

**A Learner's
Dictionary
of English
Idioms**



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About this dictionary

Idioms are a very important part of the English language: you may be told that if you want to *go far* you should *pull your socks up* and use your *grey matter*. An idiom is a phrase which you cannot understand by putting together the meanings of the words in it. For example, *pull your socks up* has nothing to do with socks or pulling them up, but means 'improve your behaviour'.

This dictionary is for intermediate learners of English who want a clear explanation of the common idioms that are used in contemporary English. You will find over 5500 idioms clearly explained, nearly all with one or more examples of how they are commonly used.

How to use this dictionary

Order of entries

Idioms are in alphabetical order according to the first of the most important words in each, and this 'key word' is printed in *italic* type:

like anything
a bag of nerves
change one's tune

Because it is sometimes difficult to decide which is the key word, there are many cross-references to guide you to the right place in the Dictionary. For example, if you look up *humble pie* at *humble* you will find

eat humble pie → **eat**

which means that the idiom is defined at *eat*. Cross-references will also help you when there are different versions of an idiom: if you look up *climb on the bandwagon* at *climb*, you will find

climb on the bandwagon → **jump/climb on the bandwagon**

which means that you will find the idiom at *jump*.

Note that *be* is rarely counted as part of an idiom: you should therefore look for *ill at ease* rather than *be ill at ease*, for example.

Within each group of idioms with the same key word, idioms are listed alphabetically according to the words after the key word, taking one word at a time. **A**, **an**, and **the** are counted for this purpose, but words which are normally replaced by others when an idiom is actually used (**sb**, **sth**, **sb's**, **sth's**, **one**, **one's**, **oneself**, and **etc**) are not. Also, when there are alternatives, only the first is counted. Thus, the order of these entries:

know/have all the answers
not know any better
know sth backwards
know best

is determined by **all**, **any**, **backwards**, and **best**. **Sb**, **sth**, **one** etc and any words before the key word are counted if they are the only difference between two or more idioms:

at last **look up**
at the last **look sb up**
 look sth up

Contractions and hyphenated words are treated as two words:

how on earth? **knock off**
how's your father **knock-on effect**
how the hell? **knock sb out**

A word in round brackets is counted in the alphabetical ordering only if it is the key word, as in **the (absolute) limit**.

Alternatives

/ and () are used to show that there are different versions of an idiom:

cut both/two ways

means that **cut both ways** and **cut two ways** are both idioms:

that (all) depends

means that **that all depends** and **that depends** are both idioms

Stress

The stress in an idiom is normally on the last noun, verb, adjective, or adverb, eg on *bucket* in *kick the bucket*. When this is not so, however, it is shown by ':

'small fry

Occasionally, , is used to show lighter stress.

Style labels

These show that some idioms have limited use: amongst others, (*informal*) means that the idiom is used in everyday conversation and would not be used much in writing; (*slang*) indicates a very informal style normally used between people of the same age, especially young people; (*taboo*) describes an idiom that is rude or offensive and is generally best avoided by learners of English.

A label applies also to any alternatives given in the same entry (or in the same numbered section of an entry) unless they are differently labelled

Derived words

These are given in some entries: they are mainly nouns and adjectives that take their meaning from the idiom, eg the adjective **back-breaking** from the idiom **break one's back**.

See also . . .

An idiom given after 'See also' is worth comparing because it either uses some of the same words or has a similar meaning.

Abbreviations

<i>adj</i>	adjective
<i>eg</i>	for example
<i>etc</i>	and so on
<i>n</i>	noun
<i>pl</i>	plural
<i>sb</i>	somebody
<i>sth</i>	something
<i>US</i>	American
<i>vb</i>	verb

A

from **A to Z** very thoroughly and in detail: *He's spent four years examining the life cycle of insects, so he knows his subject from A to Z.*

the ABC of sth the basic facts of a subject: *There are several books available that give you the ABC of home computers. See also as easy as ABC.*

abide by sth 1 obey or keep a rule or law: *Players must abide by the rules of the game.* 2 accept sth such as a decision or judgment without arguing over it: *The company managers and the unions agreed to abide by the findings of the committee on pay and working conditions.*

be above oneself → **get/be'above oneself**

above all (else) especially; most importantly; in addition to all the other things: *When you choose a new car, see that it's big enough for what you want and that it's economical, but above all else, make sure you can afford it! Leave everything as you found it, and above all don't forget to lock the door.*

above and beyond more than; in addition to: *Our soldiers did above and beyond what was expected of them, and they will be rewarded accordingly.*

above/below par (of sb's health, performance etc) better/worse than it usually is: *He said he'd been feeling a bit below par for a few weeks but had not realised that there was anything seriously wrong with him until the doctor told him he had cancer. not up to par = below par.*

the (absolute) limit (informal) very annoying; intolerable: *You children really are the limit! Why can't you ever arrive on time?*

on 'no account not for any reason: *On no account must they disturb the hens. 'You wouldn't like to take my place, would you?' 'On no account (or Not on 'any account).'*

account for sb kill, defeat, or overcome sb: *He hoped to account for two or three of his attackers before he was captured. 'That's you accounted for, anyway,' I thought, as the heckler sat down without another word to say.*

account for sb/sth keep and give a record of sb/sth: *I have to account for every penny I spend. 'With three passengers still not accounted for (or still unaccounted for), rescue operations continued into the night.*

account for sth be/give a reason or explanation for sth: *If he was in pain that would account for his bad temper. 'Why did she give up her studies when she was doing so well?' 'I can't account for it either.'*

on account of sb/sth because of sb/sth: *I can't go, but don't stay in on account of 'me (or on 'my account). 'Flights were delayed on account of the fog.*

there's no accounting for tastes (saying) you cannot guess who or what another person may like.

by/from 'all accounts → **all**

within an ace of (doing) sth only just fail to do, achieve, or suffer sth: *I was within an ace of punching him, I was so angry. 'This sudden change of fortune came when they were within an ace of victory.*

sb's Achilles' heel a weakness or flaw in an otherwise strong person, organization, defence system etc.

the 'acid test (of sth) a severe test that proves or disproves the worth, ability etc (of sth): *He has done well as a student teacher under supervision. The acid test will come when he has to face a class by himself.*

catch sb in the act (of doing sth) → **catch act/be one's age** not act in such a foolish, childish way: *Come on, Jenny, stop playing with your food—act your age!*

act like a charm → **work/act like a charm**

an act of God an event not caused or controlled by man, especially a natural disaster such as a flood or earthquake: *The policy insures your property against acts of God but not against enemy action in war. 'He was determined to walk the whole way, and nothing less than an act of God could have stopped him.*

act/play the fool behave in a stupid or playful way intended to amuse: *It was impossible to get a decent game of tennis with Frank acting the fool most of the time.*

act/play up (informal) cause trouble in an annoying, tiresome way: *The children are all right with me—they only start acting up when their parents come home.*

where the 'action is → **where**

'action stations (an order to go to) the places in which everybody is ready for action: *Action stations, everyone! The royal party have just arrived outside!*

actions speak louder than words (saying) what you do matters more than what you say.

In actual fact → **In fact**

Adam's ale (old-fashioned or literary) water.

Adam's apple the part in the front of the neck, especially on a man, which sticks out and moves when a person talks.

add fuel to the fire cause or encourage more activity, a stronger emotion or attitude etc: *In an area where there are already strong feelings about discrimination, the smallest incident seems only to add fuel to the fire and produce even further discontent. Also fan the flames (of sth).*

add insult to injury offend sb's feelings as well as cause him (material) loss or damage:

(not) add up

The tiny sum of money offered in compensation for the damage added insult to injury.

(not) add up (informal) (not) make sense or seem reasonable: *Why did the gang bother to break in if they could just walk in? It doesn't add up.*

add 'up to sth mean sth: *What all these new restrictions add up to is that I can't invite my friends here any more.*

admit/allow of sth (formal) offer scope or opportunity for sth: *The terms of the lease do not admit of sub-letting.*

to (better etc) advantage in a way that produces a good or profitable result: *You should be spending your time to better advantage (than you do).* / *It's a lovely picture, but it's not seen to advantage where it is. Why don't you hang it nearer the light?*

I'm afraid → **I**

afraid/frightened of one's own shadow extremely timid and nervous.

be after sb/sth → **go/be after sb/sth**

after all 1 finally; in the end; after everything that has gone before: *We looked everywhere for the key and then found it in my coat pocket after all.* 2 contrary to what a person first intends to do or expects to happen: *I think I will have something to eat after all.* / *We could have left our coats at home—it didn't rain after all.* 3 what is more important in the circumstances (often used with a reason or argument that has been remembered or thought of): *Can't I stay up late tonight? After all, there's no school tomorrow!* / *You got a fair price for your car. It is six years old, after all.*

act/be one's age → **act**

be/come of age be/reach the age when you are legally responsible for your own actions: *When he comes of age, he can do what he wants with the money left to him in his father's will.*

over/under age too old/young to be employed, join the army, be admitted to a place etc: *At the recruiting office they told him he was over age.* / *The landlords of pubs have been warned against serving under-age drinkers.*

pile on the agony → **pile**

agony aunt (informal) the woman who answers readers' letters about their personal problems in a newspaper or magazine.

agree to differ allow each other to keep different opinions about sth, especially in order to avoid further argument: *'I don't think you'll ever convince me.'* / *'OK—let's say we agree to differ, then.'*

(not) agree with sb (of climates, foods, or activities) (not) suit sb's health or comfort: *Greasy food doesn't agree with me. I always get indigestion afterwards.* / *A nap after lunch just doesn't agree with me. I always wake up with a headache.*

(be) ahead of one's/its time (of sb or an idea, invention etc) (be) more advanced than others of his/its period and unlikely to be accepted, except by future generations: *Leo-*

nardo da Vinci's notebooks and drawings show him to have had a scientific knowledge that was well ahead of his time.

what's sth in aid of? → **what**

in the air (of a piece of information or idea) going about: *There's a rumour in the air that Siegfried's going to be sacked soon.*

(up) in the air (of plans or proposals) very uncertain and perhaps never to be carried out: *It could be an interesting trip—but the plan's very much up in the air still, you know; nothing fixed or final.*

off the air not broadcasting or not being broadcast: *The series you mentioned has been off the air for weeks now. Hadn't you noticed?* / *'I can't get Radio Clyde tonight.'* / *'Oh, it's off the air because of an industrial dispute.'* See also **on the air**.

on the air broadcasting or being broadcast: *He's on the air a lot, that fellow, considering he's a fairly minor politician.* / *Goodnight from all of us here. BBC-2 will come on the air again at 6.40 for Open University students.* See also **off the air**.

tread/walk on air → **tread**

put on airs → **put**

airs and graces affected manners to give an impression of great elegance, but in reality often having the opposite effect: *I'm inclined to suspect anybody so full of airs and graces as she is of being insincere.*

roll in the aisles → **roll**

an Aladdin's cave a treasure-house; any place where valuable or interesting objects can be found or seen: *He kept for his private pleasure an Aladdin's cave of stolen masterpieces.* / *London toy shops must seem like Aladdin's caves to children from the country.*

alive and kicking (informal) alive and well or active: *'Whatever happened to Fred?'* / *'He's still alive and kicking. I think he's landed a job somewhere in Africa.'*

in all as a total quantity or number: *We had only ten litres in all to last us till the end of the week.* / *'You must have hundreds of tapes there.'* / *'340 in all.'*

hy/from 'all accounts from what people say; from what is in the newspapers etc; as seems generally agreed: *Unemployment is high and from all accounts is going to get worse.* / *'I'm sorry you couldn't be there.'* / *'Me, too. It was a very happy occasion by all accounts.'*

all along from the start until this particular time: *I've said all along that this would happen.* / *'I knew that all along.'*

all and sundry everyone; people of any or every kind: *The place would be open to all and sundry if her wishes were fulfilled.*

all at once suddenly: *Everything seemed settled, when all at once he changed his mind.*

carry all before one → **carry all/everything before one**

all being well if nothing unforeseen or unfortunate happens: *We'll see you then, all being well, around Christmas.*

in all one's born days (informal) at any time

in your life (usually used when referring to sth unpleasant): *How dare you talk to me like that! I've never been spoken to like that in all my born days!*

all but 1 very nearly: *I all but fell into the trap. He himself was all but bankrupt and so couldn't help us. 2* all the people or things mentioned except . . . : *All but two of the boys failed the exam.*

for all sb cares/knows sb does not care/know: *He can sack me tomorrow for all I care. That was years ago. He might be dead by now for all anyone knows.*

in all conscience truly; without doubt or question: *I can say in all conscience that I've never knowingly harmed anybody.*

it was all/sb could do (not) to do sth (informal) it was very difficult (not) to do sth: *The situation was so desperately sad that the couple found it was all they could do not to cry.*

(not) be/take all day/morning/afternoon/evening/night (informal) (not) spend too long a time; (not) be too slow (used as a request to hurry up): *Don't be all day choosing your book. Also (not) have (got) all day etc.*

all day and every day without change or a break over a period of time: *I have to be active—I couldn't sit around all day and every day now I've retired.*

it/that (all) depends → *depends*

all dressed up and nowhere to go (informal) wearing your best clothes and ready for an engagement, party etc, but not actually going, for example because of a change of plans; clearly ready for an event which does not take place (usually used humorously).

be all ears/eyes (informal) pay close attention by listening/looking: *Yes, tell me, I'm all ears!*

at 'all events in any case; whatever the circumstances: *We do not have a record of his travels, but he must, at all events, have visited Madagascar during the summer of 1854.*

(all) for the best → *best*

on all fours → *on one's hands and knees*

be all go be (a situation where people are) constantly active, energetic, excited etc: *With the election so close, it's all go for the organizers at the moment.*

all good things (must) come to an end (saying) (said especially in reference to the end of a happy holiday, or meeting with friends etc.)

be (all) Greek to sb (informal) (of difficult or technical talk or writing) be too hard for sb to understand: *His lecture on the latest developments in electronics was all Greek to me.*

all hell breaks loose violent rioting or great, noisy uproar and confusion suddenly start: *When the soldiers fired shots into the crowd, all hell broke loose.*

(all) hot and bothered → *hot*

at/till all hours (of the night) at/till any time between late evening and early morning: *He sat up working till all hours to finish his essay.*

all 'in 1 (of a price) with everything included; with no extra to pay: *I'll sell you this car for £10,000 all in. These are 'all-in prices—room, breakfast, service and tax. 2 (informal) very tired; exhausted: *I'll finish digging that patch tomorrow, Mary. Right now, I'm all in.**

all in at the day's work sth that a person accepts as normal or to be expected in his daily routine or duties: *To a trawlerman, it seems, a soaking is all in a day's work.*

all in all 1 taking everything into consideration: *All in all, we've done a good day's work. 2* the object of (obsessive) devotion and interest: *A man can love his wife without her becoming his all in all.*

be (all) in the mind → *mind*

to all intents (and purposes) in all practical respects; in fact; in every way: *He was treated with kindness but was still to all intents and purposes a slave.*

when all is said and done when all the facts are considered: *Half of these costly conferences, when all is said and done, achieve little or nothing.*

for all one is worth (do sth) with all your energy and/or concentration: *The thief ran off down the road, so I chased him for all I was worth.*

all manner of all kinds of: *The warehouse was stocked with all manner of goods.*

all my eye and Betty Martin! → *my eye! foot!*

all of (informal) (used to emphasize an amount such as an age or distance): *It took us all of four hours to clear out the garage! It must be all of 1000 kilometres from here to Paris.*

all of a sudden (informal) suddenly and unexpectedly: *I was sitting reading my book when all of a sudden the lights went out.*

all one (to sb) or all the same (to sb) make no difference, not matter at all (to st): *Clearly, it was all one to him whether we approved or not. Also one and the same.*

be sb all 'over be typical of sb; be just the way he is likely to behave: *It was a tactless thing to say, but that's your father all over!*

be all over sb welcome, fuss over or flatter sb greatly or too much: *James is the children's favourite uncle. They're all over him as soon as he comes to visit us!*

be all over bar the shouting (informal) (of sth such as a contest or performance) be (successfully) concluded with only the official announcement, the applause etc to follow: *90% of the votes had been counted, and Macdonald had won—it was all over bar the shouting!*

all 'over the place/shop (informal) (found, scattered etc) everywhere: *Walk along a main street anywhere and you'll see foreign-built cars all over the shop.*

of 'all people, places etc be a particular person, place, thing that is the most/least likely or suitable: *Of all people, you should be the one to sympathize, having just had a similar*

all right

accident yourself. / If it's a rest they need, then why go to London of all places?

all right 1 (a way of agreeing to something, which may be willing or not, as shown by the tone of voice and expression on the face): 'Come for your dinner, Billy.' 'All right, Mum. What are we having today?' / 'May I borrow your camera this afternoon?' asked Bill. 'All right, but don't make a habit of it,' agreed Harry reluctantly. **2** certainly, without doubt (used at the end of a statement, promise, or threat, to emphasize it): Jack's an amusing fellow all right. / 'And tell him we're very annoyed.' 'I'll tell him that all right.' / We know their marriage is in a mess all right, but what are we going to do about it? **3** in good or satisfactory health or condition; uninjured, undamaged, or in working order: I had a bad cold last week but I feel all right now. / The machine's all right—the trouble is that you don't know how to work it. This is also a common way of replying to a greeting such as **How are you?**: 'How are you, June?' 'All right, thanks—and how are you?' As a question it may itself be a greeting: 'All right?' 'Yes thanks—and you?' **4** (only just) satisfactory or good enough; well or satisfactorily enough: 'Don't you like the Smiths?' 'Peter's all right, but his wife is a bit of a troublemaker.' / 'Did I do all right?' 'Yes, what you said was splendid!' **5** (used at the beginning of a sentence to show annoyance and impatience): All right, there's no need to get so angry with me! / All right, forget I ever came into your life if that's how you feel about me! **6** Have you understood so far? (used to join parts of an explanation): So you want to get to the station? OK, you turn left at the end and go straight on at the junction. All right? Go down the hill, and there it is. Also **right**. See also **it's all right**; **that's all right**.

all right (with sb) allowed; convenient (for sb); not an action or arrangement that sb would dislike or object to: Is it all right to park here? / 'Stay overnight with us.' 'Well, if you're sure that would be all right with your wife, we'd be glad to.'

a bit of all right → **bit**

do all right for oneself → **do**

it's all right (used to show discontent, dissatisfaction, or sometimes envy): 'I'm on holiday tomorrow!' 'It's all right for some, isn't it? I've got to go to work!' Also **it's all very well**: It's all very well filing these papers away, but are you ever going to use them again? See also **that's all right**.

see sb (all) right → **see**

that's all right (used as a response to sb saying thank you or apologizing): 'Thank you for these flowers.' 'Oh, that's all right.' / 'I'm sorry I couldn't come to the party.' 'It's all right—perhaps you'll be able to make it another time.' See also **it's all right**.

all's fair in love and war (saying) actions sb would usually be blamed for are excused in love or in war.

all's well that ends well (saying) if the final result is good, earlier difficulties or setbacks no longer matter.

(be) (all) square (with sb) → **square**

(not) as stupid, tired etc as all that (not) as stupid etc as to do sth that has previously been described or suggested: 'You didn't sign the paper, did you?' 'I am not as stupid as all that.' / 'Father can't be nursed at home any longer.' 'Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't realize he was as ill as all that.'

(not) (all) that good, easy etc → **that**

and all that (jazz) (informal) and more/other things of the same kind, having the same meaning, or of equal (un)importance: She was very polite and apologetic and all that—said it had all been a misunderstanding. / 'Our grandmother,' said Paul, 'is very keen on good manners, brushing your teeth, keeping your back straight, and all that jazz.' / He knows a lot about politics and all that, but not too much about real life.

all the best! (informal) (a wish that sb will be happy, successful etc, used when saying goodbye, at the end of a letter, or when drinking with sb): All the best, then, Maria, and we'll see you in a fortnight!

be (all) the better/worse for sth → **be (all, none etc) the better/worse for sth**

of all the cheek, nerve etc! an exclamation of annoyance or disapproval: Of all the nerve! Some people want everything done for them! / Of all the idiots, leaving his car unlocked in the middle of town!

make all the difference → **make**

all the go/rage very much in fashion: Electronic games were all the go that year, and every child wanted one for Christmas.

for all the good sb/sth is/does sb/sth is so bad or does so little good that . . . : For all the good the boy's education did him, he might as well have had none.

all the same nevertheless: I'm sure your figures will be correct, but I'll check them all the same, if you don't mind.

not for all the tea in China → **tea**

all the world and his wife large numbers of people, especially assembled as guests, spectators, or holidaymakers: There was no escape on our little holiday beach! All the world and his wife were there.

(not) all there (informal) (not) having a right, sane mind or normal intelligence: One of their boys is not all there, you know. He has to go to a special school. / Anne may be stupid in some respects but she's all there when it comes to money matters.

all things considered when everything, especially something bad, connected with a situation or event is considered: The weather was awful for the garden fete, so they did quite well, all things considered, to raise as much as £360.

be all things to all men vary your behaviour or the expression of your opinions, to suit your company or audience.

be 'all thumbs → one's fingers are all thumbs

all told with all items counted and included: 'How many?' '60 passengers all told.'

all too common, often etc much more common etc than a person likes or is right: *The vegetables were overcooked—an all too common fault in British kitchens. I One meets with such courtesy all too seldom.*

it's all 'up with sb/sth (informal) sb is dead or sure to die; sb's career or prosperity is at an end; sth is ended, cannot continue, or must be abandoned: *If he hadn't been wearing a life-jacket it would certainly have been all up with him.*

it's all very well → **it's all right**

all very well/fine (but . . .) good or satisfactory in some respect(s) only: *Camping is all very well if you get good weather.*

for all one's wealth, disadvantages etc in spite of one's wealth etc: *The Duke, for all his wealth, was a deeply unhappy man. I She's an awful gossip but a good-hearted woman for all that.*

all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy (saying) it is not healthy to spend all your time working and never relaxing.

it's all yours, theirs etc (informal) I am or would be pleased to have nothing (further) to do with sb/sth: *I'm trying my best to do a difficult job. If anyone wants to take over from me, it's all theirs. I 'There you are, Mr Brown,' she said, taking him into the classroom, 'they're all yours.'*

(right) up sb's alley → **(right) up sb's street/alley**

allow of sth → **admit/allow of sth**

make allowance(s) for sb/sth → **make in the altogether** naked, wearing no clothes:

There they all were, alone on the beach, in the altogether.

can/could always do sth be free to do sth; have the option of doing sth: *Make him the offer—he can always say no.*

any amount (of) → **any amount/number (of)**

amount to sth be regarded as sth, especially after all the points have been considered: *The news agency reported that the agreement between the superpowers amounted to an attempt at gaining nuclear superiority. I A promise from her amounts to nothing.*

ancient/past history sth, especially in sb's past, that is no longer relevant or significant: *Tom's first marriage to Stella is ancient history.*

and all 1 and other (connected) matters: *What with her job and the 'children and all, Jane's kept pretty busy. 2* as well; included; too: *They've invited themselves, dog and all, for the weekend. I You can take that smile off your face and all, young Jones. 3* in spite of; notwithstanding: *Crippled leg and all, he's a lot more active than you are.*

and how! (informal) very much so: *'Would you like a place in the team?' 'And how!'*

an angel of mercy sb who brings help, com-

as easy, clear, quickly etc as anything

fort etc just at the right time: *No sooner had I realized that we didn't have a spare tyre in the car than this man came up, a real angel of mercy, and helped us to mend the puncture.*

angle/fish for sth try to obtain sth such as compliments, an invitation, or information for yourself by hints or other indirect methods: *I could tell from what he was saying that he was fishing for information on what business we were doing with Pane & Co.*

a horse of another colour → **horse**

answer (sb) back defend yourself when being accused or criticized; reply rudely to sb, such as a parent, teacher, or boss, who is criticizing you or telling you what to do: *It's easy for the others to blame Jack when he's not here to answer (them) back. I Don't answer back, my lad, and take that grin off your face, too!*

answer for sb say or promise what sb will do: *'Would your husband help?' 'I can't answer for him,' but I don't see why not.'*

answer for sth (have to) accept the responsibility or blame for sth: *He has neglected his health and now he has to answer for the consequences. I That poor woman seems more neurotic every time I see her—her husband's got a lot to answer for.*

answer to sb (for sth) try to explain or justify (mis)conduct to sb who may punish you (for sth) (often used as a warning or threat): *If I catch you in here again, it's the police you'll have to answer to.*

have (got) ants in one's pants → **have**

any amount/number (of) (informal) a large amount/number of: *They were a bit stingy with the sandwiches, but there was any amount of drink. I 'Who wants to watch rubbish like that?' 'Any number of people, I assure you.'*

in 'any case anyway; whatever happens or has happened: *I don't yet know who'll bring them or when, but in any case we'll see you get the papers back tomorrow. I The Irish runner got badly bumped in the last lap but wouldn't have won in any case.*

'any day (of the week) (informal) (used to emphasize a strong preference): *I'd rather have him than his brother any day of the week.*

'any day of the week (informal) at any time, as frequently as you want: *You can hear that stuff on the radio any day of the week.*

any minute, day etc now in the next few minutes, days etc; very soon: *The car will be here any minute now.*

'any old time, place/where, how etc (informal) any time, place, manner etc at all; any time etc that may be convenient for sb, though perhaps not for others: *I told him he could drop in and see us any old time. I I want this job done properly, not any old how.*

'anyone's/anybody's guess a matter no one can be sure about: *Who will win is anybody's guess.*

as easy, clear, quickly etc as anything (informal) very easy etc indeed: *'I could climb up there as easy as anything,' boasted Sally. I It*

If anything

was only a small gift, but she was as pleased as anything with it.

If anything if there is any difference: *I can't really tell who is taller, but Peter is, if anything.* / *If anything, I think I prefer my old pen as it writes a bit better.*

like anything (informal) very well, much, hard, fast etc: *She ran like anything to catch the bus.* / *It hurts like anything.*

more than anything (else) (in the world)

→ more

anything but certainly not; far from; just the opposite of: *Jack is anything but mean.* / *I wouldn't say he was generous—anything but!*
anything doing? 1 (informal) is anything happening?: *Anything doing tonight? Do you fancy going to the cinema with me?* 2 (informal) can you help?: *I need a lift into town. Anything doing?*

anything goes anything is permitted; there are no rules for work or behaviour: *Don't imagine, because you have more freedom than in most schools, that anything goes.* / *In our modern society, anything goes.* Note that there is no change of tense: *It will be (or It was) a case of anything goes.*

if anything happens to sb (euphemistic) if sb dies, especially in an accident, or is seriously injured.

anything 'in it → something, anything, nothing etc 'in it

anything 'in it for sb → something, anything, nothing etc 'in it for sb

anything like at all near; to any degree (used with a negative, in a question, or in an if-clause): *He isn't anything like as clever as his brother.* / *If this weekend is anything like the summer camp you've told us about, then it will be fantastic.* Also **anywhere near**: *Your car isn't anywhere near as fast as ours!* Also (with positive forms) **nothing like**; **nowhere near**: *This exam's nothing like as easy as last year's.*

anything out of the ordinary/usual → ordinary

come/fall apart at the seams → come

an apology for sth an example of bad quality of sth: *I'm sorry, but this is rather an apology for lunch—we'll have a good meal this evening.*

to all appearances apparently; as far as a person can judge from looking at or observing sb/sth: *The house was to all appearances unoccupied.* / *Although to all appearances a normal healthy child, David suffered from asthma.*

the apple of sb's eye a person or thing that is dearly loved, especially treasured: *Rosalind is the apple of her father's eye.*

in apple-pie order or neatly and tidily arranged: *I'm sure he'll have left his papers in apple-pie order.*

tied to his mother's/wife's 'apron strings
→ tied

(come) out of the ark → come

cost an arm and a leg → cost (sb) a pretty penny

the strong/long arm of the law → strong

(keep/hold sb/sth) at arm's length → keep

an armchair critic, expert, cricketer etc a person who offers criticisms about an art, study, or sport, in which he has never actively taken part.

armed to the teeth (with sth) (informal) equipped with or carrying many weapons or many articles having a definite purpose: *The tourists stepped out of the coach, armed to the teeth with cameras, binoculars, and guide-books.*

up in arms (informal) protesting; showing anger, opposition, and disapproval: *Local parents are up in arms about threats to close two of the town's secondary schools.*

as and when whenever; at such times as: *This tap gives you instant hot water as and when required.*

as for sb/sth referring to or turning to the subject of sb/sth: *I like Muriel—but as for George, I wouldn't care if I never saw him again.*

as if (used to show anger at or disapproval of a suggestion, explanation etc): *As if you expect me to believe that! / As if I really cared!*

it isn't as if or it's not as if if it is not true that: *It isn't as if he didn't recognize me! I just stood there and he walked straight past!*

as if/though I would, anybody could etc (used to deny a possibility): *'Don't tell the boss I said that, will you?' 'Oh, Alice, as if I would!'*

as it is/was in the state of affairs that exists/existed: *We won't be able to buy a new car this year—we've only got just enough money for a holiday as it is.*

as it were if it may be expressed in this way: *What is shown on television is, as it were, a reflection of what society is like.* Also **so to speak**.

as you were → you

what more could one ask? → what

ask after sb enquire, through another person, about sb's health and well-being: *Tell Anna I was asking after her.*

ask for one's cards → get one's cards

ask for it (informal) behave in such a way that you deserve to be corrected, scolded, punished: *Been pushed out, has he? Well, he's been asking for it.* / *'You're always so sharp with people, aren't you?' 'No, I'm not—only if they ask for it.'*

ask for the moon → cry/ask for the moon

ask/look for trouble (informal) behave in a way that is likely to involve you in trouble, especially an accident, fight, or illness: *They're asking for trouble, leaving young children alone in a house.* / *You could see right away that they'd come here looking for trouble.* Note that this is usually used in continuous tenses.

ask sb in invite a neighbour, salesman, or casual caller inside your house to discuss sth, have a cup of tea etc: *Don't leave him outside, Peter. Ask him in.*

if you **ask me** in my opinion (usually used when the opinion has not been asked for): *If you ask me, Mark shouldn't have bought that car—it's just not worth it. / I don't think you two will ever get on, if you ask me. / We weren't asking you, so shut up!*

ask me another (informal) I don't know; I can't answer your question: *'What's the population of Wales?' 'Ask me another.' Also don't ask me.*

ask sb out invite sb to a special occasion such as a dinner or party, whether mentioned or not: *We can't come round on Saturday, I'm sorry. We've been asked out to a dance that evening. / Surprise, surprise! So Rob's finally asked you out! I am pleased!*

ask sb over/round invite a friend to come to your house for a meal, drink etc: *Why don't we ask Shirley and Neil round one evening?*

I ask you (used to show surprise or other strong feeling): *Well, I ask you! What a nerve that chap has—coming in here and just taking my tape-recorder without my permission! / Not another day when it rains the whole time! I ask you!*

be sb's for the asking → (can) have/get sth for the asking

(can) have/get sth for the asking → **have** it's asking a lot (off/from sb/sth) you want or expect a lot of, or too much, work, help, or self-sacrifice from sb/sth: *It's asking a lot, I know, but could you go instead of me? Also it's a lot to ask (off/from sb/sth): A chance to do a day's work for a living wage is not a lot to ask, but it's more than many people get.*

be at sb → **get/be at sb**

at all 1 to the slightest degree (used with a negative, in a question, or in an if-clause): *I didn't know that at all. / If you're at all unhappy about marrying him, then don't. 2* anyway; even so: *I'm surprised she came at all.*

be at it (informal) be doing sth such as work: *You've been hard at it for five hours now without a break. Surely you can take half an hour off for a cup of tea and a sandwich?*

make an attempt on sth → **make**

make an attempt on sb's life → **make**

pay attention (to sb/sth) → **pay**

avoid sb/sth like the plague (informal) dislike or fear sb/sth intensely and try to avoid him/it: *What's he so frightened of that he avoids women like the plague?*

have an axe to grind → **have**

B

a babe in arms an infant too young to sit up or crawl about; helpless and/or harmless person: *At the family party there were all ages from babes in arms to great-grandfathers. / When it comes to buying property, he is a babe in arms.*

babes in the wood simple, innocent people who are easily misled or exploited, especially a pair of young lovers or inexperienced partners in a business venture.

sb's baby (informal) (of a task) be sb's responsibility: *That's an invoicing problem—it's Richard's baby.*

as smooth/soft as a baby's bottom → **smooth**

behind sb's back when sb is not looking, not present, or not informed, because he would not like or would disapprove of what is said or done: *You shouldn't say nasty things like that about Ruth behind her back. / The boys smoke behind his back. See also go behind sb's back.*

get (sb) off one's/sb's back → **get**

get on sb's back → **get**

go behind sb's back → **go**

on one's back helpless or ill: *That glandular fever really put Sue flat on her back for months.*

put sb/oneself on the back → **put**

stab sb in the back → **stab**

back down withdraw (the full extent of) a statement, claim, or accusation: *The Prime Minister is not prepared to back down over his threat to withhold the money from the steel*

industry. / After swearing the process was 100% safe, the manufacturers are now having to back down.

be (back) in business → **business**

sb's back is turned sb is not looking or is not present or informed: *The children laugh at him as soon as his back is turned.*

one's back is up (informal) you feel offended, resentful, or angry: *He started to apologize, but by that time my back was up and I wouldn't listen. See also get/put sb's back up.*

see the back of sb/sth → **see**

at the back of sth the motive or reason for sth: *Fred insists that George can't act, but I think a bit of professional jealousy is at the back of it.*

like the back of a bus (informal) very ugly: *You know Janet Butler—she looks like the back of a bus!*

fall off the back of a lorry → **fall**

the back of beyond an isolated place or one with poor communications and little activity: *After leading a hectic business life in the city, Bob was pleased to be able to retire to the back of beyond.*

know sth like the back of one's hand → **know**

have (got) eyes in the back of one's head → **have**

talk through the back of one's head/neck → **talk**

at/in the back of one's mind in your

backout (of sth)

thoughts or memory but not always heeded or not easily recalled: *I think your father knew in the back of his mind that he was being deceived. / There's something else at the back of my mind that I meant to say to you, but it's escaped me for the moment.*

back out (of sth) withdraw from an undertaking, promise, or agreement: *After saying he would serve on the committee, he now wants to back out.*

take a back seat → **take**

a **back-seat driver** a passenger who keeps giving the driver advice or instructions about how to control the car; sb who, without authority, interferes with the management of a business, sb's affairs etc.

fed up (to the back teeth) (with sb/sth) → **fed**

(it's) back to the drawing-board sth must be planned again from the beginning because of failure, revised opinions, or changed circumstances: *The Advertising Standards Authority refused to accept our advertisement, so it's back to the drawing-board to rewrite it.*

have (got) one's back to the wall → **have**
back sb up give sb support; make it known that you agree with sb's argument, claim, or objection: *Can I rely on you to back me up if I propose these changes?*

back sth up supplement sth to make it more effective: *The term's public lectures are backed up by a full programme of small discussion groups.* **back-up** n, adj: *We're prepared to give you lots of back-up. / back-up materials.*

'backroom boys people such as scientists or researchers whose work does not bring them into contact with the public or bring them public acclaim: *It's the backroom boys in the space centre, as well as the astronauts in space, who deserve recognition.*

a kick up the backside → **a kick in the pants**

backwards and forwards in one direction and then the opposite, repeatedly or often: *He rocked the stone backwards and forwards until it loosened enough to roll out.* Also **back and forth; to and fro**: *His wife had been going back and forth to hospital all week.*

not (so/too) bad (informal) quite good really: *We were surprised that the weather turned out to be not bad after all. / 'How are you feeling today, Rita?' 'Not too bad, thanks!'*

that can't be bad (informal) (an expression of approval): *He's just won second prize in the competition—a weekend abroad!* 'Well, that can't be bad, can it?'

(it's) too bad (informal) it's unfortunate; it's a pity, but nothing can be done about it: *Too bad that you don't like what I've done—but you'll just have to accept it, that's all. / It really is too bad that the play's been cancelled. / 'It's too bad of you not to have rung me to tell me you were going to be late,' complained Mum indignantly.*

give a bad account of oneself → **give a good, bad etc account of oneself**

a bad/rotten apple one of a group of people who is dishonest or disobedient and who has an unfavourable effect on the good ones: *In every police force, there are bound to be a few rotten apples.*

in sb's bad/books → **in sb's good/bad/black books**

bad blood (between sb and sb else) ill-feeling or enmity between two people: *There's been bad blood between Miss Randall and Mr Smith ever since she was promoted above him.*

a bad egg/lot (slang, old-fashioned) an untrustworthy or dishonest person.

come to a bad end → **come**
make the best of a bad job → **make the best of sth**

bad language swear words; talk that includes obscene words: *Please don't use bad language in front of the children.*

bad/hard/tough luck! (informal) (an expression of sympathy on sb's misfortune): *So she didn't inherit a penny? That was hard luck, after all the years she'd worked for him!* Also **hard lines!**

bad news travels fast (saying) people are often quicker to pass on bad news than good news.

take sth in bad part → **take sth in good/bad part**

turn up like a bad penny → **turn**
good riddance (to bad rubbish) → **good**

(a) bad/poor show! (becoming old-fashioned) (a comment on) sth disappointing, unlucky, to be disapproved of etc: *'I crashed the car yesterday.'* 'Oh, bad show!' See also **(a) good show!**

a bad taste in the/one's mouth a feeling of distaste or disgust about sth you have seen, heard, or taken part in: *The film left a bad taste in his mouth.*

go from bad to worse → **go**

do sb a bad turn → **do sb a good/bad turn**
bad value for money → **(good/bad) value for money**

in a bad way in a very poor or dangerous state: *One of the two survivors was in a very bad way when we picked them up.*

a bad workman blames his tools (saying) (said by sb who excuses his own inefficiency by complaining about the quality of his tools or the material he has to work with).

badly off → **well/badly off**

badly off (for sth) → **well/badly off (for sth)**
in the bag (informal) already achieved or certain to be so very soon: *With a three-goal lead and only ten minutes left to play, victory was in the bag.*

let the cat out of the bag → **let**

bag and baggage with all your luggage and/or movable possessions: *His landlady put him out, bag and baggage, the next morning.*

a bag of bones (informal) a very thin or emaciated person.

put all one's eggs in/into one basket

a bag of nerves (informal) a nervous, easily agitated person.

a bag of tricks (informal) all the equipment that is needed to do sth, especially when this is viewed as having a strangely mysterious effect: *I'll just go and get my bag of tricks from the van and we'll have your television set repaired in no time at all, madam!*

bags I (do) sth (informal) I, as first to speak, claim the right to do or have sth in preference to anyone else present: *'The boys can sleep here.'* *'Bags I the top bunk,'* said Tommy quickly. Also **I bags ... I bags** the front seat!

bags of (slang) = lots of.

bail sb/sth out → **bale/bail sb/sth out**

a baker's dozen 13.

in the balance (of events, the future etc) still uncertain and at a critical point where a decision may be taken to follow one of two ways: *The future of the school is still (or still hangs) in the balance.*

on balance after comparing the value, importance, or merits of two or more things: *Time is money for businessmen, so that on balance the cost of flying is not much greater than that of travelling overland.* *'Isn't he a difficult man to work with?' 'On balance, no. You saw him at his worst that day.'*

throw sb off his balance → **throw**

as bald as a coot completely bald or with no hair on the top of the head.

bale/bail sb/sth out help sb, an organization etc, in need, especially by providing money: *The government decided the only solution was to bale the company out.* *'In some parts of the country, because of the lack of money, parents want to bail out the schools for their children's sakes, and they have the cash to do this.'*

on the ball (informal) shrewd and intelligent either in general or in a particular respect: *He looks rather a simpleton, but he's on the ball when it comes to investing.*

have (got) the ball at one's feet → **have**

the ball is in sb's court sb, having received an offer, challenge etc, must decide what to do or make the next move: *We've shown, by inviting them to Mary's wedding, that we wish to forget our quarrel. The ball is in their court now.*

a ball of fire a highly competent, lively, and successful person: *Since her appointment, she's reorganized the sales force, halved the company's debts, and worked out a profit-sharing scheme—a real ball of fire, in fact!*

set/start/keep the 'ball rolling → **set**

the balloon goes up (informal) sth serious, such as a war, begins: *I managed to catch a quick sleep in the afternoon, before the balloon went up, and the battle began in the evening.*

slip on a banana skin → **slip**

jump/climb on the bandwagon → **jump**

go with a bang → **go with a bang/swing**

bang goes sth (informal) that puts an end to a particular plan, hope etc: *The car repairs*

cost me over a week's pay, so bang goes our evening out at the theatre.

bang one's head against a brick wall (informal) try for a long time to achieve sth, but not be successful; make no progress in an action or enquiry because of an obstruction: *I realized they weren't even listening to my protests. I was just banging my head against a brick wall!*

bang/spot on (informal) absolutely accurate in an answer, estimate, or description: *'I suppose you want your money back?' 'You're bang on there, mate.'* *'What a mimic! His imitations of politicians, in particular, are bang on.'* *'Well, I work out the percentage profit on the deal as 31.8%. Does that agree with your figures?' 'Yes, it's spot on; I've checked it on my calculator.'*

bank on sb/sth rely on sb/sth; have confidence that sb will act or sth will happen as expected: *I'm banking on you to support me (or on your support).* *'Is it going to stay dry for our fete this afternoon, Mr Smith?' 'I wouldn't bank on it.'*

a baptism of fire a difficult or violent introduction to a way of life, profession, or new activity: *His first night on the beat turned out to be a baptism of fire for the young policeman.* *'The new Defence Secretary faces a baptism of fire over his decision to re-allocate money amongst the different sections of the armed forces.'*

be all over bar the shouting → **all**

the bare bones of sth the basic facts of a story, subject etc, without supplementary background, details, or interpretation: *Given only the bare bones of the case, most people would have felt quite sure that Brown had killed his wife.*

into the bargain as well; in addition: *She gave us a cup of tea and, into the bargain, some useful information.* *'So I had a nasty fall and broke my watch into the bargain.'*

(not) bargain for sth (not) expect sth; (not) include sth in your plans or arrangements: *We hadn't bargained for such bad weather.* *'Giving birth to triplets was certainly more than Jill bargained for!'*

wouldn't touch sb/sth with a barge-pole → **touch**

sb's bark is worse than his bite (saying) sb appears bad-tempered or is apt to scold or threaten but will do no real harm to others.

bark up the wrong tree be mistaken and direct your efforts, enquiries, or accusations towards the wrong person or thing: *Evans may have been the obvious suspect, but I think that the police were barking up the wrong tree that time.*

have (got) sb over a barrel → **have**

behind bars in or into prison: *The thief was caught and spent the next two years behind bars.* *'He would like to see all such vandals put behind bars.'*

put all one's eggs in/into one basket → **put**

off one's own bat

off one's own bat (informal) independently, without asking for help; voluntarily, without being prompted or forced: *He didn't ask anyone's advice when he wanted to buy a house—he just went ahead and did it off his own bat.*

not bat an eyelid/eye show no sign of being concerned, disturbed, or dismayed: *He watched the whole grisly proceedings without even batting an eyelid.*

like a bat out of hell (informal) very fast: *If there was a fire, I wouldn't wait to sound the alarm—I'd be off like a bat out of hell!*

with bated breath scarcely breathing because tense with anxiety, fear, or expectation: *The competitors waited with bated breath for the judges to announce the results.*

throw the baby out with the bathwater → **throw**

have (got) bats in the belfry → **have**
bawl sb out (slang) rebuke or scold sb severely, especially in front of others: *He got bawled out by the referee.*

keep/hold sb/sth at bay → **keep**
the be-all and end-all (of) the whole extent of; the supreme aim or interest of: *He refuses to accept that the be-all and end-all of our existence is a life with God. Football isn't the be-all and end-all of life, you know.*

be that as it may whether that is true or not (though it probably is): *'It's a film that has been highly praised by the critics.' 'Be that as it may, I didn't enjoy it.' Also that's as (it) may be.*

broad in the beam → **broad**
on/off beam having the right or relevant; wrong or irrelevant idea or approach: *You're way off beam with your estimate.*

on one's/its beam-ends having almost no more money, stocks, or other resources: *Can you lend me some money? I'm on my beam-ends till Friday. As things are going at present, the whole of British industry will be on its beam-ends in a year or two.*

not (have) a bean → **have**
bear/carry one's cross(es) suffer the trouble(s) that life brings to you: *We all have our crosses to bear. Blind from birth, he carried his cross bravely.*

bear sb down overcome sb's strength; cause sb hardship (usually used in the passive): *He was borne down by poverty.*

bear down on sb/sth (formal) move in a fast, threatening way towards sb/sth: *Enemy ships bore down relentlessly on the small group of boats at the harbour entrance.*

bear fruit produce a good and desired result: *The new teaching methods had borne fruit at last and all the students passed the exam.*

a bear garden (informal) a place or occasion where there is much noise and rough behaviour: *You can't leave these kids for five minutes without them turning the classroom into a bear garden!*

bear heavily on sb cause hardship or suffering to sb: *The extra responsibilities of his new*

job bore heavily on his health, and he had several heart attacks.

bring sth to bear on/upon sb/sth → **bring**
bear on/upon sth (formal) have relevance to or a significant effect on sth: *How does this bear on what Peter said earlier?*

bear sb/sth out confirm or support sb's statement or a theory, opinion, or suspicion: *I was working late—the office cleaner will bear me out. The claims made for the fertilizer were not borne out by the results.*

bear the brunt (of sth) bear the heaviest share of an attack, loss, or deprivation: *The private motorist, as usual, has to bear the brunt of the increase in the tax on petrol announced today.*

bear up (informal) show courage and ability to cope in hard conditions, grief, or pain: *His widow bore up wonderfully at the funeral. I try to bear up, but it's awful to have to live in an institution after having had a home of your own.*

bear with sb/sth tolerate sb/sth; excuse or be patient with sb/sth: *I've borne with your drunkenness and bad tempers long enough, and now I'm going to leave you. If you will bear with me a moment, sir, I should like to explain a little more fully.*

like a bear with a sore head surly; short-tempered: *Dad's always like a bear with a sore head when he gets up, so nobody asks him a favour till well after breakfast.*

have a, no, some etc bearing on/upon sth → **have**

beat a path to sb's door → **the world beats a path to sb's door**

beat a retreat signal a military retreat; go or run back or away from sb/sth you fear or wish to avoid: *When I saw the bull I beat a hasty retreat!*

beat about the bush talk about a subject indirectly; take too long before saying or asking what is on your mind: *Let's not beat about the bush, Miss Brown. I've sent for you to discuss your work, which has become most unsatisfactory recently.*

beat sb at his 'own game do better than sb in his own special work, skill, or activity; defeat sb by doing as he does, but more successfully: *If you thought someone was cheating you, would you challenge him or try to beat him at his own game?*

beat one's brain(s) → **rack/beat one's brain(s)**

beat one's brains out (informal) struggle with a long and difficult task: *We've spent months beating our brains out to think of ways of raising more money. See also rack/beat one's brain(s); blow/dash one's/ab's brains out.*

beat one's breast display your feelings of guilt, distress, or shame openly (sometimes used to imply that you are too vehement to be sincere): *If anything happens to the children while you're out enjoying yourself, don't come beating your breast to me about it afterwards.*

beat sb down make sb reduce the price he asks for an article: *The car is worth all of what you are asking, so don't let him beat you down for the sake of a quick sale!*

beat sb hands down → **win hands down**

beat sb/sth hollow defeat sb completely; be greatly superior to, better than, sb/sth: *The students took on the staff in a game of volleyball and beat them hollow. I thought I had a nice garden myself but this one beats it hollow.*

beat sb/sth into a cocked hat → **knock/beat sb/sth into a cocked hat**

beat it (slang) go away: *'Beat it!' the attendant told the boys. 'This is a car park, not a playground.'* The party was getting a bit rowdy for my liking, so I beat it.

can you beat it/tha? (an exclamation used about sth that is very or unusually annoying, foolish, or stupid): *Can you beat it? They've sent us the wrong size yet again!*

beat the drum (for sb/sth) try to attract public attention to sb/sth: *The Prime Minister has beaten the drum for our exports on a recent trip abroad.*

beat/knock the living daylights out of sb (slang) beat sb brutally, showing no mercy: *Jack used to get home drunk from the pub several nights a week and beat the living daylights out of his wife and kids. It's a wonder they're still alive.*

beat sb to it (informal) get somewhere, invent or discover sth, complete a task, or put a product on the market before sb else does; narrowly defeat a competitor for an award, elected post, or business contract: *I hurried home to tell my wife the good news, but somebody had beaten me to it. Mr Lowe has scored 25 points but Miss Jones has just beaten him to it with 26.*

beat sb up (informal) injure sb with heavy blows from fists, sticks etc: *The store was raided and an elderly night watchman beaten up, shortly after midnight. beating-up n.*

a rod/stick to beat sb with → **rod**

off the beaten track far away from anywhere that people normally go to: *He lived in a little hut right off the beaten track.*

it beats me (why, how etc) I cannot understand or explain sth: *It beats me how he can afford it. What he does with his time beats me.*

the beauty of (doing) sth the special convenience of or the advantage gained by doing or having sth: *The beauty of (having) a small car is that you can often find a parking space when others can't.*

beauty sleep sleep (often used humorously to speak of long sleep that will refresh and restore sb): *Look at the time! You won't get your beauty sleep tonight.* Note that this is usually used with a possessive.

beaver away (informal) work very hard, willingly and busily: *He beavers away in his every evening writing articles for learnedicals.* Also **work like a beaver.**

at sb's beck and call ready or require

obey sb and do just as he wishes: *In return for a home she was expected to be at her aunt's beck and call 16 hours a day.*

become of sb/sth happen to sb/sth (usually preceded by **what** or **whatever**): *Whatever became of old Willy? I've not heard anything about him for years!*

a bed of roses (informal) luxurious, pleasant, or easy conditions of life or work (often used in the negative): *I'm not disappointed because I never expected our marriage to be a bed of roses.* See also (not) **be roses all the way.**

have (got) a bee in one's bonnet (about sth) → **have**

beef about sb/sth (slang) complain about sb/sth: *She's always beefing about her neighbours.*

beef sth up (informal) strengthen sth by adding an extra ingredient, further support, or vitality: *The introduction to the book needs beefing up a bit to arouse the reader's interest.*

make a bee-line for sb/sth go quickly by the most direct way towards sb/sth: *At parties Joe always makes a bee-line for the most attractive girl.*

have (been and) gone and done it (now/again) → **gone**

(not) (all) beer and skittles (informal) (not) (all) fun, pleasure, and entertainment: *We call ourselves a Social Club, but it's not all beer and skittles. We do a lot of useful community work. Once you have a family to support, you'll learn that there's more to life than beer and skittles.*

the bees' knees (slang) sb/sth wonderful, or exactly what you want: *Patricia thinks she is the bees' knees in every way—that's what makes her so insufferable. A plate of hot soup right now would be the bees' knees, wouldn't it, Sam?* See also **the cat's pyjamas/whiskers.**

beetle off (slang) go or hurry away: *Why don't you children beetle off and give us some peace?*

(and) not before time → **not**

beg, borrow, or steal sth obtain sth by any means you can: *'I haven't got a life-jacket.' Then beg, borrow, or steal one—the skipper won't let you on board without one.'*

beg the question (formal) assume that the truth of a statement or proposition is also the proof or explanation of it: *Telling a child who asks why his dachshund has short legs that all dachshunds have short legs is begging the question.*

beg to differ (formal) claim the right to express an opposite or different opinion (usually used with the first person subject): *'I think we should adopt the manager's proposals.' 'Well, I beg to differ.'* The advertisements stated that the film was suitable for older children; some of us beg to differ.

to begin/start with 1 for a start; as a first item, statement, reason, when another or others will follow: *The house is not at all suitable. It's too big to begin with and it's too near*

fall/be behind (with sth)

the main road. **2** originally: at/from the start; before (doing or saying) anything else: *This was marsh land to begin with, but just see what good drainage has done for it. / 'I never really wanted this job.' 'Then why didn't you say so to begin with?' Also in the 'first place.*

fall/be behind (with sth) → fall

have (got) bats in the belfry → have

(not) **believe** a word of it or not **believe** a word sb says (not) believe sb/sth at all; (not) trust sb to tell the truth: *Some people say he was a spy during the war, but I don't believe a word of it.*

(not) **believe** one's ears/eyes be so surprised at what you hear/see that at first you cannot believe it: *I couldn't believe my ears when the judge announced I'd won! / We could hardly believe our eyes—there he was, our son back home after all those long years! Note that this is usually used with **can't/couldn't**.*

believe in sb/sth **1** trust in, have confidence or faith in sb/sth: *You can most certainly believe in Jonathan—he'll never let you down! / When he became unemployed he found he could no longer believe in his own abilities.* **2** be sure that sb/sth that cannot be seen does really exist: *Do you believe in fairies? / He was a deep believer in God.* **3** support the idea of or favour sth: *He believes in giving people a second chance if they fail. / She doesn't believe in sending her children away to boarding-school.*

would you believe it (?!) (an exclamation of astonishment, joy, or dismay): *Would you believe it! Somebody has let down all the tyres of my car!*

believe it or not whether you believe it or not (usually used for emphasis without implying real doubt about being believed): *I am still, believe it or not, very nervous about speaking in public. / It's the usual excuse, I know, but—believe it or not—I had to wait 25 minutes for a bus.*

will believe it/that when one sees it (informal) doubt that sth will ever happen or be done: *'John says he'll pay you back the money he owes you on Friday.' 'I'll believe that when I see it!'*

believe (you) 'me you can/should believe me (used to emphasize an assertion, promise, or threat: *He's the worst singer in the world, believe you me. / 'You should write to the firm and complain.' 'Believe you me, I will.'*

if you, they etc can believe that, you'll, they'll etc believe anything (informal) you etc must be very stupid or foolish if you believe that: *My father listened to the party political broadcast with a believe-that-and-you'll-believe-anything look on his face.*

be saved by the bell → saved

bell the cat (old-fashioned) do sth which is dangerous to yourself in order to help or protect other people: *Somebody must complain to the Manager about the shortage of money in the department, but who's going to bell the cat?*

have a bellyful (of sb/sth) → have

below par → above/below par

below the belt (informal) (of an action, comment, attack etc) unfair; not following the accepted rules: *Giving the workers the sack while they were on strike was very much below the belt. / The boss's rude comments really hit below the belt.*

under one's belt already achieved in your experience, and so making you feel more confident: *With ten years' experience under his belt, Mark was ready to start his own business. / Once I'd got a couple of good answers under my belt, I didn't feel particularly nervous about the rest of the exam.*

belt up (slang) = shut up: *'Belt up!' their father said angrily. 'You do nothing all day but quarrel with each other.'*

round the bend/twist (informal) mad or insane; overwrought with anger, exasperation, worry, or fear: *I always thought he was odd but now I know he's definitely round the bend. / Why can't you do as the doctor tells you? You're driving (or sending) me round the twist the way you're carrying on.*

bend/lean/fall over backwards to do sth try very hard to help, please, or satisfy sb: *Because he was the boy's stepfather he bent over backwards to be good to him.*

be bent on (doing) sth (informal) be determined about (doing/having) sth: *I could tell, the moment they went out, that those two boys were bent on mischief. / If your son is bent on marrying her, then there's not much you can do to stop him.*

at best/worst taking the most/least favourable or hopeful view: *Smoking is acknowledged to be at best unwholesome and expensive, and at worst lethal. / We'll find somewhere to stay the night. At worst all that can happen is that we'll have to sleep in the car.*

(all) for the best a good and beneficial result, though this may not be foreseen: *One never knows what may be for the best in this world. If I'd got the job I wanted I might never have met you.*

with the best (of them) (can do sth) as well as anyone; as ably as the best in a sport, art, or skill: *He was one of those scholars who can write a learned treatise with the best of them yet can't keep up an ordinary conversation.*

one's best bib and tucker your best or finest clothes: *Everybody will be wearing their best bib and tucker on Sunday morning.*

put one's best foot forward → put

have (got) the best of sth → have

make the best of sth → make

the best of both worlds the best or the most attractive or advantageous of two ways of life, policies, or philosophies: *You want the best of both worlds—to live near the town centre for the shops, but far enough away to avoid all the noise and traffic.*

the best of (British) luck (to sb) (informal) (a form of well-wishing; sometimes sarcastic,