

NEW ENGLISH
IDIOMS
DICTIONARY

最新英语习语 词典

主 编 ● 王尚阁



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前言

和其他语言一样，英语里也有许多习惯用语（以下简称“习语”）。这些无处不在的习语就像是浩瀚的英语词汇海洋上的点点浪花，从根本上美化了这种国际性语言。对于这些习语，母语为汉语的我们，时常感到困惑，甚至难以理解，即使我们认识其中所有的单词；因为整个词组的含义与每一个单词之间几乎、甚至没有一点关联。这是不可避免的跨文化障碍。比如，“let the cat out of the bag”意指“揭开秘密、昭示秘密”，可见这个习语的含义与“猫”和“袋子”毫不相干；但是几百年前，它的确与“猫”和“袋子”紧密相连。

为了准确地理解英语语言，我们必须准确了解这些俯拾即是习语的意思和用法。假如仅仅依据它们的字面意思去猜测，我们必定感到一头雾水、闹出笑话，乃至铸成大错，所以我们必须掌握它们字面下面的真正含义。

英语习语的来源五花八门，从《圣经》到赛马，从古代寓言到现代口语；有时候，也来源于著名作家，例如霍曼、伊索、乔叟或莎士比亚等，妙笔生花般的创造性运用。由于这些作家备受欢迎，他们创造的表达方法自然广为流传。遗憾的是，我们往往无法弄明白是谁第一个使用了这些特定的表达方式。

有些习语起源于美国土著人的风俗习惯（“bury the hatchet”），有些来自非洲裔美国人的口头语言（“chill out”），另一些习语的流行则是因为它们朗朗上口，便于识记（“snug as a bug in a rug”、“spick-and-span”）。有些习语出自非正式交谈或者随意的、不标准的语言，另一些是众所周知的格言或者短小精悍的实用而真实的表达方式。部分习语的广泛使用源自特定地区的、由方言表达的民间习语。尽管本词典收录的大部分习语带有明显的美国特色，但也有许多习语是从其他语言借用而来的。有些习语的使用可以追溯到数千年前的古希腊、古罗马时代，另外一些则始于近代。

研究语言习惯表达方式之起源的词汇学家们可能不大赞同某些习语的本源，我们这本词典还是尽量提供了最为广泛接受的注解。

这本词典为您经常听到或读到的 700 条以上的习语提供了例句、

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注解及其来源；长期的日常教学也很大程度上帮助我们选取了最有争议的习惯用法，并予以澄清。

英语语言多彩而美丽，但它的许多习惯表达方法却晦涩难懂。这本词典应该能够赏心悦目地陪伴您，成为您使用和学习英语语言的得心应手的工具。

为了方便您查阅，我们按照习语第一个单词的首写字母顺序从 A 到 Z 组织编排。如果您希望查阅某个习语的含义和出处，您只需要在词典后面的索引里找到这个习语的首个单词的首个字母即可。例如，习语 “**throw a monkey wrench into the works**” 就能够很容易地在 T 为首的首的索引条目中找到它所在的页码。

假如您只记得某个习语中一两个单词该怎么办呢？这本词典最后的索引部分，不仅按照英文字母顺序罗列了所有的习语，还专门依据关键词给您提供了可靠的查询线索。在关键词索引部分，“**Throw a monkey wrench into the works**” 也同样可以在 “**throw**”、“**monkey**”、“**wrench**” 或者 “**works**” 条目下查阅。

很多习语的含义非常相似。有时，一个习语也同时被收录在近义的习语条目里。遇到这种情况，本词典会给您提示其近义的习语。词典里没有单独列出这个习语条目，但通过参阅另一条近义习语，您同样可以得到相关的解释。

这本词典的编纂者都是常年耕耘在英语教学和研究第一线的高校教师。他们多年来教学实践的丰富经验和不同视角的学术背景，以及对于我们国家高等院校英语教育事业和广大学子的拳拳之心，再加上中国人民大学出版社的至臻编辑，为这本词典的成功编著以及广大读者的方便使用，提供了可靠而又专业的保障。

许峻铭老师、董春燕老师、张旗伟老师、李蕊老师和毋娟老师在这本词典的编纂过程中提供了无私的帮助，我在此一并表示感谢。

王尚阁

2011 年 11 月 11 日于郑州



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Ace up your sleeve 制胜法宝，锦囊妙计，王牌

I don't know how Henry is going to get his mom to buy him a bike, but I'm sure he has an ace up his sleeve.

虽然我不清楚亨利打算怎么说服他的妈妈给他买辆自行车，但是我敢肯定他自有妙计。

Meaning: a surprise or secret advantage, especially something tricky that is kept hidden until needed

语义：一个新奇或神秘的有利条件，尤指一些不到迫不得已不轻易出手的狡猾手段

► **Origin:** Back in the 1500s most people didn't have pockets in their clothes, so they kept things hidden in their sleeves. Later on, magicians hid objects, even small live animals, up their sleeves and then pulled them out unexpectedly to surprise their audiences. In the 1800s dishonest card players secretly slipped a winning card, often an ace, up their sleeves and pulled it out to win the game when nobody was looking.

► **语源：**16 世纪的服装大多都没有设计口袋，所以人们都把东西放在袖子里。后来魔术师把他们的道具，甚至小动物，都藏在袖子里，然后再出其不意地把小动物变出来以博得观众的喝彩。19 世纪，一些不遵守游戏规则的玩家偷偷地把王牌，往往是么点牌（同花色中最大的牌），藏在袖子里，趁大家不备亮出王牌赢得比赛。

Achilles' heel 致命弱点 (尤指人的性格中虽小但致命的缺点)

I'm an A student in math and science, but English is my Achilles' heel.

我的理工科成绩优异，但是英语是我的弱项。

Meaning: the one weakness, fault, flaw, or vulnerable spot in one's

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otherwise strong character

语义：某人唯一的劣势、毛病或弱点

► **Origin:** In *The Iliad*, the famous story about the Trojan War by the Greek poet Homer, Achilles was a great hero and warrior. However, he had one weak spot, the heel of one foot. When he was a baby, his mother wanted to be certain that her son could never be harmed so she dipped little Achilles upside down in the magical River Styx. Wherever the water touched his body, he became invulnerable. But since she was holding him by his heel, that part of him never got wet. Years later Achilles was killed in the Trojan War by an enemy who shot a poisoned arrow into his heel.

► **语源：**《伊利亚特》，古希腊讲述特洛伊战争的英雄史诗，相传为荷马所作。阿基里斯是史诗中伟大的英雄和武士。他全身刀枪不入，却有个致命的弱点，脚踵。阿基里斯小的时候，他的母亲为了让他这一生不受任何伤害，握住他的一只脚踵，让他的整个身体浸染冥河的圣水。凡是冥河的水浸染过的部位都会变得无懈可击。然而他母亲所握的脚踵却没有被浸湿。数年后，特洛伊战争中，敌人的毒箭射中了阿基里斯的脚踵，他因此而丧命。

Action-verb Idioms 行为动词习语

Most people want action-packed lives, from “splitting hairs” to a humongous “hitting of the jackpot.” Many idioms contain the names of action verbs. Some action-verb idioms in this book are:

大多数人都希望过一种“action-packed(有行为包装的,即兴奋有趣的)”生活,从“splitting hairs(对微不足道的细微差别争论不休)”到“hitting of the jackpot(中大奖,行大运,大获成功)”都有人喜欢。很多习语都包含行为动词。本书中该类习语有:

Beat around the bush 旁敲侧击,拐弯抹角

Beat the band 猛烈地,起劲地

Carry the ball 负起责任

Climb the walls 走人,离开

Drive a hard bargain 杀价,迫使对方接受苛刻条件

Drive you up the wall 使人发狂、紧张、烦恼等

Hit the books 用功读书,准备功课

Hit the ceiling 勃然大怒,大发雷霆

Hit the hay 上床睡觉
 Hit the jackpot 中大奖，行大运，大获成功
 Hit the nail right on the head 语言中肯，正中要害
 Hit the road 上路，动身
 Hit the roof 勃然大怒，极其激动
 Hit the spot 使人满足，正合需要
 Jump off the deep end 感情用事，不顾后果；深陷其中，缺乏准备
 Jump on the bandwagon 随大流，凑热闹
 Jump the gun 抢跑
 Kick the bucket 一命呜呼，完蛋，蹬腿，见阎王
 Kick up a fuss 大吵大闹，起哄
 Play both ends against the middle 脚踏两只船；鹬蚌相争，渔翁得利
 Play fast and loose 玩弄，欺诈，耍滑头
 Play second fiddle 做二把手，做副手，居次要位置
 Play the field 爱情不专一，三心二意
 Play with fire 玩火，冒险
 Pull a fast one 欺骗，搞鬼
 Pull no punches 不放水，不手下留情
 Pull out all the stops 全力以赴
 Pull strings 幕后操纵
 Pull the rug out from under you 拆台，破坏计划
 Pull up stakes 迁移，搬家，收摊
 Pull yourself together 控制情绪
 Raise Cain 引起骚乱，闹事，吵闹
 Raise the devil 兴妖作怪，制造骚乱
 Raise the roof 大声喧闹，吵翻天
 Run circles around someone 大大胜过，远远超过
 Saw logs 打鼾
 Scratch the surface 流于表面，非常肤浅
 Sling hash 当餐馆或食堂的服务员
 Strike a happy medium 折中，不偏不倚
 Strike while the iron is hot. 趁热打铁。
 Throw a curve 误导，说谎，骗人，让人摸不透

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Throw a monkey wrench into the works 妨碍, 破坏, 阻挠, 干涉

Throw caution to the wind 不顾一切, 莽撞行事

Throw cold water on something 泼冷水, 使泄气

Throw in the towel 认输, 放弃

Throw the baby out with the bathwater 将小孩连同洗澡水一起倒掉; 良莠不分

Add fuel to the fire 火上浇油

I was already angry with you, and when you forgot to pick me up, that really added fuel to the fire.

我已经够生你的气了, 你又忘了接我, 这不是火上浇油嘛!

Meaning: to make a bad situation worse; do or say something that causes more trouble, or makes someone angrier

语义: 使不好的事情变得更糟糕, 说一些话或做一些事引起争端, 或使得某人更生气

► **Origin:** Thousands of years ago the famous Roman historian Livy used this expression. If you pour water on a fire, it goes out. But if you put fuel (like coal or wood) on a fire, you make it burn hotter and brighter. If “fire” represents any kind of trouble, then anything you do to make that trouble worse is “fuel.” A similar expression is “fan the flames.”

► **语源:** 几千年前, 罗马著名历史学家李维曾用过这则习语。如果在火上浇水, 火自然会熄灭。但是如果在火上添加燃料(如煤炭、木材), 火势会更旺。假设“火”代表任何一种麻烦, 那么任何让这个麻烦变得更麻烦的事都可称其为“燃料”。“煽风点火”和它的用法相似。

Afraid of your own shadow 胆小怕事的, 草木皆兵的

My dog was afraid of its own shadow when it was a puppy, but now it barks fearlessly at the biggest dogs.

我的小狗小时候看见自己的影子都会害怕, 而现在它在那些大狗面前也无所畏惧。

Meaning: very easily frightened, especially of small or imaginary things

语义: 很容易受惊吓, 尤其是被那些弱小的或者根本不存在的事物吓到

► **Origin:** Shadows can be scary. Horror movies, for instance, are full of

fearsome shadows. They sometimes make you hold your breath and jump out of your seat in terror. Umbra, the ancient Latin word for “shadow,” also means “ghost.” There are real things in this world to be fearful of, but if someone is afraid of his own shadow, then he’s a very jumpy, nervous person who panics easily.

► **语源：**影子有时候的确很恐怖。比如在惊悚电影中到处可见令人毛骨悚然的影子。有时候你会被吓得屏住呼吸甚至从座位上跳起来。Umbra 这个词在拉丁语中既代表影子，也有“幽灵”的意思。这世上的确有一些实际存在的事物值得我们为之畏惧，但是如果连自己的影子都会吓着自己，那他铁定是个胆小如鼠、惴惴不安、易受惊吓之人。

Air your dirty laundry in public 家丑外扬

My upstairs neighbors fight a lot and air their dirty laundry in public.

我家楼上的邻居经常发生口角，使得大家都知道了他们家的丑事。

Meaning: to talk about your private disagreements or embarrassing matters in public, usually while quarreling

语义：将私人恩怨或者尴尬的事情公之于众，尤其是在吵架的时候

► **Origin:** Picture this: instead of hanging your freshly washed laundry on a clothesline, you hang your dirty clothes out there in the air for all the world to see. Wouldn’t that be embarrassing? Imagine that your “dirty laundry” represents secret personal matters and that “to air” them means to discuss them out loud for any one to hear. Some people use “air your dirty linen in public.”

► **语源：**想象一下，你把你的脏衣服，而非洗得干干净净的衣服，都挂在晾衣绳上，所有的人都看得到。你不觉得这是很尴尬的事吗？假设你的“脏衣服”代表个人私密的事情，“拿去晒”它们也就是将这些事大声地讲给所有的人听。也有人用 “air your dirty linen in public” 这个短语，意思是一样的。

An albatross around your neck 累赘，负担

Everywhere I go, my mother makes me take my bratty little sister. She’s an albatross around my neck.

不管我去哪里，我妈妈都让我带上我那不听话的妹妹。她真是个累赘。

Meaning: a very difficult burden that you can’t get rid of or a reminder of

something you did that was wrong

语义：一个摆脱不掉的麻烦，或是警醒某人做了错事的东西

► **Origin:** In 1798 the English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote his most famous poem, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” In the poem a young sailor shoots a large seabird called an albatross. In those days that was considered very unlucky. Sure enough, a lot of bad things happen to the ship, and the crew blames the young sailor. They hang the dead bird around his neck.

► **语源：**1798年，英国诗人塞缪尔·泰勒·柯尔律治完成了他最著名的诗作《古舟子咏》。诗中描写了一名年轻的水手射死了一种叫做信天翁的大型海鸟，这在当时被视为不幸的象征，而当时船上确实发生了好多不幸的事，因此所有的人都埋怨那个年轻的水手，并把那只死了的信天翁挂在他的脖子上。

All ears 聚精会神；洗耳恭听

You said you had something important to tell me. I’m all ears!

你说有重要的事要告诉我，我洗耳恭听！

Meaning: eager to listen; sharply attentive; curious

语义：迫不及待地要听；极其专注；好奇的

► **Origin:** the ear is the organ by which a person hears. So, if we figuratively say that you’re “all ears,” it means that at that moment you’re keenly listening to whatever is being said. It’s as if no other part of your body mattered except your ears. This idiom is about three centuries old.

► **语源：**耳朵是人的听觉器官。因此，如果比喻性地把你说成“全身都是耳朵”，说明那一刻你在全神贯注地听。就好像除了耳朵以外其他身体器官都不重要了。这则习语至今已有大约三个世纪的历史。

All that glitters is not gold. 闪光的未必都是金子。

Denis bought a bracelet that looked great online, but when she got it, she realized that all that glitters is not gold.

丹尼斯在网上买了个看起来很棒的手镯，但当她拿到手镯的时候才发现这玩意儿根本不值钱。

Meaning: Something that seems attractive and valuable at first might turn

out to be worthless.

语义：第一眼看上去很引人注目、很珍贵的东西实际上可能一文不值。

► **Origin:** This expression comes from the late Middle Ages (the 1400s) and teaches us that appearances can be deceiving. This famous saying appears in various forms in many other languages. The great American author O. Henry (1862—1910) wrote a short story about people fooled by what they thought would be a quick way to make lots of money. The story was called “The Gold that Glittered.” Gold miners in the old West in the mid-1800s discovered this lesson the hard way. Some spotted chunks of glittering yellowish rock and thought that it was gold, but it was only fool’s gold, an almost worthless brass-colored mineral called iron pyrite. They were very disappointed, as anyone would be who was attracted by something that appeared to be beautiful or precocious but that turned out to be useless junk.

► **语源：**这则起源于中世纪的习语告诉我们外表是具有欺骗性的。这个有名的习语在不同的语言中有不同的表达方式。美国著名作家欧·亨利的短篇小说《发光金子》就是关于人们如何被投机取巧的赚钱门道所玩弄。作品讲述了 19 世纪中期，旧时西部的淘金者在教训中领悟到了这一点。有些人误把闪着金光的大块岩石挖掘出来，以为是金子，但是到最后才发现那只是几乎没价值的黄铜色的铁矿石。他们非常失望。而每个人都可能成为误把看似美丽、珍贵实而毫无价值的垃圾当宝贝的人。

All thumbs 笨手笨脚

Marco can’t build the model of the atom for the science project. He’s all thumbs.

马克连这个科研项目的原子结构图都做不出来，真是笨手笨脚。

Meaning: awkward and clumsy, especially with the hands

语义：不灵活的，笨拙的（尤其是指双手）

► **Origin:** Human beings and apes have thumbs; most other animals don’t. A thumb helps the other fingers pick things up, turn dials, and do other fine motor tasks. But what if all your finger were thumbs? You’d have a hard time picking up small objects, keyboarding a computer, doing art projects,

and so on. That's why this expression means clumsy at doing physical tasks with your hands.

► 语源：人和猿都有拇指；大多数其他种类动物却没有。拇指能够帮助其他手指捡东西、转动转盘以及做其他精细的肌肉运动的动作。但是如果你所有的手指都成了拇指会怎么样呢？你捡小东西、操作电脑键盘、搞艺术创作等动作都变得非常困难。所以这个词组指的是双手动作笨拙的样子。

Animal Idioms

Most people love animals, from adorable kittens to humongous bulls. Many idioms contain the names of animals. Some animal idioms in this book are:

人们大多都喜欢动物，从可爱的小猫到硕大的公牛都有人喜欢。许多习语都包含有动物的名称。本书中与动物相关的一些习语有：

As the crow flies 成直线地；笔直地

Bats in your belfry 神经不正常

Beat a dead horse 做无用功；徒劳；炒冷饭

Bee in your bonnet 奇怪而固执的想法；冥思苦想

Bird in the hand is worth two in the bush 一鸟在手胜过双鸟在林

Birds of a feather flock together. 物以类聚，人以群分。

Bug off 滚开，走开

Bull in a china shop 冒失鬼

Busy as a bee 忙得不可开交

Buy a pig in a poke 盲目购买；隔山买牛

Chickens come home to roost 自作自受，害人不成反害己

Clam up 拒不开口，闭口不言

Crocodile tears 鳄鱼的眼泪，假慈悲

Cry wolf 谎报险情，发假警报

Dark-horse candidate 黑马候选人

Dead as a dodo 僵死，完全过时，彻底废弃

Dead duck 注定失败者，无望之人或事

Dog day of summer 三伏天，酷暑期

Dog-eat-dog world 互相残杀的世界

Don't count your chickens before they hatch. 小鸡孵出之前先不要数；不要过早打如意算盘。

Don't look a gift horse in the mouth. 不要对礼物吹毛求疵。

Early bird catches the worm 早起的鸟儿有虫吃；捷足先登；笨鸟先飞

Eat crow 忍辱，屈服，丢脸，被迫认错

Fat cat 大亨，阔佬

Fish out of water 离水之鱼，在陌生环境下不得其所的人

For the birds 毫无意义，荒唐可笑，不值得认真对待

Get your goat 使某人恼怒，挫伤，嘲弄

Go to the dogs 败落，大不如前

High horse 趾高气扬，臭架子

Hold your horses 沉住气，耐心等待，且慢，请三思

Horse of a different color 完全是另一回事，风马牛不相及之事

In a pretty kettle of fish 身处困境，处境很糟

Kill two birds with one stone 一石二鸟，一箭双雕，一举两得

Knee-high to a grasshopper 矮小，幼小

Let sleeping dogs lie 别没事找事，莫惹是生非

Let the cat out of the bag 泄露秘密

Lock the barn door after the horse is out 事后做无用功

Mad as a wet hen 心烦不安，气急败坏

Make a silk purse out of a sow's ear 雕朽木为玉器，化腐朽为神奇

Monkey business 欺骗，胡闹，恶作剧

Ants in your pants 热锅上的蚂蚁；坐立不安

You never sit still. You must have ants in your pants.

你连一会儿都坐不住。活像是热锅上的蚂蚁。

Meaning: extreme restlessness; over activity

语义: 极其不安宁；过分活泼

► **Origin:** We can easily imagine where this saying came from. What if you actually had ants in your pants? You'd find it difficult to settle down. You'd keep squirming to get rid of the ants. But in China, there is another saying expressing the same meaning, which is "ants in the hot pan."

► **语源:** 我们很容易想象到这个习语的出处。如果你的裤子里进了蚂蚁会是什么滋味呢？你会很难安稳下来，局促不安，直到把蚂蚁赶出来。但在中国，同样的意义会用另外一种表达方式，就是“热锅上的

蚂蚁”。

Apple of one's eye 掌上明珠；极其珍爱的人 / 物

Kate is the apple of my eye.

凯特是我的掌上明珠。

Meaning: a person or thing that is greatly loved, treasured, and adored

语义: 被极度宠爱、珍惜和崇拜的人或物

► **Origin:** This saying is used in the Bible. Ancient people thought that the pupil of the eye was solid and shaped like an apple. The pupil (“apple of the eye”) was precious because without it, you couldn’t see.

► **语源:** 这则习语出自《圣经》。古代的人们认为人的瞳孔是实心的而且形状像苹果。瞳孔（眼睛里的苹果）非常的宝贵，因为没了它眼睛也就失去了作用。

As the crow flies 直线距离；笔直地；最短距离

Jennifer lives only a few blocks from school as the crow flies.

珍妮弗的家到学校的直线距离只有几个街区远。

Meaning: by the shortest and most direct route; measured in a straight, direct line between

语义: 最短的直线距离；测量出的两点间的最短距离

► **Origin:** Most birds, including crows, fly to their destination in a straight, direct line. They don’t zigzag or take detours. Therefore, they get where they’re going by the most direct route. People can’t always travel as directly as a crow flying through the air. They must walk, drive, or ride following the twist and turns. Measuring distances “as the crow flies” is often unrealistic because five miles between two points in a straight line might be ten miles of twists and turns, hills and obstacles.

► **语源:** 大多数鸟类，包括乌鸦，都以直线路径飞往目的地。它们从不“Z”字形前进，也不绕行。因此，它们以最直接的路线到达目的地。人类的出行路线不可能总像乌鸦在空中飞行那样直接。他们必须走路、开车或骑车迂回。以两点间最短距离测量两地的距离往往是一种理想化的测量方式，因为两点间直线距离为5英里时，现实中很有可能迂回了10英里，甚至有山头和其他障碍相隔。

Asleep at the switch 玩忽职守；错失良机

Tootsie lost her job because she was asleep at the switch.

图西的玩忽职守使她丢了工作。

Meaning: not attending to one's job or failing to react quickly; not being alert

语义: 未能专心工作或者没能及时做出反应；反应迟钝

► **Origin:** This saying comes from the early days of the railroad (the mid-1800s). One of a trainman's most important duties was to switch a train from one track to another at exactly the right moment. If he fell asleep at the switch, the train might go off the tracks or crash. Today the meaning has been extended to anyone who isn't paying attention and fails to do a job at the right time.

► **语源:** 这个习语是过去铁路上流传下来的（19世纪80年代中期）。一位铁路工人最重要的任务是在正确的时刻将火车从一个轨道转换到另一个轨道上，也就是搬道岔。他一旦在要搬道岔的时候睡着了，火车就会脱轨或是发生碰撞。如今这个习语的语义有所延伸，它指任何人在某一关键时刻没有认真工作，玩忽职守，错失良机。

At the drop of a hat 立即；马上；毫不迟疑

Lou would have gone to the football game at the drop of a hat.

卢本应该毫不迟疑地去参加足球比赛。

Meaning: right away; at once; without delay; willing at any moment

语义: 立刻；马上；毫不迟疑；随时待命

► **Origin:** There are many ways to start a race or other sporting event: shooting a gun, waving a flag, yelling "ready, set, go!" and so on. Years ago someone would drop a hat as the starting signal, and the contest would begin immediately. Today if anyone does anything (not just something athletic) eagerly and on the spur of the moment, we say it's done "at the drop of a hat."

► **语源:** 开始一场赛跑或是其他体育运动有很多方式：开枪、挥旗、喊“预备开始”。很多年前有人用丢帽子的方式作为开始比赛的信号，比赛也就随即开始。如今如果谁很急切地做某件事（并非一定是体育运动），我们就会用到这个习语。