

CHAMBERS *English* DICTIONARY OF IDIOMS

钱伯斯 英语惯用语词典

外语教学与研究出版社
Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press

Prentice Hall, Inc.

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— *English* —
DICTIONARY OF
Idioms

钱伯斯
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Compiled by
Penny Hands



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Chambers English Dictionary of Idioms

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INTRODUCTION

What is an idiom? - the scope of the dictionary

The term 'idiom' is not an easily defined one - it can refer to many kinds of words and phrases. The traditional definition of an idiom is 'a group of words which has a different meaning from the sum of its parts'. This means that knowing the meanings of all the words in a phrase will not necessarily help you to understand the meaning of the whole phrase. In some cases it is possible to make a good guess at the meaning of an idiom, because the image created is an obvious one, eg. *look like thunder* [= look angry], but in others it is virtually impossible to do so.

In this dictionary, we have covered 5 main kinds of idiom. These are:

- metaphorical expressions, for example, **make someone's blood boil** or **knock it off!**
- sayings, for example, **that's the way the cookie crumbles**.
- some phrasal verbs which have a fixed element, for example, **live it up**.
- proverbs and variations on proverbs, for example **a bird in the hand...**
- some foreign or Latin phrases which are commonly used in English, for example, **fait accompli** and **ad infinitum**.

What is not included in this dictionary?

Some less 'colourful' phrases, such as *if only* and *up till now* have not been included. These and many more are fully dealt with in the *Chambers Essential English Dictionary (CEED)*. Phrasal verbs, similarly, are dealt with elsewhere, both in *CEED*, and in greater detail in the *Chambers Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs*.

Labelling

The principle behind the dictionary throughout has been that it should be easy for the learner to use. This is why we have avoided the use of complicated coding and terminology. The only labelling we have kept is that which describes the register of language to which an idiom belongs, for example, *formal*, *informal*, *disrespectful*, *vulgar*, or *offensive*.

How to find an idiom

In order to make the dictionary as simple as possible to use, we have devised a rigorous ordering system. Under this system, any idiom that you are looking for which contains a noun will be found under the **first noun** that occurs

within it. So, **up in arms** will be found under **arms**, and **go to the devil** will be found under **devil**. If there is no noun in the idiom, look for the **first verb**. An example of this kind of idiom would be **snuff it** [= die], where **snuff** is the first (and only) verb. So this idiom will be found under **snuff**. If there is no noun or verb in the idiom you are looking for, it will be found under the **first adjective**. So **above and beyond** will be found under **above**. If there is no noun, verb, or adjective, look for the **first adverb**. An example of this kind of idiom would be **slowly but surely**, which will be found under **slowly**.

Remember:

- first noun
 - first verb
 - first adjective
 - first adverb
- } ordering system

There is one notable exception to this rule. This is that idioms of the type **white as a sheet** or **bald as a coot**, although they contain a noun, will always be found under the **first adjective**. This is because there are often several possible nouns which can go with the adjective, and so it is more useful to see them grouped together.

Finally, note that an idiom will always be found under its headword in the form in which it occurs within the idiom. This means that **caught short** will be found under **caught**, not **catch**, and **up in arms** will be found under **arms**, not **arm**. If the verb or noun is variable within the idiom, it will be found under the base form: for example, if you want to know the meaning of *fluff it* in *I fluffed it*, you will find the idiom under **fluff**.

Ordering within an entry

Within entries, idioms are ordered alphabetically. The only words that are ignored under the system are *a*, *an*, and *the*. A typical example of ordering would be the following:

death
at death's door
catch your death
the death of someone
dice with death, etc...

The subject index - expanding your knowledge of idioms in English

The main part of this dictionary has been designed so that you can look for the meanings of idioms that you have heard or read. However, many students,

rather than always waiting for idioms to come along, will wish to expand their knowledge of idioms on their own initiative. The subject index allows you to do just this. Containing over 100 categories, it lists those subject areas where the idioms in this dictionary most commonly occur. Let's say you want to express how angry you feel about something. Turn to the back of the book, and under **anger** you will find a section called **things people say when they are angry or annoyed**. Here you will find plenty of expressions that you can use to express your anger. Once you have found the idioms that interest you, check their entries in the main part of the dictionary. Here you will find information regarding the register or level of language to which the idioms belong, as well as their definitions, any notes on usage or history, and any synonyms or near-synonyms.

The corpus - what is it?

The British National Corpus is a large collection or 'database' of English language, both spoken and written. It has been recorded and gathered from books, magazines, newspapers, radio and TV, formal meetings, and ordinary people's everyday conversations. It contains 100 million words.

How is the corpus used in this dictionary?

Access to such a language corpus has revolutionized dictionary-making, helping us to learn a lot of new things about the English language. Learners, of course, can benefit directly from this new-found knowledge. It helps our task in the following ways:

- **new meanings**
The corpus frequently shows us new meanings of words or idioms.
- **frequency**
It shows us how frequently a word or idiom occurs, for example, once or twice within 100 million words, or thousands of times.
- **collocation**
It shows us which words are normally used with a particular idiom, for example, a search on the term *scot-free* shows us that people *go*, *get off*, or *escape*, *scot-free*.
- **context**
It shows us in what sort of situations certain idioms are used, for example, on television, at a business meeting, or in a conversation between friends.
- **spoken versus written language**
It enables us to see if an idiom occurs more frequently in spoken or written language.
- **gender, age, status**
It enables us to see what kinds of people use certain idioms.

The corpus and examples

In addition, the corpus has been used extensively in this dictionary to provide material for examples. These examples serve to support the definition (that is, help to show meaning), to show collocation, to show context, and to illustrate level of language. Where possible, material is authentic in that it is transferred directly from the corpus. However, in order to keep the examples clear and useful, the language has sometimes been modified or graded.

We hope that you will enjoy using this dictionary both as a reference book, and as a helpful and productive learning tool. Similarly, it is hoped that teachers will find it useful as an aid to devising classroom activities.

Penny Hands 1996

ORGANIZATION OF ENTRIES

eagle

the eagle eye of 'so-and-so

You are under **the eagle eye** of a certain person if they are watching you very carefully to make sure that you do not do anything wrong: *Nothing ever escaped the eagle eye of our 'maths teacher.*

legal 'eagle

If you describe a lawyer as a **legal eagle**, you mean that they are well-known for being exceptionally good at, and enthusiastic about, their job: *Leigh Lawson, alias TV legal eagle Kinsey.*

The mark ' shows where the main stress occurs in the idiom. If the main stress shifts to another part of the sentence in speech, this is shown in the example.

Definitions are written as whole sentences, showing the idiom being used in a natural and grammatically correct way.

Cross-references to other headwords help you to find the idiom you are looking for.

ear (see also ear)

bend someone's ear (informal)

You **bend someone's ear** when you force them to listen while you talk to them for a long time about something: *Whenever I meet her, she bends my ear about how things have changed since the good old days.*

catch someone's 'ear

When a sound **catches your ear**, you suddenly notice it for some reason: *A noise on the pavement behind me caught my ear and I turned round.*

SEE ALSO catch someone's eye EYE

Cross-references to other idioms are marked with a diamond and introduced with the words SEE ALSO. They draw your attention to variations and other idioms with similar meanings, to help you to expand your knowledge in particular subject areas. The arrow tells you where to find the idiom.

Register labels show if an idiom is formal, informal, disrespectful or vulgar. They will also tell you if the idiom is used humorously, or if it was more commonly used in the past.

Examples supported by the British National Corpus show the range of ways in which the idiom can be used.

ear-bashing (informal)

Someone gives you an **ear-bashing** if they tell you, forcefully and without listening to your comments, how much they disapprove of something: *I picked up the phone and gave him an ear-bashing. Evelyn was inclined to appease Samuel rather than endure his ear-bashing tantrums.*

have your 'ear to the ground or keep your 'ear to the ground

You **have, or are keeping, your ear to the ground** if you are taking care to be well-informed about what is happening around you: *You must keep your ear to the ground and contact me if you discover anything suspicious.*

Red Indians used the method of listening with an ear next to the ground to help them discover the position of other people or animals.

Variants are always given in full.

Notes of interest (i) explain the history of certain idioms, (ii) define words within idioms and (iii) give variants and information on usage.

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A

go from A to 'B or get from A to 'B

You **go** or **get** from A to B when you go from one place to another: *How long does it take to get from A to B?*

A to 'Z

From A to Z means from the beginning to the end or, of a subject, covered thoroughly: *She went through the whole explanation again from A to Z.* □ *An Illustrated A to Z of Garden Plants.* □ *an A to Z of London.* [= book of maps showing all the roads in London]

the AB'C

The ABC of a subject is the basic facts or principles of it; the ABC is also the alphabet and the first lessons in reading taken at primary school: *The ABC of Practical Woodworking.* □ *The first schools just taught the ABC and counting.*

ability

to the best of your a'bilities or to the best of your a'bility

You do something to the best of your abilities or ability when you do it as well as you can: *I know you haven't had much practice yet, but just do it to the best of your ability; don't worry if you make mistakes.*

abode

no fixed a'bode

Someone is of no fixed abode when they do not have a regular place to live: *It's hard to get a job when you have no fixed abode.*

about

how a'bout or what a'bout

1 You say to someone 'how about' or 'what about' something when you are suggesting doing it or having it: *How about going for a walk?* □ *How about a drink?* □ *What about the restaurant round the corner?* *They do good pizzas.* 2 You say to someone 'how about' or 'what about' something when you are reminding them of it or asking them to consider it: *We've got enough food for today, but what about tomorrow?*

not about to

You say you are not about to do something when you are determined not to do it, or when it is not your intention to do it: *I'm not about to become one of those husbands who shops with his wife on Saturday mornings and cuts the grass on Sunday afternoons.* □ *I'm not about to dismiss their arguments completely, but I do see some problems in what they suggest.*

that's about 'it

You say 'that's about it' when you have finished doing something, for example, telling someone something: *Well, that's about it; does anybody have any questions?*

above

above and be'yond

Something which is done or required above and beyond the normal level is done or required in addition to the normal level: *They often needed money above and beyond their budget.*

◇ SEE ALSO over and above > OVER

a'bove yourself

People say you are above yourself or that you are getting above yourself if they think you are too pleased with yourself, or rather conceited: *These small-time villains have a habit of getting above themselves, laying themselves open to easy detection.*

accident

an accident waiting to 'happen

You can say that someone or something is an accident waiting to happen if you feel sure that they are going to be involved in some kind of disaster at some time: *That son of theirs is an accident waiting to happen.*

by 'accident

Something, whether good or bad, happens by accident if it happens unexpectedly, without planning: *In 1928, Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin, purely by accident.* □ *Occasionally we would meet by accident in a corridor or out in the street.*

more by accident than de'sign

Something desirable that happens more by accident than design, happens more

through chance than because of any skill or judgement used by anyone: *He got the job more by accident than design, since it was he who had to take over when his boss first went off sick.*

- ▷ SEE ALSO more by luck than judgement
- ▷ LUCK

accidents

accidents will 'happen

If you say that **accidents will happen**, you mean that things can always go unexpectedly wrong, even when people have taken the strictest precautions: *The system is tested to the highest possible levels, but accidents will happen, so we recommend that you still take out some sort of insurance.*

accord

of your own ac'cord

You do something of your own **accord** if you do it without anyone asking you to: *He'll soon get tired of screaming and stop of his own accord.*

account

bring someone to ac'count or call someone to ac'count

You **bring**, or **call**, **someone to account** when you make them explain their actions and perhaps punish them: *The police have assured us that they will do all they can to see that those responsible are brought to account.*

of no ac'count

You say something is of **no account** if it is not important, or does not matter: *Whether or not you see him again is of no account to me.*

on someone's ac'count or on something's ac'count or on account of 'someone or 'something

Someone does something on **someone's** or **something's account** or **on account of someone** or **something** when they do it because of them, or for them only: *Please, don't make anything on my account; I'll only eat if everyone's having something.* □ *He walked slowly on account of his heart.*

on no ac'count

1 You say that **on no account** will you do something, or will something happen, when you will not do it or it will not happen under any circumstances: *On no account will I ask them for money.* **2** You say that something should **on no account**, or **not on any account**, be done, if it must never be done: *Don't on any account switch off the computer.*

settle an ac'count

You **settle an account** with someone when you do something to harm them in return for something unpleasant that they have done to you in the past: *It has been suggested that the murder was committed as a way of settling an account between the two gangs.*

take account of 'such-and-such or take such-and-such into ac'count

You **take account of** a certain thing, or **take** a certain thing **into account** if it is one of the things you consider when making a decision, judgement or statement: *Have you taken account of staff holidays in the schedule?* □ *Remember to take your travelling expenses into account when you submit your bill.*

turn something to good ac'count or put something to good ac'count

You **turn**, or **put**, **something to good account** when you use a situation or opportunity to your advantage: *But couldn't all this be turned to good account? Let's think about it in a positive way.*

accounts

by all ac'counts

You say that something is true by **all accounts** if it is the general opinion of the people you are inclined to believe: *By all accounts it's an excellent reference book for teachers and language learners alike.*

ace

have an ace up your 'sleeve

You **have an ace up your sleeve** when you have a secret or hidden advantage that you can use against an opponent: *I bet he's got an ace up his sleeve; he wouldn't let anybody beat him that easily.*

aces

have all the 'aces or hold all the 'aces

You **have**, or **hold**, **all the aces** when you are in a dominant position because you have certain advantages over someone else: *It's a difficult situation: he's a lot brighter than his teacher, but the teacher's the one who holds all the aces.*

acquaintance

make the ac'quaintance of someone

You **make the acquaintance of someone** when you meet them and get to know them: *I made his acquaintance at University.*

a passing ac'quaintance

You have a **passing acquaintance** with someone if you know them slightly: *He never found work, made no male friends*

and had only a passing acquaintance with people in a local pub.

act

act of 'God'

An **act of God** is a totally unexpected natural event, such as an earthquake, which you could not have predicted or prevented: *Famine caused by drought is not an unstoppable act of God. It is simply the most dramatic manifestation of soil degradation, caused by poor agricultural techniques.*

'Act of God' is a legal term referring to events for which you cannot expect compensation from insurance.

catch someone in the 'act'

You **catch someone in the act** when you discover them while they are doing something wrong:

◇ SEE ALSO **catch someone red-handed**
▷ CATCH

clean up your 'act'

Someone **cleans up their act** when they start complying with general standards of behaviour: *I think it's about time I cleaned up my act and started taking my responsibilities a bit more seriously.*

get in on the 'act'

You **get in on the act** when you get yourself involved in some profitable deal or activity in order to share the benefits: *Everybody's getting in on the act now; the market's totally flooded with computer games of this type.*

get your 'act together'

You **get your act together** when you organize yourself, your time and your work efficiently: *We're going to have to get our act together if we want to finish this job by the end of the month.*

a hard act to 'follow'

You say that someone or something is a **hard act to follow** when they set such a high standard that others will find it difficult or impossible to match them: *It won't be easy taking over from the old managing director; he's quite a hard act to follow.*

'Act', here, refers to a performance in the theatre or a cabaret, for example.

put on an 'act'

Someone **puts on an act** when they behave in an elaborately false or artificial way: *The most uncomfortable part now is the interviews, because I can't put on an act, particularly on TV. I get really embarrassed.*

This expression often occurs in the negative, and is used to talk about not

being able to, or not wanting to, change one's natural behaviour.

action

in 'action'

Someone or something is **in action** when they are working or carrying out a particular activity.

out of 'action'

A machine or vehicle is **out of action** if you cannot use it because it is broken or not working: *I'm afraid I can't give you a lift; my car's out of action at the moment.*

actions

actions speak louder than 'words'

If you say **'actions speak louder than words'**, you mean that what people do is more important and effective than what they say: *Okay, well, since actions speak louder than words, I think we should consider a one-day strike.*

actress

as the actress said to the 'bishop'

If you say **'as the actress said to the bishop'**, you are indicating a sexual double meaning in a seemingly ordinary remark: *'Admiring my equipment, I see.'* 'As the actress said to the bishop.'

Adam

not know someone from 'Adam'

If you say that you do **not know someone from Adam**, you mean that you do not have any idea who they are: *You can't be suggesting I was with him last night; I don't know him from Adam.*

According to the Bible, Adam was the first man on earth, and therefore someone you could not possibly know.

add

add 'up'

Facts, or aspects of a situation, **add up** when you realize that they make sense: *Suddenly it all added up; they were planning to take the money and leave the country. □ It just doesn't add up - why would he give up everything he's always worked for?*

ado

without more a'do or without further a'do (formal)

You announce that you are about to do something, especially perform some official ceremony, **without more ado**, or **without further ado**, when you intend to do it immediately, without any more delay:

You must all be getting impatient to know the results, so without further ado I shall ask Mrs Rennie to read out the names of the winners.

advantage

take ad'vantage of

1 You **take advantage of** an opportunity or situation when you make the best use of it: *Why don't you take advantage of his offer while it lasts?* 2 You **take advantage of** a person when you treat them unfairly or make selfish use of their kindness or good nature: *I get the feeling he's taking advantage of you; are you sure he really cares for you?*

to best ad'vantage

Something is seen or used to **best advantage** when it is likely to impress you because its best qualities are particularly evident: *It is designed to display both dancer and dance to best advantage from the audience's point of view.*

◇ SEE ALSO **to best effect** > **EFFECT**; in a **good light** > **LIGHT**

to your ad'vantage

Something is **to your advantage** if it would be useful or beneficial to you: *It would be to your advantage to get experience in English-teaching abroad.*

afar

from a'far

From afar means from a long distance away; you admire someone **from afar** when you find them interesting or attractive, but you do not have the opportunity to develop your relationship with them: *He had admired her from afar but never dared speak to her.*

after

after 'all

1 You use **'after all** with the meaning 'in spite of what was expected' when stating something surprising: *She didn't get the job after all.* 2 **After all** also means 'because it must be remembered that': *You can't expect to master English in a few days – after all, it's not easy to learn a language.*

after 'you

You say **'after you** politely to someone to ask them to go in front of you, for example, through a door.

be 'after someone

1 You are **after someone**, or **go after someone** if you are looking for them or chasing them, especially in order to catch or punish them: *The police are after two boys who stole a car and drove it straight into the*

owner's garden wall. 2 You are also **after someone** if you are attracted to them and want to start a relationship with them: *I can tell he's after you by the way he looks at you when you're talking to other men.*

be 'after something

Someone who is **after something** is looking for, or hoping to be given something: *Hello, I'm after something for removing wine stains.*

again

again and a'gain

Something happens **again and again** if it happens often or repeatedly: *I've told her again and again to switch off the computer at night.*

◇ SEE ALSO **time and time again** or **time and again** or **time after time** > **TIME**; **over and over** or **over and over again** > **OVER**

then a'gain or there a'gain

You use **'then again** or **'there again** when making a comment that conflicts with something that has just been said: *I know the children shouldn't eat so many chips; there again, there isn't much else they actually like.* □ *He says he'll come, but then again he may not manage to.*

against

as a'gainst

You use **as against** when making comparisons: *Our sales total this year was \$5 000 000, as against last year's \$4 000 000.*

have something a'gainst

You **have something against** someone or something if you have a reason for disliking or disapproving of them: *Greg was once more conscious of the man's eye on him – watchful, anxious, distrustful. 'What's he afraid of?' he wondered. 'What's he got against me?'*

◇ SEE ALSO **not have a good word to say about** > **WORD**

age

act your 'age

If you tell someone to **act their age** you are telling them to stop being childish or silly: *Why don't you just act your age for once?*

age of con'sent

The **age of consent** is the age at which a person may legally agree to have sexual relations: *They have pledged to create a common age of consent, regardless of gender or sexual orientation.*

come of 'age

1 You **come of age** when you become legally old enough to have an adult's rights and duties: *I came of age in the '60s, when there*

were chances, when it was all there waiting. Now they come out of school to nothing. 2 Someone or something **comes of age** when they reach a level at which they are recognized as being fully mature, developed, or independent: *I regard it as the moment in my career when I truly came of age as a butler.* □ *The English-language feature film came of age in the 1930s, because of its singularity as a piece of entertainment.*

feel your 'age or look your 'age

You **feel**, or **look**, your age if you feel or look as old as you are; you also **feel your age** if you feel tired or unhealthy: *Some days, you feel your age. Other times you don't feel your age at all. If it's a good day, I feel on top of the world. I do all I can on my good days.*

a ripe old 'age or a grand old 'age or the grand old age of 'such-and-such or the ripe old age of 'such-and-such

Someone who has lived to a **ripe**, or **grand**, **old age**, or to the **ripe**, or **grand**, **old age** of a certain number of years, has lived to a very old age: *She lived to the grand old age of 91.* □ *We have all heard of cases where someone has smoked 60 cigarettes a day and still lived to a ripe old age – but is it really worth taking the chance?*

under 'age

Someone who does something when they are **under age** is too young to be legally allowed to do it: *the problem of under-age drinking.*

agree

agree to 'differ

Two people **agree to differ** when they decide to stop arguing with each other because neither of them is prepared to change their opinion: *I think we're just going to have to agree to differ, don't you?*

agreed

be a'greed

People are **agreed** when they have made a decision and all know what they have decided: *Are we all agreed on the plan for the day?*

agreement

in a'greement

You are **in agreement** with someone if you have the same opinion as they do: *Oh dear, I thought we were all in agreement; what's the problem?*

aid

aid and a'bet (formal)

You **aid and abet** someone when you help them to do something which is wrong or

against the law: *He was convicted of murder and his wife was given ten years' imprisonment for aiding and abetting.*

in aid of

1 An event is held **in aid of** something such as a charity if the money made by the event is to be given to it: *a ball held in aid of Amnesty International.* 2 You ask what something is **in aid of** when you want to know the reason for it: *What's all this 'noise in aid of?*

to the aid of someone or to someone's 'aid

You go **to the aid of** someone, or **to someone's aid**, when you go and help them: *We ran to the aid of the people on the 'boat.* □ *Thanks for coming to my aid.*

with the aid of

You do something **with the aid of** a person or thing when they help you to do it or support you: *He walks with the aid of a 'stick.*

aim

take 'aim

You **take aim** when you point a weapon or missile at someone or something, so as to hit them when you throw or shoot.

air

clear the 'air

Something such as a quarrel or argument **clears the air** if it gives people the opportunity to express their opinions frankly, and so reduces tension: *A good argument often clears the air.*

◇ SEE ALSO **get something off your chest**

▷ CHEST

go up in the 'air

You **go up in the air** if you are extremely angry about something: *I daren't tell my Mum; she'll go up in the air.*

hot 'air

Hot air is a derogatory term referring to claims and promises made by someone who does not intend to keep them: *It was an impressive speech, but how much of it was just hot air?*

in the 'air

1 A possibility is **in the air** if you hear people discussing it a lot: *Talk of an election was in the air.* 2 A project is still a bit **in the air** if its future is doubtful or undecided: *It's all a bit in the air still, but we'll have to make some definite decisions pretty soon.* 3 Something is **in the air** when people can feel that it is present, but they do not mention it directly: *There is a spirit of unrest in the air, violence, lawlessness and corruption.*

into thin 'air

Someone or something disappears **into thin air** if they disappear suddenly and comple-

tely: *My keys seem to have disappeared into thin air.*

on the 'air

Someone is **on the air** when they are being broadcast on radio or television.

out of thin 'air

Someone or something appears **out of thin air** if they appear suddenly and unexpectedly: *Then suddenly, out of thin air, she appeared in the room.*

walk on 'air

You are **walking on air** when you are extremely happy: *He's been walking on air ever since he met Julia.*

◇ SEE ALSO **thrilled to bits** ▷ BITS; **on cloud nine** ▷ CLOUD; **in seventh heaven** ▷ HEAVEN; **over the moon** ▷ MOON; **on top of the world** ▷ TOP

airs

put on airs and 'graces

Somebody puts on **airs and graces** when they behave in a way that suggests that they want people to think that they are more important or sophisticated than they really are: *Bella never put on airs and graces, remaining a real Blackpool girl. The stars must have enjoyed her infectious laughter.*

atches

drop your 'atches

Someone who **drops their aitches** does not pronounce the letter 'h', especially at the beginning of words: *Don't drop your aitches, and remember to say please and thank you.*

Dropping your aitches is considered a typical feature of uneducated speech.

alarm

alarm bells start to 'ring or warning bells start to 'ring

You say that **alarm bells**, or **warning bells**, **start to ring** when you begin to sense that something is going wrong: *The warning bells started to ring for me when I noticed she seemed to have a lot more money than usual.*

false 'alarm

A **false alarm** is a situation where you think something bad or dangerous is going to happen, or has happened, but you then discover that nothing is wrong after all: *'Did the police find your car?' 'Oh, actually it was a false alarm; I'd just forgotten where I'd parked it.'*

raise the 'alarm or sound the 'alarm

You **raise**, or **sound**, the **alarm** when you warn people of trouble or danger, or report an alarming circumstance, for example, to

the police: *It was seven-year-old Jenny Curtis who raised the alarm when she called the police from a phone box on the way home from school.*

aleck

smart 'aleck or smart 'alec

A **smart aleck** or **alec** is a person who has a very high opinion of themselves, and who thinks they know everything: *a right little smart aleck.*

◇ SEE ALSO **clever clogs** ▷ CLOGS; **clever dick** ▷ DICK; **know-all** or **know-it-all** ▷ KNOW

alert

on the 'alert

You are **on the alert** when you are watching for trouble or danger, or for developments of other kinds: *Teachers have to be constantly on the alert for signs of confusion and misunderstanding in their pupils.*

alive

alive and 'kicking

Someone is **alive and kicking** when they are still alive and in a strong and healthy condition: *No, he's not dead, he's alive and kicking, and living in North London with his family.*

all

all 'along

Something has been the case **all along** if it has been so since the beginning without people realizing it: *The truth was staring us in the face all along and we couldn't see it.*
□ *To think I was right all along.*

all and 'sundry

All and sundry refers to everybody indiscriminately: *Rodney had found a much larger place than usual and invited all and sundry to join them.*

all but

You **all but** do something when you almost do it: *We all but suc'ceeded.* □ *The news all but 'killed her.*

all for

You are **all for** something if you are enthusiastically in favour of it: *I'm all for bringing boys and girls up in the same 'way.*

all 'in

1 Someone is **all in** when they are exhausted: *You look all in.* 2 Something such as a holiday costs a certain amount **all in** if all the major expenses are included in the price: *an all-in price.*

◇ SEE ALSO **all done** in ▷ DONE

all in 'all

You use **'all in all'** to sum up what you think, or give your conclusion: *All in all, we did pretty well.*