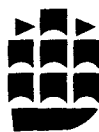




Longman
Dictionary of
**ENGLISH
IDIOMS**

The up-to-date dictionary of idioms

LONGMAN DICTIONARY OF ENGLISH IDIOMS



Longman

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Preface

The aim of this dictionary is to provide the student of English with a thorough coverage of the most common idiomatic phrases in use. We have attempted to give as much information and guidance about the use of idioms as is possible in a dictionary. All the definitions have been written in the controlled vocabulary listed on pp. 379 to 386 in order to help the foreign learner of English. The example sentences are drawn from a variety of written and spoken sources—books, newspapers, magazines, recorded conversations, and radio and television programmes—and have been chosen for simplicity of sentence structure and language. These citations are not always in the controlled defining vocabulary; when a citation is too complex in structure or language to be useful as an illustrative example of an idiom, invented example sentences have been used instead, and these have been specially written in the defining vocabulary. Together with the context in which an idiom may be used, we have described in what ways an idiomatic phrase may vary, whether in wording or in grammatical details such as the inflection of nouns and verbs, passivization, the mobility of certain elements in the phrase, etc. This information is shown by means of a few simple symbols in the headword and by the short grammatical descriptions that accompany main entries. Since many idioms have a large number of variant forms, these have all been entered as cross-references to a common form of the idiom. Usage notes have been written for a number of idioms which may present particular difficulties, either because they are highly variable or to warn the student that some idioms may sound awkward unless used by a skilled speaker of English.

The dictionary is intended not only for learners of English. We hope that these definitions and illustrations, the comments on usage and grammar, and the notes on the origins of many idiomatic phrases, will be valuable and of interest to all speakers of the language.

T. H. Long
Della Summers
September 1979

Introduction

1 CHARACTERISTICS OF IDIOMS

The expressions collected in this dictionary are, in a very broad sense, *metaphorical* rather than *literal*. They are also more or less *invariable* or *fixed* in form or order in a way that makes them different from literal expressions. Because they are metaphorical, one cannot usually discover their meanings by looking up the individual words in an ordinary dictionary. Because they are more or less invariable, both in wording and in certain grammatical ways, they cannot be changed or varied in the way literal expressions are normally varied, whether in speech or writing. These expressions, or *idioms*, tend to have other characteristics in common, although these do not apply generally to every case. Most, but not all, of these expressions are phrases of two or more words. Many, but not all, of these expressions belong to informal spoken English rather than to formal written English.

Metaphorical meaning and certain kinds of invariableness are related to each other. This can be seen in two well-known phrases, (1) *give^o up the ghost* and (2) *spill^o the beans*. The meanings are: (1) to die (definition 1 in the entry) and (2) to reveal something; make something known. These meanings are quite different from the literal meanings of the words in the phrases. For example, one cannot often substitute words that are close in meaning in these phrases. *The man gave up the ghost* = the man died, but a substitution, such as *the man gave up the apparition* or *the man released the ghost*, tends to make the phrase literal and the idiomatic meaning is lost. One cannot make even simpler substitutions. For example, a noun may be replaced by a pronoun in a literal sentence, but this cannot usually be done in an idiom without loss of the idiomatic meaning. One may say, literally, *he spilt the beans on the floor and he opened the tin of beans and spilt them on the floor*. One may use the idiom in a sentence like *he spilt the beans* (= revealed the secret) over *my plans to find a new job*, but one cannot say *he spilt them over my plans to find a new job*¹. Both *give^o up the ghost* and *spill^o the beans* are verb phrases consisting of transitive verbs (*give up*, *spill*) followed by direct objects (*ghost*, *beans*). Normally a transitive verb phrase can be changed to a passive. When one uses an idiom, however, some grammatical operations, like the formation of the passive, are impossible.

It would sound quite unnatural to say *at 3 o'clock the ghost was given up by the man*. Notice also that one cannot make other changes without losing the idiomatic meaning. For example, one would not say *the men gave up the ghosts*. Almost all idiomatic phrases fail in one way or another to permit the usual grammatical operations which literal phrases will permit. This and a number of other characteristics relating to the grammatical fixity of idioms are described when necessary in the grammatical notes after the definitions in the dictionary.

Although metaphorical meaning and invariability characterize the idioms in this dictionary, these are very broad and general characteristics. Idioms vary a great deal in how metaphorical or invariable they are. In other words, *idiomaticity* (the quality of being idiomatic) is a matter of degree or scale. Thus, some of the phrases we have been considering (*spill^o the beans*) may be used in a literal context or they may be used idiomatically. Other phrases have no literal meaning at all and may only be used as idioms, e.g. *until/till kingdom come*. Some idioms are completely fixed, e.g. *down and out*. Other idioms have a limited number of variants, e.g. *up to the/one's ears/eyes/neck/eyeballs* (= wholly concerned with something) or *in someone's bad books* (= in disfavour with someone), which has one variant expressing the opposite meaning, *in someone's good books*. Other idioms are very open and allow a large number of certain types of words (e.g. nouns) to be used in certain positions (see the entry *down with N^o!*).

Historical explanations

The metaphorical meaning of some idioms is easier to understand when one knows how it developed. When possible, historical explanations of the idioms are given in the dictionary. See, for example, *the salt of the earth* and *blue blood* (7.9 below). In many cases, however, it is not possible to explain exactly the connection between the literal words of

¹The reason that pronouns often cannot be substituted for nouns in idiomatic phrases is that the meaning of the phrase *as a whole* has become idiomatic. Thus the noun *beans* cannot be treated as a single word that can be replaced by an equivalent word or pronoun. Pronouns do occur in idiomatic phrases, of course, especially the pronoun *it* (e.g. *snuff^o it* = to die). Such phrases with pronouns are idioms in their own right.

an idiom and the metaphorical meaning that has developed. An example is a **fine kettle of fish**. No exact connection between a kettle filled with fish and the idiomatic meaning, 'a confused or difficult state of affairs', has so far been found. The explanation given is therefore a *probable* one, but it cannot be definitely established.

Further information on historical explanations of idiomatic phrases will be found in the following books:

C. E. Funk, *A Hog on Ice and Other Curious Expressions*, London 1950, *Heavens to Betsy! and Other Curious Sayings*, New York 1955, *Thereby Hangs a Tale....* New York 1950; W. J. Funk, *Word Origins and Their Romantic Stories*, New York 1950; A. H. Holt, *Phrase and Word Origins*, New York 1961 (revised edition); W. and M. Morris, *Dictionary of Word and Phrase Origins*, 2 vols, New York 1962, 1967; E. Radford, *To Coin a Phrase: A Dictionary of Origins*, London 1973 (revised edition).

2 TYPES OF IDIOMS INCLUDED IN THE DICTIONARY

It is helpful to list idioms according to the ways they may be grouped together. The groups listed here are not intended to be exact, and a particular idiom may belong to more than one group. This list is simply a way of calling attention to certain kinds of idiomatic expressions.

2.1 Traditional idioms

The two examples, **spill^o the beans** and **give^o up the ghost**, are the types of expressions which people usually understand by the term *idiom*. Many of them, like the two examples, are *almost full sentences*. Only subjects need to be added to make full sentences of the verb phrases **give^o up the ghost** and **spill^o the beans**. Other types of idioms are not almost full sentences but rather function like particular *parts of speech*. An idiomatic noun phrase, for example, will often function in a sentence in the same way a noun would, as a subject, direct object, or, perhaps most frequently, as a complement. Thus, the idiomatic noun phrase **the salt of the earth** will normally be used as a complement, as in *he is the salt of the earth*.

2.2 Idioms in which actions stand for emotions or feelings

A number of idioms which refer to actions that have a specific meaning in English culture may be misunderstood if one is just starting to learn English. It is important to note that

these actions are *not* literal and that the meaning associated with a particular action in English may not be the meaning associated with that action in some other language or culture. Consider the idiom **hang^o one's head^o**. This idiom is often followed by *in shame* or *in guilt* and in such cases the meaning is clear: the action of hanging (i.e. lowering) one's head is associated with shame or guilt. The phrase, however, is often used alone, without a stated reference to shame or guilt, as in the sentence *she hung her head whenever anyone mentioned the broken clock*. One must learn that this action is a sign of shame or guilt. Another example is **throw^o up^m one's hands/arms**. Consider the sentence *I threw up my hands when I heard how much money he earned*. It would be quite wrong to think that this sentence means either 'I was glad to hear that he earned a lot of money' or 'I was glad to hear that he earned only a little money'. The action in this idiom is not a sign of gladness but of annoyance, impatience, etc. In this and in other idioms the action referred to may never really happen. For example, *I wash my hands of it* does not mean that the speaker really performs this action. *He nearly fell off his chair when they told him the news* is just a metaphorical way of saying 'he was very surprised'. It is quite likely that he did not even move in his chair, and it is possible that he was not sitting in a chair at all. In these idioms the meaning is often specific to English-speaking countries. For example, in English **stick^o one's chin^o out** means to show opposition to something. This same action in other countries may be a sign of agreement, a way of saying 'no', etc.

The student who is just starting to learn English should be especially careful in learning these idioms. He should be aware of the danger of translating such phrases as these *word for word*.

2.3 Pairs of words

A large number of idioms consist of pairs of words joined by *and* or *or*. Many of these belong to the first group and function as particular parts of speech. For example, the noun phrase **cats and dogs** in *it was raining cats and dogs* (= it was raining heavily) functions as an adverb. Many of these phrases cannot be reversed. For example, in the idiom **go^o/be^o at** **Ⓟ hammer and tongs** (= to quarrel, fight, or argue with (someone) very loudly), one cannot reverse the pair of nouns and say *they were going at each other tongs and hammer*.

2.4 Idioms with 'it'

A number of idiomatic verb phrases have the pronoun *it* as a fixed part of the idiom. The pronoun does not refer to a word coming before it as it normally does. Examples are **snuff^o it** (= to die) and **live^o it up** (= to have an exciting and happy time).

2.5 Allusions

Certain common phrases and a few single words have been included in the dictionary because they have special significance in English society and their meanings are often not defined in ordinary dictionaries. For example, **Whitehall**, a place in London where many government offices are, has come to mean 'the government' or 'the civil service'. Another example is **Catch 22**, which was first used as the title of an American book.

2.6 Sayings

A number of sayings are included in the dictionary. These are usually complete sentences. Both the more informal sayings (e.g. **you can't take it with you**, **there's always (a) next time**) and the older and more metaphorical proverbs (e.g. **a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush**, **a rolling stone gathers no moss**, **all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy**) are included under this heading.

2.7 Typical conversational phrases

Some fixed conversational phrases whose meanings are not literal and which therefore may be difficult to understand, such as **how do you do?**, **all right**, **so to speak**, and **now you're talking!**, are included in the dictionary.

2.8 Similes

A large number of idioms, which compare a quality, condition, action, etc., with a noun, are included in the dictionary. Examples are **(as) easy as pie** (= very easy) and **(as) dead as a doornail** (= truly dead). These phrases emphasize the meaning of the first word and can usually be translated by simply putting *very* in front of it, as in *very easy* above. Certain verbal idioms (e.g. **work^o like a horse^o** = work very hard) are also similes and function in a similar way to the adjective phrases.

3 SOME EXPRESSIONS NOT INCLUDED IN THE DICTIONARY

3.1 Archaisms

Phrases that are thought to be no longer in use are not defined in the dictionary. There are, however, several common idiomatic phrases that contain archaic or very unusual

words, and these are included. Examples are **to and fro** and **kith and kin**.

3.2 Jargon

Phrases or words limited to special and technical fields are not included in the dictionary.

3.3 Americanisms

American idioms that are not used in Britain are not included in the dictionary. Many American expressions are in common use in Britain; all of these are included in the dictionary.

3.4 Foreign phrases

Foreign phrases (e.g. French *bête noire*, *de trop*), which are sometimes used by English speakers, are not included in the dictionary.

3.5 Common phrases and terms

Common English phrases that *do not present a problem of metaphorical meaning* have not been defined in the dictionary. Examples are *on strike*, *in abeyance*, and *free of*. There are also a number of terms or names of things (e.g. *zebra* 'crossing', *fish and 'chips*) which have not been included. Although these terms often have a metaphorical element, they have customarily been defined in ordinary dictionaries of English as compounds, and their meanings do not present the same difficulty to the learner as the phrases defined in the dictionary.

3.6 Phrasal verbs

Expressions that consist *only* of a verb and one or more adverbial particles or prepositions are not defined in the dictionary. Examples are *soldier on*, *put up with*, and *make up*. These expressions, called *phrasal verbs*, are now usually treated in general-language dictionaries, and they are treated in full in the forthcoming *Longman Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs* by Rosemary Courtney. Idiomatic verbal phrases are otherwise included in the dictionary (e.g. **see^o red**, **live^o it up**, **push^o the boat out**, **pass^o the hat round^o**).

4 THE DEFINING VOCABULARY

4.1 Controlled vocabulary

The definitions and invented examples in this dictionary have been written in a controlled vocabulary of approximately 2000 words. This defining vocabulary is the same as that used in the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (1978) and other Longman dictionaries for students of English. It is based on Michael West's *A General Service List of*

English Words (1953). This defining vocabulary is used in most other Longman dictionaries for post-intermediate students. It is listed on pp. 379–386. A number of prefixes and suffixes, which may be added to the words in the list to form derivative words, are listed at the end of the defining vocabulary. Citations (passages taken from a book, newspaper, radio programme, etc.) are printed as they originally appeared.

4.2 Difficult words

Occasionally, the definition, invented example, or historical explanation requires the use of a word not included in the defining vocabulary. Words of this type are printed in SMALL CAPITALS and are followed wherever possible by an explanation in simpler language. For example, in the explanation of the idiom **play° possum** (= to pretend to be dead), the following historical explanation is given:

Referring to the OPOSSUM, a North American animal that pretends to be dead when threatened by other animals.

It should be noted that, as far as possible, sentence patterns have been kept simple and citations have been selected on this basis.

5 ALPHABETICAL ORDER

5.1 The alpha word

Alphabetical order is shown first by a single word, which we shall call the *alpha word*, which is printed in capital letters above all the idioms that contain that word.

The form of this word is exactly the same as that in the idioms printed under it; it may therefore be a plural noun or a part of a verb. For example:

ACE

an/someone's ace° in the hole

have°/keep° an ace°, card°, etc., up one's sleeve°

within/in an ace of ♡

ACES

hold°/have° the aces

5.2 Homograph numbers

Some *alpha words* are marked by the numbers ¹ and ². This means that these two words are spelled the same way (i.e. they are *homographs*) but have different meanings and different histories in the English language. For example, see BALL¹ (= a round object used in games) and BALL² (= a formal dance).

5.3 Pronunciations of alpha words

A pronunciation is given for homographs if they are pronounced differently and for any other alpha words that may present a difficulty in pronunciation.

See *Pronunciation Symbols* inside the back cover. A full explanation of this system is to be found in the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (1978).

5.4 Alphabetical order of idiom phrases

The idioms under each alpha word are listed in strict alphabetical order, except that:

the, a, and an are not taken into account

variants are not taken into account

the symbols ①, ② and ③ are not taken into account

For example, the idiom **leave° ① standing** is followed by the idiom **leave°/let° well (enough) alone**. (*l + s* in **leave° ① standing** is followed by *l + w* in **leave°... well (enough) alone**).

Let is a variant shown after the sign / and so is not taken into account. Words in brackets that are *not* variants are taken into account for alphabetical order, e.g. *enough* in **leave°/let° well (enough) alone**.

6 THE FORM OF THE IDIOM PHRASE

Idioms are printed in **heavy type** under each alpha word. The idiom is always shown in its most usual form. Verbal phrases are shown in the infinitive unless the idiom is most commonly used in a particular tense (e.g. **you could have knocked me down with a feather**) or in a contracted form (e.g. **that'll be the day**). Noun phrases are shown in the singular unless the idiom is usually used in the plural (e.g. **cakes and ale**).

6.1 Symbols used in the idiom phrase

6.1.1 The symbol °

The symbol ° after a word means 'this word may inflect or change in form'. If the word is a verb, all tenses may be used and the subject may be plural as well as singular. In the idiom **jump° the gun** (= to act before the right time) the sign ° means one can use the verb in the idiom in an unlimited number of forms, e.g. **they have jumped the gun; be careful that you don't jump the gun; that would be jumping the gun**. There is no ° on the noun **gun** and this means that one must always say **the gun**; it cannot become **the guns**.

Often when the subject of the verb in idioms is plural, any other nouns in the idiom may also become plural. In the idiom **laugh° up**

one's sleeve^o, the ^o on the noun *sleeve* means that one would usually use *sleeve* in the plural if the subject of the verb is plural, i.e. *they were laughing up their sleeves*. In actual speech, such a noun may be left in the singular, e.g. *they were laughing up their sleeve*, but it is usually better to use the plural form of the noun in such cases if it is marked ^o.

Noun idioms may also be marked with a ^o. For example, a *nest egg*^o (= a small amount of money saved) could be used in the plural, as in *many young people today have nest eggs*. If a plural noun is marked with ^o, it is possible that it may sometimes be used in the singular.

Note. Words that are not marked with the sign (^o) should not be used in any other form. For example, in the idiom *cap in hand* neither *cap* nor *hand* is marked with ^o because even if the subject of the sentence or clause is plural, these words remain unchanged, as in the sentence *they went cap in hand to their boss*.

6.1.2 The symbol ⑤

The symbol ⑤ means that the *direct object* of the verb occurs here *when used inside the idiom*. For example, the idiom *haul*^o ⑤ *over the coals* (= to scold someone) may be used in the sentence *the teacher hauled the boy over the coals for not doing his homework*.

The direct object may come *after* the idiom, especially if it is a long phrase, as in the sentence *the teacher hauled over the coals all the pupils in his class who had not done their homework*.

When the direct object is a pronoun, however, it must always be used in the position marked by the ⑤. One can only say *the teacher hauled them over the coals*, not *the teacher hauled over the coals them*.

When a possessive (*his, her, its, our, your, their*) occurs in the idiom phrase and refers to the direct object, it is usually written *his* but represents any possessive that is appropriate. For example, the idiom *throw*^o ⑤ *off (his) balance* may take any of the following forms: *he threw me off my balance; I threw John off his balance; I threw Jane off her balance; he threw you off your balance; he threw us off our balance; he threw John and Jane off their balance*.

6.1.3 The symbol ①

The symbol ① means that the *indirect object* of the verb occurs here *when used inside the idiom*, as in *read*^o ① *the riot act* (= to scold severely).

The indirect object may also be used after the idiom, especially if it is a long phrase, but then it must always take the form of a prepositional phrase with *to*, as in *he read the riot act to the children who had broken the window*.

Indirect objects that are pronouns occur either in the position marked by the ① (e.g. *the teacher read them the riot act*) or else after *to* at the end of the idiom (e.g. *he read the riot act to them*).

6.1.4 The symbol ⑥

The symbol ⑥ means that the object of the preposition occurs here, as in the idiom *put*^o *one's shirt on* ⑥ (= to bet all one has). Compare *keep your shirt on!* (= keep calm!), where *on* is not a preposition but an adverb and therefore cannot take an object.

Note. ⑤, ①, and ⑥ are not marked with the sign ^o, but they represent an unlimited number of nouns or noun phrases, any of the pronouns, and may be singular or plural and either a person or a thing.

Typical objects are shown in the definition in brackets or in the examples, as in:

put^o *one's shirt on* ⑥...to bet all the money that one has on (a horse in a race, the result of a competition, etc.): *I think I've quite a good chance of getting the job, but I wouldn't put my shirt on it*.

6.1.5 The symbol ^m

The symbol ^m means that the preceding word is movable and may occur either before or after the object. The sign is only used on adverbs and on prepositions together with their objects ⑥. For example, *prick*^o *up*^m *one's ears* (= to show sudden interest) means that one can say *he pricked up his ears at what he heard* or *he pricked his ears up at what he heard*.

In the idiom *wait*^o *on* ⑥^m *hand and foot* (= to look after someone like a servant), the preposition *on* and its object may move to the end of the idiom. One may say *she waited on him hand and foot* or *she waited hand and foot on him*.

A more difficult example is the idiom *know*^o (*on*^m) *which side one's bread is*^o *battered*. The word *on* may move to the end of the idiom or, as the brackets indicate, be left out from the idiom completely. There are therefore three possible variations of the idiom: *he knows on which side his bread is battered*, *he knows which side his bread is battered on*, and *he knows which side his bread is battered*.

6.1.6 The symbol ¹

This symbol marks the main stress in the idiom phrase and is shown before the word which is stressed. Normal stress in English falls on the *last* word in a sentence if it is a *content word*. (Content words are nouns, main verbs, adjectives, and most adverbs: other words, e.g. articles, auxiliary verbs, conjunctions, object pronouns, and prepositions with only one syllable are *form* or *function words* and are not usually stressed.)

The stress in idiom phrases usually falls on the last content word in the normal way and this is not marked.

6.1.7 The symbol ~

The symbol ~ before a grammatical note means that the note refers to all the definitions of the idiom. Similarly, this sign before a cross-reference or variant beginning with 'Also' means that what follows applies to all the definitions. See also 7.5.1.

6.2 'One' and 'someone' in the idiom phrase

The difference between *one* and *someone* is very important in dictionaries and is very often confused.

In this dictionary, *one*, *one's*, and *oneself* are used when and only when the 'one' refers to the speaker or to the subject of the last verb or clause. For example, *push^o one's luck* means that it is possible to say *he pushed his luck, we pushed our luck, they pushed their luck*, etc., but it is not possible to say *they pushed my luck, she pushed his luck*, etc. The subject of the verb must be the same person as the one whose luck it is.

Someone is not usually found in the idiom phrase because its place is taken by ①, ②, or ③. But its possessive form (*someone's*) and the reflexive forms (*himself, herself*, etc.) are widely used. For example, the phrase *get^o on someone's nerves* (= to annoy someone) must be used with a subject *different from* the person who is being annoyed, as in *her silly ideas get on my nerves*.

Someone, someone's, himself, etc., are substitutes for any noun: e.g. one may say that *her silly ideas got on John's nerves, my mother's nerves, everyone's nerves*, etc. If the word *someone* is a fixed word in the idiom, as it is in *someone has just walked over my grave*, this is stated in the grammatical note.

One, one's, and oneself are substitutes only for *me, my, myself, you, your, yourself, him, his, himself*, etc. The form used is the same in person and number as the subject of the phrase, as in *he could have kicked himself for revealing the secret*.

6.3 Negatives in the idiom phrase

Negatives are usually shown by *not* or *no* unless the idiom is completely fixed with other negative words, as in *neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red herring*. All usual variations of the negative are possible unless the grammatical note states the opposite. Therefore, *not + verb* may give *never, didn't*, etc.; *no + noun* may give *not any*, etc. For example, *cut^o no ice* (= to fail to impress) may be used thus: *his excuses didn't cut any ice with her*.

Negatives are only shown in the idiom phrase itself when the phrase is almost always negative.

When the negative form of an idiom is not shown, it is because the idiom is not usually negative. However, unless specified in the grammatical note, the idiom can be made negative in the usual way.

6.4 N, V, Adj, Adv, etc., in the idiom phrase

These abbreviations are shown in the idiom when a particular type of word (*part of speech*), which is not an object of a verb or preposition, is always used in that position in the idiom. For example, in a(n) *N* in a million any count noun or noun phrase may be substituted for *N*: *a mother in a million, an aunt in a million*.

6.5 Possessives ('s, -s') in the idiom phrase

Possessives shown in the 's or s' form cannot usually be changed to *of*-phrases. For example, one cannot change the idiom at *arm's length* to *at the length of an arm*.

In the case of *someone's* or *something's* in idiom phrases, the *of*-phrase is usually quite acceptable, especially if the *of*-phrase is long (e.g. *lie^o at someone's door* might be changed, as in *the blame for this trouble lies at the door of those who advised us to buy a new untested machine*). When the *of*-phrase cannot be substituted this fact is stated in the grammatical note. For example, in *beat^o someone's brains out*, the grammatical note reads [V: never beat the brains of ③ out].

6.6 Variants in the idiom phrase

A certain amount of variation may be shown in the form of the idiom itself.

One-word variants are shown after the symbol (/). This means that the word before the slash may be substituted by the word following, but only if they are both single words. For example, *sell^o/go^o like hot cakes* means that one may say *the new book sold like hot cakes* or *the new book went like hot cakes*. The

more frequently used word is placed first.

When a variant is more than one word, it is shown after *or* and in brackets. For example, **come^o in from** (*or out of*) **the cold**.

Sometimes when many similar words of a particular type may be used in an idiom, only the most common of them are shown. For example, **laugh^o, cry^o, talk^o, shout^o, etc., one's head^o off**.

Variants with different meanings are also shown in the ways described. For example, **into** (*or out of*) **line**.

6.7 Optional words in the idiom phrase

Words that are often but not always used in the idiom are shown in brackets. For example, it **takes all sorts** (*to make a world*) and **roses**, (*roses*) **all the way**, when one may say *their plan went well from the start—it was roses all the way* (*or it was roses, roses all the way*).

6.8 Insertion of words into the idiom phrase

A number of idiomatic phrases are so fixed that one cannot put additional words, especially adverbs, within the phrase. For example, it is possible to insert many adverbs into a literal sentence like *he went to the door*, as in *he went quickly* (*or quietly, angrily, etc.*) *to the door*, but it is not possible to insert such adverbs into an idiom like *go the whole hog*.

Many idioms do permit quite free insertion of adverbs and adjectives, however. These are shown in brackets in the idiom phrase if they are commonly used with the idiom (e.g. **go^o (all) to pieces**). They are shown only in the examples if the adverbs are less frequently used in the idiom or if a large number of adverbs may be used (e.g. *he made (much, a great deal of, etc.) capital out of the fact that he had been to many countries*). Many taboo and impolite words may be inserted into otherwise fixed idioms as *intensifiers* (words that give emphasis) when other adjectives and adverbs cannot be inserted (e.g. one may say *he went the whole bloody/damn hog*).

7 THE EXPLANATION OF THE IDIOM

Information about the idioms in the dictionary is divided into the following parts:

1. The definition
2. Example sentences and citations
3. Cross-references
4. The grammatical note
5. Related forms of the idiom

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7.1 The definition

Wherever possible, the definitions are written in the controlled vocabulary (The Defining Vocabulary, pp. 379-386). They are intended to be as clear and accurate as possible and may be substituted into a sentence in place of the idiom. For example, the definition of **all ears** is 'keen to listen to what is about to be said'. The example sentence of this idiom is *when he said that he had exciting news, they were all ears*. The definition may be substituted for the idiom thus: *when he said that he had exciting news, they were keen to listen to what was about to be said*.

When looking up a definition the reader should note the following features:

7.1.1 The word 'to'

To is used to introduce verbal definitions to show the infinitive.

7.1.2 Typical subjects and/or objects

These are shown in brackets in the definition; the subject always comes in brackets before the definition. For example: **fall^o on deaf ears** (of requests for help, etc.) to be or remain unnoticed or disregarded....

The typical objects come inside the definition. For example: **pat^o/slap^o ② on the back** to praise (a person) for something he has done....

When the object or subject can be a person or thing of any type, nothing is put in the definition. For example: **not be^o a patch on ②** is defined as 'to be not nearly so good as'.

7.1.3 Numbered definitions

These are used for different meanings. The definitions are arranged in order of frequency, i.e. the most common meaning is put first.

Sometimes definitions are divided into parts marked **a** and **b** because of small grammatical differences which affect the wording of the definition.

7.1.4 Labels

A label in *italics* is often shown before the definition to indicate that the idiom is suitable only in certain situations. The four most important labels are:

fml, *not fml*, *coll*, and *sl*.

These are listed first below and are then

followed by other special labels in alphabetical order.

fml : formal

This indicates that the speaker or writer has a formal relationship with the person or persons he is speaking or writing to. Used in official letters, public speeches, etc. Example: lift^o (up^m) one's/someone's heart.

not fml : not formal

The expression so labelled is not suitable for use in the situations described under *fml*, but quite acceptable in most other situations when it would be inappropriate to use *coll* or *sl*. Examples: for a rainy day; a rough diamond^o.

coll : colloquial

This indicates that the expression is suitable for use in speech rather than in writing (the written language is generally more formal). Examples: the best of British!; in the same boat.

sl : slang

Slang expressions are first used in the speech of a specific social group, age group, etc., and only later become more widely used in the spoken language. Slang idioms are often also impolite or taboo (see *impol*, *taboo*). They can never be used in formal situations. The foreign student should always take the greatest care in using slang idioms. Examples: stoned out of one's mind^o/head^o; be^o (strictly) for the birds.

derog : derogatory

A derogatory expression is intended to show scorn for or to insult the person or thing referred to. Example: mutton dressed (up) as lamb.

euph : euphemistic

A euphemistic expression or euphemism is a mild and indirect way of referring to something regarded as unpleasant or taboo. Examples: (go^o to) meet^o one's maker (= to die); of a certain age (= middle-aged).

humor : humorous

The expression is intended to make the hearer laugh or be amused. Example: as the actress said to the bishop.

impol : impolite

The expression is likely to insult or offend people. Example: shit^o bricks (or a brick) (= to be very anxious).

lit : literary

The expression is most likely to be used in formal literature, poetry, etc. Example: Adam's ale (= water); a land of milk and honey.

old-fash : old-fashioned

The expression sounds slightly out of date; it is likely to be used by older people. Examples: not so dusty (= not bad); make^o bricks without straw.

pomp : pompous

The expression would be used by someone who is foolishly self-important; the speaker regards what he is saying as being more important than his audience does. Example: darken^o someone's door(s).

rhet : rhetorical

The expression is likely to be used in public speeches, especially those that sound grand and important. Example: lend^o ① an/one's ear (= to listen).

taboo

The expression must not be used in polite conversation; it usually contains a slang word referring to sex or excrement. Example: fuck all.

US : United States, American

The expression is used in Britain but will still sound rather American to most British speakers. Examples: out of sight; small potatoes.

Note. Idioms that have no label may be used in all situations. Example: bring^o/pull^o ② up short.

7.2 Example sentences and citations

After almost every definition there is an example sentence printed in *italics* showing a typical use of the idiom in modern English. Wherever possible, these sentences have been taken from books, newspapers, magazines, radio programmes, etc., and are shown in the dictionary in the same form in which they were first used. These *citations*, as they are called, have been chosen for their usefulness in showing the student how native writers and speakers use the idiom. Each citation is followed by the name of the book, newspaper, etc., and in the case of a newspaper (or magazine) the date. Example: go^o easy on ② ...Add a sprinkling of sugar and butter and salt. Go easy on the salt. You can always add more later. (*Nova Nov 74*).

A list of Citation Sources is given at the back of the dictionary.

The use of an idiom may be illustrated by an invented sentence. These are usually based on citations. Explanations are sometimes given after the citations or invented sentences.

Under lead^o ② up the garden path (= to cause a person to believe something that is not true; deceive), the example is followed by

an equals sign and an explanation: *for about three months everything went fine between her and me, then she started to lead me up the garden path again* = she began to go out with other men.

Citations and examples are sometimes introduced by numbers, e.g. (i), (ii), (iii) etc. This is done so that specific uses of the idiom can be explained.

Example: **any day (of the week)** *coll* under any conditions (used to indicate a great eagerness or preference to do something, as in (i), or complete certainty of the truth of one's opinions, as in (ii)): (i) *I'd accept a job abroad any day rather than stay in this country* || (ii) *I'm a better player than he is any day of the week* [Adv 3]

7.3 Cross-references

7.3.1 Where to look for the main explanation of an idiom

The main definition is, wherever possible, given under the first important noun in the idiom, e.g. **let^o the cat out of the bag** is at **CAT**. If there is no noun, look under the first important verb in the phrase, e.g. **bite^o off more than one can chew** is under **BITE**. If there is no noun and no verb, look under the first adjective, then the first adverb, and so on.

The only exceptions are *simile phrases*, in which the main definition is at the first main word, e.g. (as) **dead as a doornail** is defined under **DEAD**; **work^o like a horse** under **WORK**. The main words in an idiom have a *cross-reference*, i.e. an indication of where to look for the explanation. Only words like *a, an, the, some, get, have, on, in*, etc., do not have cross-references.

7.3.2. Cross-references introduced by 'see at'

Cross-references are of two main types. The first type tells the reader under which word he will find the definition of the idiom that he is looking up. It is introduced by the words 'see at'. If the reader looks up **let^o the cat out of the bag** under the alpha word **LET**, he will find the cross-reference 'see at **CAT**'.

7.3.3 Cross-references introduced by →

The second type of cross-reference is the one found under a variant word in the idiom phrase. In this case, the cross-reference is more detailed and is introduced by an arrow (→).

Under the word **CLANGER** the reader will find the idiom **drop^o a clanger^o** with the cross-reference

→ **drop^o a BRICK**

This type of cross-reference is also used to show the connection between idioms of opposite meaning. Thus under the idiom **with (a) bad grace** the reader will find the cross-reference

→ **with (a) good GRACE**

In each case the word in CAPITAL LETTERS is the word under which the explanation of the idiom will be found.

7.4 The grammatical note

All idioms, except those that are complete sentences or clauses, have a grammatical note placed within square brackets, [], giving a part of speech and any other information necessary to their correct use. This note is intended to be helpful to the student, but idioms present many grammatical difficulties and it must be emphasized that, although the grammatical description given is regarded as the most usual and natural for native speakers, other constructions may sometimes be formed. However, the foreign learner need not concern himself with these.

7.4.1 Abbreviations and terms in the grammatical note

The abbreviations explained here will also be found in the complete list of abbreviations inside the back of the dictionary.

A few abbreviations occur very frequently in the grammatical note. They are also occasionally used in the idiom headword. Most of these occur at the beginning of each note and are usually abbreviations of a part of speech—adjective, adverb, noun, verb, etc.—or of some other simple grammatical term, such as imperative, interjection, passive, or plural. The most important abbreviations are the following:

Adj : adjective

Adj 1 an adjective phrase that follows the verbs *be, seem, feel, grow, become*, etc., like *black in the cat is black*. Example: **up a gum tree**.

Adj 2 an adjective phrase that is used before a noun, like *black in the black cat*. Example: **dyed-in-the-wool**.

Adj 3 an adjective phrase that follows the noun, like *major or general* in the phrases *sergeant major or secretary general*. Example: **of a certain age**.

Adv : adverb

Adv 1 an adverb phrase that is usually used at the beginning of a sentence or clause. Example: **between you, me, and the gatepost**.

Adv 2 an adverb phrase that is usually used in the middle of a sentence or clause,

either between the subject and the verb or between the verb and the object or complement. Example: **ever so** (definition 1).

Adv 3 an adverb phrase that is usually used at the end of a sentence or clause, often following an object or complement. Examples: **from A to Z**; **from rags to riches**.

Note. If Adv has no number after it, the idiom concerned may be used in any position in the sentence.

Conj : conjunction

This refers to a phrase that joins two clauses and operates like the conjunctions *and*, *or*, *but*, *when*, etc. Example: **as/so long as**.

Impv : imperative

This indicates a direct command, with or without a verb. Example: **out with it!**

Note. If an idiom is almost always used in the imperative, the form of the idiom phrase is imperative, e.g. **keep your hair on!** Otherwise the idiom phrase will be shown in the infinitive; thus, **let^o it all hang out** has this grammatical note: [V: usu. Impv]

Interj : interjection

This refers to a sharp expression of surprise, annoyance, etc.

Example: **so there!**

N : noun, noun phrase

This refers to something that can be counted or become plural, and can take *a* or *an* as well as *the*. N is divided as follows:

N 1 a noun phrase that usually appears as the subject of a sentence or a clause. Example: **the inner man**.

N 2 a noun phrase that is usually used as the object of a verb or preposition. Example: **the gift of the gab**.

N 3 a noun phrase that is usually used as the complement of a verb (see Compl below). Example: **a nasty piece of work**.

Note. Some noun-phrase idioms have grammars showing a combination of two numbers. Thus **the inner man** has the grammatical note [N1,2]. If no number occurs after N, the phrase may be used as subject, object, or complement.

Nm : mass (or uncountable) noun or noun phrase

This refers to something that cannot be counted or become plural and cannot take *a* or *an*, but can take *the* or *some*, e.g. **traffic**, **sugar**, **food**. Nm takes a singular verb.

Nm 1, **Nm 2**, **Nm 3** Numbers after Nm have the same meaning as N1, N2, and N3 above. If no number is shown, the idiom

may be used as subject, object, or complement. Example: **red tape**.

Pass: passive voice

This indicates that a verbal idiom may be used in the passive. Two classes of passive are shown:

Pass 1 This indicates the type of passive in which the *direct object* of the active form becomes the subject in the passive, as *ball* in *the ball was kicked by the boy* (from *the boy kicked the ball*). For example, **cut^o ② to the quick** has the grammatical note [V: Pass 1]; *His cruel words cut her to the quick* becomes in the passive *She was cut to the quick by his cruel words*.

Pass 2 This indicates the type of passive in which the *indirect object* of the active form becomes the subject in the passive, as *me* becomes *I* in *I was given the book by John* (from *John gave me the book*). Almost every idiom that can become Pass 2 will form Pass 1 as well. For example **read^o ① the riot act** has the grammatical note [V: Pass 1,2]: *I read them the riot act* can become *The riot act was read to them by me* [Pass 1] or *They were read the riot act by me* [Pass 2].

Note. Passivization (the process of forming a passive sentence from an active one) is only mentioned when it would be quite acceptable to a native speaker. If a verbal idiom is marked [V] only, without any Pass, the reader should assume that the passive form is not used or is very unusual.

Pl : plural

This describes an idiom that is plural in form and takes a plural verb. Example: **nuts and bolts...** [N Pl] as in *The nuts and bolts of the matter are...*

Recip : reciprocal

This indicates that the action of a verb is done to *each other* by the members of a plural or collective subject. For example, the sentence *they kissed* is the same as the sentence *they kissed each other*. In the dictionary *kissed* in *they kissed* would be described as [Recip].

Note. (1) When a singular subject is used with a reciprocal verb or verb phrase, the reciprocal nature of the verb is often expressed by the use of *with* + a prepositional object.

Thus the grammatical note of **make° one's peace** is [V: foll. by *with* + ③, or Recip]. One can say *they made their peace* or *they made peace with each other* or *he made his peace with John*.

(2) *Recip* is also used to describe adjective-phrase idioms that express the relationship between two or more people or things.

Example: **on a par**. One can say *they were on a par* or *they were on a par with each other* or *he was on a par with John*.

V : verb or verb phrase

Examples: **go° phut**, **kick° th. bucket**.

Other abbreviations or terms may sometimes be used in the grammatical note. They are:

Active : active voice

This term indicates that a verbal idiom usually found in the passive form can be turned into an active sentence.

Example: **be° hoist with one's own petard**...

[V: sometimes Active, as in *the police hoisted the criminal with his own petard*]

Art : article

The definite article is *the* and the indefinite articles are *a* and *an*.

Note. Idioms with a fixed *a* or *an* may be changed to *the* when followed by a relative clause. Thus in the idiom **a knight° in shining armour**, *a* may be changed to *the* in such sentences as *he was the knight in shining armour who would save us from danger*.

Aux : auxiliary

This indicates either verbs like *be*, *have*, etc., used with participles to form other tenses or the passive, or verbs like *can*, *may*, *should*, *will*, *must*, etc., used with another verb in the infinitive (without *to*).

Example: **God/heaven forbid!**...[Interj: foll. by *that*-clause having *should* as Aux V, or used alone as an answer to a question, suggestion, etc.]

Comp : the comparative degree of an adverb or adjective

The comparative is expressed by *more* + Adj or Adv (e.g. *more important*, *more slowly*) or Adj + *-er* (e.g. *bigger*).

Example: **a hell/heck of a lot**...[Adv 3, often 2, used before a Comp Adj or Adv]

Compl : complement

This refers to the part of a sentence that comes after verbs like *be*, *feel*, *seem*, *become*, *grow*, etc. For example, *tired* in *I feel tired* or *a mother* in *she became a mother*.

Cond : conditional

This is a form of the verb consisting of *would*, *should*, or *could* followed by a verb in the

infinitive (without *to*) and referring to the probability, possibility, necessity, or desirability, of the action of the verb.

Example: **wait° and see°**...[V: usu. Impv, Infin, Cond, or Fut]

Det : determiner

This indicates any of a class of words that behave like adjectives and are used to specify rather than describe a noun. Determiners must come before the noun, and other adjectives relating to the noun, and several of them, like *each*, *either*, *enough*, or *some*, are often used as pronouns. Possessive and demonstrative adjectives and pronouns, and cardinal numerals, are determiners.

Example: **one and the same**.

Note. For some idioms, like **fair game**, the grammatical note reads [Nm 3: no Art or Det]. This means that one cannot say *the fair game*, *a fair game*, *someone's fair game*, *more fair game*, *enough fair game*, etc.

Fut : future tense

Example: **be. in the wars**...[V: never Fut or Cond]

Gerund : gerund

This indicates a verb form ending in *-ing* and behaving like a noun, e.g. *swimming* in *I like swimming*.

Example: **take° turns**...[V: often foll. by Infin or *at* + Gerund]

Infin : infinitive

This refers to the basic form of a verb which does not show the person or number of the subject or the tense. It is usually used with *to*, e.g. *to eat*; it is used without *to* after an auxiliary verb, e.g. *he can swim*.

Example: **take° (the) time (off/out)**...[V: usu. foll. by Infin]

Interr : interrogative

This refers to adjectives and pronouns used in questions.

Example: **cross° one's heart° (and hope to die)**...[V: usu. Impv, Interr, or Interj; when Interr, usu. without Subj, as in *are you sure you don't know who did this?* *Cross your heart?*]

Neg : negative

This indicates any use of the negative, e.g. *no*, *not*, *did not*, *have not*, *never*, etc.

Example: **hit° a man when he's down**...[V: often Neg Impv]

Obj : object of a verb or preposition

Example: **what makes° ③ tick**...[Obj after *find out*, *know*, *discover*, etc., or used alone as a question]

Part : participle

This refers to the form of the verb ending in

-ed (past participle) or **-ing** (present participle), used with an auxiliary to form the passive or a compound tense, e.g. *finished* (in *he has finished and when will you have finished?*) or *dying* (in *he is dying*), and also as an adjective (*a closed door, running water*).

Note. The present participle is used especially for progressive verbs, as in *she is making a dress* or *were you asking for more information?*

Past : past tense

This refers to the simple form of the past, e.g. *she cried, they went, or he hit the ball*.

Example: **while the going is^o good...** [usu. Pres or Past]

Perf : perfect tense

This refers to the tense found in sentences like *we have finished* or *she has married him now*.

Example: **(sow^o the wind and) reap^o the whirlwind...** [V: *sow* usu. Perf, *reap* usu. Fut]

Pers : person or personal

This refers to pronouns, e.g. 1st person (*I* singular; *we* plural), 2nd person (*you* singular and plural), and 3rd person (*he, she, it* singular; *they* plural).

Example: **off with *Pers Pron***

Pluperf : pluperfect tense

This refers to an action completed in the past at a time earlier than the action of another stated verb also in the past. It is formed by *had* + past participle, as in *they had arrived before the storm began*.

Example: **have^o a good innings...** [V: often Pluperf]

Pos: positive

This refers to positive as opposed to negative, as e.g. when a normally negative phrase may become positive.

Example: **not know^o beans about** [V: sometimes Pos in *if*-clauses, questions, etc.]

Possess : possessive

This refers to the forms of nouns, pronouns, or adjectives such as *his, her, hers, its, my, mine, John's, of John*, etc.

Example: **ups and downs...** [N Pl 2, after *have*, or 3; often with Possess]

Pres : present tense

Example: **call^o the shots** [V: usu. Pres]

Progress : progressive or continuous tense

This tense describes an action that takes some time to complete or is still going on. It is formed by *be* + present participle, as in *she is walking, they were talking, the cars will be coming round the corner soon*.

Example: **puff^o and blow^o...** [V: usu. Progress]

Pron : pronoun

This refers to *I, me, mine, you, yours, they,*

them, theirs, etc., or to any idiom used as a pronoun.

Example: **what's-his/her/its-name...** [Pron]

Sing : singular

Example: **every last N (of** [N: only a Sing N (often *one*) follows *last*]

Subj : subject (of a verb)

Example: **run^o in the family...** [V: often takes it as Subj]

Superl : the superlative degree of an adjective or adverb

This form is expressed by *most* + Adj or Adv (e.g. *the most wicked man, most stupidly*) or Adj or Adv + *-est* (e.g. *cleverest, quickest*).

Example: **by a 'long chalk** (= by very much)...

[Adv 3: after a Superl]

7.4.2 Collocational words

In addition to giving the grammar of an idiom and describing its function in a sentence, the grammatical note often indicates the usual words, especially prepositions and verbs, with which the idiom may be used. These collocational words are indicated by such phrases as *often foll. by, after, esp. after*, etc.

Examples: **a labour of love...** [N3, sometimes 2, after *as*]

the top of the ladder... [N2, often after *reach, rise to*, etc.]

give^o way... [V: often foll. by *to* + [P]]

Note: When an idiom is very often or usually used in a particular expression, this information may be given after the grammatical note and introduced by the words

Often (or Usu.) in the phrase...

Example: **play^o [P] by ear...** [V: Pass 1] Usu. in the phrase **play^o it by ear**.

A description such as this often has a definition, an example or citation, and a separate grammatical note if its grammatical description is different from that of the main idiom.

7.5 Related forms of the idiom

7.5.1 Where to find related forms

Some idioms give rise to another form or part of speech that is quite commonly used. These related forms are shown in heavy type at the end of the definition after the grammatical description of the main entry and are introduced by the sign ~.

Example: **split^o hairs...** [V] ~ **hair-splitting:** *he's only interested in hair-splitting, not in real discussion* [Nm: often no Art]

7.5.2 Grammatical notes for related forms

A grammatical description is always given for

these related forms in the same style as for the main idioms.

7.5.3 Definitions of related forms

A definition for a related form is given only when the sense cannot be easily guessed from the meaning of the main idiom. When the related form is not defined, an example phrase is given to show how the idiom is used.

7.6 Variant form after 'Also'

In many cases, certain variants of the idiom are placed not within the idiom phrase itself but after the grammatical note and introduced by the word 'Also'. Variants of this type include the following:

i) Variants having a different wording from that of the main-entry phrase.

Example: cannot^o hold a candle to ⑤...[V]
Also: not be^o fit/able to hold a candle to ⑤.

ii) Variants having a different grammatical description from that of the main-entry phrase.

Example: in someone's good graces...[Adv 3, after *be, get, keep, stay, etc.*] Also: into someone's good graces [Adv 3 after *get*]

iii) Variants that would cause misunderstanding or would be too awkward in appearance if they were placed in the main-entry phrase.

Examples: (still) wet behind the ears...[Adj 1] Also (*coll*): not dry behind the ears

call^o/bring^o ⑤ to account...[V: Pass 1] Also (*less common*): hold^o ⑤ to account.

Note. 'Also' forms are regularly used to cover certain changes of the idiom, such as one in which *have* + ⑤ is changed into *with* + ⑤. Example: have ⑤ on one's mind...[V] Also: with ⑤ on one's mind [Adv]...

7.7 Different senses after 'Compare'

Compare introduces phrases having an *opposite* or *different* meaning from, but similar in form and wording to, the main idiom. For example, under *bad faith*: ...in *bad faith* with dishonest intentions... Compare in (all) *good faith* with sincere or honest intentions.... *Compare* phrases are always defined in this way and not under their own main entry, but there will be a cross-reference as in this example under the *alpha word* *GOOD*, the reader will find

in (all) *good faith* → *bad faith*

7.8 Other idioms after 'See also'

See also introduces a cross-reference to another main idiom that is related in some way, especially in being similar in form but

different in meaning. For example, the two idioms *stare^o ⑤ in the face* and *look^o ⑤ in the face* are similar but mean very different things. They are defined as follows:

stare^o ⑤ in the face not fm! 1 (of an object) to be clearly in view, or (of a fact, answer, etc.) to be clearly suitable or correct, but not noticed or made use of by (a person):.... *I spent half an hour searching for my keys before I saw them on the table in front of me. They had been staring me in the face all the time.* 2 to seem about to happen to (a person):.... See also: *look^o ⑤ in the face*.

look^o ⑤ in the face to look boldly and steadily at (danger, an opponent, enemy, etc.): *after my bad behaviour I was so ashamed that I could not look him in the face....* See also: *stare^o ⑤ in the face*.

7.9 Historical explanations

An explanation of where the idiom comes from or how it came to mean what it does is always given if possible. The explanation is introduced by the sign <.

Examples: *blue blood* the blood of a noble or royal family; noble descent... <A translation of Spanish *sangre azul*, used by families to mean that their blood was pure Spanish and that they had no *MOORISH* blood. The phrase perhaps refers to the blue colour of the *VEINS* of people who have light skin.

the salt of the earth someone who is very dependable, honest, etc.... <From the Bible: "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?" (Matthew 5:13).

7.10 Usage notes

7.10.1 Purpose and position of usage notes

Many idioms require some additional remarks on the way in which they should be used. Some idioms, such as *all of a doodah*, should be avoided or used with caution by a beginning student of English until he is sure of the effect the idioms will have when heard by a native speaker. For such idioms a short usage note has been added at the very end of the entry concerned and is indicated by a new paragraph.

7.10.2 Usage notes and variable idioms

A number of idioms show very wide variations. In such cases a usage note is added, as under *day in, day out*:

Other units of time, esp. those referring to longer periods, can be used in similar phrases, e.g. *week in, week out; night in, night out; month in, month out, and year in, year out. Hours, minutes, and seconds* are not used in this way.