison three years ago and he has been going straight ever since.*

go swimmingly go very well, very smoothly. *The party was going swimmingly until Bill turned up drunk as usual.*

go/do/make the rounds go from one person or place to another. *There is a story going the rounds that the Greens are going to be divorced.*

go the whole hog do something fully, completely. *Having bought the house, they decided to go the whole hog, and buy all the furniture in it as well.*

go through hoops/the hoop be forced to do something one dislikes doing or which one finds difficult. *We all had to go through the hoop of reading our essays aloud to the rest of the class.* Also **put someone through hoops/the hoop** force someone to do something he dislikes, finds difficult. *During our first few weeks in the army,*

they really put us through the hoops. [See also JUMP THROUGH A HOOP/HOOPS.]

go through one's paces [See under PUT SOMEONE/SOMETHING THROUGH HIS/HER/ITS PACES.]

go through the ceiling/roof [See under HIT THE CEILING/ROOF.]

go through the motions only pretend to be doing something. *It's quite obvious now that Bill hardly did any work at all: he must have been just going through the motions.*

go to any length do anything (in order to achieve something). *Look at that ridiculous dress that Miss Brown is wearing: she'll go to any lengths to attract people's attention.*

go to earth go into hiding. *The police search for the escaped prisoner has been unsuccessful: he has gone to earth somewhere in the city.*

go to one's head 1. affect one's thinking, judgment. *The wine I had at lunchtime seems to have gone to my head: I can't think properly.* 2. make one proud. *Being promoted so young seems to have gone to Smith's head: he won't speak to any of his old friends.*

go (all) to pieces lose one's courage, self-confidence; panic, break down. *When he heard the news of his wife's death, he just went to pieces, i.e. he broke down.*

go (all) to pot become ruined, destroyed. *His son is a very poor businessman: ever since he took over his father's business, it has gone all to pot.*

go to rack and ruin become broken down, ruined; decay. *Nobody has lived in the house for many years, and it has been allowed to go to rack and ruin.*

go/run to seed become run-down, unfit, useless. *He used to be a very athletic person, but since he started drinking heavily, he's really gone to seed, i.e. become very unfit.*

go to show prove; be an example (of something one believes). *When we started out the sun was shining, but when we arrived at the seaside it was pouring with rain: it just goes to show that you can never rely on the weather in Britain.*

go to the dogs become useless, worthless, ruined. *Everything costs three times as much now as it did five years ago: the country is going to the dogs.*

go to the trouble do something which involves one in extra effort (usually to oblige someone). *The kind stranger went to the trouble of giving us his phone number, in case we might need help later.*

go to the wall be ruined; fail. *Business has been so bad recently that many companies have gone to the wall.* Also **drive/push someone/something to the wall** cause someone/something to be ruined or to fail. *He used his great power to drive his business competitors to the wall.* [See also WEAKEST GO TO THE WALL.]

go to town do something very well, or to a great extent. *You have certainly gone to town on the Christmas decorations: I don't think I've ever seen so many.*

go to waste be wasted. *She dropped her expensive bottle of perfume and it broke: it's a shame to think of all that money going to waste.*

go up in flames/smoke be destroyed, ruined, unsuccessful. *His hands were seriously injured when he fell, so all his plans for becoming a musician went up in smoke.*

go with a bang [See WITH A BANG.]

go without saying it does not need to be said because it is obvious. *Since you are our guests, it goes without saying that we shall pay all the bills for your accommodation.*

go wrong 1. fail; break down. *I can't understand why the radio is not working: nothing has ever gone wrong with it before.* 2. make a mistake, wrong decision. *The machine would not work, so we had to examine the plans carefully to see where we had gone wrong.* 3. not turn out as planned, intended. *We prepared the reception very carefully, but everything went wrong.*

GOD. God/goodness (only) knows (exclamation) I have no idea; no-one knows. *Teaching was a most unsuitable career for him: why he chose it, God only knows.*

GOING. going on (for) (especially with reference to a person's age) almost. *He looks very well for his age: he must be going on for sixty.*

GOOD. good account of oneself [See GIVE A GOOD ACCOUNT OF ONESELF.]

good as one gets [See GIVE AS GOOD AS ONE GETS.]

good as one's word [See AS GOOD AS ONE'S WORD.]

(in) good faith (in a) state of mind where one is acting fairly and expecting to be treated fairly. *Mr. Jones said that he bought the car in good faith, not knowing that it had been stolen.* [See also BAD FAITH.]

good grace [See under WITH (A) BAD GRACE.]

good grief (exclamation to show surprise, etc.). *"Good grief!" he cried. "Peter - I haven't seen you for years!"*

good head on one's shoulders [See HAVE A GOOD HEAD ON ONE'S SHOULDERS.]

(hit a) good patch (have a) period, time when things are going well. *The gambler lost most of his money, but then hit a good patch and got it all back again.* [See also (HIT A) BAD PATCH.]

good riddance (to bad rubbish) (expression used to show that one is glad to get rid of, be free of someone or something). *When I told Jean that Peter was leaving, her only reply was, "Good riddance!"*

GOODNESS. goodness (only) knows [See GOD (ONLY) KNOWS.]

GONE. gone with the wind disappeared without trace. *All the achievements of his lifetime have gone with the wind: no-one even remembers his name now.*

GOOSE. [See KILL THE GOOSE THAT LAYS THE GOLDEN EGGS.]

GRAND. grand slam complete series of victories in a competition, or in different competitions; act of winning series of tricks in a card game. *He is a brilliant golfer: he has to win only one more competition to complete the grand slam.*

GRANDMOTHER. [See TEACH ONE'S GRANDMOTHER TO SUCK EGGS.]

GRASP. grasp at straws [See CLUTCH AT STRAWS.]

GRASS. grass is always greener on the other side of the fence/hill something one does not have always seems better than what one does have; a place where one cannot be always seems better than the place where one actually is. *He wishes to give up teaching and become a lawyer like his brother: I think it's a case of the grass being always greener on the other side of the fence.*

grass grows under one's feet [See (NOT) LET THE GRASS GROW UNDER ONE'S FEET.]

grass widow wife whose husband has to live away from her for a long time because of his job, etc. *Julia's husband has to work abroad quite a lot, so the poor woman is a grass widow for most of the year.*

GREASE. grease/oil someone's palm bribe someone; pay someone for a favour. *The head waiter can get a table for you, but you will have to grease his palm first.*

GREAT. (go) great guns 1. (do something) very enthusiastically, vigorously. *I left them talking together at 9 p.m. and when I returned at midnight they were still going great guns, i.e. still having a lively conversation.* 2. (progress) very well. *He started a new business and I hear that it's going great guns, i.e. very successful.*

great Scott (exclamation of surprise). *"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "Are you still here? I thought you had gone ages ago."*

GREEN. green about/around the gills looking as if one is ill, or going to be sick. *I think that Peter is going to be sea-sick: he's looking a bit green around the gills.* Also **white about/around the gills** (same meaning).

green cheese feelings of envy at someone else's good fortune. *Jim does not like Jack; I think it's green cheese, since Jack earns more than Jim does.*

(have) green fingers (have the) ability to make plants and flowers grow; (have) skill in gardening. *Jack certainly has green fingers: you should see all the vegetables he grows in his small garden.*

green with envy very envious at others' good luck. *When Peter saw Bill's expensive new car, he was green with envy.*

GRIN. grin and bear it cheerfully endure something unpleasant. *I don't want to share my room, but I suppose I'll just have to grin and bear it.*

GRIND. grind to a halt stop working or going. *Because of the bad weather all forms of transport have ground to a halt.*

GRIST. (all) grist to the/one's mill something that one can use for one's own purposes. *He is interested in writing a book on the problems that foreigners have in learning English: anything you can tell him on that subject will be grist to his mill, i.e. useful to him.*

GROUND. ground rules (unwritten) rules that apply in a special

situation. *If you have never been to one of the company chairman's parties before, I'd better tell you some of the ground rules.*

GROWING. **growing pains** pains or problems which one experiences when one is growing up. *The headmaster decided not to punish Jack for his behaviour: he just put Jack's strange conduct down to growing pains, i.e. caused by the problems of growing up.*

GUTS. [See HAVE SOMEONE'S GUTS FOR GARTERS.]

H

HAIL. **hail-fellow-well-met** showing (or pretending to show) that one is very glad to meet someone. *He greeted me in his usual hail-fellow-well-met fashion.*

HAIR. **hair of the dog that bit you** small drink of liquor taken when one is recovering from drinking too much (this is supposed to help one recover more quickly). *Jack woke up after the party feeling terrible: he went over to the drinks cupboard and helped himself to a hair of the dog that bit him (i.e. took another drink).*

(make one's) hair stand on end (make one feel) very much afraid or amazed. *You should hear Bill talking about his experiences during the war: they would make your hair stand on end.*

HALCYON. **halcyon days** time when things were happy and peaceful. *He would often remember the halcyon days of his childhood.*

HALE. **hale and hearty** fit and cheerful. *He's a remarkable man: although he is in his seventies, he is still hale and hearty.*

HALF. **half a loaf is better than none/no bread** something is better than nothing. *The police managed to recover only £5 of the money that was stolen; still, half-a-loaf is better than no bread, I suppose.*

half a mind/notion [See HAVE HALF A MIND/NOTION.]

(see with) half an eye (see with) a quick glance. *You can see with half an eye that he isn't sober, i.e. it is obvious.*

half as much again the original amount with fifty per cent added on. *The first price we were offered for our house was a good one, but the next buyer offered half as much again.*

half-baked (informal) badly thought out; silly. *They had some half-baked notion of raising money by holding a pop concert.*

half cut/half-seas over rather drunk. *By the time he left the bar he was half cut/half-seas over.*

half the battle half or a major part of what has to be done. *If you want to camp in a field, getting the farmer's permission is half the battle.*

HALFWAY. **halfway house** middle point or way between two things. *He says that the new political party is going to be a kind of halfway house between the extreme views of the left and the right.*

- HAM.** **ham it up** overact; act in an exaggerated way. *So as to make the audience laugh, the actors hammed it up.*
- HAMMER.** (go at it) **hammer and tongs** (do something, e.g. fight, work) with great energy. *They started quarrelling before dinner and an hour later they were still at it hammer and tongs.*
- HAND.** **hand in glove (with)** in close co-operation (with) (especially for a bad purpose). *It was revealed in the newspapers that some policemen had actually been working hand in glove with the criminals.*
hand in the till [See HAVE ONE'S HAND IN THE TILL.]
(have to) hand it to (must) admire (sometimes reluctantly). *You have to hand it to Bill; he may not work very hard, but he always comes first.*
(not let one's left) hand know what one's right hand is doing [See (NOT) LET ONE'S LEFT HAND KNOW WHAT ONE'S RIGHT HAND IS DOING.]
(make/earn money) hand over fist make/earn money at a tremendous rate. *Ever since they opened their shop they have been making money hand over fist.*
hand that feeds one [See BITE THE HAND THAT FEEDS ONE.]
hand-to-mouth [See under LIVE FROM HAND TO MOUTH.]
- HANDLE.** **handle to one's name** title (such as Sir, Dr, etc.). *I knew Bill when he was plain Mr. Jones; now he has a handle to his name: he's Sir William Jones now.*
handle/treat with kid gloves touch or deal with very carefully. *This matter is very delicate and will have to be handled with kid gloves; otherwise, there may be a scandal.*
- HANDS.** **(one's) hands are tied** [See HAVE ONE'S HANDS TIED.]
(win) hands down (win) easily. *It wasn't an exciting match: the home side won hands down.*
hands off! (informal exclamation) don't touch! *Hands off that book: it belongs to me!*
- HANDSOME.** **handsome is as/that handsome does** one should judge someone by the way he/she behaves (not by his/her appearance). *The girls all think that the new manager is very nice, but let's see: handsome is as handsome does.*
- HANG.** **hang by a thread** be in danger or doubt. *The success of John's application for the job is hanging by a thread: the committee is evenly divided.*
hang fire wait, delay. *We can't start yet; we shall have to hang fire until the others arrive.*
hang heavy/heavily (on one's hands) (usually with reference to time) pass slowly. *The weeks until her husband's return hung heavy on her hands.*
hang in the balance be undecided. *The jury has not yet returned its verdict: the accused man's fate still hangs in the balance.*
hang on every word of/hang on the words/lips of pay very close

attention to what someone is saying. *The audience hung on the speaker's every word.*

hang/hold on to your hat(s) (expression used when something exciting is going to be done or said). *Hang on to your hats: I'm going to drive this car as fast as it can go!*

hang over one's head be a constant threat to one. *During the last years of the politician's life, the threat of imprisonment hung over his head.*

HANGED. [See AS WELL BE HANGED FOR A SHEEP AS A LAMB.]

HAPPY. happy hunting ground place where everything is as one would wish it; heaven. *The market was Peter's happy hunting ground: he bought dozens of bargains.*

HARD. hard-and-fast strict. *It is a hard-and-fast rule that all the students must be back in their rooms by midnight.*

hard/tough as nails 1. without feelings (of pity, tenderness, etc.). *I wouldn't like to annoy that barmaid: she looks as hard as nails.* 2. very fit. *After six months training, the young soldiers were all as hard as nails.*

hard at it [See AT IT.]

(no) hard feeling(s) (often used with negative) (no) feelings of anger, resentment, etc. *John beat Peter but I don't think Peter has any hard feelings. "I'm sorry I knocked you over - no hard feelings?" i.e. I hope you don't feel angry or upset.*

hard nut to crack [See TOUGH NUT TO CRACK.]

hard put (to it) almost unable (to do/find, etc. something). *There are very few good restaurants in this town: in fact, I would be hard put to it to name even one.*

hard sell aggressive, ruthless way of selling goods. *These salesmen are trained in the techniques of the hard sell.*

hard stuff [See DROP OF THE HARD STUFF.]

hard up poor. *When I was a student, I was always hard up.*

(the) hard way way which causes one most pain, difficulty, etc. *Young people find it very easy to earn money these days; I earned all my money the hard way, i.e. by working hard.*

HATCHET. hatchet man someone who is employed to do unpleasant jobs, such as getting rid of unwanted employees from a business. *I would try to impress Smith, if I were you: they say he is the company's new hatchet man.*

HATE. hate someone's guts dislike someone intensely. *Jim and Peter are not friends: in fact, they hate each other's guts.*

HAUL. haul someone over the coals give someone a row. *Anyone who comes late will be hauled over the coals.*

HAVE. have a ball (informal) have a good time; enjoy oneself. *You should have come to Jim's party: we really had a ball.*

have a bash at [See under GIVE SOMETHING A BASH.]

have a basinful/bellyful (informal) have had as much as one can

stand, put up with. *My boss is always giving me rows; I've had a bellyful; if he gives me another row, I'll resign.*

have a bone to pick with someone have a reason to quarrel with someone. *I have a bone to pick with you about the rude way you spoke to me last night.*

(not) have a cat in hell's chance [See under STAND A CHANCE.]

have a chance [See STAND A CHANCE.]

have a chip on one's shoulder [See CHIP ON ONE'S SHOULDER.]

have a crush on (usually of young girls) have a strong liking for. *Almost all the girls in the class had a crush on their handsome young teacher.*

(not) have a dog's chance [See under STAND A CHANCE.]

have one's feet on the ground [See KEEP ONE'S FEET ON THE GROUND.]

have a/one's finger in the pie [See FINGER IN THE PIE.]

have/throw a fit (informal) be very angry. *You'd better get this room tidied up: if your mother sees it like this, she'll have a fit.* Also **have/throw fits** (similar meaning).

have a go (at) 1. attempt (something). *He had never played tennis before, but he decided to have a go at it, anyway.* 2. attack; fight; criticise. *Just because he's a politician, everyone seems to want to have a go at him.*

have a good head on one's shoulders be clever, shrewd. *Your son will do well in business: he has a good head on his shoulders.*

have a good time enjoy oneself. *Everyone had a good time at the party.*

have/take a hand in take part in doing something. *Almost everyone in the school had a hand in making the play a success.*

have a heart (informal) (expression used to show that something unreasonable is being requested or ordered) show pity, mercy. *When their father told them to have all the grass cut by noon, the children asked him to have a heart.*

have a heart of gold be very kind, sympathetic. *You can rely on her: she has a heart of gold.* Also **with a heart of gold** very kind. *I'm looking for someone with a heart of gold to help me.*

have a heart of stone be very unkind, unfeeling. *Anyone who can treat his children so badly must have a heart of stone.* Also **with a heart of stone** very unkind. *Their father was a man with a heart of stone.*

have a high old time (sometimes used in a disapproving way) enjoy oneself. *The children had a high old time at the birthday party, and it took us ages to clean up the place afterwards.*

(not) have a leg to stand on (usually with negative) (not) have an excuse, argument. *I have three witnesses who will swear that they saw the accused at the scene of the crime: he doesn't have a leg to stand on, i.e. he will have no arguments against that.*

have a level head [See KEEP A LEVEL HEAD.]

have all one's marbles (informal often with reference to old people) be perfectly sane. *Mr. Green may be a very old man, but he's certainly got all his marbles.* [See also LOSE ONE'S MARBLES.]

have all the aces/trumps [See HOLD ALL THE ACES/TRUMPS.]

have a lot/nothing/plenty/something going for one have a lot (nothing/plenty/something) which is in one's favour. *I'm sure Mary will be a successful actress; she has at least three things going for her: she is beautiful, she has a nice voice, and she works very hard.*

have an ace up one's sleeve [See under UP ONE'S SLEEVE.]

have an ear (close) to the ground [See under HAVE ONE'S EAR (CLOSE) TO THE GROUND.]

have an edge on/have the edge be slightly better (than). *Peter and Philip are both good students, but I think that Peter has an edge on Philip.*

have an eye for be interested in; be a good judge of. *I would advise you to go shopping with John: he has a good eye for a bargain, i.e. he is a good judge of what is cheap and good value.*

have an eye to the main chance look out for what will benefit oneself. *Brown was a very ambitious young man: he always had an eye to the main chance.*

have a screw loose/missing (informal) be not quite sane. *That chap has been behaving oddly all evening: I think he's got a screw loose.*

(not) have a snowball's chance in hell [See under STAND A CHANCE.]

have a stake in have a share in; be part owner of; stand to gain by something doing well. *Paul has a stake in this company: he is one of the largest shareholders.*

have/get a thing about have a special feeling (either good or bad) for (something). *You'd better not smoke in his presence: he has a thing about cigarettes, i.e. he especially dislikes cigarettes. I have a thing about old castles: I always visit as many as I can when I'm touring.*

have a way with be able to manage by making good relationships with. *Joan is a very good teacher: she has a way with children.* Also

have a way with one have some quality which makes one liked by others. *I think you'll like Jane: she has a way with her.*

have a word with speak briefly to someone. *"Could I have a word with you? - There's something I want to know."*

have one's back to/against the wall be in a bad or dangerous situation which one cannot escape from. *The soldiers decided that they would have to stand and fight: their backs were to the wall.*

have been around 1. have experienced many things; be sophisticated. *You won't find it easy to deceive Jack: he's been around.* 2. have been in existence. *I'm surprised you haven't seen these coins: they've been around for years.*

have/get butterflies (in one's stomach/tummy) (informal) feel nervous. *I always have butterflies in my stomach whenever I have to make a speech.*

have one's cake and eat it too [See EAT ONE'S CAKE AND HAVE IT TOO.]

have/had one's chips (informal) (about to) fail, be beaten, die. *There's someone trapped at the top of the burning building: I think the poor chap has had his chips.*

have/be done with be finished with. *You can have those papers now: I've done with them.*

have/keep one's ear/an ear (close) to the ground/grapevine have good information about what is happening or going to happen. *If you want to know what's happening, ask Bill: he has his ear close to the ground.*

have someone eating out of one's hand have someone completely under one's control. *The audience did not like the young entertainer at first, but very soon they were eating out of his hand, i.e. they were enjoying his performance very much.*

(not) have enough intelligence/sense, etc. to come in from/in out of the rain [See (NOT) KNOW ENOUGH TO COME IN FROM/IN OUT OF THE RAIN.]

have one's eye/an eye on watch carefully. *I see that house at the corner is up for sale at last: I've had my eye on it for ages, i.e. I have been watching for ages to see if it was for sale.*

have eyes only for pay attention to one person only. *I don't think that Jack would be willing to go out with anyone but Jane: he has eyes only for her.*

have one's eyes peeled/skinned [See KEEP ONE'S EYES PEELED/SKINNED.]

have one's feet (planted) (firmly) on the ground [See KEEP ONE'S FEET (PLANTED) (FIRMLY) ON THE GROUND.]

have one's fingers crossed [See KEEP ONE'S FINGERS CROSSED.]

have green fingers [See GREEN FINGERS.]

have someone's guts for garters (informal) punish someone severely. *If anyone is late, I'll have his guts for garters.*

have had it 1. (with reference to a person) have come to the end (of one's life, what one can endure, etc.). *"I've had it," the injured soldier whispered. "Leave me here to die."* 2. (with reference to a thing) have come to the end of its usefulness. *I think this radio has had it: it will never work again.*

have half a mind/notion feel rather inclined (to do something, especially something which will involve conflict with others). *The service in this hotel was terrible and I have half a mind to write and complain about it.*

have one's hand/fingers in the till steal, especially from a shop. *Jones has been dismissed from the shop: they say he always had his hand in the till.*

have one's hands full be very busy. *I don't think Jane will be able to help you: she has her hands full with her father being ill.*

have one's hands tied/one's hands are tied one is prevented from acting, doing something. *The police say they cannot help us until we bring them some proof: their hands are tied.* Also **tie someone's hands** prevent someone from doing something. *He would like to help you but the authorities have tied his hands.*

have one's head in the clouds live in a dream world: be out of touch with reality. *Mary never knows what is happening around her: she always has her head in the clouds.*

have one's head in the sand [See **HIDE ONE'S HEAD IN THE SAND.**]
have one's head screwed on (the right way) be clever, shrewd. *George has done very well out of his investments: he certainly has his head screwed on the right way.*

have one's heart in one's mouth be in a state of fear, terror. *All the time I was climbing on the mountain, my heart was in my mouth.* Also **with one's heart in one's mouth** in a state of fear or terror. *With my heart in my mouth I nervously walked along the narrow bridge.*

have one's heart in the right place [See **HEART IS IN THE RIGHT PLACE.**]

have (many/several, etc.) irons in the fire be working on several projects at the same time, so that if some fail others will be left which may be successful. *I'm very busy at the moment because I have several irons in the fire.*

have it both ways (often with negative) gain, win no matter which way something turns out. *Either you help us and share our profits or you keep your money safe: you can't have it both ways, i.e. you can't expect to share our profits if you don't help us with your money.*

have it/something coming (to one) deserve the punishment, etc. that one gets. *I'm not sorry that Jack has been dismissed: he's had it coming to him for a long time.*

have it in for (someone) (informal) dislike (someone) very much; wish to do someone harm. *I see that Jim was beaten up last night: someone obviously had it in for him.*

have it made have all that one would wish for. *In his new job, Bill has a marvellous salary and a lovely big office: he really has it made.*

have it out (with someone) discuss something (e.g. a cause for complaint) frankly (with someone); put one's point of view plainly. *Mr. Brown keeps interfering with my work: I'm going to his office now to have it out with him.*

have kittens (informal) be in a state of fear, panic or anger. *When I tell Miss Jones that I won't be able to help her tomorrow, she'll probably have kittens, i.e. be very upset.*

have one's knickers in a twist [See **GET ONE'S KNICKERS IN A TWIST.**]

have money to burn [See **MONEY TO BURN.**]

have no business not have the right (to do something). *You will have to tell him to leave: he has no business being in here without official permission.*

have no say not have any authority (in making a decision). *The ordinary people can help to choose their president, but they have no say in deciding who should be king.* [See also **HAVE ONE'S SAY.**]

have no scruples not be held back by feelings of sentiment, mercy. *If any student is found guilty of theft, I shall have no scruples in expelling him.*

have nothing on/not have anything on (informal) 1. be very poor when compared with (someone or something else). *You may think that Dick is a good runner, but he doesn't have anything on his brother, i.e. his brother is a much better runner.* 2. not have proof or evidence

against. *I think that he will be released, because they really don't have anything on him.*

have/be nothing to do with (someone/something) not be the concern of (someone); not be connected with (something). *I don't know why he keeps interfering: it has nothing to do with him.* [See also HAVE/BE (SOMETHING) TO DO WITH.]

have occasion (to) (usually with negative or question) have a reason (for doing something). *I don't know where his office is: I've never had occasion to go there.*

have off by heart [See LEARN/HAVE/KNOW (OFF) BY HEART.]

have something on be busy, engaged, be doing something. *I can't come with you tonight, I have something else on.*

have someone on a string [See ON A STRING.]

have one foot in the grave [See ONE FOOT IN THE GRAVE.]

have something on one's mind [See ON ONE'S MIND.]

have something on the brain [See ON THE BRAIN.]

have qualms be uncertain (because what one intends to do may be wrong, dangerous, etc.). *He said last week that he would have to sack most of his workers, but I think he is having qualms about doing so.*

have one's say make one's opinions known; speak. *Everyone will have a chance to have his say.* [See also HAVE NO SAY.]

have seen better days [See SEEN BETTER DAYS.]

have someone/something taped understand what someone is like; understand how something works. *Jack can't fool me: I've got him taped. If you want to know how to arrange a successful party, ask Jim – he's got it all taped.*

have the ball at one's feet have the power to decide what happens next. *You must decide what you want to do: the ball is at your feet now.*

have the best of both worlds be able to enjoy the advantages of two different situations, without having to choose between them. *My brother teaches medicine at the University, but he also has a lot of private patients; so he has the security of the university job and the large income; from a private practice: he has the best of both worlds.*

have the bit between one's teeth [See TAKE THE BIT BETWEEN ONE'S TEETH.]

have the cards stacked in one's favour be at a great advantage. *Bill has the cards stacked in his favour in this contest: he is bigger and stronger than his opponent, and he can move faster.*

have the cheek to be bold, impudent enough to. *After I had paid for his meal and driven him home, he had the cheek to ask me for the loan of £5!*

have the courage of one's convictions be brave enough to act according to one's beliefs. *If you feel so strongly about this matter, then you must speak up: you must have the courage of your convictions.*

have the dirt on (informal) know about someone's bad actions. *The newspaper reporter claimed that he had the dirt on some of the country's leading politicians.*

have the face to be bold enough to do something without feeling

ashamed or embarrassed. *How can he have the face to ask me for more money when he already owes me more than £100?*

have the floor [See TAKE THE FLOOR.]

have the hang of [See GET THE HANG OF.]

have/get the last laugh be successful in the end. *All his relatives made fun of Charles when his grandmother left him only her old armchair, but he had the last laugh: it contained all her savings!* [See also (HE) LAUGHS BEST WHO LAUGHS LAST.]

have/get/say the last/final word make the final comment (in an argument, discussion, etc.). *I hate arguing with Mary: she must always have the last word.*

have the life of Riley [See (LEAD/HAVE/LIVE THE LIFE OF RILEY.)]

have the nerve to dare to. *He came in late this morning, and then had the nerve to ask to be allowed to go home early!*

have the upper/whip hand [See WHIP HAND.]

have the wind up [See GET THE WIND UP.]

have time on one's hands [See TIME ON ONE'S HANDS.]

have/be (something) to do with be connected with. *What does that remark have to do with the subject we have been talking about? I don't know why my feet are sore: I think it has something to do with these new shoes.* Also **have little/a lot/not much (etc.) to do with** have little/a lot of/not much (etc.) connection with. *That suggestion hasn't much to do with what we are discussing now.* [See also HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH.]

have to hand it to [See HAND IT TO.]

have two strikes against one have two things which are to one's disadvantage. *He is from a poor family and he is not well educated, so he has two strikes against him.*

have what's coming to one [See (GET/HAVE) WHAT IS COMING TO ONE.]

have one's wits about one [See KEEP ONE'S WITS ABOUT ONE.]

have words argue, quarrel. *John and Mary look rather upset: I think they have been having words.* -

HAVING. (not) **having any** (informal) (not) permitting something; (not) agreeing to do something. *Some of the students tried to misbehave with the new teacher, but he soon showed them that he wasn't having any.*

HAY. [See MAKE HAY WHILE THE SUN SHINES.]

HE. [See (HE) LAUGHS BEST WHO LAUGHS LAST.]

HEAD. (keep one's) **head above water** (manage with difficulty to stay) in control of a situation. *We have had many heavy expenses to pay in running the business, but so far we have kept our heads above water.*

(bang one's) **head against a brick wall** [See BANG ONE'S HEAD AGAINST A (BRICK) WALL.]

head and shoulders above [See STAND/BE HEAD AND SHOULDERS ABOVE.]

head in the clouds [See HAVE ONE'S HEAD IN THE CLOUDS.]

head in the sand [See HIDE ONE'S HEAD IN THE SAND.]

(good) head on one's shoulders [See HAVE A GOOD HEAD ON ONE'S SHOULDERS.]

(not make) head or tail of [See (NOT) MAKE HEAD OR TAIL OF.]

head screwed on [See HAVE ONE'S HEAD SCREWED ON (THE RIGHT WAY).]

head start good advantage. *Anyone who has a good education has a head start as far as getting a job is concerned.*

HEADING. **heading for a fall** [See RIDING FOR A FALL.]

HEADS. **heads I win, tails you lose** whatever happens, the situation is to one person's advantage and another's disadvantage. *If the landlord improves the house, he can charge us more rent; if he doesn't improve it, we have to go on living in these miserable circumstances: it's a case of heads I win, tails you lose, i.e. whatever happens is to our disadvantage.*

HEART. **heart at rest** [See under SET SOMEONE/SOMETHING AT REST.]

heart go out to feel sorry for someone. *Poor Harry has not been chosen for the team after practising so hard; my heart goes out to him.*

heart in one's mouth [See HAVE ONE'S HEART IN ONE'S MOUTH.]

(someone's) heart is in the right place (someone) is really very kind. *Jack may not seem a very friendly person, but his heart is in the right place.*

heart of gold [See HAVE A HEART OF GOLD.]

heart of stone [See HAVE A HEART OF STONE.]

heart on one's sleeve [See WEAR ONE'S HEART ON ONE'S SLEEVE.]

(one's) heart sinks (one) is depressed, anxious. *When the pilot said that we would be passing through a storm, my heart sank.*

(one's) heart skips/misses a beat (one) is suddenly affected by some emotion, good or bad. *When I heard his voice again after so many years, my heart missed a beat.*

(one's) heart stands still (one) is affected by tremendous tension or anxiety. *While we waited for news of the survivors, our hearts stood still.*

heart-to-heart (talk, etc.) honest (discussion), where nothing is concealed. *The boy had a heart-to-heart talk with his father about what he should do for a career.*

HEAVEN. **heaven (only) knows** [See GOD (ONLY) KNOWS.]

HEAVY. **(a) heavy heart** depression, low spirits. *He returned from the scene of the accident with a heavy heart.* [See also LIGHT HEART.]

HELL. **(all) hell breaks loose** [See ALL HELL BREAKS/IS LET LOOSE.]

hell for leather [See GO/RIDE HELL FOR LEATHER.]

(come) hell or high water [See COME HELL OR HIGH WATER.]

hell-raiser [See under RAISE CAIN.]

hell/the devil to pay unpleasant consequence of something done. *If your father discovers that you have been staying up late, there will be hell to pay.*

HEM. **hem and haw** avoid saying anything meaningful; talk in order

to waste time. *When we asked him to give us back the money he owed us, he hemmed and hawed for a while, but eventually returned it.*

HEN. **hen party** party for women only. *Mary held a hen party for her friends once a month.*

HERE. **here goes** (expression used when one begins something, especially when one is not certain of how it will turn out). *Jim was not a very confident swimmer but he dived into the deep end, saying, "Here goes!"*

HIDE. **hide/bury/have one's head in the sand** refuse to face the facts; avoid reality. *Anyone who thinks that the world's oil supplies will never be used up is just hiding his head in the sand.*

hide one's light under a bushel conceal, be modest about one's achievements/abilities, etc. *Sheila has been hiding her light under a bushel: no-one knew that she could sing so well.*

hide or hair/(neither) hide nor hair (informal; usually with negative) sign; evidence. *They've searched everywhere but they can't find hide nor hair of him.*

HIGH. **high and dry** (informal) completely alone and without help. *His friends had gone away and left him high and dry.*

high jinks wild, mischievous activity, usually of a harmless kind. *The children had some high jinks while their parents were out of the house.*

high old time [See HAVE A HIGH OLD TIME.]

high time very near the time, or almost past the time (for something to be done). *If you want to catch your train, it's high time you were leaving.*

HIGHTAIL. **hightail it** run away, get away quickly. *When they heard that extra police were coming, the crooks hightailed it out of town.*

HIGHWAY. **highway robbery** [See DAYLIGHT ROBBERY.]

HIND. [See TALK THE HIND LEGS OFF A DONKEY/MULE.]

HIT. **hit a good patch** [See GOOD PATCH.]

hit-and-miss [See HIT-OR-MISS.]

hit-and-run having knocked someone down and not stopped. *The old man was knocked down by a hit-and-run driver last week.*

hit it off (well) become (good) friends. *We had soon become friends; in fact, we hit it off immediately.* Also **hit it off badly** not feel friendly. *They hit it off rather badly when they first met.*

hit-or-miss/hit-and-miss rough, approximate, not exact. *The work of distributing these letters seems to have been a hit-or-miss affair; sometimes the right people have got them, sometimes not.*

hit/get into one's stride get to the stage where one works/performs best. *After the first ten minutes, the home team hit its stride and won easily.*

hit the/score a bull's eye get something exactly right. *John hit the bull's eye with his first answer.*

hit the ceiling/roof (informal) be very angry. *John's father hit the roof when he discovered that John had borrowed his car without permission.* Also **go through the ceiling/roof** (same meaning).

hit the deck (informal) throw oneself on the ground. *All the people there hit the deck when they heard the sound of an explosion.*

hit the hay/sack (informal) go to bed. *I'm very tired; I think I'll hit the hay.*

hit the high spots go out to celebrate (especially by visiting the best/most expensive places). *When we go into town at the week-ends, we hit the high spots.*

hit the jackpot be extremely successful (e.g. in a competition); get the best prize. *His last novel seems to have hit the jackpot, i.e. it was very successful.*

hit the nail on the head say something that is exactly correct; be exactly right. *I thought that the chairman's suggestion hit the nail on the head, i.e. it was a very good one.*

hit the road/trail leave; go on a journey. *Let's go now: it's time we hit the road, i.e. it's time we left. After staying at home for some time, Jack has hit the road again, i.e. started travelling about.*

hit the sack [See HIT THE HAY.]

hit the trail [See HIT THE ROAD.]

HITCH. **hitch one's waggon to a star/the stars** be very ambitious. *Bob has hitched his waggon to a star: he has decided that he wants to be a famous actor.*

HOBSON. **Hobson's choice** no choice at all. *We can either travel in this old car, or we cannot go at all: it's Hobson's choice, i.e. there is only one car to travel in.*

HOIST. **(be) hoist with one's own petard** (be) trapped by a plan, etc. by which one had meant to trap someone else. *Jim tried to make me laugh during the lesson and get me punished, but the teacher saw him and gave him the punishment: so Jim was hoist with his own petard.*

HOLD. **(not) hold a brief for** (usually with negative) (not) like; (not) admire; (not) be prepared to defend. *I don't hold any brief for people who steal from old ladies.*

(not) hold a candle to (usually with negative) (not) be nearly as good as. *John is fairly good at English, but he doesn't hold a candle to his brother Jim, i.e. Jim is much better.*

hold/have all the aces/trumps have all the advantages. *I don't think that we shall win our case against such a big company: it holds all the aces.*

hold one's breath wait anxiously. *The people below held their breath as the fireman climbed up to rescue the cat.* [See also CATCH ONE'S BREATH; TAKE SOMEONE'S BREATH AWAY.]

hold court meet with one's admirers. *The famous writer used to hold court in a nearby restaurant every evening.*

hold everything! [See HOLD IT!]

hold (one's) fire wait for the best time before one acts or speaks. *The*

opposition party challenged the Prime Minister to reply to the questions, but he held his fire until the end of the debate.

hold good/true be true. *Treat others as you expect them to treat you: that is a rule which holds good wherever you go, i.e. the same rule applies everywhere.*

hold one's head up not be ashamed. *Now that she has been declared innocent, she can hold her head up again.*

hold one's horses (informal) wait. *Don't be angry, just hold your horses: I can explain everything, i.e. wait until I explain.*

hold it/everything! (informal exclamation) stop! wait! *"Hold it! - Where do you think you are going?"*

hold on to your hat(s) [See HANG ON TO YOUR HAT(S).]

hold one's own do as well as others. *Don't worry about Jack losing his money: when it comes to playing cards, he can hold his own, i.e. he can play well.*

hold one's peace [See HOLD ONE'S TONGUE.]

hold the floor [See under TAKE THE FLOOR.]

hold the fort be responsible for something while someone else is away. *Although the shop was very busy, Mary told old Mr. Brown to take a rest: she would hold the fort until he came back.*

hold the purse strings [See PURSE STRINGS.]

hold the stage be the centre of everyone's attention. *Jack likes an audience: he loves to hold the stage.*

hold one's tongue/peace be silent; not speak. *The boy's mother told him to hold his tongue when adults were speaking.*

hold true [See HOLD GOOD.]

(not) hold water (often with negative) (not) be true, believable. *His story does not hold water: I don't believe it.*

HOLDING. [See LEAVE SOMEONE HOLDING THE BABY/BAG.]

HOLE. **hole in one's hat** [See TALK THROUGH (A HOLE IN) ONE'S HAT.]

hole-in-the-wall secret; hidden. *I refuse to have anything to do with such hole-in-the-wall business: all my business affairs are legal and open.* Also **hole-and-corner/hole-in-the-corner** (same meaning).

HOLIER. **holier-than-thou** intended to impress others with one's virtue, goodness. *I can't stand his holier-than-thou manner: I'm sure he is not as virtuous as he pretends to be.*

HOLY. **holy terror** (informal; often used in a humorous way) someone who is to be feared; someone whose behaviour is very bad. *Our Latin teacher was a holy terror: we were all afraid of him. That child of theirs is a holy terror, i.e. badly behaved.* Also **in holy terror** very much afraid. *We used to live in holy terror of our Latin teacher.*

HOME. **home truths** things which one believes to be true even though they may not be pleasant to hear. *I'm going to tell Bill a few home truths about his rude behaviour.*

HONEST. **honest-to-goodness/God** genuine; real. *His novel is an honest-to-goodness attempt to show what a working-class life is like.*

Also **honest-to-goodness/God!** (exclamation to show that one is telling the truth, or is surprised). *I never stole your money, honest-to-God!*

HOONEYMOON. **honeymoon is over** end of the time at the beginning of a relationship when people are friendly. *The new manager was very popular when he first started, but now the honeymoon is over.*

HOOK. (fall for/swallow something) **hook, line and sinker** (accept, believe something) completely. *He gave her some unlikely excuse for his being late and she swallowed it, hook, line and sinker.*

HOOKED. **hooked on** (informal) extremely fond of; not able to do without. *By that time, the poor chap was hooked on drugs, i.e. he was a drug-addict.*

HOP. **hop it!** [See BEAT IT!]

hop to it (informal) start doing something immediately. *If this room is to be cleaned up before your parents arrive, you'd better hop to it.*

HOPE. **hope against hope** hope for something although it is not likely to happen. *Even though the crash was a bad one, we still hoped against hope that there might be some survivors.*

HORNET. (stir up a) **hornet's nest** (do something which causes a) lot of trouble, angry feelings. *The speech you made at the meeting last week seems to have stirred up a real hornet's nest: there are a lot of angry letters in the newspapers today.*

HORNS. **horns of a dilemma** [See ON THE HORNS OF A DILEMMA.]

HORSE. **horse sense** common sense. *If he had even a bit of horse sense, he would not get into such trouble.*

(from the) **horse's mouth** [See STRAIGHT/RIGHT FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH.]

HOT. **hot air** talk which does not mean anything. *You should not pay any attention to his promises; they are just a lot of hot air.*

hot and bothered anxious and upset. *She arrived at the exam hall all hot and bothered because she was late.*

(blow) **hot and cold** [See BLOW HOT AND COLD.]

hot potato subject, topic which is difficult to handle. *The committee did not even consider the topic of raising the subscription, since it was thought to be top much of a hot potato.* Also **drop someone/something like a hot potato** abandon someone/something quickly (usually when one becomes aware of some difficulty or problem). *When he discovered how expensive the project was going to be, he dropped it like a hot potato.*

hot seat 1. difficult or dangerous position. *There are very few candidates for the position of chairman: it is considered too much of a hot seat.* 2. (in USA) electric chair, on which criminals are executed.

hot under the collar angry, upset. *Don't say anything about lawyers to him: he gets hot under the collar when anyone mentions them, i.e. he does not like them.*

(in/into/out of) **hot water** (in/into/out of) trouble. *Poor Jack - he always seems to be getting into hot water.*

HOTBED. (a) **hotbed of** (with special reference to vice, sin, intrigue, etc.) (a) place where much vice, intrigue, etc. is to be found. *As the old king lay dying, the palace became a hotbed of intrigue as to who should succeed him.*

HOUSE. [See **EAT SOMEONE OUT OF HOUSE AND HOME**; **PUT ONE'S (OWN) HOUSE IN ORDER.**]

HOW. **how about/what about** what do you think of . . .; may I suggest. . . . *How about us all going to the cinema this evening?*

how about that/what about that (then) (expression used to draw attention to something surprising, worthy of praise, etc.). *We've just scored our ninth goal - how about that!*

how come?/how so? how did this happen?; what is the reason? *How come Jack was the only one allowed to leave early?*

how do you do? (expression used when people are introduced. The reply is also **How do you do?**). *When Mr. Smith was introduced to Mr. Jones, they both said, "How do you do?"*

how on earth/how in God's name/hell/the world [See under **WHAT ON EARTH.**]

how the hell [See under **WHAT THE HELL.**]

how the wind blows/is blowing [See under **WAY THE WIND BLOWS/IS BLOWING.**]

HUE. **hue and cry** noisy excitement. *In the hue and cry after the robbery was discovered, the thief was able to escape.*

HUSBAND. **husband one's resources** not waste whatever strength, supplies, etc. one has left. *The explorers decided that, since they had a very long journey to make, they would have to husband their resources carefully.*

HUSH. **hush-hush** (informal) very secret. *Roger is doing some hush-hush work for the government.*

I

I. (and) I don't think! (informal) (expression to show that one does not believe what has been said). *He's a marvellous writer - and I don't think!, i.e. I think he is a poor writer.*

I'll/I'd bet (you) my bottom dollar I am absolutely certain. *I'll bet you my bottom dollar that Jane comes late.* Also you can **bet your bottom dollar.**

I'll eat my hat (informal expression used to show that one does not believe that something is possible). *He boasts that he was a champion swimmer when he was younger: if that's true, I'll eat my hat!*

I'll have your guts for garters! [See **HAVE SOMEONE'S GUTS FOR GARTERS.**]

I'll say (informal) I agree completely. *"Don't you think that Jim is very lazy?" — "I'll say he is!"*

IF. if the cap fits, wear it [See IF THE SHOE FITS, WEAR IT.]

if the mountain will not come to Mahomet (**Mahomet will go to the mountain**) if one person refuses to come to visit another, then the other person must go to the first. *Mr. Smith says that he cannot come to see us, so if the mountain will not come to Mahomet . . . i.e. we shall go to see Mr. Smith.*

if the occasion arises if there is an opportunity. *I shall speak to him about that matter if the occasion arises.*

if the shoe/cap fits, wear it if you think that what I have said applies to you, then act accordingly. *The headmaster has said that any students who don't attend classes regularly may be expelled: if the shoe fits, wear it, i.e. if you think that he was referring to you, then you should do something about it.*

if the worst comes to the worst if the worst thing that we can imagine happens. *I'm told the show may be very boring: if the worst comes to the worst, we can leave early and come home.*

ILL. ill at ease anxious; uncomfortable. *The last witness seemed very ill at ease when she was being questioned: do you think she was lying?*

ill wind [See IT IS AN ILL WIND (THAT BLOWS NOBODY GOOD).]

IN. in a bad way very bad; very ill. *The finances of the company are in a bad way: it may have to close down soon. I'm afraid your uncle is in a bad way: he may not survive.*

in abeyance no longer in use, practice. *There used to be a law against shops being open on Sunday, but it has been in abeyance for many years now.*

in a big way using, investing a large amount of money, effort, etc. *Our company is going into the motor-car business in a big way: we are investing millions of pounds in it over the next few years.* [See also IN A SMALL WAY.]

in a bind in a difficult situation. *Sue is in a bit of a bind at the moment: she has to look after her father, who is ill, and at the same time she has to find time to study for her final exams.*

in a body all together; as a group. *As a kind of protest, the students left the hall in a body in the middle of the graduation ceremony.*

in a cleft stick in a situation where none of the choices is good. *I am in a cleft stick as to what I should do for my holidays: if I go on holiday with my parents, my girlfriend won't be happy, and if I go with my girlfriend, my parents won't be happy.*

in a cold sweat in a state of great fear. *I hate travelling by plane: during take-off, I'm always in a cold sweat.*

in a flash very quickly; immediately. *He just looked at the maths problem once, and the solution came to him in a flash.*

in/into a flat spin in/into a confused and excited state. *The news that they were to be given a quick test put the students into a flat spin.*

in a fog confused; not able to understand. *I've read his book twice, and I'm still in a fog.*

in/into a groove in a situation where one is always doing the same thing; leading an unexciting kind of life. *I'd like to work abroad for a while, I feel that I've got into a groove.*

in a hole [See IN A SPOT.]

(be) in aid of to help; (be/have) the purpose of. *We are selling these flags in aid of charity. What's all this in aid of? i.e. Why is this going on?*

in a kind of way [See IN A WAY.]

in/into a lather (informal) in/into a confused and excited state. *John is in a terrible lather: he's lost his wallet.*

in all in total. *There were about fifty people there in all.*

in all one's born days (often used with negative) during one's whole life. *I have never seen anything so disgraceful in all my born days.*

in all respects in every way. *He was in all respects a proper gentleman.* Also **in every respect** (same meaning).

in an unguarded moment when one is not being careful about what one is saying. *I happen to know that Bill is a very rich man: in an unguarded moment, he told me so.*

in a nutshell very briefly. *We have very little time left: could you please explain your point of view in a nutshell?*

in any case/event allowing for anything that may happen. *Your parcel should arrive very soon, in any case before the weekend.* Also **at all events.**

in arrears not up-to-date with one's payments. *If you are more than £5 in arrears, they will send you a warning letter.*

in a rut in a situation where one has been doing the same thing for a long time. *I have been doing this job for too long: I'm in a rut.*

in a scrape [See GET INTO/BE IN A SCRAPE.]

in a sense according to one way of understanding something. *I know that Jones is very strict with his workers: but, in a sense, he is doing them good, because his business is efficient and their jobs are secure.*

in a small way using, investing only a small amount of money, effort, etc. *He is in business in a small way: he owns a fruit stall at the market.* [See also IN A BIG WAY.]

in a sort of way [See IN A WAY.]

in a spot/hole in a difficult situation. *John's sister is coming to stay with us, and that has put us in a bit of a spot: we don't really have enough room.*

in at the death/kill present when the most important part of something takes place. *We arrived in time to see the winning goal of the game, so we were in at the death.*

in a way looking at the matter from one point of view. *We are sorry that our son, John, is studying abroad, but, in a way, it's good: he must learn to be independent.*

in a/one word very briefly. *In a word, Professor Jones, what are your views on the present financial crisis?*

(live) in a world of one's own (be) in a state where one is not paying attention to what is around one; (be) cut off from reality. *Jim is not a practical person at all: most of the time he lives in a world of his own.*

in/into someone's bad/black books disliked by someone. *I think I*

must be in Peter's bad books: he is always asking me to do the most difficult jobs. [See also IN/INTO SOMEONE'S GOOD BOOKS.]

in bad faith [See BAD FAITH.]

in bad odour having a bad reputation; generally disliked. *Jack has been in bad odour with the management since the last strike: they think he caused it.*

in one's birthday suit (informal) naked; with no clothes on. *The little boy was playing about the garden in his birthday suit.*

in black and white [See BLACK AND WHITE.]

in someone's black books [See IN SOMEONE'S BAD BOOKS.]

in one's/the blood part of one from birth, not learned from outside. *Love of music is in his blood: his father and grandfather were both excellent musicians.*

in broad daylight [See BROAD DAYLIGHT.]

in character according to the way one would expect someone to act from what one knows of him. *He was an extremely kind man: the fact that his last thoughts were for his friends was completely in character.* [See also OUT OF CHARACTER.]

in charge of in control of; responsible for. *Who is in charge of this section today?*

in check [See KEEP/HOLD IN CHECK.]

(go round) in circles [See GO ROUND IN CIRCLES.]

in/into circulation going about, meeting people. *John is now out of hospital: it's nice to know that he is back in circulation again.*

in clover very happy and contented. *You know how anxious Bill was to go overseas; well, he has got a job which involves a lot of overseas travel, so he's really in clover.*

in cold blood deliberately, not acting out of passion and emotion. *I think that anyone who murders another person in cold blood should be hanged.* Also **cold-blooded** deliberate, unemotional: *a cold-blooded murder.*

in common shared by the people/things concerned. *The language which everyone in the group has in common is English.*

in condition fit (enough). *If you are going to be in condition to play for the first team, you will have to train very hard.*

in one's cups drunk. *You should not pay any attention to what he says when he is in his cups.*

in/into deep water(s) in/into a difficult or dangerous situation. *If you try to get your money back by force, you may find yourself in deep water; you should call in the police.*

in (great) demand wanted by a lot of people. *You should buy this book while there are some copies left: it is in great demand.*

in dispute 1. in a situation where there is disagreement. *The two countries are in dispute over an island that is half-way between them.* 2. cause of quarrel, disagreement. *You will see the island that is in dispute on this map.*

in/by dribs and drabs in very small amounts and only from time to time. *We are trying to raise some money for charity, but we're only getting it in dribs and drabs.*

in earnest seriously; with all one's power. *For a long time he did nothing, but now he has started working in earnest.*

in easy circumstances prosperous; well-off. *Now that our children have finished their education, we are in easier circumstances than we used to be, i.e. more prosperous.*

in effect really; in reality. *The factory is going to be modernised: this means, in effect, that there will be fewer jobs.*

in one's element enjoying what one is doing; engaged in what one likes doing best. *Jack has always been keen on cars; now that he has got a job in a garage, he is really in his element.* [See also OUT OF ONE'S ELEMENT.]

in every respect [See under IN ALL RESPECTS.]

in one's favour as a help to one. *The home team kicked off with the wind in their favour, i.e. blowing towards the other team's goal.*

in fine (formal) briefly but accurately. *In fine, I would say that this book is the best one on the subject that has ever been written.*

in fine fettle in good spirits. *Harry has completely recovered from his illness and you will find him in good fettle.*

in fits and starts [See BY FITS AND STARTS.]

in for a penny, in for a pound if one starts something, one might as well carry on with it. *Since we have painted this part of the fence, we might as well paint all of it: in for a penny, in for a pound.*

in force (with special reference to rules, laws, etc.) in operation; being applied or enforced. *Laws to make sure that one's car is safe to drive have been in force for many years now.*

in full sail (with reference to a sailing ship) with all its sails out. *The racing yacht was a magnificent sight as it came into the harbour in full sail.*

in full swing fully started. *By the time we arrived, the party was already in full swing, i.e. all the guests had arrived and were enjoying themselves.*

in general generally speaking; as a rule. *I don't like historical novels in general, but this particular one is very interesting.*

in one's glory proud of oneself. *John was in his glory when he won the golf competition.*

in/into someone's good books liked by someone. *Jack must be in the teacher's good books: he was the only student who was not punished for being late.* [See also IN/INTO SOMEONE'S BAD/BLACK BOOKS.]

(be) in good company (be) the same as many famous people. *If you are interested in horse-racing, you are in good company: most of the British royal family are interested in it too.*

in good faith [See GOOD FAITH.]

in good order working well; the way it should be. *The equipment arrived in good order.*

in good time early enough (to do something). *They arrived in good time to catch the train. Classes start punctually, so be in good time.* [See also IN ONE'S OWN GOOD TIME.]

in someone's hair [See GET IN/INTO SOMEONE'S HAIR.]

in hand 1. being attended to. *I complained to the Ministry because*

they had not replied to my letter, but they assured me that the matter was in hand, i.e. they were attending to it. 2. under control. *The police have got the situation in hand.* [See also OUT OF HAND.] 3. still available; not done or used up. *The supplies are not finished; we still have some in hand.*

in/into harness at work; doing what one has to do. *I hate having nothing to do: I can't wait to get back in harness again.*

in high spirits joyful; in a good mood. *The children are always in high spirits on the last day of the school term.*

in hot water [See HOT WATER.]

in Indian/single file one behind the other; in a line. *The path between the trees was so narrow that we had to walk in Indian file.*

in keeping (with) in agreement (with). *I don't think that what the government is doing now is in keeping with what it promised before it was elected.* [See also OUT OF KEEPING (WITH).]

in kind 1. in the same way. *After our cars crashed, the other driver began to insult me, and I replied in kind.* 2. in goods, not money. *The farm workers used to be paid in kind: they were allowed to take some of the crops.*

in league with co-operating with; working together with. *It was then we realised that one of our generals was in league with the enemy.*

in leaps and bounds [See BY LEAPS AND BOUNDS.]

in lieu (of) (*lieu* is pronounced *loo*) instead (of); as a substitute (for). *The workers who were dismissed were paid a month's wages in lieu of notice, i.e. they were paid a month's wages extra because they agreed to be dismissed immediately, instead of working a bit longer.*

in line 1. in the same straight line. *Arrange those chairs so that they are in line.* [See also OUT OF LINE.] 2. under control; disciplined. *These soldiers are a rough lot: you may have trouble in keeping them in line.*

in line with in agreement with; corresponding to. *The latest law about the wearing of safety belts is in line with other recent laws on safer motoring.* [See also OUT OF LINE WITH.]

in living memory [See WITHIN LIVING MEMORY.]

in low spirits depressed, unhappy. *Jack is in low spirits today: his team was beaten in the cup-final.*

in luck fortunate; lucky. *You are in luck: you have won first prize.* [See also OUT OF LUCK.]

in mind [See BEAR/KEEP IN MIND.]

in one's/the mind's eye in one's thoughts. *Although our old house was knocked down a long time ago, I can still see it in my mind's eye.*

in name (only) not really; only in appearance. *He is the manager in name only; most of the work is actually done by his son.*

in no time (at all)/in nothing flat very quickly indeed. *Let me do that for you: I'll have it done in no time at all.*

in no uncertain terms clearly and forcefully. *If that man is rude to me again, I shall tell him what I think of him, in no uncertain terms.*

in one ear and out the other [See GO IN ONE EAR AND OUT THE OTHER.]

in one fell swoop [See AT ONE FELL SWOOP.]

in one word [See IN A WORD.]

in order 1. properly arranged. *Make sure everything is in order for the inspection tomorrow.* 2. according to the rules. *The judge has decided that it will be quite in order for you to speak to the prisoner.* [See also OUT OF ORDER.]

in one's own good time taking as long as one likes. *He is a good craftsman, but not if you're in a hurry: he does things in his own good time.* [See also IN GOOD TIME.]

in passing by the way. *He just happened to mention in passing that he had met you before.*

in perspective in its true importance, when compared to other things. *I admit that hanging is a cruel punishment, but we must see it in perspective, and compare it with what the murderer has done to his victim.*

in place 1. where it, etc. should be. *The children tidied up the room and left everything in place.* 2. polite, suitable. *Do you think it would be in place if I left early?* [See OUT OF PLACE.]

in someone's pocket under someone's control. *He was a very powerful criminal; they say that he even had High Court judges in his pocket.*

in one's prime period of one's life when one is at the height of one's powers, at one's best. *I think that no-one ever wrote better poetry in English than Wordsworth in his prime.*

in print 1. in a book, newspaper, etc. *All authors look forward to seeing their names in print.* 2. published. *His books are still in print.* [See also OUT OF PRINT.]

in progress still going on. *I thought he had finished his work, but it seems it is still in progress.*

in question which is being discussed; which has been referred to. *The lawyer said that the house in question had already been sold.*

in Queer Street (informal) in a very difficult situation. *If you spend more money than you earn, you'll soon find yourself in Queer Street.*

in reason [See WITHIN REASON.]

in/with relation to when compared to. *The speed of this car is very good in relation to the size of its engine, i.e. it has a small engine but comparatively high speed.*

in one's right mind sane. *He obviously wasn't in his right mind when he committed suicide.*

in round figures/numbers measured approximately, to the nearest 10, 50, 100, etc.; roughly correct. *You don't have to give the exact number; you can give the answer in round numbers, if you like.*

in season at the time when plants, fruits, etc. are normally ripe. *Apples are expensive just now because they are not in season.* [See also OUT OF SEASON.]

in one's seventh heaven very happy. *Her boy-friend has asked her to marry him: she is in her seventh heaven.*

in/into shape 1. fit. *The football season will be starting soon and I am trying to get into shape for it.* 2. in/into the required, necessary condition. *I'm trying to get my car into shape for a long journey.* [See also OUT OF SHAPE.]

in/into one's shell not mixing with other people. *There was a time when he visited other people, but I'm afraid he's gone back into his shell again.*

in/into someone's shoes in/into someone's place. *You have been treated very badly: if I were in your shoes, I'd complain.*

in short briefly; in a few words. *He is greedy, lazy, untruthful, and boastful; in short, a very nasty person.*

in short order quickly; without wasting time. *The sergeant was very efficient: in short order, he had his men fully armed and ready to march.*

in short supply scarce. *Because of the bad weather, fresh food is in short supply.*

in single file [See IN INDIAN FILE.]

in so many words exactly as stated. *He told his guests that they had to leave, but not, of course, in so many words, i.e. he expressed his meaning more politely. I just told him, in so many words, to get out.*

in step 1. walking/moving, etc. at the same pace as others. *Try to keep in step when you are marching.* 2. doing the same thing at the same time; doing something at the correct time to fit in with someone else. *Most of the class are in step, except Jane, who has been ill for weeks.* [See also OUT OF STEP.]

in stitches laughing out loud; laughing a lot. *The professor is a very amusing speaker: he has us in stitches during his lectures, i.e. he makes us laugh a lot.*

in stock available for sale or for use. *I asked the shopkeeper if he had any butter in stock.* [See also OUT OF STOCK.]

in store 1. kept for use when needed. *Keep these supplies in store: they may be needed later.* 2. waiting, going to happen. *I wonder what fate has in store for us next? I think that there is trouble in store for him, i.e. he is going to be in trouble.*

in strength in large numbers. *You'll meet most of my family at the party tonight: they'll be there in strength.*

in substance giving the main points briefly. *It was a long speech, but what he was saying in substance was that taxes should be reduced.*

in suspense in a state of anxiety; waiting anxiously. *The results were not announced until the end of the period, so we were kept in suspense all that time.*

in one's teens between the ages of thirteen and nineteen. *Everyone there was very young; most of them were only in their teens.*

in terms of with reference to; in relation to. *Have you thought about these plans in terms of what they would cost.*

in the act [See CATCH IN THE ACT.]

in the affirmative, saying "yes". *When asked if they wanted to plead guilty, the accused men all replied in the affirmative.* [See also IN THE NEGATIVE.]

in the air being discussed, or thought about. *He was the first to write down these ideas, although they were in the air at the time.*

in the bag (informal) secure; certain. *We shall certainly win tomorrow's game: the result is in the bag.*

in/into the black showing a profit. *After several years of losses, our company is at last in the black.* [See also **IN/INTO THE RED.**]

in the buff (informal) naked. *They had forgotten to bring swimsuits so they swam in the buff.*

in the circumstances [See **UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES.**]

in the clear 1. safe; secure. *The police suspected him of the theft, but now he is in the clear.* 2. free of debt. *We've been paying back our debts, and at last we are in the clear.*

in the clouds [See **HAVE ONE'S HEAD IN THE CLOUDS.**]

in the course/fullness of time as time goes on. *He is only a beginner at tennis; his game will improve in the course of time.*

in the dark not knowing what is going on. *We are still in the dark as to what is going to happen tomorrow: no-one knows.*

in the doghouse (informal) being treated in an unfriendly way because one has offended someone. *I forgot to send my wife a card for her birthday, and since then I have been in the doghouse, i.e. she has not been friendly towards me.*

in the doldrums in a situation where no progress is made, where nothing is happening. *Business is in the doldrums because most people have no money to spend.*

in the driver's seat (informal) in control; in charge. *Since the President has been ill, many people are saying that it is actually the Vice-President who is in the driver's seat.*

in the event when something actually happens. *She was afraid that she wouldn't like living in London but, in the event, she thoroughly enjoyed it.*

in the event of/that if. *In the event of your being late, we shall start without you, i.e. if you are late. . .*

in the eyes of (the law, etc.) according to (the law, etc.). *You may not think it very serious, but theft is still an offence in the eyes of the law.*

in the face of against; in spite of. *The factories were taken over by the government in the face of opposition from the factory-owners.*

in the family way (informal, rather old-fashioned way of saying "pregnant", once considered an impolite word) pregnant, about to have a baby. *She has to relax a bit; she's in the family way.*

in the flesh in reality; in person. *You will have a chance to see your favourite film-star in the flesh today: he is coming to visit our school.*

in the know knowing what is going on. *We have been trying to find out what is going to happen, but the few people who are in the know refuse to talk.*

in the lap of luxury in a very pleasant and expensive way. *He won a lot of money in a competition and since then he has been living in the lap of luxury.*

in the lap of the gods a matter of fate; not under one's control. *We have done all we can to help him; from now on his future is in the lap of the gods: there is nothing more we can do.*

(not) in the least (usually with negative) (not) at all. *"Do you mind if I smoke?" - "Not in the least."*

in the light of to judge by; going on the evidence of. *In the light of*

what happened last year, I think that we must plan things more carefully this year, i.e. things were badly planned last year and therefore. . .
in the line of duty what one has to do (because one is paid for it, etc.).
I thanked the policeman for all his help, but he just said, "It's all in the line of duty, sir," i.e. "You don't need to thank me – that is what I am paid for."

in the long run over a long period of time. *These changes are making things very inconvenient now, but they should improve matters in the long run.*

in the main mostly; for the most part. *He can lose his temper at times, but in the main, he is a good man to work for.*

in the melting-pot not yet decided. *Our main speaker cannot come, so all the arrangements are back in the melting-pot again.*

in the money well-off; rich. *They have been in the money ever since they bought that new shop.*

in the nature of things the way things are normally; as one would naturally expect. *It is in the nature of things that as people get older they become less active.*

in the negative saying "no". *When asked if he wanted to make any statement, the prisoner answered in the negative.* [See also IN THE AFFIRMATIVE.]

in the nick of time just in time. *Jack grabbed the little girl in the nick of time, otherwise she would have fallen into the pool.*

in the pink (of condition) (informal) fit and healthy. *I wasn't well last month, but now I'm in the pink.*

in the public eye watched by the public; under public supervision. *Any successful politician or film-star is going to be very much in the public eye, i.e. not going to have much privacy.*

in the raw 1. without the comforts of normal civilised life. *George Orwell was a writer who lived among very poor people for a long time: he really saw life in the raw.* 2. (informal) without clothes' on. *It was so warm that he slept in the raw.*

in/into the red owing money. *We have been trying to pay back our debts, but we are still in the red.* [See also IN/INTO THE BLACK.]

in the right correct; having justice, the law on one's side. *You are in the right: your neighbours are not entitled to walk across your land without your permission.* [See also IN THE WRONG.]

in the/someone's road [See IN THE/SOMEONE'S WAY.]

in the running/race having a chance. *We think that our college is going to win the competition, but there are two other colleges which are still very much in the running.*

in the same boat in the same condition, situation. *I realise that you only had one hour to do the examination, but all the other candidates are in the same boat, i.e. they only had one hour too.*

in the same breath (often used when one says something which goes against what one has just said) at the same time. *He told us what a wonderful party it would be and, almost in the same breath, said that he would not be coming to it.* Also **in/with one breath** (same meaning).

in the soup (informal) in trouble. *I haven't studied at all for the exam tomorrow: I'm really going to be in the soup.*

in the swim doing what is in fashion; keeping up with modern life. *It is much easier to keep in the swim if you live in a large city.*

in the teeth of in spite of; against. *The new theatre was built in the teeth of opposition from people who thought it would be too expensive.*

in the thick of in the middle of. *Wherever there was fighting, the captain could be seen there in the thick of it.*

in the twinkling of an eye [See TWINKLING OF AN EYE.]

in the wake of following after (something or someone that has happened or gone before). *In the wake of the recent outbreak of food-poisoning, people are being more careful about what they eat.* Also **in someone's wake** (same meaning).

in the/someone's way causing annoyance or hindrance; preventing easy movement. *Please remove these boxes: they are in the way.* Also **in the/someone's road** (same meaning). [See also OUT OF THE WAY.]

in the wind (perhaps) going to happen, although not yet widely known about. *Things may be different from now on: some changes are in the wind.*

in the wrong incorrect; having done something which is illegal, unjust. *We took the matter to court, but the judge decided that we were in the wrong.* [See also IN THE RIGHT.]

in the year dot [See THE YEAR DOT.]

in time not late. *By hurrying, we were just in time to catch the train.*

in top gear performing well. *Michael is our top salesman; when he is in top gear he can easily sell more than any of the others.*

(keep) in touch (with) (stay) in communication (with). *Don't forget to keep in touch with us while you are away: write to us regularly.* [See also OUT OF TOUCH.]

in tow with one; following behind one. *Mrs. Green turned up at the meeting with three of her children in tow.*

(stop) in one's tracks (stop suddenly) at the exact spot where one is. *When he saw the lion, he stopped in his tracks, i.e. he stopped right there.*

in training fit; in the process of making oneself fit. *The boxer was in training for his next fight.* [See also OUT OF TRAINING.]

in trust in safekeeping for someone. *When the girl's father died, his money was kept in trust for her until she was twenty-one.*

in tune 1. making the right sounds; sounding well together. *Before you start playing the music, you must make sure that all the instruments are in tune with one another.* 2. fitting in well together. *I am afraid that Mr. Brown's ideas are not in tune with mine, i.e. we have different, conflicting ideas.* [See also OUT OF TUNE.]

in turn alternately; one after the other. *Each of the children took it in turn to read a part of the story aloud. Jim gave the book to John and he, in turn, gave it to Mary.* [See also OUT OF TURN.]

in two shakes (of a lamb's tail) (informal) very quickly. *I won't be long: I'll be with you in two shakes.*

in vain with no result; uselessly. *We knocked at the door for ten minutes, but in vain: no-one answered.*

in view of bearing in mind. *I think we ought to cancel our holiday in view of what was said on the news about probable transport strikes.*

in virtue of [See BY VIRTUE OF.]

in one's way 1. annoyance, hindrance to one. *These boxes are in my way; please remove them.* 2. according to the nature of the person/thing referred to. *He is quite a clever man, in his way.*

INCH. [See WITHIN AN ACE/INCH OF; WITHIN AN INCH OF ONE'S LIFE.]

INS. ins and outs details. *I don't know all the ins and outs of the matter: I just have a general idea.*

INSIDE. inside out [See KNOW INSIDE OUT.]

inside track 1. (with reference to running, etc.) the track which is closest to the centre of the athletics field, and therefore requires the least amount of running. *All the runners will want to get into the inside track as soon as possible.* 2. in the best or most favoured position. *I think John is on the inside track for the new job: I'm sure he will get it.*

INSULT. [See ADD INSULT TO INJURY.]

INTO. into a flat spin [See IN A FLAT SPIN.]

into a scrape [See GET INTO A SCRAPE.]

into someone's bad/black books [See IN SOMEONE'S BAD/BLACK BOOKS.]

into deep water [See IN DEEP WATER.]

(come) into effect (start) working, operating. *The new laws come into effect at midnight tonight.*

into someone's good books [See IN SOMEONE'S GOOD BOOKS.]

into someone's hair [See GET IN/INTO SOMEONE'S HAIR.]

into hot water [See HOT WATER.]

into line the same as others. *The old designs are being altered to bring them into line with the new ones, i.e. so that they will all be the same. You will have to bring your people into line, i.e. make them behave the same as others.*

into question [See CALL IN/INTO QUESTION/DOUBT; BRING/COME INTO QUESTION.]

into shape [See IN SHAPE.]

into one's shell [See IN ONE'S SHELL.]

into someone's shoes [See IN/INTO SOMEONE'S SHOES.]

into the bargain as well; also. *They were not only robbed, they were beaten up, into the bargain.*

into the black [See IN THE BLACK.]

into the red [See IN THE RED.]

into thin air [See DISAPPEAR/MELT/VANISH INTO THIN AIR.]

IRON. (while the) iron is hot [See STRIKE WHILE THE IRON IS HOT.]

IRONS. irons in the fire [See HAVE (MANY/SEVERAL, ETC.) IRONS IN THE FIRE.]

ITCHING. itching palm dishonesty; wish to steal things. *His itching palm has got him into trouble with the police several times.*

IT. **it is an ill wind (that blows nobody good)** even something that is bad usually brings some good results with it for someone. *The fact that the bus broke down meant that Jim had a good excuse for missing his exam: as they say, it's an ill wind that blows nobody good.*

it never rains but it pours things (especially problems or troubles) do not usually happen singly/on their own. *My car has broken down, and the same has happened to my wife's: it never rains but it pours.*

IVORY. **ivory tower** situation where one can cut oneself off from the problems of ordinary life. *It is all very well for professors in their ivory towers to tell us how to run our factories; if they had to work in them, they would soon see our problems.*

J

JAUNDICED. [See TAKE A JAUNDICED VIEW OF.]

JAW. **jaw drop (a mile)** show that one is surprised. *His jaw dropped a mile when he learned he had won the football pools.*

JIG. **jig is up** (informal) one has been caught; something is finished, at an end. *As soon as the thieves saw the police-car coming, they knew that the jig was up.*

JOHNNY. **Johnny-come-lately** someone who has just recently joined a group, class, etc.; someone with little experience. *I do not like being told how to do my job by a Johnny-come-lately like him.*

JOIN. **join forces** join together; become united. *The two armies joined forces to fight against the common enemy.*
join issue with [See TAKE ISSUE WITH.]

JOKING. **joking apart/aside** speaking seriously. *Joking apart, I think we should do something to make that path outside safer.*

JUMP. **jump bail** run away from being tried in court, even though some money (= bail) has been put up as security. *He was released on bail of £500, but he jumped bail and was never caught again.*

jump down someone's throat speak angrily to someone. *When I told him a joke about lawyers, he just about jumped down my throat: it was then I discovered he was a lawyer himself.* [See also FLY AT SOMEONE'S THROAT.]

jumping-off place place where one starts from (usually on a long or difficult journey). *This town is a jumping-off place for expeditions up the river.*

jump in the lake [See GO JUMP IN THE LAKE/OCEAN/RIVER/SEA, ETC.]

jump/climb/get on a/the bandwagon start doing something which may bring one advantage because it is fashionable. *He has had a successful career, partly because he always jumped on the correct bandwagon at the correct time.* Also **jump/climb/get aboard a/the bandwagon.**

jump out of one's skin (informal) be suddenly very frightened. *When I heard the explosion I just about jumped out of my skin.*

jump the gun 1. in a race, start before the starter's gun has fired. *The runner was disqualified for jumping the gun three times.* 2. do something before one should. *We are not supposed to go home until tomorrow, but some people have jumped the gun.*

jump through a hoop/hoops do a thing/things at someone else's command, or to please someone else. *I'm tired of jumping through hoops: from now on I'm going to follow my own wishes.* [See also GO THROUGH HOOPS/THE HOOP.]

jump to conclusions come to a decision about something before one has had all the evidence. *Don't jump to conclusions: wait until I have finished speaking.* Also **jump to the wrong conclusion** come to the wrong decision about something because one is not in possession of all the evidence. *He saw a man running away from the scene of the crime and jumped to the wrong conclusion.*

JUST. **just about** almost. *I'll be with you shortly: I've just about finished what I'm working on.*

just now 1. a few moments ago. *He can't be far away: he was here just now.* 2. at this time. *I'll phone him at home: he should be there just now.*

just the thing the exact thing that was requested/needed, etc. *Consider buying that mirror: it would be just the thing for your hall.*

just what the doctor ordered (informal) the exact thing that one wants or needs to make one feel better/more contented, etc. *I really enjoyed that long sleep: it was just what the doctor ordered.*

K

KANGAROO. **kangaroo court** unofficial court. *Because he had not joined in the strike, the poor man was tried before a kangaroo court and sentenced to be beaten up, i.e. he was judged by his fellow workers.*

KEEN. **keen as mustard** (informal) very keen. *All the boys are as keen as mustard to get a place in the school football team.*

KEEP. **keep a civil tongue in one's head** speak respectfully and politely. *Remember to keep a civil tongue in your head when you are speaking to older people.*

keep/have a level head remain calm/sensible. *Even in the middle of the fire he kept a level head, and saved many lives.*

keep an ace up one's sleeve [See under UP ONE'S SLEEVE.]

keep an ear (close) to the ground [See under HAVE ONE'S EAR/AN EAR (CLOSE) TO THE GROUND/GRAPEVINE.]

keep an eye on/keep one's eye on watch; guard. *Would you mind keeping an eye on this parcel for me for a few minutes?*

keep an eye to the main chance [See HAVE AN EYE TO THE MAIN CHANCE.]

keep a stiff upper lip [See STIFF UPPER LIP.]

keep a straight face [See STRAIGHT FACE.]

keep someone at a distance/at arm's length avoid meeting someone. *I always end up quarrelling with that man so I try to keep him at a distance.*

keep a weather eye open (for) watch carefully (for). *There are some holes in that field which are quite dangerous: keep a weather eye open for them.*

keep body and soul together (often with negative) stay alive. *Near the end of their long journey there was hardly enough food left to keep body and soul together.*

keep one's chin up remain cheerful/confident. *I know that things are going badly for you just now, but you will just have to keep your chin up and hope that they will get better soon.*

keep (someone) company stay together (with someone). *Jane was lonely, so Mary stayed with her and kept her company until midnight.*

keep one's distance stay away from someone or something. *They have a large fierce-looking dog: I always keep my distance from it.*

keep one's ear (close) to the ground [See under HAVE ONE'S EAR/AN EAR (CLOSE) TO THE GROUND/GRAPEVINE.]

keep one's end up do one's share; do as well as others. *Although he was not as strong as the other workers, Jack managed to keep his end up.*

keep one's eye on the ball concentrate on what is important for oneself. *In spite of the many different jobs he had to do, Jack always managed to keep his eye on the ball.*

keep/have one's eyes peeled/skinned be on the look-out. *The soldiers were told to keep their eyes peeled for enemy planes.*

keep one's feet stay balanced. *Although the ship was rolling badly, the captain managed to keep his feet.*

keep/have one's feet (planted) (firmly) on the ground be realistic, practical. *Even after winning a large sum of money, the poor man kept his feet firmly on the ground, and spent it sensibly.*

keep/have one's fingers crossed (sometimes two fingers of one hand are actually crossed when this expression is used) hope that things will turn out well/that one will be lucky. *I have sent in my application for the job; all I can do now is keep my fingers crossed.*

keep one's hair/shirt/wig on (informal and impolite way of telling people to) remain calm. *She told the impatient customer to keep his hair on, and he would be served along with the others.*

keep/get one's hand in remain in practice. *I am not a very good golfer, but I try to keep my hand in by having an occasional game at the weekend.*

keep one's head [See KEEP A LEVEL HEAD.]

keep one's head above water [See HEAD ABOVE WATER.]

keep/hold someone/something in check keep someone/something under control; prevent someone/something from advancing. *Keep your feelings in check. They are trying to keep the enemy in check.*

keep someone/something in mind [See BEAR SOMEONE/SOMETHING IN MIND.]

keep (oneself) in the background not draw attention (to oneself). *Very few people knew him because he kept himself in the background.*

keep in touch (with) [See IN TOUCH (WITH).]

keep one's mouth/trap shut (informal) not say anything; not speak. *The thieves told the watchman that if he kept his mouth shut no harm would come to him.*

keep one's nose clean (informal) not get involved in trouble of any kind. *The police released him but warned him to keep his nose clean or else he would be arrested again.*

keep one's/someone's nose to the grindstone keep working hard. *He kept his nose to the grindstone and eventually built up a prosperous business.*

keep out of someone's hair [See GET OUT OF SOMEONE'S HAIR.]

keep one's own counsel not reveal one's plans to others. *In writing it is wise to keep your own counsel, otherwise people may steal your ideas.*

keep pace (with) stay level (with). *You cannot find these articles in the shops because production has not kept pace with the public demand, i.e. people want more than can be produced.*

keep one's shirt on [See KEEP ONE'S HAIR/SHIRT/WIG ON.]

keep tabs on know what someone/something is doing; know what is happening to someone/something. *Keep tabs on the sale of these cigarettes: I shall want to know how many have been sold. He is a very important visitor so the police have been asked to keep tabs on him.*

keep one's temper not become angry. *His behaviour was very rude but, fortunately, I managed to keep my temper.* [See also LOSE ONE'S TEMPER.]

keep the ball rolling continue something, not let it stop. *The important thing with young children is to keep the ball rolling from one activity to another; otherwise they become bored. Most of the group had nothing to say, but Mary and Peter kept the ball rolling.* [See also START/GET/SET THE BALL ROLLING.]

keep the peace prevent people quarrelling or fighting. *Those two children are always fighting each other when their mother is not there to keep the peace.*

keep the pot/kettle boiling keep an exciting activity going, not let things calm down or stop. *The audience kept the pot boiling by shouting encouragement to the players.*

keep the wolf from the door get/give enough to keep one alive. *When we were young, our family was very poor, and sometimes it was difficult to keep the wolf from the door.*

keep time do something in the correct rhythm or beat. *When you are learning to dance, the main thing is to keep time to the music.*

keep track follow; keep a record of. *The man suspected of the murder travelled about so much that it was difficult for the police to keep track of him.*

keep something under one's hat (informal) keep something

secret. *Keep this under your hat, but I hear that we are to have a new manager.*

keep under wraps [See UNDER WRAPS.]

keep up appearances make it seem that everything is going well for one, or that everything is normal. *His family is not as wealthy as it used to be, but they keep up appearances by running a big car and living in the same large house.*

keep up with the Joneses appear to be as wealthy (e.g. by possessing the same things) as other people one knows. *It's silly to spend all your time working just so that you can keep up with the Joneses.*

keep/have one's wits about one continue to think clearly even in a confused or dangerous situation. *During the fire, the young boy kept his wits about him and got out by one of the less crowded exits.* Also **with one's wits about one** able to think clearly or sensibly. *Anyone with his wits about him would have been more careful.*

keep one's word keep a promise. *If he says he will be there, then you can be sure he will: he always keeps his word.*

KETTLE. (watched) **kettle never boils** [See WATCHED KETTLE/POT NEVER BOILS.]

kettle of fish (informal) situation, especially an awkward or difficult one (often used with **fine/pretty/nice**, etc., but meaning "difficult", "bad", etc.). *This is a fine kettle of fish: not even one of my students has managed to pass the final exam!*

KICK. **kick against the pricks** complain about things that cannot be improved or changed. *He will have to learn to accept certain things in life, instead of kicking against the pricks all the time.*

kick one's heels [See COOL ONE'S HEELS.]

kick in the pants/teeth insult; punishment; serious setback. *The government's decision was a kick in the teeth for everything we had worked for.*

kick over the traces reject the rules which had controlled one earlier. *John was very strictly brought up but, as soon as he was 21, he kicked over the traces.*

kick the bucket (informal) die. *The old man finally kicked the bucket at the age of 83.*

kick up a fuss/row quarrel; be angry. *When he discovered that his room had been given to someone else, the tourist kicked up quite a fuss.*

KILL. **kill the goose that lays the golden eggs** destroy something that brings one wealth, profit, etc. *The new government does not seem to realise that, by overtaxing all the shopkeepers, it is killing the goose that lays the golden eggs, i.e. the shopkeepers are bringing wealth to the country.*

kill two birds with one stone achieve two aims by doing one thing. *If I get a job in London, I shall be killing two birds with one stone; I shall be near my parents and I shall also be in the best place for advancement in my career.*

KISS. **kiss of death** something which has a disastrous effect. *Every-*

thing went well until the unpopular Mr. Smith said he supported us: it was the kiss of death to all our efforts.

KNEE. **knee-high to a grasshopper** (informal: usually with reference to a child) small. *I knew you many years ago, when you were only knee-high to a grasshopper.*

KNICKERS. [See GET ONE'S KNICKERS IN A TWIST.]

KNIT. **knit one's brow(s)** bring one's eyebrows together, as when one is angry, concentrating, puzzled, etc. *The prince's rude reply caused the king to knit his brows.*

KNOCK. **knock all of a heap** [See STRIKE ALL OF A HEAP.]

knock someone's block off (informal) hit/punch someone on the head. *If he insults me like that again, I'm going to knock his block off.*

knock holes in [See PICK HOLES IN.]

knock/beat into a cocked hat (informal) easily defeat, overcome. *Professor Smith's theory knocks all the others into a cocked hat, i.e. it proves that they are completely wrong.*

knock someone/something into shape [See LICK SOMEONE/SOMETHING INTO SHAPE.]

knock it off (informal) stop doing something. *I can't sleep because of that noise you're making: knock it off, will you?*

knock off one's feet cause one to be very surprised. *The announcement that John and Mary were to be married just knocked me off my feet: I didn't even know that they were going out together.*

knock on wood [US: See TOUCH WOOD.]

knock oneself out (informal) work extremely hard. *He really knocked himself out to get the repairs done on time.*

knock the living daylights out of [See BEAT THE LIVING DAYLIGHTS OUT OF.]

KNOW. **know all the angles/answers** (informal) know how something (e.g. an organisation) works; be clever, shrewd. *If you have any problems in this matter, ask Jack: he knows all the angles.*

know a thing or two (informal) be shrewd, clever. *I think it would be foolish to try to trick Tom: he knows a thing or two.*

know something backwards (informal) know something thoroughly; have something memorised. *I have read that book so many times that I practically know it backwards.*

know (off) by heart [See LEARN (OFF) BY HEART.]

know by sight recognise someone from his appearance (but not know him by his name). *I know the man you are looking for by sight, but I'm afraid I don't know his name.*

(not) know enough to come in out of the rain (informal: usually used with a negative) (not) have common sense. *I'm surprised that you chose Jane for such a responsible job: I wouldn't have thought she knew enough to come in out of the rain, i.e. she does stupid things.* Also **(not) have enough intelligence/sense, etc. to come in from/in out of the rain.**

(not) know from Adam (usually with negative) (not) be able to

recognise a person. *There is no point in my looking for him: even if I met him, I wouldn't know him from Adam.*

know how many beans make five (informal) be sensible, clever. *You won't fool him: he knows how many beans make five.*

(not) know if/whether one is coming or going (usually with negative) be confused. *So many things have happened today that I don't know whether I am coming or going, i.e. I feel confused.*

know something/someone inside out know completely, thoroughly. *I know this town inside out: I have lived here all my life.*

know one's (own) mind be able to make decisions about what one wants and stick to them. *It's hopeless working with David, because he doesn't know his own mind: first he decides one thing, and then he decides another.*

know someone/something of old [See OF OLD.]

know one's onions (informal) be clever, shrewd. *You should leave the matter in Dr. Green's hands: he knows his onions.*

know one's stuff know something that one is supposed to know, e.g. know how to do one's job. *Professor Brown is a real expert in his subject: he certainly knows his stuff.*

know/learn the ropes know/learn how something (e.g. a job) is done/organised. *Everything will be confusing for you at the beginning, but you'll soon get to know the ropes.* [See also SHOW SOMEONE THE ROPES.]

know the score (informal) know the truth; know the real situation. *If you want information, ask Jim: he knows the score.* Also **what's the score?** What is the situation? What has happened, been decided? *When I came out of the meeting, Jim came up and said: "What's the score?"*

know one's way about/around know how to get things done; be familiar with a place/organisation. *Jack is friendly with all sorts of important people: he knows his way around.*

know what's what [See WHAT'S WHAT.]

know which side one's bread is buttered on be aware of what will bring one advantage or gain. *You can be sure that Tom will not offend the new manager: Tom knows which side his bread is buttered on, i.e. offending the manager will be to his disadvantage, so he won't do it.*

(not) know which way to turn (always with negative) (not) know what to do next; (not) know where to go for help. *So many things have gone wrong for me recently that I don't know which way to turn.*

KNOWLEDGE. [See (A) LITTLE KNOWLEDGE IS A DANGEROUS THING.]

KNOWN. (have) known better days [See (HAVE) SEEN BETTER DAYS.]

L

LABOUR. **labour of love** something one does because one wants to do it, not for money. *His poetry does not sell as well as his novels, but he still spends a lot of time on it: it's a real labour of love.*

LADIES. **ladies' man/lady's man** man who likes the company of women and is liked by them. *Young Bill is turning into quite a ladies' man.*

LADY. **lady killer** man who is very attractive to women. *He was a real lady killer when he was younger.*

lady's man [See LADIES' MAN.]

LAME. (a) **lame duck** 1. (someone or something) that cannot survive without help. *The government has said it will give no more public money to help lame duck industries, i.e. those industries will be allowed to fail.* 2. (US) (politician, etc.) whose period of office is coming to an end. *The present administration is a lame duck administration so nothing much can be expected of it.*

LAND. **land flowing with milk and honey** [See FLOWING WITH MILK AND HONEY.]

land on one's feet/both feet be fortunate, lucky (especially in coming out of a difficult situation). *Jack was dismissed one day, and the following day he had got a much better-paid job: he always lands on his feet.* Also **fall on one's feet** (same meaning).

LAP. [See IN THE LAP OF LUXURY; IN THE LAP OF THE GODS.]

LARGE. **large as life** [See AS LARGE AS LIFE.]

large fish/frog in a small pond [See BIG FISH/FROG IN A SMALL POND.]

LAST. **last ditch effort/stand, etc.** final attempt to do something before one has to give up. *The firemen are making a last ditch effort to put out the fire.*

last laugh [See HAVE THE LAST LAUGH.]

last straw [See under STRAW THAT BREAKS THE CAMEL'S BACK.]

last word [See HAVE THE LAST WORD.]

LAUGH. **laugh on the other side of one's face/mouth** not be amused any more; be sorry for something which one has been pleased at before. *He may think that throwing stones at my windows is amusing, but he'll be laughing on the other side of his face soon: I've just reported him to the police.*

(he) laughs best who laughs last the person who is successful in the end is the really happy one. *I know you are winning so far, but remember: he laughs best who laughs last, i.e. you may not win in the end.* Also found in many other forms, e.g. **he who laughs longest laughs best, etc.** [See also HAVE/GET THE LAST LAUGH.]

laugh up one's sleeve be secretly amused. *Although they did not dare show it, most of the audience were laughing up their sleeves at the politician's silly remarks.*

LAUGHING. **laughing matter** [See NO LAUGHING MATTER.]

LAW. **law of averages** the common-sense idea that, in matters of chance, one cannot continue to get the same result (not a proper scientific law). *They have five children, all boys: by the law of averages, the next one should be a girl.*

law unto oneself not bound by the rules that have to be obeyed by others. *We all have to be in here by 9 a.m. but the managing director is a law unto himself: he can come in at any time.*

LAY. lay a finger on touch; harm. *Anyone who lays a finger on that child will be reported to me.*

lay an egg (informal) 1. be surprised, alarmed, angry. *When the headmaster finds that broken window, he will lay an egg.* 2. (US) (with reference to a performance, joke, etc.) fail completely; make a joke, performance, etc. that fails completely. *The show laid an egg and was cancelled after only two performances.*

lay something at someone's door blame someone for something. *The responsibility for starting the fire was laid at his door, i.e. he was blamed for it.*

lay/put one's cards on the table be honest and open; not hide anything. *I'm going to lay my cards on the table and tell you everything I know about this affair.*

lay down the law give commands that must be obeyed. *The children behaved badly today: I'm going to have to lay down the law about their behaviour.*

lay eyes on [See CLAP EYES ON.]

lay hands on get possession of. *For weapons, the mob used anything they could lay their hands on.*

lay it on (thick) do or say anything, however unlikely or ridiculous, in order to make people feel sorrow, anger, etc. *The beggar said that he had to support thirteen children and several other relatives: he really laid it on thick.*

lay it/something on the line give clear and strict instructions (about something). *From now on, I'm going to lay it on the line: arrive at work on time, or risk dismissal.*

lay (much/little, etc.) store by [See SET (MUCH/LITTLE, ETC.) STORE BY.]

lay to rest bury. *He was finally laid to rest in the village he had been born in.*

lay waste destroy, ruin. *The invading army laid waste the countryside as they advanced.*

LEAD. lead (someone) a dog's life be unhappy, miserable; cause (someone) to be unhappy, miserable. *His wife is a horrible woman; they say she leads him a dog's life. Since he got married to her, he's been leading a dog's life.*

lead someone a merry chase/dance avoid being caught or found by someone (over a long distance, period of time). *The thieves led the police a merry chase all over the city before they were finally caught.*

lead someone by the nose get someone to do what one wants. *Jack is very much under Mary's influence: she just leads him by the nose.*

lead the life of Riley [See LIFE OF RILEY.]

lead the way go first. *You lead the way and we'll follow.*

lead someone up the garden path deceive someone. *When he said he was an expert car-mechanic, he was leading you up the garden path: he really knows nothing about cars.*

LEAF. [See TAKE A LEAF OUT OF SOMEONE'S BOOK.]

LEAN. **lean over backwards** [See FALL OVER BACKWARDS.]

LEAP. **leap in the dark** something one does without knowing how it will turn out. *We're going to open up a hotel, and it's really a leap in the dark: we've never done this sort of thing before.*

LEARN. **learn/have/know (off) by heart** come to learn/know something by memorising it. *When I was young, we knew lots of poems off by heart, i.e. we could repeat them from memory.*

learn the ropes [See KNOW THE ROPES.]

LEASE. [See NEW LEASE OF/ON LIFE.]

LEAST. **least said, soonest mended** when something goes wrong (e.g. in a quarrel), it is better not to go on talking about it. *There is no use in complaining about what has happened: least said, soonest mended.*

LEAVE. **leave a bad/bitter/nasty taste in one's mouth** leave one feeling annoyed, disgusted. *I was shocked at her remarks; they left a bad taste in my mouth.*

leave someone be [See LET SOMEONE BE.]

leave someone/something hanging (in the air) leave someone in a state of anxiety or expectation; leave something not completed, not decided. *The committee did not have time to discuss the matter, so it has been left hanging, i.e. undecided.*

leave someone holding the baby/bag let someone else be responsible. *My boss has made a mess of the arrangements for next week's conference; now he's going abroad, and I'm left holding the baby, i.e. I shall be blamed if anything goes wrong.*

leave someone/something in the lurch leave someone without warning, in a difficult situation. *She has had a hard life: after she had her third child, her husband walked out and left her in the lurch.*

leave no avenue unexplored/no stone unturned do everything one can. *The minister said he would leave no avenue unexplored in his attempts to improve the standard of education.*

leave someone to his own devices leave someone alone to do what he likes, without any help or guidance. *To our amazement, our host went away and left his guests to their own devices.*

leave/let well enough alone not interfere with things when they are going well. *Our car used to go fine until my husband started trying to improve its performance: he doesn't have the sense to leave well enough alone.*

leave word leave a message. *If you have any news for me, leave word with the janitor: he will let me know.*

LEFT. **left and right/left, right and centre** [See RIGHT AND LEFT.]

left-handed compliment compliment or praise which is also a criticism in some way. *They praised their hostess on her cooking, saying it showed what could be done using cheap ingredients: it was a*

kind of left-handed compliment, i.e. in one way she was being praised for her cooking skill, in another she was being criticised for serving a cheap meal.

(not let one's) left hand know what one's right hand is doing
[See (NOT) LET ONE'S LEFT HAND KNOW WHAT ONE'S RIGHT HAND IS DOING.]

LEG. [See (NOT) HAVE A LEG TO STAND ON.]

LEND. **lend (someone) a hand** [See GIVE (SOMEONE) A HAND.]

lend colour to [See GIVE COLOUR TO.]

lend itself to be easily adapted (made usable) for. *This material is very cheap but also very long-lasting: it lends itself to all sorts of uses in industry.*

LESS. **less than no time** very quickly. *In less than no time the children were dressed and ready to go out.*

LET. **let alone** much less. *I am surprised that Jack has joined the Royal Air Force: he can't drive a car, let alone pilot an aeroplane.*

let/leave someone be leave someone alone; not interfere with someone. *Don't annoy your brother while he is working; let him be.*

let bygones be bygones forgive some harm done to one; make up a quarrel that has taken place in the past. *The two enemies agreed to let bygones be bygones and became friends from then on.*

let someone down easy give someone bad news very gently. *When you tell him that he hasn't got the job, let him down easy: he expected to get it.*

let someone have it attack with the fists or by using a weapon. *He just drew back his fist and let him have it. The policeman pointed his gun at the armed robber and let him have it, i.e. shot at him.*

let it all hang out (informal) show or say what one really thinks or feels. *At the group meetings, they would let it all hang out, discussing their most private thoughts and feelings.*

let it ride let something happen without taking any action. *His last remark was rather insulting but I just let it ride.*

let it/something rip 1. allow something to go at full speed or power. *He drove the car fairly carefully for an hour, and then he let it rip.* 2. do something as forcefully, strongly as one can. *During the speech, he let it rip and told them what he thought of them.*

(not) let one's left hand know what one's right hand is doing (usually with negative) (not) allow one part of a group, organisation, etc. to know what those in another part are doing. *There was great confusion in the arrangements because the organiser didn't seem to have let his left hand know what his right hand was doing.*

let/set someone/something loose set free. *They had let the dogs loose in an attempt to catch the escaped criminal.*

let me see/let's see (expression used while one is trying to think of something, looking for the answer to questions, etc.). *He must be - let's see now - about 34 years old.*

let off steam 1. express one's feelings. *We had better hold a public meeting, because people will want to let off steam on this issue.* 2. get rid

of one's energies. *At the end of the term the students let off steam by having a big parade.*

let sleeping dogs lie keep quiet about something which might cause trouble or problems. *You say that he took part in a bank robbery when he was a young man: I say it all happened a long time ago, and we should let sleeping dogs lie.*

let the cat out of the bag reveal a secret. *We were planning a surprise birthday party for Mary, but Jack let the cat out of the bag, so now she knows about it.*

let the chips fall where they may accept one's fate; let what will happen, happen. *I am going to make a full confession, and let the chips fall where they may.*

(not) let the grass grow under one's feet (often with negative) (not) waste time. *As soon as he heard that the post was vacant, he applied for it: he certainly doesn't believe in letting the grass grow under his feet.*

let things slide not pay proper attention to things. *You may have some problems in running this office: the previous manager was often ill and let things slide.*

let well enough alone [See LEAVE WELL ENOUGH ALONE.]

LETTER. (keep to the) **letter of the law** (keep to the) exact words of a law. *According to the letter of the law you are guilty, but I shall try to persuade the judge that this law was not intended to cover cases like yours.*

LEVEL. [See DO ONE'S LEVEL BEST.]

LICK. **lick someone's boots** humble oneself to gain someone's favour. *I am not interested in getting promotion if it means I have to lick the boss's boots.*

lick one's chops/lips look forward to something with great eagerness. *The home team are sure they are going to win, so they are licking their chops in anticipation of tonight's game.* Also **smack one's chops/lips** (same meaning).

lick someone/something into shape train someone; make someone fit, disciplined. *After a few months' training, the recruits had been licked into shape.* Also **get/knock/put someone/something into shape** (same meaning).

LIE. **lie down on the job** be lazy; not do one's job properly through neglect or laziness. *Bob should have finished his work by now, but he's been lying down on the job.*

lie in state (usually with reference to the dead body of a king, president or similar person) be in a place where people can come to pay their respects. *After the king died his body lay in state for two days in the cathedral.*

lie in/through one's teeth tell bold, outrageous lies. *If he says he never struck his wife, he is lying in his teeth: he was seen striking her many times.*

lie in wait remain hidden so as to be able to take someone by surprise. *A small group of the rebels were lying in wait at the side of the*

road for the general's car, i.e. they were going to make a surprise attack on it.

lie low remain hidden; keep out of sight. *After committing the robbery, the thieves agreed that it would be a good idea to find a safe place to stay and lie low for a while.*

lie of the land what the situation is like; how things are developing. *Before advancing any further, the general sent an advance party to explore the lie of the land, i.e. to see what lay ahead of them. Before you make any changes, it would be best to take a few weeks to see the lie of the land, i.e. to find out what the present situation is like.*

LIFE. **life and soul of the party** someone who laughs and jokes a lot.

You will find John good company: he is the life and soul of the party.

(take one's) life in one's hands [See TAKE ONE'S LIFE IN ONE'S HANDS.]

life in the old dog yet [See THERE'S LIFE IN THE OLD DOG YET.]

(lead/have/live the) life of Riley (informal) (have) a very good time; (lead) a very happy, contented life. *Ever since he won a fortune on the football pools he has been leading the life of Riley.*

LIFT. **(not) lift a finger/hand** (often with negative) (not) do even a small thing (to help). *He turned out to be a very poor friend: when I was in trouble he didn't even lift a finger to help me.*

LIGHT. **light at the end of the tunnel** [See SEE SOME/THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL.]

(a) light heart cheerfulness; good spirits. *He set out on his journey with a light heart.* [See also HEAVY HEART.]

(hide one's) light under a bushel [See HIDE ONE'S LIGHT UNDER A BUSHEL.]

LIGHTNING. **lightning never strikes twice (in the same place)** an unusual thing never happens twice (to the same person, in the same place, etc.). *If you have already been involved in an aeroplane accident, it is very unlikely that it will happen to you again: lightning never strikes twice.*

LIKE. **like a bat out of hell** (informal) very fast; very quickly. *When someone shouted "Fire!", I got out of that house like a bat out of hell.*

(fit) like a glove [See FIT LIKE A GLOVE.]

(feel) like a million dollars [See FEEL LIKE A MILLION DOLLARS.]

like anything [See LIKE MAD.]

like a red rag to a bull [See RED RAG.]

like a shot very quickly. *When the headmaster said "You may go now", the student left the room like a shot.*

like blazes [See LIKE MAD.]

like father, like son sons are usually like their fathers in what they do. *George and his father never miss going to a football match on Saturdays: like father, like son.*

like hell (informal) 1. (impolite) no, not at all. *"You must leave immediately." - "Like hell I will!" i.e. I have no intention of leaving.* 2. very much, very hard. *The miners worked like hell to free their trapped comrades.*

(sell) like hot cakes (be sold) very quickly. *This book is very popular: it is selling like hot cakes.*

(tell it) like it is [See TELL IT LIKE IT IS.]

like it or lump it (informal) put up with, endure something, whether one likes it or not. *The rule is that you must be home by midnight, and if you don't like it you can lump it.*

like mad/like blazes/like anything very much, very quickly, very strongly, etc. *Everybody was rushing about like mad, i.e. very quickly. He studied like blazes for his exams, i.e. he studied a lot. They pushed the car like mad to get it moving.*

like nobody's business [See NOBODY'S BUSINESS.]

(spend) like water (spend) freely. *He spent the money he had won like water, and soon he was poor again.*

like water off a duck's back without any effect at all. *There is no use complaining to him: it's like water off a duck's back, i.e. your complaints will have no effect on him.*

(spread) like wildfire (spread) very quickly. *News of the President's arrival spread like wildfire through the town.*

LIKES. **(the) likes of** a person like, people like (often used in a critical way). *I am not going to work for the likes of him! i.e. I refuse to work for someone like that.*

LINE. **line of duty** [See IN THE LINE OF DUTY.]

line of least resistance whatever action is easier, more convenient. *If you complain enough to Jack, he will do as you say: he always follows the line of least resistance.*

line one's (own) pockets (usually with reference to someone in a position of authority) gain money for oneself (often dishonestly). *They say that, when he was Commissioner of Police, he lined his pockets with bribes from criminals.*

LION. **(the) lion's share** (the) largest share. *Since he was the leader of the gang, he had the lion's share of the money they stole.*

LIP. **(give/pay) lip service** (make) only a pretence that one believes in something. *The politician said that the government paid lip service to equal opportunities for all, but in fact the rich had all the advantages.*

LIPS. **(one's) lips are sealed** one must keep something secret. *I'm sorry I'm not permitted to tell you what was decided: my lips are sealed.*

LITTLE. **little fish/frog in a big/large pond** person of little importance in a big organisation. *I thought I was an important person at school, but when I went up to university, I was only a little fish in a big pond.* [See also BIG FISH/FROG IN A SMALL POND.]

(a) little knowledge is a dangerous thing knowing only a little about some things is worse than not knowing anything at all. *Sometimes serious accidents can be caused by people who think they can do their own electrical repairs: a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.*

little pitchers have big ears (rather old-fashioned) one has to be careful about what one says in front of children because they are very

often listening. *Don't criticise our neighbours when the children are in the house: little pitchers have big ears.*

little wonder [See NO WONDER.]

LIVE. live and learn one has to learn from one's experience. *I have been in the habit of leaving my door unlocked, and last night someone walked in and stole my wallet: you live and learn, i.e. from now on I shall keep my door locked.*

live and let live one must be tolerant of others. *I know that she dresses very strangely but it is no business of mine: live and let live, I say.*

live from hand to mouth live very poorly, close to starvation level. *After he lost his job, the whole family had to live from hand to mouth.* Also **hand-to-mouth** with just enough to survive: *a hand-to-mouth existence.*

live in a fool's paradise [See FOOL'S PARADISE.]

live in a world of one's own [See (LIVE) IN A WORLD OF ONE'S OWN.]

live it up enjoy oneself; have a good time. *We have decided to live it up a little, so we're throwing a party this Saturday.*

live off the fat of the land [See FAT OF THE LAND.]

live on borrowed time live longer than one is expected to. *I'm afraid that your grandfather is living on borrowed time: he will probably die soon.*

live rough [See under ROUGH IT.]

live the life of Riley [See (LEAD/HAVE/LIVE THE) LIFE OF RILEY.]

LIVING. living daylights [See BEAT THE (LIVING) DAYLIGHTS OUT OF; SCARE THE (LIVING) DAYLIGHTS OUT OF.]

living end someone/something remarkable, extraordinary. *His aunt is the most amusing character: she is the living end.*

LOAF. [See HALF A LOAF IS BETTER THAN NONE/NO BREAD.]

LOCK. lock, stock and barrel everything, without exception. *He has sold the whole business, lock, stock and barrel, to his main competitor.*

lock the stable door (after the horse has bolted) try to take care of something after suffering loss, damage. *After being robbed last week, the bank has decided to put in a modern safe: it's a good example of locking the stable door!*

LONE. lone wolf someone who prefers to be alone. *I don't think that Jack will want to come with us: he is a bit of a lone wolf.*

LONG. (pull a) long face (put on an) expression which shows that one is unhappy, one does not like something. *When I said that we were going for a walk, John pulled a long face: he hates going for walks.*

(a/the) long haul something that takes a long time and requires a lot of effort; the longest, most difficult part of some undertaking. *Tom is doing well at the moment, but I don't know how he will last over the long haul.*

long in the tooth old. *In my opinion, they are a bit long in the tooth for climbing a mountain.*

long shot something (e.g. a plan) which is not very likely to succeed. *We are going to attempt to prevent the fire spreading by cutting down these bushes: it's a long shot, but worth trying.* Also **(not) by a long shot/chalk** not by any means. *He has not given up his hopes of becoming chairman, not by a long shot.*

LOOK. look after number one [See (LOOK AFTER) NUMBER ONE.]

look a gift horse in the mouth make a criticism or complaint about something one has been given as a gift. *He thanked us for the watch but said that he would have preferred a leather strap: talk about looking a gift horse in the mouth! i.e. isn't that a good example of someone being ungrateful for a gift?*

look alive [See LOOK LIVELY.]

look as if butter wouldn't melt in one's mouth [See BUTTER WOULDN'T MELT IN ONE'S MOUTH.]

look at the world through rose-coloured/rose-tinted/rosy glasses/spectacles [See SEE THE WORLD THROUGH ROSE-COLOURED/ROSE-TINTED/ROSY GLASSES/SPECTACLES.]

look before you leap think about what will happen afterwards before you do anything. *In choosing a career, it's very important to look before you leap: you may regret it if you make the wrong decision.*

look black seem very bad. *His wife is still seriously ill: things are looking black for him at the moment.*

look daggers (at someone) look angrily (at someone). *Mary looked daggers at the man who had bumped into her without apologising.*

look down one's nose at show that one feels superior to. *She looks down her nose at anyone who has not been to a university.*

look for trouble do something which is dangerous, or which can cause problems. *Anyone who wanders round the streets after dark is just looking for trouble.* [See also ASK FOR IT/TROUBLE.]

look someone (right/straight) in the eye look at someone directly (to show, e.g. that one is not afraid). *When the chairman told her to leave the meeting, she looked him in the eye and refused.*

look/feel like death warmed up (informal) look/feel ill. *He looked like death warmed up after his illness: he looked very pale.*

look like thunder [See FACE LIKE THUNDER.]

look lively/sharp/alive be on the alert. *You had better look sharp; the bus will be here at any moment.*

look the other way pretend not to see something. *When they come across a poor person they look the other way, i.e. ignore the poor person.*

look to one's laurels protect one's title, reputation, position, etc. *Bill is a very good runner: the champion will have to look to his laurels, i.e. the champion must be careful, otherwise Bill may win the championship.*

LOOSE. (clear up/tie up) loose ends (settle) matters which have not been finally decided, properly cleared up. *I must work late tonight: there are some loose ends I must tie up before I go away.*

LORD. lord it over command others, as if one were their master. *After*

he scored the winning goal in the schools championship, young Jennings was able to lord it over his classmates for weeks.

LOSE. **lose one's bearings** lose one's way. *The party lost its bearings in the thick jungle and was not found for several days.*

lose face look foolish or unimportant in the presence of others. *The businessman was furious because his secretary's carelessness had caused him to lose face with his colleagues.*

lose one's grip not be so able or efficient as one once was, as one used to be. *This shop used to give very good service, but the owner has been ill recently and is perhaps losing his grip.*

lose ground [See GIVE GROUND.]

lose one's head panic, behave in an unreasonable way. *A lot of things went wrong during the meal, and finally the head-waiter simply lost his head and started screaming at the other waiters.*

lose one's heart (to) fall in love (with). *She lost her heart to the young man who had rescued her from drowning.*

lose one's marbles (informal; often with reference to old people) lose one's wits. *That old chap is behaving very strangely: I think he's lost his marbles.* [See also HAVE ONE'S MARBLES.]

lose one's nerve lose one's courage. *He had climbed almost to the top of the rock, but lost his nerve and turned back.* [See also GET UP/HAVE THE NERVE (TO); WHAT A NERVE!]

lose one's shirt lose everything one has (usually, by gambling). *He lost his shirt at the casino.*

lose sight of forget; ignore. *By all means, play sports at the University, but don't lose sight of your main reason for being there: to get a degree.*

lose one's temper become angry. *When he realised how badly he had been treated, he lost his temper.* [See also KEEP ONE'S TEMPER.]

lose the hang of forget how to do something; no longer be able to perform some skill. *You have to keep practising your music, otherwise you'll lose the hang of it.* [See also GET/HAVE THE HANG OF.]

lose/miss the thread not be able to follow or understand (an argument, etc.). *The lecturer was not a very clear speaker and I soon lost the thread of his argument.*

lose one's tongue not be able to speak. *He was so astonished that he lost his tongue.*

lose touch not be aware of what is happening, of what people are saying or thinking. *It is difficult to keep up with events when you live in the country: you tend to lose touch.*

lose track not be able to keep a record; forget. *I lose track of the number of times he repeated what he had already said, i.e. he did it so many times that I could not record them all in my memory.*

LOST. (a) **lost cause** something that must fail. *He will never be a successful politician: he supports too many lost causes.*

LUCK. [See AS LUCK WOULD HAVE IT.]

LUMP. **lump in one's throat** feeling of great emotion, e.g. sadness or

pride. *I get very emotional watching movies; I always have a lump in my throat when I watch the sad scenes.* [See also BRING A LUMP TO ONE'S THROAT.]

lump it [See LIKE IT OR LUMP IT.]

lump sum amount of money paid all together. *You have the choice of getting your pension in one lump sum, or of having it paid to you in weekly instalments.*

lump to one's throat [See BRING A LUMP TO ONE'S THROAT.]

M

MAD. **mad as a hatter/March hare** completely insane. *Don't pay any attention to anything he says: he is as mad as a hatter.*

MADE. **made of money** very wealthy. *He owns dozens of shops and other properties: he's made of money.*

made-to-measure 1. (with reference to clothes) cut to fit the person who is to wear it. *He looked very smart in his new made-to-measure suit.* 2. (generally) specially arranged, modified, etc. to suit someone. *The trip was made-to-measure for his interests.*

made to order made according to what someone wishes or requires. *The chair was so comfortable that it was as if it had been made to order.*

MAIDEN. **maiden name** name a woman has before she gets married. *Nancy Smith's maiden name was Nancy Brown.*

maiden speech first speech one makes in Parliament, a debating society, etc. *It is the custom that a speaker is always congratulated on his maiden speech.*

MAIN. **main drag** (informal) most important, busiest street. *On our first night in the town we wandered down the main drag looking at the sights.*

MAKE. **make a beeline for** go straight for. *We were very thirsty so, as soon as we arrived at the hotel, we made a beeline for the bar.*

make/earn a bomb earn, gain a lot of money. *He's very wealthy; they say he's making a bomb out of selling second-hand cars.* Also **cost/spend a bomb** cost/spend a lot of money. *His house cost him a bomb. He spent a bomb in buying that big house.*

make a clean breast of confess. *The criminal made a clean breast of everything he had done.*

make a clean sweep of [See CLEAN SWEEP.]

make a comeback regain a title, position, etc. after a period of failure or inactivity. *Ali was one of the few boxers who made a successful comeback after losing the world title.*

make a day of it spend the entire day doing something. *If we are going to London this morning, we might as well make a day of it and go to a show in the evening.*

make a dent/hole in 1. cause a piece of metal, etc. to bend by bumping against it. *Someone has kicked my car and made a dent in it.*

2. have a noticeable effect on, especially by diminishing. *The holiday will make quite a dent in our savings, i.e. we shall have to spend a lot of our savings to pay for it.*

make a face show that one is displeased. *When the student discovered how long the essay would have to be, she made a face.*

make a go of make something work. *We don't know whether it will be successful, but we are going to try to make a go of it anyway.*

make a hash of do something badly. *We were relying on him to score the winning goal but he made a hash of it, i.e. he missed his chance.*

make a hit (with) be successful (with). *The young playwright made a hit with his first play.*

make a hole in [See MAKE A DENT IN.]

make all the difference be very effective; have a good or positive effect. *If you want to improve your running, buy a really good pair of running shoes: you will find it makes all the difference.*

make amends (to someone for something) do something for someone (e.g. making a payment of money) to make up for a wrong one has done to him or her in the past. *The young man made amends for the damage he caused by paying for it out of his wages. He promised to make amends to her for his carelessness.*

make a monkey out of (informal) cause someone to look foolish. *Those children have been trying to make a monkey out of me.*

make a mountain out of a molehill make something appear to be more important than it is. *Mary is still complaining about the trick that Jack played on her last week: she is making a mountain out of a molehill.*

make an example of punish someone in a way that will be a warning to others. *I shall make an example of any student who misbehaves.*

make a night of it stay up all night (especially with reference to enjoying oneself). *We decided that we might as well make a night of it so the party went on until dawn.*

make a pass at cause a member of the opposite sex to know that one is attracted to him/her. *Jack made a pass at the waitress but she just ignored him.*

make a/one's pile (informal) make a lot of money. *He made his pile from buying and selling property.*

make a/one's pitch/play for try to get someone's liking, admiration, support. *During the election both parties will be making a play for the working-class vote.*

make a/one's point put forward an idea/one's view on something. *Could I make a point?, i.e. may I put forward an idea? I think you have made your point, i.e. I think you have expressed your point of view (so let us now move on).*

make a point of be careful to do something. *He always makes a point of checking that the back door is locked before he leaves the house.*

make a practice of do something as a matter of habit. *You may occasionally use the emergency exit if you are in a hurry, but don't make a practice of it.*

make a rod for one's own back do something which can later be used against one. *By putting the former president in prison, the new president may be making a rod for his own back, i.e. he also may be put in prison by his successor.*

make a scene quarrel publicly; have a row. *I thought of complaining about the service in that restaurant, but I didn't want to make a scene.*

make a silk purse out of a sow's ear make something excellent from poor materials. *Putting on such a difficult play with such poor actors is really attempting to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.*

make a splash draw attention (to oneself). *The big party he threw for his friends made quite a splash in the local newspapers.*

make oneself at home make oneself relaxed and comfortable in a strange place. *He has this marvellous ability to make himself at home no matter where he is.*

make a virtue of necessity make the most of something that one did not intend to happen; put something unintended to good use. *They could not afford to buy furniture for one of the rooms; so they made a virtue of necessity by turning it into a play-room for the children.*

make one's bed and lie on it put up with the results of one's actions. *Since he wasted his time before the exam, he shouldn't complain because he failed: he's made his bed, he must lie on it.*

make believe pretend. *The children made believe that they were cowboys and Indians.* Also **make-believe** pretence. *He told his friends that his parents were very wealthy, but it was all make-believe, i.e. they were not wealthy at all.*

make one's blood boil make one very angry. *The cruel way in which the children had been treated was enough to make our blood boil.*

make bold with [See MAKE FREE WITH.]

make bricks without straw try to do something without the proper materials. *Teaching English with no books is like making bricks without straw.*

make conversation talk to someone out of politeness, not really exchanging any information. *He didn't say anything interesting: we were just making conversation.*

make do (with) do the best one can with whatever is available. *We don't have proper notebooks, so we shall have to make do with these sheets of paper.* Also **make do and mend** (same meaning).

make ends meet not spend more than one earns or receives. *Prices are rising so fast that housewives are finding it very difficult to make ends meet.*

make eyes at show someone by one's expression that one is attracted to him/her. *He was so handsome that all the girls made eyes at him.*

make faces at make strange expressions to show that one does not like someone. *Whenever the unpopular teacher turned his back, the students would make faces at him.*

make one's flesh crawl/creep make one feel terrified, horrified. *He can tell stories about his wartime experiences that would make your flesh creep.*

make free/bold with help oneself to; make full use of. *While your friends were here they made free with our food supplies, so now there is hardly any food left.*

make fun of laugh at; make jokes about. *The students made fun of the professor's strange way of speaking.*

make good 1. (informal) be a success. *He went to Australia some years ago and made good as a sheep farmer.* 2. be successful in achieving/doing something. *The convict made good his escape.* 3. make up for something that one has lost, damaged, etc. by some kind of payment. *We'd like to borrow these glasses: if any are broken, we shall make good the loss.*

make good time travel quickly. *We made good time in spite of the poor state of the roads.*

make great strides [See MAKE RAPID/GREAT STRIDES.]

make someone's hackles rise cause someone to be annoyed, angry. *That kind of rude behaviour makes my hackles rise.* Also **someone's hackles rise** someone becomes annoyed. *His hackles rise at their rude behaviour;* **raise someone's hackles** make someone angry. *That sort of rude behaviour always raised his hackles.*

make one's hair stand on end [See (MAKE ONE'S) HAIR STAND ON END.]

make hay (while the sun shines) take advantage of a favourable situation while it lasts. *Make hay while the sun shines: enjoy yourself while you are young.*

(not) make head or tail of (usually with negative) (not) be able to understand at all. *Jack's handwriting is terrible: I can't make head or tail of this letter he has written me.*

make headway make progress. *The police have been working hard on the case, but there are few clues, and so they have not made much headway.*

make heavy weather (of/out of) have difficulty (with). *This is supposed to be an easy book, but I'm afraid I'm making very heavy weather of it, i.e. I am finding-it very difficult.*

make it one's business (to)/make something one's business do something which one is not paid to do, but one feels ought to be done. *He made it his business to check every day that his elderly neighbours were well.*

make it hot for punish; speak angrily to. *The teacher said that she would make it hot for the next student who wasted her time.*

make it snappy (informal and impolite) be quick. *Two cups of coffee, and make it snappy: we're in a hurry.*

make light/little of give the impression that something is not very serious or important. *The cut in his finger seemed quite deep to me, but he made light of it: "It's nothing," he said.*

make little of 1. not understand much of. *I studied the letter for a long time, but could make little of it.* 2. [See MAKE LIGHT OF.]

make love (to) 1. have sexual relations (with). *Casanova was supposed to have made love to dozens of women.* 2. (old-fashioned) show romantic, tender feelings. *Couples were going by, arm-in-arm, making love in the moonlight.*

make one's/its mark become famous, well-known. *While still a young man, he had already made his mark as a scientist.*

make mincemeat of destroy completely. *He made mincemeat of his opponent's arguments.*

make money hand over fist [See HAND OVER FIST.]

make one's mouth water fill one with the desire to have something. *You should see the beautiful jewels she is wearing; they would make your mouth water.* Also **mouth-watering** filling one with desire for something. *The food on the table was mouth-watering.*

make much of 1. pay a lot of attention, respect to. *The people of the town made much of the visiting film-star.* 2. (usually with negative) be able to understand. *I listened to his lectures, but I didn't make much of them.*

make no bones (about it) show or say clearly what one thinks. *He made no bones about how boring he found the meeting: he kept yawning and looking at his watch.*

make no mistake do not believe otherwise. *Make no mistake swimming is the best all-round exercise you can take.*

make nothing of [See CAN MAKE NOTHING OF.]

make rapid/great strides progress quickly. *The country is making rapid strides in the development of its educational system.*

make oneself scarce go away; escape. *When the thieves saw the police coming, they soon made themselves scarce.*

make sense be sensible, reasonable, able to be understood. *This is a very poor essay; parts of it don't even make sense, i.e. I can't understand them.*

make short work of deal quickly with. *The manager made short work of the workers' complaints: he simply told them to return to work immediately.*

make the best of (a bad bargain/job) do the best one can (in an unsatisfactory situation). *The living conditions are not very good, I'm afraid: you'll just have to make the best of a bad bargain.*

make the grade manage to reach a certain satisfactory standard. *Every year we train about twenty young people to be managers, but only about half of them finally make the grade, i.e. become managers.*

make the most of take the fullest advantage from. *Not many people get a chance to study at university, so make the most of it.*

make the pace [See SET THE PACE.]

make the rounds [See GO THE ROUNDS.]

make tracks (for) go away (to); move (towards). *It's getting late; we'll have to make tracks, i.e. leave. He made tracks straight for the bar, i.e. he went straight to the bar.*

make up one's mind come to a decision. *Are you going out tonight or not: please make up your mind.*

make up someone's mind (for him/her, etc.) cause someone to come to a decision. *If he can't decide what to do, you will have to make up his mind for him.*

make one's way 1. go; move. *He made his way quickly to the other*

end of the hall. 2. (often with **in life**, or **in the world**) be successful in finding a job and looking after oneself. *After school, you will have to make your way (in the world), and it will be easier to do that if you have good results.*

make way (for) make, leave a clear way for someone. *The people crowded round the injured man, but they made way for the doctor when he reached the scene of the accident.*

MAN. man Friday loyal servant who helps his master in various ways. *He acted as a kind of man Friday for his employer.* [See also **GIRL FRIDAY**.]

man in the street ordinary, average person. *If you ask the man in the street, he'll tell you that murderers ought to be hanged.*

man of his word person who does what he promises to do. *If Jack promises to help you, then he will: he is a man of his word.*

man of letters writer whose books, articles, etc. are respected because of their artistic value; someone who knows a lot about literature. *Jack's detective stories are very popular, but you wouldn't call him a man of letters, i.e. his books are not regarded as being of great artistic value.*

man of (many) parts person who has many different kinds of ability and experience. *He has done an amazing number of things in his life-time: he is a real man of parts.*

man of straw person who is without power or ability. *Don't pay any attention to his promises: he's just a man of straw.*

man of the world person who has experienced many things, and is therefore tolerant and easy-going. *Ask your uncle for advice: he is a man of the world.*

man-to-man honest(ly); frank(ly); holding nothing back. *The father said to his son, "I want you to discuss your problems with me, man-to-man."*

MANNER. [See **BY NO (MANNER OF) MEANS**.]

MANY. many a long day a long time. *We haven't had such a good summer for many a long day.*

many hands make light work if many people are available to do a certain job, the job is easier to do. *If we can get some others to help us, the job won't take nearly so long: many hands make light work.*

MARK. mark my words pay attention to what I say. *Mark my words, that son of yours will be a famous politician one day.*

mark time 1. move one's feet as if marching while actually remaining on the same spot. *The soldiers were ordered to mark time.* 2. spend time doing something without making any real progress. *Until we get the proper tools for this job we are just marking time.*

MARKED. (a) marked man someone who has been noted as one who must be killed, or punished in some way. *From the time that he gave the information about the terrorists to the police, he was a marked man.*

MATTER. matter of course something that need not be noted or

commented on. *I thought that the chairman's behaviour was extraordinary, but the committee members seem to take it as a matter of course.*

matter of fact something that really happened. *We have to treat this as a matter of fact, not opinion.* Also **matter-of-fact** not showing any emotion. *The police inspector's manner while he asked questions was very matter-of-fact.*

MEAN. mean business be very serious, determined about what one is doing. *He says he will blow up the bank unless we give him all the money in it: I think he means business, i.e. I think he intends to carry out his threat.*

mean well (by) have good intentions (towards). *I don't think she intended to insult you by offering you money: she means well.*

MEANS. means to an end something one uses to get or achieve something else. *For me, money is only a means to an end: I spend most of mine on enjoying myself.*

MEET. meet one's eye come to one's attention; be seen by one. *When I went into the room, the first thing that met my eye was a large red cupboard.*

meet someone halfway [See under GO HALFWAY (TO MEET SOMEONE).]

meet one's Waterloo be finally defeated. *He won every fight until the world championship: then he met his Waterloo.*

MELT. melt into thin air [See DISAPPEAR INTO THIN AIR.]

MIDDLE. middle of the road not extreme; moderate. *They have chosen a middle of the road candidate for President.*

MILK. milk of human kindness good feelings towards others. *He is very critical of others, so he's not exactly full of the milk of human kindness.*

MINCE. (not to) mince matters/one's words (usually with negative) (not to) be polite, tactful. *Not to mince matters, I thought that your behaviour was disgraceful, i.e. to be frank with you. . .*

MIND. mind at rest [See under SET SOMEONE/SOMETHING AT REST.]

mind one's own business not interfere in other people's concerns. *He is always telling me what to do – why doesn't he mind his own business?*

mind/watch one's p's and q's be very careful about what one says and does; be on one's best behaviour. *My boss is going to be at the dinner tonight, so I'll have to mind my p's and q's.*

MINT. mint money make a lot of money. *That shop does a lot of business: the owners must be minting money.* Also **(make/earn) a mint of money** (make/earn) a lot of money. *He made a mint of money by writing plays for television.*

MISS. miss one's footing slip. *He was climbing a steep side of the mountain when he missed his footing and fell.*

(a) miss is as good as a mile the important thing is to succeed in

doing something, and the amount by which one fails does not matter. *In this exam, you get full marks for a correct answer and nothing for an incorrect answer, no matter how close it is: so a miss is as good as a mile.*
miss the boat/bus fail to take advantage of an opportunity. *You should have applied for the job when it was advertised; now it's too late and you've missed the bus.*

miss the thread [See LOSE THE THREAD.]

MISTAKE. [See AND NO MISTAKE.]

MIXED. **mixed blessing** something that has bad effects as well as good. *My new job is much better paid, but it means that I have to spend more time away from home; so it's a sort of mixed blessing.*

MONEY. **money burns a hole in one's pocket** one spends one's money very quickly. *Jack always spends his wages in a few days. money just burns a hole in his pocket.*

money for jam/old rope (informal) money that is very easily earned; anything that can be very easily done. *In this job you only have to work about ten hours a week: it's money for old rope.*

money is no object [See NO OBJECT.]

(have/with) money to burn (one has) so much money that one does not have to worry about how it is spent. *Anyone who paid £100,000 for such a small house must have money to burn.*

MONKEY. **monkey/funny business** (informal) something one is not supposed to do, or one has been forbidden to do. *The teacher told the class that they were to go on working while she was out of the room: she didn't want any monkey business.*

MONTH. **month of Sundays** (informal) very long period of time. *Last night was the most enjoyable time I've had in a month of Sundays.*

MOP. **mop the floor with** [See WIPE THE FLOOR WITH.]

MOOT. (a) **moot point** something on which people may have different opinions. *He thinks that children should never be physically punished in school; whether that is correct or not is a moot point.*

MORE. **more power to your elbow!** I hope that you will be able to carry on with what you are doing to an even greater extent. *You are doing very good work, and all I can say is - more power to your elbow!*
more than one can chew [See BITE OFF MORE THAN ONE CAN CHEW.]
more (to something) than meets the eye something is more complicated, has more meaning, than it seems to have at first. *Jim says that he now prefers to go out on Friday night rather than Saturday night: I think there is more to that than meets the eye, i.e. he has a special reason for going out on Friday night which he has not told us.*

MORNING. **morning after** unpleasant effects felt when one has drunk too much or stayed up too late the previous night. *I don't drink too much beer in the evening because I hate the morning after feeling.*

MOTHER. **mother and father of** greatest (best or worst) example of.

After his heavy drinking the night before, he woke up with the mother and father of all headaches, i.e. a very bad headache [See also DADDY OF THEM ALL.]

mother's apron strings [See TIED TO ONE'S MOTHER'S APRON STRINGS.]

MOUNTAIN. [See IF THE MOUNTAIN WILL NOT COME TO MAHOMET; MAKE A MOUNTAIN OUT OF A MOLEHILL.]

MOUTH. **mouth-watering** [See MAKE ONE'S MOUTH WATER.]

MUDDY. **muddy waters** [See FISH IN MUDDY WATERS.]

MUM. **mum's the word** be quiet; say nothing (about this). *Remember that Betty's party is meant to be a surprise one, so mum's the word, i.e. don't let Betty know anything about it.* Also **keep (something) mum** keep (something) quiet. *Keep mum about this: don't say anything to anyone.*

MY. **my eye!** nonsense! rubbish! *"He says he's too busy to do it." - "My eye! He's just too lazy."* [See also ALL MY EYE.]

N

NAB. **nab someone red-handed** [See CATCH SOMEONE RED-HANDED.]

NAIL. **nail one's colours/flag to the mast** say publicly what one believes in or intends to do, and be prepared to defend it. *I shall speak up at the meeting; I'm not afraid to nail my colours to the mast.*

nail in one's coffin something which will cause one loss, damage or is a danger to one's health. *Every cigarette you smoke is another nail in your coffin, i.e. cigarettes are bad for your health.*

NAME. **(one's) name is dirt/mud** (one) has a bad reputation. *Ever since you wrote that letter criticising the village, your name has been mud there.*

name of the game (informal) the main aspect of something; what something is all about. *It is useless to try to make motor-racing a safe sport: in motor-racing danger is the name of the game, i.e. it is supposed to be dangerous.*

NARROW. **narrow shave/squeak** (informal) something just avoided and no more. *We just managed to get out of the burning building in time: it was a narrow squeak.*

NEAR. **near/close thing** something which comes close to failing. *We just managed to catch the train but it was a near thing, i.e. we almost missed it.*

NECK. **neck and neck** 1. (with reference to horse-racing) side by side; together. *As they came up to the finishing-post, the two horses were neck and neck.* 2. equal. *With nearly all the votes counted, the two main parties are still neck and neck.* Also **neck-and-neck** very close: *a neck-and-neck finish.*

neck of the woods (informal and often humorous) place; area; part of the country. *We haven't seen you in this neck of the woods for a while: where have you been?*

neck or nothing (expression used to show that someone is willing to risk everything). *I'm risking all my money on the success of this invention; if it fails I'm ruined: it's neck or nothing.*

NEEDLE. **needle in a haystack** something almost impossible to find. *It was a huge car-park; trying to find Jim's car was like trying to find a needle in a haystack, i.e. almost impossible.*

NEEDS. **needs must (when the devil drives)** (phrase used when something one would not normally want to do simply has to be done). *I hate working through my lunch hour, but needs must when the devil drives.*

NEITHER. **neither fish (flesh) nor fowl** (used to criticise something) not completely one thing or another; not in any one particular class. *The book he has written is neither fish nor fowl: it's not exactly a poem, and it is not really a novel, but something in between.*

neither here nor there not important. *Don't pay any attention to what he says: his opinion is neither here nor there.*

NEVER. **never mind** 1. and even less. *He can hardly write his name, never mind write a book!* 2. don't worry (about); don't bother (about). *We've missed the train, but never mind, there will be another one along shortly. Never mind the cases: someone else will get them.*

never say die! don't give up! *"Never say die!" the mountaineer muttered to himself as he climbed the last section of the cliff. Also never-say-die (adj.) determined. It was his never-say-die spirit which took him to the top of the mountain.*

NEW. **new broom (sweeps clean)** someone who comes in new to a position/job (usually makes a lot of changes). *Now that our old boss has retired, I wonder what changes the new broom will make?*

new lease of/on life fresh period of health and energy. *He was not well for a long time, but then he took up painting as a hobby, and seemed to take on a new lease of life.*

NICK. [See IN THE NICK OF TIME.]

NINE. **nine days' wonder** something which everybody talks about for a short time. *The fact that the new doctor was a lady was a nine days' wonder in the village.*

NIP. **nip something in the bud** stop something before it has a chance to develop. *It looked as if there was going to be some trouble at the meeting, but the police nipped it in the bud by quickly arresting a few of the troublemakers.*

NO. **no call to** no acceptable reason to. *He had no call to get up and interrupt the speaker: it wasn't necessary.*

no (spring) chicken (informal) not young. *They got married quite late in life; he was in his fifties, and she was no chicken either.*

no deal/no dice (informal) certainly not; not acceptable. *He wanted me to be his business partner, but I said no dice. I'll pay you what we agreed, but if you raise the price, then it's no deal, i.e. the agreement is cancelled.*

no doubt certainly; it can be assumed. *No doubt, he's the finest boxer alive. You will, no doubt, be coming to the meeting? i.e. I suppose you will.*

no end (informal) to a very great extent. *She has been boasting no end about how wealthy her husband is.* Also **no end of** a large number or amount of. *Since he appeared on television, there has been no end of people wanting to meet him.*

no fear! [See under NOT ON YOUR LIFE/NELLIE!]

no-go area area (of a city, etc.) where there is so much violence that not even the police can go into it to restore order. *Certain parts of the city are still no-go areas.*

no great shakes (informal) not very good. *I can play golf a little, but I'm no great shakes at it.*

no hard feelings [See HARD FEELINGS.]

no laughing matter serious; important. *Jim's fall down the stairs is no laughing matter: he is seriously ill.*

no love lost (between) no friendship. *They live side-by-side, but there's no love lost between them, i.e. they don't like each other.*

no matter it makes no difference. *No matter what he says, you must do as you think best. I've made up my mind that I'm leaving school next year, no matter what, i.e. it makes no difference what happens. Our attempt failed, but no matter: we'll try again next year.*

no mistake [See AND NO MISTAKE.]

no object no problem (in the way of something being done). *Spend as much as you like: money is no object. We'll go anywhere: distance is no object.*

no relish for no liking for; dislike, fear of. *I'm not going up there: I've no relish for heights, i.e. I don't like being high up.*

no smoke without fire if a lot of different people tell a similar story then at least some of it is true. *Everybody is saying that he was involved in the robbery, so he probably had something to do with it: there's no smoke without fire.*

no sooner said than done something is done as soon as it is asked for. *The service in the hotel was marvellous: it was a case of no sooner said than done.*

no such thing (informal contradiction) nothing like that. *They say that he's lazy but he's no such thing.*

no sweat (informal) there is no problem; it will be done easily. *"Can I have my car back today?" I asked. - "No sweat, it will be ready at twelve o'clock" he said.*

no way (informal) it cannot be done; it is impossible. *"Will my car be fixed by tomorrow?" I asked. "No way!" the mechanic replied. No way are they going to allow him to do that.*

no/little/small/wonder it is not surprising. *No wonder fewer people are drinking coffee: look at the price of it.*

NOBODY. (like) **nobody's business** (informal) (in a) remarkable, surprising way. *He plays the violin like nobody's business, i.e. he plays it very well.*

nobody's fool shrewd, intelligent person. *I don't think it will be easy to cheat the new manager: he's nobody's fool.*

NONE. **none so blind (as those who will not see)** it is impossible to prove something to someone if he will not pay attention to the argument, or if he deliberately ignores the evidence. *I proved my point conclusively to Jack, but he wouldn't admit that he was wrong: there are none so blind. . . .*

none to speak of [See under NOT TO SPEAK OF.]

NOSE. (**poke/push/put/shove one's**) **nose in/into** [See POKE ONE'S NOSE INTO.]

nose (stuck) in a book (informal) absorbed in reading a book. *He doesn't seem to be interested in sports: he always has his nose in a book.*

(**cut off one's**) **nose to spite one's face** [See CUT OFF ONE'S NOSE TO SPITE ONE'S FACE.]

nose to the grindstone [See KEEP ONE'S NOSE TO THE GRINDSTONE.]

NOT. **not a bit of it** (informal) not in the least. *"When I caught him, was he ashamed of what he had done? Not a bit of it!"*

not anything to write home about [See NOTHING TO WRITE HOME ABOUT.]

not a soul not a single person. *When we arrived there wasn't a soul there to greet us.*

not be as/so black as he/she, etc. is painted not so bad as people say he/she, etc. is. *People are afraid of him, but he is not so black as he is painted.*

not for the world not for anything. *I wouldn't do anything to harm him - not for the world.*

not likely! [See NOT ON YOUR LIFE!]

not much cop (informal) not very good; not worth much. *We didn't stay in that hotel very long: it wasn't much cop.*

not on your life!/Nellie! (informal exclamation) no! certainly not! *"Are you going to Jim's party?" - "Not on your life! His last party was terrible."* Also **no fear!**; **not likely!** (same meaning).

not the only fish in the sea/pebble on the beach not the only suitable person. *Jane is very upset because Jack has broken off their engagement, but she shouldn't be: he's not the only fish in the sea (pebble on the beach).*

not to mention/not to speak of and one might also mention, include; in addition. *It was a terrible holiday, with the most awful weather, not to mention the problems we had with our car on the way.* Also **without mentioning** (same meaning).

not to speak of 1. [See NOT TO MENTION.] 2. not serious; not worth talking about. *"Did you have any problems with your car?" -*

"Not to speak of." Also **none/nothing to speak of** (same meaning as 2).

not worth a rap (informal) of no value; worthless. *His ideas are not worth a rap: pay no attention to what he says.* [See also (NOT) CARE/GIVE A RAP.]

NOTHING. nothing doing (informal and impolite) no; I refuse. *He wanted me to help him, but I told him nothing doing: he had never helped me.*

nothing for it no choice; no alternative. *I cannot swim, but since the boat was sinking, there was nothing for it but to jump into the sea.*

nothing like as good as (informal) not nearly as good as; much worse than. *He is nothing like as good as his brother at sports, i.e. his brother is good but he is not.*

nothing more nor less than/nothing short of really; the same as. *What he told us was nothing more nor less than a lie! His achievements are nothing short of brilliant.*

nothing succeeds like success one success leads to another. *His brilliant performance as a footballer led to his being given a good job in television: nothing succeeds like success.*

nothing the matter [See under WHAT'S THE MATTER.]

nothing to speak of [See under NOT TO SPEAK OF.]

nothing to write home about person or thing that is not very interesting or unusual. *I don't see why she is so attracted to him: he's really nothing to write home about.* Also **not anything to write home about** (same meaning).

nothing venture (nothing gain/win) if one does not take a risk, one will never be successful. *I have invested everything I own in this new business: I may fail, but nothing venture, nothing win.* Also **nothing ventured (nothing gained)** (same meaning).

NULL. null and void (usually with reference to legal documents) not effective; having no force. *Since you never signed this contract, it is null and void.*

NUMBER. (look after/take care of) number one (think only of) oneself, at the expense of other people. *The main lesson I have learnt in life is always to look after number one.*

NURSE. nurse a grudge not forget nor forgive an injury that was done to one; keep alive in one's mind a reason for not liking someone. *"It looks as if your car has been damaged on purpose. Do you know of anyone who might be nursing a grudge against you?"*

NUTS. nuts and bolts the practical details. *He is concerned with general policy, not with the nuts and bolts of how it is actually done.*
nuts on (informal) extremely fond of; very interested in. *He's nuts on old cars: he's collected about a dozen of them.*

NUTTY. (as) nutty as a fruitcake (informal) insane; crazy. *That old gentleman was behaving very strangely: I think he's as nutty as a fruitcake.*

O

OAR. [See PUT ONE'S OAR IN.]

OCCASION. [See IF THE OCCASION ARISES.]

ODDS. (the) odds are it is probable; probably. *Don't wait for Jack; the odds are that he has slept in again.*

odds-on almost certain (to happen). *There is an odds-on chance that we shall see him, i.e. we have a very good chance of seeing him. His horse is an odds-on favourite to win, i.e. most of the bets have been put on it to win.*

OF. of age old enough (to vote, inherit money, etc.: usually between the ages of 18 and 21). *His wealth is divided equally between his two sons, who will get it when they come of age.*

of all things the most unlikely thing that could happen. *He wants to become – of all things – a racing-driver, i.e. this is a very unlikely thing for him to do.*

of a sort [See OF SORTS.]

of late recently. *I notice that Jack has been working less hard of late.*

of little/no account/consequence unimportant. *The most important exam is the final one: the others are of no account. Also of (no) great account/consequence (not) very important. Don't pay much attention to his views: they are of no great account.*

of old in times long ago. *The children loved hearing stories about days of old.* Also **know someone/something of old** know someone/something from a long time back. *You will find Jim difficult to work with – I know him of old.*

of one/the same mind having the same opinion (about something). *We get on very well together because in most matters we are of the same mind. Are they of the same mind about this today as they were last week?*

of one's own accord through one's own wish. *I did not have to ask him to apologise: he did it of his own accord.*

of sorts of some kind, but not the real thing. *To protect themselves against the rain, they made a roof of sorts from branches, i.e. it was not a proper roof.*

of the deepest dye (old-fashioned) of the worst kind; of the most extreme kind. *Don't trust him: he is a villain of the deepest dye.*

of the first water/order of the highest quality; of the best kind. *Because it was a diamond of the first water, it was insured for thousands of pounds.*

OFF. off and on/on and off from time to time; occasionally. *I've been living in England off and on for several years now.*

off by heart [See LEARN/HAVE/KNOW (OFF) BY HEART.]

off one's chest [See GET SOMETHING OFF ONE'S CHEST.]

off one's chump [See OFF ONE'S HEAD.]

off-colour 1. ill; not well. *I don't think I'll eat any more today: I'm*

feeling a bit off-colour. 2. in bad taste. *I thought that some of his jokes were rather off-colour.*

off duty not at work. *The nurse said that she would meet us later, when she was off duty.* [See also ON DUTY.]

off one's food not wanting to eat. *I'm not keeping well; I've been off my food for several days.*

off (one's) guard not expecting something. *Our sudden attack caught the enemy off guard.*

off one's hands not one's responsibility; not in one's possession. *I'm selling these things cheaply just to get them off my hands, i.e. to get rid of them.*

off one's head/chump/nut/rocker (informal) crazy; insane. *Anyone who thought of such a crazy plan must be off his head.* Also **out of one's head**; **out of one's (tiny) mind** (same meaning).

off-key 1. (sing, play an instrument, etc.) not making the proper notes. *He sang terribly off-key.* 2. unsuitable; not fitting or appropriate. *The speech he made was off-key for that particular audience.*

off one's nut [See OFF ONE'S HEAD.]

off one's own bat without being asked or ordered by someone else. *Nobody asked him to help us: he helped off his own bat.*

off one's rocker [See OFF ONE'S HEAD.]

off the beaten track 1. (with reference to places) out-of-the-way; not normally visited by outsiders. *He likes to go for his holidays to places that are off the beaten track.* 2. unusual. *You will find his plays strange: they are about subjects that are a bit off the beaten track.*

off the cuff not prepared beforehand. *I did not have time to prepare a speech so I just made one off the cuff.* Also **off-the-cuff** unprepared: an *off-the-cuff* remark.

off the hook out of a difficult situation. *I didn't want to go to the meeting, but Jack got me off the hook by going in my place.*

off the map difficult to get to; far away from the main towns and roads. *It will take you hours to reach the village; it is right off the map.* [See also ON THE MAP.]

off the rails [See GO OFF THE RAILS.]

off the record not to be made public. *The President talked to the news reporters frankly but off the record.* [See also ON RECORD; PUT/SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT.]

off the scent [See THROW SOMEONE OFF THE SCENT.]

off the top of one's head without having time to think or prepare. *I haven't been able to prepare anything for the meeting, so I'll just have to answer the questions off the top of my head.*

OIL. **oil on troubled waters** [See POUR OIL ON TROUBLED WATERS.]

oil someone's palm [See GREASE SOMEONE'S PALM.]

OLD. **(an) old flame** person that one was at one time in love with. *John had not met Mary for some years; she was an old flame of his.*

(an) old hand experienced person. *Get James to help you with selling the house; he is an old hand at that sort of thing.*

old hat (informal) too familiar; too well known. *We did not find the lecture very interesting; the ideas were a bit old hat.*

(the) old one-two [See (THE OLD) ONE-TWO.]

old wives' story/tale traditional belief that is completely mistaken. *Fortunately people today are not so likely to believe old wives' tales.*

ON. on a bandwagon [See JUMP ON A/THE BANDWAGON.]

on account as an advance for money that is owed. *I shall pay you £5 on account, and the rest over the next six months.*

on someone's account because of someone. *Please don't worry on my account: I shall be quite safe.*

on a firm footing securely; on a safe basis, foundation. *The first time they started the business it failed, but the next time – having learned from their mistake – they started it on a firmer footing.*

on a limb [See OUT ON A LIMB.]

on all fours (with reference to human beings) on hands and knees; (animals) on all four legs. *The cat jumped from the top of the tree and landed on all fours.*

on and off [See OFF AND ON.]

on an even keel in an orderly way; to a well-organised, well-ordered state of affairs. *The revolution was followed by a period of chaos; the new government is trying to get things back on an even keel.*

on a par with equal to; at the same level as. *His performance was very good today: it's on a par with anything he has done before.* [See also BELOW PAR; UP TO PAR/SCRATCH/THE MARK.]

on approval on loan to see whether one wants to buy or not. *Peter got some stamps on approval, but he has decided not to buy any of them.*
(have someone) on a string (have someone) under one's control. *Jack has fallen in love with Jane and she has him on a string, i.e. he will do anything she says.*

on someone's back bothering someone; annoying someone. *I'm tired of working for my present boss; he's always on my back for something or other.* [See also GET OFF SOMEONE'S BACK.]

on one's beam ends completely without money. *He was rich at one time, but when I met him last week he was on his beam ends.*

on board on a ship, train, plane. *The passengers were welcomed on board by the captain.*

on call available for duty. *One of the doctors has to be on call over the weekend, i.e. he has to be available to attend to his patients.*

on cloud nine (informal) extremely happy. *When he heard that he had passed the exam he was on cloud nine.*

on duty doing one's work. *The policeman refused our offer of a drink because he was on duty.* [See also OFF DUTY.]

on easy street having a pleasant time; living a life without care. *Jack's on easy street now with all the money that he has saved up.*

on edge nervous; tense. *She was very much on edge until the doctor told her that her son had come through the operation successfully.*

on end continuously; without a break. *He used to read books for hours on end.*

on faith believing in something because one is told it is so. *I'm sorry I*

cannot prove what I'm saying: you will have to take it on faith, i.e. believe it because I am saying it.

on one's feet 1. well; able to walk about. *The doctor says that I'll soon be on my feet again.* 2. doing well; in a prosperous condition. *The government is trying to get the country back on its feet again.* 3. quickly; without needing time for preparation. *One of his strong points as a politician is his ability to think on his feet.*

on foot by walking. *My car has broken down, so we shall have to continue on foot.*

on (one's) guard 1. prepared against something; ready to defend oneself. *They say that there are some thieves about, so be on guard.* 2. doing the duty of a guard. *We have several soldiers on guard at the gate.*

on hand available; ready to be used. *If you need extra help, we have some people on hand to help you.*

on one's hands in one's possession. *I'm trying to sell off these books; I don't want them on my hands any longer.* [See also TIME ON ONE'S HANDS.]

(get up) on one's high horse (start) behaving as if one is better, or knows better, than others. *When Mary tried to give her opinion, Jack got up on his high horse and said that women did not know anything about political matters.*

on ice 1. on a surface of ice. *The play is being performed on ice.* 2. kept ready for later use. *I can't use this idea just now, but it may be useful later: let's keep it on ice.*

on in years old. *My father is getting a bit on in years and cannot walk as far as he used to.*

on one's knees 1. in a bad way; doing badly. *The business is on its knees, and another strike will finish it.* 2. begging desperately for something. *We went on our knees to the government asking for more money.*

on one's last legs, extremely tired, exhausted; about to be finished, ruined. *When the contest ended, the champion was on his last legs, i.e. about to collapse. He says the country is on its last legs.*

on one's mettle in a situation where one is determined to show one's skill, ability. *The good performance of the other teams put our team on its mettle.*

(have something) on one's mind (have something which is) causing one to worry, be anxious, etc. *I must discuss with you something that has been on my mind for some weeks now.*

on no account for no reason whatsoever. *The students are on no account to leave the school grounds after 9 p.m. (or, The students are not on any account . . .).*

on occasion(s) from time to time; occasionally. *I know the park you mean; I used to go there for a walk on occasion.*

on (the) one hand . . . (on the other hand) (expression used when two alternatives or choices are being considered). *I don't know whether John will pass his degree exams or not: on the one hand, he is certainly very clever; on the other hand, he does not work very hard.*

on one's own by oneself; without help. *The little boy had painted the whole picture on his own.*

on one's own account for oneself; personally. *I am not making this complaint on my own account, but on behalf of others, i.e. the complaint affects others, not myself.*

on paper according to what has been written down. *On paper, the house looks very nice, but when you see it you will find that it is not so impressive.*

on pins and needles in a very anxious or nervous state. *The students will be on pins and needles until they know their grades.*

on purpose intentionally, deliberately. *It wasn't a mistake: he did it on purpose.*

on record in a situation where something can be proved from public documents, etc. *The President is on record as saying that prices will not rise this year.* Also **go on record** state publicly. *The President went on record as saying that prices will not rise this year.* [See also OFF THE RECORD; PUT/SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT.]

on reflection after thinking the matter over. *I agreed to go but, on reflection, I don't think that that was a wise thing to do.*

on sale being sold. *You can get shoes like these easily: they are on sale at most shops.*

on schedule at the correct time; punctually. *Most of the trains arrive on schedule.*

on second thoughts [See SECOND THOUGHTS.]

on one's shoulders part of one's responsibility. *The responsibility for organising the party is on Jim's shoulders.*

(not) on speaking terms (usually with negative) (not) friendly, (not) speaking to one another. *Although they live next door to one another, they are not on speaking terms.*

on tenterhooks very tense, nervous. *He had bet a lot of money on the home team winning, so he was on tenterhooks until the end of the game.*

on that account because of that; for that reason. *He is saving up to buy a house, so, on that account, he will probably accept any work you offer him.*

on that score (informal) because of that; for that reason. *I'll make sure that everyone is on time, so you needn't have any worries on that score.*

on the air broadcasting; on radio or television. *The President is making a broadcast to the nation tonight: he'll be on the air at 8 o'clock.*

on the alert watching out (for someone/something). *When the prisoner escaped, all police in the area were put on the alert.*

on the ball (informal) very efficient; very good at what one does. *That new salesman is really on the ball: sales have doubled since he arrived.*

on the bandwagon [See JUMP ON A/THE BANDWAGON.]

on the blink (informal) not working. *This radio seems to be on the blink: I can't hear a thing.*

(have something) on the brain (have something) always in one's

thoughts. *My son has football on the brain: he is not interested in anything else.*

on the contrary the situation is the opposite (of what has been stated). *It isn't true that Jack is no good at music: on the contrary, he plays the piano well.*

on the dot exactly, punctually. *He arrived at seven o'clock on the dot.*

on the face of it apparently; from the appearance of something. *Jack's school results have been very good so, on the face of it, he should do well at the university; but he has chosen a very difficult subject for his degree.*

on the fence [See SIT ON THE FENCE.]

on the fiddle (informal) in a situation where one is cheating someone, stealing from someone. *He used to be a qualified accountant but he was on the fiddle, and the police caught him.*

on the go active, busy. *I don't know where Mary gets her energy from: she's always on the go.*

on the heels of closely following; immediately after. *On the heels of the bad news about his father's illness came the good news that he had won a scholarship.*

on the horns of a dilemma having to make a difficult choice. *Jim is on the horns of a dilemma: he has received invitations to two parties for the same evening, and he cannot decide which to attend.*

(every hour) on the hour at the time when an hour starts, e.g. at one o'clock, two o'clock, etc. *The news is broadcast from this station every hour on the hour.*

on the house at the expense of the owner of the place where one is. *The owner of the bar said, "Today is my birthday, so the drinks are on the house", i.e. he would pay for them.*

on the level (informal) honest; honestly. *I don't trust him: how do we know he is on the level? I tell you it's true: on the level.*

on the loose free; not under control. *Be careful, some wild animals are supposed to be on the loose around here.*

on the make (informal) 1. looking for any way to make oneself richer, more powerful, etc. *Don't trust him with any of your money: I think he's on the make.* 2. making sexual advances. *I'll never invite him to a party again: he's always on the make.*

(put somewhere) on the map (make a place) well known. *The famous author's books soon put the little village he was born in on the map.* [See also OFF THE MAP.]

(come) on the market (be) for sale. *We are waiting for a suitable house to come on the market, then we'll move.*

on the mend getting better (in health). *My father wasn't well for a time, but he's on the mend now.*

on the move going from one place to another. *The Smiths are very fond of travel: they always seem to be on the move.*

(pay) (cash) on the nail (informal) (pay) (money) immediately when one obtains something. *He bought the car and paid all the money on the nail.*

on the nod (having been agreed to) without discussion. *All the proposals he put up to the committee were accepted on the nod.*

on the off chance because of a slight possibility. *I went to the library on the off chance of seeing John, although I know he doesn't spend much time there.*

on the other hand [See ON (THE) ONE HAND . . . (ON THE OTHER HAND).]

on the point of about to. *He was just on the point of giving up hope when we came to rescue him.*

on the q.t./quiet (informal) secretly; secret. *I shall let you in without a pass but, remember, it's strictly on the q.t., i.e. no one else must know.*

on the rails (informal) behaving normally, properly. *The company has been performing badly recently but I hope to have it back on the rails soon.* [See also GO OFF THE RAILS.]

on the rocks 1. ruined; finished. *It has been a very bad year for trade: I'm afraid that our business will soon be on the rocks, i.e. bankrupt.* 2. (with reference to a drink) with ice. *He ordered a Scotch on the rocks, i.e. a glass of Scotch whisky with ice.*

on the run escaping, running away (from something/somebody). *He is on the run from the police: they are looking for him everywhere.*

on the shelf (informal) 1. put away unused. *We produced a plan but it has just been left on the shelf.* 2. (with reference to a woman) unmarried and with no possibility of being married. *She married him because she was afraid of being left on the shelf.*

on the side 1. in addition to something (especially one's main job). *He trains horses but he also makes some money on the side from gambling.* 2. privately, secretly. *Unknown to his wife, he had a love affair on the side with his secretary.*

on the sly (informal) secretly (usually with the idea of wrongly or illegally). *We found that he was selling information about our products on the sly to our competitors.*

on the spot 1. in a difficult situation. *Henry's conduct has put me on the spot: I really don't know what to do.* 2. immediately. *I asked him for the loan of £20 and he gave me it on the spot.* 3. in the place where one has to be to deal with a situation. *There has been some trouble in the town centre, but there are policemen on the spot.*

on the spur of the moment without planning beforehand. *We hadn't planned to go to London: we just went on the spur of the moment.* Also **spur-of-the-moment** unplanned: *a spur-of-the-moment decision.*

on the stage performing as an actor, actress, etc. for one's living. *Don't go on the stage: it's a very uncertain career.*

on the strength of because of (something good, positive). *On the strength of his many successful performances, he was chosen to play the leading role in an important film.*

on/at the stroke of as the clock is striking the hour. *We got back to the hotel on the stroke of midnight.*

on the threshold at the beginning of: at the entrance to. *He is on the threshold of a successful career as a writer.*

on the tip of one's tongue about to come to one's memory so that one can say something. *His name was on the tip of my tongue, but it has gone again, i.e. I almost remembered it but I've forgotten it again.*

(out) on the town (out) enjoying the entertainment available in a town or city. *John's final exams finished today, so he and his friends will be on the town tonight.*

on the understanding with something agreed to by both sides. *I shall allow you to go out tonight, on the understanding that you will be home by midnight.*

on the up and up going from one success to another. *Jim's career as a businessman is on the up and up: they say he will be the next managing director.*

on the wane declining; getting smaller. *The team's fortunes seem to be on the wane: they may have to go down to a lower league, i.e. they are playing badly.*

on the warpath ready to quarrel with someone. *You had better be punctual for your meeting with Mr. Smith: he's on the warpath.*

on the way/on one's way 1. on one's journey from one place to another. *We saw a number of very nice houses on the way here/on our way here.* 2. started towards some goal, aim, destination. *He is on the way (on his way) to becoming a very good artist, i.e. he has made a start in that direction. I'm just on my way home, i.e. about to start for home.* 3. about to happen. *They say that some new regulations about drunken driving are on the way.*

on the whole for the most part; generally speaking. *I think that the plan has some weaknesses but, on the whole, it's worth doing.*

(skate) on thin ice (be) in a dangerous, unsafe situation. *The audience will have strong feelings on this subject: if you mention it in your speech you will be skating on thin ice.*

on tick (informal) on credit, i.e. with an arrangement for the money owed to be paid later. *We used to buy our groceries on tick and pay for them at the end of the week.*

on time punctually. *Fortunately the supplies were not late, and arrived on time.*

on tiptoe 1. standing on the tips of one's toes (to see something, etc.). *If we stood on tiptoe, we could just see over the fence.* 2. walking very quietly. *We went through the bedroom on tiptoe so as not to disturb the sleeping children.*

on to a good thing (informal) in the position of having discovered something that will be profitable or useful to one. *When he saw how anxious the dealers were to buy his stamps, he realised that he was on to a good thing.*

on one's toes alert; ready to act. *The inspector may come at any time, so we shall have to be on our toes.*

on top of in addition to. *He is working very hard at the moment because he has to do a lot of corrections on top of his normal teaching duties.*

(sitting) on top of the world (feeling) extremely happy. *He's really happy about his new job: he's on top of the world.*

on trial 1. being tried in a court of law. *The prisoner is on trial for murder.* 2. being tested. *This new method is on trial for a month to see if it is any good.*

(down) on one's uppers (informal) poor. *I lent him the money because he looked as if he was on his uppers.*

on one's way [See ON THE WAY.]

ONCE. once and for all for the last time. *I am telling you once and for all that you must be here on time.* Also **once-and-for-all** final, unique: a once-and-for-all opportunity.

once in a blue moon very rarely. *I used to see him a lot but now we meet only once in a blue moon.*

(every) once in a while occasionally. *I don't go to the cinema as regularly as I used to: maybe just once in a while.*

once upon a time (often used to start children's stories) at one time in the past. *Once upon a time there was a king who wanted to be very rich.*

ONE. one-armed bandit (informal) gambling machine which works by pulling a lever (long handle). (The proper name is **slot machine**.) *The casino has dozens of one-armed bandits.*

one eye on part of one's attention. *In this business, you have to keep one eye on what your competitors are doing, i.e. you have to pay attention to what your competitors are doing.*

one fine day [See under ONE OF THESE (FINE) DAYS.]

(have) one foot in the grave (informal) (be) old and about to die. *He's got one foot in the grave: he can't last much longer.* Also **with one foot in the grave** (same meaning).

one of these (fine) days (informal) some time in the future. *If he goes on wasting his money, one of these (fine) days he is going to find himself a poor man.* Also **one fine day** (same meaning).

one-track mind thinking all the time of only one thing. *He has got a one-track mind: all he thinks about is money.*

(the old) one-two (informal). 1. act of punching someone first with one fist and then with the other. *Jim's a boxer, so he was able to defend himself with the old one-two.* 2. act of putting an end to something. *I'm afraid that the new manager has given our plans the old one-two.*

(be) one up (on someone) (have an) advantage (over someone). *The fact that you can speak English puts you one up on the other candidates.*

one-upmanship skill of gaining an advantage over an opponent, usually by some unfair means. *During the golf match, Jack practised his one-upmanship by coughing just as his opponent was about to hit the ball.*

OPEN. open an account make an arrangement so that one can deposit or borrow money, or get credit from a shop, bank, etc. *I'm just going along to the bank to open an account.*

open and above board honest, fair. *No one will try to cheat you: the whole thing is open and above board.*

open one's eyes (to) make one realise; make one aware (of). *It was the inspector's report which opened our eyes to what was going on.* Also

with one's eyes open aware of all the facts, problems, dangers, etc. *I know that what I intend to do is dangerous: I'm going into it with my eyes open.* [See also WITH ONE'S EYES SHUT.]

open its doors 1. allow to enter. *It was some time before the medical profession opened its doors to women doctors.* 2. open for business. *The store opened its doors for the first time yesterday.* [See also OPEN THE DOOR.]

open question question to which no generally agreed answer has been found. *Whether it is useful to hang murderers is still an open question as far as many people are concerned.*

open secret something which is meant to be secret but which is not. *It's an open secret that John is going to resign soon.*

open sesame 1. (words supposed to have magical powers, and meaning) open! *When he cried "Open sesame!" the rock opened and revealed a cave.* 2. something which will open up all kinds of opportunities. *A good education is the open sesame to a whole range of interesting careers.*

open the door allow to begin. *The successful operation on his leg opened the door to a new life for him.* [See also OPEN ITS DOORS.]

ORDER. order of the day 1. fashion at a particular time. *At one time all our women students wore skirts; now jeans are the order of the day.* 2. (especially with reference to the House of Commons) something which is to be discussed on a particular day; programme of things to be discussed on a particular occasion. *He looked at the order of the day to see if there was anything interesting in it.*

OTHER. (have) other fish to fry (informal) (have) better things to do. *I can't spend all my time doing Jack's work for him: I have other fish to fry.*

OUT. out-and-out complete. *Don't believe him: he's an out-and-out liar.*

out cold (informal) unconscious. *The box fell on his head and when we found him he was still out cold.*

(get) out from under (informal) (get) out of some difficult situation. *My father's death left me with debts of thousands of pounds, and I've been struggling to get out from under ever since.*

out in the cold ignored; left alone. *They chatted to one another but, being the only stranger, I was left out in the cold, i.e. everyone ignored me.*

out like a light in a deep sleep; unconscious. *I was so exhausted that, as soon as my head touched the pillow, I was out like a light.*

out of bounds forbidden, not to be entered. *The village pub is out of bounds for the soldiers, i.e. they are not allowed to go there.*

out of character unlike a person's normal behaviour; untypical of a person's behaviour. *It's out of character for Jim to tell lies: he is usually very honest.* [See also IN CHARACTER.]

out of circulation not meeting other people. *I think John is ill: he has been out of circulation for days.*

out of commission not able to be used; not working. *The first three public telephones we tried to use were out of commission.*

out of condition not fit. *You should take more exercise: you are obviously out of condition.*

out of date not modern enough; too old. *We ought to buy some new office equipment: the stuff we've got is out of date.*

out of one's depth 1. in water, etc. that is too deep for one. *Don't go out of your depth if you can't swim.* 2. unable to understand or deal with something. *After I joined the evening class I soon discovered that I was out of my depth: the other students were much more advanced than I was.*

out of one's element in a situation where one is different from others; in an unfamiliar (and perhaps unpleasant) situation. *Because John was older than the other boys in the group, he was a bit out of his element.* [See also IN ONE'S ELEMENT.]

out of gear [See THROW SOMEONE/SOMETHING OUT OF GEAR.]

out of someone's hair [See GET/KEEP OUT OF SOMEONE'S HAIR.]

out of hand 1. (usually with **get**) out of control. *The police have been called in, in case the demonstration gets out of hand.* [See also IN HAND.] 2. immediately, without any (need for) careful thought. *His request for another trial was dismissed out of hand.*

out of one's head [See under OFF ONE'S HEAD.]

out of hot water [See HOT WATER.]

out of keeping (with) not suitable to; not corresponding to. *His recent statement is out of keeping with what he promised us earlier, i.e. it does not correspond to, it contradicts, what he promised earlier.* [See also IN KEEPING.]

out of line 1. not in the same straight line as the others. *If you look along this row of chairs, you will see that one is out of line.* [See also IN LINE.] 2. not suitable; not proper. *Those remarks you made about me were out of line, and I want an apology.*

out of line with contradicting; not corresponding to. *The judge's latest verdict is out of line with his previous verdicts.* [See also IN LINE WITH.]

out of luck unlucky. *If you're looking for a cigarette, you're out of luck: I've just smoked my last one.* [See also IN LUCK.]

out of one's mind [See under OFF ONE'S HEAD. Also GO OUT OF ONE'S MIND.]

out of/from nowhere (appearing) very suddenly and surprisingly. *At the last moment, a white horse appeared out of nowhere to win the race.*

out of order 1. not in the proper arrangement. *All these cards are out of order.* 2. not working. *I can't get this machine to work: it seems to be out of order.* 3. (with reference to a meeting) not allowed by the rules; not obeying the rules. *His question was out of order. He kept interrupting, so the chairman ruled him out of order.* [See also IN ORDER.]

out of place 1. not where it should be. *He kept his room very tidy: there was nothing out of place.* 2. unusual. *I didn't notice anything out of place about his behaviour; did you?* 3. not suitable or fitting. *I*

thought that some of his remarks were out of place. [See also **IN PLACE.**]
out of pocket having spent some money. *You won't be out of pocket: I'll pay you for all expenses.*

out of print (with reference to a book) no longer being printed (and therefore difficult to get from a book shop). *The book you are looking for has been out of print for many years.* [See also **IN PRINT.**]

out of season not being grown (because it is the wrong season). *Apples are very expensive just now; they are out of season here, so they have to be imported.* [See also **IN SEASON.**]

out of one's senses [See **OFF ONE'S HEAD.** Also **GO OUT OF ONE'S MIND.**]

out of shape not fit. *He will have to train hard for his next fight: he is a bit out of shape.* [See also **IN SHAPE.**]

(come) **out of one's shell** (become) less shy, more confident. *After a short time, she came out of her shell and began to talk more freely.*

out of sight 1. no longer visible. *The children watched the ship sail away until it was out of sight.* 2. (informal) amazing; wonderful. *You should have seen their costumes: they were out of sight!* (Also used as an exclamation with the same meaning.)

out of sight, out of mind one does not think of someone or something that one does not see. *When she went away he immediately forgot about her: it was a case of "Out of sight, out of mind."*

out of sorts (informal) unwell; slightly ill; in a bad temper. *I'm not going out tonight: I feel a bit out of sorts.*

out of spite for reasons of dislike, revenge, etc. *They reported him to the police out of spite, because they hated him so much.*

out of step 1. not walking, moving at the same pace as others. *As the soldiers marched past we noticed that one or two of them were out of step.* 2. not fitting in; different. *You're the only one who isn't coming: you're out of step with everyone else.* [See also **IN STEP.**]

out of stock 1. not available for selling or using; used up. *We have no cigarettes left: they're out of stock.* 2. not having something available to sell or use. *We've no cigarettes left: we're out of stock.* [See also **IN STOCK.**]

out of the blue not expected; without any kind of preparation. *I hadn't expected to be promoted: it just came out of the blue.*

out of the corner of one's eye by looking sideways while not turning one's head. *I kept my face to the front but, out of the corner of my eye, I could see that someone was creeping up on me.*

out of the frying pan (and) into the fire from one difficult or dangerous situation to another. *He joined the army to escape the strict discipline of his home: but it was a case of out of the frying pan into the fire, i.e. the army was just as strict.*

out of the ordinary unusual. *The police searched the missing man's room but they couldn't find anything out of the ordinary.*

out of the question not even to be considered. *You are not to go out in terrible weather like this: it is out of the question.*

out of the race/running no longer with a chance of winning or getting something. *Either Jim or Bill will get the job: Jack is out of the running.*

out of the/someone's way. 1. where it will not annoy (one). *Get all these boxes out of the way before our guests arrive.* Also **out of the/someone's road** (same meaning). 2. difficult to get to; remote. *The village is a little bit out of the way, so it may take you some time to reach it.* [See also **IN THE/SOMEONE'S WAY.**]

out of thin air as if from nowhere. *Suddenly three people appeared before us out of thin air, i.e. we did not know where they had come from.*

out of this world (informal) wonderful; marvellous. *You must try to see his latest film: it is really out of this world.*

out of touch not aware of the latest things which have been happening. *I have just come back from holiday so I am a bit out of touch.* [See also **IN TOUCH.**]

out of training not having kept oneself fit. *He lost the race because he was out of training.* [See also **IN TRAINING.**]

out of tune 1. (with reference to an instrument) not playing its notes properly. *This piano sounds terrible: it's out of tune.* 2. not fitting in; contradicting; not in agreement. *His ideas are out of tune with what most people think.* [See also **IN TUNE.**]

out of turn 1. not in the proper order. *You answered out of turn, i.e. it was not your turn to answer.* 2. impolitely; not in the normal or expected way. *I hope I am not speaking out of turn, i.e. I hope I am not saying something that I should not be saying.* [See also **IN TURN.**]

out of work unemployed. *There are 500 men out of work in this town.*

out on a limb different from everyone else; strange. *No-one else agrees with his theories: he is right out on a limb.*

out on one's feet exhausted. *I've been working here since early morning and I'm out on my feet.*

out on the town [See **ON THE TOWN.**]

OVER. **over a barrel** in a position where one is powerless, unable to do what one wants. *I'm over a barrel: I must do what I'm told.* Also **have someone over a barrel** have someone in a position where he is completely under one's power. *With this information we have him over a barrel: he must do what we tell him to do.*

over and done [See **OVER (AND DONE) WITH.**]

over and over (again) very many times. *I've told my children over and over to be careful crossing the street.*

over someone's head 1. not able to be understood by someone. *I went to hear the professor's talk, but I'm afraid it was all over my head.* 2. ignoring the normal authority, and going to someone higher up. *The worker made his complaint direct to the chairman of the company, going over the head of his own manager.* 3. going above others who might normally be considered more likely. *He was promoted over the heads of several people who had been in the firm a much longer time than he had.*

over my dead body (informal expression used to show how much one is opposed to something). *I shall die before I accept/allow that! If he wants to come into my house again, it will be over my dead body!*

over the hill (informal) 1. too old. *Old Joe used to help me with my*

garden, but now he's over the hill as far as that's concerned. 2. [See OVER THE HUMP.]

over the hump/hill having done the most difficult bit of something; having experienced the worst of something. *Cleaning out the house was a very difficult job, but I think that we are over the hump now.*

(get it) over (and done) with (get something unpleasant) done and finished with. *I have an essay to write for tomorrow, so I'd better get it over with.* Also **over and done** (same meaning).

P

P. [See MIND/WATCH ONE'S P'S AND Q'S.]

PACK. **pack a punch** 1. be able to punch hard. *The new heavy-weight champion packs quite a punch.* 2. have a lot of power; be able to go fast. *This new motor-car engine packs a terrific punch, i.e. it is very powerful.*

pack of lies lot of lies. *Everything he has told you has been a pack of lies.*

PACKED. **packed (in together) like sardines** crushed in very close together. *The passengers were packed like sardines into the carriages.*

PADDLE. **paddle one's own canoe** (informal) do something by oneself, on one's own. *I decided that it was best not to depend on anyone else, but to paddle my own canoe.*

PAIN. **pain in the neck** (informal) nuisance; something or someone that annoys one. *I hate meeting that man: he's a pain in the neck.*

PAINT. **paint the town (red)** have a good time by going to bars and night clubs, etc. *When our exams are over we're going to go out and paint the town red.*

PAINTED. **painted sepulchre** [See WHITED SEPULCHRE.]

PALE. **pale around the gills** [See GREEN ABOUT/AROUND THE GILLS.]

PALMY. **palmy days** time when one was most powerful, wealthy, successful, etc. *He often used to talk about his palmy days when he was a well-known athlete.*

PAR. **par for the course** 1. (with reference to golf) what a good player would normally be expected to get. *His score was par for the course.* 2. what one would normally expect. *The minister's speech lasted an hour, which is about par for the course, i.e. that is the time his speeches usually last.*

PART. **part company** 1. go in different directions; leave one another. *I'll go with you to the end of this street, and then I'm afraid we shall have to part company.* 2. disagree. *We are in agreement on most issues, but we part company on the subject of capital punishment.*

PARTIAL. **partial to** fond of. *He was very partial to a cup of tea shortly before going to bed.*

PARTING. **parting of the ways** 1. going in different directions. *I'm afraid that this is the parting of the ways: I have to turn right, but you continue straight on.* 2. end of a friendship, alliance. *The two parties formed a coalition government, but the parting of the ways came when Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia.*

parting shot (often with reference to people who have been quarrelling) remark one makes as one is leaving. *His parting shot was, "You will hear more from me about this!"*

PASS. **pass an opinion** say what one thinks (about something). *He read my article, but did not pass any opinion on it.*

pass muster (especially with reference to something that may be seen or inspected) be good enough. *This suit is not very clean, but I think it will pass muster.*

pass the buck avoid being responsible for something by putting the responsibility on to someone else. *I spent all day trying to find an official who would deal with my complaint; but each one passed the buck to someone else.*

pass the time of day make polite remarks when one meets someone. *I didn't know him well: when we met, we would just pass the time of day, i.e. exchange a few polite remarks.*

PAST. **past question** [See WITHOUT QUESTION.]

PAT. **pat/slap on the back** act of congratulating, praising someone. *The boss gave him a pat on the back for handling things so well.* Also **pat/slap someone on the back** congratulate/praise someone. *The whole class patted him on the back because of his good play in the final game.*

PATH. **path/line of least resistance** easiest, most convenient way. *I would not rely on Jim: he will just take the path of least resistance.*

PAVE. **pave the way** make it easier (for something to happen). *The continual rioting in the streets paved the way for the army taking over the government.*

PAY. **pay attention (to)** look and listen carefully (to someone or something); think carefully about. *Pay attention to the instructions you are about to hear.*

pay someone back in his own coin treat someone in the way one has been treated by him. *We turned up half-an-hour late for Jim's meeting: he always keeps us waiting, so we thought we would pay him back in his own coin.*

pay lip service [See LIP SERVICE.]

pay on the nail [See ON THE NAIL.]

pay one's (last) respects go to show one's respect for someone (when he/she dies). *All his friends went to the funeral to pay their last respects.*

pay the piper (and call the tune) [See CALL THE TUNE.]

pay through the nose (informal) pay too much. *The shopkeeper*

knew we needed the supplies badly, so he made us pay through the nose for them.

pay one's way have enough money to pay for the things one needs. *I never earned much money, but I always had enough to pay my way.*

PEARLS. [See CAST (ONE'S) PEARLS BEFORE SWINE.]

PENNY. **penny for your thoughts** tell me what you are thinking. *You are looking very worried: a penny for your thoughts.*

penny wise (and) pound foolish in the habit of saving small amounts of money but wasting large amounts. *Janet is penny wise and pound foolish: she buys cheap food, and then spends all her savings on expensive clothes.*

PEOPLE. **people (who live) in glass houses should not throw stones** people who have certain faults or vices should not blame other people for having the same faults or vices. *He spends hardly any money but he is always blaming others for being mean: someone ought to tell him that people in glass houses should not throw stones.*

PEP. **pep talk** talk with someone in which one gives him/her encouragement. *The team were losing so, at half-time, the manager gave them a pep talk.*

PERISH. **perish the thought** (informal: usually humorous) you should not even think such a thing. *"I was afraid you might leave me."*
– *"Perish the thought: I would never do anything like that."*

PICK. **pick a quarrel** deliberately start a quarrel. *When he is drunk he goes about picking quarrels with people.*

pick someone's brains get information from someone; find out from someone what one wants to know. *I hope you'll allow me to pick your brains on this subject: I know very little about it.*

pick/knock holes in find things that are wrong with (an argument). *His arguments were not well thought out: the students were easily able to pick holes in them.*

pick/take/gather up the threads start where one has left off. *I have had to stop work on my book for a period of three years: I hope that I shall be able to pick up the threads again.*

pick one's way go carefully. *The ground was covered with broken bottles: he had to pick his way carefully to get to the exit.*

pick/choose/weigh one's words be careful about what one says. *I did not want to make the audience angry, so I had to pick my words carefully.*

PIECE. **(a) piece of cake** something extremely easy. *I won the race easily: it was a piece of cake.*

(a) piece of one's mind [See GIVE SOMEONE A PIECE OF ONE'S MIND.]

PIG. **(buy a) pig in a poke** (buy) something that one has not had a chance to look at or examine properly. *In the case of his new house, he really bought a pig in a poke, because he paid for it before it was finished.*

PIGS. pigs might fly (expression used to show that one finds something unbelievable) anything that is unlikely might happen. *Jim might arrive on time, and pigs might fly! i.e. he is usually late.*

PILE. pile it on thick [See LAY IT ON (THICK).]

pile/put on the agony do everything to make people sorry for one. *The chap who wanted me to lend him some money told me all about his wife and starving children: he really piled on the agony.*

PIN. pin one's ears back (informal) listen carefully. *You'd better pin your ears back, I've got important news for you.*

pin one's faith/hopes on rely completely on. *My father is very ill but we are pinning our faith on a new method of treatment he is getting.*

PINS. (all) pins and needles (full of the) uncomfortable prickling feeling one gets when circulation comes back to a part of the body (e.g. arm, leg) which has been allowed to go numb. *He had been lying with the weight of his body on one leg and when he got up it was all pins and needles.*

PIPE. [See PUT THAT IN YOUR PIPE AND SMOKE IT.]

PIPER. [See (HE WHO PAYS THE PIPER SHOULD) CALL THE TUNE.]

PITCHED. pitched battle long, fierce fight. *He was injured in a pitched battle between the two groups of football supporters.*

PITCHERS. [See LITTLE PITCHERS HAVE BIG EARS.]

PLAIN. plain sailing very easy; presenting no problems. *The first year of the course is very difficult, but after that it is plain sailing.*

plain speaking saying honestly what one thinks. *You must tell him exactly what you think: the time has come for plain speaking.*

PLAY. play a cat and mouse game [See PLAY CAT AND MOUSE WITH SOMEONE.]

play one's best card [See PLAY ONE'S TRUMP CARD.]

play one's cards right/well act cleverly, shrewdly. *If you play your cards right, you may get the job.*

play cat and mouse with someone enjoy using one's power over someone, especially by pretending to release someone from one's power and then bringing him back under one's control. *The dictator played a cat and mouse game with his opponents, by sometimes letting them speak freely and at other times silencing them.* Also **(play) a cat and mouse game** (enjoy) a situation where someone is at one's mercy. *I don't like the way that Jim was treated: the manager decided to sack him, but played a cat and mouse game with him for weeks before he finally did so.*

play ducks and drakes with change around or use to suit oneself. *He was sacked because he was playing ducks and drakes with the company's money, i.e. he was using it for his own purposes.*

play (someone) for a sucker (informal) make a fool of someone (e.g. by cheating him). *The professional gamblers played him for a sucker, and by the end of the game he had no money left.*

play hard to get reject someone's attempts at friendship in order to make him/her even more anxious to know one better. *I don't know whether Anna really doesn't like me, or whether she's just playing hard to get.*

play havoc with destroy; ruin; cause confusion in. *The bad weather played havoc with our plans for the weekend.*

play into someone's hands act for someone else's advantage, and one's own disadvantage, without meaning to. *By ordering our soldiers to leave the higher ground, we played into the enemy's hands.*

play it/something by ear act without deciding in advance what one is going to do. *We don't know what questions will be raised at the meeting, so we shall just have to play it by ear.*

play politics try to do something for political advantage or gain. *The Principal said that the student leaders were not really concerned with solving the problem, but just playing politics.*

play (it) safe not take any risks. *You can climb to the summit by a more direct route, but we shall play safe and go up an easier way.*

play second fiddle be in an inferior or lower place to someone else; have a less important part to play than someone else. *When young Jones was appointed head of the department, I left: I wasn't going to play second fiddle to someone much younger than myself.*

play the field choose among a number of different possibilities (often with reference to going out with a number of different girlfriends or boy-friends). *Jim isn't ready to get engaged or married: he's still playing the field.*

play the game (informal) do something fairly, honourably. *Jack should not have repeated what Jim told him in private: it's just not playing the game, i.e. it is not an honourable thing to do.*

play to the gallery behave so as to attract the attention of others. *Bill is not popular with his teachers because he's always playing to the gallery, i.e. attracting the attention of the other students.*

play one's trump/best card produce the fact, argument, plan, etc. which one hopes will bring one victory. *Almost at the end of the trial, the defending lawyer produced his trump card: someone who had actually seen the murder.*

play with fire become involved with something very dangerous. *Any student who starts taking drugs is playing with fire.*

PLAYED. **played out** finished; exhausted. *This used to be a rich mining area at one time, but now it's all played out. By the time we had finished the walk, we were completely played out.*

PLEASE. **please/suit yourself** (informal) do what you like. *You can either go to town or stay here: just please yourself.*

PLEASED. **pleased as Punch** (informal) very happy. *He was as pleased as Punch when he won first prize.*

PLOT. [See **THE PLOT THICKENS.**]

PLUCK. **pluck/screw up (one's) courage** force oneself to be brave.

At last he plucked up enough courage to go to his boss and demand more wages.

POCKET. **pocket one's pride** act in a humble way because it is necessary. *I knew that he could harm my career, so I had to pocket my pride and apologise to him.*

POINT. **point blank** 1. very close (range). *The shot was fired at point blank range.* 2. without any discussion/explanation. *I refused point blank to help them.*

(at this) point in time [See AT THIS POINT IN TIME.]

POISON. **poison-pen letter** letter which is written to cause trouble, usually by attacking someone's good character. *The police have been trying to find out who wrote the poison-pen letters which have caused so much bad feeling in the village.*

POKE. **poke/push/put/shove one's nose in/into** interfere in. *He's always poking his nose into other people's business.*

POLES. **poles apart** very different. *Although they are brothers, they are poles apart politically: one is very left-wing and the other is very right-wing.*

POOR. **poor form** [See BAD FORM.]

POP. **pop the question** (informal) make a proposal of marriage. *Tom and Jane have been going together for years now, but he hasn't popped the question.*

PORT. **port of call** place that one can visit. *There is a bar at the corner, which is Jim's usual port of call on his way home from work.*

POSSESSION. **possession is nine points/-tenths of the law** having something actually in your possession puts you in a very strong position in any kind of dispute over who owns it. *You shouldn't give him back the car until he can prove that it is his: remember, possession is nine-tenths of the law.*

POT. **pot calling the kettle black** someone who is guilty of a certain fault accusing someone else of having the same fault. *No-one is lazier than Harry, and yet he criticised Jack for coming late: it was a case of the pot calling the kettle black.*

pot luck [See TAKE POT LUCK.]

(watched) pot never boils [See WATCHED KETTLE/POT NEVER BOILS.]

POUND. **pound of flesh** something owed to someone which he/she demands in spite of the hardship which may come as a result. *Our boss will not let you away early no matter how good your reasons are: he insists on his pound of flesh.*

POUR. **pour cold water on** [See THROW COLD WATER ON.]

pour oil on troubled waters try to make peace in a situation where people are angry or quarrelling. *My two neighbours were quarrelling so badly that I went along to see if I could pour oil on troubled waters.*

POWER. [See MORE POWER TO YOUR ELBOW.]

POWERS. **powers that be** people in authority. *The powers that be have decided to knock down those fine old houses and put up a block of flats.*

PRESENCE. **presence of mind** ability to think quickly in a difficult situation. *When he saw the accident, he had the presence of mind to get the police immediately.*

PRESS. **press one's luck** [See PUSH ONE'S LUCK.]

PRESSED. **pressed for time** busy; with very little time. *I shall have to leave soon, as I'm a bit pressed for time.*

PRETTY. [See COME TO A FINE/PRETTY PASS.]

PREY. **prey on one's mind** cause one sorrow, worry, anger, etc. *They say that he killed himself because his wife's tragic death had been preying on his mind.*

(a) **prey to** victim of. *I am usually (a) prey to any colds or chills that happen to be going round, i.e. I usually catch these colds or chills.*

PRICE. (put/set a) **price on someone's head** (announce, make public a) reward to be paid for the arrest of a wanted person. *I think that the robber will soon be caught: there is a price on his head. A price has been put on the robber's head.*

PRIME. **prime of life** height of one's powers. *It is a terrible tragedy that such a gifted artist died in the prime of life.*

PRIVATE. **private eye** (informal) detective who works privately, i.e. not as part of a police force. *He left the police force to work as a private eye.*

PRODUCE. **produce the goods** [See DELIVER THE GOODS.]

PROMISE. **promise (someone) the moon** make any kind of promise, however impossible, in order to get what one wants. *Never trust politicians: they will promise you the moon in order to get your vote.*

PROOF. **proof of the pudding is in the eating** one does not know how good or bad something is until one tries it for oneself. *You may find that you don't like studying law: the proof of the pudding is in the eating.*

PROS. (weigh up the) **pros and cons** (consider the) points for and points against. *We have to decide whether to go to London for our holiday: let's make a list of the pros and cons. Let's weigh up the pros and cons of going to London for our holiday.*

PULL. **pull a long face** [See LONG FACE.]

pull one's finger out (informal and impolite) stop being lazy. *He has hardly worked at all since he left school: it's about time he pulled his finger out.*

pull in one's belt [See TIGHTEN ONE'S BELT.]

pull in one's horns not be able to act in the way one would like to; be

forced to retreat or cut back in some way. *Since my salary has been reduced, I may have to pull in my horns as far as expensive holidays are concerned, i.e. spend less on holidays. He tried to bully her at first, but she soon forced him to pull in his horns, i.e. stop bullying her.*

pull someone's leg play a joke on someone, usually by misleading him in some way. *They told him his car had fallen into the river, but they were only pulling his leg: it was still sitting in the car-park. Also leg-pull joke of this kind. It turned out that the whole thing was a leg-pull, and we had all been tricked.*

pull out all the stops try one's hardest; do everything one can. *They pulled out all the stops to make the party a success.*

pull something out of a hat produce something at random, without proper thought. *These figures for next year's profit look to me as if they have just been pulled out of a hat.*

(not) pull one's punches (usually with negative) (not) care about hurting other people's feelings. *The manager condemned the strikers strongly: he certainly didn't pull his punches.*

pull strings use one's influence to get something done. *The rich man's son was released from prison, because his father was able to pull strings. Also string-pulling use of personal influence. Quite a lot of string-pulling has been going on to release him from prison.*

pull the rug/carpet from under do or say something which puts someone else at a disadvantage. *He talked for a long time about how immoral young people were nowadays, but then his wife pulled the rug from under him by revealing that he had cheated in his final exams at university.*

pull the wool over someone's eyes deceive someone. *Bill is a very difficult man to cheat: it won't be easy to pull the wool over his eyes.*

pull oneself together regain control of oneself; act calmly and sensibly. *Just before the party, he was shocked to hear the news about his brother's illness; but he managed to pull himself together, and go out and meet his guests.*

pull oneself up by the/one's (own) bootstraps/bootlaces improve oneself or one's position entirely by one's own efforts. *He came from a poor home, and had very little education, but he pulled himself up by his own bootstraps, and now he is a doctor.*

pull/bring one up short make one stop whatever one is doing. *He was glancing through the newspaper when a headline on the second page pulled him up short.*

pull one's weight do one's share of what has to be done. *If we want to get this job done in time, then everyone will have to pull his weight.*

PURE. **pure and simple** (this phrase usually comes after the noun it refers to) only, and nothing else. *He told the police that his friendship with the accused man was a business partnership, pure and simple. Also purely and simply (same meaning). It was purely and simply a business partnership.*

PURSE. **(hold the) purse strings** (be in control of) the supply of

money. *Our business has to apply to the government when it needs money: the government holds the purse strings.*

PUSH. push one's luck (informal) be too daring, especially when one has had a narrow escape from danger or difficulty. *The policeman said to the motorist who had been driving too fast: "I'll let you off this time, but don't push your luck!"* i.e. don't risk going too fast again.

push one's nose in/into [See POKE ONE'S NOSE IN/INTO.]

push someone/something to the wall [See UNDER GO TO THE WALL.]

push up (the) daisies (informal and humorous) be dead. *I don't know what happened to the man who betrayed the criminals: he's pushing up daisies, I should imagine, i.e. they probably killed him.*

PUT. put a/the damper(s) on (informal) keep under control; have a restricting, controlling effect on. *The fact that the headmaster was there tended to put a damper on the party, i.e. people were careful about how they behaved so they did not relax and enjoy themselves.*

put all one's eggs in/into one basket risk everything on only one thing; concentrate on only one thing. *This car company used to sell several different models but now it has decided to put all its eggs in one basket, and produce only one model, i.e. the fate of the company now depends on one model.*

put an end/a stop to stop. *I am going to put an end to their bad behaviour.*

put a price on someone's head [See PRICE ON SOMEONE'S HEAD.]

put a spoke in someone's wheel hinder someone in what he is trying to do; make it difficult for someone to do something. *Jack wants to be elected chairman, but I'm going to see if I can put a spoke in his wheel.*

put someone at (his/her) ease make someone feel relaxed by, for example, treating him/her in a friendly way. *I felt rather nervous when I was to meet the Prime Minister, but he soon put me at my ease.*

put one's back into (it) work very hard (at something). *We can get this job finished in an hour if we put our backs into it.*

put/turn back the clock do things in an old-fashioned way. *The politician said that to start hanging people for murder would be to put the clock back fifty years, i.e. hanging was the way things were done fifty years ago, not today.* Also **put back a clock/one's clock** set a/one's clock at an earlier time. *At the end of the summer, people in Britain have to put their clocks back one hour.*

put someone's back up [See GET SOMEONE'S BACK UP.]

put someone beyond the pale [See BEYOND THE PALE.]

put one's cards on the table [See LAY ONE'S CARDS ON THE TABLE.]

put one's foot down 1. be firm; insist that what one wants to be done is carried out. *The children wanted to stay up late, but I put my foot down and insisted on their going to bed at the usual time.* 2. go fast (in a car, etc.). *I found a stretch of straight road, so I put my foot down to see just how fast this new car could go.*

put one's foot in it (accidentally) do or say something which hurts, offends or embarrasses others. *I really put my foot in it when I asked*

Jane how she had got on in her exam: she said that she had completely failed, and then she burst into tears.

put one's hand to [See TURN ONE'S HAND TO.]

put our/their/your heads together consult together; share one another's ideas. *If this plan fails, we shall have to put our heads together and try to think of something else.*

put/set one's (own) house in order arrange one's affairs properly. *After a serious illness, he decided to put his house in order, by making a proper will, and so on. If you are hoping to gain promotion, you will have to set your house in order, i.e. act properly, suitably.*

put in a good word for praise, recommend (someone). *As it happens, the chairman of the company you are trying to get a job in is an old friend of mine: I'll put in a good word for you.*

put in an appearance go somewhere so that one can be seen, often as a matter of duty. *Some of my students will be at the college dance tonight, so I suppose I shall have to put in an appearance.*

put (one) in mind of (informal) remind one of. *Look at that old car: it puts me in mind of the one my father used to have.*

put/set someone in his/her (proper) place treat someone (especially someone who is proud, boastful, etc.) in the way that he/she deserves to be treated. *He tried to boss my mother around, but she soon put him in his place, i.e. did not allow him to tell her what to do.*

put oneself in someone's place/shoes try to imagine what it would be like to be someone else in a certain situation. *Putting myself in your shoes, I think I would report the whole matter to the police, i.e. that is what I would do in your situation.*

put someone/something in/into the shade (informal) be much better than someone/something else. *I thought that Jack's car was nice, but Jim's new car puts it in the shade, i.e. Jim's car is much nicer.* Also **cast/throw someone/something in/into the shade** (same meaning).

put it to someone suggest to someone (often used by lawyers talking to witnesses, etc.). *The lawyer put it to the witness that he (the witness) had seen the crime being committed, but was deliberately keeping back information from the Court.*

put one's mind to [See SET ONE'S MIND TO.]

put one's neck out [See STICK ONE'S NECK OUT.]

put one's nose into [See POKE ONE'S NOSE INTO.]

put/shove/stick one's oar in (informal) give opinions or suggestions without being asked for them. *I wish Jim would shut up – he's always putting his oar in.*

put on a bold/brave front/face pretend to be calm, not worried. *I knew that I was not going to get a friendly reception, but I put on a bold front, and went in.*

put on airs [See GIVE ONESELF AIRS.]

put on an act/a big act pretend to be something that one is not, e.g. frightened, injured, etc. *I don't think that she was as upset as she pretended to be: it was all a big act.*

put on the agony [See PILE ON THE AGONY.]

put somewhere on the map [See ON THE MAP.]

put on one's thinking cap think carefully (about some problem). *We shall have to put on our thinking caps if we want to solve this problem.*

put out feelers/a feeler try to find out something in a careful way. *There may be one or two people who are interested in joining us: I'll put out a few feelers.*

put (someone) out of the way kill, get rid of someone. *The robbers said that if I gave them any trouble, they would put me out of the way.*

put out the welcome mat make someone feel welcome. *When we went to visit our relatives in Australia, they certainly put out the welcome mat for us.*

put paid to finish; bring to an end. *If I fail these exams, it will put paid to my hopes of becoming a doctor.*

put/set one's shoulder to the wheel help, work to get something done. *We would soon be a rich company if every employee put his shoulder to the wheel.*

put that in your pipe and smoke it (informal and impolite) you will have to accept what has been done/said. *I am never going to work for you again, so you can just put that in your pipe and smoke it.*

put the anchors on (informal) brake; suddenly slow down. *As soon as I saw the tree lying across the road, I put the anchors on.*

put the arm/the screws on someone (informal) try to force someone to do something. *We refused, but they have been putting the arm on us to make us change our mind.*

put/set the cart before the horse put or do things in the wrong order. *Some teachers teach a course and then test their students, but that is putting the cart before the horse: first, they should test their students to find out what they need to know, and then they should teach them.*

put/set the record straight correct a mistake or something that has been misunderstood. *People have been saying that Harry has not worked hard enough for the company; let me set the record straight: his work has been excellent.* [See also OFF THE RECORD; ON THE RECORD.]

put the seal on [See SET THE SEAL ON.]

put the wind up (informal) frighten. *I was all alone in the house, and the sound of the dogs howling really put the wind up me.* [See also GET/HAVE THE WIND UP.]

put someone through hoops/the hoop [See under GO THROUGH HOOPS/THE HOOP.]

put someone/something through his/her/its paces cause someone/something to show all the things that he/she/it can do. *The inventor put his invention through its paces before a large audience.* Also **go through one's paces** show what one can do. *You will have a chance to go through your paces during tonight's competition.*

put someone through the mill [See under THROUGH THE MILL.]

put something to (good) account [See TURN SOMETHING TO (GOOD) ACCOUNT.]

put to it in a situation where one has to try to do something. *It is very*

difficult to choose one's favourite novel, but if I were put to it, I suppose I would choose "War and Peace".

put/set to rights (informal) bring something back to the condition or state it should be in. *We shall have to put this ship to rights before we can sail in her again. This is a very unjust situation, but the government has promised to set it to rights.*

put (out) to sea go out to sea. *The ship will put to sea at dawn.*

put someone/something to shame be much better than someone/something. *The behaviour of the younger children put the older ones to shame.*

put something to the proof make a trial of something to see whether it is true or not. *You have often said that your car is faster than mine: tomorrow we shall have a chance to put that statement to the proof.*

put two and two together come to an obvious conclusion. *I saw his car in the garage and a light at his window, so I put two and two together and guessed that he was still at home. Also put two and two together and make five* come to a reasonable, but incorrect conclusion. *His car was outside his house, the light was on, but he wasn't there: I had put two and two together and made five.*

put up or shut up (informal) show by one's actions that one is really interested in, involved with, something, or be silent. *If you are so interested in our club, then you should join it: put up or shut up.*

put someone wise (about) (informal) give someone advice or information (about). *I must put you wise about Jack: he is not to be trusted with money.*

put words in someone's mouth pretend that someone has said something which he/she has not, in fact, said. *I never said anything like that: you must stop putting words in my mouth.*

Q

QUEER. queer fish (informal) strange person. *I never liked Jones: I always thought of him as a queer fish.*

queer one's pitch make it difficult or impossible for someone to do what he/she wants to do. *I want to go home before the end of term: but, if one of the other students asks first, it may queer my pitch. Also queer the pitch for someone* (same meaning). *One of the other students asked for permission to go home before I did, and that queered the pitch for me.*

QUITE. quite so (rather old-fashioned) I agree. *"This matter has to be handled very carefully," he said - "Quite so," I replied.*

quite the thing fashionable; in fashion. *Suddenly it was quite the thing to wear one's hair long.* (with negative) not fashionable; not polite. *It is not quite the thing to arrive too promptly for a party.*

QUITS. quits with (informal) even with; revenged on. *He caused me to lose my job; if I can make him lose his job, then I'll be quits with him.* [See also CALL IT QUILTS.]

R

RACE. race against time/the clock [See under AGAINST TIME.]

RACK. rack and ruin [See GO TO RACK AND RUIN.]

rack one's brain(s) (informal) think very hard. *I have been racking my brains trying to remember his name.*

RAG. rag-tag and bobtail (rather old-fashioned) common people. *He used to bring all the rag-tag and bobtail into the house.*

RAIN. rain buckets/cats and dogs (informal) rain heavily. *I won't go out tonight: it's raining buckets. It's raining cats and dogs outside.*

Also come down in buckets (informal) rain heavily. *It's coming down in buckets outside.*

(come) rain or (come) shine in every kind of weather. *He always goes for a walk on Sunday, rain or shine.*

RAINS. [See IT NEVER RAINS BUT IT POURS.]

RAINY. (for a) rainy day (for a) time when one is in need. *It is always a good idea to save up for a rainy day.*

RAISE. raise Cain/raise hell 1. make it clear that one is angry. *If I don't get better service, I am going to the manager and raise Cain.* 2. make a lot of noise. *As soon as the teacher left the classroom the children started to raise Cain.* Also hell-raiser person who enjoys himself in a wild, noisy way. *He used to be a real hell-raiser when he was younger.*

raise eyebrows cause people to be shocked or surprised. *His strange behaviour at the dinner party raised eyebrows.*

raise one's hat to [See TAKE OFF ONE'S HAT TO.]

raise hell [See RAISE CAIN.]

raise the roof 1. make a very loud noise (by applause, cheering, etc.). *The audience raised the roof with their applause.* 2. express one's anger loudly. *Your father will raise the roof when he sees that you've broken another window.*

RANK. rank and file ordinary people inside an organisation, not the leaders. *The rank and file of the union have decided to go on strike, although the union leaders asked them not to.* Also rank-and-file ordinary: the rank-and-file members of the union.

RAP. rap someone on/over the knuckles give someone a warning or a row. *Don't leave early without the manager's permission otherwise you may be rapped over the knuckles.* Also give someone a rap on/over the knuckles (same meaning).

RAT. rat race organisation or community where everyone is in fierce competition with everyone else. *He used to work as a salesman, but he decided to leave the rat-race and now he has a farm in the country, i.e. giving up a way of life in which he was always competing with others.*

REACH. reach the end of one's rope/tether [See END OF ONE'S ROPE/TETHER.]

READ. read between the lines see a meaning which is suggested but not openly stated. *In this letter that Jack has written he does not actually say that he needs money but, if you read between the lines, you will see that he does need more cash.*

read someone like a book be able to know what someone is thinking or planning. *Mary told me that she was going to the library to study but I can read her like a book: I was pretty sure that she was going to the cinema with her boyfriend.*

read someone's mind know what someone is thinking. *I was trying to think of a polite excuse for leaving, but my hostess read my mind and said, "I mustn't keep you any longer: it's getting late."*

read (someone) the riot act speak angrily (to someone) because he/she has done something wrong. *If my daughter comes home late tonight again, I'm going to read her the riot act.*

REAP. reap the whirlwind [See SOW THE WIND AND REAP THE WHIRLWIND.]

reap where/what one sows experience the bad results of one's bad actions, or good results of one's good actions. *He always neglected his children, and now they have no time for him: he is reaping where he has sown.*

RED. red carpet treatment [See under ROLL OUT THE RED CARPET (FOR SOMEONE).]

red herring something that is deliberately brought to one's attention to lead one astray. *I think his story about the blind man is a red herring to distract us from something else which he does not want us to think about.*

red-letter day very important day. *Next Thursday is a red-letter day for me: it is the day that I am expecting the results of my exams.*

(see the) red light [See SEE THE RED LIGHT.]

(like a) red rag (to a bull) something that is sure to annoy a certain person. *Smoking in his presence is like a red rag to a bull: he thinks that smoking is a filthy habit.*

REDOUND. redound to one's credit (formal) cause one to be praised. *The work that you have done to help these old people will certainly redound to your credit.*

REDUCE. reduce someone to tears make someone cry, weep. *His angry words reduced her to tears.*

REGAIN. regain one's feet stand up again after having fallen down. *The boxer managed to regain his feet, but he was obviously not going to be able to fight much longer.*

REGULAR. (as) regular as clockwork very regularly. *He came in here every morning at nine, regular as clockwork, i.e. it was a fixed habit of his.*

REPEAT. repeat oneself say something again. *Listen carefully, because I don't want to repeat myself.*

RESIGN. **resign oneself to** accept, get used to, accustomed to (something unpleasant). *He resigned himself to the idea that he would never be a world-class tennis player.*

REST. **rest assured** (formal) be sure, certain. *You may rest assured that we shall do everything we can to help.*

rest on one's laurels stop working or competing because one is satisfied with what one has already achieved. *He hasn't done much since he wrote his first book some years ago: he's just been resting on his laurels.*

RETRACE. **retrace one's steps** go back the way one has come. *When they realised that they were lost, they tried to retrace their steps through the forest.*

RETURN. **return the compliment** 1. praise the person who has said something nice or complimentary about one. *When he praised my speech, I returned the compliment about his.* 2. behave to others in the same way as they have behaved to oneself. *He emptied all his rubbish into my garden, so I just returned the compliment, i.e. I emptied my rubbish into his.*

REVEAL. **reveal one's true colours** [See SHOW/REVEAL ONE'S (TRUE) COLOURS.]

RHYME. **rhyme or reason (to)** (usually with negative) reason (for); sensible explanation (for). *I cannot understand why he is behaving in this way: there is no rhyme or reason to it.*

RIDE. **ride hell for leather** [See GO HELL FOR LEATHER.]

ride roughshod over ignore, go against in a ruthless, unsympathetic way. *The people protested against the new road, but the authorities rode roughshod over their complaints.*

RIDING. **riding/heading for a fall** behaving in a way which will bring about one's downfall. *Jack's proud behaviour is losing him a lot of friends: he is riding for a fall, i.e. the enemies he is making may cause him trouble.*

riding high very successful; be very happy. *Jim is riding high at the moment, but I don't know how long his success will last.*

RIGHT. **right along/down the line** [See ALL ALONG/DOWN THE LINE.]

right and left/right, left and centre in all directions; in all ways. *He is very popular: he has been making friends right and left since he arrived here.* Also **left and right/left, right and centre** (same meaning).

(as) right as rain (informal) fine; well; healthy. *I wasn't so well last week, but now I'm as right as rain.*

right/straight away (informal) immediately. *I'll do that for you right away.* Also **right/straight off** (same meaning).

right down one's alley/street [See DOWN ONE'S ALLEY/STREET.]

right from the horse's mouth [See STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH.]

right of way 1. path over private land which anyone can use. *The farmer should not have told you to leave that path: it is a right of way.* 2. right of one vehicle or vessel (such as a car, boat, etc.) to go, cross or pass before another. *At this corner, cars coming from the left have right of way.*

right under one's (very) nose [See UNDER ONE'S (VERY) NOSE.]

RING. ring a bell remind one of something. *I don't recognise his face, but his name rings a bell, i.e. I think I have heard it somewhere before.*

ring the changes give an impression of difference or variety by using a limited number of things in different ways. *The cook tried to ring the changes by preparing the food she had in different ways.*

RISE. rise from/through the ranks (in an army) promoted from the group who are not officers; rise from the ordinary level in a group. *You have to admire him: he rose from the ranks to become a general.* Also **come up from/through the ranks** (same meaning).

rise with the lark get up early. *He usually goes to bed very early and rises with the lark.* Also **up with the lark** up out of bed very early in the morning. *He's up with the lark every morning, while everyone else is asleep.*

ROB. rob Peter to pay Paul pay one's debts by borrowing money from someone else; get rid of one problem by taking on another. *He got the money to pay his income tax debts by borrowing from a money-lender: it was just a case of robbing Peter to pay Paul.*

ROCK. rock bottom (at) the very lowest level. *No one is buying cars these days so their prices have hit rock bottom.* Also **rock-bottom** very low. *Cars are very cheap just now: they are being sold at rock-bottom prices.*

rock the boat do something independently which may cause problems to the other members of the group one belongs to. *The staff are going to put in a claim for higher wages to the management: Jack said that he would be willing to accept less than the others, but he was told not to rock the boat, i.e. the others were afraid that Jack's accepting less might make their claim unacceptable.*

ROD. [See MAKE A ROD FOR ONE'S OWN BACK; RULE WITH A ROD OF IRON.]

ROLL. roll out the red carpet (for someone) put a great effort into making someone feel welcome. *Everywhere that the distinguished visitors went, people rolled out the red carpet for them.* Also **give someone the red-carpet treatment** (same meaning). *People everywhere gave the distinguished visitors the red-carpet treatment.*

roll up one's sleeves be ready to work hard. *If you want to finish this job before Monday, then you will really have to roll up your sleeves.*

ROLLING. rolling in it/money (informal) very rich. *He's well-off: in fact, he's simply rolling in money.*

rolling stone (gathers no moss) person who keeps moving from one place to another (will never own many things). *Jack will never be able*

to save any money unless he gets a job and sticks to it: a rolling stone gathers no moss.

ROME. [See WHEN IN ROME (DO AS THE ROMANS DO).]

ROOM. **room for improvement** possibility for something to be made better. *You have written a very good essay, but I think that there is still some room for improvement, i.e. it could be made even better.*

(not) room to swing a cat in (informal: usually with negative) (not) enough space. *The place we have to do our work in is very small: there isn't room to swing a cat in it.*

ROOT. **root and branch** completely. *The Prime Minister decided to get rid of all the opposition to his ideas, root and branch.*

ROPE. [See GIVE SOMEONE ENOUGH ROPE AND HE WILL HANG HIMSELF.]

ROSE. **rose-coloured** [See SEE/LOOK AT THE WORLD THROUGH ROSE-COLOURED/ROSE-TINTED/ROSY GLASSES.]

ROTTEN. **rotten to the core** [See TO THE CORE.]

ROUGH. **rough and ready** not exact; not properly done. *I have done the job in a rough and ready way: I shall do it properly when I have time.*

rough-and-tumble situation where one has to be tough, competing against others. *When he left the university to take up a job in business, he found that the quiet life of the university had not prepared him for the rough-and-tumble of business.*

rough it put up with hardships. *When I travel abroad, I don't like staying in hotels: I prefer to rough it, i.e. staying in the cheapest accommodation.* Also **live/sleep rough** live, sleep out in the open, with none of the usual comforts such as a proper house, bed, etc. *He started drinking heavily and recently he's been living rough.*

rough with the smooth [See TAKE THE ROUGH WITH THE SMOOTH.]

ROUND. **round robin** 1. letter of complaint signed by a number of people, who are all equally responsible for the complaint. (Sometimes the signatures are written in a circle so that there is no indication of who signed the letter first.) *The members of the committee were so upset by the chairman's action that they sent him a round robin about it.* 2. (mostly US) game or competition in which every player has a chance to play every other player.

(all) round the clock [See (ALL) AROUND THE CLOCK.]

RUB. **rub it in** remind someone of something that he would rather forget, e.g. a defeat or disgrace. *I know that I did badly in the competition: please don't rub it in by continuing to talk about it.*

rub shoulders/elbows mix with; meet. *It is a very expensive club: if you join it, you will find yourself rubbing shoulders with some wealthy people.*

rub someone (up) the wrong way annoy someone without intending to. *He doesn't like me: I must have rubbed him the wrong way on some occasion.*

RUG. [See PULL THE RUG FROM UNDER.]

RULE. (by) **rule of thumb** (by using a) quick way of doing things which is not exact but works reasonably well. *If you want to turn degrees Centigrade into degrees Fahrenheit, a handy rule of thumb is to double the Centigrade figure and add 30.* Also **rule-of-thumb** quick and reasonably exact: *a rule-of-thumb method.*

rule the roost (over) (informal) be in command (of). *Since his older brother has left home, John has been ruling the roost over his other brothers and sisters.*

rule someone/something with a rod of iron keep someone/something under very strict control. *Our parents were very strict: as children we were ruled with a rod of iron.*

RUN. **run a risk/run the risk of** do something which involves danger/the danger of. *Unless you dress warmly in winter, you run the risk of catching a chill.*

run a temperature have a higher-than-normal temperature. *The doctor says that Jane is running a slight temperature, but she is not seriously ill.*

run away with the idea (informal) have the opinion, belief. *When I say that he doesn't work very hard, you mustn't run away with the idea that he is lazy: it is just that his health is not very good.*

run counter to (formal) be against; be contrary to. *I am amazed at what you have told me about Jim: it runs counter to everything I have heard about him.*

run for it try to escape. *The prisoner decided to make a run for it.*

run for one's life run away as quickly as one can. *"Run for your life!" the policeman shouted to the people near the burning building.*

run for one's money [See GIVE SOMEONE A RUN FOR HIS MONEY.]

run high be strong. *After the football match, the feelings of both groups of supporters were running high, i.e. both groups were excited, emotional.*

run in the family occur in a family from one generation to the next. *Musical ability runs in that family: they have always been good musicians for as far back as anyone can remember.*

run into a brick wall not be able to make any progress. *I have been trying to obtain the information you requested but I keep running into a brick wall: everyone refuses to talk about it.*

run into debt owe people money. *If you do not spend your money wisely you will soon run into debt.*

run something into the ground use something (e.g. a car) until it can't work any more. *I'm not going to buy a new car: I'm just going to run the car I have into the ground.*

run of bad/good luck situation of being unlucky/lucky over a period of time, or several times, one after the other. *My brother would like to borrow some money from you: he's had a run of bad luck in his business deals.*

run-of-the-mill ordinary. *It's a run-of-the-mill sort of play: not marvellous, but not terrible either.*

run rings round be much quicker (at moving, thinking) than someone else. *The thieves ran rings round the police and escaped.*

run riot behave in a wild way. *They had to call in the police because the students were running riot through the town, frightening the passers-by.*

run short (of) not to have enough of something. *We're running short of sugar: we'll have to buy some more tomorrow.*

run the gauntlet move into a situation where one has to meet criticism or opposition from others. *Those who wanted to work in the factory had to run the gauntlet of opposition from those who were on strike, i.e. they had to move through the strikers to get to the factory.*

run to earth/ground look for, chase someone until he/she is found in his/her hiding place. *The police looked for the witness everywhere and finally ran him to earth in London.*

run to seed [See GO TO SEED.]

run wild move about freely, without any kind of control. *It's disgraceful the way she lets her children run wild: they should be kept under firmer control.*

RUNNING. running battle/fight fight, dispute in which the people involved are always moving on to new positions or arguments, so the fight, etc. is never definitely settled. *I have been carrying on a running fight with the income tax people for years about how much I owe them, i.e. the dispute has gone on for years.*

RUSH. rush one's fences try to deal with problems before one needs to. *If you get promotion, don't rush your fences: wait for some time before you make any big decisions.*

rush headlong move into something rashly, without proper thought. *The children rushed headlong into the street. He rushed headlong into a new enterprise, and was soon in great financial trouble.*

S

SACRED. sacred cow something that people generally feel should not be criticised or questioned. *Education is one of the sacred cows of our modern civilisation, i.e. people generally would not dare to say it is a bad thing, or question its usefulness.*

SAFE. safe and sound safe, well. *His mother was overjoyed to hear that her little boy had been found, safe and sound.*

SAID. (you) said it [See under YOU CAN SAY THAT AGAIN.]

SAIL. sail close to/near the wind do or say something which is very close to being illegal or immoral. *I would not say that Jack is a crook, but he sometimes sails close to the wind in his business dealings.*

SALT. salt of the earth very best kind of people. *The villagers here may not be rich or well-educated but, in my opinion, they are the salt of the earth, i.e. they are kind, good, etc.*

SAME. **same here** (informal) I/we agree; I/we have the same opinion, experience, etc. *"We thought that the service in our hotel was dreadful."* – *"Same here: we are going to complain to the manager."*

SANDS. **sands (of time) are running out (for someone/something)** there is not much time left (for someone/something). *I think that the sands are running out for the present Prime Minister: he will have to resign soon.*

SAUCE. [See WHAT IS SAUCE FOR THE GOOSE....]

SAVE. **save appearances** do something to save one's honour, reputation, etc. *The meeting had to be abandoned because hardly anyone turned up: but, to save appearances, it was announced that it had been abandoned because of bad weather conditions.*

save one's bacon (informal) save oneself; run away from danger. *Instead of helping the passengers when the ship hit the rocks, the crew members were only interested in saving their own bacon.*

save one's breath (to cool one's porridge) not waste one's time talking. *If you are thinking of asking him not to climb the mountain, you might as well save your breath: he is determined to go.*

save (one's) face keep one's reputation good; not be publicly disgraced. *To save face, the company said in public that it was not to blame, but privately paid large sums of money to people making claims against it.* Also **face-saving** intended to save one's reputation, to prevent public disgrace. *The company came to a face-saving agreement.* Also **lose face** be publicly shamed or disgraced. *The officer lost face when his men publicly refused to obey his commands.*

save one's (own) neck/skin (informal) save oneself; rush away from danger. *They behaved in a very cowardly way: they were only interested in saving their own necks.*

save the day bring about final victory, success. *We thought that we were going to lose the game, but the two goals that were scored in the last five minutes saved the day.*

SAY. (I'll) say [See I'LL SAY.]

say a mouthful (informal) say something which means a lot more than one might think. *"They say that he is the richest man in this town."* – *"Whoever said that, said a mouthful: he has more money than everyone else put together."*

(not) say boo to a goose (informal: usually with the negatives can't/couldn't/won't/wouldn't) (not even able or willing to) do something that needs just a little bit of courage. *He is a very quiet, timid sort of person: he wouldn't say boo to a goose.*

(before one can) say Jack Robinson [See BEFORE ONE CAN SAY JACK ROBINSON.]

say/speak one's piece say what one thinks about something; say what one has to say. *I got up at the beginning of the meeting, said my piece and then left.*

(you can) say that again [See YOU CAN SAY THAT AGAIN.]

say the word tell me/us what to do (and I'll/we'll do it). *If you ever need any help, just say the word.*

SAYING. [See AS THE SAYING GOES.]

SAYS. **says who?/says you!** (informal) (this expression is used to challenge or deny what someone has said) only according to you; I don't agree. *"Your team are sure to be defeated."* - *"Says who?"* *"We're definitely going to win the cup."* - *"Says you!"* Also written **sez who?/sez you!**

SCARE. **scare (someone) stiff** make (someone) very frightened. *The children refused to walk along the narrow bridge: they were scared stiff.*

scare the (living) daylights out of frighten someone terribly. *The howling sound she heard outside just about scared the living daylights out of her.*

SCORE. **score a bull's eye** [See HIT THE BULL'S EYE.]

SCOT. **(get off) scot free** (be released) without any punishment. *Those criminals were not punished at all: they got off scot free.*

SCRAPE. **scrape (the bottom of) the barrel** get, use the very worst quality (usually because nothing better is available). *The country is so short of teachers that the government has been scraping the bottom of the barrel: some of the new teachers have very poor qualifications.*

SCRATCH. **scratch someone's back (and he'll scratch yours)** help someone (in the hope that he/she will help you in return). *I think we should do everything we can to help the new manager: if we scratch his back, he may scratch ours.*

scratch the surface do something which is superficial, not deep or profound. *The professor said that his discoveries had only scratched the surface of the problem: there was still a lot to be discovered.*

SCREAM. **scream blue murder** [See YELL BLUE MURDER.]

SCREW. **(have a) 'screw loose** [See HAVE A SCREW LOOSE/ ISSING.]
screw up (one's) courage [See PLUCK UP (ONE'S) COURAGE.]

SEARCH. **search me** (informal) I don't know. *"Where has my book gone?"* - *"Search me: I gave it back to you about a week ago."*

SECOND. **(come off) second best** (be) not as good as someone/something else. *He has had a number of fights with the champion, but he has always come off second best.*

second bite at the cherry [See under TWO BITES AT THE CHERRY.]

second childhood state of a very old person, when he/she starts behaving like a child again. *He is a very old man now and in his second childhood: you won't get much sense out of him.*

second fiddle [See PLAY SECOND FIDDLE.]

second nature habit, way of behaving which has become automatic, part of one's personality. *He has had to be careful with money for so many years that it is second nature to him now, i.e. he does it automatically, without thinking.*

second string to one's bow [See under TWO STRINGS TO ONE'S BOW.]
(on) second thoughts (when one has had) further thoughts, ideas about something which may cause one to change one's mind. *I said that I would meet you at the station but now I am having second thoughts about that: it may not be possible for me to get there in time.*
second to none the best. *You should go to that restaurant: their food is second to none.*

(get one's) second wind 1. (reach a state of) steady breathing after a period of breathlessness, while one is doing something that requires effort, e.g. running. *It seemed as if the other runners were going to catch up on me, but then I got my second wind and I was able to stay ahead of them.* 2. (get back the) ability to continue doing something. *I had to stop writing after three hours: then I got my second wind and continued until it was dark.*

SEE. (not) see beyond/past (the end of) one's nose (informal: usually with negative) (not be able to) take a wider, more long-term view of things. *As a businessman, he can't see beyond the end of his nose: he is spending all his profits now, instead of keeping some to invest later.*

(not) see eye to eye (with someone) (often with negative) (not) agree with someone. *Jack and Mary don't see eye to eye on this matter. Jack does not see eye to eye with Mary on this matter.*

see fair play [See FAIR PLAY.]

see fit think (is) right. *You can either come yourself or not, as you see fit, i.e. do what you think is right.*

see how the wind blows/is blowing [See under WAY THE WIND BLOWS.]

see red be extremely angry. *When he found the thieves in his bedroom, he just saw red and attacked them with his fists.*

see someone (all) right (informal) look after someone; make sure that someone gets what he needs. *If you need anything, just get in touch with my father: he'll see you all right.*

see some/the light at the end of the tunnel see that one's difficulties or problems will be solved eventually. *For a long time we wondered whether we would ever be able to get the company out of the mess it was in, but now we are able to see some light at the end of the tunnel.*

see stars be in a dazed condition, e.g. after bumping one's head. *When the piece of wood fell on his head, he saw stars for about a minute afterwards.*

see the colour of someone's money (informal) see that someone actually has the necessary cash with him. *I'm afraid I cannot accept your offer for my car until I see the colour of your money, i.e. you must produce the money first.*

see the light be converted to what one thinks is the correct point of view; leave one way of thinking or behaving and take up a better one. *He drifted from one job to another, but then he finally saw the light and settled down to a good steady job with prospects of promotion.* Also **see the light (of day)** 1. become real. *We have some plans for a new type of*

car, but we don't know whether it will ever see the light of day, i.e. it might never be actually built. 2. become public. His writings never saw the light of day until long after his death.

see the light at the end of the tunnel [See SEE SOME LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL.]

see the red light stop doing something because one realises that it is harmful or dangerous. *He used to drink very heavily, but he saw the red light, and now he doesn't take any drink at all.*

(not) see the wood for the trees [See CAN'T SEE THE WOOD FOR THE TREES.]

see/look at the world through rose-coloured/rose-tinted/rosy glasses/spectacles have a cheerful attitude to life in general, not paying any attention to the unpleasant side of things. *Ever since he fell in love, he has been seeing the world through rose-coloured glasses.*

see the writing on the wall [See WRITING ON THE WALL.]

see things imagine something to be present when it isn't. *Peter says that there is a lion in our back garden: he must be seeing things!*

see to it make sure that something is done. *The plates will have to be washed and put away after the meal: will you see to it?*

see one's way clear (to) be sure that one can manage to do something; not be aware of any problems, obstacles which will prevent one from doing something. *If you could see your way clear to doing this before next week, we would be very grateful.*

see which way the wind blows/is blowing [See WAY THE WIND BLOWS/IS BLOWING.]

see with half an eye [See HALF AN EYE.]

SEEING. seeing is believing one can really believe something only if one can see it for oneself. *Some people make fun of his supernatural powers, but I have seen the amazing things he can do, and seeing is believing.*

SEEN. (have) seen/known better days be old, used, past its best. *He was wearing a dirty shirt, cracked shoes and a suit that had seen better days.*

SELL. sell someone a pup (informal) cheat someone by selling him something that is worthless. *He had to buy the house quickly without examining it properly; when he did examine it, he realised that he had been sold a pup, i.e. the house was in very bad condition.*

sell someone/something down the river (informal) betray someone/something. *When the thief entered the house, he discovered the police waiting for him; then he realised that someone had sold him down the river.*

sell like hot cakes [See LIKE HOT CAKES.]

sell someone/something short 1. not give someone/something the praise that he/she/it deserves. *When you are being interviewed for the job remember not to sell yourself short, i.e. don't be modest about your achievements.* 2. trick someone by giving him/her less than the proper amount. *When we opened the bags we discovered that they had sold us short.*

SEND. **send someone about his business** (informal) send someone away because one is angry or displeased with him. *He was trying to sell me some things that were obviously stolen, so I soon sent him about his business.*

send someone off/away with a flea in his/her ear get rid of someone by showing that one disapproves of what he/she has said or done. *I asked her to go out with me but she sent me off with a flea in my ear, i.e. she made it clear that I should not have asked her.*

send someone packing quickly send someone away because one does not like or want him/her. *On our return home, we found some boys we did not know playing in our garden; we sent them packing.*

send to Coventry punish someone by refusing to speak to him/her. *The other workers sent him to Coventry because he had refused to join the strike.*

send (someone) word send a message (to someone). *You should have sent us word that you were coming.*

SEPARATE. **separate/tell the sheep from the goats** make a distinction between those who are good, intelligent, successful, etc. and those who are not. *At the end of the year we have a test which separates the sheep from the goats.* Also **separate/tell the wheat/grain from the chaff** (same meaning).

SERVE. **serve/fulfill its/one's/the purpose** do what it/one is required to do. *We can throw out these books: they have served their purpose and we don't need them any more.* Also **answer one's purpose(s)** (same meaning).

serve no purpose be useless. *You can take this desk away: it serves no purpose here.*

serve someone right (the word *serve* can either be used in an unchanging way or as a normal verb) be a punishment that someone deserves. *His wife has left him, and serve him right/it serves him right: he treated her very badly.*

serve the purpose [See **SERVE ITS PURPOSE.**]

SET. **set an example** behave well, do something well, so that others can copy or imitate. *We expect the older pupils in the school to set an example to the younger ones.*

set a price on someone's head [See **PRICE ON SOMEONE'S HEAD.**]

set someone at (his/her) ease [See **PUT SOMEONE AT (HIS/HER) EASE.**]

set someone/something at rest calm someone/something down. *The doctor set my fears at rest when he explained that my illness was not serious.* Also **set someone's heart/mind at rest** stop someone from worrying, being anxious. *The letter from her son showed that he was safe and set her heart at rest.*

set someone/something back on his/her/its heels have a very bad effect on someone/something: cause to be shocked, unpleasantly surprised. *The bad news from abroad has set the tourist industry back on its heels.*

set one's cap at try to capture someone's love, affection. *Mary seems*

to be paying a lot of attention to Jack these days: do you think she's set her cap at him?

set eyes on [See CLAP EYES ON.]

set one's face against be opposed to. *The new government has set its face against any changes in the way the elections are run.*

set forth 1. describe, explain. *The judge set forth the arguments which had been put forward by each side.* 2. (rather old-fashioned) begin a journey. *They set forth at dawn.*

set one's hand to [See TURN ONE'S HAND TO.]

set one's heart/mind on want (to do) something very much. *Her husband worked hard to save up for the house she had set her heart on. They had set their minds on going to Africa by sea.*

set one's house in order [See PUT ONE'S HOUSE IN ORDER.]

set someone in his/her (proper) place [See PUT SOMEONE IN HIS/HER (PROPER) PLACE.]

set loose [See LET/SET LOOSE.]

set/put/apply one's mind to think hard about; concentrate on. *You can do anything if you really set your mind to it.*

set sail (with reference to ships) begin a voyage. *The fleet is setting sail tonight.*

set one's shoulder to the wheel [See PUT ONE'S SHOULDER TO THE WHEEL.]

set one's sights on choose an aim which one wants to fulfill, or a target which one wants to reach. *He is a very ambitious politician: I think he has set his eyes on the Presidency, i.e. he has decided that he wants to be President.*

set/lay (much/little, etc.) store by regard as being of (much/little, etc.) importance. *I know the weather forecast is bad, but I'm still going out: I don't set much store by weather forecasts anyway.*

set one's teeth on edge (usually with reference to a sound or taste) cause one to have an unpleasant sensation. *The small boy was scraping a nail across glass, and the noise set my teeth on edge.*

set the ball rolling [See START THE BALL ROLLING.]

set/make the pace do something at a certain rate or speed which others try to beat or do at the same rate or speed. *Jack set the pace for most of the race, i.e. the other runners had to run at a certain speed to keep up with him.* Also **pace-setter** someone who does things at a certain rate or speed which others try to equal or beat. *Jack was the pace-setter for most of the race.*

set the record straight [See PUT THE RECORD STRAIGHT.]

set/put the seal on confirm that something is complete. *We had a meeting next day which set the seal on our new business partnership, i.e. after the meeting the partnership was official, confirmed.*

set the/a table put knives, forks, spoons, etc. in their proper places on a table before a meal. *In order to save time in the morning, we always set the table for breakfast on the previous evening.*

set the Thames/world on fire (informal) be a great success; cause a great sensation. *He is a very ambitious student but, in my opinion, he will never set the Thames on fire.*

set tongues wagging (usually with reference to something considered shocking) cause people to talk. *The way that, at the last minute, she broke off her engagement to be married has set tongues wagging.*

set to rights [See PUT TO RIGHTS.]

SETTLE. **settle a score/an old score/old scores (with someone)** have one's revenge, punish someone for something done in the past. *I think you should avoid him if you can: he said he had some old scores to settle with you.* Also **pay off a score/an old score/old scores** (same meaning).

settle someone's hash punish someone; defeat, overcome someone. *If he misbehaves again, I'm going to settle his hash.*

SEZ. **sez who?/sez you!** [See SAYS WHO?]

SHADOW. **shadow of doubt** (usually with negative) smallest amount of doubt, uncertainty. *He is guilty, without a shadow of doubt, i.e. he is certainly guilty.*

SHAKE. **shake in one's shoes** (informal) be very afraid. *The boys who were to be punished were shaking in their shoes as they waited outside the headmaster's room.*

SHANKS'. (use) **Shanks' pony/mare** (go) on foot. *The car has broken down, so we shall have to use Shanks' pony to get to town.* Also **go on/by Shanks' pony/mare** (same meaning).

SHARE. **share and share alike** (informal) divide things equally. *The partners agreed that, if they made a profit, they would share and share alike.*

SHARP. **sharp as a needle/tack** (informal) bright; quick; intelligent. *I think that young man is going to be very successful in business: he was sharp as a tack.*

SHED. **shed crocodile tears** -- [See CROCODILE TEARS.]

shed light on/upon [See THROW/SHED/CAST LIGHT ON/UPON.]

SHEEP. [See SEPARATE/TELL THE SHEEP FROM THE GOATS.]

SHIFT. **shift for oneself** look after oneself, without help from others. *There will be no-one in the house tonight to prepare the meal, so we shall have to shift for ourselves.*

SHIP. **ship comes in** [See WHEN ONE'S SHIP COMES IN.]

SHIPSHAPE. **shipshape (and Bristol fashion)** (informal) clean; neat; tidy. *The officer inspected our rooms and found that everything was shipshape.*

SHOE. (if the) **shoe fits, wear it** [See IF THE SHOE FITS, WEAR IT.]
shoe is on the other foot [See BOOT IS ON THE OTHER FOOT.]

SHOOT. **shoot one's bolt** use up what is left of one's power, resources. *The general said that he would launch one last attack but, if that failed, he would have shot his bolt: he would have to surrender.*

shoot off one's mouth (informal) 1. talk about things one should be keeping secret; talk about things one really does not know much about. *Keep quiet about this: don't go around shooting off your mouth/shooting your mouth off.* 2. talk in a proud, boastful way. *He is always shooting his mouth off about how important his job is.*

SHORT. **short and/but sweet** lasting a short time but direct, not wasting any words; shorter than expected, shorter than usual. *He thought for a long time, but his answer was short and sweet: "Get out of my house, and never come back!"*

(take a) short cut (go by a) quick way. *I know a short cut across the fields: let's take it.*

short end of the deal/stick [See GET THE SHORT END OF THE DEAL/STICK.]

(run) short of [See RUN SHORT (OF).]

(give someone) short shrift deal with someone quickly and without sympathy. *He started to explain his personal problems to the judge, who gave him short shrift: he was told to stop wasting the Court's time and fined £100.* Also **get short shrift (from someone)** be dealt with quickly and without sympathy. *He got short shrift from the judge when he tried to explain about his personal problems.*

SHOT. **shot in the arm** something which helps or encourages. *The chairman of the company said that the order, worth millions of pounds, was a real shot in the arm, i.e. it would help the company a lot.*

shot in the dark wild guess; something done at random, with no certainty of success. *I didn't know the correct answer, so I just had a shot in the dark, i.e. I made a guess.*

shot through with mixed with. *His story was shot through with lies.*

SHOULDER. **shoulder to shoulder** on the same side. *They fought shoulder to shoulder in the last war.*

shoulder to the wheel [See PUT ONE'S SHOULDER TO THE WHEEL.]

SHOVE. **shove one's neck out** [See STICK ONE'S NECK OUT.]

shove one's nose in/into [See POKE ONE'S NOSE IN/INTO.]

shove one's oar in [See PUT ONE'S OAR IN.]

SHOW. **show cause** give reasons why something must be done. *The police cannot search the house without first showing cause.*

show/reveal one's (true) colours show what one is really like (usually in a bad sense). *We all thought that our new neighbour was a charming man: it was only later that he showed his true colours.* Also **shown/revealed in one's true colours** shown as one really is. *We liked him until he was revealed in his true colours.*

show one's face appear, be present especially when one has offended or annoyed others who may also be present. *He won't dare show his face again at the club after the way he behaved there last time.*

show someone the door make someone leave. *He behaved so badly to my other guests that I showed him the door.*

show the flag be present at a function, etc. simply in order to show that one has taken the trouble to attend. *The headmaster won't be able*

to stay for the whole concert, but he'll be there at the beginning, just to show the flag.

show someone the ropes (informal) show someone how to do something new; teach someone what he has to do. *At first, I did not know what to do: then one of the other workers showed me the ropes.* [See also KNOW/LEARN THE ROPES.]

SHUT. **shut one's eyes to** [See CLOSE ONE'S EYES TO.]

shut the door to prevent; stop; put an end to. *If the government stops these experiments, it will have shut the door to developing new forms of energy.*

shut up shop close down one's business, either for a time, or for ever. *They generally shut up shop at five p.m., i.e. that is when they close their business for the night. When he got to 65 years of age, he decided to shut up shop and retire.*

SICK. **sick and tired of** very annoyed with (usually in connection with something which happens frequently). *I'm sick and tired of students coming late to class.*

SIGHT. **sight for sore eyes** something that one is pleased or surprised to see. *You know how lazy John is: to see him working so hard in his garden was a sight for sore eyes.*

sight unseen without being seen or examined. *I took quite a risk when I bought this camera: I bought it sight unseen, i.e. I did not see it until after I had bought it.*

SIGN. **sign of the times** example of the sort of things that are happening in this period of time. *The old man said that the impolite way in which children spoke to their parents nowadays was another sign of the times.*

sign one's own death warrant do something which will bring about one's own death, destruction, failure, etc. *When the young man spoke out against the government, he was signing his own death warrant.*

sign the pledge [See TAKE THE PLEDGE.]

SILENCE. **silence gives consent** when one does not say anything against a decision, one shows that one agrees to it. *When Mr. Green's name was proposed for chairman, the secretary asked if anyone disagreed: when no one spoke, the secretary said, "Silence gives consent," and Mr. Green became the new chairman.*

SILENT. **silent majority** the majority of people, who do not have extreme views and are not heard speaking in public so often as those who do have extreme views. *During an election, the politician who gains most votes will be the one who expresses what the silent majority is thinking.*

SILK. [See MAKE A SILK PURSE OUT OF A SOW'S EAR.]

SILVER. [See BORN WITH A SILVER SPOON IN ONE'S MOUTH.]

SIMPLE. [See AS EASY/SIMPLE AS ABC.]

SINCE. **since the year dot** [See THE YEAR DOT.]
since time immemorial [See FROM TIME IMMEMORIAL.]

SING. **sing a different tune** [See WHISTLE A DIFFERENT TUNE.]
sing the praises of someone/sing someone's praises praise someone very highly. *Jack's team won and, when he came home, he sang the praises of the player who scored the winning goal.*

SINK. **sink or swim** fail or succeed. *I have helped him many times and he has never thanked me; now he can sink or swim, I don't care.*

SINS. [See VISIT ONE'S CRIMES, SINS (ETC.) ON SOMEONE.]

SIT. **sit on the fence** refuse/be unable to choose between various alternatives; refuse to support one side or the other. *No one knows which side Jim supports: he just sits on the fence and refuses to vote.*
sit tight stay where one is, without moving; avoid doing anything. *Don't go out; just sit tight until the storm is over.*
sit up and take notice (of) pay attention (to). *He was not well-known until his recent, successful play: but since then people have begun to sit up and take notice.*

SITTING. **sitting pretty** in a very good situation. *For a long time I was out of work, but now I'm sitting pretty: I've got a secure job with a good salary.*

SIX. **six (of one) and half-a-dozen (of the other)** no difference; the same. *On this route, there is no difference in time or money between travelling by rail and travelling by bus: it's six of one and half-a-dozen of the other.*

SIXES. [See AT SIXES AND SEVENS.]

SKATE. **skate on thin ice** [See ON THIN ICE.]

SKELETON. **skeleton in the cupboard** (US closet) something bad, evil which has been kept secret. *The police inspector says that some of the witnesses may have been lying because they have some skeletons in the cupboard which they don't want to be made public.* Also **family skeleton** disgraceful family secret. *The fact that my Uncle Bob spent some years in prison was a family skeleton which we kept carefully hidden.*

SKIN. **skin someone alive** beat up, punish someone severely. *If I ever find out who broke into our house, I'll skin him alive.*

skin and bone(s) very, very thin; starved. *When the family who had been lost in the jungle were finally rescued, they were only skin and bones.*

(no) skin off one's nose (informal: always with negative) (not) something that has a bad effect on one. *That book doesn't belong to me so I don't care what you do with it: it's no skin off my nose if you cut it up.*

skin of one's teeth [See BY THE SKIN OF ONE'S TEETH.]

SKIP. **skip bail** run away from facing trial, although it means losing

bail, i.e. money which has been paid to the Court to guarantee that one will face trial. *He skipped bail, and now the police are looking for him.*

skip it/forget it (informal) don't bother about it. *If you don't have time to do this, just skip it: I'll do it myself later.*

SLAP. **slap on the back** [See PAT ON THE BACK.]

SLEEP. (not) **sleep a wink** (usually with negative) (not) sleep even for a very short time. *The hotel was very noisy last night: I didn't sleep a wink all night.*

sleep like a log/top sleep very deeply. *I was so exhausted that I slept like a log.*

sleep on it put off a decision on something until the next day. *I can't decide just now: I'll sleep on it and tell you what I've decided tomorrow.*

sleep rough [See under ROUGH IT.]

SLEEPING. [See LET SLEEPING DOGS LIE.]

SLIP. **slip of the pen** something one writes down without meaning to. *Could you let me have back that cheque I've just given you: I think I made a slip of the pen and wrote £50 instead of £5.*

slip of the tongue something one says without meaning to. *I hope that Doctor Green was not offended when I introduced him as Mister Green: it was a slip of the tongue.*

slip through someone's fingers manage to escape in a situation where one was likely to be caught; something is not obtained which might easily have been obtained. *The police are furious because he slipped through their fingers. Just because of one silly mistake, a fortune has slipped through our fingers.*

slip through the net escape in spite of the arrangements that have been made to catch one. *The police were watching all the ports, railway stations and airports: but, somehow, he managed to slip through the net.*

SLOW. (do a) **slow burn** (show) slowly increasing feelings of anger. *I watched the customer doing a slow burn, as the sales assistant continued to ignore him.*

SMACK. **smack one's chops/lips** [See under LICK ONE'S CHOPS/LIPS.]

SMALL. **small fish/frog in a big pond** [See LITTLE FISH/FROG IN A BIG POND.]

small hours [See THE (WEE) SMALL HOURS.]

small talk conversation about unimportant things, not serious discussion. *I met him at coffee-time and we had a chat, but it was just small talk, nothing worth repeating.*

small wonder [See NO WONDER.]

SMART. **smart Aleck** (informal) person who tries to show off his cleverness, especially by making fun of someone or something. *When the Professor started his lecture on "Communication Today", we discovered that some smart Aleck had unplugged the microphone, i.e.*

someone had made fun of the Professor by preventing the microphone from working.

SMASH. smash hit (informal: usually with reference to a play, film, record, etc.) great success. *His latest play has been a smash hit all over Europe.*

SMELL. smell a rat (informal) suspect that something is wrong. *The police inspector said, "There is something about his story that makes me smell a rat. I am going to investigate it further."*

SMOKE. [See NO SMOKE WITHOUT FIRE.]

SNAIL. (at a) snail's pace (at a) very slow speed. *I shall move into my new house as soon as it is finished, but the builders seem to be working at a snail's pace.*

SNAKE. snake in the grass (informal) someone who betrays people's friendship; someone who cannot be trusted. *I am really angry at how that snake in the grass has treated me, after all the kindness I have shown him.*

SNAP. snap someone's head off [See BITE SOMEONE'S HEAD OFF.]

SNEEZE. (not to be) sneezed/sniffed at (informal: always with negative) (not to be) ignored, rejected. *I may not leave my present job after all: they have offered to double my salary, which is an offer certainly not to be sneezed at, i.e. I must consider it carefully.*

SMIFF. (not to be) sniffed at [See (NOT TO BE) SNEEZED AT.]

SNOWBALL. (not have/stand a) snowball's chance in hell [See under STAND A CHANCE.]

SO. (without) so much as (a by-your-leave) (without) even (asking permission). *He came into my house and sat down without so much as a by-your-leave, i.e. without even asking my permission.*

so-so (informal) not good and not bad. *I'm just feeling so-so at the moment: not as ill as I was, but not completely well either.*

so to speak to express it in this way. *From London one can travel direct to all the main cities in Europe: London is, so to speak, the gateway to Europe.*

so what? (informal) what difference does that make? *"Professor Black is very angry at your behaviour in class yesterday." – "So what? I'm dropping his subject anyway."*

SOBER. sober as a judge 1. not at all under the influence of alcoholic drink; completely sober. *I did not take any drink at all last night, and so I went to bed as sober as a judge.* 2. very serious, unsmiling. *Everyone else was relaxed and happy, but he was as sober as a judge.*

SOFT. soft/weak in the head (informal) not completely sane. *Anyone who has such stupid ideas must be soft in the head.*

soft option easier, more convenient thing to do. *I won't be able to rely on Jack to support me if things become difficult: he always goes for the soft option, i.e. he will do what is easier, more convenient for himself.*

SOIL. **soil one's hands** [See DIRTY ONE'S HANDS.]

SOMETHING. **something else** (informal: the word *something* cannot be changed) something out of the ordinary: very good, bad, interesting, surprising, etc. *His paintings really are something else: I haven't seen anything so good from any living artist.*

something else again (the word *something* cannot be changed) something different; a different thing, situation. *I don't mind if the children play quietly in this room, but I'm afraid that playing with a ball is something else again: they could break a window, i.e. playing with a ball is a different matter, and I will not allow it.*

something the matter [See under WHAT'S THE MATTER.]

SONG. **song and dance** (informal) fuss; bother; row. *You had better ask the farmer's permission if you are going to camp in his field: we didn't last time, and he made a tremendous song and dance about it, i.e. he showed that he was very angry.*

SOON. [See AS SOON AS SOMEONE'S BACK IS TURNED.]

SORE. **sore subject/point/spot** something which someone prefers not to hear about, because it is embarrassing or brings back unpleasant memories. *Don't mention football in his presence: it has been a sore subject with him since his team was knocked out in the first round of the cup.*

SOUL. **soul of discretion** someone who can keep secrets; someone who does not say things which annoy or embarrass others. *If you have any personal problems you can discuss them with Paul: he is the soul of discretion.*

(call one's) **soul one's own** [See CALL ONE'S SOUL ONE'S OWN.]

SOW. **sow the seeds of** do something which will have results later. *The French Revolution sowed the seeds of other revolutions which later occurred all over Europe.*

sow the wind and reap the whirlwind suffer the results of one's bad actions in the past. *Because of his crimes, he will spend the rest of his life in prison: he has sown the wind and reaped the whirlwind.*

sow one's wild oats do the wild, foolish things that young people often do. *I don't think that we should criticise him now for what he did when he was young: he was probably just sowing his wild oats.*

SPADE. [See CALL A SPADE A SPADE.]

SPANNER. [See THROW A SPANNER IN THE WORKS.]

SPEAK. **speak for itself** not require anyone to comment or explain. *He was a war-hero, great writer and famous politician: his achievements speak for themselves.*

speak one's (own) mind say what one really thinks. *I hope that what I am going to say will not offend anyone, but I feel that I must speak my mind.*

speak/talk of the devil (informal expression used when a person about whom one has been speaking suddenly appears). *I am surprised*

that Jones has not come – well, speak of the devil, here he comes now!
speak one's piece [See SAY ONE'S PIECE.]

speak volumes (usually not with reference to speech) convey a lot of meaning; be full of meaning. *At the end of his talk, his wife did not say anything, but the expression on her face spoke volumes, i.e. people could tell what she was thinking just by looking at her.*

SPEND. spend a bomb [See under MAKE/EARN A BOMB.]

spend like water [See LIKE WATER.]

SPICK. spick and span very clean and tidy. *She looks after the house very well: it is always spick and span.*

SPIKE. spike someone's guns prevent someone doing what he/she intended to do. *We knew that they intended to use the main square for their meeting, so we spiked their guns by getting there first and using it for our own.*

SPILL. spill the beans (informal) tell everything one knows about something which some others wish to be kept secret. *The police have arrested four men suspected of committing the robbery: they are trying to get one of them to spill the beans.*

SPILT. [See CRY OVER SPILT MILK.]

SPIN. spin a yarn (informal) tell stories which are not true, either to amuse others, or perhaps to deceive them. *Somerset Maugham is a great storyteller; he can spin a good yarn. I don't believe what he says: I think he's just spinning yarns.*

SPIT. spit and image [See SPITTING IMAGE.]

(the dead) **spit of** [See under SPITTING IMAGE.]

SPITTING. spitting image/spit and image (informal) exact likeness, i.e. exactly the same in appearance (as someone/something else). *I'm sorry, I confused you with someone else I knew some years ago: you're his spitting image.* Also **the (dead) spit of** exact likeness of. *You're the dead spit of someone I knew years ago.*

SPLICE. splice the mainbrace (usually used humorously) take an alcoholic drink to refresh oneself, especially when one is, or has been, working hard. *He put down his tools, wiped his brow and said, "Let's splice the mainbrace!"*

SPLIT. split hairs make very fine distinctions that are not necessary. *You say you were five minutes late and I say you were ten minutes late; but let's not split hairs – the point is that you did not arrive on time, i.e. the exact number of minutes does not matter.* Also **hair-splitting** 1. act of making unnecessary fine distinctions; 2. concerned with making unnecessary fine distinctions: *a hair-splitting discussion.*
split/burst one's sides (laughing) laugh very heartily. *The children in the audience were splitting their sides at the funny antics of the clowns.*

split the difference (informal) strike a bargain by choosing an amount exactly half-way between what each side has previously

offered. *I have asked you for £600 for the car and you have offered me £400; let's split the difference: I'll let you have it for £500.*

SPOILING. **spoiling for a fight** in a bad mood and anxious to get into a fight or quarrel. *Don't say anything likely to annoy Jack tonight: he's spoiling for a fight.*

SPOKE. [See PUT A SPOKE IN SOMEONE'S WHEEL.]

SPOT. **spot cash** money given immediately, without delay. *There is a man at the door offering spot cash for any books that you would like to sell.*

SPREAD. [See (SPREAD) LIKE WILDFIRE.]

SPUR. [See ON THE SPUR OF THE MOMENT.]

SQUARE. **square meal** complete meal. *We have been living on biscuits and water; we haven't had a square meal for ages.*

square peg (in a round hole) someone who is in a post, situation which does not suit him. *I like working outside and they have given me an office job: I am just a square peg in a round hole.*

square one's shoulders draw one's shoulders back as when preparing oneself for a fight or preparing to meet any difficult situation bravely. *John squared his shoulders as he walked into the interview room.*

STAB. **stab in the back** 1. (verb) betray; be disloyal to. *Do not trust anyone in business: they will stab you in the back if it suits them.* 2. (noun) act of treachery, betrayal. *I was shocked at Jim's turning against me: I had not been expecting a stab in the back from him.*

STABLE. [See LOCK THE STABLE DOOR (AFTER THE HORSE HAS BOLTED).]

STACK. **stack the cards/odds (against someone)** arrange things so that someone has an unfair advantage (over someone else). *If you come from the sort of poor district that I come from, then the cards are stacked against you, i.e. other people (who come from better districts) will have an unfair advantage over you. I was confident of winning because the cards were stacked in my favour, i.e. I had been given an unfair advantage.*

STAGE. [See AT THIS/THAT STAGE OF THE GAME.]

STAKE. **stake a/one's claim** come forward and make one's claim to a share of something. *If you want a share of the profits, now is the time to stake your claim.*

(have a) **stake in** [See HAVE A STAKE IN.]

STAMPING. **stamping ground** place which one visits a lot, spends a lot of one's time in. *If you are going to Joe's Bar I'd like to come along: it's my old stamping-ground, i.e. it is a place that I used to visit a lot some time ago.*

STAND. **stand/have a chance** have a possibility. *I have voted for him, but I don't really think he stands a chance of being elected, i.e. I don't*

really think that there is any possibility that he will be elected. Also (not) stand/have a cat in hell's chance/a dog's chance/a snowball's chance in hell (informal: usually with negative) (not) have any possibility at all. *I don't know why Jim is entering the competition: he hasn't a cat in hell's chance of winning.*

stand aloof not be involved with others; not speak to, or mix with others. *Whenever there was a quarrel among us children, my father would simply stand aloof, refusing to take either side.*

(not) stand a snowball's chance in hell [See under STAND A CHANCE.]

stand corrected (formal) admit that one has made a mistake. *"Did you say that you were away for three days?" – "Two days." – "I stand corrected: you were away for two days."*

stand fast/firm keep one's position; not move. *The general ordered his soldiers to stand fast when the enemy advanced.*

stand/be head and shoulders above be much better than. *His work is head and shoulders above that of his classmates.*

stand in awe of have great respect for. *The students stood in awe of their professor because of his fame as a scientist.*

stand someone in good stead be of great use to one. *Your university education will stand you in good stead when you have to find a job.*

stand on ceremony be carefully polite. *Our distinguished host told us not to stand on ceremony, just be relaxed and feel at home.*

stand on one's dignity not allow oneself to be treated in a relaxed way, without the respect which one feels one deserves. *The party was spoiled by the Ambassador, who stood on his dignity, and made everyone feel uncomfortable, i.e. he did not let anyone forget his high rank.*

stand/hold/keep one's ground stay where one is (especially under attack). *The enemy attacked our positions several times, but we stood our ground.*

stand on one's own (two) feet/legs be independent; not need help from others. *I'm not giving my son any more help with his business: he'll have to learn to stand on his own two feet.*

stand on one's rights refuse to give up what one is entitled to (e.g. by law). *I tried to persuade him to be reasonable, but he is standing on his rights.*

stand out a mile [See STICK OUT A MILE.]

stand pat refuse to change; decide to keep things the same. *We tried to get him to change his mind, but he just stood pat, i.e. he stuck to his previous opinion.*

(it) stands to reason (it) is reasonable, logical. *If he has been driving since early morning, it stands to reason that he will be very tired when he finally gets back home.*

stand up and be counted be prepared to air one's views/beliefs publicly. *I am ready to stand up and be counted as one of your supporters.*

STAR. (one's) star is in the ascendant (one) is in a situation where

one is heading for success, victory. *He was joined by many new supporters who saw that his star was in the ascendant.*

STARE. **stare someone in the face** (usually with reference to something unpleasant) be about to happen to someone. *The general realised that defeat was staring him in the face unless he could think of a new plan.*

STARK. **stark raving/staring bonkers** (informal) completely insane. *Anyone who suggested such a crazy idea must be stark raving bonkers.*

START. **start something** (informal; the word *something* cannot be changed) do something which others copy. *When you came in to the office last week with one of those brightly-coloured shirts, you really started something: now everyone is wearing them.*

start/get/set the ball rolling begin something (e.g. a discussion) which can then be continued with the help of others. *We've met today to discuss the political situation; perhaps it would be best if I started the ball rolling by asking a few questions.* [See also **KEEP THE BALL ROLLING.**]

STAY. **stay put** (informal) stay where one is. *If there is a serious accident, just stay put until the police arrive.*

STEAL. **steal a march on** gain an advantage over (usually secretly or unfairly). *When it came to promotion, Jack stole a march on the others in the office by quietly doing favours for the manager, i.e. Jack had a better chance of being promoted because he had done favours for the manager.*

steal the show attract most of the attention during a performance; be most highly praised. *It was a little girl singer that no one had ever heard of before who stole the show.*

steal someone's thunder spoil the effect of what someone is going to do by doing it first. *I know that a later speaker is going to tell you some interesting facts about our trip to Europe, so I am not going to steal his thunder by mentioning them now.*

STEER. **steer a middle course** not go too far to one extreme or the other. *The judge will have to steer a middle course between being too severe with the accused men and being too easy on them.*

steer clear of avoid. *Try to steer clear of political topics at the dinner-party tonight: some of our guests have very strong opinions on politics.*

STEP. **step into someone's shoes** be appointed to a vacant post because one is next in line. *When the chairman retires, the vice-chairman will step into his shoes.* [See also **FILL SOMEONE'S SHOES.**]

step into/fill the breach take the place of someone else. *One of the musicians felt ill, but fortunately we found someone else who was able to step into the breach.*

step on someone's toes [See **TREAD ON SOMEONE'S TOES.**]

STEW. **stew in one's own juice** (informal) suffer, without any help

from others, the results of what one has done. *He was very nasty to everyone and now no one will speak to him: let him stew in his own juice.*

STICK. **stick around** (informal) don't go away; stay here. *I know that the show has not been very entertaining so far: but stick around: there are some good acts later on.*

stick-in-the-mud 1. dull sort of person who is not willing to try anything new or adventurous. *My sister and I both got a chance to go on a camping holiday, but she's such a stick-in-the-mud that she refused to come with me.* 2. dull, unadventurous: *a stick-in-the-mud attitude to life.*

stick in one's throat/gullet/craw be completely disagreeable and unacceptable to one (because it is unpleasant, dishonest, etc.). *He offered me a lot of money if I helped him; but I could not accept his plan: it stuck in my throat.*

stick it out [See SWEAT IT OUT.]

stick/put/shove one's neck out do something that is dangerous, e.g. by saying something that will displease people, or may be proved wrong. *It is risky to forecast the result of elections, but I'm going to stick my neck out and say that our party will win the next election with a large majority.*

stick one's oar in [See PUT ONE'S OAR IN.]

stick/stand out a mile (informal) be very obvious. *You must be able to see the solution to the problem now: it sticks out a mile!*

stick together 1. keep close to one another. *The captain whispered to his men, "Remember to stick together when we are going through the forest."* 2. be loyal to one another. *I think that the members of a family should stick together, especially when one of them is in trouble.*

stick to one's guns keep to one's own statement or point of view, in spite of what others may say or think. *The lawyer, defending the accused man tried to get the young boy to change his evidence: but the little boy stuck to his guns.*

stick with it not give up; be persistent. *You may find learning English difficult at the beginning, but stick with it: you'll soon be making good progress.*

STIFF. **(keep a) stiff upper lip** (have an) ability not to show what one is feeling. *They say that army officers used to be trained to keep a stiff upper lip, no matter how depressed they were feeling.*

STILL. **still life** drawing, painting, etc. of fruit and flowers. *He is famous for his still lifes: the fruit looks so real, you feel that you could eat it!*

still waters run deep people who behave quietly and do not say much may, nevertheless, think a lot and have strong feelings. *Jane is a very quiet girl, but she may surprise us all one day: still waters run deep, you know.*

STIR. **stir up a hornets' nest** [See HORNETS' NEST.]

STOCK. **stock-in-trade** something one uses to help with one's busi-

ness. *Salesmen usually know a lot of jokes: they are part of their stock-in-trade.*

STONE. **stone-dead** (informal) completely dead. *The heavy machine fell on him and killed him stone-dead.*

(rolling) stone gathers no moss [See ROLLING STONE (GATHERS NO MOSS).]

(leave no) stone unturned [See LEAVE NO AVENUE UNEXPLORED/NO STONE UNTURNED.]

STONY. **stony-broke** (informal) with no money at all. *Could you buy me a cup of tea: I'm stony-broke.*

STOP. **stop at nothing** do anything, however dangerous or immoral (to achieve one's aim). *He is a dangerous man, who will stop at nothing to get what he wants.*

stop in one's tracks [See IN ONE'S TRACKS.]

STORM. **storm in a teacup** fuss, excitement about something that is really not important. *All this argument about the elections to the village council is just a storm in a teacup.*

STRAIGHT. **straight away** [See RIGHT AWAY.]

(keep a) straight face (keep a) serious expression which does not let others see that one is really amused. *He tells his ridiculous stories with such a straight face that many people believe them. When I saw the silly clothes he was wearing I could hardly keep a straight face.*

straight/right from the horse's mouth directly from a reliable source; directly from a person concerned. *I swear that this information is genuine: I got it straight from the horse's mouth.*

straight from the shoulder [See FROM THE SHOULDER.]

straight off [See under RIGHT AWAY.]

STRAIN. **strain one's eyes** try very hard to see. *The sentry thought he had seen something moving in the dark and strained his eyes to make out what it was.*

STRANGE. **strange to say** surprisingly. *He was supposed to have died during the war but, strange to say, many people reported seeing him alive many years afterwards.*

STRAW. **straw in the wind** something which indicates what is likely to happen. *Both countries have increased the size of their armies: many people are taking this as a straw in the wind that they may soon be at war with each other.*

straw that breaks the camel's back small thing which makes a difficult or unpleasant situation into an impossible one. *If they add another fifty pence to the price of this article it will be the straw that breaks the camel's back: people will stop buying it.* Also **the last straw** (same meaning). *He left work feeling very tired, to discover that his car would not start: this was the last straw - he lost his temper.*

STRETCH. **stretch a point** 1. make an exception (to a rule or regulation, etc.). *You really should have your ticket with you to be admitted,*

but since you are a regular customer, we'll stretch a point. 2. say something that is not quite true. It would be stretching a point to say that he is a brilliant pianist, although he is certainly very good.

stretch one's legs (informal) go for a short walk (after one has been sitting down for some time). *One of the advantages of travelling long distances by train is that you can always get up and stretch your legs by walking along the train.*

STRICTLY. **strictly for the birds** [See FOR THE BIRDS.]

strictly speaking if one is being exact; if one is following the rules exactly. *Strictly speaking a whale is not a fish, it is a mammal. Strictly speaking, it is only club members who are allowed to buy drinks at the bar.*

STRIKE. **strike a balance (between ... and ...)** consider two extremes, and choose the best way between them. *You have to strike a balance between working too hard and not working hard enough.* Also **strike a happy medium** (same meaning).

strike a bargain agree on a price that suits the buyer and the seller; come to an arrangement that suits both sides. *We could not agree on a price for some time, but finally we struck a bargain. Let's strike a bargain: if you let me read your books, I'll let you read mine.*

strike a blow for do something to help. *By publishing such an article criticising the government, this newspaper has struck a blow for the freedom of the press.*

strike a happy medium [See under STRIKE A BALANCE.]

strike/knock all of a heap cause to be very surprised. *We didn't expect to hear that news: we were struck all of a heap. The unexpected news struck us all of a heap.*

strike at the root of destroy something by attacking what it depends on, what it is caused by. *By building these factories, the government hopes to strike at the root of poverty in this country, i.e. the poverty is caused by lack of employment, and the factories will provide the employment.*

strike it rich find a large amount of oil, precious stones, gold, etc.; suddenly become wealthy. *He looked for diamonds for many years before he finally struck it rich. He struck it rich when he became owner of a chain of shops.*

strike while the iron is hot do something while the time is right or suitable. *I have just been chosen salesman of the year, so I have decided to ask for a rise in salary now: I might as well strike while the iron is hot.*

STRING. **another/a second string to one's bow** [See under TWO STRINGS TO ONE'S BOW.]

STRINGS. **strings attached** conditions; things which one must agree to do as a price for accepting some offer. *The young director has agreed to make the film, but only if there are no strings attached, i.e. he wants to make the film in his own way, without conditions.*

(two) strings to one's bow [See TWO STRINGS TO ONE'S BOW.]

STROKE. **stroke (of work)** (usually with negative) the slightest bit

of work. *I've never seen anyone so lazy: he hasn't done a stroke of work all week.*

STRUCK. **struck all of a heap** [See STRIKE ALL OF A HEAP.]

STUCK. **stuck on someone/something** (informal) very fond of. *Mary is talking a lot about her boy-friend Bill these days: she seems to be quite stuck on him.*

stuck-up (informal) proud. *She's terribly stuck-up: she won't talk to anyone that she thinks is inferior to her.*

STUFF. **stuff and nonsense** (informal) rubbish. *Don't believe what you read about him in the newspapers: it's stuff and nonsense.*

stuff it (informal and impolite: angry way of rejecting something) keep it. *I told him that if he didn't like the way I was doing the job, he could stuff it.*

SUCCEEDS. [See NOTHING SUCCEEDS LIKE SUCCESS.]

SUCH. **such as it is** considering/remembering its problems or drawbacks. *I work mostly in my study, such as it is, i.e. it is not a perfect study. The army, such as it is, is quite well trained, i.e. it is not a big or powerful army.*

such being the case since this is so; in these circumstances. *Such being the case, I think we should return immediately.*

SUGAR. **sugar the pill** try to make something unpleasant easier to accept. *This company wants permission to build a rather ugly factory near our village; it is sugaring the pill by offering to build a new school as well.*

SUIT. **suit someone's book** (informal) be convenient, suitable to someone. *I don't give my workers a row for coming late, because it suits my book; it means that I can occasionally come in late myself.*

SUM. **sum total** complete total. *I am afraid that the sum total of our efforts in this matter has been zero, i.e. we have not managed to achieve anything.*

SURE. **sure as hell/fate** (informal) certainly; without fail. *Jack always keeps us waiting; we had a golf-match last Saturday and there he was, sure as fate, twenty minutes late.*

sure enough (informal) as one might expect. *We didn't really expect our team to win and, sure enough, they were beaten 3-0.*

sure thing (informal) something one can rely on. *I've been told about a horse that's running in the next race: they say it's a sure thing, i.e. certain to win.*

SURVIVAL. **survival of the fittest** only the best, strongest will be successful. *As we climbed the mountain, no-one was able to help anyone else: it was a case of the survival of the fittest.*

SWALLOW. **swallow something hook, line and sinker** [See HOOK, LINE AND SINKER.]

swallow one's pride force oneself to act in a humble way. *Just*

because he is my boss, I shall have to swallow my pride and apologise to him.

SWEAR. **swear like a trooper** use a lot of swear-words. *He was furious at being locked out of the house: he was swearing like a trooper.*

SWEAT. **sweat blood** 1. work very hard. *I hope Professor Brown gives my essay a good grade: I sweated blood over it.* 2. be very anxious or impatient. *The students sweated blood as they waited for the results of their exams.*

sweat/stick it out be anxious, uncomfortable, in unpleasant circumstances, for a certain period of time. *It may be some hours before the jury gives its verdict: in the meantime, the accused men will have to sweat it out.*

sweat of one's brow [See BY THE SWEAT OF ONE'S BROW.]

SWEATED. **sweated labour** workers who are badly-paid and over-worked. *He can sell his goods at low prices because he employs sweated labour.*

SWEEP. **sweep all before one** [See CARRY ALL BEFORE ONE.]

sweep someone off his feet cause someone to have great feelings of love, admiration, pleasure, etc. *The handsome young man swept her off her feet, i.e. she fell in love with him. The young President swept the country off its feet, i.e. everyone liked and admired him.*

sweep the board win every prize; win everything. *Our college athletics team swept the board, winning every event.*

SWEET. **sweet tooth** liking for sweet things. *She is always buying herself boxes of chocolates: she has such a sweet tooth.*

SWELL. **swell the ranks of** add to the already large number of. *When these factories close down, the workers will only swell the ranks of the unemployed.*

SWIM. **swim against the current/stream/tide** go against what most other people think, say, or do. *He is trying to persuade people to use up less fuel, but I'm afraid he's swimming against the tide, i.e. most people are using more.* Also **go against the current/stream/tide** (same meaning).

SWING. **swing one's weight (behind)** add one's (powerful) support (to). *You will probably be elected if the chairman swings his weight behind you.*

T

TAIL. **(with one's) tail between one's legs** [See WITH ONE'S TAIL BETWEEN ONE'S LEGS.]

TAKE. **take aback** [See TAKEN ABACK.]

take a back seat not be as important as before. *He used to be the*

most important man in the team, but since his illness he has had to take a back seat.

take a bad turn suddenly feel very ill. *He was just walking to work when suddenly he took a bad turn and had to be taken to hospital.*

take a calculated risk [See CALCULATED RISK.]

take account of pay attention to. *I cannot promise that the parcel will arrive in time; we have to take account of the fact that the postmen may be going on strike soon.*

take a dim view of (informal) not like; not approve of. *I cannot phone you: my boss takes a dim view of employees using the phone.*

take a hand in [See HAVE A HAND IN.]

take a hint understand something that has not been said openly or directly. *It was around midnight when my host remarked that he would have to get up very early the next day: I took the hint and left, i.e. I understood that my host was politely suggesting I should go.*

take a jaundiced view of not be impressed by. *I must say that I take a jaundiced view of Bill's promises: he has broken his promises so many times in the past.*

take a leaf out of someone's book imitate, copy someone. *I am going to take a leaf out of your book, and stop smoking, just as you have done.*

take an oath swear (that one will do something); give one's word; promise. *He took an oath that he would never return to England until he had found his missing son.*

take a notion suddenly wish (to do something). *I realised that my sister's house was not far away, and I took a notion to visit her.*

take a powder (informal: impolite as a command) go away; leave. *He kept following me so at last I told him to take a powder.*

take a punch/poke/sock at (informal) punch; hit. *What he said annoyed me so much that I took a sock at him.*

take/get a rise out of (informal) make someone show that he/she is annoyed, usually by making fun of him or her. *Don't pay any attention to what they say: they're taking a rise out of you.*

take a shine to (informal) like; quickly become fond of. *Our little girl doesn't usually like visitors, but she's taken quite a shine to you, i.e. she likes you.*

take a short cut [See SHORT CUT.]

take at face value [See FACE VALUE.]

take someone at his word act on what someone has said. *The judge said "You are a free man": so I took him at his word and walked out of the court.*

take a turn for the better/worse become better/worse. *Business was poor until last Sunday, but things have taken a turn for the better since then.*

take someone's breath away surprise, amaze someone. *When he opened the treasure chest, the sight of the jewels inside took his breath away.* [See also CATCH ONE'S BREATH; HOLD ONE'S BREATH.]

take someone/something by storm 1. make a tremendous impression on; have a great effect on. *His new play took London by*

storm: everyone was talking about it. 2. capture by a sudden violent attack. We waited until it was dark and then took the fort by storm.

take someone by surprise 1. come upon someone when he is not expecting it. *The gang took us by surprise: we were not expecting them.* 2. come as a surprise to someone; be unexpected. *Our home team's winning the cup took everyone by surprise: nobody thought they could do it.*

take care be careful. *Always take care when you are crossing a busy road.*

take care of look after; be responsible for. *You must go: we'll take care of the house until you come back.*

take charge (of) be in control (of). *You will be taking charge of this department as from Monday.*

take/bring someone down a notch/peg (or two) make someone feel less important, less proud. *I'm glad that the new manager is being strict with Jane: that should take her down a notch.*

take effect 1. come into operation. *The new regulations take effect from midnight on Sunday.* 2. produce results. *The sleeping-pills should begin to take effect in a few minutes.*

take exception (to) be offended (by); show that one does not like. *I must say I take exception to the nasty remarks he made about doctors: I think that doctors do a fine job.*

take someone's fancy [See TICKLE SOMEONE'S FANCY.]

take someone for a ride make a fool of someone; cheat, trick someone. *I'm afraid that the men who sold you that house were taking you for a ride: the house did not belong to them – you've been cheated.*

take someone/something for granted 1. accept that something is true without having to prove it. *We can take it for granted that only half of those invited will reply to the invitation.* 2. not show any gratitude, thanks to someone for something. *I left that job because the boss just took me for granted, no matter how much extra work I did.*

take heart be encouraged. *We took heart from our leader's words.*

take heed (of) pay attention (to). *When your parents give you advice, you should always take heed.*

take holy orders become a priest. *After he left university, he took holy orders.*

take ill become ill. *He suddenly took ill and was rushed to hospital.*

take something in good part accept something (e.g. being made fun of) without losing one's temper. *People made funny remarks about Jack's brightly-coloured tie, but he took it all in good part.*

take someone/something in hand bring someone/something under one's control. *The garden is growing a bit wild: I think I shall have to take it in hand this summer.*

take something in one's stride accept, deal with something without being upset in any way. *Jim has had quite a lot of bad news from home this term, but I must say he has taken it all in his stride, and his work has not been affected at all.*

take something into account/take account of something consider something; include something. *When we are making up the bill,*

we shall have to take into account all the extra work that was done at the end.

take/join issue with argue against. *I want to take issue with you on the last point that you raised.*

take it 1. understand; assume. *Can I take it that you will be staying for dinner? i.e. Am I correct in thinking. . .* 2. be able to endure punishment, hardship, criticism, etc. *I hope you saw how quickly he gave in: he can dish it out, but he can't take it, i.e. he can give punishment but he can't accept it.*

take it easy be relaxed; not work too hard; not be too anxious or excited. *You look tired: why don't you just take it easy for a while?*

take it into one's head have a sudden or unexpected wish (to do something). *I don't know why, but yesterday I took it into my head to visit one of my aunts.*

take it/something on the chin accept something bravely, without complaining. *Although they were badly beaten, the team took it on the chin, going to congratulate their opponents at the end.*

take it or leave it accept it or don't accept it: it makes no difference. *The price is £5: take it or leave it, i.e. I am not going to bargain with you.*

take it out of one exhaust one; tire one out. *Walking up all those stairs really takes it out of you.*

take it out on get rid of one's angry feelings on. *Whenever he has a bad day at the office, he comes home and takes it out on his poor wife.*

take it upon oneself assume the right or the responsibility to do something. *I was furious when Jack took it upon himself to apologise on our behalf: no-one asked him to speak for us, and, anyway, no apology was necessary.*

take it with one [See CAN'T TAKE IT WITH ONE.]

take kindly to (usually with negative) like; appreciate; be fond of. *Remember to say only good things about his new book: he doesn't take kindly to criticism.*

take one's leave (formal) go away. *I'll take my leave now, if you don't mind: I have another appointment somewhere else.*

take leave of one's senses go mad; be insane. *Judging by the strange way he is behaving, I think he must have taken leave of his senses.*

take liberties (with) 1. be too free with someone, breaking the rules of good manners. *Just because I was nice to him, he started to take liberties.* 2. make changes in something (especially a piece of writing). *I don't like producers who take liberties with Shakespeare's plays.* [See also TAKE THE LIBERTY (OF/TO).]

take one's life in one's hands do something very dangerous. *Anyone who takes his car out in these conditions is taking his life in his hands.*

take something lying down accept something without protesting or fighting back. *He has been treating me very badly, but if he thinks I'm going to take it lying down, he's making a mistake.*

take one's medicine accept one's punishment. *You have broken the*

rules, and you have been caught: *I'm afraid you will just have to take your medicine.*

take someone's name in vain (often used humorously) mention someone's name disrespectfully. *"Did I hear someone take my name in vain?" Bill said, as he came towards us.* Also **take the name of the Lord in vain** mention God's name for a wrong reason, e.g. as a curse, etc. *We read in the Bible that we should not take the name of the Lord in vain.*

take note of/notice of pay attention to. *He shouted and waved his arms, but nobody took any notice of him.*

take no thought for not care, worry about. *He seems to live only for today, taking no thought for tomorrow, i.e. he does not worry about the future.*

take off/raise one's hat to express one's admiration for. *When her husband died, she raised a family of five children all on her own: I take off my hat to her.*

take orders from accept commands, instructions. *While I am away you will be taking orders from another officer.*

take one's own way [See GO ONE'S OWN WAY.]

take (great) pains put in (a lot of) effort, work. *The lawyer took great pains to explain to me all the difficult points of the case.*

take someone's part/side support, help, defend someone. *I decided to take his part against the others.*

take part in be involved with; help, assist in. *They say that he took part in last week's big bank robbery.*

take pity on feel sorry for. *The little boy looked so disappointed that I took pity on him and gave him some money.*

take place happen. *All this took place in London many years ago.*

take pot luck accept whatever one happens to get. *There is a box for every child: since there is no way of knowing what each box contains, they will just have to take pot luck.*

take pride in be proud of. *These craftsmen take pride in the things that they make.*

take root 1. (with reference to a plant) put down roots. *I planted this bush some time ago, but it doesn't seem to have taken root.* 2. be accepted. *Somehow the idea that Jim would make the best leader seems to have taken root among our supporters.*

take oneself seriously think that what one does is important, and therefore should not be laughed at. *Try not to offend him during the discussion: he takes himself very seriously.*

take shape become real; take on a definite form. *The plans for the ceremony are beginning to take shape, i.e. it is now beginning to be clear what the final plans will be like.*

take sick [See TAKE ILL.]

take sides support one side or the other. *The referee in a football match is not supposed to take sides.*

take steps do something; take a certain course of action. *The authorities are very worried about the accident, and they are taking steps to see that nothing like that happens again.*

take stock 1. (with reference to a shop, store, etc.) listing all the goods on the shelves and making sure that nothing has been lost or stolen. *The shop is closed on the last Friday of every month, when we take stock.* Also **stock-taking**: *The shop is closed next Friday for stock-taking.* 2. examine or think about something carefully (so that a decision can be made). *Let's take stock of the situation, and then make our decision.*

take the biscuit/cake (informal) be the most surprising, amazing thing. *I think that his rude behaviour at the party really took the biscuit.*

take/have/get the bit between one's teeth 1. (with reference to a horse) be running out of control. *The horse had taken the bit between its teeth and its young rider was terrified.* 2. be very determined (to continue with something). *You will find it difficult to stop your daughter becoming an actress now; she's got the bit between her teeth.*

take the bull by the horns handle a difficult situation in a direct way. *My boss has ignored my hints about increasing my pay, so I'm just going to take the bull by the horns and ask him directly.*

take the cake [See TAKE THE BISCUIT.]

take the chill off heat up a little bit. *This little fire does not fully heat the room, but it does take the chill off it.*

take the consequences accept what follows as a result of something. *I'm warning you that if you come in late again, you will have to take the consequences.*

take the edge off change something so that it does not have its full effect. *He made many serious complaints, but at the end he told quite a funny joke, which helped to take the edge off his previous remarks. I ate some biscuits before dinner, and they took the edge off my appetite, i.e. I was not so hungry at dinner.*

take the floor 1. speak to an audience. *The young man took the floor and spoke very well.* Also **be given/get/have/hold the floor** get/have the right to speak to an audience. *The leader of the group was given the floor.* 2. start to dance. *The band struck up and several couples took the floor.*

take the gilt off the gingerbread spoil the effect of something; make something less good than it might have been. *The company has given me a gift of £500 for my services, but the fact that I shall have to pay tax on it rather takes the gilt off the gingerbread.*

take the law into one's own hands do what one thinks is right but not in the usual legal way. *In the old days, ordinary people would sometimes take the law into their own hands by breaking into prisons and killing the prisoners.*

take the liberty (of/to) be bold enough to do something which someone else might think rude. *Excuse me, I took the liberty of reading your newspaper while you were away: I hope you don't mind.* [See also TAKE LIBERTIES (WITH).]

take/get the measure of someone decide as to what sort of person someone is, what his physical or moral strengths and weaknesses are. *Before the contest began, he watched his opponent carefully, trying to take his measure.*

take the occasion to do something when one has the opportunity. *Since I am here, perhaps I can take the occasion to thank you for the help that you have given me.*

take/sign the pledge make a solemn promise not to take any more alcoholic drink. *He used to drink a lot, but now he has taken the pledge.*

take the rap (informal) take the blame or punishment. *He took the rap for the big bank robbery, although we think there may have been others involved.*

take the rough with the smooth accept unpleasant things as well as pleasant ones. *Don't be so upset when things go badly for you: you must learn to take the rough with the smooth.*

take the words out of someone's mouth say something which someone else was about to say. *You've taken the words out of my mouth: I was about to say the same thing.*

take thought think carefully. *You should take thought before you spend so much money.*

take one's time avoid hurry; do something slowly. *I've told you before not to rush in here: take your time.*

take something to heart allow something to have a very great effect on the way one acts or thinks. *He took his brother's death very much to heart: all his enjoyment of life was gone.*

take to one's heels run away. *When the boys saw the police coming, they took to their heels.*

take someone to task criticise someone; discuss with someone the things he has done wrong. *The President took his generals to task over the way they had conducted the war, i.e. he thought that they had conducted it badly and told them so.*

take someone to the cleaners (informal) cheat someone so badly that he/she has little or nothing left. *Unfortunately he fell in with some bad companions and they took him to the cleaners: he was left penniless.*

take turns do something alternately, first one person doing it, and then the other. *Bill and Frank took turns to stay awake, i.e. first Bill would stay awake for a while, then Frank.*

take umbrage (at) be offended (by). *I think she's taken umbrage at the way you left her party without saying goodbye.*

take up arms get ready to fight. *The peasants up in the mountains have taken up arms against the government.* [See also UP IN ARMS.]

take up the threads [See PICK UP THE THREADS.]

take wing(s) 1. fly away. *The huge bird ran along the ground and then at last took wing.* 2. develop, progress very quickly. *After the publication of his first book, his career as an author has taken wings.*

take something with a pinch of salt not believe something easily or completely. *Jack tends to get things confused: I would take anything he says with a pinch of salt.*

TAKEN. **taken aback** surprised. *I was taken aback when he casually mentioned that he intended to marry my daughter.*

TAKING. **taking one thing with another** when one has considered

everything. *Taking one thing with another, I suppose we have been rather lucky.*

TALK. **talk of the devil** [See SPEAK OF THE DEVIL.]

talk shop talk about things that are concerned with one's job. *They never discuss plays or books or films, or anything outside their jobs: they just talk shop all the time.*

talk the hind legs off a donkey/mule talk a lot. *She would talk the hind legs off a donkey: she just goes on and on.*

talk through (a hole in) one's hat (informal) talk nonsense; say things that are not true. *If he says he saw me in town last night, he's talking through a hole in his hat: I was at home all evening.*

talk to someone like a Dutch uncle give someone good advice in a solemn or serious way. *I don't like talking to young people like a Dutch uncle, but sometimes it is useful.*

talk turkey have a serious, honest, practical discussion. *Let's talk turkey and get this matter settled.*

TALKING. **talking point** something that people discuss, talk about. *Keeping fit by running has become quite a talking point.*

TALL. **tall order** something one is asked or told to do which is difficult to achieve. *The group-leader expects each member of the group to sell £20 worth of tickets: I think that's a tall order.*

tall story story that is difficult to believe. *He tells some tall stories about his war experiences: personally, I don't believe them.*

TARRED. **tarred with the same brush** having the same attitude/outlook/fault; sharing the same guilt. *I would not trust anyone from that group: they are all tarred with the same brush.*

TASTE. **taste of one's own medicine** [See DOSE/TASTE OF ONE'S OWN MEDICINE.]

TEACH. **teach/give someone a lesson** make someone learn something by giving him an unpleasant experience. *He was almost run down by a car because he ran across the road without looking first; I hope that his narrow escape will teach him a lesson.*

teach one's grandmother to suck eggs try to teach someone things which he/she is already expert in. *Once we started playing our game of tennis I discovered that the man I had been giving advice to was actually a better player than I was: I had been teaching my grandmother to suck eggs.*

TEETH. [See SET ONE'S TEETH ON EDGE.]

TELL. **tell someone apart** make a distinction between; tell one from the other. *The two brothers were so similar in appearance that it was almost impossible to tell them apart.*

tell it like it is (informal) give a truthful account of something; be honest about something. *He has written a book about his time in prison in which he tells it like it is, i.e. he gives an honest account of his prison-life.*

tell its/their own tale let someone know what has happened without being told. *No-one had to tell me that my precious vase had been broken: the broken pieces on the floor told their own tale.*

tell it/that, etc. to the Marines! (informal) I don't believe you! *You say that you have been studying hard; after such poor results, you can tell that to the Marines!*

tell the sheep from the goats [See SEPARATE THE SHEEP FROM THE GOATS.]

tell the wheat/grain from the chaff [See under SEPARATE THE SHEEP FROM THE GOATS.]

tell someone where to get off (informal) give someone a row; speak angrily to someone. *He tried to order her about, but she soon told him where to get off.*

TEMPT. **tempt fate/providence** do something foolish, dangerous, likely to have unpleasant consequences. *When he attempted to break the land speed record last year his car blew up; now he is trying it again: he seems to be tempting fate.*

THAMES. [See SET THE THAMES ON FIRE.]

THANK. **thank one's (lucky) stars** (informal) be very grateful. *You should thank your lucky stars that you have been given such a good education.*

THAT. **that'll be the day!** (informal) I can't believe it will ever happen! *"You get up at 5 a.m. to study? – that'll be the day!" i.e. I don't believe you.*

that's flat! I am not going to change my mind! *I am not going to lend you any more money, and that's flat!*

that's for sure! [See under FOR SURE.]

that's that (informal) that is finished; nothing more can be done. *As he finished off painting his house, Jack said: "Well, that's that for another few years."*

THE. **the ABC of something** the most simple, most basic elements of a subject. *You can learn the ABC of car repairs from this book.*

the back of beyond [See BACK OF BEYOND.]

the eleventh hour [See AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR.]

the (very) idea! (expression of shock or disbelief). *"The electrician wanted to be paid £20 just for an hour's work." – "The very idea!" i.e. how ridiculous!*

(what's/something/nothing) the matter [See WHAT'S THE MATTER.]

the plot thickens things become more complicated. *With regard to Jim's engagement to Jane, it seems that the plot thickens: Jack will give you the details, i.e. there have been some complications about the engagement.*

the (wee) small hours the very early hours of the morning, i.e. from after midnight to about 4 a.m. *The party went on past midnight, so that we did not get home until the small hours.*

the (very) thing something (very) suitable, (very) good. *A nice long*

holiday would be the very thing for Jack to help him recover after his illness.

the three R's reading, writing and arithmetic (counting), i.e. the basic things in education. *Children today are being taught too many different subjects: we should concentrate on the three R's.*

the worse for wear 1. in poor condition. *By the time he had dragged himself through the tunnel, his clothes were somewhat the worse for wear, i.e. they were dirty and perhaps torn.* 2. drunk. *He came home somewhat the worse for wear (i.e. rather drunk).*

(since/from) the year dot (informal) (from) a very long time ago. *We're very old friends: we've known one another since the year dot.*

THEN. **then and there** immediately. *He paid the money then and there.* Also **there and then** (same meaning).

(and) then some [See AND THEN SOME.]

THERE. **there and then** [See THEN AND THERE.]

there's life in the old dog yet (informal and humorous) though old, he/she is still very lively. *Because I am nearly seventy, my family think that I should not work so hard: but I'll show them that there is life in the old dog yet.*

there's no accounting for taste(s) [See (THERE'S NO) ACCOUNTING FOR TASTE.]

there's nothing to it (informal) 1. it's very easy. *If you follow the instructions carefully, there's nothing to it.* 2. there is no reason for believing something. *There's a rumour that he's a thief, but I'm sure there's nothing to it.*

THICK. **thick as thieves** [See AS THICK AS THIEVES.]

thick of the fray middle of the fight, struggle. *If there is any kind of fight or argument, you will find Jack in the thick of the fray.*

THICKER. [See BLOOD IS THICKER THAN WATER.]

THIN. **(out of) thin air** [See OUT OF THIN AIR.]

thin end of the wedge something which, if allowed, will become more common, more important. *The headmaster said that allowing the pupils to come to school casually dressed at the end of the term was the thin end of the wedge: the next thing would be their turning up unsuitably dressed throughout the year.*

(skate on) thin ice [See (SKATE) ON THIN ICE.]

THING. [See BEST THING SINCE SLICED BREAD; HAVE/GET A THING ABOUT; THE (VERY) THING.]

THINK. **think aloud/out loud** say out loud to oneself what one is thinking. *"Did you say something to me?" - "No, I was just thinking aloud."*

think (the) better of decide that it is unwise to do something one had intended to do; change one's mind about. *I was going to go out for a walk this evening, but, when I saw the rain, I thought better of it.*

think highly of admire. *He is a great admirer of yours: he thinks very*

highly of your work. Also **think much of** (same meaning, but often used with negative).

think little of 1. [See THINK NOTHING OF.] 2. have a low opinion of. *He must think very little of his wife if he treats her so badly.*

think no end of (informal) like and admire. *You are her favourite uncle: she thinks no end of you.*

think nothing of not worry about; do something without any problems or anxiety. *He trains very hard: he thinks nothing of running ten miles every day.* Also **think nothing of it** (polite expression used when one is being thanked or when someone has apologised to one) not at all; don't mention it. *"I am very grateful to you for helping me." - "Oh, think nothing of it."* [See also YOU'RE WELCOME.]

think on one's feet think very quickly, especially in discussion or debate. *The Prime Minister is very good at dealing with people who interrupt him during debates: he can certainly think on his feet.*

think out loud [See THINK ALOUD.]

think twice consider something carefully. *You should think twice before buying such an expensive house: it will take you a long time to pay for it.*

THREAD. **thread one's way** walk carefully in a situation where one has to avoid bumping other people or obstacles, e.g. in a crowded street. *He threaded his way through the crowded streets of the old part of the town.*

THREE. [See THE THREE R'S.]

THROUGH. **through and through** completely. *Have nothing to do with him: he is a villain through and through, i.e. a complete villain, there is no goodness in him at all.*

through the mill through great hardships. *I've had one examination after another in the past fortnight: I've really been through the mill.* Also **put someone through the mill** make someone experience hardships. *My first six months in the army were very tough: they really put us through the mill.*

through thick and thin through every kind of situation, good or bad. *She has been very loyal to her husband: she stood by him through thick and thin, i.e. she supported him, even when things were going badly for him.*

through with (informal) completely finished with. *I'm not going to study any more: I'm through with study. I'm having nothing more to do with her: I'm through with her.*

THROW. **throw a party** have a party. *Jack is throwing a party next week to celebrate his twenty-first birthday.*

throw a spanner in the works (informal) ruin, destroy something; prevent something from working, happening. *We were going to have a meeting tonight but Jim threw a spanner in the works by saying that he couldn't come.*

throw oneself at someone's feet 1. show publicly one's love or admiration for someone. *She was very beautiful: several rich men*

threw themselves at her feet. 2. behave in a very humble way (to ask for mercy, forgiveness, etc.). *The condemned man threw himself at the judge's feet, promising to be a good citizen in future.*

throw a veil/curtain over [See DRAW A VEIL/CURTAIN OVER.]

throw/flip, etc. caution to the winds behave very bravely, recklessly. *The general decided to throw caution to the winds, and attack boldly during daylight.*

throw/pour cold water on point out all the problems and disadvantages of something. *Bill threw cold water on the new plan: he said that it would never work.*

throw/cast/flip something in someone's face/teeth remind one of something that one would rather forget. *The crowd threw in the politician's teeth the promises that he had made to them before the election.*

throw/cast in one's lot with join; support. *After the rebels' great victory against the government forces, many people threw in their lot with the rebel army.*

throw someone/something in/into the shade [See PUT SOMEONE/SOMETHING IN/INTO THE SHADE.]

throw in the sponge/towel surrender; accept defeat. *After being knocked down four times in one round, he decided to throw in the towel.*

throw/shed/cast light on/upon give more information about. *The scientists say that these discoveries throw light on how the universe began.*

throw someone off the scent mislead someone (who is following one). *By changing the cars that they drove several times, the bank robbers eventually managed to throw the police off the scent.*

throw someone/something out of gear interfere with the way that someone/something normally works. *The manager has changed the time of our lunch hour and it has thrown the whole office out of gear, i.e. things are not going the way they should.*

throw the book at (informal) bring serious charges against. *If the police find out what you have done, they will throw the book at you.*

throw/give someone to the dogs/lions/wolves abandon someone to an unpleasant fate. *He will make use of you and then, when you are no longer of use to him, he will throw you to the wolves.*

throw up one's hands/arms (in horror, despair, etc.) show that one is shocked, disappointed, terrified, etc. *When they realised the dangerous situation they were in, some of them threw up their hands in despair.*

throw one's weight about/around use whatever power or influence one has in an overbearing manner. *I don't like the way that the boss's son comes into the office and throws his weight around.*

THUMB. **thumb a ride** get a ride in a car by standing at the side of the road and pointing with one's thumb in the direction in which one is going. *It didn't cost me anything to reach here: I thumbed a ride.*

thumb one's nose at 1. place one's thumb on one's nose, with the fingers stretched out as a sign of disrespect. *The boy was punished for thumbing his nose at a teacher.* 2. show that one has no respect for. *By*

behaving in this disgraceful manner, he is thumbing his nose at the university authorities.

TICKLE. **tickle/catch/take someone's fancy** (informal) attract, appeal to someone. *You can do anything that tickles your fancy.*

TICKLED. **tickled pink/to death** (informal) very pleased; very amused. *She was tickled pink that you invited her to your party.*

TIE. **tie one's hands** [See HAVE ONE'S HANDS TIED.]

tie (someone up) in/into knots confuse someone; involve someone in a confused situation. *So many things have gone wrong with the arrangements that we have been tied in knots trying to sort it all out.*

tie up loose ends [See LOOSE ENDS.]

TIED. **tied to one's mother's apron strings** completely under one's mother's influence. *She will never leave home: she is too tied to her mother's apron strings.*

TIGHTEN. **tighten/pull in one's belt** do without certain things. *My salary is going to be cut as from next month, so I shall just have to tighten my belt.*

TILL. **till/until the cows come home** (informal) for a very long time. *He is a marvellous singer: I could listen to him till the cows come home.*

TILT. **tilt/tip/turn the scales** give an advantage, one way or the other. *One of the visiting team's best players was injured, and this tilted the scales in favour of the home team.* Also **tilt/tip the balance** (same meaning).

TIME. **time and (time) again** [See AGAIN AND AGAIN.]

time and a half payment at the normal rate plus 50%. *The normal rate is £4 per hour, but if the men work on Saturday then they are paid time and a half, i.e. £6 per hour.*

time, gentlemen, please (expression used by barmen to show that the bar will soon be closed). *The barman looked at his watch and then called out, "Time, gentlemen, please!"*

time is ripe it is the right time. *The politician told his audience that the time was ripe for a change of government.*

time of day [See PASS THE TIME OF DAY.]

time of life age (especially old age). *I cannot take too much exercise at my time of life: I'm over seventy, you know.*

time of one's life very happy, enjoyable time. *Your son seems to enjoy staying with us: he's been having the time of his life.*

(have) time on one's hands (have) time to spare. *Young people sometimes get into trouble when they have time on their hands, and there is nothing for them to do.*

time(s) without number very many times. *I've seen him dashing to catch that train time without number.*

TIP. **tip of one's tongue** [See ON THE TIP OF ONE'S TONGUE.]

tip the scales/balance [See TILT THE SCALES/BALANCE.]

tip someone the wink (informal) secretly give someone a warning,

a signal, or any kind of useful information. *A friend of his tipped him the wink that the police were searching for him, so he went into hiding.*

TIT. tit for tat (informal) exchange one harm, injury or insult in return for another. *He dumped some rubbish in my garden, so I dumped some of my rubbish in his: I gave him tit for tat.*

TO. to a degree 1. to a large extent. *He was emotional to a degree, often losing his temper.* 2. to a certain, limited extent. *I sympathise with him to a degree, but he is also himself responsible for many of the problems he faces.*

to advantage at its best. *The garden is seen to advantage in summer when all the flowers are in bloom.*

to a fault having some good quality to too great an extent. *He is hard-working to a fault: I think it would be better if he were more relaxed.*

to a frazzle [See DONE/BURNT TO A FRAZZLE; WORN TO A FRAZZLE.]

to/from/by all appearances as far as one can see from the outside. *To all appearances, he is as healthy as ever, but I still think that a doctor should examine him.*

to all intents and purposes from a practical, realistic point of view; almost. *The house is ours to all intents and purposes, although we still have a few legal documents to sign.*

to a man/to the last man without exception. *To a man, the crew said that they would follow their captain.*

to and fro from one place to another and back again. *Messengers were continually travelling to and fro between the United Nations and the member governments.*

to a nicety exactly. *He had calculated to a nicety how much material he would need to finish the job.*

to a shadow [See WORN TO A FRAZZLE/SHADOW.]

to a T exactly; perfectly. *My new job suits me to a T: it's just what I wanted.*

to a turn (usually with reference to food) perfectly. *The food was cooked to a turn.*

-to-be that is going to be in the near future. *He brought his bride-to-be along to meet the family, i.e. the woman who was going to be his bride.*

to be sure (informal) of course. *He is not, to be sure, as young as he used to be.*

to boot as well; in addition. *He was rich, clever and handsome to boot.* (time/years, etc.) **to come** (time/years, etc.) in the future. *In years to come, people will wonder why we did not take better care of the wild life now living on our planet.*

to date until now. *Here is a record of all the money I have spent to date.*

to one's face in one's presence; in front of one. *I told him to his face what I thought of him.*

to one's feet to a standing position. *His speech brought the audience to its feet, shouting and cheering.*

- to one's heart's content** as much as one likes. *He has been very happy since he retired because he can play golf to his heart's content.*
- to heel** (with reference to a dog) to a position close to its owner, at its owner's foot. *When he called his dog, it came to heel.* Also **bring to heel** bring someone under control. *His supporters may be behaving wildly at the moment, but he can always bring them to heel when he wants to.*
- to little purpose** useless. *All the doctor's efforts were to little purpose: the child died.*
- to my mind** in my opinion. *To my mind, this is the most important thing we have discussed so far.*
- to no avail/purpose** useless; without success. *I tried to save him from drowning, but my efforts were to no avail.* Also **of no avail/of little avail** useless/almost useless. *The doctor's efforts to save her were of little avail.*
- to order.** 1. just as one orders, requires. *The food is cooked to order.* 2. (especially in **bring/call a meeting to order**) ask a group of people to be quiet, to pay attention. *The chairman called the meeting to order.*
- to put it mildly** to say something in a way that is understating the truth. *To put it mildly, he is fond of his drink, i.e. he really drinks a lot.*
- to scale** according to a fixed measurement. *Everything on the map has been drawn to scale: this road, which is 3 inches long on the map, is actually 3 miles long, and this lake, which is 5 inches long on the map, is actually 5 miles long, and so on.*
- to some purpose** with some results. *The years he has spent on research have been to some purpose: he has made many important discoveries.*
- to speak of** (usually with negative) worth mentioning. *They say that there aren't any nice views to speak of in this area.*
- to that effect** with that general meaning. *He said that he was a captain in the army, or something to that effect, i.e. he mentioned some kind of military rank.*
- to the best of one's belief/knowledge** as far as one knows. *I last saw him in London and, to the best of my belief, he is still living there.*
- to the bitter end** to the very end. *They fought against the invaders to the bitter end, i.e. until the invaders had killed them.*
- to the brim** full. *He filled our glasses to the brim, i.e. they could not contain any more.*
- to the contrary** contradicting (what has been stated). *You can assume that I shall be in the United States, unless you hear from me to the contrary.*
- to the core** completely; totally. *He loves his country more than anything: he is a nationalist to the core.* Also **rotten to the core** completely bad, evil. *Jack is campaigning against corruption in the government: he says the whole system is rotten to the core.*
- to the effect** having the general sense; roughly. *I can't remember what he said exactly, but it was to the effect that he would be back soon.*
- to the eye** to look at. *The display of flowers was very pleasing to the eye.*

to the fore in the front; easily seen, noticed. *He is doing well in the competition: he is well to the fore, i.e. among the leaders.*

to the full completely. *He was ill a short while ago, but now he is well again, enjoying life to the full.*

(all) to the good 1. a (very) good thing. *If she is taking some exercise, that is (all) to the good: she needs to lose some weight.* 2. in profit. *I backed a few horses, and at the end of the day I was £20 to the good, i.e. I had won £20.*

(up) to the hilt completely. *She confirmed his story up to the hilt, i.e. according to her, everything he said was true.*

to the last man [See TO A MAN.]

to the letter exactly and completely. *I followed all your instructions to the letter.*

to the nth degree as much as possible. *The rule that everyone coming into the building must be searched has to be followed to the nth degree, i.e. no exceptions.*

to the tune of to the amount, value of. *The accountant stole money from his company to the tune of one million pounds.*

(go/drive/push) to the wall [See GO TO THE WALL.]

TOE. toe the line/mark follow the instructions or rules as laid down; behave as one is expected to. *The club rules are there to be obeyed: anyone who does not toe the line will be expelled.*

TOM. Tom, Dick and Harry (informal) everyone, no matter how unsuitable; anyone at all. *When my husband is drunk, he brings any old Tom, Dick and Harry back to our house with him.*

TONGUE. tongue in cheek/with (one's) tongue in (one's) cheek not meant to be taken seriously. *Bill suggested that we should all go for a midnight swim: but I think it was said tongue in cheek, i.e. he did not mean the suggestion to be taken seriously.* Also **tongue-in-cheek** not meant to be taken seriously: *a tongue-in-cheek suggestion.* **(civil) tongue in one's head** [See KEEP A CIVIL TONGUE IN ONE'S HEAD.]

TONGUES. tongues wag [See SET TONGUES WAGGING.]

TOO. too bad bad luck; a pity. *It's too bad you won't be able to come with us, i.e. I'm sorry. "Jim isn't here yet." – "Too bad, we'll have to leave without him," i.e. there's nothing we can do, we can't wait.*

too big for one's boots (informal) having too high an opinion of oneself. *I'm tired of being ordered about by Jack: he's getting too big for his boots.*

too many cooks (spoil the broth) if too many people are involved in doing something, then it will probably be done badly. *The party never took place because there were six people organising it, and they all had different ideas on how it should be done: it was a case of too many cooks spoiling the broth.*

TOOTH. tooth and nail [See FIGHT SOMEONE/SOMETHING TOOTH AND NAIL.]

(a) tooth for a tooth [See EYE FOR AN EYE AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.]

TOP. top dog most important person; winner; best person. *They are holding the elections for the chairman's post now: it will be interesting to see who comes out top dog.*

top of the ladder/tree highest post; most respected position (in a profession, etc.). *He is very ambitious and very hard-working: I expect he'll reach the top of the ladder some day.*

TOUCH. touch and go very doubtful; very uncertain. *The doctors don't know whether he will live or not: it's touch and go.* Also **touch-and-go** very uncertain: *a touch-and-go situation.*

(not) touch someone/something with a barge/ten-foot pole (usually with negative) (not) have anything to do with someone/something. *That house you are buying is supposed to be very unlucky; I wouldn't touch it with a barge pole.*

touch wood (US: **knock on wood**. When these expressions are used, the speaker often actually touches or hits wood, an action which is supposed to bring luck) if I am lucky; may my luck continue. *We should be in New York this time tomorrow, touch wood. My car has been running well this year – touch wood!*

TOUGH. tough as nails [See **HARD AS NAILS**.]

tough/hard nut to crack difficult to solve; difficult to beat, overcome. *The police have been trying to solve the case for weeks now, but it seems to be a tough nut to crack.*

TOWER. tower of strength someone who gives help, comfort, etc. *My wife was a tower of strength to me during my recent long illness.*

TRAIL. trail one's coat try to start an argument. *Don't pay any attention to his remarks: he's simply trailing his coat.*

TRAVEL. travel light travel with very little luggage. *I always travel light on short trips.*

TREAD. tread on air [See **WALK ON AIR**.]

tread/step on someone's toes (informal) annoy someone. *He is very proud of the modern paintings in his house, so don't tread on his toes by making funny remarks about them.*

tread water stay afloat in water by moving the legs up and down, but not swimming. *Don't swim away just yet: just tread water until I am ready to come in.*

TREAT. treat with kid gloves [See **HANDLE WITH KID GLOVES**.]

TRIAL. trial and error trying something out, making mistakes and learning from them. *We didn't have any theories about the best way to make the engine work: we developed it simply by trial and error.*

TRICK. trick of the trade something which one learns to do as part of one's job. *On my first day as a salesman, I learnt some of the tricks of the trade that the other salesmen used in order to get people to buy.*

TROUBLE. trouble brewing trouble likely to happen. *Judging by the angry looks on people's faces, I would say that there is trouble brewing.*

trouble in store [See IN STORE.]

TROUBLED. [See FISH IN MUDDY/TROUBLED WATERS; POUR OIL ON TROUBLED WATERS.]

TRUE. true colours [See SHOW/REVEAL ONE'S (TRUE) COLOURS.]
(run) true to form (behave) in the usual, expected way. *He ran true to form, turning up ten minutes late, i.e. he is usually late.*

TRUMP. [See PLAY ONE'S TRUMP/BEST CARD.]

TRY. try conclusions (with) enter into a struggle, contest (with someone) to decide who is the stronger, more powerful. *If the President tries conclusions with the Army, he may find that the Army has more power in the country.*

try one's hand (at) try to do something to see if one likes it or is good at it. *I've never played golf before but I'd like to try my hand at it.*

TURN. turn a blind eye to ignore; pretend one doesn't know about. *Near the exam time, some students miss my lectures and go to the library to study, but I just turn a blind eye to that.*

(turn and) turn about taking it in turns, one after the other. *When we go birdwatching, we have only one pair of binoculars for watching the birds, so we take it turn and turn about to use them.*

turn a deaf ear to refuse to listen to. *Several of the customers were angry, but he simply turned a deaf ear to their complaints.*

(not) turn a hair (usually with negative) not show any emotion (such as fear, annoyance, etc.), especially when one might be expected to. *When she walked into her house and saw a man standing there with a gun, she didn't turn a hair: "Can I help you?" she said. Also without turning a hair* without showing any emotion. *He is completely fearless: he entered the burning building without turning a hair.*

turn one's back on refuse to have anything more to do with; have no more contact with. *Since he has become wealthy, he has turned his back on all his old friends.*

turn back the clock [See PUT BACK THE CLOCK.]

turn/put/set one's hand to try to do; attempt. *He is successful at everything he turns his hand to.*

turn one's head cause one to become too proud. *The praise that he received turned the young actor's head, so that he would not listen to advice any more.*

turn (over) in one's grave (always with reference to a dead person) be angry at, ashamed of something (as if he were still alive). *If Mozart could hear how this orchestra is playing his music, he would be turning over in his grave, i.e. they are playing his music so badly that Mozart would be very angry if he were able to hear it.*

turn something inside out search very thoroughly. *I've turned the whole place inside out looking for my missing watch.*

turn (somewhere) into a bear-garden (informal) make (a place) dirty and untidy. *Within ten minutes the children had turned my beautiful living-room into a bear-garden.*

turn loose [See LET LOOSE.]

turn of events unexpected change in what happens. *This remarkable turn of events amazed everyone.*

turn of phrase way of expressing one's meaning. *He is very entertaining to listen to: he has a very nice turn of phrase.*

turn of the century end of one century and the beginning of another, especially the beginning of the twentieth century (i.e. around 1900). *This was the kind of house people lived in at the turn of the century.*

turn of the tide 1. time when the flow of the tide changes, either coming in or going out. *We are coming up to the turn of the tide: it is full now, and it will soon be going out.* 2. time when things change, either steadily improving or steadily getting worse. *As far as the war was concerned, that year marked the turn of the tide in our favour: from then on we started to win great victories.*

turn on/upon one's heel(s) turn away (usually showing anger, annoyance, etc.). *He turned on his heel and went out, angrily slamming the door behind him.*

turn over a new leaf change one's behaviour for the better. *He used to get up to all sorts of mischief, but now he seems to have turned over a new leaf.*

turn one's stomach make one feel ill. *The conditions inside the prison were so horrible that they turned my stomach.*

turn tail (and run) (informal) turn round (to run away). *As soon as they saw the police, they turned tail and ran.*

turn the other cheek be prepared to be insulted or harmed again, when one has already suffered in this way. *When he treats her badly, she simply turns the other cheek, i.e. she does not defend herself, or look for revenge.*

turn the scales [See TILT THE SCALES.]

turn the tables (on) bring about a sudden change so that, instead of losing, one is now winning. *We turned the tables on them by picking up and throwing back the stones that they had thrown at us.*

turn the tide change things so that they steadily improve, or steadily get worse. *We were losing the battle, but the arrival of some extra reinforcements turned the tide in our favour.*

turn/put something to (good) account make good use of something. *He had some terrible experiences during his childhood, but he turned them to good account in writing his novels.*

turn turtle turn upside down. *The waves were so big that our boat turned turtle and we all fell out.*

turn up like a bad penny (informal) appear when one is not wanted. *We have tried to discourage him from coming to our meetings, but he keeps turning up like a bad penny.*

turn up one's nose at refuse something; show that something is not good enough for one. *No matter how carefully I prepare the food, he just turns up his nose at it.*

turn up trumps be more successful than expected; do something surprisingly well. *Many people laughed at his invention, but he turned up trumps in the end: it is now being made by a large company.*

TWIDDLE. twiddle one's thumbs. 1. clasp one's hands together and move the thumbs round each other. *"Stop twiddling your thumbs, and start writing," the teacher said.* 2. waste one's time; have nothing to do. *The plane will not be taking off for another four hours, so, in the meantime, we have to sit here twiddling our thumbs.*

TWINKLING. (in the) twinkling of an eye (in a) very short time; very quickly. *He had the meal prepared in the twinkling of an eye.*

TWIST. twist one's arm 1. pull someone's arm round his back to cause pain. *He was twisting this small boy's arm.* 2. try to get someone to do something against his will; try to persuade someone to do something. *I don't want to go on the committee but some friends have been twisting my arm.*

TWO. (put) two and two together [See PUT TWO AND TWO TOGETHER.]
(kill) two birds with one stone [See KILL TWO BIRDS WITH ONE STONE.]
two bites at/of the cherry two chances to do something. *Because he is so young he will be allowed to sit the scholarship exam again next year, if he fails it this year: so he will have two bites at the cherry.* Also **second bite at the cherry** (same meaning).

two can play at that game [See GAME THAT TWO CAN PLAY AT.]

two heads are better than one two people can solve problems more easily than one. *I hope that you will be able to help me with planning the party: two heads are better than one.*

two shakes of a lamb's tail [See IN TWO SHAKES (OF A LAMB'S TAIL).]

two strikes against one [See HAVE TWO STRIKES AGAINST ONE.]

two strings to one's bow two things which one can take advantage of, e.g. two things one can do, two interests, two opportunities, etc. *He has two strings to his bow: in addition to being a very good football player, he also has a successful hotel business.* Also **another/a second string to one's bow** something else one can do or use. *He is not worried about his first plan failing: he has another string to his bow.*

two-time cheat, deceive (especially with another man or woman). *It seems he beat her up because she was two-timing him, i.e. also going out with someone else.*

U

UGLY. ugly duckling person who is not attractive or not clever when young, but becomes attractive or intelligent later. *Some famous film stars were ugly ducklings when they were young.*

UNDER. under a cloud suspected of having done something wrong. *He left the company he worked for under a cloud, but no-one could prove anything.*

under age less than the permitted age. *The government is trying to stop under age drinking, i.e. drinking by those who are below the permitted age.*

under one's belt as part of one's experience. *That young writer has already got three successful plays under his belt.*

under one's breath [See BELOW/BENEATH/UNDER ONE'S BREATH.]

under cover hidden or disguised, so as not to be seen or recognised. *Some policemen are here, under cover, i.e. they cannot be seen.* Also **under cover of** under the protection of. *The spy was landed in enemy territory under cover of darkness.*

under duress because one has been forced to. *The information had been got from him under duress, i.e. he was forced to give it.*

under fire being shot at. *We have been under fire for twenty minutes.*

(keep) under one's hat [See KEEP SOMETHING UNDER ONE'S HAT.]

(right) under one's (very) nose (informal) very close to one; in a place where one should be able to see/notice something. *I've been looking everywhere for this pen and here it is, right under my nose.*

under one's own steam by one's own efforts. *I didn't get help from anyone in building up my business: I did it all under my own steam.*

under the circumstances because of the way things are; in this situation. *It's raining and very few people have turned up so, under the circumstances, I think that the best thing is to cancel the concert.*

under the counter not legally or officially. *These goods are not really for sale, but quite a few are being sold under the counter.*

under the hammer sold to the highest bidder. *The contents of the house will soon be under the hammer.*

under the sun on earth; at all. *Nowhere under the sun have I seen such a beautiful painting!*

under the weather not completely well; ill. *I'm feeling a bit under the weather these days, but it's nothing serious.*

under someone's thumb in someone's power; under someone's control. *Her husband won't do anything without asking her permission: she has him right under her thumb.*

under way started; in the course of being done. *The project is under way but it will take five years to finish it.*

under one's wing under one's protection. *Jack has taken the new student under his wing and is helping him.*

(keep) under wraps (keep) concealed; (keep) hidden. *They have designed a new kind of car, but they are keeping it under wraps until the car exhibition opens.*

UNKNOWN. unknown quantity person or thing that nothing is known about. *Their new player is an unknown quantity: he has never played here before.*

UNTIL. until the cows come home [See TILL THE COWS COME HOME.]

UP. up against it (informal) in a very difficult situation. *She has to look after three children on her own, and she's lost her job: she's really up against it.*

(right) up one's alley/street [See under DOWN ONE'S ALLEY/STREET.]

up and doing (informal) up and moving about. *I can't lie around here all day: I must be up and doing.*

up a (gum) tree (informal) in a very difficult situation which is

almost impossible to escape from. *I'm up a gum tree financially: I owe £500 and I have no money left at all.*

up front 1. (especially with reference to sport) in the forward position. *He plays mostly up front.* 2. (US informal) sincere, not hiding anything. *I was completely up front about my past life.*

up in arms 1. showing one's anger; making a lot of noise and fuss. *The members of the audience were up in arms when told that the performance had been cancelled.* 2. armed and ready to fight. *Some areas in the north of the country are already up in arms.* [See also TAKE UP ARMS.]

up in the air 1. undecided; uncertain. *Our holiday plans are up in the air for the time being: nothing has been decided.* 2. excited; emotional. *He's been up in the air since he heard about his promotion.*

up one's sleeve concealed, ready to be produced. *Don't go yet, I think that our host has an important announcement up his sleeve.* Also **(have/keep an) ace/card up one's sleeve** (have) something which one keeps hidden until it is useful to one to reveal it. *Even if he loses the election the President has another card up his sleeve: the army is ready to seize control to keep him in power.*

(right) up one's street [See under DOWN ONE'S ALLEY/STREET.]

up the creek (without a paddle) (informal) in a dangerous or hopeless situation. *Unless we get money to pay our debts, we're going to be right up the creek.*

up the garden path [See LEAD SOMEONE UP THE GARDEN PATH.]

up the pole (informal) 1. mad; stupid. *I don't know why he's doing such foolish things: he must be up the pole.* 2. mistaken. *I think his solution to that problem is up the pole.*

up the spout (informal) finished, ruined. *My job's up the spout: the factory I work in is closing down.*

up to all the dodges (informal) shrewd; knowing all the ways of cheating. *He makes a lot of money in addition to his pay: he is up to all the dodges.*

up to it able to do something. *It's a large garden for an old man to look after: do you think that your father is up to it?*

up to par/scratch/the mark good enough; up to the usual standard. *I advise you not to use these old tools: they're not quite up to scratch.* [See also BELOW PAR; ON A PAR WITH.]

up to the/one's ears/eyes in (informal: often with reference to work or debt) having a lot of. *Don't lend him any money: he's up to his ears in debt, as it is, i.e. he is heavily in debt.* *We've been up to our eyes in work this week, i.e. very busy.*

up to the hilt [See TO THE HILT.]

(dressed) up to the nines (dressed) very smartly; in one's best clothes. *He must be going somewhere important: he's all dressed up to the nines.*

up to something doing or about to do something which one does not want others to know about. *That man over there is behaving very suspiciously: I bet he's up to something. I wonder what he's up to?*

up with the lark [See under RISE WITH THE LARK.]

UPPER. **upper crust** (informal) people in the highest level of society. *It was a very big society wedding; all the upper crust were there.*
upper hand [See WHIP HAND.]

UPS. **ups and downs** periods of good and bad luck, periods of happiness and unhappiness. *You have to learn to accept the ups and downs of life.*

UPSET. **upset the applecart/upset someone's applecart** ruin something that has been organised in a certain way; spoil someone's plans or organisation. *Please do what you are told: don't upset the applecart.*

USE. **use one's head/loaf** use one's intelligence; think intelligently. *Don't just go in and start shouting at him: use your head and prepare what you're going to say.*
use Shanks' pony [See SHANKS' PONY.]

USED. **used to** 1. accustomed to. *We found the noise from the airport a nuisance at first, but we are used to it now.* 2. was/were in the habit of. *They used to come here, but they don't any longer.*

V

VANISH. **vanish into thin air** [See DISAPPEAR INTO THIN AIR.]

VEIL. [See DRAW/CAST/THROW A VEIL OVER.]

VERY. [See THE (VERY) IDEA; THE (VERY) THING.]

VEXED. **vexed question** problem that is difficult to solve. *The problem of who is to look after my pets while I'm on holiday is always a vexed question.*

VICIOUS. **vicious circle** situation in which one bad or unpleasant thing causes another, and this in turn causes the original bad or unpleasant thing to come back, and so on. *People do not have enough money to buy things, and so we have unemployment: unemployment means that there is no money to buy things: it's a vicious circle.*

VIEW. (with a) **view to** (with the) intention of. *We bought this big house with a view to turning it into a hotel.*

view someone/something with a jaundiced eye think of or look at someone/something with no enthusiasm; have a low opinion of someone or something. *This is the fifth time I have put my car in to have a simple fault repaired: you can see why I view garages with a jaundiced eye.*

VIRTUE. [See MAKE A VIRTUE OF NECESSITY.]

VISIT. **visit one's crime, sins (etc.) on someone** force someone else to pay for one's own sins, crimes, etc. *The father's crimes were visited on his children, i.e. they paid the penalty for his crimes.*

VOICE. **voice in the matter** opportunity to state one's view on a particular matter. *I don't think you should make any decision on the future of the village without asking the villagers themselves: they should have a voice in the matter.*

W

WAGE. **wage war** fight a war. *It is many years now since war was waged in Europe.*

WAIT. **wait at table** serve food at a table in the proper way. *This week the hotel manager is giving the staff some training on how to wait at table.*

wait on someone hand and foot do everything one can for someone in the way of service. *Ever since her husband became ill, she has waited on him hand and foot.*

WAKE. [See FIT TO WAKE THE DEAD.]

WALK. **walk all over someone** treat someone very badly. *I don't know why her husband doesn't leave her: she just walks all over him.*
walk of life level of society. *The former President was liked by people from all walks of life.*

walk/tread on air be extremely happy. *He was walking on air after Sally said she would marry him.*

walk the floor walk backwards and forwards across the floor. *Something was wrong with the baby last night: we walked the floor with him all night, i.e. we carried him up and down the room as we walked, trying to get him to sleep.*

walk the plank walk to the end of a plank (long narrow piece of wood) that is pointing out from the side of a ship, until one falls into the water and drowns (a punishment said to have been used by pirates long ago). *The evil captain made all his prisoners walk the plank.*

WALKING. **walking papers** notice that one is dismissed. *When he came in late again last week, the manager gave him his walking papers, i.e. dismissed, sacked him.*

WANT. **want to/a bet?** (informal) I don't agree with you, and I would be prepared to bet on it. *"I think that the weather will be fine tomorrow." - "Want a bet?"*

WAR. **war of nerves** situation in which one person, organisation or country tries to get advantage over another psychologically by making threats of various kinds, but not taking direct action. *As the two fleets sailed towards each other, each side waited for the other to give in first: it was a war of nerves.*

WARM. **warm the cockles of one's heart** cause one to feel happy and contented. *The sight of my daughter playing with her children, my grandchildren, really warmed the cockles of my heart.*

WASH. wash-and-wear (with reference to clothes) able to be washed in the normal way and then worn, i.e. without having to be sent to a special cleaners. *I always buy wash-and-wear clothes for convenience.*
wash one's dirty linen in public discuss in public things which should normally be kept private. *In telling the story of his life, he mentioned a lot of things which should have been kept private: one shouldn't wash one's dirty linen in public.*

wash one's hands of say that one is not responsible for. *I think that this is a stupid and dangerous plan: I wash my hands of it.*

WASTE. waste one's breath talk uselessly, to no purpose. *Don't give him any more advice: you're wasting your breath, he won't listen.*

WATCH. watch it (informal) be careful. *Watch it when you are putting that light bulb in: the electricity may still be switched on.*

watch one's p's and q's [See MIND ONE'S P'S AND Q'S.]

WATCHED. watched kettle/pot never boils time seems to pass more slowly when one is anxiously awaiting the result of something. *The experiment lasted only twenty minutes although it seemed much longer to those waiting for the result: a watched kettle never boils.*

WATER. water off a duck's back something that has no effect, result. *He takes a lot of criticism from his colleagues, but it's all water off a duck's back – he pays absolutely no notice.*

(all) water under the bridge something in the past about which nothing can be done now. *There is no use saying that you should have studied harder at school: you left school years ago, and that's all water under the bridge now.* Also phrases such as **a lot of water has passed/flowed under the bridge (since then)** many things have happened. *I used to be a good athlete when I was a boy, but a lot of water has passed under the bridge since then.*

WAY. way of the world way in which most people behave, i.e. looking after their own interests. *When you're successful, you have lots of friends: if you fail you have none: that's the way of the world.*

(see/find out which) way the wind blows/is blowing (see/find out) what people are thinking, intending to do; (see/find out) what is going to happen. *"Have you heard that they may be replacing the chairman by someone else?" – "Ah, so that's the way the wind is blowing!"* Also **(see/find out) how the wind blows/is blowing** (same meaning).

(have a) way with [See HAVE A WAY WITH.]

WAYS. ways and means 1. methods (of doing something). *He is investigating all the means of getting the house built cheaply.* 2. (US) methods of obtaining money (especially for an organisation). *The United States House of Representatives has a Committee of Ways and Means.*

WEAK. weak in the head [See SOFT IN THE HEAD.]

WEAKEST. weakest go to the wall those who are weakest are

defeated, die out. *Where animals are allowed to live naturally it's always the case that the weakest go to the wall.* [See also GO TO THE WALL.]

WEAR. (fair) **wear and tear** [See FAIR WEAR AND TEAR.]

wear one's heart on one's sleeve show one's emotions very easily in public. *Jack doesn't say much but he feels his father's death very deeply: he never was one to wear his heart on his sleeve.*

wear out one's welcome visit too often or stay for too long a time as someone's guest. *I think we should leave before midnight: we don't want to wear out our welcome.*

wear the trousers (US pants) (usually with reference to a marriage) be in charge; be the master. *People say of that couple that she wears the trousers, i.e. the husband does as he is told by the wife.*

wear thin 1. become thinner. *This suit is wearing thin at the elbows.*
2. not be as good, effective as it used to be. *It was quite a funny joke when I first heard it, but now it's beginning to wear a bit thin.*

wear to a frazzle [See WORN TO A FRAZZLE/SHADOW.]

wear well not show the signs of age or much use. *This suit has worn very well: I've had it for three years now and it still looks like new. You're wearing well, i.e. you don't look any older.*

WEATHER. **weather breaks** weather changes, good weather giving way to bad, or bad to good. *It's been raining for three days: when is this weather going to break?*

weather eye open [See KEEP A WEATHER EYE OPEN.]

weather the storm(s) come through a difficult or dangerous experience successfully. *For a long time he was in political disgrace, but he weathered the storm successfully and now he runs an important ministry.*

WEE. **wee small hours** [See THE (WEE) SMALL HOURS.]

WEEP. [See CROCODILE TEARS.]

WEIGH. **weigh anchor** (with reference to a ship) take up the anchor in order to go to sea. *The ship will weigh anchor at dawn, and should be well down the river by noon.*

weigh up the pros and cons [See PROS AND CONS.]

weigh one's words think carefully about what one is going to say. *It was obviously an important question, because the Prime Minister seemed to weigh her words before she spoke.*

WEIGHT. **weight of the world on one's shoulders** very heavy responsibilities. *He seemed to be carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders, i.e. he looked depressed, very serious.*

WELCOME. (you're) **welcome** [See YOU'RE WELCOME.]

WELL. **well and good** that's fine. *If she comes here tonight, well and good: if she doesn't, I'll see her tomorrow.*

well away (informal) drunk. *By the time he came out of the pub, he was well away: he was staggering all over the place.*

well disposed to fond of; having a good opinion of. *I think you will get on well together: the reputation you have as a hard worker has made him well disposed to you.*

well-founded true. *The stories you have heard about him are probably well-founded.*

well-heeled (informal) rich. *He may be able to lend the money you need: he looks well-heeled.*

well I never! (informal expression of surprise) my goodness! *"Well I never! Have you ever seen anyone behave so strangely?"*

well-to-do rich. *She has plenty of money: she comes from a well-to-do family.*

well out of it/something wise or lucky not to be involved in something. *That company that you used to work for has gone bankrupt: you were well out of it, i.e. you were wise to leave it when you did.*

WET. wet behind the ears (informal) young; inexperienced. *I have been doing this job for ten years: I object to being given instructions by people who are still wet behind the ears.* [See also (NOT) DRY BEHIND THE EARS.]

wet blanket (informal) boring, dull person. *Don't invite Jack to the party: he's a bit of a wet blanket.*

wet one's whistle (informal) have a drink. *Let's go into this bar for a drink: I haven't wet my whistle today.*

WHAT. what about [See HOW ABOUT.]

what about it [See WHAT OF IT.]

what about that! [See HOW ABOUT THAT.]

what a carry-on! (informal exclamation of surprise, amusement, annoyance) what a fuss; how ridiculous. *"You should have seen them trying to get the car started - what a carry on!"*

what a nerve! (exclamation to show displeasure at someone's rudeness) how dare he/she/they! *He turned up two hours late for the dinner-party and demanded to be fed - what a nerve!*

what for why. *"I have to go back into town." - "What for?"*

(give someone) what for (give someone) a row/scolding. *You'd better clean yourself up: if your mother sees you in that state she'll give you what for, i.e. she will speak angrily to you. Also get what for be spoken to angrily. If his mother sees him in that state, he'll get what for.*

what have you/what not anything similar. *He collects stamps, coins and what have you, i.e. other things of the same kind.*

what in God's name/hell/the world [See WHAT ON EARTH.]

(get/have) what is/what's coming to one (get) the punishment one deserves. *I'm sorry that Jack was sent to prison: he simply got what was coming to him.*

what is sauce for the goose (is sauce for the gander) what is good enough for one person is good enough for another. *If you are staying at a first-class hotel then we should be too: what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.*

(not) what it is cracked up to be [See (NOT WHAT IT IS) CRACKED UP TO BE.]

what of/about it? (informal) what's wrong with that? *"The waiter served you first."* – *"What of it? We were here before you."*

what on earth/what in God's name/hell/the world (informal; used to express anger, surprise, etc.) *what.* *"What on earth are you doing here? – I thought you were in Paris."* Also similar expressions such as **how on earth/where on earth/who on earth/why on earth**, etc. [See also **WHAT THE HELL**.]

what's the damage? (informal) how much does it cost; what do I owe you? *"Thank you for doing a very good job. What's the damage?"*

what's the (big) idea? (informal) what do you think you are doing? *We have been standing here for hours, and now you join the queue in front of us: what's the big idea?*

what's the matter (with someone) (informal) what's wrong (with someone). *He looks pale: what's the matter with him?* Also **nothing/something the matter (with someone)** nothing/something wrong (with someone). *"You look worried, is there something the matter with you."* – *"There's nothing the matter/Nothing's the matter."*

what's the odds? (informal) what does it matter? what is the use of it? *"Jack may be too late to take part in the race."* – *"What's the odds? He's not going to win anyway."*

what's the score? [See under **KNOW THE SCORE**.]

what's up (with) (informal) what's wrong with. *"What's up with Jack? – He's looking very angry."*

(know) what's what 1. (know) how things are done; (know) the situation as it really is. *If you have any problems in your new job, ask Jim: he knows what's what.* 2. (know) how one thing is to be distinguished from another. *These things are all mixed up, and I don't know what's what.*

what the doctor ordered [See **JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED**.]

what the hell (informal). 1. (used to express anger, surprise, etc.) *what.* *I've never seen him before: what the hell is he doing in my house?* Also similar expressions such as **how/where/who/why the hell**. *"Where the hell have you been? I've been looking for you everywhere."* 2. *never mind; don't bother.* *"I'm tired of waiting, aren't you?"* – *"What the hell, let's go home."*

what with (one thing and another) because of (several different things). *I'm terribly busy today, what with one of my assistants being on holiday, another ill, and more customers than usual.*

WHEAT. **wheat from the chaff** [See under **SEPARATE THE SHEEP FROM THE GOATS**.]

WHEEL. **wheel and deal** make private arrangements, sometimes of a dishonest kind, so that one can get what one wants. *He knows a lot of important people so he can make money by wheeling and dealing.* Also **wheeler-dealer** someone who often or usually tries to get what he wants by such arrangements. *I don't really trust Jack: he's something of a wheeler-dealer.*

wheels within wheels many complications connected by hidden or

secret arrangements or relationships. *This matter is not as simple as it looks: there are wheels within wheels.*

WHEN. **when/after all's said and done** when everything has been considered. *His last play was terrible but, when all's said and done, he's still a very good writer.*

when someone's back is turned [See AS SOON AS SOMEONE'S BACK IS TURNED.]

when in Rome (do as the Romans do) when you are in a foreign country (or among strangers) you must behave as they do. *When I go abroad, I try to avoid international restaurants, and eat only local food: when in Rome I do as the Romans do.*

when one's ship comes in when one becomes rich, successful. *Some day, when my ship comes in, I am going to buy a big house with a large garden.*

when the chips are down when it is vital, important. *You can rely on him to help you when the chips are down.*

WHERE. **where on earth/where in God's name/hell/the world** [See under WHAT ON EARTH.]

where the hell [See under WHAT THE HELL.]

where there's a will there's a way if one really wants to do something one will find some way of doing it. *If Jack really wants to go to university he should be able to do it: where there's a will there's a way.*

WHET. **whet the appetite** 1. make one all the more ready to eat. *This dish is only to whet your appetite: the main dish comes later.* 2. make one anxious to have more of something. *The few books that he was able to afford simply whetted his appetite for more study.*

WHICH. **which is which** how one thing is to be distinguished from another. *One of these coats belongs to Jim and the other one is John's: but I don't know which is which, i.e. which one belongs to Jim, and which one to John.*

which way the wind blows/is blowing [See WAY THE WIND BLOWS/IS BLOWING.]

WHILE. **(a) while ago/back** time in the past. *He was in here just a short while ago, i.e. recently. The last time we met was a while ago: not recently anyway.*

WHIP. **(have the) whip/upper hand** (be in) control. *At one time he did not have much influence in the company, but now he has the whip hand.*

WHISTLE. **whistle a different/another tune** (informal) think, act or behave in a different way. *He is very happy now but when he learns that he has been sacked from his job, he will be whistling a different tune, i.e. he will no longer be happy.* Also **dance to a different/another tune** (same meaning). [See also CHANGE ONE'S TUNE.]

whistle in the dark try to remain brave, cheerful in a difficult or dangerous situation. *Jack says that his job is quite safe in spite of*

rising unemployment, but I think he is whistling in the dark, i.e. his job is not safe, and he knows it

WHITE. **white about/around the gills** [See under GREEN ABOUT/AROUND THE GILLS.]

(as) white as a sheet very pale, usually from fright or illness. *The girl who saw the accident was white as a sheet.*

white lie unimportant lie; lie told for a good reason, e.g. to be kind to someone. *My husband was so exhausted when he came home that I told our guests a white lie: I said he was ill and would have to go straight to bed.*

WHITED. **whited/painted sepulchre** someone who pretends to be good but is not. *He goes to church every week but cheats his customers when he can: he's just a whited sepulchre.*

WHO. **who on earth/who in God's name/hell/the world** [See WHAT ON EARTH.]

who's who 1. how to distinguish one person from another. *Can you tell me who's who in this photograph?, i.e. can you tell me who these people are?* 2. who the important people are. *This book tells you who's who in modern literature.*

who the hell [See under WHAT THE HELL.]

WHOLE. **whole bag of tricks** [See BAG OF TRICKS.]

(the) whole shooting-match (informal) everything, with no exceptions. *Everything was stolen: clothes, jewellery, furniture – the whole shooting-match.*

WHOO. **whoop it up** (informal) have a good time by drinking, singing, etc. *They work very hard all week and then, on Saturday evening, they go into town and whoop it up.*

WHY. **(the) why(s) and (the) wherefore(s)** (informal) reason(s). *If you say that you are going to break your agreement with him, he'll want to know the whys and wherefores.*

why on earth/why in God's name/hell/the world [See under WHAT ON EARTH.]

WIDE. **wide of the mark** 1. far from the centre of a target. *He shot at the target, but his shot went wide of the mark.* 2. wrong. *If you said that he was a criminal, you would not be far wide of the mark, i.e. you would not be completely wrong, because he is not a very honest man. I tried to guess the answer, but I was wide of the mark.*

WILD. **wild goose chase** search with no hope of success. *We went on a wild goose chase all over town looking for a particular book that he wanted to buy: of course, we didn't find it.*

wild horses couldn't/wouldn't (make one do something) (informal: used for emphasis) nothing at all could/would (make one do something). *I hated living in London: wild horses wouldn't get me back there again.*

WILDCAT. **wildcat strike** strike, stopping of work, which is not

officially approved by a trade union. *This industry suffers from wild-cat strikes, where the workers simply put their tools down and walk out.*

WILL. **will not** [See entries under WONT.]

(where there's a) will there's a way [See WHERE THERE'S A WILL THERE'S A WAY.]

WIN. **win hands down** [See HANDS DOWN.]

win/gain one's spurs show one's ability so that one becomes recognised, well-known. *Alexander won his spurs as a leader in battle when he was still only a young man.*

WIND. [See PUT THE WIND UP; IT IS AN ILL WIND (THAT BLOWS NOBODY GOOD); GET/HAVE THE WIND UP.]

WING. **wing one's way** fly. *We got into the plane and winged our way south.*

WINNING. **winning streak** situation where one keeps winning. *Our team have hit a winning streak; we've won the last eleven games in a row.*

WIPE. **wipe the floor with** (informal) easily defeat; beat. *Our team will easily beat you: we'll wipe the floor with you.*

WISE. **wise after the event** knowing something when it is too late. *When they saw that thieves had stolen their car-radio, they realised that they should have locked their car; it was a case of being wise after the event.*

wise guy (informal) someone who is funny at the expense of others, who makes fun of others. *While the singer was trying to get on with his act, some wise guy in the front row kept making funny remarks.*

WISHFUL. **wishful thinking** believing that things will happen in a certain way because one wants them to. *People who say that we shall soon be able to get our energy from the sun are just indulging in wishful thinking.*

WITH. **with a bad/good grace** [See WITH (A) BAD GRACE.]

(go) with a bang (take place) successfully. *The party went with a bang: everyone enjoyed it.*

with a fine-tooth(ed) comb [See GO OVER/THROUGH WITH A FINE-TOOTH(ED) COMB.]

with a finger in the pie [See under FINGER IN THE PIE.]

(view) with a jaundiced eye [See VIEW WITH A JAUNDICED EYE.]

with a vengeance remarkably; completely. *After an unsuccessful start, his performance improved with a vengeance, i.e. it was a remarkable improvement.*

with a view to [See (WITH A) VIEW TO.]

with a whole skin safely; unhurt. *It was a dangerous expedition, and I felt lucky to have returned with a whole skin.*

with (a) bad grace showing that one is angry or disappointed; impolitely. *The tennis-player took his defeat with a bad grace, even refusing to shake hands with his opponent.* Also **with (a) good grace**

without showing one's annoyance or disappointment; politely. *He took his defeat with good grace.*

with one's eyes open [See under OPEN ONE'S EYES (TO).]

with one's eyes shut easily; without effort. *It's very easy to operate that machine: I could do it with my eyes shut.* [See also WITH ONE'S EYES OPEN under OPEN ONE'S EYES TO.]

with flying colours brilliantly; in an excellent way. *They say that he passed the exam with flying colours.*

with one's heart in one's mouth [See HAVE ONE'S HEART IN ONE'S MOUTH.]

(catch someone) with his/her pants/trousers down [See CATCH SOMEONE WITH HIS/HER PANTS/TROUSERS DOWN.]

with it (informal) fashionable; modern; up to date. *She has such old-fashioned ideas: she's really not with it.*

with kid gloves [See HANDLE/TREAT WITH KID GLOVES.]

with one accord everyone together; without exception. *With one accord, the audience stood up and cheered.*

with one foot in the grave [See under ONE FOOT IN THE GRAVE.]

with one voice all saying the same thing, without exception. *With one voice, they demanded his resignation.*

with open arms 1. in a very friendly way. *They were most friendly: they welcomed us with open arms.* 2. eagerly. *Any suggestions will be welcomed with open arms.*

with reference/regard to in connection with. *I am writing with reference to your letter of the 25th May 1979. They made some comments with regard to your proposals.*

with relation to [See IN RELATION TO.]

with respect to in connection with. *I should like to make a point with respect to what you have just said.*

with one's tail between one's legs completely defeated; overcome with shame or fear. *They boasted at the beginning of the match, but after their defeat they left with their tails between their legs.* [See also WITH ONE'S TAIL UP.]

with one's tail up in a happy, eager frame of mind; expecting that one will win, be successful. *Since they were leading 3-0 at half-time, they came out in the second half with their tails up.* [See also WITH ONE'S TAIL BETWEEN ONE'S LEGS.]

with the best of them as well as the best people in that area, field. *Jack is a first-class golfer: he can play golf with the best of them.*

with (one's) tongue in (one's) cheek [See TONGUE IN CHEEK.]

with velvet gloves [See HANDLE WITH KID GLOVES.]

with one's wits about one [See KEEP ONE'S WITS ABOUT ONE.]

WITHIN. **within an ace of/an inch of** very close to. *Our horse was within an ace of winning the race, but he stumbled at the last fence.*

within an inch of one's life until one is almost dead. *The men who attacked him beat him within an inch of his life.*

within bounds within certain limits; within reason. *The teachers are free to use any teaching method they like, within bounds.*

within hailing distance close enough to hear one. *I looked around to see whether there was a taxi within hailing distance.*

within/in living memory as long ago as anyone now alive can remember. *The villagers say that no-one has climbed that mountain within living memory.*

within (easy) reach not far; (easily) able to be reached. *It is a small town within easy reach of London.*

within/in reason according to what is sensible, reasonable. *I'll do anything you want, within reason.*

within striking distance (of) fairly close (to); able to be reached (from). *Is your cottage within striking distance of any town?*

within the bounds of possibility possible. *It's just within the bounds of possibility that he may win the championship for a third time.*

WITHOUT. **without a bean** (informal) very poor; penniless. *After I had paid for my meal I was left without a bean.*

without fail certainly; surely. *Don't worry: I shall be there without fail.*

without/beyond/past question certainly. *He is without question the best football-player in Europe.*

without turning a hair [See TURN A HAIR.]

without so much as [See SO MUCH AS (A BY-YOUR-LEAVE).]

WITS. [See AT ONE'S WITS' END; KEEP ONE'S WITS ABOUT ONE.]

WOLF. **wolf from the door** [See KEEP THE WOLF FROM THE DOOR.]

wolf in sheep's clothing someone or something that looks harmless but is really dangerous. *Don't trust that man: he may seem friendly and harmless, but he's a wolf in sheep's clothing.*

WON'T. **won't hear of** will not allow. *You mustn't go to a hotel, I won't hear of it: you will stay with us.*

won't say boo to a goose [See SAY BOO TO A GOOSE.]

won't wash not be believable. *Your story about not being near the scene of the crime won't wash: we have several people who can identify you.*

WOOD. [See CAN'T SEE THE WOOD FOR THE TREES.]

WOOL. [See PULL THE WOOL OVER SOMEONE'S EYES.]

WORD. **word for word** exactly. *He copied the document word for word.*

word in edgeways [See GET A WORD IN EDGEWAYS/EDGEWISE.]

word of mouth [See BY WORD OF MOUTH.]

(have a) word with [See HAVE A WORD WITH.]

WORDS. **words of one syllable** very simple language. *The new assistant does not seem to be very intelligent: you have to explain things to him in words of one syllable.*

WORK. **work against time/the clock** try to get something finished

within a certain time. *We are working against time: this must be finished by midnight.*

worked off one's feet forced to work very hard. *This has been a terribly busy day for us: we have been worked off our feet.*

work one's fingers to the bone work very hard. *She worked her fingers to the bone so that her children could have a good education.*

work out one's own salvation achieve something by one's own efforts; solve a problem on one's own. *I'm sorry I can't help you: you'll have to work out your own salvation.*

work one's passage pay for one's journey on a ship by doing work on the ship. *He joined the ship at London and worked his passage to New York.*

work to rule do less work than usual either because the workers do no more than they have to, or because everything is done according to regulations which are usually ignored to save time. *The workers decided that they would not go on strike, but that they would work to rule instead.*

work/do wonders (for someone/something) cause a great improvement (on someone/something); be very effective (for someone/something). *If you suffer from headaches, you should try these pills: my sister used them and they worked wonders for her.*

WORLD. **world is one's oyster** one can work or live anywhere in the world or one can do anything (because one has some advantage). *If you are a doctor, you will be welcome to work anywhere: the world is your oyster. He was young, rich and well-educated: the world was his oyster, i.e. he could go anywhere, do anything.*

(in a) **world of one's own** [See IN A WORLD OF ONE'S OWN.]

(set the) **world on fire** [See SET THE THAMES ON FIRE.]

(weight of the) **world on one's shoulders** [See WEIGHT OF THE WORLD ON ONE'S SHOULDERS.]

WORM. (the) **worm turns** someone who has been accepting bad treatment decides to put up with it no longer. *Miss Smith, who had been bullied by her boss for many years, got up one day, put the wastepaper basket over his head and left for good: the worm had turned!*

WORN. **worn to a frazzle/shadow** (informal) extremely tired; exhausted. *We had been working all day and were worn to a frazzle.*
[See also DONE/BURNT TO A FRAZZLE.]

WORSE. (the) **worse for wear** [See THE WORSE FOR WEAR.]

WORST. [See IF THE WORST COMES TO THE WORST.]

WORTH. **worth one's salt** deserving what one is paid; good enough (to do one's job). *Any electrician worth his salt will fix that for you, i.e. any good, competent electrician.*

worth one's/its weight in gold very useful; very valuable. *This book is worth its weight in gold: it will help me to pass my exam.*

(make something) **worth someone's while** (make something)

rewarding for someone to spend time or effort on it. *It would be worth your while to climb up to the top of the hill: there's a beautiful view from there. If you help me with these heavy bags, I'll make it worth your while, i.e. I'll pay you.*

WOULDN'T. wouldn't say boo to a goose [See SAY BOO TO A GOOSE.]

WRAPPED. wrapped up in very much interested in. *There are various things he has been interested in: at the moment he is all wrapped up in stamp collecting.*

WRITE. (nothing to) write home about [See NOTHING TO WRITE HOME ABOUT.]

WRITING. (see the) writing on the wall (notice) warning signs that things will go badly if one continues with something. *He used to be a boxer, but when his health began to fail he saw the writing on the wall, and got a job selling sports goods.*

WRONG. [See GET HOLD OF THE WRONG END OF THE STICK; GET UP ON THE WRONG SIDE OF THE BED.]

Y

YAKITY. yakity-yak (informal) continual talking. *It's difficult to concentrate in this office because of the yakity-yak that goes on all the time.*

YEAR. year round going on all the year. *In this resort we have year-round tourist attractions.*

YELL. yell/scream blue murder (informal) cry out very loudly. *It's amazing that no-one heard me: I was yelling blue murder.*

YELLOW. yellow-bellied (informal) cowardly. *He was so yellow-bellied that he ran away even before the fighting started!*

YEOMAN. (do) yeoman service (give) very good service; (be) very useful, especially over a period of time. *This pen of mine has done yeoman service for me ever since I was at school.*

YES. yes-man someone who always agrees with a person in authority. *The President is surrounded by yes-men: no-one dares to criticise him.*

YOU. you bet (your boots/your life) (informal expression used to show that one agrees with some statement) you can bet (anything valuable) on it. *"Are you saying that he can run faster than anyone here?" - "You bet!"*

you can bet your bottom dollar [See I'LL/TD BET MY BOTTOM DOLLAR.]

you can say that again/you said it (informal expression of agreement) I agree with you. *"That girl talks too much." - "You can say that again!"*

you don't say 1. (informal expression of surprise). *"I've just won*

£500!" - "You don't say!" 2. (informally used to show that one is not surprised). *"They've discovered that Jack has been cheating his employer!" - "You don't say," i.e. I am not surprised to hear that: I thought he was dishonest.*

you're telling me (informal expression of agreement) I agree with you. *"It's about time we left." - "You're telling me: we've been here for hours."*

you're welcome (polite expression used when one is being thanked) don't mention it; not at all. *"Thanks for all your help." - "Oh, you're welcome."*

you said it [See YOU CAN SAY THAT AGAIN.]

YOURS. yours truly 1. (informal way of referring to oneself). *"Who do you think they chose for this dangerous mission? Yours truly," i.e. they chose me.* 2. (way of signing off a friendly letter). *The letter was signed: "Yours truly, Bill."*

Z

ZERO. zero hour exact time when something important (e.g. a military attack) has been planned to start. *The soldiers waited nervously for zero hour, which had been fixed for 9 a.m.*

Dictionary of English Idioms

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Priority is given to idioms in common use likely to cause difficulty to the foreign learner. There is therefore a preference for "opaque" idioms: these are expressions whose meanings cannot be established by adding together the meanings of the component parts. Examples are *bite the dust*, *bend over backwards*, *fly off the handle*, *face the music*, *toe the line*, *tongue in cheek*, *see red*, *see stars*, *throw in one's lot*, etc.

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