English Idioms
by Sally Jennings

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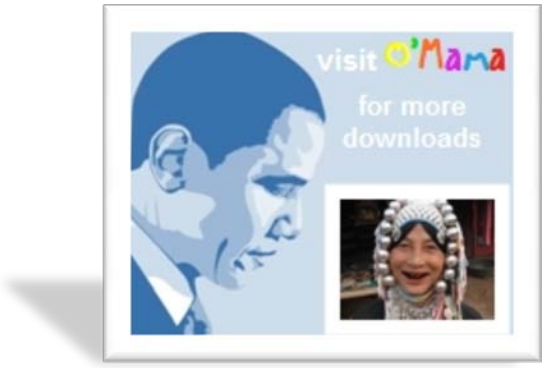

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Idioms, Slang, Phrasal Verbs, Colloquialisms, Clichés, and Proverbs, with Context Examples

Expressions are alphabetized according to the first word in the expression. Spelling is American.

Pronouns have been used instead of names in almost all cases to avoid obvious ethnicity in the examples. The English language has no room to maneuver around using either "he" or "she;" because of this, please consider that any use of "he" could just as well be "she," and vice versa.

The language in the context examples is not intentionally aimed at any job class or occupation. Many situations described had to be stated negatively since the particular idiom is used that way. Some idioms are used almost exclusively to refer to one occupation.

Warning to students: many of these expressions are far too informal for formal writing. If you are not familiar with an expression you see here, and need to know if you may use it in formal written work, ask your teacher. Decisions about the use of idioms in formal writing are often decided on a case-by-case basis, one at a time. I have not had time to make these decisions and mark acceptability partly because there would be 700 decisions to be made! Besides, how can I judge what you or your teacher will find acceptable in your situation?

However, there was one type of marking I could not resist doing. Parenthesized idioms (shown like this), are worn-out expressions. You might hear them or read them somewhere, but if you avoid using them, you just might make the world a better place.

Square brackets [ ] enclose an expression similar in meaning to the expression before the brackets.

Suggestions for student use:

Replace some of the non-idiom words with blanks, use the structure and the idiom as it stands, and form different sentences. This is a type of pattern practice.

How much can you guess about who might be speaking the idiom from the clues in the context? Can you make up a story about this situation?

Can you define the idioms from the context? Do you know an equivalent expression in another language?

Some of the context is in "direct speech" form, but without quotation marks, or speaker identification. Some of the context is in "reported speech" form. Can you identify which is which, and change the “reported speech” forms into “direct speech” and add quotations wherever they are necessary?

Do some research into the background of some of the more interesting idioms (using the Internet or a good dictionary).

Can you spice up the idioms by using names of people, trade names, brand names, and company names where possible?

Can you group some of these idioms into patterns within a metaphor structure (for example "finances" and "war," we "fight inflation.")

Compose a short story using several idioms together, perhaps part of a group using one word. For an examples of this, see my stories "The Night Out" (with optional mp3 audio) and "Up to Something" (with optional mp3 audio) on other pages of this web site.

This is a work in progress. After you have used it, I welcome your response at the email link above. I have a baccalaureate degree in Arts, with a major in English (language emphasis), and extra Linguistics courses from the University of British Columbia. English is my first language. Nevertheless, I still have a lot to learn about English, and I would appreciate your suggestions.

Listen while you read - mp3 audio clips, 10 idioms each clip

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

a background check /a backgrounder

We did a background check on him. He's clean. No prison record, outstanding warrants, that kind of stuff.

a ballpark figure

Just give me the ballpark figure for the project, I don't need it down to the exact cent.

a big deal /a really big deal

"So I blew my curfew, big deal," said the teenager.

a bitter pill

After their winning streak, and intensive training schedule, the team's defeat was a bitter pill to swallow.

a box office hit/a blockbuster

The movie was a great success, a box office hit, a blockbuster.

a breadbasket

The Prairies are the breadbasket of Canada, they grow many of Canada's food products.

a breadwinner

As the main wage earner, he is the breadwinner of the household.

a brief interlude

After a brief interlude, they resumed their work.

a brief respite

The shower offered a brief respite from the searing heat of August.

a calming influence

This teddy bear is a calming influence for my toddler.

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

a case of mistaken identity

They talked to me as though I were my twin sister. It was clearly a case of mistaken identity.

a change of habit

Unless you show a change of habit, you will fail.

a chief executive officer (CEO)

The CEO is the Chief Executive Officer, the head of the company.

a combined total

They added the subtotals of the two sections to arrive at the combined total.

a crime of passion

He killed his lover. It was a crime of passion.

a crucial component

Studying is a crucial component in academic success. A student cannot succeed without studying.

a day off /a week off /a month off / time off

She wanted a week off, but her boss only gave her three days off.

a dirty trick/dirty tricks

He played a dirty trick and deceived them.

a dog's breakfast

The book covered too many things too quickly, it was a real dog's breakfast, a mixed up mess.

a fact-finding mission

The diplomat went to the Middle East on a fact-finding mission.

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

a fait accompli

It is too late to change your mind, the order has been shipped. It is a fait accompli, an accomplished fact.

a fat cat

Some say that rich, privileged people are fat cats.

a feverish pace

They rushed to complete the highway before the deadline. They had been working at a feverish pace.

a fitting memorial

The sports scholarship fund was a fitting memorial to the famous athlete.

a flash in the pan

He had high grades in his first semester, but quit school partway through his second semester. He was just a flash in the pan.

a flat out lie /a flat out guess

She meant to deceive them, but they caught her, accusing her of a flat-out lie.

He didn't win the count-the-pennies contest through skill; he just made a flat-out guess.

a foregone conclusion

They predicted events would turn out like this. Everyone could see it coming. It was a foregone conclusion.

a gene pool

He is a habitual criminal. So you can't say he made a positive contribution to the gene pool.

a habitual liar

Why believe her? She's just a habitual liar. She lies as a habit, a lot of the time, about many things.

a half-baked idea

His plan won't work. He hasn't thought about it enough yet. All it is is some half-baked scheme he has.

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

a hell-hole

The hottest area of the combat zone was a real hell-hole.

a hidden agenda

The union is accusing the management of having a hidden agenda, something they aren't willing to admit.

a hit and run accident

The car struck the pedestrian and left. It was a hit and run accident.

a hope and a prayer

He is an incompetent pilot. He flies on a hope and a prayer.

a key witness

The success of the case rests on the testimony of the prosecution's key witness.

a level playing field

Business is unfair to newcomers, who naively expect a level playing field, where everyone is treated equally.

a major threat

Airport security considers passengers armed with weapons a major threat.

a make-up examination

Since you were away for the test, you will have to write a make-up examination.

a manila envelope

He carried the important papers in a plain brown manila envelope.

a marked improvement

He is out of bed after the operation, and has made a marked improvement.

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

a matter of time

They kept borrowing heavily, so it was just a matter of time before they ran out of credit.

a merciful solution

Some Europeans feel euthanasia is a merciful solution to shorten the suffering of terminally ill patients.

a mission of mercy

The aid workers flew in food and supplies to the war-torn country on a mission of mercy.

a near miss

The planes came within 20 meters of each other, so it was a near miss.

a new kid on the block

Since the boss has only been here one week, he doesn't know how things work. He's the new kid on the block.

a newcomer to the list

As one of the nouveau riche, she was a newcomer to the elite list.

a niche market

The successful company manufactured and sold scooters for seniors and captured a niche market.

a once in a lifetime opportunity

Their participation in the Olympics was a once in a lifetime opportunity for the team members.

a parking garage

The car was broken into when it was parked on level four of the parking garage.

a passion for living /life

Her obituary mentioned her great passion for life.

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

a person of interest

The police are looking for him in connection with the beating death. He is a person of interest.

a pick-me-up

A café latte is a great pick-me-up. It gives me so much energy when I am tired.

(a picture is worth a thousand words)

A picture is worth a thousand words.

a point-by-point breakdown

The sportscaster gave a point-by-point breakdown of the game.

a pretty picture

All this mud on the floor, clothes everywhere, empty chip bags and pop cans; such a pretty picture!

a priority list

The provincial government took the women's centre off the spending priority list.

a public eyesore

The rusted bench was ugly; it was a public eyesore.

a runaway success

The movie sold out. The packed house proved it was a runaway success.

a scare tactic /scare tactics

The older child bullied her younger sister. She used every scare tactic she could think of.

a scattergun approach

The company mismanaged the affair by using a scattergun approach. It was all hit and miss.

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

a skeleton in the closet

He's not telling you everything, bet he has a skeleton or two in the closet.

a slice of life

Teenage school woes, parental pressure, dating nightmares, how's that for a slice of life?

a slippery slope

Don't even start on that issue. Don't go there. It's a slippery slope.

a smash success /a smashing success

The program was well received, a smashing success.

a smattering of applause

The lukewarm speech received a smattering of applause.

a sore spot

She's very sensitive and touchy on that issue. It's a real sore spot.

a speedy recovery

We wish you a speedy recovery. Get well soon!

a splash of colour

The red maple tree was a splash of colour on the bare lawn.

a square peg in a round hole

He doesn't fit in this department. He's a square peg in a round hole.

a standing ovation

The outstanding performance rated a standing ovation from the audience. Everyone stood up and clapped.

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

a state of affairs

The roast was burning in the oven, the washer had gone off balance, and then the smoke alarm went off upstairs. What a pretty state of affairs!

a stitch in time saves nine

Better think and act ahead; a stitch in time saves nine.

a sucker punch

He came up from behind, grabbed his head, and landed a sucker punch, right to his face.

a sure thing

The deal's done, I promise. It's a sure thing.

a sweet deal /a really sweet deal

He gets plenty of perks with his job, it's a really sweet deal.

a symptom of a larger problem

The inadequate level of English at the university level is just a symptom of a larger problem.

a tight schedule

He had only thirty minutes between planes, it was a very tight schedule.

a tight spot

If you get in trouble with the teacher, don't expect me to get you out of a tight spot.

a time slot

Her school schedule was almost full. She had only one time slot left.

a toothy grin

The witch's mask stared back with a toothy grin.

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

a trade-off

I'll mend your pants if you will babysit. It will be a trade-off.

a train of thought

She was sitting quietly, but he interrupted her and broke her train of thought.

a vintage car

He had a pristine, restored, 1930's Packard, truly a beautiful vintage car.

a weather vane

The wind whistled over the barn roof, spinning the weather vane around and around.

a welcome change

The vacation was a welcome change from months of hard work.

a while ago /a short while ago

He left work a short while ago. He has been gone about fifteen minutes.

a world of difference

Your donation to our cause will make a world of difference in a child's life.

absent/absence without leave /AWOL

He is AWOL from the army.

all of a sudden

He had just gotten off his bike, when all of a sudden, he collapsed.

Am I right?

So you knew ahead of time, [all along,] [in advance,] but you won't admit it. Am I right?

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

an economic disaster

Their personal finances are nothing short of an economic disaster. They are flat broke all the time.

an eager beaver

I gave him the project to work on, and he started right away. He's a real eager beaver.

an errand of mercy

She took the pie to the sick man on an errand of mercy.

an instant success

Sales took right off and the company's products became an instant success.

an open and shut case

He was caught red-handed. There were plenty of credible witnesses. It was an open and shut case.

an opportunity for advancement

The job ad promised the successful applicant opportunity for advancement, a chance for a promotion.

an unbiased opinion

You say your girlfriend is very beautiful? Now isn't that an unbiased opinion!

an undisclosed source

The news report was based on information from an undisclosed source.

as far as something /someone is concerned

The father told his adult son, that as far as he was concerned, he could do anything he wanted. He trusted him.

at any (given) time

We are finished here, so you are free to go at any time.

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

(at the end of the day)

When all was said and done, at the end of the day, the company was a success.

at the last minute /a last minute change

He changed his mind at the last minute.

at this (moment in) time /at this (point in) time

At this time, the Manager is on a business trip overseas.

aware /unaware of the discrepancy

The bank staff seemed to be unaware of the discrepancy in our chequing account.

bear with me

This is long, so please be patient and bear with me.

best of show

The tiny dog in the pink collar won Best of Show.

better...or else

You better do what he says, or else!

better and better

She loved country life. It was better and better each passing year.

between a rock and a hard place

He shouldn't have lied. As a result of his lie, he was caught between a rock and a hard place.

big bucks

He's just dreaming if he thinks he is going to be making big bucks at that job. They don't pay much.

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

bread and butter

The wife spends lots of time doing volunteer work, but her husband's job is their bread and butter. His job pays their bills.

break and enter /B & E

All the doors were locked, so the police charged the burglar with Break and Enter.

breakneck speed

The two motorcyclists raced down the street at breakneck speed.

but then again

She could do that for you, but then again, why should she do it if she knows you don't like her?

can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear

Don't trust your confidences to a low class gossip. You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

can't see the forest for the trees

He is way too close to the situation. He can't see the forest for the trees.

carry out attacks

The army will carry out the attacks as planned.

cat got your tongue

Are you in shock or something? What's the matter, cat got your tongue? You haven't said anything.

catch-as-catch-can

She's a real free spirit. She has lived her life catch-as-catch-can.

cheek by jowl

They built the houses without side yards. They were packed in cheek by jowl on the property.

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

come on

Come on, hurry up, or we will be late.

command central

The whole war is run out of Command Central.

cost effective

It would be more cost effective to hire two hard workers than three lazy people.

couldn't care less

She went on and on about it. I didn't tell her that I couldn't care less.

crack troops

Some nations boast they have crack troops who are better than any others.

cutthroat competition

After University, he encountered more cutthroat competition in the job market. He was even unemployed for a few months.

damage control

The CEO sent his First Vice President to assess the situation and do damage control after the fiasco.

day in and day out

He worked hard day in and day out to solve the problem, but had little success.

details have been forthcoming / details have not been forthcoming

The government is silent on the issue. After last week's press release few details have been forthcoming.

difficult to find...a more

It would be difficult to find a more dedicated employee.

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

Do you get it? (also past, Did you get it?)

Did you understand what he said? Did you get it?

domestic violence

That family is known for its domestic violence. The oldest brother beats up the little kids all the time.

don't give it a second thought

It's okay if the vase broke. Don't give it a second thought. It is replaceable.

don't look a gift horse in the mouth

You should be grateful for anything given to you. Don't look a gift horse in the mouth.

down and out

The Great Depression ruined the fortunes of many people. They were quickly down and out.

dream on

You think he will hire all your friends? Dream on!

dressed to kill

She spent oodles of money on her prom dress. She was dressed to kill. Her father, when he found out the cost, was fit to be tied.

easy for you to say

Just because you learned to water-ski in two hours, you think I can too? That's easy for you to say!

end over end

The piano tumbled down the steps end over end, pulling one of the movers with it.

endless speculation

Further discussion will only produce endless speculation.

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

every nook and cranny

I looked high and low for that gold brooch, searching every nook and cranny of the house.

experts recommend

Experts recommend rest, ice and elevation for a sprained ankle.

far-fetched

She says she will be a millionaire by age forty, but everybody who knows her thinks that idea is far-fetched.

far-flung

The fur trade spread to the far-flung corners of the Empire [everywhere].

first in line

We camped out all night to be first in line to buy a condo at the new development.

fishy /sounds fishy /looks fishy /smells fishy /seems fishy

You think she is telling the truth? I don't. Every time I hear more of her story it sounds fishier and fishier to me.

fit to be tied

He is so upset about his daughter's mistake, he is fit to be tied.

fly by night

They won't be here long, They are just a fly by night operation.

fly off the handle

Don't get angry at her. Why are you so quick to fly off the handle?

folks on the street

The official story is that the project was a real money-loser, but the folks on the street know better.

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

for a song

He sold the property for so little, you could say that it went for a song.

for hours /days /months on end

I suppose now we will have to endure his whining for days on end?

for the birds

That doesn't make sense! That's for the birds!

fresh out of something

I'm sorry sir, the kitchen is fresh out of pie [we don't have any more].

full of potential

She is just wasting her life going out with him. She is so full of potential, why lose everything? Bad mistake!

fun to be with

I really like her. She is a good conversationalist, and so fun to be with.

Get lost!

They kept pestering him after he told them no, so he told them to get lost.

(glass half full /glass half empty)

An optimist sees the glass half full. A pessimist sees it half empty.

go to the dogs

With all the break and enters, and other crime, this neighborhood is really going to the dogs.

Good riddance!

He finally got kicked out of office by his own party? Good riddance!

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

Got a minute?

I have something to show you. Got a minute?

hard hit by

The area was hard hit, first by wildfires, then by flooding.

hard to come by

A vase like that, in mint condition, could prove hard to come by [very hard to find anywhere else].

hard to resist

The marketing pitch proved hard to resist. So he bought the CD player.

hash it out among themselves

If they have their differences, leave them to hash it out among themselves. They will work it out, eventually.

Haste makes waste.

Don't run with that milk and spill it! Haste makes waste.

high time for a change

The opposition party said it was high time for a change.

Hip, hip, hooray!

The celebrating crowd shouted "Hip, hip, hooray!"

hit or miss

It didn't seem well planned, it seemed hit or miss.

honourable mention

First, second, and third prizes went to others, but her work received honourable mention [fourth best].

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

I hear what you're saying

I'm kind of tired of this argument, but I hear what you are saying [I am listening to you and understanding you, but I am upset].

if push comes to shove

We'll handle that if, and when, we have to; if push comes to shove.

in a round-about way

He wasn't direct about anything, he always told a story in a round-about way.

in (actual) fact

In fact, events were quite different.

in living memory

There had never been such a large parade in the small town in living memory [even the oldest person there had never seen one].

in no uncertain terms

I told her off, and made it clear to her what the consequences would be in no uncertain terms.

in terms of

In terms of physical mobility, he is doing okay. In terms of weight loss, he is not.

in the foreseeable future

The government has budgeted no further funding for this project in the foreseeable future.

in the near future

It won't happen tomorrow, but in the near future we expect another grant.

it just goes to show you

It just goes to show you, you can't trust a habitual liar.

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

it's a deal /it's a done deal

If you want that car for that price, then it's a done deal, by me.

it's all in a day's work

I know I went out of my way to do that for you, but it is just all in a day's work.

it's not for someone to say

It's not for her to say whether you get the job. She's not the Manager.

it's not rocket science

The parents should have been able to figure out the toy assembly diagram; it's not rocket science.

it's such a tragedy

Now three of his immediate family are gone. It's such a tragedy. They all died too young.

just in the nick of time

She stopped the toddler from crossing the street alone just in the nick of time by quickly grabbing him by the collar.

let's get with it /let's get on with it

Enough coffee break, guys. Now let's get on with the job.

long, long ago

There were dinosaurs long, long ago [a long, long, time ago].

made public

Voters want the party's final expenses made public [announced so everyone will know].

make it quick /better make it quick

Yes, you can run and get your sweater, but better make it quick. We have to leave right now.

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

markets dry up

He started a small manufacturing business, but events took a twist, and his markets dried up [there were no buyers for his product].

missing in action /MIA

Some soldiers who didn't return from the war were listed as missing in action.

money talks

He was accused of bribery. His hallmark statement was that money talks [he used his money to bribe people].

more than enough time

Don't rush around so. We have more than enough time to get ready.

much to my surprise [or his/her/their]

Much to our surprise, our children gave us a cruise to Greece for our anniversary.

navel-gazing

They are so self-absorbed. That group practices and preaches a lot of navel-gazing.

neck and neck

The two horses were even at the finish line, having gone 40 yards neck and neck.

net-savvy

She may be a senior citizen, but she knows a lot about the computer. She is very net-savvy.

never a dull moment

Four things went wrong in the office that day. There was never a dull moment.

next to nothing

Shop at a thrift store and clothes will cost you next to nothing.

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

nice and soft /nice and warm

My toddler says her blankie is nice and soft.

nip and tuck

The students may barely make it through this semester sharing that house with all its expensive extras. It will be nip and tuck.

no less

He wants forty dollars for that ratty looking old leather jacket, no less!

no rest for the weary

Something else needs to be done after our long day of work? No rest for the weary, I guess.

no trespassing

Stay off our property. No Trespassing

not a chance /small chance

He's just dreaming if he thinks they will pay his way to go to the expensive management course. Small chance! [No way!]

not an issue at this time

Whether the government will place the children with another family permanently is not an issue at this time [they are reserving judgment and not saying yet].

not as (adjective) as everyone seems to think

Such a heartthrob! Well, let me tell you, Mr. Muscles is not as strong as everyone seems to think.

not at all

Don't bother to thank me for the favour. Don't mention it, not at all.

not at the moment

"Do you have any cooked chickens?" she asked.

"Not at the moment," he answered, " but we will have some in half an hour."

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

not by any stretch of the imagination

Our family budget did not cover her extra expenses, not by any stretch of the imagination.

(not) hardly Note, "not hardly" is used in some regions, but is incorrect because it is a double negative, it should always be "hardly"

Do you really think that happened that way? Hardly!

not lose any sleep over

It didn't work out this time, but it's not that important. Don't lose any sleep over it.

not worth the paper it's written on

His guarantee is not worth the paper it is written on [useless].

not worth talking about

She won't even discuss it. She says it is not worth talking about.

nothing ventured, nothing gained

Sure, take the risk and do it. You know what they say, nothing ventured, nothing gained.

nuts to you

I don't believe you, and I don't want to talk about it. Nuts to you!

of one kind or another

We will find you a suitable replacement of one kind or another.

oh, my /oh, my dear

Look at all this mess. Oh, my dear!

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

(on a) daily/weekly/monthly (basis)

He checks the rain gauge daily.

(on a month-to-month basis)

Bank statements should be reviewed monthly.

on a need-to-know basis/NTK

Please distribute this confidential information on a need-to-know basis only [don't tell everyone].

on condition of anonymity

She provided key details to the reporter, on condition of anonymity, asking that her identity remain hidden.

on notice about

The company put the gardener on notice about his sloppy grounds keeping. He had to change or risk being fired.

on the money /right on the money

That bet you placed at the racetrack yesterday sure paid off. You were right on the money!

on the run

She usually skips a sit-down breakfast and eats on the run.

on the run from the law

The three convicts escaped from prison, and are on the run from the law.

on the table /on the table during discussions

The issue of contracting-out should be on the table during discussions [negotiable].

on-again, off-again

Their love affair is on-again, off-again, come and go, up and down.

once and for all

Let me tell you, when he talks to the Service Rep, he will straighten him out once and for all.

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

Once burned, twice shy.

After his disastrous experience hang-gliding he will probably stay on the ground. Once burned, twice shy.

once upon a time

The phrase "Once upon a time..." begins many children's stories.

one of a kind

That work of art will never be repeated. It is one of a kind.

open for business

Today, they are still setting up the kitchen, but tomorrow the restaurant will be open for business.

out of place

He wasn't used to wearing a suit and tie, and felt quite out of place at the cocktail party.

Out of sight, out of mind.

The toddler fretted over the broken toy until her mother removed it, saying "Out of sight, out of mind."

out of step with /in step with

When he goes off on those wild tangents, he shows he is out of step with the rest of the management board.

Out of the frying pan, into the fire.

They moved from a rental to a very old house that soon needed major structural repairs. Out of the frying pan, into the fire.

outstanding in [one's] field

She is an excellent teacher, positively outstanding in her field.

over and done with

Don't cry over the past. It is over and done with.

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

over, and over again

He covered the same material thoroughly, rewording it over and over again.

over the moon about

Wow are they ever in love! She is just over the moon about him.

over-the-counter

Rather than use a prescription drug, the doctor recommended an over-the-counter drug, easily available at the pharmacy.

paid a pittance

We think we got a good deal on that used bike. We bought it at a thrift shop and paid a pittance.

part and parcel of

His story is part and parcel of the entire fraud. They cannot be separated.

peace of mind

Only when she knew her daughter was taken care of did she have peace of mind.

poised to take action

The entrepreneur is poised to take action if she sees an opening in the market.

prepared to offer

Perhaps the buyers are prepared to offer a slightly higher price on the property.

pretty good

You did just fine, kid. That was pretty good for a beginner.

pretty straightforward

The terms of the deal seem to be clear. Everything looks pretty straightforward.

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

prices plunge

The company will lose too much money on current stock if prices plunge.

pros and cons

The government is weighing its options before it decides. There are both benefits and drawbacks, pros and cons.

quiet reflection

Facing a hectic afternoon, she paused for a moment of quiet reflection in the small courtyard garden.

rapt attention

The toddler was watching the cartoon show with rapt attention, just fascinated.

ready.....at all times

The troops were ready to face the enemy at all times.

ready for action

The troops were armed and ready for action.

ready for business

The water was mopped up, and the gutter unblocked. The store was ready for business again three hours after the rain storm.

ready to party

Exams are over, and every student is ready to party.

reverse engineering

A foreign company stole the patented design by taking apart the design through reverse engineering.

right now

Come on, we have to leave right now!

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

right this minute

Come here, now, right this minute!

ripe for the kill

He is sure that the market for his new product is ready, ripe for the kill

risk management

The company plans very carefully, showing careful risk management to maximize profits and cut losses.

sales are down /up

The housing market is soft right now. Sales are down.

sales decline

Sales of that product declined last year for the first time following ten years of steady gain.

sales fall off

It was a very hot market until recently, when sales fell off.

scout's honour

I promise it will be delivered tomorrow. Scout's Honour!

severance pay

When he was laid off, he made a special trip to the office to collect his severance pay [final pay].

share and share alike

Here's the pizza, kids. Now nobody hogs it, okay? It will be share and share alike.

six of one, half a dozen of the other

Both options are equal; six of one, half a dozen of the other.

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

someone has such a hard life

Oh you poor girl! Only two cookies and not three. You have such a hard life!

someone's heart is in the right place

When she was in the hospital, the office sent her flowers. Someone's heart was in the right place.

someone's luck ran out

The death was just a freak accident. They say his luck ran out.

someone's standing in the polls

That politician has recently enjoyed a high standing in the polls. He is really popular.

sound effects

The performers added sound effects to the song, tooting like train whistles at the end.

speaking of which

We have been talking about food all morning, speaking of which, would you like to go get some lunch?

split down the middle

The voters returned a 51.1, 49.9 split down the middle for the incumbent.

split half-and-half

It doesn't make sense to buy two of these huge drinks for two children. Why not get an extra glass and split one half-and-half?

strange bedfellows

Politics makes strange bedfellows. People whom you don't expect to work together, do.

stream-of-consciousness

He just spoke whatever came to his mind. It was a stream-of-consciousness speech.

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

strictly speaking

I will let you have that for free, but strictly speaking, we aren't allowed to give them away [don't tell the boss].

such is life

So you didn't win the lottery after all? Such is life.

sugar-coated

He was so polite to the angry customer; his story was sugar-coated.

(sure to please)

We will decide for you which colour to send when you order. Our selection is sure to please.

survival of the fittest

The competition was fierce. It was survival of the fittest.

survival tactics

The rescue guides trained the skiers in avalanche survival tactics.

thanks to

Thanks to quick thinking on his part, the car fire did not spread to the gas tank.

the backbone of a plan

The government now has in place the backbone of a plan to handle further political setbacks in that area.

the biggest loser

If you cheat on an exam, even if you pass, the biggest loser will be you, not anyone else.

the bottom line

They expected huge financial losses, but the bottom line did not look bad.

mp3 audio of the next 10 idioms

the final curtain call

The actors came back for one final curtain call at the end of the play.

the heart of an issue

That's more like it. Now that he is being honest, we are getting to the heart of the issue.

the hit parade

Few songs are big sellers, finding a place on the hit parade.

the onus falls on

The onus falls on the parents to care for the child. It is their responsibility.

the pot calling the kettle black

But she is like that too, and even more so! When she says that, it's just the pot calling the kettle black.

the real world

You thought you would get rich by winning the lottery? Welcome back to the real world!

the right to die

There has been a public debate in Canada regarding the issue of euthanasia, or the right to die.

the school of hard knocks

He had a rough life, but learned much in the school of hard knocks.

The show's not over until the fat lady sings.

I guess we'll wait and see what happens. I am reserving judgment. The show's not over until the fat lady sings.

the survival of the fittest

The market competition in realty is stiff. It's a case of the survival of the fittest.

the turn of the century

At the turn of the last century, parts of Europe were untouched by recent active warfare. That was soon to change.

the will to live

The elderly woman's health declined when she lost her will to live.

the wraps come off

Once the new building is unveiled and the wraps come off, we may consider leasing some space.

these are exciting times /to live in exciting times

"John is involved in so many sports, and now he has this girlfriend," said the teenager's mother. "We sure live in exciting times."

things look bad/good/better/worse

Things are looking better outside our house, now that we have the new gardens planted. Everything looked pretty bad for a while.

thinly veiled

Her distaste for the decorator's choice of fabrics was thinly veiled.

time for a change

The premier of that province has been in office too long. It is time for a change.

time for action

Come on, boys, coffee break is over. It's time for action.

to just get by

We just get by on my pay rate.

to accept change

Some people are very much creatures of habit; it is very hard for them to accept change.

to add up to

Everything you are buying adds up to forty dollars.

Yes, you are right it is expensive. It sure adds up, doesn't it?

to address an issue

The politician refused to address the issue.

to apply for a job

I applied for a job in computer science yesterday.

to assess information

Once we have read the company's application, and assessed the information, we will contact them.

to avoid responsibility

He was gone from home long hours in order to avoid the responsibility of caring for his young son.

to barely survive

The cat barely survived the accident with the car.

to be a lemon

That vehicle had three major repairs in the first two years we owned it. It has turned out to be a real lemon.

to be an item

Did you know she is dating the courier driver? That's right, they are an item.

to be at stake

We can't lose this game because the whole championship is at stake. We won't advance to the finals if we lose.

to be based on information

Part of the news report was based on information from an unnamed source.

to be beyond belief

Have you seen what she did to her hair? It's beyond belief. [You will be shocked.]

to be called to account for /to account for

The school called him to account for the way he had spent the last three weeks.

to be derelict in one's duty

Parents who neglect their children are derelict in their duty.

to be honest /to be honest with you /to be perfectly honest

I am truly confused. To be perfectly honest, I don't know.

To be honest with you, I don't know the first thing about how to do this assignment.

to be in the hole

They spent fifty bucks on the supplies, but only charged forty bucks for the stuff they sold. So, they went [are] in the hole ten bucks.

to be knee deep in something

The farmer waded into the flooded field to rescue the horse until he was nearly knee deep in mud.

to be marginalized by society

The couple felt that they were being left out of every group, because of their circumstances. They believed they were marginalized by society.

to be no fun

"I don't want to go to the doctor," wailed the six-year-old, "that will be no fun!"

to be no stranger to

Those people are no strangers to success, they have had two gold medalists in their family.

to be no surprise /to come as no surprise

It should come as no surprise that their teenage daughter has racked up yet another awesome credit card bill.

to be on call for

The emergency room physician was on call for the weekend. He had his cell phone turned on and with

him at all times.

to be reduced to tears

When the toddler grabbed the books from her sister's arms, her sister was reduced to tears.

to be sick and tired of

I'm sick and tired of you two children fighting.

to be sitting pretty

If they sell that house for the list price, they will be sitting pretty.

to be there for someone

I know you are having a hard time right now, but I'll be there for you [support you] when you need me.

to be tied down

The mother of the baby triplets was tied down to a schedule of diaper changes, bottles, laundry and naps.

to be true to oneself

If you speak up for what you believe in, you are being true to yourself.

to be willing to negotiate

Union and management were both willing to negotiate a deal to avert a strike or lockout.

to be worried sick

Ever since her daughter had failed the test, the mother had been worried sick about her future.

to bend over backwards

The salesperson bent over backwards to be helpful when they bought the car.

to blank out /to draw a blank about something

She couldn't find the right words. She just blanked out.

When they asked the postal code at her last address, she drew a blank.

to blow a kiss to someone

The charming toddler held her hand palm up, pursed her lips, and blew her Grandma a kiss.

to brace for the worst

There is a hurricane warning, and residents of Atlantic Canada are bracing for the worst.

to break even

The business is making as much as it has spent, so it is breaking even. It is viable.

to break every rule in the book

The dishonest company made the sale, but in the process, it broke every rule in the book.

to break into

The thief broke into the store through the back window, and stole the computer.

to break open

The little girl broke the chocolate egg open and pulled out the prize.

to break the bank

If our son spends any more on fancy cars, he'll break the bank. We just can't afford it.

to bring to bear on

They brought all the facts to bear on the case and solved it.

to bring to justice

The criminals were brought to justice. They will all be doing time behind bars.

to burn the candle at both ends

He has committed far too much of his available time. He's only sleeping five hours at night; burning the candle at both ends.

to burst the bubble

The man was quite attracted to the woman until she mentioned her husband and burst the bubble.

to buy off

Rumours are that they have bought off half the team. It's all rigged.

to call the shots /to call all the shots

In that family, Dad makes the money, but Mom calls all the shots.

to call to someone's attention / to call someone's attention to something

Someone walking by their car called their attention to the flat tire.

to carve out a niche

That company is trying to carve out a niche in the interior design market.

to cause quite a stir

Her engagement is causing quite a stir at work, since she has dated several men there.

to cave in

Dad caved in and bought his oldest daughter a car for her graduation.

to celebrate a victory /birthday

The winning team went out to a pub to celebrate their victory.

to chicken out

He dared his sister to a roller blade race, but she chickened out at the last minute.

to chill out

The weary mother told her screaming toddler to settle down and chill out.

to clean up a mess

The cat got sick [threw up, vomited, up-chucked, barfed] on the rug and Dad had to clean up the mess.

to coast to victory

They worked hard during the beginning of the campaign, and then at the end seemed to coast to victory without much effort.

to come away with something

There were several consolation prizes, so even though they didn't win a first or second prize, they came away with something.

to come in contact with

If you work at a hospital laundry, you will come in contact with a variety of communicable diseases.

to come to grief

Better not try to cheat on that exam, or you will come to grief.

to come to mind

She thought very hard about where the lost papers could be, but nothing came to mind.

to come to nothing /nought

The family worried about the bullying, but the issue disappeared, and it came to nought.

to come to terms with

She is still coming to terms with her mother's death.

to come under the influence of

During his time at that university, he came under the influence of some right-wing thinkers.

to come undone

After her boyfriend ended their relationship, she collapsed. She couldn't take it, she just came undone.

to conduct a study

The research group is conducting a study of their new product.

to convey a message /the convey the message that

The official wanted to convey the message that the family had not been forgotten in their sorrow.

to cramp someone's style

She's an actress, and he is so straight-laced, he just cramps her style.

to create a disturbance

The gang members gathered often at the club, broke bottles and yelled, and generally created a disturbance.

to create confusion

When the accident blocked both exits, that created confusion for commuters.

to cross one's heart and hope to die

"I promise I won't break it," yelled the little boy, grabbing the toy boat, "cross my heart and hope to die."

to crow about something

He just won the thousands on the lottery, so now he really has something to crow about.

to cry in one's soup

It's all doom and gloom with that family, they are always crying in their soup over something or other.

to cry over spilled milk

It's too late to cry over spilled milk.

to cut a deal

The two companies cut a deal and merged.

to cut to the chase

He stopped further discussion, and cut to the chase, calling for a decision from the board.

to defend a decision

She defended her decision to become a lawyer, saying she had wanted to bring justice in society.

to deliver on one's promise

The company performed the service repair on the car for free. They really delivered on their promise.

to derive a list

He took the directory and derived a list of prospective clients.

to deserve praise for a job well done

Today, we are honouring our longest-serving volunteer, who certainly deserves praise for a job well done.

to distance oneself from

The politician refused to be drawn into the discussion, distancing herself from the issue by claiming it was another minister's department.

to disturb the peace

The police warned him about using the bullhorn to disturb the peace.

to do a favor

"Do me a favor, please, and be quiet while I am on the phone," the mother told her little girl.

to do a snow job

They believed him alright, he really did a snow job and conned them all. Wait until they find out he lied!

to down drink /food

Because it was so hot, and he was so thirsty, he downed three glasses in a row, then stopped to talk.

to draw attention to something

The store would like to draw your attention to the specials in the women's shoe department.

to draw a conclusion

The students will be asked to draw a conclusion from the information presented in live debate.

to dredge up something

Don't dredge up anything from a past relationship to poison a new one.

to drive someone around the bend

The toddler's lengthy temper tantrums nearly drove her mother around the bend.

to drive someone up the wall

When he got a busy signal repeatedly after calling the company all afternoon, it really drove him up the wall.

to drop a hint

What she really wanted for Valentine's Day was a diamond ring from her boyfriend, so she dropped a hint or two. Now they are engaged.

to earn a living

He earns a living as a customer service representative.

to earn brownie points

The man earned brownie points from his wife every time he mopped the kitchen floor. She was pleased and surprised.

to eke out an existence

During the Depression, Prairie farmers barely eked out an existence, as soil blew away from their farms.

to exacerbate a condition

Don't get him involved in this argument, that will just exacerbate the condition. It will get much worse fast.

to face off against someone

The two teams faced off against each other on centre ice, and the game began.

to fare better /worse /well overall

He didn't do very well on Part III of the exam, but he fared well overall, earning a higher grade than twenty of his classmates.

to feast one's eyes on

She entered the small boutique and feasted her eyes on the pleasant display of soaps and perfumes.

to feed someone a line

You don't really believe what that guy told you, do you? He was just feeding you a line.

to feel for someone

"Oh, you work so hard," said the girl to her older brother who had just gotten his first job. "I really feel for you!"

to feel like a million dollars

"Wow," said the senior citizen, "now that the Doctor put me on that new medicine, I feel like a million dollars!"

to fiddle with

Don't fiddle with that TV remote, you will screw up the channel selections.

There's been some fiddling with the financial figures for the organization, and some money is apparently missing.

to fight fire with fire

The company finally rearranged their sales tactics, and began to make more money. They were gaining over the competition by fighting fire with fire [a response appropriate to the threat].

to figure it out

I just can't understand these instructions, the girl said. She hoped her father could figure it out.

to fill someone's shoes

He is a valuable employee. When he retires from the company, it will be hard to fill his shoes.

to fill in for

She was gone from work Friday so a co-worker filled in for her.

to find a way to make it happen

Don't worry about money, the parent promised. If you want to go to college, son, we will find a way to make it happen.

to find common ground

The two sides were able to solve the labour dispute by finding common ground about benefits and contracting out.

to find the time

"Come see me next week if you manage to find the time in your busy schedule," the mother told her daughter.

to fix up with

She wants to fix me up with some cousin of hers, but I really don't want to start dating again.

to flex one's muscles

We don't think he is serious about threatening to sue, he's just flexing his muscles.

to float a loan

The son was able to able to enlist two relatives to help him and floated a loan from his father in order to buy the new car.

to foil a plot

The company foiled a plot by hackers to break into their client database.

to forge ahead

The research arm of the corporation didn't let the failure hold them back. They just forged ahead with new work in a related area.

to funnel money

The thugs funneled money through a series of bank accounts until they reached their source of supply.

to gather information /intelligence

According to the information the investigators have gathered, he is very deeply involved in the smuggling ring.

to get one's nose out of joint

"Oh don't get your nose out of joint," the mother told her toddler, "I'm sorry I spilled juice on your pants."

to get hooked on

They fed the kid marshmallows, and now she is hooked on candy, a real "sugarholic."

to get off someone's back

The employee had an abusive boss who wouldn't get off his back about the new performance standards.

to get over someone

She broke up with her boyfriend yesterday, but it may take a couple of weeks for her to get over him.

to get the ax

That government program will either get the ax or get more money.

to get the ball rolling

The new company opened on time with plenty of publicity to get the ball rolling.

to get to the bottom of

We are waiting to see it they will investigate far enough to get to the bottom of it.

to get up on the wrong side of the bed

She was very crabby. He told her she must have gotten up on the wrong side of the bed that morning.

to give credit for /to

The awards ceremony emcee gave credit to the organizers of the gala for the fine job they did on the food and entertainment.

to give someone something to think about

The time he spent in jail gave the drunk driver something to think about.

to give someone the heebie-jeebies

That horror flick gave me the heebie-jeebies. I'll be scared of the dark, now.

to go around in circles

They don't know what to do now that they haven't heard from their son. They are just going around in circles.

to go from crisis to crisis

That couple seems to live their lives going from crisis to crisis.

to go hungry

"If you don't eat your peas, you will just have to go hungry," said the father to his toddler.

to go to bat for someone

We are pretty sure he will make the team. His former team coach is going to bat for him to get him a spot.

to hand over the goods /money

"Please hand over the CD player," the angry teenager told his little brother.

to hang on

She is still hanging on to the hope that they might be able to buy the more expensive house.

to hang out

He hangs out with some tough-looking kids at the coffee shop.

to harbour a secret

The diary harbored a secret the family had never known.

to have a chance to

"I wish we had a chance to buy a new toy, Mama," said the little girl.

to have a change of heart

He told her no, but then had a change of heart and bought the new bicycle anyway.

to have a hole in one's head

Why is he crossing six lanes of highway outside of the crosswalk? Does he have a hole in his head?

to have a knack for /to have an eye for /to have a flare for

She has a knack for crafts. She knits the most fabulous sweaters. She really has an eye for colour and a flare for design.

to have a reputation for

That company has a reputation for fine service.

to have a ripple effect

He thinks his actions won't hurt anyone, but it will have a ripple effect. People he doesn't even know will be damaged.

to have been saying that all along

"I knew that would happen," the father told his son. "Haven't I been saying that all along?"

to have gone missing / went missing

I can't find my red shoe, it's gone missing. It went missing yesterday, I think.

to have mixed feelings about something

She had mixed feelings about dating him. Sometimes he just didn't seem to be her type.

to have the world by the tail

If he wins the lottery, he'll have the world by the tail.

to have unfinished business

He returned to his homeland to sell his home. This wrapped up his unfinished business.

to head out for

They were heading out for a camping trip when they got the news about the tornado.

to hit a home run

The last batter connected with the ball so well that he rounded all the bases before the catcher caught

the ball. It was a home run.

to hold the dubious distinction of

He holds the dubious distinction of changing departments more often than anyone else in our company.

to hope for the best

The cat was very injured, but the vet operated on her and they all hoped for the best.

to horse around

The kids were horsing around in the water, getting everybody wet.

to hunker down

During the thunderstorm, we just lit some candles and hunkered down in the cabin.

to identify a group /target /trigger

He has identified the preschool children as his target audience for his magician's act.

to increase /decrease dramatically

Spending has increased dramatically over the last two decades.

to issue a directive

The company issued a directive to its middle management to cut back on all non-essential training expenses.

to jump to a conclusion

She looked at the way he was dressed and jumped to the conclusion that he had money.

to keep afloat

They hoped the extra loan from the bank would keep the business afloat during the mill strike.

to keep an eye on

Keep an eye on the beans I put on to cook so they don't burn, while I go take the wash out of the dryer.

to keep an account of

We will have to keep a good account of the money we spend on extras, because the mortgage is going to take a pretty big chunk out of our pay.

to keep it under your hat

She says not to tell anybody she is expecting a baby again. Just keep it under your hat.

to keep under wraps

The company president kept the new plan under wraps until the funding was all worked out.

to kick the bucket

Sometime during the night, the sick frog kicked the bucket. They buried it's body this morning.

to knock one's socks off

He did a really good job on the public relations work. It just knocked off our socks to see how hard he worked.

to land a job

He's sure happy. He landed the job he has always wanted.

to launch an investigation

The police launched an investigation into the killings.

to lead to misunderstanding

Too many careless remarks like that will lead to misunderstanding.

to leave (all) one's options open

If you take a broad variety of courses in the first two years of university, you can leave your options open for a career choice.

to leave high and dry

She lost her wallet at the bus depot. It left her high and dry for cash to get a ride home.

to let someone know

If you don't want to come next week, please let me know.

to limit out

They caught several fish this morning, and limited out for the day.

to live on the growing edge

That's my son, he's into high tech. He loves to live on the growing edge.

to look at the ramifications

Before you change neighborhoods, look at all the ramifications of your children changing schools.

to look down on

Among other things, multiculturalism teaches us not to look down on anyone because of their ethnic background.

to look down the road

That plan won't work for our community. They should be able to see that if they just look down the road a few years.

to look like a joke

After I had been gardening, my new shoes were so dirty they looked like a joke.

to look up to

The small girl really looked up to her aunt and uncle. She just adored them.

to lose out on

If you don't get back to the tour bus on time, you will lose out on the explanation the tour guide is giving about the next stop.

to lose the scent

The dog tracked the rabbit through the bushes, and then lost the scent.

to lose track of

She enjoyed the new book so much, she lost track of time and two hours went by before she realized it.

to make one's mark

He has really made his mark in the art world and now sells his work for many thousands of dollars a piece.

to make a good /bad showing

The junior soccer team is making a good showing, winning three games so far this season.

to make a mockery of

In that trial, the acquittal of the accused makes a mockery of justice.

to make a mountain out of a molehill

"Don't make such a fuss," said the parent to her toddler, "you are making a mountain out of a molehill."

to make a pact

The seven-year-old girls made a pact to start a secret club where no boys would be allowed.

to make amends for

The young offender will have to make amends for the damage he caused. Some are suggesting community service would be appropriate.

to make an effort

I know you can pass the exam if you apply yourself to studying the material and really make an effort.

to make ends meet

Between the two of them, her parents make enough money to make ends meet.

to make it to the top of a list

She made it to the top of the list of post-doctoral candidates they were interviewing for the job.

to make the most of an opportunity

In order to make the most of the opportunity, you must act now, before all the units are sold.

to maximize your return

Certain investments will do better than others, maximizing your return on the dollars you invest.

to meet the criteria for

He met all the criteria for entrance to the elite school. He met all their entrance requirements.

to mess around

Do it right, don't just mess around.

Don't mess around with that cat now, or he will claw you.

to milk something dry

He renewed the business contract until the hiring company ran out of money for his project. He had milked them dry.

to miss the action /to miss all the action

If she comes to the party two hours late, she is going to miss all the action.

to miss out (on)

Three people showed up at the Canada Day Celebrations an hour after the last of the cake was gone. They missed out on a very good cake.

to miss the boat

If she waits too late to apply for that school, she will miss the boat and not get in.

to miss the mark

He was aiming for a bank balance of $5,000 this month, but it's only about $4,500. So, he missed the mark by about $$500.

to mix metaphors

Parts of two different metaphors should not be used together. For instance, "to pull the wool out from under (someone's) feet" and "to pull the rug over (someone's) eyes," are both incorrect. They are mixed metaphors. The correct metaphors are "to pull the rug out from under (someone's) feet," and "to pull the wool over {someone's}eyes."

to muddy the waters

The professor asked the class if they understood his explanation, or whether it had only muddied the waters and made things worse.

to name a panel

The firm named a panel of distinguished members to lead the public discussions.

to need a crutch

He does just fine in his third language, but his mother still needs a crutch, so she takes an a dictionary everywhere.

to opt for

"I'll opt for the blue sports car," the game show contestant said. "That's my choice."

to opt out of

They opted out of the undercoating for their new car, because the local road maintenance crews use sand, not salt. So they reasoned the car wouldn't rust.

to owe a debt of gratitude

She saved our son's life when he was drowning, so we owe her a debt of gratitude.

to paint the town red

The old fashioned song said they would have a really good time partying, painting the town red.

to pass on the savings

We were able to get a very good deal on the wholesale price of these computers, so we are passing on the savings to you, our customers.

to pass up a deal

They could not pass up the deal and bought the house when it dropped in price by ten percent.

to pay attention to

"Will you stand up straight, and pay attention to what you are doing?" the crabby mother asked her jiggling toddler.

to pay the piper

He won't get away with what he did. He'll have to pay the piper someday.

to pay through the nose

She made the mistake of trusting her new friend with her purse, and the "friend" took some money from her. Now she is paying through the nose for her ignorance.

to pin down

The politician evaded their questions. He was hard to pin down.

to pinch hit for

The Principal is unexpectedly gone today, so the Vice Principal is pinch hitting for him.

to pinch pennies

Neither of them makes much money, so they really have to pinch pennies or they will be in debt.

to play around with

The cat just played around with the snake, and then left it.

to play hooky

He is gone when he is supposed to be here. Why does he always play hooky on Friday's?

to play with fire

You should know better than to get involved in that scheme. Don't play with fire or you will get burned.

to plow through

In their search, they ploughed through hundreds of job applications before they found a suitable applicant.

to polish off

He finished the apple pie and congratulated himself that he had polished off the whole meal.

to pop into one's mind /head

It just popped into the student's head that the answer to question number three was "were" not "was."

to pose a problem

That leak in the roof poses quite a problem for us if we want to go on vacation during wet weather.

to post a notice

She posted a rental-wanted notice on the Library bulletin board.

to present a basis for

The first person giving the talk will present the basis for our argument.

to present a threat to

The militant groups present a threat to cross-country travel in that country.

to press one's luck

You already have one freebie this visit, don't press your luck to get another one.

to prove to be someone's salvation

The web site proved to be his salvation on the essay part of his homework.

to pull a fast one /to pull a fast one on someone

I can hardly believe they got away with what they did. They cheated us. They really pulled a fast one.

to pull a stunt

He got away with too much. Next time someone pulls that kind of stunt, call us.

to pull someone's leg

You don't believe his story, do you? He is just pulling your leg.

to pull the plug on

The government pulled the plug on the funding program, causing the clinic to shut down.

to pull the rug out from under

They changed their minds at the last minute and decided not to rent the suite to her. They pulled the rug out from under her feet, and left her with nowhere to go.

to pull the wool over someone's eyes

That company is not telling you truth. They are just pulling the wool over your eyes.

to push the envelope

If the company wants to keep growing, they have to keep pushing the envelope, staying ahead of market trends.

to put a spin on something

She isn't telling you all of the story, just her side. You know she always likes to put her own spin on things, and twist them.

to put on hold

The bank put a hold on his account so he could not make debit transactions because he was bouncing so many checks.

to put on the back burner

She wanted to marry him, but after meeting his family, and finding out she didn't like them, she decided to put the idea on the back burner for a while.

to put one's money where one's mouth is

Your promises are all empty. Why don't you put your money where your mouth is?

to put /place the blame on

Without placing any blame, we can state that someone made a very big mistake here.

to put something behind oneself

She tried hard to put the loss of her friends behind her and concentrate on the future at the new school.

to rain on someone's parade

I hate to rain on your parade, but it won't be as simple as you think. The solution is much more complicated.

to reach an agreement

The union and management reached an agreement over the terms of the new contract.

to reject an idea

She quickly saw he was very tired, and rejected her earlier idea that they would go out this evening.

to rely solely on /upon

The pilots will be relying solely on their instruments when the plane takes off in this much fog.

to remain calm

"Please remain calm," said the teacher. I am sure the laptop cord is here somewhere. It can't be too far away. We will find it.

to render ineffective

He took a second medication in addition to the first, and it rendered the first ineffective, cancelling it out.

to return a favor /the favor

I really appreciate your link to our web site. How can I return the favor?

to reveal (the) specifics

He has some plan or other to work things out, but he won't reveal the specifics to his wife.

to reverse a negative trend

Housing sales have picked up again, reversing the negative trend from last year. Realtors say the increase in sales is welcome.

to review the matter

The committee has promised to take another look at the finances in order to keep the school open. After they review the matter, they will contact us.

to run a risk

If you eat undercooked hamburger, you run the risk of getting e-coli.

to run for cover

The fox ran for cover when the dogs approached.

to run with an idea / to take an idea and run with it

That company is very successful. They act quickly when they enter new markets. They really take an idea and run with it.

to save face

He needs to keep his dignity, so you better not mention his mistake. Just let him save face, for once.

to save the best for last

Wow! Chocolate torte after that super dinner? You sure saved the best for last.

to save the day

That take-out food really saved the day for our volunteer movers. They were so hungry after all that work.

to say the least /at the very least

It wasn't right that you didn't know your financial manager made an expensive mistake. He should have contacted you about the error, to say the least.

to scramble to come up with

After the flash flooding, the disaster relief agency had to scramble to come up with fresh water and food for the victims.

to screw up /to be screwed up

The car repair place screwed up and cancelled the wrong appointment. It's all screwed up now.

to scrimp and save

If she scrimps and saves, she can make a down payment on the condo.

to see no end in sight

The toddler's parents saw no end of the temper tantrums in sight, but fortunately, they were wrong.

to sell off

He is going to sell off all his possessions and move to Canada.

to sell someone down the river

It is too late for them to back out now, they have too much invested. That lawyer really sold them down the river with his advice.

to sell someone short

Don't sell him short, he may be able to produce what he has promised.

to serve as a reminder

The cenotaph in the park serves as a reminder of the veterans.

to set the stage for

Her success at gymnastics set the stage for her success later in synchronized swimming.

to settle a score

His former roommate stole $300 from him. We hope they will find a peaceful way to settle the score.

to settle an argument

The mother walked into the room and asked her daughters if they needed help to settle their argument.

to shake a leg

Come on, we don't have much time to get there. We will really have to shake a leg or we will be late.

to shake on it

Let's stop the bargaining and declare the deal final. Would you like to shake on it?

to share information

We would like the school to share more information with us about our daughter's progress in reading.

to shed a few pounds /some pounds

She was overweight, so she started running every other day, and shed a few pounds.

to shed light on

You must know something about this. Please tell us what you know and shed some light on the matter.

to shell out

The father shelled out a cool ten grand ($10,000.00) for his oldest daughter's wedding.

to shoot off one's mouth

He doesn't know what he is talking about. He is just shooting off his mouth.

to shoot the rapids

Some drivers weave through rush hour traffic like rafters shooting the rapids.

to show cause

If he has evidence we need to hear that he was wronged by the tenants' group, then he should tell us. Come on, show cause.

to sign off on

The school secretary signed off on the courier package delivery.

to siphon off money

The tutoring service is siphoning off money as it passes from the student to the tutor. Everybody wants a piece of the pie.

to skirt around

Don't you think she is just skirting around the issue? Or is she really dealing with every part of the argument?

to smarten up

"Don't mess in that mud," the father told his son. "When you wear good clothes, you have to smarten up and stay clean or Mom will be angry."

to smell a rat

There is something not right about her explanation. I think I smell a rat.

to sort out in the end

I am sure we will sort it all out in the end, although it seems very confused now.

to spend a bundle

The mother spent a bundle on their back-to-school clothes this year, so she wants the school to begin

requiring school uniforms, instead.

to spill the beans

The little girl told her brother Dad had gotten him a camera for his birthday. She ruined the surprise, and spilled the beans.

to spot a fake

A jeweler can spot a fake diamond. A customs officer should be able to spot a fake passport. A merchant should learn to spot a fake $20 bill.

to square away

Settle the debts you have and get squared away, and then contact me again about buying the boat.

to squeeze in /into

We can just squeeze one more word into your classified ad.

to squeeze out

She applied to medical school, but got squeezed out by the competition. She will try again, I guess.

to squelch a rumor /rumors

The minister responsible for that portfolio squelched the rumor that the funds had been mishandled.

to stage an attack

The rebels staged an attack at night and took the town.

to stand by

We can't just stand by and watch, we want to be involved.

to stand in for

The bride's brother walked her down the aisle, standing in for her absent father.

to stand in the gap

The call to patriotism in some countries involves a call to stand in the gap against "evil forces."

to stand up

for He is capable of standing up for what he believes.

to step up the action

They stepped up the action in the war, fighting more battles with more troops.

to stick to a plan

If they would pick a good plan and just stick to it, they would be out of debt soon.

to stretch the truth

The little boy was very good at fibbing, stretching the truth into little lies.

to strike out

They really struck out in that game. It is game over and they are out of the playoffs.

to string someone along

He won't be able to hire all those people. He is just stringing them along.

to suffer withdrawal symptoms

She suffered withdrawal symptoms when she gave up coffee, but soon the headaches were over.

to support an agenda

The parents seem to support the principal's agenda about the discipline in the school.

to suss out something

He is very clever about sussing out the truth when he researches that kind of topic.

to swear by something

Parents usually swear by a certain brand of diaper that it prevents leaks.

to sweep an issue under the carpet

He may be a successful politician, but sometimes he does sweep an issue under the carpet, and not answer our questions directly.

to sweeten the pot /to sweeten the deal

Can I offer you free car mats to sweeten the deal on the sports model?

to switch horses in midstream

Switching majors in the third year of university is like switching horses midstream.

to take a chance

They bought the house, even though they knew they were taking a chance that the roof would soon need to be replaced.

to take a crack at

Want to go to Reno and take a crack at winning something on the slots?

to take a decision

The decision has been taken about the school. It will remain open for the time being.

to take a second look

Can we come back to the house you showed us last week and take a second look? We may want to buy it.

to take action

The police are taking action against auto theft and using bait cars that videotape thieves stealing the cars.

to take issue with

He wants to take issue with anyone who asks any questions about his son's behavior.

to take measures

They will take measures to secure the borders of the country if the government falls.

to take off (on someone)

The toddler was right with his parents in the boys clothing, but his mother let go of his hand and he just took off on them.

to take over

She said she would take over the payments on the car.

to take steps

The doctor is taking steps to stop the progression of the disease.

to take the fall

The two boys pulled the stunt together, buy only one boy was caught. He took the fall for it.

to take the heat

She resigned from the minister's portfolio because she could not take the heat about the scandal.

to take the plunge

Are you ready to take the plunge from engagement into marriage?

to take something to heart

I promise I won't do it again. I will really take your advice to heart next time, and resist.

to target individuals

The new tax law targets individuals earning between $80,000 and $100,000 a year.

to tell it like it is

She is sometimes too honest, always trying to tell it like it is.

to tell one's own version

He wants to tell us his version of events, so we should be quiet and listen.

to tend to exaggerate /to tend not to exaggerate

She tends not to exaggerate, so I would be surprised if she is wrong about the affair.

to test a response

That party is testing the public response to their platform in the polls.

to think outside the box

The youngest members of that company seem to be the best at innovations and thinking outside the box.

to tighten controls

The corporation has tightened controls on executive expense accounts in order to save money.

to tighten one's belt

He lost his job last week, but has already found work starting next week. They just have to tighten their belts and spend less for a couple of weeks.

to trace ancestry

He can trace his ancestry back to the first settlers in that area.

to trade places

I might complain, but I wouldn't trade places with you for anything in the world.

to turn over a new leaf

She has practiced the piano every day this month. She seems to be turning over a new leaf and really applying herself for a change.

to uncover a plan

The R.C.M.P. has uncovered a plan by a theft ring to fence bank card with stolen account numbers.

to undermine the process

When they aren't honest with the police, they just undermine the process of investigation.

to underscore the need to /for

The beggars on the streets underscore the need for more social programs.

to understand how to best help

If is difficult for parents in that situation to understand how to best help their child.

to use as a measuring stick

The tutor uses her marked work as a measuring stick to customize lesson plans for the student.

to volunteer for a job

The teenagers volunteered to do a variety of cleaning jobs for the senior citizens.

to wander away from

The older man wandered away from the group and became disoriented in the large mall.

to want it yesterday

They are in too much of a hurry for that job to be done. He told me he wants it yesterday.

to warm up to

After about an hour of chat, he was just warming up to his topic. No one knew how to stop him

to wash one's hands of

I'm not involved. I wash my hands of the whole affair.

to waste an opportunity

She is just wasting the opportunity to get a higher degree if she quits school to work now.

to water down

Don't water down the story too much or there won't be any fun left.

to wear out one's welcome

Her aunt stayed a very long three months with them, so she had really worn out her welcome when she left.

to weasel out of

They promised to fix the steering by Friday, but they had too many service jobs to handle. Now they are trying to weasel out of their promise. Now that's bad management.

What a shame!

Did you just say that she fell and broke her leg yesterday? What a shame!

to wimp out

The third student wimped out on the other two and left them stranded at the work party. He was too tired to work hard, so he just left.

to wish someone well

We are sorry to hear you are leaving the company. We will really miss you, We certainly wish you well in your new position.

to wish upon a star

The toddler was learning from the storybook all about how to wish upon a star, the stuff of magic and fairy tales.

to wolf down (food)

The two boys stopped hiking just long enough to wolf down a cheese sandwich, and two chocolate bars each and drink two bottles of water.

to work in cooperation with

The police are working in cooperation with the parents to keep the school ground safe.

to work up a sweat

The painters were out in the hot sun scraping the fence boards, really working up a sweat.

to work without a net

Because he is self-employed, he doesn't have the unemployment benefits he used to have. Now he is really working without a net.

to worry about nothing

The small girl said she stayed awake afraid of the dark. Her mother reminded her that she was worrying about nothing.

to wrap up a deal

They agreed on the final price for the vehicle and wrapped up the deal.

to yield insight into

The government report yields a little insight into the financial problems of that organization.

to zip around

She bought a tiny little two-seater to zip around town.

too wonderful for words

Your gifts to our daughter were too wonderful for words.

totally awesome

"All right," the teenager gloated, "a new car, totally awesome!"

touch base

Every couple of weeks or so, please touch base with the district manager to let him know how you are doing.

trumped up charges

The family felt the charges against their son had been manufactured. He was in jail in another country on trumped up charges.

trying to perfect

The corporation has been trying to perfect their customer support web site for months.

twenty-four/seven, 24/7

If you need help, we provide that 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That's right, 24/7.

under pressure

He works so well under pressure, they ought to promote him.

under the weather

She got sick yesterday, and is still under the weather this morning.

unmitigated disaster

The toddler's playroom was an unmitigated disaster, toys scattered everywhere, juice and cookies ground into the carpet, and the drapes pulled down.

up and over

The father boosted his son up and over the bars of the jungle gym.

up in arms

The girls were up in arms about being excluded from the sports team.

up in the air

We don't know what is going on. Our whole trip is in jeopardy since the travel company declared

bankruptcy. Everything is up in the air.

up one's sleeve

The Dad had so many tricks up his sleeve, his young daughter was often spellbound as he performed for her.

up-to-date

He has old information. The new web site is much more up-to-date.

up-to-the minute

Their live coverage will give you up-to-the minute coverage of the election results as they are received.

vastly overrated

That hot sauce is vastly overrated. It isn't hot at all.

very much so

Would you like to have a copy of your last examination results? Yes please, very much so.

Walk softly and carry a big stick.

The strategy to win over the competition without them realizing what you have done is to walk softly and carry a big stick.

way cool /so cool /cool dude

Oh, he is so cool, so way cool. Even his sister calls him one cool dude.

way to go

Another goal! Way to go, team!

welcome back

Boy did we ever miss you. We worked so hard when you were gone. Welcome back.

what goes around, comes around

She got what she deserved. You know what they say, what goes around comes around.

What world do you live in?

He is not being realistic. What world does he live in?

What's the matter?

Oh, sweetheart, you look so depressed. Is something the matter? What is it? What's the matter?

(when all is said and done)

When all is said and done, when it is final, then we will know the result.

When the cat's away, the mice will play.

The boys had a loud party when their parents were away for the night. When the cat's away, the mice will play.

Where there's a will, there's a way.

It looks like there is no solution, but where there's a will, there's a way.

which way the wind is blowing

We need to do some market testing to find out which way the wind is blowing before we launch our new product.

winners and losers

In every contest, there are winners and losers. Don't feel badly if you don't win this time.

with all due respect

With all due respect to the Honourable Member, I don't believe his facts are correct.

with reckless abandon

She spent the last of her inheritance with reckless abandon, buying a large diamond and a sports car.

worth a try

We don't know if this medical treatment will work, but at this stage, it is worth a try.

worthy of merit

Also worthy of merit was the fine work done by our newest quilting club member.

written in stone

You can always choose new parameters afterwards, nothing is written in stone.

you do what you have to do

When you are as desperate as I am, you do what you have to do to change the situation.

you had better

You had better listen to me, young lady!

you'd better start /you had better start looking for

You had better start looking for a job before you graduate, otherwise all the openings will be gone.

you'd better stop /you had better stop doing that

You had better stop doing that with your pen or you will mark the desk.

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