

# NTC's ENGLISH IDIOMS Dictionary

## 英语习语词典

(英文原版)

Richard A. Spears  
Betty Kirkpatrick

The Most Practical Reference  
to the Idiomatic Expressions  
of Contemporary English



中央编译出版社  
Central Compilation & Translation Press

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Richard A. Spears, Betty Kirkpatrick

**NTC's English Idioms Dictionary**

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# TO THE USER

Every language has phrases or sentences that cannot be understood literally. Even if you know the meanings of all the words in a phrase and understand the grammar of the phrase completely, the meaning of the phrase may still be confusing. Many proverbs, informal phrases, and common sayings offer this kind of problem. A phrase or sentence of this type is said to be idiomatic. This dictionary is a collection of the idiomatic phrases and sentences that occur frequently in the varieties of English that follow the British standard.

## HOW TO USE THIS DICTIONARY

1. First, try looking up the complete phrase in the dictionary. Each expression is alphabetized under the first word of the phrase. For example, **in so many words** will be found in the section dealing with the letter "i." Entry phrases are never inverted or reordered, e. g., **so many words, in; words, in so many; or many words, in so.** Initial articles, *a, an, the* are not part of the entry except in the case of proverbs or other complete sentences, where the choice of article is invariant.
2. If you do not find the phrase you want or if you cannot decide exactly what the phrase is, look up any major word in the phrase in the Phrase-Finder Index, which begins on page **365**. There you will find all the phrases that contain the key word you have looked up. Pick out phrase you want and look it up.
3. An entry head may have one or more alternate forms. The entry head and its alternates are printed in **boldface type**, and the alternate forms are preceded by "AND." Two or more alternate forms are separated by a semicolon. For example:

**bear a grudge (against someone) AND have a grudge against someone;  
hold a grudge (against someone)** to have an old resentment for someone; to have continual anger for someone. □ *She bears a grudge against the judge who sentenced her.* □ *I have a grudge against my landlord for o-*

vercharging me. □ *How long can a person hold a grudge? Let's be friends.*

4. Many of the entry phrases have more than one major sense or meaning. These senses or meanings are numbered with boldface numerals. For example:

**stand for something** 1. to endure something. □ *The teacher won't stand for any whispering in class.* □ *We just can't stand for that kind of behaviour.* 2. to signify something. □ *In a traffic signal, the red light stands for "stop."* □ *The abbreviation "Dr." stands for "doctor."* 3. to endorse or support an ideal; to represent a quality. □ *The mayor claims to stand for honesty in government and jobs for everyone.* □ *Every candidate for public office stands for all the good things in life.*

5. Individual numbered senses may have additional forms that appear in boldface type, in which case the "AND" and the additional form(s) follow the numeral. For example:

**set something aside** 1. to discard or reject something. □ *The judge set the ruling aside and released the prisoner.* □ *I have to set aside your opinion. I think you're wrong.* 2. **AND lay something aside; put something aside** to put something apart or to the side. □ *Take part of the cooking juices and set it aside for later use.* □ *Lay that glass aside because it's cracked.*

6. Some entries have additional related forms within the entry. These are introduced by "ALSO:" and are in boldface type. For example:

**scare someone stiff** to scare someone severely; to frighten someone to death. (*Stiff* means dead.) □ *That loud noise scared me stiff.* □ *The robber jumped out and scared us stiff.* **ALSO: scared stiff** badly frightened. (See also *scared to death* at *frighten someone to death.*) □ *We were scared stiff by the robber.*

7. The boldface entry head (together with any alternates) is usually followed by a definition. Alternate definitions are separated by a semicolon (;). These additional definitions are usually given to show slight differences in meaning or interpretation. Sometimes an alternate definition is given when the vocabulary of the first definition is difficult. For example:

**dead on one's or its feet** exhausted; worn out; no longer effective or successful. □ *Ann is so tired. She's really dead on her feet.* □ *He can't teach well anymore. He's dead on his feet.* □ *This inefficient company is dead on its feet.*

8. Some entries are followed by instructions or suggestions to look up some other phrase. For example:

**scarcer than hen's teeth** See (*as*) *scarce as hen's teeth.*

9. A definition may be followed by comments in parentheses. These comments tell about some of the variations of a phrase, explain what it alludes to, give other useful information, or indicate cross-referencing. For example:

**desert a sinking ship AND leave a sinking ship** to leave a place, a person, or a situation when things become difficult or unpleasant. (Rats are said to be the first to leave a ship which is sinking.) ☐ *I hate to be the one to desert a sinking ship, but I can't stand it around here any more.* ☐ *There goes Tom. Wouldn't you know he'd leave a sinking ship rather than stay around and try to help?*

10. When the comments apply to all the numbered senses of an entry, the comments are found before the first numbered sense. For example:

**sew something up AND sew up something** (See also *get something sewed up.*) 1. to sew something; to stitch closed a tear or hole. ☐ *I had better sew this rip up before it tears more.* ☐ *Please sew up this hole in my sock. My toe keeps coming out.* 2. to finalize something; to secure something. (Informal.) ☐ *The manager told me to sew this contract up, or else.* ☐ *Let's sew this contract up today.*

11. Some definitions are preceded by additional information in square brackets. This information clarifies the definition by supplying details about the typical grammatical context in which the phrase is found. For example:

**serve someone right** [for an act or event] to punish someone fairly (for doing something). ☐ *John copied off my test paper. It would serve him right if he fails the test.* ☐ *It'd serve John right if he got arrested.*

12. Some entries are cross-referenced to similar idiomatic phrases that are related in form or meaning. For example:

**in the black** not in debt; in a financially profitable condition. (Compare to *in the red*. *In* can be replaced *with into*. See comment at *in a jam* and the examples below.) ☐ *I wish my accounts were in the black.* ☐ *Sally moved the company into the black.*

13. Sometimes the numbered senses refer only to people or things, but not both, even though the entry head indicates both someone or something. In such cases, the numeral is followed by “[with someone]” or “[with something].” For example:

**set about someone or something** 1. [with someone] to attack someone. ☐ *The thieves set about the night watchman with knives.* ☐ *The older boys set about Tom on his way home.* 2. [with something] to begin something; to tackle something. ☐ *He doesn't know how to set about repairing the bike.* ☐ *She set about the task right away.*

**14.** Entry heads and their variants appear in **boldface type**. Examples are introduced by a □ and are in *italic type*. An entry head appears in *slanted type* whenever the phrase is referred to in a definition or cross-reference.

**15.** Some entry heads stand for two or more idiomatic expressions. Parentheses are used to show which parts of the phrase may or may not be there. For example: **all set (to do something)** stands for **all set** and **all set to do something**.

## TERMS AND SYMBOLS

□ (a box) marks the beginning of an example.

**ALSO:** introduces additional forms within an entry that are related to the main entry head.

**AND** indicates that an entry head has variant forms that are the same or similar in meaning as the entry head. One or more variant forms are preceded by **AND**.

**compare to** means to consult the entry indicated and examine its form or meaning in relation to the entry head containing the “compare to” instruction.

**entry head** is the first word or phrase, in boldface type, of an entry; the word or phrase that the definition explains.

**formal** indicates an expression that is literary in origin or usually reserved for writing.

**informal** refers to a very casual expression that is most likely to be spoken and not written.

**see** means to turn to the entry head indicated.

**see also** means to consult the entry head indicated for additional information or to find expressions similar in form or meaning to the entry head containing the “see also” instruction.

**see under** means to turn to the entry head indicated and look for the phrase you are seeking *within* the entry indicated, usually after **AND** or **ALSO:**.

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# ABOUT THIS DICTIONARY

*NTC's English Idioms Dictionary* is designed for easy use by life-long speakers of English, as well as the new-to-English speaker or learner. A controlled vocabulary is used in both the definitions and the examples, while special features make this dictionary uniquely effective for language learners. The dictionary covers over 6500 different forms in approximately 5500 entry blocks in 6000 definitions.

This is a dictionary of form and meaning. It focuses on the user's need to know the meaning, usage, and appropriate contexts for each idiomatic phrase. The definitions and examples provide sufficient information to allow a person trained in English grammar to parse the idiomatic expressions. Persons who do not understand English grammar or English grammar terminology and who cannot themselves parse the idiomatic expressions or example sentences do not derive much benefit from grammatical explanations. The dictionary relies on clarity, simplicity, and carefully written examples to lead the user to the meaning and appropriate usage of each idiomatic expression.

The special features that make this book useful for learners do not detract from or interfere with its usefulness for the life-long English speaker, and should, in fact, add to its usefulness. Specialized knowledge of English lexical and sentential semantics and English grammar is not used in indexing, defining, or explaining the idiomatic phrases.

Idioms or idiomatic expressions are often defined as "set phrases" or "fixed phrases." The number of idiomatic expressions that are totally invariant is really quite small, however, even when the English proverbs are included in this category. Most such phrases can vary the choice of noun or pronoun and most select from a wide variety of verb tense and aspect patterns. Adjectives and some adverbs can be added at will to idiomatic phrases. Furthermore, the new-to-English user is faced with the difficulty of isolating an idiomatic expression from the rest of the sentence and determining where to find it in a dictionary of idioms. If the user cannot extract the essential idiomatic expression, the likelihood of finding it in *any* dictionary is reduced considerably.

In dictionaries that list each idiomatic expression under a "key word," there may be some difficulty in deciding what the "key word" is. In phrases such as **button, on the** or **cards, on the**, the key word, the only noun in the phrase, is easy to determine if one has correctly isolated the phrase from the sentence in



which it was found. In phrases that have more than one noun, such as **all hours of the day and night**, **drive a coach and horses through something**, or **All roads lead to Rome**, deciding on a “key word” may be more difficult. It is even more difficult when the only noun in the phrase is one of the variable words, such as with **go around with her old friends**, **go around with Jim**, **go around with no one at all**.

This dictionary uses the Phrase-Finder Index to avoid the problems users face with trying to isolate the complete idiom and predicting its location in the dictionary. Simply look up any major word—noun, verb, adjective, or adverb—in the Phrase-Finder Index, and you will find the form of the entry head that contains the definition you seek.

For instance, in trying to unravel the sentence “This one is head and shoulders above the others,” the idiomatic expression **head and shoulders above someone or something** will be listed in the index under *head*, *shoulders*, and *above*. The Phrase-Finder Index allows the user to determine which portion of the sentence is the idiom as well as the form of the idiom chosen to be an entry head.

Another important feature for the learner is the use of object placeholders indicating human and nonhuman. This means that there is an indication of whether an object can be a person, a thing, or both.

Typical dictionary entries for idiomatic phrases—especially for phrasal verbs, prepositional verbs, and phrasal prepositional verbs—omit the objects, as in **put on hold**; **bail out**, or **see through**. This dictionary uses the stand-in pronouns *someone* and *something* to indicate whether the verb in the phrase calls for an object, where the object should go in the sentence, whether the object can be human or nonhuman, and if there are different meanings dependent on whether the object is human or nonhuman. All of that information is vital to learners of English, although it seems to come perfectly naturally to life-long English speakers. For example, there is a big difference between **put someone on hold** and **put something on hold**, or between **bail someone out** and **bail something out**. There is also a great difference between **see something through** and **see through something**. These differences may never be revealed if the entry heads are just **put on hold**, **bail out**, and **see through**, with no object indicated.

Many idioms have optional parts. In fact, a phrase may seem opaque simply because it is really just an ellipsis of a longer, less opaque phrase. This dictionary shows as full a form of an idiom as possible with the frequently omitted parts in parentheses. For example: **all set (to do something)**; **back down (from something)**; **be all eyes (and ears)**; etc.

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# A

**A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.** a proverb meaning that something you already have is better than something you might get. ☐ *Bill has offered to buy my car for £3,000. Someone else might pay more, but a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.* ☐ *I might be able to find a better offer, but a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.*

**(a case of) the blind leading the blind** a situation where people who don't know how to do something try to explain or demonstrate it to other people. ☐ *Tom doesn't know anything about cars, but he's trying to teach Sally how to change the oil. It's a case of the blind leading the blind.* ☐ *When I tried to show Mary how to use a computer, it was the blind leading the blind.*

**A fool and his money are soon parted.**

a proverb meaning that a person who acts unwisely with money soon loses it. (Often said about a person who has just lost a sum of money because of poor judgement.) ☐ *When Bill lost a £400 bet on a horse-race, Mary said, "A fool and his money are soon parted."* ☐ *When John bought a cheap used car that fell apart the next day, he said, "Oh well, a fool and his money are soon parted."*

**A friend in need is a friend indeed.** a proverb meaning that a true friend is a person who will help you when you really need someone. (Compare to *fair-weather friend*.) ☐ *When Bill helped me with geometry, I really learned the meaning of "A friend in need is a friend indeed."* ☐ *"A friend in need is a friend indeed" sounds silly until*

*you need someone very badly.*

**A little bird told me.** learned from a mysterious or secret source. (Often given as an evasive answer to someone who asks how you learned something.) ☐ *"All right," said Mary, "where did you get that information?" John replied, "A little bird told me."* ☐ *A little bird told me where I might find you.*

**A little knowledge is a dangerous thing**

See the following entry.

**A little learning is a dangerous thing.**

**AND A little knowledge is a dangerous thing.** a proverb meaning that incomplete knowledge can embarrass or harm someone or something. (From a line in Alexander Pope's "An Essay on Criticism.") ☐ *After one week's apprenticeship John thought he could mend my electric drill. A little learning is a dangerous thing.* ☐ *The doctor said, "Just because you've had a course in first aid, you shouldn't have treated your own illness. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing."* ☐ *John thought he knew how to care for the garden, but he killed all the flowers. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing.*

**A penny for your thoughts.** I notice you are thinking about something; I would be happy to know what you are thinking about. (As if to say, "I will give you a penny for your thoughts." Note variation.) ☐ *You look sad. A penny for your thoughts.* ☐ *You were lost in thought. A penny for them.*

**A penny saved is a penny earned.** a pro-

## A rolling stone gathers no moss.

verb meaning that money saved through thrift comes to the same thing as money earned from employment. (Sometimes used to explain meanness.) ☐ *"I didn't want to pay that much for the book," said Mary. "Afterd all, a penny saved is a penny earned."* ☐ *Bob put his money in a new bank which pays more interest than his old bank, saying, "A penny saved is a penny earned."*

**A rolling stone gathers no moss.** a proverb which describes a person who keeps changing jobs or residences and, therefore, accumulates no possessions or responsibilities. ☐ *"John just can't seem to stay in one place," said Sally. "Oh well, a rolling stone gathers no moss."* ☐ *Bill has no furniture to bother with because he's always on the move. He keeps saying that a rolling stone gathers no moss.*

**A stitch in time(saves nine).** a proverb meaning that early action to repair something damaged can save a lot of time because if the damage is left to get worse the repair will take longer. ☐ *Get the roof repaired when there's only one slate missing. A stitch in time saves nine.* ☐ *You should replace the rotten floorboards before the rot spreads. You know—a stitch in time.*

**A watched pot never boils.** a proverb meaning that when one is waiting for something to happen, the time taken seems longer if one is constantly thinking and worrying about it. (Refers to the seemingly long time it takes water to boil when you are waiting for it.) ☐ *John was looking out the window, waiting eagerly for the mail to be delivered. Ann said, "Be patient. A watched pot never boils."* ☐ *Billy weighed himself four times a day while he was trying to lose weight. His mother said, "Relax. A watched pot never boils."*

**abandon oneself to someone or something** to give up and accept a situation; to yield to a person; to allow oneself to be completely controlled by someone or something. ☐ *Ann gave up and abandoned herself to grief.* ☐ *Bill saw the gun and abandoned himself to the robber.* ☐ *Bill abandoned himself to the music.*

**ABC of something** the basic facts or principles of something. ☐ *I have never mastered the ABC of car maintenance.* ☐ *The book claims to be a guide to the ABC of cooking.*

**abide by something** to follow the rules of something; to obey orders. ☐ *John felt that he had to abide by his father's wishes.* ☐ *All drivers are expected to abide by the rules of the road.*

**able to breathe again** able to relax and recover from a busy or stressful time. (*Able to* can be replaced with *can.*) ☐ *Now that the annual sale is over, the sales staff will be able to breathe again.* ☐ *Final exams are over, so I can breathe again.*

**able to do something blindfold** **AND able to do something standing on one's head** able to do something easily and quickly. (Informal. *Able to* can be replaced with *can.*) ☐ *Bill boasted that he could pass his driver's test blindfold.* ☐ *Mary is very good with computers. She can program blindfold.* ☐ *Dr. Jones is a great surgeon. He can take out an appendix standing on his head.*

**able to do something standing on one's head** See the previous entry.

**able to take a joke** able to accept ridicule good-naturedly; willingly to be the object or butt of a joke without taking offence. (*Able to* can be replaced with *can.*) ☐ *Let's play a trick on Bill and see if he's able to take a joke.* ☐ *Better not tease Ann. She can't take a joke.*

**able to take something** able to endure something; able to endure abuse. (Often in the negative. *Able to* can be replaced with *can.* See also the previous entry.) ☐ *Stop shouting like that. I'm not able to take it any more.* ☐ *Go ahead, hit me again. I can take it.* **ALSO: able to take just so much** able to endure only a limited amount of discomfort or distress. (*Able to* can be replaced with *can.*) ☐ *Please stop hurting my feelings. I'm able to take just so much.* ☐ *I can take just so much.*

**about to do something** ready to do something; to be on the verge of doing some-

thing. ☐ *I think our old cat is about to die.* ☐ *The apple tree is about to bloom.*

**(above and) beyond the call of duty** in addition to what is required; more than is required by the terms of one's employment. ☐ *We didn't expect the police officer to drive us home. That was above and beyond the call of duty.* ☐ *The English teacher helped pupils after school every day, even though it was beyond the call of duty.*

**above-board** in the open; visible to the public; honest. ☐ *Don't keep it a secret. Let's make certain that everything is above-board.* ☐ *The police inspector had to make certain that everything was above-board.*

**above one's station** higher than one's social class or position in society. ☐ *He has been educated above his station and is now ashamed of his parents' poverty.* ☐ *She is getting above her station since she started working in the office. She ignores her old friends in the warehouse.*

**above someone's head** too difficult or clever for someone to understand. (Treated grammatically as a distance above one's head or understanding.) ☐ *The children have no idea what the new teacher is talking about. Her ideas are away above their heads.* ☐ *She started a physics course, but it turned out to be miles above her head.*

**above suspicion** in such a position of respect that one would not be suspected of wrongdoing. ☐ *The general is a fine old man, completely above suspicion. He would not be involved in espionage.* ☐ *Members of the police force should be above suspicion, but sometimes a few of them are found guilty of corruption.*

**absent without leave AND AWOL** absent from a military unit without permission; absent from anything without permission. (AWOL is an abbreviation. This is a serious offence in the armed services.) ☐ *The soldier was taken away by the military police because he was absent without leave.* ☐ *John was AWOL from school and got into a lot of trouble with his parents.* **ALSO:** **go AWOL** to become absent without leave. ☐ *Private Smith went AWOL last Wednesday.*

*day. Now he's in a military prison.* ☐ *Peter decided to go AWOL from school camp.*

**according to all accounts AND by all accounts** from all the reports; judging from what everyone is saying. ☐ *According to all accounts, the police were on the scene immediately.* ☐ *According to all accounts, the meeting broke up over a very minor matter.* ☐ *By all accounts, it was a very poor performance.*

**according to one's (own) lights** according to the way one believes; according to the way one's conscience or inclinations lead one. ☐ *People must act on this matter according to their own lights.* ☐ *John may have been wrong, but he did what he did according to his lights.*

**Achilles' heel** a weak point or fault in someone or something otherwise perfect or excellent. (From the Greek hero Achilles, who had only one vulnerable part of his body, his heel, by which his mother held him to dip him in the River Styx to make him invulnerable. See also *chink in one's armour*.) ☐ *He was very brave, but fear of spiders was his Achilles' heel.* ☐ *She was a wonderful wife, but extravagance was her Achilles' heel.*

**acid test** a test whose findings are beyond doubt or dispute. ☐ *Her new husband seems generous, but the acid test will be if he lets her mother stay with them.* ☐ *The MP isn't very popular just now, but the acid test will be if he gets re-elected next election.*

**acquainted with someone or something** knowing someone or something by name, not necessarily well; knowing of the existence of someone or something. ☐ *I'm acquainted with John, but I've only met him once.* ☐ *I'm acquainted with the street you describe, but I don't know how to get there.*

**acquire a taste for something** to develop a liking for food, drink, or something else; to learn to like something. ☐ *One acquires a taste for fine wines.* ☐ *Many people are not able to acquire a taste for foreign food.* ☐ *Mary acquired a taste for art when she was very young.*

**across the board** equally for everyone or everything. □ *The government raised the pay of all the teachers across the board.* □ *The council cut the budget by reducing the money for each department 10 percent across the board.*

**act of faith** an act or deed demonstrating religious faith; an act or deed showing trust in someone or something. □ *He lit candles in church as an act of faith.* □ *For him to trust you with his car was a real act of faith.*

**act of God** an occurrence (usually an accident) for which no human is responsible; an act of nature such as a storm, earthquake, or windstorm. □ *My insurance company wouldn't pay for the damage because it was an act of God.* □ *The thief tried to convince the judge that the broken shop-window was an act of God.*

**act of war** an international act of violence to which war is considered a suitable response; [figuratively] any hostile act between two people. □ *To bomb a ship is an act of war.* □ *Can spying be considered an act of war?* □ *"You just broke my stereo," shouted John. "That's an act of war!"*

**act one's age** to behave more maturely; to act as grown-up as one really is. □ *Come on, John, act your age. Stop throwing stones.* □ *Mary! Stop teasing your little brother. Act your age!*

**act something out** AND **act out something** to perform an imaginary event as if one were in a play. □ *Bill always acted his anger out by shouting and pounding his fists.* □ *The psychiatrist asked Bill to act out the way he felt about getting sacked.*

**act the goat** deliberately to behave in a silly or eccentric way; to play the fool. (Informal.) □ *He was asked to leave the class because he was always acting the goat.* □ *No one takes him seriously. He acts the goat too much.*

**act up** to misbehave; to behave in a troublesome or unco-operative way. (Informal.) □ *John, why do you always have to act up when your father and I take you out to eat?* □ *My arthritis is acting up. It*

*really hurts.* □ *My car is acting up. I could hardly get it started this morning.*

**Actions speak louder than words.** a proverb meaning that it is better to do something about a problem than just talk about it. □ *Mary kept promising to find work. John finally looked her in the eye and said, "Actions speak louder than words!"* □ *After listening to the MP promising to cut government spending, Ann wrote a simple note saying, "Actions speak louder than words."*

**add fuel to the fire** AND **add fuel to the flame** to make a problem worse; to say or do something which makes a bad situation worse; to make an angry person get even more angry. □ *To spank a crying child just adds fuel to the fire.* □ *Bill was shouting angrily, and Bob tried to get him to stop by laughing at him. Of course, that was just adding fuel to the flame.*

**add insult to injury** to make a bad situation worse; to hurt the feelings of a person who has already been hurt. □ *First, the basement flooded, and then, to add insult to injury, a pipe burst in the kitchen.* □ *My car barely started this morning, and to add insult to injury, I got a flat tyre in the driveway.* □ *First of all he asked John's girlfriend out and then, to add insult to injury, he applied for his job.*

**add something up** AND **add up something**; **total something up**; **total up something** to make a mathematical total; to combine facts in order to come to a conclusion. (See also the following entry.) □ *I've got to finish adding the figures up.* □ *Hurry and add up the numbers.* □ *When you total up all the facts, you see things entirely differently.*

**add up (to something)** to mean something; to signify or represent something; to result in something. (Informal.) □ *All this adds up to trouble!* □ *I don't understand the situation. It just doesn't add up.*

**advanced in years** See *up in years*.

**afraid of one's own shadow** easily frightened; always frightened, timid, or suspicious. □ *After Tom was robbed, he was a-*

fraid of his own shadow. ☐ Jane has always been a shy child. She has been afraid of her own shadow since she was three.

**after a fashion** in a manner which is just barely adequate; not very well. ☐ He thanked me—after a fashion—for my help.  
☐ Oh yes, I can swim, after a fashion.

**after all** anyway; in spite of what had been decided. (Often refers to a change in plans or a reversal of plans.) ☐ Mary had planned to go to the bank first, but she came here after all. ☐ It looks like Tom will study law after all.

**after all is said and done** when everything is settled or concluded; finally. ☐ After all was said and done, the wedding was a lovely affair. ☐ After all is said and done, things will turn out just as I said.

**after hours** after the regular closing time; after any normal or regular time, such as one's bedtime. ☐ John was arrested in a bar after hours. ☐ The soldier was caught sneaking into the barracks after hours. ☐ Ted found employment sweeping floors in the bank after hours.

**after the fact** after a crime or offence has taken place. (Primarily a legal phrase.) ☐ He was not involved in the actual robbery. He was an accomplice after the fact. ☐ Because she gave the thief shelter she may well be charged with being an accessory after the fact.

**after the style of someone or something** in the manner or style of someone or something; in imitation of someone or something. ☐ She thinks her painting is after the style of the Impressionists. ☐ The parish church was built after the style of a French cathedral.

**against someone's will** without a person's consent or agreement. ☐ You cannot force me to come with you against my will! ☐ Against their will, the men were made to stand up against the wall and be searched.

**ahead of one's time** having ideas or attitudes that are too advanced to be acceptable to or appreciated by the society in which one is living. ☐ People buy that artist's work now, but his paintings were

laughed at when he was alive. He was ahead of his time. ☐ Mary's grandmother was ahead of her time in wanting to study medicine. Women were supposed to stay at home and do nothing until they were married.

**ahead of time** beforehand; before the announced time. ☐ If you turn up ahead of time, you will have to wait. ☐ Be there ahead of time if you want to get a good seat.

**aid and abet someone** to help someone, especially in a crime or misdeed; to incite someone to do something which is wrong. ☐ He was scolded for aiding and abetting those boys who were fighting. ☐ It's illegal to aid and abet a thief.

**aim to do something** to mean to do something; to intend to do something in the future. ☐ I aim to paint the house as soon as I can find the time. ☐ He aims to take a few days off and go fishing.

**air one's dirty linen in public** AND **wash one's dirty linen in public** to discuss private or embarrassing matters in public, especially when quarrelling or complaining. (Figurative.) ☐ John's mother had asked him repeatedly not to air the family's dirty linen in public. ☐ Mr. and Mrs. Johnson are arguing again. Why must they always wash their dirty linen in public?

**air one's grievances** to complain; to make a public complaint. ☐ I know how you feel, John, but it isn't necessary to air your grievances over and over. ☐ I know you're busy, sir, but I must air my grievances. This matter is very serious.

**airs and graces** proud behaviour adopted by one who is acting as though one were more important than one is in order to impress others. ☐ She is only a junior secretary, but from her airs and graces you would think she was managing director. ☐ Jane comes from a very humble background despite her airs and graces.

**alive and kicking** well and healthy. (Informal.) ☐ JANE: How is Bill? MARY: Oh, he's alive and kicking. ☐ I thought the firm was in trouble, but apparently it's alive and kicking.

**alive with someone or something** covered with, filled with, or active with people or things. (Informal.) ☐ *Look! Ants everywhere. The floor is alive with ants!* ☐ *When we got to the scene of the crime, the place was alive with police activity.* ☐ *The campground was alive with campers from all over the country.*

**all and sundry** everyone; one and all, indiscriminately. ☐ *Cold drinks were served to all and sundry.* ☐ *All and sundry came to the village fair.*

**all better now** improved; cured. (Childish.) ☐ *My leg was sore, but it's all better now.* ☐ *I fell off my tricycle and bumped my knee. Mummy kissed it, and it's all better now.*

**all day long** throughout the day; during the entire day. ☐ *The sun shone brightly all day long.* ☐ *I can't keep smiling all day long.*

**all dressed up** dressed in one's best clothes; dressed formally. (See also *dress up*; get (all) dolled up.) ☐ *We're all dressed up to go out to dinner.* ☐ *I really hate to get all dressed up just to go somewhere to eat.*

**all for something** very much in favour of something. (For is usually emphasized.) ☐ *Bill is all for stopping to get icecream.* ☐ *Mary suggested that they sell their house. They were far from all for it, but they did it anyway.*

**all hours (of the day and night)** very late in the night or very early in the morning. ☐ *Why do you always stay out until all hours of the day and night?* ☐ *I like to stay out till all hours partying.*

**all in** 1. tired; exhausted. (Informal.) ☐ *I just walked all the way from town. I'm all in.* ☐ *"What a day!" said Sally. "I'm all in."* 2. with everything included in the price. ☐ *If that's the price all in, I can afford the holiday.* ☐ *The cost of staying there is £50 per night all in.*

**all in a day's work** part of what is expected; typical or normal. ☐ *I don't particularly like to cook, but it's all in a day's work.* ☐ *Putting up with rude customers*

*isn't pleasant, but it's all in a day's work.* ☐ *Cleaning up after other people is all in a day's work for a chamber-maid.*

**all in all** considering everything which has happened. ☐ *All in all, it was a jolly good party.* ☐ *All in all, I'm glad that I visited Oxford.*

**all in good time** at some future time; in good time; soon. (This phrase is used to encourage people to be patient and wait quietly.) ☐ *When will the baby be born?* *All in good time.* ☐ *MARY: I'm starved! When will Bill get here with the fish and chips?* *TOM: All in good time, Mary, all in good time.*

**all in one breath** spoken very rapidly, usually while one is very excited. ☐ *Ann said all in one breath, "Hurry, quick! The procession is coming!"* ☐ *Jane was in a play, and she was so excited that she said her whole speech all in one breath.*

**all in one piece** safely; without damage. (Informal.) ☐ *Her son came home from school all in one piece, even though he had been in a fight.* ☐ *The package was handled carelessly, but the vase inside arrived all in one piece.*

**all manner of someone or something** all types of people or things. ☐ *We saw all manner of people there. They came from every country in the world.* ☐ *They were selling all manner of things in the little shop.*

**all my eye (and Betty Martin)** nonsense; not true. ☐ *Jane is always talking about her wonderful childhood, but it's all my eye.* ☐ *He pretends to have great plans, but they're all my eye and Betty Martin.*

**all night long** throughout the whole night. ☐ *I couldn't sleep all night long.* ☐ *John was sick all night long.*

**all of a sudden** suddenly. ☐ *All of a sudden lightning struck the tree we were sitting under.* ☐ *I felt a sharp pain in my side all of a sudden.*

**all out effort** a very good and thorough effort. ☐ *We need an all out effort to get*



this matter finished on time. □ The government began an all out effort to reduce the budget.

**all out war** total war, as opposed to minor warlike acts or threats of war. □ We are now concerned about all out war in the Middle East. □ Threats of all out war caused many tourists to leave the country immediately.

**all over** 1. finished; dead. (Compare to all over with.) □ The affair is all over. He's going out with someone else. □ It's all over. He's dead now. 2. everywhere. □ Oh, I just itch all over. □ She's spreading the rumour all over.

**all over bar the shouting** decided and concluded; finished except for the formalities. (Informal. An elaboration of all over, which means "finished.") □ The last goal was made just as the final whistle sounded. Tom said, "Well, it's all over bar the shouting." □ Tom has finished his exams and is waiting to graduate. It's all over bar the shouting.

**all over the place** everywhere; in all parts of a particular location. (Informal. An elaboration of all over.) □ Tom, stop leaving your dirty clothes all over the place. □ We keep finding this kind of problem all over the place.

**all over with** finished. (See also all over.) □ His problems are all over with now. □ It's all over with him now. He's been sacked.

**all right** well, good, or okay, but not excellent. (Informal. This phrase has all the uses that okay has.) □ I was a little sick, but now I'm all right. □ His work is all right, but nothing to brag about.

**all right with someone** acceptable to someone. (Sometimes used ironically.) □ If you want to ruin your life and marry Tom, it's all right with me. □ I'll see if it's all right with my father.

**All roads lead to Rome.** a proverb meaning that there are many different routes to the same goal. □ Mary was criticizing the way that Jane was planting the flowers. John said, "Never mind, Mary, all roads

lead to Rome." □ Some people learn by doing. Others have to be taught. In the long run, all roads lead to Rome.

**all set (to do something)** prepared or ready to do something. □ Are you all set to cook the steaks? □ Yes, the fire is ready, and I'm all set to start. □ TOM: Is everything ready? JANE: Yes, we are all set.

**all skin and bones** See nothing but skin and bones.

**all systems go** everything is ready. (Informal. Originally said when preparing to launch a rocket.) □ The factory opens tomorrow. Then it's all systems go. □ TOM: Are you lot ready to start playing? BILL: Sure, Tom, all systems go.

**all talk** talking about doing something, but never actually doing it. (See also Actions speak louder than words.) □ Bill keeps saying he'll get a job soon, but he's all talk. □ Jack won't take part in a fight. He's just all talk.

**All that glitters is not gold.** a proverb meaning that many attractive and alluring things have no value. □ The used car looked fine but didn't run well at all. "Ah yes," thought Bill, "all that glitters is not gold." □ When Mary was disappointed about losing Tom, Jane reminded her, "All that glitters is not gold."

**all the livelong day** throughout the whole day. (Literary.) □ They kept at their work all the livelong day. □ Bob just sat by the river fishing, all the livelong day.

**all the rage** in current fashion. (Informal.) □ A new dance called the "floppy disc" is all the rage. □ Wearing a rope instead of a belt is all the rage these days.

**all the same AND just the same** 1. nevertheless; anyhow. □ They were told not to bring presents, but they brought them all the same. □ His parents said no, but John went out just the same. 2. See the following entry.

**all the same (to someone)** of no consequence to someone; immaterial to someone. □ It's all the same to me whether we