

English

Idioms And Expressions For Foreigners, *Like Me!*

BURNING THE MIDNIGHT OIL. **Sitting duck.**

How do you like them apples? *Hot potato.*

Going to town. CUTTING CORNERS.

Last chicken in the shop.

Page-turner. *Hanging on someone's coattail.*

Fishing in the wrong pond. **Having an axe to grind.**

Keep your shirt on! *On the fence.*

Holding the bag. Bottom falling out.

I Thought I Knew English, But I Didn't Know That!

Reza Mashayekhi



East To West

WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING

This book makes my job easier. I'll have much more to talk about in my classes. Your book is informative, and I look forward to using it. I encourage ESL students to read it and use it as a reference.

Rachael Chen, English teacher
Taipei, Taiwan

Absolutely brilliant! This book has helped me to expand my understanding of the English language and culture. As a foreigner myself and student of American Politics, I do recommend it to those wanting to expand their understanding of idioms and expressions in a frugal and easy-to-read composition.

Jorge L. Mendoza, Graduate student of American Politics
University of California, San Diego

Thank you for writing this book. So many times, perhaps out of laziness or habit, we cause stress and distrust in life by using an obscure phrase or expression, when we could just as easily use words with our intent clearly stated. I expect that your readers will benefit greatly by learning the true meaning behind so many common expressions we take for granted. In addition, I hope many readers with English as their primary language will take seriously the importance of clarity in thought and speech. As "texting" and other technological shortcuts begin to dominate our communications systems, this will become increasingly important. Congratulations upon completing a most daunting task, and thank you for allowing me to add my comments.

Dorothy Miller, Literary Consultant
San Diego, California

I like the way this book goes beyond the American culture and covers many other countries' sayings, anecdotes and idioms in a very clear and concise language. This way, Reza brings us to the realization that people of different cultures and backgrounds share more or less the same thoughts and idioms on the same subjects. Reza's extensive work is definitely appreciated by me, and being an ESL instructor, I can use it as a valuable guideline in the curriculum of my class.

Angie Moeen, ESL teacher
San Diego, California

I think this book—with its expressions, meanings, and examples—will be very helpful to any foreigner to get to know the English language, and I highly recommend it. It is a useful tool.

Cathy Peterson, Former English teacher in Malta and Iran
Oxnard, California

A practical, entertaining, and sometimes funny look at phrases we take for granted everyday ... This book would be useful for those new to these expressions or for anyone who uses these phrases without really thinking about them.

Alan J. Schretzmann
San Diego, California

This is a great book to keep in your home, office, or brief case. The book lists idioms alphabetically and provides examples for their use, as well as their origin when available. The descriptions are brief and easy-to-understand, and I wish my Japanese mother had had a copy of it when she was raising me! It is a perfect choice for a gift for people who love to learn idioms.

Amy Smith
San Diego, California

In one stop, your book has clarified the definition of many expressions I hear regularly, yet wasn't sure of their real meaning . I found the background and origin information to be very informative, clever, and, at times, very funny! As I deal with a number of foreigners in my line of work, I can see how this book could be very useful for a visitor from another country. It doesn't matter if you are "one taco short of a combination plate" or a "one-trick pony," you will enjoy this book!

Mark Sutton
San Diego, California

This is a useful book for foreigners trying to gain a better command of modern English. It is easy to understand, and I recommend that students learn several new phrases a day. By the end of a year, you will feel much more comfortable conversing with native speakers if you have an understanding of what these expressions mean and how they are used.

Karen Watanabe, Former ESL teacher in Tokyo and NYC
Ann Arbor, Michigan

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East To West Publications
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CONTENTS

About the author	vii
Foreword	viii
Acknowledgements	x
About the book	xi
Warning-Disclaimer	xii
Clues to use	xiii
Dedication	xv
The List	17
Appendix	388
Index	389

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Reza Mashayekhi was born and reared in Tehran, Iran. He later attended the University of Michigan, where he received a degree in aerospace engineering.



Reza has always been interested in learning the intricacies of the English language. This is why, alongside of his engineering work, he has taught English to non-English speakers. He has done this because he has wanted to expand his knowledge of English, and he has a good explanation for his reasoning.

“When you want to learn a subject, you approach it from your own perspective,” he says. “Once you feel that you know enough about it, you typically move on to something else. When you *teach* a subject, however, you have to learn everything about it before you can satisfactorily answer all of the questions that are raised by the students.”

Reza also consults with non-English speakers to prepare them for their public speaking events, or to help with their day-to-day conversational skills, both in the form of workshops and on a one-on-one basis.

Being a non-native speaker of English, living and working in the U.S., Reza’s experience through the years and his interactions with his students and clients has led to the compilation of this book.

FOREWORD

A lack of or incomplete communication has been one of the major causes of conflict and bloodshed throughout history. While addressing major world conflicts is not the goal here, this book is an effective tool for helping to accomplish better communication between at least some of the people. It can help to reduce the possibility of unwanted, and sometimes devastating, consequences.

In 1990, a Boeing 707, from Colombia, crashed in New York before it could reach the airport. The investigation into the crash determined that the pilot's request for emergency landing had been misinterpreted. (See *Appendix*.) This miscommunication cost the lives of the 73 people who were on that aircraft.

In another tragic incident, in 1992, a foreign exchange student was accidentally shot to death when he inadvertently walked onto someone's lawn. He apparently didn't know what the homeowner meant when he yelled, "Freeze!" (See *Dedication*.)

These, of course, are extreme examples. Less serious incidents, however, are happening around us, all of the time. They have led to receiving lower grades at school, missing flights, losing business opportunities, having broken hearts, etc.

Although difficulties with idioms and expressions mainly involve non-English speakers and foreign students, people from different regions in English-speaking countries are not necessarily immune either. Even children, as they are growing up, encounter occasional surprises. Imagine the surprised look on a little child's face upon hearing this for the first time: "You can't play outside today; it's raining cats and dogs!"

This book has been compiled with the hope of eliminating some of these misunderstandings. The entries in this book are not usually found in dictionaries. Some are not even idioms or expressions. They are simply words or phrases that are used in daily conversation.

Because we're routinely using them, it's easy to forget that common expressions—such as: *He ended up with egg on his face*, or *He has a monkey on his back*—sound somewhat strange, especially if it's the first time you're hearing them. So, if you're talking to someone, and you get the feeling that you're not getting through to them, maybe you should use one of our substitutes!

What has been compiled here will help non-English speakers, especially foreign students. It can also help native English speakers by showing them alternative ways of saying things, if necessary. Who knows, some parents may find it useful, too!

Reza Mashayekhi
San Diego, California

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I cannot thank them enough, but I will try. I'll start with author and designer Dawn Farson, without whose encouragement this book would still be just another one of many ideas in my head, and author and music instructor Suellen Fast, without whose help and ideas it would still be just another file on my computer.

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April Nelson did the proofreading and editing of the entire book, which was no small job.

The interior layout and design was done by *Scribe Freelance*.

Alina Fairy did the beautiful job of cover design.

Azita Mousavi, of *azitaart* in San Diego, and Sarah Arakaki and Kacie Paik, both graduates of the University of California, San Diego, did the wonderful job of creating the illustrations.

Mojgan Mehran did the still photography.

Also, this is probably the place to mention author and publisher Dan Poynter, whose many publications showed me the way to publish this book without relying on a big publishing company. Dan's publications have helped numerous authors to put their ideas into print.

Please see the Appendix for contact information for some of the above professionals.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Whether or not you are a native English speaker:

The information here will help you to better communicate with others. It doesn't matter if you're a student, teacher, tourist, businessman, employee, or an employer; this book will help.

You will find:

- Easy-to-understand meanings and equivalents for:
Idioms.
Phrases.
Expressions.
And some commonly used sentences.
- Typical examples showing how the expressions are used.
- The likely origins of some of these expressions.
- Illustrations that serve two purposes:
 1. They add some humor to an otherwise serious reference book; and
 2. They illustrate how some expressions could be misinterpreted by someone who is hearing them for the first time.
- And, finally, some interesting expressions and proverbs from other languages and cultures, which show how people of the world have more things in common than we tend to realize.

This book is not about English grammar. It's about being able to communicate more effectively. *Best of all, it's good for all language levels.*

If English is NOT your native language:

Use this book to better understand what you hear, read, or even say.

If English IS your native language:

Use this book to say things more clearly so that others will understand you better.

It's important to know that some idioms and expressions may have different meanings under different circumstances. If what you see here does not satisfactorily explain what you've heard or read, please let us know.

Finally, we've tried to keep it clean. Obscene words are either excluded or only partially spelled.

Please let us know if we've missed anything.

WARNING-DISCLAIMER

This book contains definitions and equivalents of commonly used phrases, idioms, and expressions of the English language and should be used as a general guide to facilitate communication. In order to make sure that the correct message is conveyed, if you're dealing with sensitive issues, you should consult other sources to receive second or third opinions. The author and publisher of this book do not assume any liability or responsibility to any person or entity for any loss or damage caused, directly or indirectly, as a result of using the information presented in this book.

CLUES TO USE!

Please read this entire section at least once!

When you refer to **The List** of idioms, phrases, and expressions, please remember the following:

- **Also:** means:
The following idiom or expression has the same meaning, or is very similar, but is not necessarily included in this book.
- **Also see:** means:
The following idiom or expression has the same meaning, or is very similar. It, too, is listed in this book.
- **Compare to:** means:
The following idiom or expression has a somewhat different meaning. It, too, is listed in this book.
- The *hidden meanings* of idioms, phrases, and expressions are provided in this book, but the more obvious (literal) meanings are not.
Example: In defining *Coming from behind*, we don't mention *Approaching from behind*.
Example: In defining *Hot potato*, we don't say *A potato that is hot*.
- The entries in **The List** have been tabulated alphabetically in their most common form.
Example: If you're looking for the meaning of: *It was raining cats and dogs*, you should look in **The List** for: *Raining cats and dogs*. (Of course, you may also look in **The Index** for one of the key words: *Rain, Raining, Cat, or Dog*.)
- Single words that are defined in dictionaries are not included here, unless they have unique applications.

Dedicated to the memory of

Yoshihiro Hattori

Yoshihiro Hattori was a Japanese foreign exchange student in the United States who lost his life due to an apparent misunderstanding over language.*

It seems that he did not know what a frightened and armed homeowner meant when he said "Freeze!"

A message from the Hattori family:

We hate the word "freeze," which was used when our son was shot to death. We desire the time when America will be safer, and the word "freeze" will disappear.

*Masaichi and Mieko Hattori,
Yoshihiro's parents*

*For more information about this tragedy, please visit:

http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/1992-10-20/news/9210200470_1_baton-rouge-peairs-haymaker

<http://www11.plala.or.jp/yoshic/index.html>

<http://www11.plala.or.jp/yoshic/y-frame-eng.html>

The List

The more languages you know, the more human you are.
(*Czech proverb.*)

However many languages you know, that much more of a human you are. (*Armenian proverb.*)

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

Don't risk it.
Don't risk losing what you have.
Don't be greedy. Be content with what you have.
You know what you've got, but you don't know what you'll get.

A camel is a horse designed by a committee.

Decision making by a committee is not an efficient process.

A comeback

A smart aleck kind of response.
A good verbal rebuttal to an insult.
A smart (and somewhat arrogant) kind of response.

Also:
Comeback line.

A day late, and a dollar short!

Too little, too late!
It's not enough. Besides, it's too late!

A dollar a pop

A dollar each.
Similarly, \$65 a pop, five cents a pop, etc.

A drop in the bucket

Insignificant.
A very small amount.

Q. *Did you get a raise?*
A. *Yeah, but it's a drop in the bucket. I want more!*

A five-hundred-member-strong club

A club with 500 members.
(This is an example. Any organization and any number could be used.)

A handful

Difficult to handle.
Not very easy to control or take care of.

Q. *Would you please take care of my dog while I'm gone?*

A. *No thanks! She's a handful.*

A hole in the head

Something that's definitely not needed.
When someone says: *I need it like I need a hole in the head*, they mean to say (with a lot of emphasis), *I don't need it!*

Q. *Do you want to buy my limousine? It's very cheap.*

A. *Right now, I need a limousine like I need a hole in the head!*

A leg to stand on

A support.
Supporting material.
Available influence or power.

When someone says: *He doesn't have a leg to stand on*, they mean something like:

He doesn't have enough data to support his theory.

He doesn't have an alibi to help him in his defense.

A little time in the desert

Time spent away from others.

When someone says: *She needs a little time in the desert*, they mean something like:

We've seen too much of her. She should go away (disappear) for a while!

A place of one's choosing

One decides where.
A place that one chooses.

Similarly, a time of one's choosing, an activity of one's choosing, etc.

A pretty penny

A lot of money.
Very expensive.

Buying a house in Tokyo costs a pretty penny.

Also:

A bundle.
A fortune.
A lot of dough.
An arm and a leg.

A question of something

About something.

A question of economics means:

About economics;

A matter of economics;

It has to do with economics; etc.

Similar:

A question of taste, ethics, freedom, etc.

A reach

A difficult thing.

When someone says: *This is a reach for me*, they mean something like: *It's difficult for me to do something like this. I don't know if I can.*

Also:

A stretch.

Gulls on land, storm at the sea. (*Portuguese.*)

Sea bird by solid ground, storm coming ahead. (*Venezuelan.*)

When things are not in their proper place, there may be trouble somewhere.

A shot in the arm

A boost.

A helpful deed.

Something that gives new energy to a person who is weary emotionally, mentally, physically, financially, etc.

Q. *Did you get a year-end bonus?*

A. *Yes, and what a shot in the arm it was! I was just about to file for bankruptcy, but now I don't have to.*

A shot in the dark This is about doing something with the hope that it will work. There is no way to predict whether or not it will be successful.

We're not having any success, so let's talk to your dad. Maybe he can help us, maybe not. Anyway, it's a shot in the dark.

A thing of the past Obsolete. Dead and gone.
Something that has no use any longer.

Thanks to Craig Newmark and his Craigslist, paying a lot of money for a small ad in a local or global publication is now a thing of the past.

Flatter the sea, but stand on earth when you do so. (*Greek.*)

A ways off In the distance.

A long way off In the distant future.

When someone says: *A new entertainment system is a long way off*, they mean something like: *We won't see a new entertainment system for a long time.*

Q. *Is your brother ready to start all over again?*

A. *Considering the fact that he's lost everything, he knows that having a normal life again is a long way off.*

Above board With honesty.
Without tricks.

Q. *Do we really need to do exactly as the contract says?*

A. *Yes, I want everything to be above board!*

Above the fray Being above commotion, confusion, etc.
Having nothing to do with the usual things, especially bad things, corruption, etc.

Used with verbs such as stay, remain, rise, etc.

A. *The senator's campaign manager is arguing with the reporters all of the time!*

B. *Yes. She lets the manager do the fighting, but she stays above the fray herself!*

Ace in the hole

Origin: Gambling

Big secret help.
A winning factor kept hidden.

She is our ace in the hole. With her at our side, I'm sure we're going to win this thing. But keep it to yourself for now.

The prosecutor had an ace in the hole: an eyewitness!

Background:

This may have its origin in the game of poker where you have an ace with the face down, until it's time to show it.

According to someone

As someone says.
Per someone's statement.

When someone says: *According to my brother, you're not innocent*, they mean something like: *He says you're not innocent.*

Achilles heel

A seemingly small, but actually crucial, weakness.
A very significant weakness in an otherwise very strong person or idea, etc., that can result in complete failure

Her biggest Achilles heel is the number of people who don't think she is qualified to be their representative.

Background:

According to Greek mythology, Achilles was invulnerable all over his body except in the area of his heel. He died from an arrow that had been shot into his heel.

Across the board

All levels, all categories, all employees, etc.
Everybody's happy as they raised salaries across the board.

Acting in a certain capacity

Having certain responsibilities.
Working in a certain capacity.
He's acting in a professional capacity. He can't just take off and go on a ski trip with you!

Acting somebody Temporary *somebody* or *something* as in:

Acting something *Acting vice president;*
Acting director of public relations; etc.

I'm the acting chairman, not the chairman. I'm acting as the chairman. I'll be temporarily performing the duties of the chairman until we have a permanent one!

Tell me who your friends are, and I will tell you who you are!
(*Assyrian, Persian, Spanish, Turkish, etc.*)

Adding insult to injury Making things even worse.

I got a ticket for parking in the wrong place. Then, to add insult to injury, they towed my car while I was talking to the policeman!

Also: Rubbing salt in the wound.

Compare to: Kick in the teeth.

Addressing something Not ignoring it.
Talking about it.
Taking care of it.
Paying attention to it.

Admission on one's part A person admitting to something.

This is an admission on my part, means:
I'm admitting it;
I'm saying I did it; etc.

After the fact After something has happened.

You've already signed the contract. You can't change it after the fact!

Your honor, the evidence was planted at the scene after the fact!

Age before beauty Older person first, prettier person next.

This is used (mostly by older men) when younger or prettier women let older men do something first, or hold the door for them, etc. It is used as a humorous compliment.

Ahead of the curve Ahead of the others.

Ain't Isn't.
 Is not.
 Aren't.
 Am not.
 Are not.

Ain't that the truth! I really agree.
 That is the truth.
 That is exactly the truth.

Airhead Stupid.
Air head Ditzzy, empty-headed, no brain.
She's an airhead. She can't even spell her own name!

A lie has no legs. (*English.*)
 In lies, one has short legs. (*Croatian.*)
 Lies have short legs. (*Czech, German.*)
 Lies have short feet (or memory). (*Armenian.*)
A lie cannot get too far; the truth will come out.

Airing one's dirty laundry Exposing one's private matters.
 Also:
 Airing one's dirty laundry in public.

AKA This is an abbreviation for:
a/k/a Also Known As.
Let me introduce you to Bill, a/k/a the Love Machine!

Albatross around one's neck A punishment. (In the old days.)
 A burden that is difficult to get rid of.
 A burden to remind the guilty person of his crime.
 Also see:
 White elephant.

Alive and kicking Alive.
 Healthy.
 Alive and healthy.

All bets are off.

Rules don't apply any more.
All agreements are canceled.

A. *And one more thing, I also want a 20 percent raise every year.*

B. *In that case all bets are off! We've never talked about an automatic raise before.*

Compare to: No holds barred.

The carpenter's door is loose. (*Arabic.*)

The cobbler's children go barefoot. (*English.*)

About those who take care of other people's problems but neglect their own family.

All but

Almost, nearly all, as in:

The chairman's visit was all but certain. I'm surprised he canceled it!

Everyone (or everything) except, as in:

All but the morons stayed home during the heavy snow.

All hands on deck

Everyone needs to help.

Everybody be ready (to get started).

We have so much to do. Come on everyone! All hands on deck!

Background:

This was originally a seaman's term. When turbulent seas caused a boat or ship to be in danger, the captain would call *All hands on deck!* It is now a general term.

All out

Full force.

All-out

With all available resources.

All-out war, all-out effort, etc.

All talk and no action

This is said about people who:

Give lip service.

Make promises but never keep them.

Talk a lot, but don't really do anything.

Continued on the next page.

All talk and no action

Continued from the previous page.

Q. *What do you think of the new manager?*

Sounds like he'll do a lot for us!

A. *Don't be so sure. I know him from before, and I know he's all talk and no action!*

All the same

Still.

However.

In spite of.

Regardless.

Nevertheless.

It was a long trip, but a nice one all the same.

She may have acted stupidly as they say, but she's a gifted performer all the same.

Making no difference, as in:

Democrat, Republican, they're all the same.

If it's all the same to you, I'd rather stay home.

From a thorn a rose emerges and from a rose a thorn. (Greek.)

Children don't necessarily take after their parents.

All too easy

Too easy.

Very easy.

All walks of life

When you say *People from all walks of life were in attendance*, it means:

All kinds of people were there.

All professions and classes were represented.

All's well that ends well.

If it ends well, it's okay.

The important thing is that it ends well, no matter what else happens.

Along party lines

Political

In line (in agreement) with one's own party, even if it means going against the will of the people who elected them.

When you say: *The senators are voting along party lines*, you mean:

They are voting for their own party's agenda;

Democrats for Democrats, and Republicans for Republicans.

Along the lines of

Something like that.

When someone says: *Sohaila said something along the lines of quitting school*, they mean:

She said she doesn't want to go to school anymore, or something like that.

Also: Something to that effect.

America's Finest City

This is a nickname for the city of San Diego, although not many people in other cities agree with it!

A pear will fall to its root. (*Turkish.*)

A splinter doesn't jump far from a log. (*Serbian.*)

The pear falls exactly underneath the pear tree. (*Albanian.*)

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. (*English, Greek, Slovak.*)

Children take after their parents.

Amounting to something

Becoming successful, having a meaningful life:

Q. *Dad, do you think I'll ever amount to anything?*

A. *Of course, son. You're smart, you work hard, and you have a good teacher, me!*

Being the same as, or similar to, something:

A. *I give up. I'm not going to work on this project anymore.*

B. *If you ask me, don't stop. In my book, quitting amounts to failure!*

A. *They say they want to train us, but they are really threatening us.*

B. *That's right. This "training" session is really amounting to intimidation!*

And counting

Still going on.

There will be more.

Layoffs total 45,000 and counting.

And something to match

If someone says: *She has beautiful eyes and a smile to match*, they mean something like:

Her smile is equally as beautiful as her eyes;

Her smile matches her beautiful eyes; etc.

And then some And even more.
Even more than that.

Q. *This lady was nice to offer us food. Did you pay her for the food?*
A. *I've been very generous to her. I've paid for the food, and then some!*

Animal magnetism Sex appeal.
Attractiveness in a rough way.

Anyone's guess No one knows.
Anybody's guess No one knows for sure.

When someone says: *The answer is anybody's guess*, they mean: *No one knows the answer.*

When someone says: *What she'll do is anyone's guess*, they mean: *We don't know what she'll do.*

Also: Your guess is as good as mine!

A woman and the sea are the same in anger. (*Greek.*)

Anyway you cut it Anyway you do it.
Anyway you slice it Anyway you look at it.

For a little humor:
Anyway you look at it you lose. Ask Mrs. Robinson!

Appealing to people Attractive to people.
Something that people like.

Related:
If something appeals to you, you like it.

Are you cool? Are you okay?
Is everything okay?
Have you chilled out? (*After an argument.*)

Are you with me? Do you understand?
Another meaning:
Do you agree with me?

Related: You're either with us, or against us!

Around-the-clock

Continuously.

Round-the-clock

Twenty four hours a day.

We've been working around-the-clock to meet our deadline, I mean ALL of the time!

Also:

24/7.

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

If wishes were horses, beggars would ride. (*English.*)

If they had planted "if," a tree would have grown in its place.

(*Persian.*)

If the word *if* wasn't there, my father would be a millionaire.

(*German.*)

If children's prayers were answered, there wouldn't be a single teacher alive. (*Persian.*)

Various plays with the word "if."

As God is my witness!

I swear to God!

God is my witness.

God knows I'm telling the truth.

As God is my witness, I'll do my best to defend you!

As good as dead

Dying.

Not active.

Will be dead.

Heading in the direction of being dead.

If you say: *He's as good as dead*, it could mean any of the following:

He's dying;

He's not active;

He'll die very soon;

He will be killed very soon;

If I see him again, he'll be in trouble, etc.

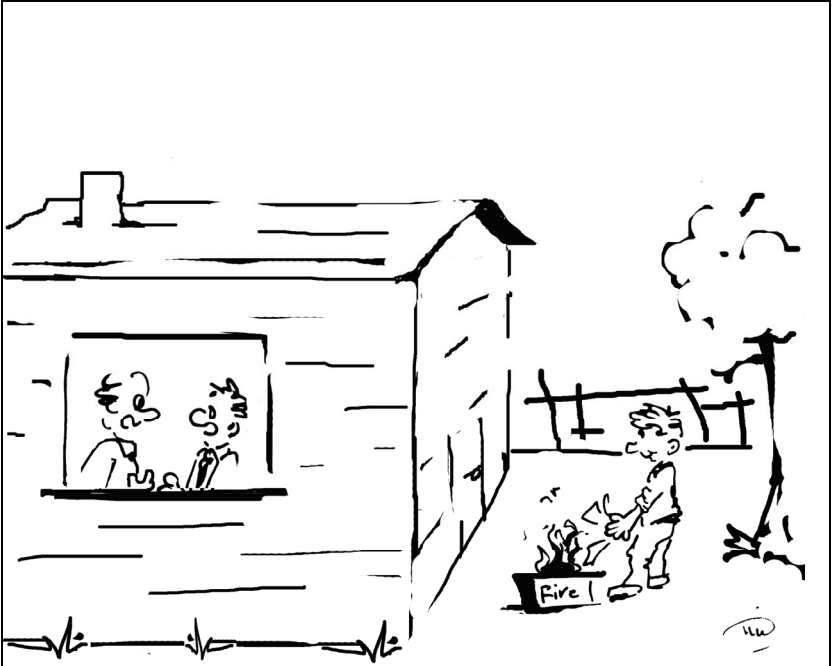
Note: Also applies to plans, projects, etc.

As luck would have it

As it turned out.

The way it happened.

As luck would have it, I had left my wallet at home. So I couldn't buy the jacket!



- Have you seen Joey? I'm late for my meeting, and I need my report.
- He must be around. I've told him to burn a few copies of the report for you.

For a definition, see:

- **Burning a copy**

As much as the next person (guy)

The usual amount.
The same amount.
The normal amount.

Don't get me wrong. I love watching political debates as much as the next guy. I just don't like this one.

As of some time

Depending on how it is used, *As of some time* means "until," or "starting."

As of yesterday, we had not received a notice! (Until yesterday.)

As of yesterday, we're not friends anymore! (Starting yesterday.)

As sure as Bob's your uncle

Sure.
You can be one hundred percent sure.

Q. *Are you sure this is going to work?*

A. *I've done it before, and, as sure as Bob's your uncle, it'll work for you, too.*

Also: There you have it!

Compare to: Bob's your uncle.

As we speak

Right now.

Even as we speak

At this very moment.

When you pick up the stick, the robber dog knows. (*Armenian.*)

When you pick up the stick, the stealing cat gets alert. (*Persian.*)

When they shouted, "Pumpkin thief," he touched his shoulder to check. (*Indian.*)

Guilty people are always on guard, looking over their shoulder.

As well

Too.

As well as

And.

Also.

In addition to.

I'll buy some food as well as some gas.

I'll buy some food, and some gas as well.

ASAP

This is an abbreviation for:

As Soon As Possible.

We need some help ASAP!

Asleep at the wheel

Missing the problem signals.

Not doing one's job (properly).

Asleep at the switch

Not being aware of what's going on.

Q. *We're about to go bankrupt. Why isn't the management doing anything?*

A. *They must have fallen asleep at the wheel!*

Avoid those who constantly praise you. (*Swahili.*)

He who knows to praise sure knows to slander. (*Albanian.*)

Do not believe that a person who lies *for* you will not also lie *to* you. (*Arabic.*)

One who tells you about someone else's business will tell someone else about yours. (*Swahili.*)

Asset, liability

Asset is a positive point, an advantage, a good thing to have, as in:

Welcome to our company. Having you on our team is a great asset!

Liability is a negative point, a disadvantage, a bad thing to have, as in:

When someone says: *He'll be a liability for us*, they mean:

His presence will hurt us more than it will help. If we keep him, it won't be good for our image.

Assuming you are right

If you're right.

Let's say you're right.

Supposing you're right.

Similarly:

Assuming it will rain; assuming we still have time; etc.

At a moment's notice

Quickly.

Very fast.

At any time.

Don't worry! Just call me and I'll be there at a moment's notice.

Firemen need to be ready to respond to an alarm at a moment's notice.

At arm's length

Origin: Legal

At a distance.

When someone says: *He's been allowed to manage the project at arm's length*, they mean: *His control over the project is limited.*

In law or real estate:

At arm's length refers to a transaction between parties who are not related to each other.

Also used in terms of relationships:

She's been hurt so many times, she is keeping him at arm's length emotionally.

At best, at worst

The best and the worst possibilities expected in a certain situation.

If someone says: *At best they won't say hello, and at worst they'll call the police*, it means something like: *The best thing they might do to me is not say hello, and the worst thing is they'll call the police to kick me off the field!*

The day you decide to leave your house naked is the day you run into your in-laws. (*Swahili.*)

At each other's throats

Verbally fighting.
Arguing very angrily.

- A. *I thought they were going to kill each other.*
- B. *I know, they were really going at each other's throats!*

Similar:

Duking it out.

Going at each other. Letting each other have it.

At large

As a whole, as in:
The city at large.

Not specific to a certain area, as in:
The representative at large.

Free, not in captivity, as in:

The killer is no longer at large. He has been arrested.

At odds with In disagreement with.

At sea Confused.

All at sea A. *I don't really think he knows what he's doing.*
 B. *No, he doesn't. Let's face it, he's at sea again!*

Similar: At a loss.

Also see: Out to lunch.

Out of sight, out of mind. (*English.*)

Out of the eye, out of the heart. (*Dutch.*)

Absence makes the heart forget. (*Parts of Africa.*)

He who leaves the eye will leave the heart. (*Persian.*)

Eyes that don't see each other, forget about each other. (*Greek.*)

If people don't see you, they'll forget you.

At someone's expense When someone says: *They're vacationing at DeWitt's expense*, they mean:

DeWitt is paying for it.

When someone says: *They're laughing at Hamid's expense, or at the expense of his feelings*, they mean:

They're making fun of Hamid.

When someone says: *We're publishing books faster at quality's expense, or at the expense of quality*, they mean something like:

We're publishing more books, but with lower quality.

At someone's mercy Under someone's control.

At the mercy of someone When someone says: *We're at April's mercy*, they mean something like:

It's April's decision;

She'll call if she wants to;

We'll have to do what she says;

What we do, or what will be done to us, is all up to her; etc.

At the end of the day

In the end.
When it's all over.
All things considered.
Considering everything.

At the end of the day YOU have to decide what you want to do with your life, not me!

Also:
When it's all said and done.

At the risk of

Taking the risk of.
Running the risk of.

If you say: *At the risk of offending you, here's what I think*, you probably mean:

I hope you don't mind, but I think you're wrong; I may be offending you, but I think you're a moron; I hope I'm not upsetting you, but I think you're crazy; etc.

At the top of one's voice

Very loud.
The loudest voice with which one can talk or sing.

At the top of one's lungs

Q. *How's your neighbor doing? Are you glad you're living next door to an opera singer?*
A. *No, I'm going crazy. She's always singing at the top of her lungs!*

A doctor's mistake is God's writing. (Greek.)

AWOL

Military

This is an abbreviation for:

Absent **W**ith**O**ut **L**ease.

When someone says: *He's AWOL*, it could mean any of the following:

*No one knows where he is.
He has left without permission.
He's absent without approval to leave.*

Note:
This is a military term, but it is being used outside the military as well.

Back in the day A long time ago.
Years, maybe decades or generations, ago.

Q. *Isn't it funny that your mom still sends handwritten letters to her friends?*
A. *Yeah. Actually, back in the day, that was the only way to communicate!*

Back of the barn This has a sexual connotation.

When you say: *They've been to the back of the barn*, you mean something like:
They're more than friends;
They know each other very well;
They have (had) a sexual relationship; etc.

Back on one's feet Back to one's normal condition with respect to health, finances, etc.

I've been down with the flu, but I hope to get back on my feet soon.

He lost everything due to the economy, but he hopes to find a job and get back on his feet again.

You look prettier when you're quiet. (*Spanish.*)
Don't speak if you can't improve on the silence. (*Spanish.*)
If talk is made of silver, then silence is made of gold. (*Arabic.*)

Back story Not the main story.
Back-story The story in the background.

I'd like to know more about Batman's back story. I already know what he does. I want to know what made him who he is.

Back to square one Starting over again.
Re-doing everything from the beginning.

A. *Hideko, the test results don't look good!*
B. *Well, I guess it's back to square one, right?*

Also:
Starting from scratch.

Backhanded compliment

An insult.
An insult that sounds like a compliment at first.

Your wife is so charming that I don't want to believe what people say about her!

Backhanding

Origin: Sports

Hitting with the back of the hand.
Returning a shot with the back of the hand.

After he made a joke at her expense, she playfully backhanded him on the arm.

Backing down

Yielding after being aggressive at first.
Changing one's position or decision under pressure.

Backseat driver

Someone who complains about how badly other people do things, but won't do anything about it himself, or herself, similar to a person in a car who's not driving but corrects the driver and/or tells the driver what to do.

Backstabber

Back stabber

Back-stabber

A person who:

Attacks you unfairly behind your back.

Hurts you when you're not expecting it.

Befriends you but betrays you to others behind your back.

Assures you of his or her support, but does not support you when you need it.

Bad blood

Friction.

Hostility.

Bad history.

Q. *Why can't those two get married?*

A. *There's bad blood between their families. They won't let them.*

Bad news

When you say: *Stay away from her, she's bad news*, you might mean one of the following:

She does drugs;

She's a bad influence;

She writes bad checks;

She regularly misses school;

She might get you in trouble; etc.

Bad seed Really bad.
Bad to the bone Completely bad, pure evil.
 Not just bad on the surface but all the way through to the bone.

Bailing (out) Quitting.
After only one week on the job, he bailed (out).

Lentils are still in the market, and the Brahmin is beating his wife for not cooking them properly. (*Indian.*)

Bailing (out) on someone Leaving them.
 Abandoning them.
My wife has bailed out on me!

Bailing someone out Helping, as in:
*I'm tired of bailing you out of your problems.
 Next time, call someone else!*

Origin: Legal

Related:
 Helping someone out of jail by paying the bail money.

Bait and switch Telling a lie at first, and changing one's word later, in order to cheat someone.
They're using a bait-and-switch strategy. They get you interested in their plan with a low interest rate, but tell you about the hidden fees later, at which time they encourage you to accept their plan with a higher interest rate!

Balancing act Multi-tasking.
 Doing, or trying to do, more than one thing at a time.
 A. *The government needs to do a lot about health care, jobs, the war, recession, etc.*
 B. *They will need to do a real balancing act if they don't want to fail.*

Ball is in your court. It's up to you.
 It's your turn.
 It's your decision.
Origin: Sports

Bang for one's buck

Value for one's money.

When someone says: *You get the most bang for your buck here*, they mean something like:

Our prices are the lowest;

Here you get more for what you pay;

Your dollar goes a long way in this store; etc.

Bar none

No exceptions.

When someone says: *This restaurant has the best steak in town, bar none*, they mean something like: *It has the best steak in town without any exceptions.*

Bare knuckle fight

A fight with no rules.

Bare knuckle race

A fight where anything is allowed.

Sports

Also see:

All bets are off.

No holds barred.

Bargaining table

Negotiation.

A place for negotiations.

When someone says: *They're still at the bargaining table*, they mean something like:

There's still hope;

They're still talking;

They haven't stopped negotiating;

They haven't come to a decision yet; etc.

The sun won't stay behind the cloud. (*Armenian.*)

The sun shines even when it is cloudy. (*Albanian.*)

There's always hope.

Bases in baseball

Sports

First, second, and third base refer to various stages in the game of baseball. Home run, or home base, is the ultimate stage.

All of these terms also refer to various levels of success in any activity, where *first base* refers to *minor success*, and *home run* refers to *achieving a goal in a big way*.

Continued on the next page.

Bases in baseball

Continued from the previous page.

All of these terms also refer to various stages in a romantic or sexual relationship, where *first base* refers to *kissing*, and *home run* refers to *full sexual intercourse*.

When someone says: *He didn't get anywhere, not even to first base*, they mean something like: *He wasn't very successful in his business, or, He didn't even get to kiss her!*

Taking rye to Kerman. (*Persian.*)
 Carrying water to the sea. (*Dutch.*)
 Carrying owls to Athens. (*German.*)
 Carrying coal to Newcastle. (*English.*)
 Taking water to the Danube. (*Hungarian.*)
 Crossing the stream to get water. (*Danish.*)

About doing something that is a waste of time.

Be as it may

However.

Be that as it may

Although that may be true.

A. *I think John means well.*

B. *Be that as it may, he's an idiot!*

Be put under

Be sedated or drugged into unconsciousness.

Medical

Q. *Why didn't you tell them they were operating on the wrong knee?*

A. *I was put under! I didn't know what was going on.*

Bean counter

An accountant.

A financial officer.

Beating a dead horse

Repeatedly talking about something.

Talking about something that has already been decided.

Wasting one's time talking about something that won't change.

Q. *Can we talk about my trip now?*

A. *Come on, stop beating a dead horse! We have already decided that you're not going.*

Beating a rap

Origin: Legal

Getting out of a bad situation without being punished.

Q. *Didn't they arrest him for stealing from his mother?*

A. *Yeah, but somehow he beat the rap and avoided going to jail.*

Also see:

Getting away with something.

Beating around the bush

Speaking indirectly.

Not saying what's on one's mind.

Of course I've asked her about her plans, but she always beats around the bush. She never gives me a straight answer.

Also:

Dance around the issue.

Dance around something.

The pot calling the kettle black. (*English.*)

The donkey called the rooster bigheaded. (*Greek.*)

The ragged says to the naked: Why don't you get dressed?
(*Portuguese.*)

Beating someone to it

Doing something before someone else gets a chance to do it.

Q. *Did you pick up the free tickets?*

A. *I was going to, but my so called friend beat me to it.*

Also:

Beating someone to the punch.

Beating the heck out of someone

An exaggerated, but polite, way of saying:

Beating someone up seriously.

Really beating someone at a game.

The following mean the same thing but are not polite:

Beating the hell (or the ho-ho's, or the bejesus, or the sh-t, or the crap) out of someone.

Beating the odds

Origin: Sports, Gambling

Winning despite low probabilities.

Succeeding despite low expectations.

It's difficult but I know that she can do it. She'll beat the odds and surprise everyone.

Related:

The odds are against it, means: It's very risky.

The odds are in its favor, means: It isn't very risky.

He even has bird's milk. *(Greek.)*

For some, cows die; for others, bulls give birth. *(Portuguese.)*

A wealthy, or lucky, person can have anything.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

People have different opinions.

Beauty means different things to different people.

A. *I don't know what he sees in her. She's as ugly as a bulldog.*

B. *He thinks she's the most beautiful creature alive. Truly, beauty is in the eye of the beholder!*

Also see: Different strokes for different folks.

Been around the block

Experienced. (Could be positive or negative.)

I think you should listen to your older brother.

He's been around the block. (Positive.)

I don't want my son hanging around with that girl sitting over there. She's obviously been around the block. (Negative. It refers to sexual promiscuity.)

Been there, done that!

I've tried it already.

It has been done before.

Before one could say ...

Quickly.

Very fast.

He is the fastest locksmith I've ever seen. He unlocked the door before I could say: This is the door!

Begs the question

Makes you wonder.
Raises the question.

Q. *The teacher's decision yesterday begs the question: Did she consider all of the facts?*

A. *I've asked myself the same question. I don't think she considered everything!*

Also: Beg the question.
Begging the question.

Behind closed doors

In private.
Private matters.

Toshiro wanted all family matters to stay behind closed doors. His wife didn't; she decided otherwise!

Behind the eight ball

Sports

In a tough spot.
In a difficult situation.

Background:

From the game of pool, where, if you're behind the eight ball, you will be in trouble.

Being a burning candle for someone

Showing the way.
Benefiting people.
Helping someone.
Saying a prayer for someone.

If I can't be a burning candle for those who count on me, then what's the use?

Being above doing something

If someone says: *Susan feels she is above being a secretary*, they mean something like: *Susan thinks being a secretary is beneath her, or is not good enough for her, etc.*

Compare to:
Not being above doing something.

Being carded

Getting carded

Being checked for identification.

If someone says: *She was carded at the door*, they mean: *Someone checked her identification card when she arrived.*

Being critical of ... Criticizing someone or something.
Not approving someone or something.

The opposition is being critical of the government's latest economic plans.

Walls have ears; doors have eyes. *(Thai.)*

Walls have mice; mice have ears. *(Persian.)*

Birds listen to day-words, and rats listen to night-words. *(Korean.)*

Be careful. Someone might be listening!

Being decent. Being properly dressed.
Having one's clothes on.

Being even with someone Not owing them anything.

A. *Thanks for the ride. I'll make it up to you.*

B. *No, we're even. You bought me lunch the other day.*

A. *Are you sure?*

B. *Yes, I don't owe you anything, and you don't owe me anything!*

Compare to: Don't get mad, get even!
Getting even with someone.

Being framed

Legal

If someone says: *Boris was framed*, they mean something like:

He didn't do what they say he did.

Someone arranged things to make him look guilty.

Someone gave false testimony (lied) to make him look guilty.

Someone planted (put) evidence somewhere to make him look guilty.

Similar:

Being set up.

Being let go

Getting fired.
Being dismissed from a job.

Q. *What happened to Jenny?*

A. *They found her sleeping on the job. She was let go this morning.*

Being up to something

Planning to do something sneaky, as in:
I don't usually see you at the office on weekends, but you're here today! What are you up to?

Ricky is up to something. I can tell by the way he stops talking whenever I come around. He's hiding something. He's up to no good!

Being able or willing to do something, as in:

Q. *Are you up to going to the movies?*

A. *No, not today. Let's do it tomorrow.*

In the land of mad people, there are insane rituals. (*Nepalese.*)

Believe you me!

Believe me!

Believe me you!

Also: You better believe it!

Below the belt

Origin: Sports

Not fair.
Not by the rules.
Excessively mean.

Q. *Did you hear what your opponent said about your background yesterday?*

A. *Yes. It was below the belt, not worthy of him, and definitely not appreciated.*

Compare to:
Cheap shot.

Bending someone's ear

Talking to someone for a long time.

Also:
Talking someone's ear off.

Bending the rules

Breaking the rules

Origin:

Legal, Political

Doing things that are against the rules.
Changing the rules a little to suit your needs or the needs of someone you want to help.

If you want the work to be done fast, we need to bend some rules!

We don't usually take orders without a small deposit. I'm going to bend the rules in your case, however, because you've been our client for a long time.



For a definition, see:

- **Feeling for someone**
- **Burning the candle at both ends**

Beside oneself

Excited, emotional, upset, etc.
Stunned to the point of coming out of your body and being beside your own self.

She was so excited to see her baby again, she didn't know what to do. She was beside herself with joy!

Not to be mistaken with *besides* which means *in addition to*.

Q. *Why aren't you coming with us?*

A. *I'm too tired. Besides, it's too late.*

Beside the point

Not the issue.
Something else.
Not what we're talking about.

Q. *Did you also want to talk about my trip?*

A. *Yes, but that's beside the point. That is not really why I called you.*

Better half

One's spouse, girlfriend, boyfriend, etc.

Q. *Where is your better half?*

A. *Oh she couldn't come, but she sent her regards.*

Also: Significant other.

Better off

Doing better.

Q. *Do you feel better now that she's gone?*

A. *Yes, I'm much better off without her.*

Better part of

Most of.

I spend the better part of the year in California; We were sleeping for the better part of the lecture; etc.

Betting a cup of coffee

This is about being (or not being) sure about something.

When someone says: *I wouldn't bet a cup of coffee on that rumor*, they obviously don't trust that rumor.

Note: Anything of little value could be used in place of coffee.

**Betting one's
bottom dollar**

Being very sure about something.

You can bet your bottom dollar I'll be at that race next week. Count on it!

**Between a rock
and a hard place**

Being in a position where one doesn't have any good choices available to choose from.

**Between the devil
and the deep blue
sea**

When someone says: *I'm between a rock and a hard place*, they mean something like:

I can't do anything; I don't know what else to do; etc.

He who is bitten by a snake fears a lizard. (*Parts of Africa.*)

Whoever gets burnt by hot milk blows on the cool yogurt. (*Greek, Turkish.*)

A person once bitten by a snake will be scared by an old rope. (*Parts of Africa.*)

One who's been bitten by a snake is afraid of a black-and-white rope. (*Persian.*)

He who has scalded himself on milk weeps when he sees a cow. (*Spanish.*)

**Between the two
of us**

The two of us together.

Between the two of us, we make a lot of money!

**Beyond a shadow
of a doubt**

Without any doubt.

Legal

Q. *Did they really find her innocent?*

A. *Yes and, what's more, they found her innocent beyond a shadow of a doubt.*

BFF

This is an abbreviation for:

Best **F**riends **F**orever.

It is used by the younger, Internet and texting generation.

Big Apple

This is a nickname for New York City.

Big brother

The government.

Be careful, big brother is watching us! They are listening to our phone conversations, too!

Big mouth A person who can't keep a secret, or talks more than he should, or exaggerates a lot, etc.
Blabber mouth

Big shoes to fill Hard to replace.

I've known your former director, and I know these are big shoes to fill but, as your new director, I'll try to do my best.

Big shot An important person.

Big wheel Q. *How's your uncle doing?*
A. *He's doing alright. He's a big shot now, which is how I got this job!*

Don't open a wall of your house. (*Thai.*)
Don't air your dirty laundry in public. (*English.*)
Washing one's dirty laundry must be done as a family. (*French.*)
Home affairs are not talked about on the public square. (*Parts of Africa.*)

Don't talk about private matters in public.

Big timing Being too busy for others.
Ignoring or avoiding others, especially if you're in a more important position than you were before.

He's been big timing me since he's become the president!

Bill of goods A plan or list of promises, especially one that's not honest.

Origin: Legal

A. *The new mayor was promising a lot of things before, but nothing is happening now!*
B. *Can't you see? He sold us a bill of goods just to get himself elected.*

Bitch slapping Slapping with the open hand.
Slapping not meant to hurt, but meant to humiliate and to show authority and to put the slapped person in his or her place.

Compare to:
Jack slapping.

**Biting off more
than one can chew**

Trying to do more than one is able to do.

This is probably too big of a mortgage for me to handle. I may be biting off more than I can chew, but I'm going to do it. Besides, I'll be getting a raise soon!

Also see: Over one's head.

Biting the dust

Dying.

Failing, breaking apart.

Falling down when wounded or dead.

A. *We are really getting old.*

B. *Oh, I know. Every now and then another one of our friends bites the dust!*

Q. *Do you know what time it is?*

A. *Sorry! My watch battery just bit the dust.*

Bless you!

God bless you!

An expression used when someone sneezes.

An expression of gratitude used to show well-wishing.

Similar:

Bless your soul!

May God bless you!

God bless your soul!

Note:

In response to sneezing, the German word *Gesundheit* is also used.

Half-filled pots splash more. (*Indian.*)

Noisy is the can that contains nothing. (*Filipino.*)

Hollow barrels sound the loudest. (*Dutch, Slovak.*)

Empty vessels make the most noise. (*Danish, English.*)

A loud person does not necessarily know more than others and is not necessarily more correct than others.

**Blessed with
something**

Fortunate or lucky to have a special skill, or gift, or position, or home, etc.

Q. *Do you think she has a great voice?*

A. *Oh, yes! She's blessed with one of the greatest voices ever.*

Blessing in disguise

A good thing that you don't recognize at first. Something that initially appears to be unfavorable but turns out to be beneficial.

My having the flu was a blessing in disguise. That's how the doctor found out about my heart problem!

- A. *I'm sorry I couldn't come to meet you today. I think I have the flu.*
B. *Well, if you do, it's a blessing in disguise because there was a shooting at work.*

Also see:
Silver lining.

Blowing hot air

Exaggerating.
Talking about nothing.

- A. *Your friend says he's becoming a company executive.*
B. *He's blowing hot air. Don't take him seriously.*

Also:
Full of hot air.
Pompous windbag.

Don't look for noon at two o'clock. (*French.*)

Don't complicate the issue.

Blowing in the wind

This has different meanings for different people.
Being present or clear.
Being in a state of motion.
Being in a place that nobody knows.

The answer's blowing in the wind. It's there for everyone to see.

Blowing one's own horn

Bragging about oneself.
Praising one's own accomplishments.

Tooting one's own horn

I'm not trying to blow my own horn, but admit it, I was really good!

Blowing out of proportion Making something seem more serious (or important, or spectacular, etc.,) than it actually is.

A. *I'm sure this was a minor accident but, the way your son explained it, I was really worried.*

B. *I know, he has a habit of blowing things out of proportion.*

Blowing out of the water Really surprising someone.
Completely destroying someone or something.

A good day is apparent in the morning. (*Swahili.*)
A good year is apparent from the spring. (*Persian.*)

Blowing someone's mind Being amazing.

It will blow your mind, means:
It's great;
You'll love it;
It's unbelievable;
You'll be so surprised; etc.

Also see: Knocking someone's socks off.

Blown to smithereens Blown to very small pieces.
Also: Blown to bits.

Blue in the face Angry, excited, exhausted, etc.
Exerting yourself to the point of depriving yourself of oxygen and turning blue.

She'll argue until she's blue in the face, means:
She'll argue for a very long time.

Bob's your uncle! It's done.
You're done.
Your job is done.

Q. *How do I know I'm doing it right?*
A. *Just follow the instructions carefully, and Bob's your uncle!*

Compare to: As sure as Bob's your uncle.

Body language

The way people act physically.

Q. *How can you tell she's happy? I certainly can't!*

A. *Well, I've known her for a long time. I know her body language.*

A good word will bring out the rat from the hole. (*Maltese.*)

He pulls a snake out of the nest with his tongue. (*Persian.*)

With a soft tongue, you can pull a snake out of its nest. (*Armenian.*)

Boiling down to ...

Coming down to ...

Basically meaning ...

Removing all of the extra things and giving the main idea or point or the heart of the matter.

When someone says: *It all boils down to them not liking us*, they mean something like:

Considering everything, they don't like us;

The conclusion is, they don't like us; etc.

Bone headed

Stupid.

Simple.

Also: Knucklehead.

Bone of contention

Reason for conflict.

The subject of a disagreement.

She had previously worked for another company, which was a bone of contention between her and her new boss, until he explained the history for the tension between them.

Background:

This apparently comes from the fact that when a bone is thrown to dogs it causes a fight among them.

Booya!

Booyah!

Boo-yah!

Boo-yeah!

This is an expression showing extreme joy and excitement due to a success of some sort, and can mean any of the following:

Yes! Yeah! All right! Hell, yes! Awesome!

Bottom line

In the end.
The end result.
The main point.

When someone says: *The bottom line is that you have to pay*, they mean something like:
You have to pay, no matter what.
All things considered, you have to pay.

The illiterate person is like an uncarved piece of wood. (*Greek.*)
The more you strike the steel, the more beautiful it becomes.
(*Albanian.*)

Bottoming out

Failing badly.

Bottom falling out

A thing you've been working on completely getting destroyed.
Also the uncertainty due to worries about such great failure.

A. *I hope I'm wrong, but I have a feeling that the bottom is falling out of the economy.*
B. *You bet. The bottom is falling out of everything!*

Bottoms up!

This phrase is used when people drink and it means:

Cheers!
Let's drink to that!

Brain drain

Mentally exhausting, as in:
Reading a physics book is a brain drain, especially for my brother!

Migration of top minds, as in:
Our top scientists and engineers are leaving us to work at larger companies for higher pay. A sad case of brain drain.

Bread and butter

One's main source of food.
One's basic source of income.

Q. *You're not quitting your job, are you?*
A. *Of course not. It's my bread and butter. I don't have a rich uncle, you know!*

Breaking bread Eating.
Sharing food.
Eating together.
Sharing your belongings with others.
Spending quality time with them, close enough to eat with.
Making others comfortable by sharing things with them.

Breaking in Training someone, as in:
It'll take a few days to break in our new secretary.

The initial period of usage, as in:
I'm not supposed to drive my new car too fast during the recommended break-in period.

Entering a place without permission or authorization, as in:
There was a break-in at our company headquarters earlier today.

Also see:
Breaking into a place.

No answer is also an answer. (*German.*)
He who is quiet agrees. (*Dutch, Spanish.*)
Silence is the sign of agreement. (*Persian.*)

Taking someone's silence as a sign of agreement.

Breaking into a place Any illegal entrance by force.
Going into a place forcefully and without a key, by breaking a door or window, etc.

Legal

Also: Breaking and entering.
Compare to:
Breaking in.

Breaking the mold Doing something in a new way, as in
I broke the mold when I showed up at work in my slippers. Later, of course, I was fired!

Eliminating duplication, as in:
They broke the mold when they made her. She is so unique!

Breath of fresh air A refreshing change.
A change that is welcome.

- A. *This new girl at the office is like a breath of fresh air. She has such a nice personality!*
B. *Are you sure it's her personality, and not her miniskirt that has attracted you?*

Those who've lost dreaming are lost.
The more you know, the less you need.
Keep your eyes on the sun, and you will not see the shadows.
We are all visitors to this time, to this place. We are just passing through. Our purpose here is to observe, to learn, to grow, to love.
And then we return home.
Aboriginal Australian

Bridging the gap Finding a solution.
Making a compromise.
Making a connection where a big difference exists.

Bring it on! I'm ready when you are!

Bringing down the house Causing enthusiastic applause.
Being very good at what you do.

Bringing in a clean broom Starting over with intention to do good.

Bringing to Bringing someone into consciousness.
Medical Waking someone up after they were passed out or drugged.

- Q. Were you out?
A. Yes, I think I was out for several minutes before they brought me to.

Compare to: Coming to.

Bro Brother.
Male friend.

Broken man A real loser.
A man who really, really feels he's a failure.
Also a man who has suffered a huge loss or is in deep grief.

Brotha, sista One way of referring to an African American
Brothah, sistah man or woman by another African American.

Bruised ego Hurt feelings.
 Someone's pride being hurt.

Brushing something off Being dismissive.
 Not taking it seriously.

My cousin doesn't accept criticism. He simply brushes it off.

It's no use crying over spilled milk. (*English.*)
Thinking first is an asset; regret later is useless. (*Indonesian.*)
Don't say the first thing that comes to your mind. (*Parts of Africa.*)
If you speak the word, it shall own you. If you don't, you shall own it.
(*Arabic.*)

About the need for thinking before doing or saying something.

Bucket list A list of things someone wants to do before he or she dies.

 Also see: Kick the bucket.

Bull's eye The small circle in the center of a target.
Origin: Sports

 When someone says: *He has a bull's eye on his back*, they mean something like: *He is an easy target.*

 Also:
 When you want to tell someone that you think he's right about something, you say: *Bull's eye*, which is another way of saying: *Yes, you're right on target on the issue.*

Bum's rush A rush.

 There was a bum's rush to get the job done yesterday.

Burden of proof The task of proving something.
Legal

 The burden of proof for my brother's innocence is on me. I'll do my best. He's my kid brother, you know.

Burning a copy	Making a copy. (Mostly applies to CDs and DVDs)
<hr/>	
Burning bridges	Cutting off connections. Terminating relationships. <i>If you burn your bridges behind you, you cannot go back!</i> When someone says: <i>Stop burning bridges with your friends</i> , they mean something like: <i>Don't cut off your relationships with them because, if you need them again, they won't be there.</i>
<hr/>	
Burning rubber	Driving very fast. Taking off quickly. Accelerating so fast that you leave (burned) tire marks on the road. <i>Faster, faster! I want to see you burn rubber!</i> Also see: Putting the pedal to the metal.
<hr/>	
<p>Better is a wise enemy than an insane friend! (<i>Greek.</i>) A good enemy is better than a bad friend! (<i>Jewish/Yiddish.</i>) A wise enemy is better than an unwise friend! (<i>Azerbaijani.</i>)</p>	
<hr/>	
Burning the candle at both ends	Working too hard. Overextending oneself. Doing too many things at once.
<hr/>	
Burning the midnight oil	Studying or working very late.
Burning the late night oil	Q. <i>Are you ready for the final exams?</i> A. <i>No, I guess I've got to start burning the midnight oil again!</i>
<hr/>	
Bursting at the seams	Too fat. Falling apart. Someone who really wants to (or needs to) say something, but they can't. Compare to: Coming apart at the seams. Slang, but incorrect: <i>Busting</i> at the seams.
<hr/>	

Burying one's head in the sand
Hiding one's head in the sand

Ignoring the surroundings.
Being embarrassed for doing a stupid thing.
Not wanting to be aware, or pretending not to be aware, of what's going on.

- Q. *Mindy's daughter is on drugs. Why doesn't she do something about this?*
A. *She'd rather bury her head in the sand. She can't face the truth.*

How come you are going barefoot on the thorns? (Greek.)

Why are you getting into this difficulty unprepared?

Butterflies in stomach

A sign of being nervous.

It was time for me to give my first lecture, but I had butterflies in my stomach and just couldn't move.

Buttering the bread

Making things more interesting.

We're buttering the bread for our employees and giving them more benefits and vacation time.

Also:

Sweetening the lemonade.

Sweetening the deal (or the pot.)

Okay, I'll sweeten the deal by giving you a free sixth night if you stay at our hotel for five nights in a row. How about that?!

Also see: Up the ante.

Buttoning up

Keeping quiet.
Not saying a word.

I want you to button up about this meeting. No one is supposed to know about it, got it?

Buying in bulk

Buying as a wholesaler.
Buying in large amounts.

Q. *How much for the pencils?*

A. *Do you want a few, or are you buying in bulk? If you buy in bulk it'll be cheaper.*



For a definition, see:

- **Burning the midnight oil**

Buying something

Believing or accepting something.

When someone says: *No one's buying your story*, they mean: *Nobody believes you.*

Also:

Buying it.

Buying into something.

By a hair

By a very small amount.

By a nose

By a whisker

By this much

By that much

He almost made it, but missed it by a hair. He came in third among two thousand contestants!

Remember:

Maxwell Smart missed it by that much!

By a long shot

Origin: Gambling, Sports

By a large margin.

By a large amount.

When you say: *Our team won the game by a long shot*, you mean something like: *When we won, our team was ahead by many points.*

When you say: *We're not out of trouble by a long shot*, you mean something like: *We're not out of trouble at all. We have a long way to go.*

Also:

It's a long shot, means: *It's unlikely.*

Q. *Do you think they can win?*

A. *No, it's a long shot.*

By all means

For sure.

Of course.

Q. *Will you cooperate with us?*

A. *Yes, by all means. You can be sure.*

By any means

By any means necessary

By any means possible

Any way possible, as in: (Positive.)

Q. *Are you sure we can get a ticket to the game?*

A. *Yes, I'm going to get it by any means possible.*

Not at all, as in: (Negative.)

That is not the whole story by any means!

By proxy*Legal*

Through a representative.

*When the political prisoner married her husband, she did it by proxy because they wouldn't let him in the prison!***By the book***Legal*

Correctly.

According to the law, or according to the rules.

*I want you to do everything by the book to make sure that we won't make a mistake again!*A large-pot without cover does not hold water. (*Haitian.*)*People who talk too much can't keep a secret.***By the wayside**

Wayside means the side of the road, but it is also used as follow:

*Falling by the wayside, means: Giving up.**Leaving something by the wayside, means: Leaving it behind.**Going by the wayside, means: Being left alone, obsolete, etc.***Call me!**

Telephone me.

Also:

Give me a call (or a ring, or a buzz, or a jingle).

Calling for something

Asking for something, as in:

Q. *What do these people want?*A. *Nothing unusual. They're calling for justice!*

Requiring something, as in:

Q. *What kind of an agreement do you have?*A. *Well, for one thing, it calls for the strike to end on Monday.*

Being appropriate for something, as in:

A. *I got my raise.*B. *Great, this calls for a celebration!***Calling it a day**

Stopping to work, usually for the day.

That's enough work for today. It's time for me to call it a day and go home, or to the movies, whichever is closer!

Calling it like it is

Telling the truth.

Saying it like it is

Making an honest comment.

Q. *When you appraise a property, do you usually say it's worth more than it really is, or less?*

A. *I call it like it is, no more, no less.*

Also: Shooting from the hip.

Calling it like you see it.

Calling it quits

Stopping or ending something.

By now, we know that we're not going to succeed. We might as well call it quits, before we lose all of our savings.

Calling on

Making a request.

I'm calling on you to punish her.

I'm calling on all of you to participate in our fight against elderly abuse.

Calling out

Challenging.

I would like to have called him out on his claim, but I wasn't so sure myself.

Calling someone on something

Pointing out a mistake, an exaggeration, a deception, or a lie.

Q. *Why did you interrupt the principal in the middle of his report?*

A. *Well, he was obviously exaggerating. I had to call him on those numbers!*

One idiot throws a stone in the well, and it takes a hundred wise men to (try to) get it out. (*Armenian, Persian.*)

Calling the shots

Making the decisions.

Telling people what to do.

Q. *Who's calling the shots around here?*

A. *I am.*

Q. *Well, then, can I borrow your step ladder for a few minutes?*

A. *I don't know. Let me ask my wife!*

APPENDIX

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INDEX

- Above, 20, 42, 199, 242
According, 21
Ace, 21
Achilles, 21
Across, 21, 75, 293
Act(ing), Action, 21, 22, 68, 228, 259
Adam, 95
Add, Adding, 22, 351, 353, 362, 190
Address, 22, 80, 87
Admission, 22
Ado, 233
Advantage, 171, 381
Advocate, 91
Afford, 63
Afraid, 178
After, 22, 166, 252, 254, 350
Against, 291
Age, 22, 75, 228
Agenda, 156
Agree, 174, 175, 188, 305, 341
Ain't, 23, 189
Air, Airing, 23, 50, 55
Airs, 288
Aisle, 293
Albatross, 23, 376
Alive, 23, 89, 184
All, All's, 24, 25
Alley, 296
Alone, 134, 208, 209
Along, 25, 26, 277, 383
Amount, 26, 165
Angle, 371
Animal, 27
Another, 151
Ante, 58, 362
Apart, 49, 57, 75, 100
Appealing, 27
Apple, 47, 78, 173
Appreciate, 174
Arm, Arm's, 19, 31, 32, 164, 358, 361, 382
Around, 23, 28, 40, 41, 87, 126, 172, 194, 358, 371, 382
Artist, 78
Ass, Assed, 70, 92, 147, 165, 232, 255, 377
Asset, 31
Association, 146
Assuming, 31
At large, 32, 105
Atheist, 343
Attitude, 170, 189
Avail, To no, 352
Average, 194
Away, 114, 126, 312
Awry, 142
Axe, 157, 169, 177
Baby, 349
Back(ing), 35, 36, 88, 97, 153, 161, 231, 252, 272, 339, 357, 369
Backhand(ing), Backstabber, Backseat, 36
Backwards, Backyard, 139, 259
Bad, 36, 37, 101, 142, 234, 277
Bag, Baggage, 157, 170, 342
Bail, 37, 196,
Bait, 37
Balance, 69, 108, 219, 329
Balancing, 37
Ball, 37, 39, 42, 63, 84, 101, 130, 152, 220, 277, 285, 321,
Banana, 304, 354
Bang, 38
Bank, 207, 384
Bar, 38, 238, 292
Bark, 115
Barn, 35, 73, 342
Barrel, 81, 216, 268, 309
Base, 38, 80, 247
Baseball, 38, 84, 166
Basket, 116, 287
Bat, 64, 140, 295, 345
Battle, 274
Bean, 39, 165, 321
Beat, 39, 40, 41, 123, 160, 225, 229, 247, 291, 332, 380

- Beauty, 22, 41
 Bed, 286, 308, 366
 Beef, 152
 Been, 41, 387
 Before, 22, 41, 73, 290
 Beg, 42, 174
 Begin, 69, 351
 Behalf, 249
 Behind, 42, 75, 150, 370, 371
 Behold, 41, 216
 Being, 44
 Believe, 44, 221
 Bell, 302
 Belly, 114
 Belt, 44, 69, 350
 Bend, 44, 139
 Benefit, 121
 Beside, Besides, 46, 49
 Best, 32, 47, 130, 286, 353
 Bet, 24, 46, 47, 95, 296, 384, 386
 Betsy, 164
 Better, 44, 46, 69, 119, 175, 178, 312, 358
 Between, 47, 293, 331
 Bidding, 94
 Big, 47, 48, 79, 303, 306, 342
 Bill, 48, 118, 346
 Bird, 17, 104, 135, 202
 Bitch, 48, 318, 319
 Bite, Biting, 95, 234, 320, 386
 Bitten, 258
 Black, 133, 144, 187, 214, 281
 Blank, 160
 Bleeding, 87
 Bless, Blessing, 49, 50, 137, 190
 Blinder, 290
 Blindsided, 67
 Block, 41, 236, 253
 Blood, 36, 316, 385
 Blow, 50, 51, 77, 202, 205, 210, 355
 Blue, 47, 51, 258, 267, 313, 356
 Board, 20, 21, 320
 Boat, 230, 297
 Bob, 30, 51, 240
 Body, Bodies, 52, 204, 268
 Bone, 37, 52, 92, 153, 224, 226, 348, 381
 Book, 61, 214, 277, 328, 385
 Boot, Booty, 130, 232, 285, 351
 Booya, Booyah, Boo-yeah, 52
 Borrow, 216
 Both, 57, 86, 199, 339
 Bother, 242, 271
 Bottom, 47, 53, 90, 132, 168
 Box, 188, 268, 324
 Bowl, 360
 Brain, 53, 241, 273, 274
 Branch, 109, 369
 Bread, 53, 54, 58
 Break, Breaking, Broken, 44, 54, 89, 116, 132, 165, 208, 241
 Breath, 55, 95, 169, 303, 376
 Breeze, 309, 316
 Brick, 168
 Bridge, 57, 210, 368, 371
 Bring, 55, 63, 76, 166, 213
 Bro, Brother(ly), 47, 55, 72, 320
 Broke, Broken, 55, 208
 Brown-noser, 92
 Bruise(d), 56
 Brush, 56
 Buck, 38, 342
 Bucket, 17, 56, 201, 292
 Bud, 237
 Budget, 249
 Bulk, 58
 Bull, 56, 337, 385
 Bullet, 93, 313, 330
 Burn, 42, 57, 230, 252, 258, 286
 Buried, 204
 Bury, 58, 371
 Bush, 17, 40, 86
 Butt, 123, 162, 232, 271, 381
 Butter, 53, 58
 Butterfly, Butterflies, 58
 Button, 58, 86, 172, 259, 285
 Buy, Buying, 58, 60, 306
 Buzz, 82
 By, 60, 61, 116, 244, 277, 304, 330
 Bygone, 210, 371

- Cage, 293
 Cake, 121, 152
 Call, Calling, 61, 62, 73, 114, 139, 193, 195, 235, 281, 318, 338, 354
 Can, 63, 127, 237, 264
 Candle, 42, 57
 Cannon, 219
 Cap, Capacity, 21, 111, 287
 Capitalize, 64
 Captive, 65
 Card, 42, 73, 169, 172, 287
 Care, 65, 175, 331, 377
 Carpet, 338
 Carrot, 65, 66
 Carrying, 66, 158
 Case, 67, 74, 176, 221
 Cashing, 64, 67
 Cat, 84, 292, 342, 375
 Catch, Catching, 82, 104, 157
 Caught, 67, 68
 Center, 68
 Cents, 260
 Chagrin, 233
 Chain, 68, 269, 283
 Chair, 234
 Chalk, 68
 Challenge, 62, 238, 365, 386
 Chance, 72, 93, 111, 112, 146, 165, 332, 354
 Charged, 278
 Charity, 69
 Charm, 345
 Chart, 248
 Chase, 86, 134, 378,
 Cheap, 44, 69, 92, 308, 332
 Check, 118, 277
 Cheese, 231, 324
 Chew, 49, 70, 269
 Chicken, 70, 121, 123, 206
 Chief, 182
 Child, 70, 281, 295
 Chin, 199
 China(man), 72, 111, 177, 241, 282
 Chip, 153, 212, 287, 375
 Chit-chat, 309, 316
 Choice, 102
 Choir, 281
 Chop, 72, 253
 Chord, 168
 Circle, 300, 316
 City, 26, 47, 72, 231, 313, 342, 378
 Classified, 73, 120
 Clay, 73, 314
 Clean, 55, 75, 326, 336
 Clear, 86, 219
 Clock, 291
 Close, 42, 67, 73, 99, 100, 169, 200, 354
 Closet, 76, 315
 Clue, 160, 243
 Coal, 125
 Coattail, 150
 Coffee, 46, 366
 Coin, 344
 Cold, 73, 74, 281, 374
 Collective, 74
 Color, 272
 Comb, 74, 113
 Combination, 258
 Come, 70, 74, 173, 236, 371, 375
 Comeback, 17
 Coming, 74-77, 99, 151, 152, 217
 Common, 77, 78, 300
 Company, 158, 200
 Compliment, 36
 Con, Cons, 78, 283
 Conclusion, 77, 120
 Conduct, 79
 Connect, 57, 79
 Content, 352
 Contention, 52
 Contest, Context, 238, 332
 Contract, 79
 Contrary, Au contraire, 253
 Conventional, 79, 324
 Cookie jar, 68
 Cool, 27, 144, 180, 324
 Corner, 79, 87, 185, 271
 Correct, 61, 168, 280, 385
 Cough, 80

- Count(er), 26, 39, 80, 193, 265
 Course, 326
 Court, Courtesy, 37, 80, 171
 Cover, 80, 81, 385
 Cow, 153
 Crack, Cracker, 81, 315
 Cranny, 242
 Crazy, 82, 118, 121, 247
 Create, Creating, 82
 Credit, 83, 243, 352
 Creep, Creepy, 165
 Crocodile, 83
 Crop, 82
 Cross, 83, 97, 125, 161, 189, 192, 210
 Crummy, 383
 Cry, Crying, 83, 84, 111, 119, 292
 Cuff, 248
 Currency, 158
 Curve, 23, 84
 Custody, 188
 Cut, 27, 86, 87, 161, 192, 259
 Cylinder, 114
 Daddy, 200
 Damn, Damned, 370, 377
 Dance, Dancing, 40, 87, 386
 Dare, 93, 96
 Date, 88, 188, 352, 362
 Day, 17, 34, 35, 61, 88, 122, 221, 226, 305, 374
 Daylight, 344, 384
 Dead, 28, 39, 88, 89, 268
 Deaf, 110
 Deal, Dealio, 89, 90, 293, 372, 383
 Death, 100, 249
 Decent, 43
 Dedicated, 90
 Deep, 47, 90, 138, 182, 328
 Defensive, 253, 255
 Degree, 135
 Deliver, 369
 Denmark, 316
 Departure, 91
 Desert, 18
 Device, 209
 Devil, 47, 91, 306
 Diamond, 171
 Dibs, 114, 158
 Die, 93, 201, 245, 361
 Differ, Difference, Different, 91, 174, 221, 225, 226
 Digress, 175
 Dime, 92, 101, 236, 252, 329
 Dirt, Dirty, 23, 92
 Discreet(ly), Discretion, 364
 Dissin', Dissing, 92
 Dixie, 376
 Dog, Doggone, 93, 141, 151, 172, 292, 331, 354, 361
 Dollar, 17, 47, 180, 341, 346, 383
 Done, 41, 67, 96, 178, 371
 Donkey, 290
 Dot, Dotted, 79, 312
 Doting, 97
 Double, 93, 97, 253
 Doubt, 47, 238
 Dough, 193
 Down, Downhill, 52, 98, 99, 140, 141, 147, 198, 220, 258, 338, 351
 Drag, 99
 Draw, Drawer, 79, 99, 100, 193, 308
 Drawn, 100, 149, 342
 Dress, 338
 Drifting, 100
 Drive, 301
 Dry, Dried, 86, 150, 302
 Drop(ping), 17, 96, 101, 194, 366
 Drum, Drummer, 225, 350
 Duck, 73, 156, 233, 314
 Due, 102, 380
 Duke, Duking, 32
 Dummy up, 102
 Dump, 102
 Dust, 49, 102, 177, 365
 Duty, 139
 Each, 32, 352
 Ear, 44, 76, 110, 128, 277, 354, 370
 Earful, 157
 Earshot, 380
 Early, 104, 122
 Earth, 98
 Easy, 25, 104, 245, 262, 342

- Eat, 93, 96, 104, 152, 174, 344, 372
 Edge, Edgewise, 97, 104, 126, 157,
 269, 272, 337
 Effect, 26, 182
 Egg, Eggshell, 105, 270, 287, 367
 Ego, 56, 188
 Eight, Eighty, 42, 105
 Element, 105, 184
 Else, 265, 319
 Emotional, Emotionally, 106
 Empty, 106, 301
 Enchilada, 377
 End, Ending, 25, 34, 57, 87, 106, 107,
 120, 138, 173, 212, 219, 223, 243,
 246, 262, 272, 321, 353, 383
 Enough, 107, 174, 192, 208
 Entirety, 183
 Envelope, 286
 Envy, 145
 Escape, 73
 Essence, 350
 Eve, 254
 Even, 30, 43, 95, 108, 127
 Ever, Every, 108, 150, 358
 Evidence, 276, 317
 Excuse, 245, 319
 Extend(ing), 109, 369, 229
 Extra, 139
 Eye, Eyeing, 41, 56, 83, 104, 109,
 120, 133, 135, 181, 186, 198, 200,
 208, 294, 305, 344, 385
 Eyeball, 178, 305, 385
 Eyebrow, 292, 304
 Face, 51, 105, 109, 189, 217, 280,
 302
 Fact, 22, 273
 Failing, 109
 Fair, 110, 264
 Faith, 208, 356
 Fall, 53, 110, 111, 121, 212, 277, 302,
 315, 337, 374
 Fame, 72, 112
 Fan, 342
 Fast, 177, 283
 Fat, 111, 189
 Fault, 68, 234
 Feather, 111, 127, 128
 Feed(ing), 95, 96, 111, 386
 Feet, 35, 99, 170, 199, 296
 Fence, 254
 Fever, 112
 Fiddle, 150, 278, 304, 354
 Field, 171
 Fifth, Fifty, 279, 354
 Fig, Fig leaf, 112
 Fight, 38, 112, 115, 274, 291, 322
 Figure, 136
 Final, 206
 Fine, Finest, 26, 113, 367
 Finger, 113, 135, 161, 288, 360, 381
 Fire, 43, 114, 144, 170, 212, 213
 Fish, 135, 213, 265, 309, 360
 Fishing, 115
 Fishy, 316
 Fist, 115, 147
 Fit, Fitting, 115, 116
 Fix, 208
 Flatfooted, 67
 Flattering, 116
 Flip, 135
 Floodgate, 116
 Floor, 258, 259, 326, 384
 Fly, 115, 116, 118, 272, 374, 378
 Food, 74, 118, 320
 Fool, 222
 Foot, Footing, 107, 118, 128, 147,
 219, 286, 291, 309, 310
 Fork, 178, 321, 328, 339
 Forest, 213
 Four(s), 114, 121, 249, 358
 Fox, Foxhole, 82, 91, 343
 Framed, 43, 276, 302
 Freaking, 121
 Free, 32, 111, 121, 234, 249, 303
 Freeze, 374
 Fresh, 55, 172
 Friday, 340
 Fringe, Frosting, 121
 Front, 252
 Fume, 301
 Game, 110, 123, 171, 199, 264, 315
 Gear, 123, 232

- Get, 64, 95, 123-132, 244, 286, 370
 Get-go, 125
 Ghost, 72
 Gist, 127
 Give, Given, Giving, 109, 132-135, 226, 319, 371
 Glass, 136, 360
 Glove, 136, 148, 150
 Go(ing), 43, 95, 136-141, 190, 371
 Goat, 124, 285
 God, 28, 49, 119, 137, 164, 249
 Gold, 141, 325, 356
 Gonna, 142
 Good(s), Goody, 48, 119, 142, 387
 Good-bye, 202, 305, 317, 331
 Goose, Goosey, 142, 219, 378
 Got, Gotta, 190, 308, 319, 385
 Grab, 173, 361
 Grace, 144
 Grade, 224
 Grand, 122, 144
 Grant, Granted, 89, 333
 Grave, Graveyard, 144, 298, 330
 Gravy, 144
 Gray, 144, 364
 Grease, 144, 324
 Greek, 193
 Green, 145
 Grind, Grinder, Grindstone, 145, 157, 199, 328
 Grips, 77
 Groove, 127
 Ground, 77, 166, 199, 257, 301
 Grounded, 145
 Groundwork, 130
 Grudge, 157, 169
 Guard, 67, 73, 211
 Guess, 27, 160, 305, 370
 Guilt, Guilty, 146, 173, 278, 317
 Gun, 197, 287, 317, 319, 360
 Gut(ter), Guts, Gutsy, 124, 159, 321
 Guy, 302
 Habit, 101, 111, 201, 222
 Hair, Hairpin, 60, 146, 184
 Half, Halfway, 46, 136, 146, 147, 226, 312, 385
 Hand(s), 17, 18, 24, 68, 69, 95, 115, 116, 129, 133, 147, 148, 151, 164, 208, 209, 255, 277, 314, 334, 363
 Handle, 118, 148
 Hang, 96, 148, 149, 150, 210, 244
 Happen, 257, 310, 366, 371, 384
 Happy, Happier, 151, 175, 356
 Hard, Hardball, 47, 151, 278
 Harmony, 188
 Hat, 149, 151, 244, 283, 348, 360
 Hatch, Hatchet, 98, 371
 Have, Having, 28, 151-162, 176, 210, 211, 243, 290, 341
 Hay, Haystack, 236, 298
 Head, 18, 23, 52, 58, 77, 92, 162, 163, 168, 172, 199, 248, 269, 287, 295, 304, 328, 358, 364, 382
 Headline, 223
 Headwind, 109, 154
 Hear, 64, 163, 210
 Heart, 83, 104, 164, 184, 334, 352
 Heat, 181, 338
 Heaven(s), 119, 164, 224
 Heavy, 164, 278
 Heck, 40, 303
 Heebie-jeebies, 165
 Heel, 21, 91, 163, 202, 254,
 Hell, 72, 74, 123, 165, 318, 374, 377
 Help, 133, 174, 175, 226, 317, 320
 High, Highly, Highway, 74, 214, 250, 302, 338, 336, 344
 Hill, 165, 269
 Hindsight, 166, 183
 Hip, 62, 195, 309
 Hit, 123, 166, 168, 318, 329, 342
 Hitch, 139
 Hog, 214
 Hold, Holding, 95, 147, 157, 169, 170, 208, 238, 243
 Hole, 18, 21, 91, 98, 170, 181, 230, 231
 Home, 69, 70, 101, 171, 221, 319
 Honor, 260
 Hoot, 377
 Hope, 128, 129, 171
 Horizon, 254

- Horn, 50, 337
 Horse, 17, 39, 73, 88, 171, 174, 198,
 250, 290, 329, 341, 342, 350
 Hot(dogging), 50, 172, 183, 185
 Hour, 106, 246
 House, 55, 172, 254, 286
 How, 173, 204
 Humor, 154, 173
 Ice, 180, 257
 Idea, 160, 306, 372, 385
 Identify, Identity, 180, 188
 If, 177, 180, 181, 242, 245
 Image, 322
 Imagination, Imagining, 113, 276
 Ins, 188
 Insult, 22, 36
 Interest, 186
 Iron, 285
 Issue, 80, 87, 159, 202, 242, 279, 334
 Jack, 48, 123, 194
 Jane, 194
 Jar, 68
 Jig, 342
 Jive, 190
 Job, 169, 205, 317, 331
 Joe, 194
 Jog, 194
 John Hancock, John Henry, 195
 Jose, 240, 241
 Judge, 328, 385
 Judgment, 88, 107, 195, 364
 Johnny, 236
 Jump, 138, 196, 197, 224
 Jury, 107
 Just, 197, 367, 382
 Justice, 94, 186, 279
 Keep, Keeping, 63, 161, 169, 170,
 197-200, 277, 290, 369
 Kept, 200, 330
 Kick(ing), 22, 23, 56, 200-202, 313
 Kid, 97, 148, 236
 Kidding, 384, 385
 Kill, 79, 84, 177, 202, 316, 328, 386
 Kind, 258
 Kiss, 92
 Kitchen, 181, 202
 Knife, Knives, 308, 342
 Knock, 127, 202, 204
 Knot, 183
 Know(n), Knowing, 23, 95, 176, 204,
 205, 209, 214, 236, 370, 385, 386
 Knowledge, 140, 353
 Knuckle, Knucklehead, 38, 52
 Kumbaya, 205
 Lack, 205
 Lam, 254
 Lamb, 148, 183, 301, 307, 337, 349
 Land(ing), 205, 206, 208
 Landfall, 223
 Last, 96, 106, 162, 206, 207, 361
 Late(r), Lately, 17, 207, 236, 302
 Laugh(ing), 175, 207, 217
 Laundry, 23
 Lawyering up, 208
 Lay, Laying, 208
 Leaf, 112, 357
 Leak, 258
 Leap, 208
 Lease, 236
 Least, 206, 353
 Leave, 34, 96, 150, 190, 208, 221
 Left, 209, 266
 Leg, 18, 19, 87, 96, 133, 159, 284,
 308, 331
 Legend, 363
 Lemon, Lemonade, 58, 357
 Lend, 133, 209
 Let, Let's, Letting, 209-212, 308
 Level, 235, 250, 254
 Liability, 31
 Lie, Liar, 208, 212
 Liberty, 334, 338
 Lick, 212
 Life, 25, 120, 165, 236, 240, 300
 Light, 184, 212, 213, 223, 305, 337
 Like, 62, 94, 197, 213, 303, 375
 Limb, 139, 332
 Limit, 246, 247, 262, 286, 342
 Line, 17, 25, 26, 53, 83, 99, 110, 114,
 171, 198, 255, 266, 277, 293, 312,
 353, 367

- Lip, Lipstick, 213, 225, 234, 328
 List, 56, 310
 Listen, 277, 331, 387
 Little, 91, 360
 Live(s), Living, 72, 214, 216, 223, 237, 304
 Liver, 72
 Load, 123, 216
 Location, 207, 249
 Long, 20, 60, 74, 95, 137, 160, 183, 185, 186, 217, 218, 317, 342
 Look, Looking, 104, 218, 331
 Loose, Loosey , 116, 165, 219, 258
 Lose, Losing, 123, 219, 277, 379
 Loss, 33, 87, 181
 Lost, 123, 180, 219, 240
 Loud, 119, 120, 217, 219
 Love, Lovey, 72, 220, 240, 355
 Low, Lower, 128, 198, 220
 Luck, 28, 98, 285, 318
 Lunch, 268, 344
 Lying, 212, 307, 321, 337
 Magic, 313
 Make(ing), 218, 221-224, 341, 370
 Man, 55, 88, 92, 122, 200, 320, 386
 Manage, 224
 Many, 225, 259
 Mark, Marker, 221, 225, 342
 Market, 79
 Marriage, 225, 310
 Mars, 228
 Match, 26, 225, 240
 Math, 385
 Matrix, 98
 Matter, 120, 240, 314, 334
 May, 39, 180, 212, 226, 319
 Mayday, 226, 320
 Mean, 60, 106, 226, 303
 Measure, 119, 336
 Meat, 89, 226, 328
 Meet, 223, 226, 344, 376
 Mention, 244, 355, 384
 Menu, 255
 Mercy, 33, 249, 268, 336
 Message, 250, 293, 382
 Metal, 57, 286, 326
 Middle, 135, 228
 Mile, 139
 Milk, 229
 Mill, 300
 Million, 258
 Mind, 51, 63, 124, 189, 192, 197, 224, 229, 247, 261, 266, 372, 382
 Mine, 27, 160, 246
 Mint, 381
 Miss, Missing, 228, 229, 230, 380
 Mixed, 125
 Mold, 54, 116
 Moment, 31, 120, 186, 214, 322
 Momentum, 276
 Mommy, 200
 Money, 19, 134, 230, 231, 264, 273, 287, 288, 296, 387
 Monkey, 144, 222, 231, 348
 Mooch, 214
 Mood, 106
 Moon, 258, 269, 293
 More, 49, 174, 231, 265, 344
 Mother, 174, 231
 Mouth(ful), 48, 153, 193, 287, 291, 321, 329, 339, 387
 Move(r), Moving, 123, 150, 232
 Much, 30, 60, 190, 233, 243, 317
 Mud, 99, 151, 233, 328
 Music, 109, 234
 Muster, 272
 Nail, 168, 234, 235
 Name, 101, 353
 Narrow, 73, 256
 Nature, 235
 Neck, 23, 235, 271, 354
 Needle, 236, 250
 Needless, 190
 New, News, 36, 201, 236, 357
 Next, 30, 236
 Nickel, 236, 381
 Nine, 216, 237, 249, 377
 Nitty-gritty, 237
 None, 38, 160, 242, 305
 Norm, 91

- Nose, 60, 84, 92, 153, 170, 199, 241, 273, 349
 Note, Notice, 31, 78, 168, 331
 Nothing, 233, 236, 244, 245, 344
 Number, 94, 176, 245, 246, 305
 Nutshell, 181
 Object, Objective, 231, 246, 333
 Occasion, 297
 Occurred, 192
 Odd, Odds, 33, 41, 242, 246
 Of course, 60, 378
 Off, 20, 24, 46, 224, 247, 248, 250
 Offensive, 255
 Oil, 57, 78
 Old, 92, 188, 269, 302, 324, 349
 Olive, Olive branch, 109
 Once, 133, 180, 258
 One, 35, 121, 122, 170, 184, 202, 245, 258, 259, 261, 288, 386
 Oops, 262
 Op-Ed, 262
 Open(ing), 116, 140, 198, 262, 264
 Opinion, 208, 365
 Option, Optional, 158, 255, 264
 Oranges, 78
 Order, 114, 123, 286, 290, 319
 Other, Otherwise, 108, 201, 218, 255, 265, 266, 309, 312, 366
 Out(s), 24, 76, 88, 98, 119, 124, 139, 150, 188, 266-268, 332,
 Outside, 189, 268, 327
 Over, 74, 93, 127, 129, 133, 147, 148, 163, 174, 183, 189, 210, 218, 265, 268-270, 288, 298, 343, 384
 Overdrive, 138
 Owe, 189
 Own, 75, 170, 175, 184, 209, 250, 260, 270, 334, 352, 383
 Pack, 194, 270, 314
 Page, 256, 270, 305
 Pain, 146, 271
 Paint, 271
 Pants, 68, 118, 198, 200, 212, 271
 Panties, 129
 Paper, 129, 271, 294
 Par, 250, 272, 362
 Parade, 292
 Part, 22, 46, 119
 Party, 25, 82, 144, 272
 Pass, 77, 121, 272
 Past(ure), 20, 88, 244, , 290, 382
 Patience, 272, 369
 Pavement, 281
 Pay(s), 118, 192, 234, 273, 297
 Paycheck, Payroll, 216, 252, 304
 Pea(s), Peanuts, 236, 273, 344
 Peace, 369
 Pedal, 326
 Penny, 19, 183, 273
 Perception, 273
 Perp, Perpetrator, 274
 Person(al), 30, 200, 208, 330, 365
 Perspective, 156, 290
 Persuasion, 235, 246
 Pete, Peter, 119, 274, 297
 Phrase, 82
 Pick, 118, 153, 232, 274, 276, 350
 Pickle, 182
 Picture, 79, 100, 276, 290, 306, 316
 Piece, 184, 259, 276
 Pig, 151, 213, 374
 Pigeon, 73, 314
 Pink, 130
 Pins, Pinning, 250, 235
 Piss, 115, 123, 276, 350
 Place, 18, 47, 54, 164, 336
 Plant, 130
 Plate, Platter, 153, 163, 258, 327
 Play, 173, 277, 278, 360, 375, 385
 Plead, 173, 278, 279
 Pleasure, 372, 384
 Plug, 284
 Pocket, 90, 230, 273
 Pocketbook, 279
 Pod, 344
 Point, 46, 53, 86, 101, 113, 124, 222, 280, 292, 339, 351, 365, 372
 Poker, 280
 Police, 185, 188, 254
 Pony, 93, 261

- Pool, 115
- Pop, 17, 280
- Possess, 371
- Postal, 139
- Poster, 281
- Pot(shot), 58, 281, 332, 362
- Potato, 172, 316
- Potential, 281
- Pounding, 281
- Pouring, 281, 292
- Powder, 332
- Powers, 343
- Practice, 281
- Preach, 281
- Pregnant, 282
- President, 89, 339, 365
- Pride, 282
- Prison, 336
- Problem, 154, 175, 241-243, 371
- Profile, 198
- Progress, 361, 381
- Project, 274, 312
- Promise, 282, 292, 367
- Pronounced, 231
- Proof, 56, 282
- Pros, 283
- Proverbial, 283
- Proxy, 61
- Pudding, 270, 282
- Pull, 243, 283-285
- Pumping iron, 285
- Punch, 40, 243, 270
- Push, 124, 271, 285, 286, 375
- Put, 39, 57, 170, 210, 286-291, 382
- Quarter, Quarterback, 149, 230
- Question, 19, 42, 216, 242, 292, 295, 341, 348
- Quick, 41, 57, 147, 181, 197, 291
- Rabbit, 98, 283
- Race, Racing, 38, 291
- Rain(ing), Rainbow, 69, 292
- Raise, 42, 135, 292
- Rank, 73, 293
- Rat, 165, 377
- Rather, 293, 317, 382
- Raw, 106, 293, 329, 383
- Reach, 19, 293
- Read, 125, 220, 225, 293, 294
- Ready, 166, 312, 316, 336, 361
- Real, Really, 255, 294, 386
- Reap, 371
- Rear, 123
- Recognizance, 260
- Recollection, 353
- Record, 248, 307, 355
- Red, 68, 187, 294, 295, 300, 306
- Register, 295
- Removed, 258
- Rest, 67, 176, 286
- Ride, 154, 210, 336, 341
- Right, 164, 168, 184, 209, 295, 296, 307, 375, 385
- Ring, Ringer, 61, 89, 348
- Rip, 296
- Rise, 255, 296, 297
- Risk, 34, 332
- River, 302, 307
- Road, 130, 258, 285, 338, 376
- Rob, Robbing, Robbery, 297, 336
- Rock, 47, 168, 256, 297, 385
- Rocker, 247
- Role, 298
- Roll, Rolling, 130, 163, 298
- Roller coaster, 106, 298
- Rome, 374
- Roof, 346
- Rope, 204
- Rose, 108
- Roundabout, 182
- Row, 156, 249
- Rub, Rubbing, 22, 298
- Rubber, 22, 57, 286, 376
- Rug, 284, 330, 360
- Ruins, 141
- Rule, 24, 38, 44, 87, 238, 277, 300
- Run, Running, 136, 166, 186, 217, 256, 272, 300, 301, 328, 350, 369
- Rundown, 134

- Run-in, 300
 Rush, 56, 198, 333
 Russian roulette, 278
 Sacrificial, 307
 Safety, 302
 Said, 175, 341
 Sail, 204, 342
 Sake, 119, 186
 Salt, 22, 331
 Salesman, 78
 Same, 25, 197, 235, 250, 256, 302
 Sand, 58, 99, 213
 Save, 300, 302, 303, 320, 324
 Say, 41, 62, 154, 162, 180, 190, 303, 309, 353, 375, 385
 Scab, 296
 Scare, 303, 377
 Scene, 109
 Schedule, 247
 Score, 108, 204, 303
 Scraping, 304
 Scratch, 35, 122, 304
 Screw, 101, 194, 258, 259, 310, 348
 Scrutiny, 116, 360
 Sea, Seaboard, 33, 47, 104, 265
 Seal, 234, 350
 Seam, 57, 75
 Search, 160, 218
 Seat, 36, 118, 185
 Sec, Second, 93, 108, 147, 161, 252, 304, 305, 365
 Secret, 264, 342, 360
 See, Seeing, 79, 208, 254, 273, 305, 306, 384
 Seed, 37, 130
 Seem, 371
 Sell, 306, 307
 Sense, 74, 78, 154, 307, 324
 Serious, 384
 Set, 302, 307
 Settle, 149, 307, 365
 Seven, 308, 358
 Shadow, 47
 Shake(y), 177, 231, 232, 257, 308
 Share, 175, 213, 259
 Shebang, 216, 777
 Shed, 308
 Sheep, 92, 148, 183
 Sheet, 345
 Shell, 185, 308
 Shift, 144, 330
 Shine, 94, 296, 386
 Ship, 196, 197, 260, 308, 320, 342, 343
 Shirt, 198, 219
 Shock, 308
 Shoe, Shoo, 48, 142, 308, 309, 366
 Shoot, 62, 309, 310, 316, 329
 Short, 17, 185, 186, 217, 244, 258, 306, 310, 342, 383
 Shot, Shotgun, 19, 20, 48, 60, 62, 69, 110, 114, 125, 126, 310
 Should, 310
 Shoulder, 153, 218
 Shout, 312
 Shove, 331, 375
 Shovel, 312
 Show, 93, 130, 245
 Sh-t, 165, 182, 183, 303, 309, 318
 Shut, 63, 114, 262, 286, 387
 Shy, 258, 312
 Side, Sideline, 201, 256, 266, 336, 339, 358, 366, 383
 Significant, 46, 312
 Silver, 50, 313
 Sing, 189, 313
 Single, 232
 Sinker, 171
 Sinking, 141, 196, 313, 343
 Sitting, 314
 Six(ing), 90, 105, 194, 259, 314
 Skin, 132, 241, 288, 300, 303, 315
 Skip, 229
 Slap, Slapping, 48, 194, 315
 Sleep, Sleeping, 290, 315
 Sleeve, 283, 362, 369
 Slice, 27
 Slide, 211

- Slim pickins, 315
 Slip, Slippery, 130, 134, 257, 315
 Slope, 257
 Small, 113, 241, 316
 Smell, 316, 366
 Smoke, Smoking, 317
 Snake oil, 78
 Sneeze, 49, 243
 Snowball, 72
 Snuff, 362
 So be it, So long, 317
 So much as, 317
 So-called, 318
 Sock, 166, 202, 318
 Someone, 33, 83, 94, 112
 Something, 79, 192, 209, 319, 343, 361, 362
 Son, 295, 318, 319
 Soon, Sooner, 30, 164, 241, 382
 So-so, 320
 Soul, 49, 74, 137, 218, 306, 320
 Sound, Sounding, 320
 Sow, 371
 Space, 134
 Speak, 30, 97, 318, 320, 321, 339
 Speed, 362, 363
 Spin, 322
 Spit, 70, 96, 321, 322
 Splash, 222
 Split, 226, 322
 Spoil, 91, 97, 292, 322
 Sponging, 214
 Square, 35, 324
 Stab, 36
 Stack, 324
 Stage, 68, 171
 Stakes, 292
 Stand, 18, 174, 324, 325, 332, 338
 Start, 35, 55, 123, 163, 325, 326
 State, 326
 Stay, 181, 185, 198, 200, 326
 Steam, 276
 Step, 178, 295, 326, 327
 Stick, 65, 66, 140, 178, 231, 328, 383
 Still, 197, 328, 385
 Stir, 297
 Stock(ing), 125, 216, 337, 368
 Stomach, 58
 Stone, 80, 202, 241, 307
 Stop, 87, 169, 229, 329, 342, 376
 Store, 159
 Storm, 333
 Story, Stories, 35, 125, 185, 358, 374
 Straight, 125, 256, 307, 329
 Stranger, 95
 Strategic, 329
 Straw, 206
 Street, 220, 368
 Stretch, 19, 171, 329, 350
 Stride, 337
 Strike, Striking, 168, 345, 380
 String, 245, 284, 383
 Stroke, 41, 91
 Strong, 18, 76, 164
 Subject, Subjective, 246, 330
 Suck, Suck-up, 92, 192
 Sugar, 200, 330
 Suit, 307, 308, 351
 Sup, 330
 Sure, 30, 51, 132, 351, 384, 386
 Swan, 330
 Swear, 330
 Sweat, 330
 Sweep, 213, 330, 360
 Sweeten, 58, 362
 Swing, 106
 Switch, 32, 37
 Sword, 97, 111, 150
 Symbol, 109, 111, 326
 T, 351
 Tab, 118, 200
 Table, 38, 202, 255, 287, 342, 356
 Tail, 331, 381
 Tailspin, 138
 Tailwind, 109, 154
 Take, Taking, 93, 132, 156, 177, 192, 212, 259, 279, 327, 331-339, 384
 Talk, 24, 44, 50, 97, 153, 210, 231, 279, 309, 316, 339, 367, 368, 387

- Tall tale, 339
 Tank, 187
 Task, 37, 63, 338
 Tea, 177, 259, 282
 Tear, 83
 Tee, 351
 Teeth, 160, 162, 201, 205, 351
 Tell, 210, 280, 338, 340, 386
 Tempered, 340
 Test, 201, 214, 224, 272, 325, 340
 Thank, Thanks, 174, 340, 384
 That, 23, 39, 41, 60, 120, 197, 341, 343, 353, 370, 372, 376
 Then, 27, 343
 Thin, 257, 272, 367, 369
 Thing(s), 151, 165, 290, 375
 Think, Thinking, 64, 190, 243, 287, 344, 386
 Third, 135, 345
 This, 60, 353
 Thou, 170
 Thought(s), 118, 161, 169, 252, 273, 304, 334
 Throat(ed), 32, 122
 Through, 99, 140, 273, 315, 346, 367, 369, 384
 Throw, 281, 302, 348, 349
 Thumb, 349, 360
 Ticker, 349
 Ticket, 126, 226, 383
 Tide, 356
 Tie, Tied, 115, 193
 Tight, Tighten, 273, 350
 Tilt, 115
 Time, 18, 30, 108, 120, 202, 216-218, 282, 291, 325, 336, 345, 350
 Timing, 48, 360
 Tipping, 351
 Tires, 201
 Toe, 198, 327, 353, 354
 Together, 258
 Toilet, 98, 187
 Toll, 333
 Tomorrow, 94
 Tongue, 313, 321, 354
 Tool, 308
 Toot, 50
 Tooth, 113
 Top, 34, 248, 270, 308, 353, 354
 Toss, 354
 Touch, 176, 187, 355, 363
 Tough, 355
 Tow, 188, 353
 Towel, 348
 Town, 141, 177, 236
 Track, 257, 261, 266, 329, 355, 383
 Trader, Trading, 171, 355
 Traditional, 324
 Train, 144, 375
 Treat(ing), 148, 234, 356
 Treatment, 107, 312
 Tree, 115
 Trick, 261, 356
 Trigger, 146, 356
 Tripping, 356
 Trouble, 316
 True, 354, 356
 Truth, 23, 75, 329, 356
 Tune, 188, 225
 Turf, 260
 Turn, 146, 270, 298, 329, 349, 356-358, 365
 Twice, 97, 180, 258, 345
 Two, 17, 135, 142, 192, 202, 241, 247, 260, 341, 358, 360
 Uncle, 30, 51, 84,
 Under, Under-rated, 39, 132, 141, 144, 182, 183, 270, 284, 330, 349, 360, 361, 368, 371
 Undoing, 261
 Until, 189, 361, 365
 Unturned, 80
 Up, Up to, 37, 44, 178, 197, 243, 245, 256, 361-363, 372
 Upper, Upping, 258, 261, 328, 363
 Upside, 358, 363
 Urgency, 307
 Used-up, 96
 Vantage, 365
 Vengeance, 380

- Venus, 228
 Verdict, 372
 Verge, 257
 Vest, 73, 169
 Village, 365
 Vine, 91
 Violin, 278, 360
 Voice, Voicing, 34, 156, 365
 Wagon, 196, 248, 257, 316, 374
 Wait, 64, 198, 202, 365, 366
 Wake up, Waking up, 297, 366
 Walk, 25, 88, 129, 257, 274, 367
 Wall, 118, 168, 248, 368, 382
 Wanna, 368
 Wash, Washed, 74, 96, 193
 Waste, 368
 Watch, 386
 Water, Water(s), 51, 63, 74, 88, 180, 183, 199, 213, 233, 243, 272, 281, 328, 340, 361, 368
 Water-cooler, 368
 Waterloo, 226
 Wave, Wavelength, 256, 297, 305
 Way(s), 20, 74, 86, 127, 137-139, 156, 168, 182, 205, 210, 218, 241, 291, 298, 339, 361, 369
 Wayside, 61
 Wear, Wearing, 272, 369
 Weather, 361
 Wedlock, 267
 Weigh, Weight, 66, 370
 Well, 25, 30, 208, 226, 228, 314, 370, 387
 Whammy, 97
 What, 371, 240, 320, 370-374
 Whatchamacallit, 374
 Wheel, 31, 48, 295, 322, 324, 374
 Which, 205, 243, 353
 Whiling, 202, 376
 Whisker, 60
 Whisky, 376
 Whistle, Whistling Dixie, 376
 White, 23, 109, 144, 369, 376, 377
 Whole, 216, 377
 Whoops, 262
 Why, 173, 378
 Wife, 141, 325, 356
 Will, 163, 181, 378
 Win, Winning, 41, 379
 Wind, 50, 102, 204, 205, 322, 345
 Winded, 218
 Windbag, 50
 Windmill, 69, 115
 Window, 206, 267
 Windy, 378
 Winging, 379
 Wingman, 379
 Wink, 135
 Wire, 99
 Wise guy, 379
 Without, 34, 63, 139, 190, 380
 Witness, 28, 188,
 Won't, 176, 192
 Wonder, 241, 380,
 Wooden, 381
 Woods, 235, 267
 Woodwork, 76
 Word(s), 126, 150 162, 207, 225, 229, 233, 242, 369, 387
 Work, 161, 343, 378, 381
 World, 176, 177, 319, 343, 344, 375
 Worn, 96
 Worth, 17, 260, 319, 381, 382, 383
 Wouldn't, 177, 382
 Wound(s), 22, 212, 296
 Wrap, 193, 360, 382
 Wrench, 348
 Wringer, 149, 346
 Writing, Written, 307, 319, 382, 383
 Wrong, 95, 115, 128, 298, 366, 383
 X, 193, 246, 344, 383
 Yank, 383
 Year(s), 141, 213, 218, 308, 380
 Yesterday, 176
 Yet, 384
 Your, Yours, 122, 387
 You're on, 386
 Zero, Zeroing, 125, 145, 242, 387
 Zip, 242, 387
 Zone, 87, 321

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