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美国英语习语与动词短语大词典

Dictionary of American Idioms and Phrasal Verbs

（美） 理查德·A·斯皮尔斯（Richard A. Spears, Ph.D.） 著

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Richard A. Spears, Ph. D.
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对于习惯用语和短语动词的掌握是能地道运用英语的重要标志，但它们也是英语学习中最困难的一部分。所以，一本合适的习语和动词短语词典是非常必要的。我认为这本《美国英语习语与动词短语大词典》是众多同类词典中最厚重、也是最具学术分量的一本。

该词典2005年由知名的McGraw—Hill推出，凝聚了编纂者数十年的心血。收录的词条多达24000余条，释义更是达到27000个，其中75%是最近50年里美国人最常用的表达方式；尤其值得一提的是，对很多词条给出了其原始出处和来源，并且对于词条使用当中的恰当语气和特定语境均有提示。因此，其价值是不言而喻的。

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About This Dictionary

All languages have phrases that cannot be understood literally and, therefore, cannot be used with confidence. They are opaque or unpredictable because they don't have expected, literal meaning. Even if you know the meaning of all the words in a phrase and understand all the grammar of the phrase completely, the meaning of the phrase may still be confusing. 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 American English. Many of them occur in some fashion in other varieties of English also.

Many overlapping terms have been used to describe the idiomatic phrases included here: verbal collocations, idioms, idiomatic expressions, clichés, proverbs, set phrases, fixed phrases, phrasal verbs, common phrases, prepositional verbs, and phrasal/prepositional verbs. They all offer the same kinds of problems to the speaker and writer of English. They are unclear because the meaning of the phrase is not literal or predictable. Phrasal verbs, also called *two-word verbs*, are idiomatic expressions because the second element of the verb (the adverb or preposition) is not necessarily predictable. For instance, why the word *up* in *call up a friend*? Why not say *call on a friend* or *call in a friend*? Actually, those are three separate, unpredictable combinations, and they each mean something completely different. For example, you can *call up a friend* on the telephone, *call on a friend* to have a visit, and *call in a friend* to come and help you with something.

Although there are some entries that are very casual or informal English, slang and idioms should not be confused. Some slang is also idiomatic, and some idioms are also slang, but generally they refer to different aspects of language. There are a few slang terms in this dictionary, because they are also fairly commonly known idioms.

GOALS OF THE DICTIONARY

A major goal of this dictionary is to make certain that each definition of a phrase illustrates the meaning of the phrase and matches it in syntax. The major exceptions are definitions that begin with "a phrase" or "an expression." Similarly, the examples for each sense must match the definition in meaning and syntax. The best use of the entries is to study the entry head, definition, and example carefully. Look for the meaning that is common to all three. If the diligent user can see the elements of meaning shared by the entry phrase, the definition, and the example(s), the dictionary entry has done its task well.

A second goal is to provide the learner with enough information about the many forms that an idiom might take to allow the user to recognize it in a variety of contexts and to be able to use it in speech and writing.

A third goal is to make the details accessible to the learner. Idiomatic expressions and their variants are complex and unpredictable. There are many synonyms and near synonyms. General cross-referencing in the body of the dictionary will help users find synonymous phrases. The Phrase-Finder Index provides a powerful tool for locating entry forms embedded in other entries and partially remembered phrases. The form of the entry is quite straightforward, consisting of entry, definition, comments (if any), and examples. Senses are numbered and may include variants *in addition to* those found in the entry head. A minimum of abbreviations and symbols are used, and these are explained in the section "Terms and Symbols." The user who understands the meaning of **entry head**, **variable**, and **wild card term** is equipped to understand everything that follows.

WHO CAN BENEFIT FROM THIS DICTIONARY?

The dictionary will prove useful for native speakers who are looking for synonymous idiomatic phrases. Many phrases can be expressed in a variety of ways, and this dictionary, through cross-referencing, can lead the native speaker to equivalent forms with the same or similar meaning. The index provides a means for a writer to find the most appropriate phrase for a given purpose. Native speakers can find most of what they want by looking up words representing key ideas in the index and following the references to phrases in the dictionary itself.

Likewise, near-native speakers who need help with phrasal verbs and common idiomatic phrases will find this reference very useful. Speakers and writers trained in British English will find this dictionary a good reference for checking on the American form and meaning of expressions previously encountered in British English.

The format of the dictionary is designed to provide the information needed by learners who are attempting to read and write conventional American English. It contains far more detail and specificity than is required by people who have heard, spoken, and written standard American English all their lives. For instance, a dictionary designed for native speakers of English might include the subentries **bail out** and **see through**. However, there are major differences in meaning between the idiomatic expressions that can be based on these words.

bail out (of something**)** "jump out"
bail someone **out (of** something**)** "post bond to get a person out of jail"
bail something **out (of** something**)** "remove water from a boat"
bail something **out** "empty a boat (of accumulated water)"

see something **through** "work at something until it is finished"
see through something "see through something that is transparent"
see through something "detect a trick or deception"

These differences may never be revealed if the entry heads are just **bail out** and **see through**, with no object indicated. This dictionary presents the additional details that a native speaker already knows. The information needed for the learner includes whether the verb can take an object and, if so, what kind of object (human, nonhuman, or both) is needed. The learner also needs to know what additional prepositional phrases are required or optional for the correct use of the expressions.

PHRASE ORIGINS

A surprising number of phrases have literary or Biblical origins. The works of Shakespeare, in particular, have provided many memorable phrases that are in constant use around the world. When the source is the Bible or Shakespeare, as well as other authors, that is noted in the dictionary entries. Most of the phrasal or two-word verbs are due to the Germanic origins of English. The choice of which particle (the second part of a two-word verb) is an ancient problem.

There are many instances, recorded in this dictionary, of a figurative phrasal verb being derived from a more literal interpretation of the same phrasal verb. In these instances, the phrasal verbs (or two-word verbs) appear in both figurative and literal senses in the same entry. One sense helps the user understand the other sense. In this case, the figurative sense has its origin in the literal sense. In entries where this occurs, the literal senses are marked *Lit.* and the figurative senses are marked *Fig.*

A high percentage of the entries in this dictionary have their origins in a figurative usage where there is no matching literal sense. That is why they offer special difficulty in understanding. Wherever necessary or possible there is a note in the entry suggesting what a figurative entry is based on or alluding to. Sometimes the relationship is completely obvious and no explanation is offered.

Quite a few of the similes (for example, **as busy as a beaver**) are contrived and appear to be part of an ever-expanding repertory of colorful and quaint comparisons. Similarly, the senses marked *Rur.* (rural) are often contrived and may

appear more often as colorful expressions in writing than they ever did in real life. That these rural-sounding expressions actually had a rural origin can be debated. Nor can all the similes be taken seriously. They are included because they might be encountered by the learner and their listing here might be useful for a writer—if nothing more than as something to be avoided.

There is another kind of "origin" that needs to be mentioned. There are a few idioms that seem to invite very clever but totally baseless tales of origin. Many of these tales are quite popular and widely known. Two examples of such "story" idioms involve **sleep tight** and **a dead ringer**. The first is associated with sleeping on a tightly strung, rope-supported mattress, and the second refers to a corpse ringing a bell. The details depend on the teller of the tale. Such tales of origin are very entertaining to many people. The idioms on which these stories are based are included in this dictionary, but the tale is neither told nor debunked here.

There are many additional phrases that are just the customary patterns used to say things in both casual and more formal situations. Common greetings and responses are included in this category, and these expressions have their origins in the functions they were meant to serve.

WHEN WERE THEY FIRST USED?

Users often have an interest in dating the origins of a phrase. It is possible to put a specific date on the early use of a *word* by consulting a historical dictionary, such as the *Oxford English Dictionary*. That will show the earliest usage recorded in the books and other documents that have been consulted for the creation of the dictionary. Some phrases and idioms may be included in the entries and quotations, but that is not the primary focus of a historical dictionary. As more and more data become available in a searchable, digital format, it is possible to find examples of the early uses of specific phrases more easily. A very careful writer of historical novels or screenplays will be interested in making sure that a certain word or phrase was actually in use during the period in question. The *OED* can be helpful in determining this kind of information. An early date for a phrase (or word) does not necessarily indicate the earliest use of the item nor the period of widespread comprehension in the population, however.

This dictionary offers the user help in seeing semantic relationships and allusions, but it has goals that are quite different from those of a historical dictionary. The major concern here is contemporary usage, and it probably reflects idiomatic English over the last 50 years. The older members of the native-speaking population know more of the entries than the younger people, but the latter will learn more as they age. Probably 75 percent of the entries are widely known, conventional English for 75 percent of the educated, native-speaking adult population.

How to Use This Dictionary

For most users, most of the time, a single instruction will be enough, and that is to start with the Phrase-Finder Index.

In the index, look up a major word in the idiom, preferably a verb, and go to the most appropriate dictionary entry listed in the right-hand column. If no appropriate entry is listed at the verb, try an adverb, preposition, or other word.

Further hints can be found at the beginning of the Phrase-Finder Index. The organization and philosophy of the dictionary is discussed in much greater detail below.

ALPHABETIZATION

In the dictionary, phrasal verbs (or two-word verbs) and their related prepositional verbs are alphabetized on the verb. All other idiomatic expressions are alphabetized in their complete forms with no inversion of parts. Entries are not listed by "key word" unless the "key word" is the first word. On the other hand, the index lists *all* the key words in a phrase. In that way, the key word is the user's choice and not the compiler's choice. All alphabetizing is word by word, rather than letter by letter. Initial *a*, *an*, and *the* are ignored in the alphabetization. Significant variants are cross-referenced to a main **entry head**. In most instances, an object of a verb or preposition is shown by a **wild card term**, either someone, something, someone or something, or some other expression such as some amount of money. Showing whether an object is human, nonhuman, or of some other semantically limited category is essential to explaining meaning and distinguishing the senses. **Wild card terms** are included in the alphabetization. In the Phrase-Finder Index, you are shown which entry head to look up. Those entry heads will include **wild card terms**. It is much easier to look up these expressions in the dictionary itself if the **wild card terms** are included in the alphabetization.

OVERCOMING OPAQUE AND UNPREDICTABLE PHRASES

There are three general reasons why idiomatic expressions are problems for students, writers, and other adults wishing to expand their skills with conventional American English. The three problems involve (1) difficulties with extracting the core of the idiomatic expression from a sentence or paragraph, (2) the variable nature of idioms, and (3) the basic opaque nature of these phrases. There is little that can be done about opacity other than use a dictionary, but there is some information about the other problems that can help the user. What follows will explain the organization of the dictionary and the way the peculiarities of English phrases have been handled here. It is not necessary to be able to understand the following discussion to use the dictionary.

EXTRACTING THE IDIOMATIC PART OF A SENTENCE

Idiomatic phrases are usually found included within a sentence, and it is difficult to extract the core of the idiom so that it can be looked up in a dictionary. These expressions are often learned in a list, and, unfortunately, the form of the expression presented in the list is probably only one of many variants. In the real world, these expressions are never seen or heard except in a complete sentence. In order to look them up in a dictionary, they have to be extracted from the sentence in which they are found. You cannot look up a

phrase that is found within a sentence unless you know the boundaries of the phrase. Here are some hints for extracting idiomatic phrases.

Simplify the Grammar

Entries in the dictionary and index use the singular form of the noun and the present tense (bare) verb. The index actually lists both regular and irregular forms when there are both. For instance **old wives' tale** is listed in the index under "old," "wife," "wives," and "tale." In order to look something up in either section, the user will save time by using the simplest form. There are more items to choose from at the simplest form.

Look for Nonliteral Meanings

Look for something in the sentence that is not understandable literally. For instance, "Sue is known for thinking ahead of her time." How can Sue think ahead of or in front of time? Only figuratively. Mentally extract the nonliteral phrase, "thinking ahead of her time." Try to match "think ahead of her time" to a phrase in the index by looking at "think" and scanning down to "think ahead" where you find **think ahead of one's time** or the shorter ***ahead of one's time**.

Ignore Immediate Context

The parts of a sentence that refer to specific places, things, measurements, and activities are not likely to be items you can look up in the index. Examine the sentence "It's almost 6:00, and you, Tom, and I have to thrash this contract out before we can meet the President of Acme Widgets for dinner at 8:00." Ignore the specifics that relate only to this time and place: "6:00," "Tom," "you," "I," "President of Acme Widgets," "dinner at 8:00." That leaves "thrash this contract out." Look up "thrash" in the index and find **thrash** something **out**, and it seems to explain the meaning of the sentence perfectly. There are things that can cause confusion, though. "Dinner at 8:00" is a common and well-known phrase. "Acme" is a (once) common name for a company, and "widget" is a common imaginary name for a product. Those words are not in the index, however.

VARIATION IN IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS

Idioms are sometimes called *fixed phrases*. In the real world, many idiomatic expressions are found in many variations, and this makes them hard to use and even harder to find in a dictionary. What follows is a discussion of the seven kinds of variation shown in this dictionary. Unfortunately, many idiomatic expressions exhibit more than one kind of variation. Fortunately, use of the Phrase-Finder Index to find a particular idiom will eliminate most of the problems caused by variation. It is important to know how the variants are related to each other so you do not think that three variants of a single phrase might have three different meanings. Knowing what the core of an idiomatic expression is, and how it can vary, makes it possible to recognize it and use its variants in a far greater number of contexts.

Grammatical Variation

In idioms in general, nouns can be plural or singular and verbs can occur in a variety of tenses and aspects. Many phrases can appear equally well in the negative or affirmative and undergo question inversion. Use the index to find the simplest form. This will lead you to the appropriate entry, even if the entry contains nouns or verbs that do not vary, such as **old wives' tale**, which is never singular. Here are some sentence examples of grammatical variation:

The tape wouldn't adhere to the door.
Why won't this glue adhere to the doors?
The adhesive adhered to the door easily.
That old glue has adhered to the front of the door nicely.
That old tape has adhered to it nicely.

The thing that all the example sentences have in common is that they all have the verb *adhere* plus a prepositional phrase beginning with *to*. The

object of *to* can be a variety of nouns or pronouns. The elements each example shares are: **adhere to** something, and that is the form of the entry in this dictionary. The general rule is to simply reduce the noun to singular and the verbs to present tense and look up the results in the index.

The Transposable Adverb

Adverbs in certain phrases can swap places with the direct object of a transitive verb. This cannot be done if the object of the verb is a pronoun. Although the result may, in some instances, look like a prepositional phrase, it is not. In the following example containing "down the door," the word *down* is an adverb that stands between the verb and its direct object:

She broke *down* the door with an axe.
She broke the door *down* with an axe.

Please hammer the nail *in*.
Please hammer *in* the nail.

But you cannot say:

*She broke down it.
*Please hammer in it.

The entry head **break** something **down**† contains a dagger (†) that indicates that the "down" can be transposed to a position just after the verb. Any word marked with the dagger can be transposed to a position immediately following the verb except when the object of the verb is a pronoun. Only the adverbs followed by † can be swapped in this manner.

Prepositions That Become Adverbs

There is both a noun *hammer* and a verb *hammer*. Similarly, some particles can function as either prepositions or adverbs, depending on how they are used. Prepositions have objects. *Out* is a preposition in "Run out the door." It is an adverb in "Put the cat out." Some prepositional verbs (verb + prepositional phrase) can become phrasal verbs (verb + adverb) by "losing" the object of the preposition. In the phrase **add** something **into** something, *add* has both an object of the verb and a prepositional phrase. Without the object of the preposition, the remaining preposition, in this case *in*, functions as an adverb, as in **add** something **in**. Examine the following sets of sentences. Note the transposable adverb in the second and third examples.

Add the flour into the eggs.
Add the flour *in*.
Add *in* the flour.

Boil the wax out of the cloth.
Boil the wax *out*.
Boil *out* the wax.

In this dictionary, these pairs are presented as variants of the same entry. Usually it is necessary to express this variation in two parts. Then, the cross-referencing or the index will lead the user to the longer entry, which is then followed by the shorter one. Note that the adverb is marked transposable in the entry heads below. The relationship between these two varieties of phrasal verb is very common in English around the world. The pairs of entries are listed as follows:

add something **into** something
and **add** something **in**†

boil something **out of** something
and **boil** something **out**†

Note that the prepositions *into* and *out* do not have daggers, indicating that they cannot be transposed to the position immediately after the verb.

Idioms with a Limited Verb Choice

There are a number of expressions in the dictionary that consist of a phrase that is likely to be preceded by one of a limited list of verbs. These expressions can usually stand alone, at least in casual conversations. The core meaning is the same regardless of the choice of initial verb. The members of the limited set of verbs that can come before the expression are not predictable. This kind

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of variation is similar to **wild card terms**. Here are examples of the sets of limited sets of verbs.

be ahead of Tom
get ahead of Tom
keep ahead of Tom
remain ahead of Tom
stay ahead of Tom

keep clear of the doors
remain clear of the doors
stand clear of the doors

If each of these idiomatic expressions were a separate entry, it would be repetitious and difficult for the user to see that they include the same basic phrase. Therefore, the core of the entry is preceded by an asterisk (*), as with ***ahead of** someone and ***clear of** something. Within the entry, a list of the appropriate verbs is given at the asterisk (*). The index lists all of the variations, and the most common ones are given cross-references in the dictionary itself. Many of them are found after *be*, *get*, and *have* and are cross-referenced from the index only. There are some expressions that must begin with *be*, *get*, or *have* and these are alphabetized in the dictionary under their initial word.

Optional Elements

Various additional words or phrases can be used optionally within a single idiomatic expression. These words or phrases occur often with the idiom in question, but they are not required. They are included as part of the idiomatic pattern since they are so typical of conventional usage. Often, idiomatic expressions seem difficult simply because they are shortened versions of a longer expression that would be easier to understand in its full form. There are many instances of optional prepositional phrases. The following examples illustrate optional words:

At last, I am able to breathe freely again.
At last, I am able to breathe again.

all joking aside
joking aside

In this dictionary, optional elements are enclosed in parentheses.

The word *freely* is the optional element in the first pair of examples, and *all* is optional in the second set. Their entries are:

able to breathe (freely) again
(all) joking aside

Variable Classes or Wild Card Terms

Idiomatic phrases include both fixed and variable classes of words. The variable classes can be very broad, such as someone, which refers to any person, or something, which refers to any thing, object, or group. Many idiomatic phrases are very particular as to whether they include either someone or something. Others can refer to people or things, someone or something, without distinction. In this dictionary, these groups are called **wild card terms**. They can be thought of as aliases or proxies for the members of the classes of words they describe. Wild card terms appear in a unique type style. In a few instances, the expression always contains the real word *someone* or *something* and in these instances, special type is not used, as with **pick on someone your own size**. The following examples show the kinds of things that wild card terms can stand for:

associate with *new friends* (someone)
associate with *them* (someone)
associate with *a bunch of different people* (someone)
associate with *the Smiths* (someone)
play *the radio* at full blast (something)
play *my new record* at full blast (something)
play *his huge stereo* at full blast (something)
play *all the audio stuff in the whole dorm* at full blast (something)

The variable classes are represented in these examples by someone or something as in **associate with** someone or **play** something **at full blast**. The wild card term indicates that any member of the specified class can be used. There are dozens of wild card terms of this kind. All of the wild card

terms are descriptive of the kind of words or phrases they can stand for. Here are some of the most common wild card terms with one example of each:

a direction "east by northeast"
a period of time "about an hour"
doing something "eating bread and butter"
some amount of money "about three bucks"
somehow "without much effort"
someone "Fred"
some place "the kitchen"
something "a toaster"
sometime "at noon"

and someone or something, which can be either someone or something.

Note: Wild card terms are mostly nouns, pronouns, and noun phrases. There is no way that these variables could be listed in an index. Therefore, the user is advised to save time by first looking up a verb, adverb, or preposition rather than a noun or pronoun.

Random and Unpatterned Variation

Some expressions differ by only a word or two and are otherwise essentially synonymous. This is more confusing when not all the senses in an entry share the same synonyms, as in the first example where the full entry is quoted. In this entry, only the first sense has a variant.

give someone **a lift 1.** and **give** someone **a ride** *Fig.* to provide transportation for someone. ☐ *I've got to get into town. Can you give me a lift?* **2.** *Fig.* to raise someone's spirits; to make a person feel better. ☐ *It was a good conversation, and her kind words really gave me a lift.*

Other entries with variants of this type are:

ache for someone or something
and **hurt for** someone or something

amount to the same thing
and **come to the same thing**

Equivalent forms of an idiomatic expression are combined into a single entry where possible. The second and any subsequent expression are joined by *and* to the first. Sometimes a numbered sense has additional variants. These are introduced by *and.*

If the variants apply to all senses, they are listed at the beginning of the entry. If they apply only to some senses, the restricted form appears after the sense number, as with **give** someone **a ride** above.

Acknowledgments

The compiler has included idiomatic phrases drawn from or suggested by Anne Bertram in the McGraw-Hill publications, *NTC's Dictionary of Proverbs and Clichés*, *NTC's Dictionary of Euphemisms*, and *NTC's Dictionary of Folksy, Regional, and Rural Sayings*, as well as other McGraw-Hill special-purpose dictionaries. In addition, I am very grateful for help from my coworkers for their counseling, writing, and editing skills, as applied to various components and stages of this dictionary. They are Carla (White) Kirschenbaum, Nancy L. Dray, Michelle Davidson, Garret Lemoi, Steven R. Kleinedler, and Frank Abate. I also wish to thank Mark and William Pattis for providing appropriate atmosphere, support, and encouragement for the creation of specialized dictionaries.

Terms and Symbols

□ is a box that marks the beginning of an example.

~ is a "swung dash" that is an abbreviation for the **entry head**.

† is a "dagger" that is seen in some **entry heads**. It shows that the adverb that precedes is one that can occur instead just after the verb in the same **entry head**. This means that the *out* in **ace** someone **out**† can also be **ace out** someone.

[....] enclose a partial entry that is followed by an instruction about where to find the whole entry or a comment. These brackets are also used to enclose information needed to understand a definition.

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

Cliché refers to an overused expression that is trite and tiresome.

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

Euph. means "euphemistic," making something sound or seem "nicer" than some other word might.

Fig. means "figurative." When the meaning of an **entry head** is not literal, it is marked *Fig.* Some are more figurative than others. Some entries contain both literal and figurative senses.

Go to means to search for and read the entry indicated. **Go to previous** means to read the entry immediately above. **Go to next** means to read the entry that follows.

Inf. means "informal." This is used for expressions that are casual but not as intrusive as those marked *Sl.*, "slang."

Jocular refers to an expression that is said in a joking or humorous way.

Lit. means "literal," the normal or expected interpretation of a word or phrase. Some entries contain both literal and figurative senses.

Prov. means "proverbial," in the manner or nature of a proverb.

Rur. means "rural" and refers to country or folksy expressions.

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

Simile refers to expressions containing as or like, such as **dry as dust**.

Sl. means "slang," very informal, colorful, playful, or intrusive alternates for more common words.

Variable is an element that stands for a class of items, usually nouns or pronouns. Many expressions must include a noun that is a person, a noun that is a thing, or both. These classes are indicated in the **entry head** as someone, something, or someone or something. There are many other variables, such as some place or sometime, whose meaning is obvious.

Wild card term is a term that represents a **variable**, such as someone, something, or someone or something.

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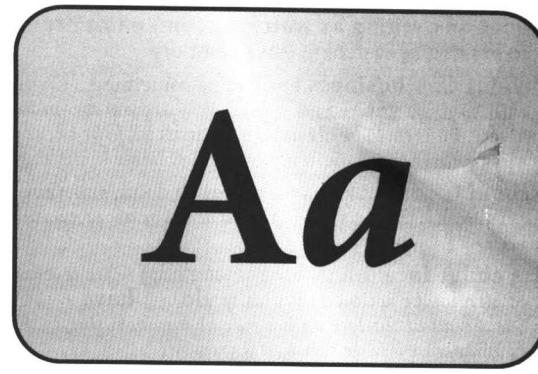

*an **A for effort** *Fig.* acknowledgement for having tried to do something, even if it was not successful. (*Typically: **get ~; give** someone ~.) ☐ *The plan didn't work, but I'll give you an A for effort for trying.*

A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do. Go to You got to do what you got to do.

Abandon hope, all ye who enter here. *Prov.* If you come in, be prepared for the worst. (Describes a hopeless situation or one somehow similar to hell. Often used jocularly. This is the English translation of the words on the gate of Hell in Dante's *Inferno.*) ☐ *This is our cafeteria. Abandon hope, all ye who enter here!*

abandon oneself **to** something to yield to the comforts or delights of something. ☐ *The children abandoned themselves to the delights of the warm summer day.*

abandon ship 1. *Lit.* to leave a sinking ship. ☐ *The captain ordered the crew and passengers to abandon ship.* **2.** *Fig.* to leave a failing enterprise. ☐ *A lot of the younger people are abandoning ship because they can get jobs elsewhere easily.*

abandon someone or something **to** someone or something to leave a person, living creature, or thing to the care of someone or something; to give up someone or something to someone or something. (Usually with the thought that the abandoned person or thing will not receive the best of care.) ☐ *They had to abandon the dogs to the storm.*

abbreviate something **to** something **1.** and **abbreviate** something **as** something to make specific initials or an acronym out of a word or phrase. ☐ *The phrase was abbreviated to* ABC. **2.** to make something into a shorter version of itself. ☐ *The act has been abbreviated to just a few minutes.*

the **ABCs of** something *Fig.* the basic facts or principles of something. ☐ *I have never mastered the ABCs of car maintenance.*

abduct someone **from** someone or something to take away or kidnap a person from someone or from a particular place, usually in secret. ☐ *The thugs abducted the child from her mother.*

abet someone **in** something to help someone in some deed; to help someone do something illegal. ☐ *Surely you do not expect me to abet you in this crime!*

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

abide with someone to remain with someone; to stay with someone. (Old and stilted. Primarily heard in the church hymn *Eventide.*) ☐ *You are welcome to abide with me for a while, young man.*

able to breathe (easily) again and **able to breathe (freely) again 1.** *Lit.* able to breathe clean, fresh air with no restriction or obstruction. ☐ *After I got out of the dank basement, I was able to breathe easily again.* **2.** *Fig.* able to relax and recover from a busy or stressful time; able to catch one's breath. (*Able to* can be replaced with *can.*) ☐ *Final exams are over, so I can breathe easily again.*

able to breathe (freely) again Go to previous.

able to cut something *Fig.* to be able to manage or execute something. (Often negative. *Able to* can be replaced with *can.*) ☐ *We thought he could handle the new account, but he is simply not able to cut it.*

able to do something to have the strength or skill to do something. (*Able to* can be replaced with *can.*) ☐ *Are you able to carry those bags by yourself?*

able to do something **blindfolded** and **able to** do something **standing on** one's **head** *Fig.* able to do something very easily, possibly without even looking. (*Able to* can be replaced with *can.*) ☐ *Bill boasted that he could pass his driver's test blindfolded.*

able to do something **standing on** one's **head** Go to previous.

able to do something **with** one's **eyes closed** *Fig.* able to do something very easily, even without having to think about it or look at it. (Always affirmative. *Able to* can be replaced with *can.*) ☐ *It's easy. I can do it with my eyes closed.*

able to fog a mirror *Fig. Inf.* alive, even if just barely. (Usually jocular. Alludes to the use of a small mirror placed under the nose to tell if a person is breathing or not. (*Able to* can be replaced with *can.*) ☐ *Look, I don't need an athlete to do this job! Anybody able to fog a mirror will do fine!*

able to make an event able to attend an event. (*Able to* can be replaced with *can.*) ☐ *I don't think I'll be able to make your party, but thanks for asking me.*

able to take a joke to be able to accept ridicule good-naturedly; to be able to be the object or butt of a joke willingly. (*Able to* can be replaced with *can.*) ☐ *Better not tease Ann. She can't take a joke.*

able to take just so much and **able to take only so much** able to endure only a limited amount of discomfort or unpleasantness. (*Able to* can be replaced with *can.*) ☐ *Please stop hurting my feelings. I'm able to take just so much.*

able to take only so much Go to previous.

abound in something to be rich and abundant in something; to have plenty of something. (A bit formal.) ☐ *The entire area abounds in game and fish.*

abound with someone or something to be plentiful with particular persons, other living beings, or objects. ☐ *The world abounds with talented people who are too shy to develop their talents.*

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