

Idioms and phrases

An expression or phrase, often informal, that has a meaning of its own that is not apparent from the meanings of its individual words is an IDIOM. For example "round the bend" is an idiom which means "mad." Thus a knowledge of these idioms is important otherwise a key idea may be missed out in a passage etc.

The following pages contain a list of the most commonly encountered idioms and their meanings. Go through this seriously and do revise it thoroughly at least once before the test.

"A"

Abide by – adhere to, conform to, agree to Ex. It is difficult to find citizens who abide by the law.

Account for – provide an explanation for Ex. He was called to account for his ridiculous behaviour.

Above board – honest, fair, frank, upright Ex. We must keep the whole affair above board.

All agog – in a state of excitement Ex. Learning of his CAT result, he was all agog.

All and sundry – everyone without exception Ex. This announcement concerns all and sundry.

All intents and purposes – practically, in actual practice Ex. There are slight differences between the two plans but to all intents and purposes they are the same.

An axe to grind – selfish motive Ex. I have no axe to grind; I just want to help you.

Animal spirits – natural cheerfulness born of good health Ex. His animal spirits are a sight to watch.

Answer a purpose – to serve a purpose Ex. Keep that bag – it may answer a purpose.

Answer for – take the responsibility for Ex. Who is going to answer for the mess our nation finds itself in ?

Apple of discord – cause of quarrel, a bone of contention Ex. Kavita's emerald ring proved to be an apple of discord.

Apple of one's eye – an object of love, the most valuable possession Ex. She is the apple of her father's eye.

Apple pie order – in perfect order Ex. Her desk is always in apple-pie order.

Ask after – inquire about one's condition or health Ex. She asked after his father.

Ask for – asked to be given, to run the risk of something negative Ex. By breaking his imported glasses, you have really asked for it now.

Ask out – invite to a function (or an outing or a party) Ex. He will definitely ask her out one day.

At all events – positively, without failure Ex. The FM assured the foreign investors that reforms would continue at all events.

At all hazards – in spite of risks Ex. The sailor decided to circumnavigate the globe at all hazards.

At a loss – to be puzzled Ex. The teacher was at a loss when quizzed intelligently.

At a low ebb – in a state of decline Ex. She was at a low ebb after the operation.

At a pinch – in a difficulty Ex. At a pinch, you could get home on foot.

At a stone's throw – very near Ex. They live only at a stone's throw from here.

At a stretch – continuously, without a break Ex. He can't work for more than three hours at a stretch.

At an arm's length – to keep aloof, to avoid, to keep at a distance Ex. She keeps her new neighbours at an arm's length.

At any rate – in any event, under any circumstances Ex. John told us that the Queen will come to see us at any rate.

At home in – to be strong, to be comfortable with a subject Ex. He was at home in Economics.

At one's beck and call – at one's disposal or command Ex. She always has plenty of men at her beck and call.

At one's finger's tips or ends – to be an expert at something Ex. He has the history of the firm at his finger tips.

At par – on level with, of a similar quality Ex. I enjoy cooking but my results are not at par with yours.

At random – aimlessly, without goals Ex. The police were stopping cars at random and checking their brakes.

At sea – weak, perplexed Ex. Can I help you ? You seem all at sea.

At sixes and sevens – in disorder, pell-mell Ex. One day before the wedding, the whole house was at sixes and sevens.

At stake – in danger Ex. (1) A great deal of money is at stake. (2) The peace of the country is at stake.

At the bottom – real cause Ex. You will definitely find his name at the bottom of all the scams.

At the eleventh hour – at a late stage, at the last moment Ex. The child was saved from the kidnappers at the eleventh hour.

At the mercy of – in the power of Ex. A sailor is at the mercy of the weather.

At the outset – right in the beginning Ex. It's always better to clarify the rules at the outset.

At the risk of – incurring danger Ex. I am advancing credit to you at the risk of my credibility.

A.B.C. – elementary facts Ex. This book gives you the ABC of engineering.

To be at daggers drawn with – to be enemies, to be on bad terms Ex. They've been at daggers drawn for years.

To be at one's wit's end – to be in a fix or confusion, to be perplexed Ex. "I am at my wit's end with this terribly complicated situation," said Mr Rao.

To be at large – to be free and not under any control Ex. The marauding hyena is still at large.

To add fuel to the fire – to increase anger Ex. Just as the discussion seemed to be becoming more rational Pratibha added fuel to the fire by saying that people should only talk about things they understand.

"B"

Back out – to withdraw, to break a promise Ex. The govt. decided to back out of the project due to political pressures.

Bad blood – enmity, bad feelings Ex. There has been bad blood between the two nations for years.

Bag and baggage – completely, leaving behind nothing Ex. She threw him out of the house bag and baggage.

Be off one's head – to be mad, insane Ex. You must be off your head to go for a picnic on such a cold day.

Bear a grudge – to have bitter feelings towards someone Ex. She bears a grudge against her mother-in-law.

Bear in mind – remember Ex. Bear in mind that you'll have to save some money if you want a holiday.

Bear up – keep one's spirits under hostile conditions Ex. She's bearing up well after her shock.

Bed of roses – full of joys and pleasures Ex. Life is not a bed of roses.

Bed of thorns – full of sufferings Ex. Her life has become bed of thorns after her husband's death.

Behind one's back – in one's absence Ex. He sometimes bullies his sister behind his mother's back.

Beside the mark – irrelevant, not to the point Ex. His guess was rather beside the mark.

Between the devil and the deep sea – to be in a fix or between two difficulties Ex. Faced with a choice between starving to death and emigrating, they were between the devil and the deep sea.

Big gun – an important figure Ex. The manager appears to run his branch himself but all the important decisions are made by the big guns at the head office in Delhi.

Bird's eye view – a general view or study Ex. (1) From the top of the building he had a bird's eye view of the whole city. (2) The CEO had a bird's eye view of the MNCs operations.

Black sheep – a disgraceful person Ex. My brother has always been the black sheep of the family because he has been in prison several times.

Blessing in disguise – a certain thing which appears to be a curse in the beginning but proves to be a blessing in the end Ex. His death in the road accident was a blessing in disguise as he was slowly dying of cancer.

Blow one's own trumpet – to speak proudly of one's achievements Ex. He really isn't very clever but he is always blowing his own trumpet.

Blow over – to end, to extinguish/terminate Ex. The trouble will soon blow over.

Blue blood – noble blood, nobility of rank Ex. They may be poor but they have blue blood in their family.

Boil down – to reduce, to come down to the basic fact Ex. His speech was a long one but it boiled down to a warning that we would all have to work harder for less money.

Bolt from the blue – a sudden shock or calamity Ex. His resignation was a bolt from the blue.

Bone of contention – a cause of quarrel Ex. Who should inherit their uncle's estate was a bone of bone of contention for many years.

Bread and butter – livelihood Ex. Writing novels is my bread and butter.

Break down – mental or nervous collapse of a person Ex. He broke down after his father's death.

Break in – enter with the aim of stealing Ex. The thief broke in to find the house empty.

Break out – appear suddenly; escape from prison Ex. They decided to break out at mid-night.

Bring up – to rear the children; to start a topic for discussion Ex. Mr Das finally decided to bring up the question of poverty before the minister.

Buckle under – to accept under pressure, to give in Ex. Apparently, India has so far not buckled under threats over the CTBT issue.

Burning question – an important question or topic of the day Ex. The burning question in the office was who was to be the next manager.

By far – beyond all comparison Ex. This is the most lucrative public issue by far.

By hook or by crook – by all means, fair or foul Ex. I'll get her to marry me, by hook or by crook.

By leaps and bounds – rapidly, at a rapid pace Ex. Construction of the new sports complex is going ahead by leaps and bounds.

By no means – in no way Ex. I am by no means certain to win.

By virtue of – on account of Ex. By virtue of the position he held, he was able to move about freely.

To bank upon – to depend, to rely Ex. I am banking upon his help to run the disco.

To be born with a silver spoon in one's mouth – born in prosperous circumstances Ex. What does he know about hardship – he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth.

To be in the good books – to be in favour with Ex. The salesman has been in the manager's good books since he increased last year's sales.

To be in the bad books – to be in disfavour with Ex. Ever since he forgot about her birthday he has been in her bad books.

To bear the brunt of – to bear the consequences Ex. As he missed the sales target by a huge margin, he had to bear the brunt of the boss.

To bear the palm – to win reward Ex. You should not expect to bear the palm in case you fail.

To beat about the bush – to talk irrelevant Ex. Stop beating about the bush and tell me what you came for.

To beat a retreat – to retire, to move back Ex. The children beat a retreat when they saw the headmaster coming.

To beat hollow – to defeat completely Ex. The king was beaten hollow in the battle.

To bell the cat – to face a risk Ex. It was agreed that they must complain to the headmaster but the question remained of who was to bell the cat.

To bid fair – likely to be Ex. She is bidding fair to be as beautiful as her mother was.

To bide one's time – to wait for a favourable chance Ex. I am just biding my time until he makes a mistake.

To break the ice – to break the silence, to get over initial shyness Ex. Let's break the ice by inviting our new neighbours for a meal.

To bring credit to – to bring fame and honour Ex. Your son will bring credit to you.

To bring down the house – to win general praise Ex. At the school function, his impersonation of the headmaster brought the house down.

To bring to book – to punish the guilty Ex. The thieves were finally tracked down and brought to book.

To burn one's fingers – to get into trouble Ex. He got his fingers badly burned speculating in oil shares.

To burn the candle at both ends – to waste one's energy, time and money uselessly Ex. He went to late night parties and got up early at 4 to study – he was trying to burn the candle at both ends.

To burn the mid-night oil – to work very hard till late at night Ex. He got his MBA degree by burning the mid-night oil.

To bury the hatchet – to forget a quarrel, to make peace Ex. Finally, the two countries decided to bury the hatchet.

"C"

A cat's paw – to make somebody a tool Ex. He was just a cat's paw in the bitter power struggle.

A chicken-hearted person – a cowardly person Ex. The IIM-CAT is definitely not for a chicken hearted person!

A child's play – something very easy Ex. Climbing that hill is child's play to the experienced mountaineer.

A cock and bull story – an imaginary or false story Ex. The tramp told a cock-and-bull story about finding the money hidden in a bottle behind a tree in the park.

A cool head – a calm judgment Ex. Those who can keep a cool head under adverse circumstances usually are the winners.

A cry in the wilderness – a useless cry Ex. The hostage's appeals were a cry in the wilderness.

Call on – to pay a visit Ex. The PM called on the ailing President.

Capital punishment – punishment of death Ex. The judge passed the verdict of capital punishment against him.

Care about – to feel for someone/something Ex. My neighbour cares a lot about me.

Care for – have respect or regard for someone Ex. She cares for her teacher.

Cast down – depressed, dejected Ex. The GD results made him feel cast down.

Casting vote – a vote which decides the issue when the voting is otherwise equal Ex. The President's casting vote is bound to create a frenzy.

Close shave – a narrow escape Ex. That was a close shave – that car nearly ran you over.

Come of – come from, descended from Ex. He has come of Austrian origins.

Come off – to be successful Ex. She has finally come off in life.

Come round – become conscious; to visit; adopt an opinion Ex. The accident victim came round in the hospital.

Come to hand – receive Ex. I was happy when my B.Sc. degree came to my hand.

Count on – to believe in, rely on Ex. Since last five days I have been counting on the courier services to deliver my parcel.

Count out – to disregard Ex. If you are planning to loot the bank, count me out.

Crocodile tears – false tears Ex. Most of the mourners at the leader's funeral shed crocodile tears.

Cut and dried – in a ready made form Ex. Her views on this topic are very cut and dried.

To call a spade a spade – to speak in plain terms, to speak out openly Ex. Many a times the doctors avoid to call a spade a spade.

To call into question – to object to Ex. The company's ability to survive has been called into question.

To carry fire and sword – to cause destruction Ex. The bandits at the Chambal always carry fire & sword.

To call for – to demand Ex. I have already called for the new books for our library.

To carry off one's feet – to be wild with excitement Ex. The CAT results carried him off his feet.

To carry the day – to win, to succeed Ex. John's arguments carried the day for us.

To cast a slur upon – to bring a blot, to bring discredit Ex. Mohan cast a slur on his parents by telling a lie.

To cast a spell over – fascinate or attract Ex. The beauty of Kashmir will surely cast a spell over you.

To cast into the shade – to throw into obscure position Ex. Ram's behaviour often casts his brother into the shade.

To catch napping – to take unawares Ex. The minister caught the staff napping during his surprise visit.

To catch tartar – to meet with a person who is more than a match for one Ex. Don't be proud of yourself, one day you will catch a tartar.

To change colour – to turn pale with fear Ex. He changed colour when he saw the woman whom he thought he had killed.

To chew the cud – to think deeply Ex. He sat chewing the cud for hours but never wrote anything down.

To clinch the issue – to decide the matter Ex. His arguments in the court finally clinched the issue.

To come of age – to be major, to be twenty one Ex. (1) My uncle will look after my inheritance until I come of age. (2) The player seems to have come of age.

To come off with flying colours – to succeed with credit Ex. He came off with flying colours in his MBA exams.

To come to a head – to reach a crisis Ex. Matters came to a head when the dismissed officer refused to hand over the charge to the newly appointed authority.

To come to a stand-still – to come to a stop Ex. Business comes to a stand-still during the load shedding.

To come to grief – to suffer, to be ruined, to fail Ex. The project came to grief.

To compare notes – to discuss impressions or opinions Ex. They decided to compare the notes in the annual general meeting.

To cool one's heels – to wait for somebody patiently Ex. Although I arrived on time for the meeting, I was left cooling my heels for half an hour.

To cross one's mind – to come into one's mind Ex. It did cross my mind that she might get lost but I never seriously thought she would.

To cross swords – to fight Ex. I try not to cross swords with my boss but he is the most unreasonable man.

To cry for the moon – to wish for something impossible Ex. She's crying for the moon by asking him to give up his claim to the property.

To cry over spilt milk – to waste time in vain, repent over lost opportunities Ex. You wouldn't have torn your skirt if you had opened the gate instead of trying to climb the fence but there's no point in crying over spilt milk.

To curry favour – to seek to win favour by gifts or flattery Ex. She wants a rise in her pay, so she is trying to curry favour with the boss.

To cut a sorry figure – to feel humbled, to make oneself ridiculous, to produce a poor result Ex. The 1996 annual meeting cut a sorry figure.

To cut no ice – to have no effect Ex. This sort of flattery cuts no ice with me.

To cut the Gordian knot – to get over a difficulty by a bold strike Ex. The PM tried to cut the Gordian knot by dissolving the state assembly.

"D"

- A dead letter** – no longer in use Ex. The issue of wages has become a dead letter today.
- A deadlock** – a position in which no progress can be made Ex. The negotiations reached a deadlock.
- A dog in the manger** – a selfish policy Ex. He is a real dog in the manger – even though he doesn't have a car he won't let anyone else use his garage.
- A drawn game or battle** – in which no party wins Ex. The game of boxing was a drawn game.
- A drug in the market** – a thing unsaleable due to its lack of demand Ex. The magazine 'Surya' has become a drug in the market.
- Dark horse** – a competition of unknown capabilities Ex. We knew how three of the four competitors would perform but the fourth was a dark horse.
- Dead of night** – in the middle of Ex. No one will see us leaving if we go in the dead of night.
- Dead shot** – a marksman whose aim never goes wrong Ex. The captain was a dead shot.
- Deal in** – to trade in something, to be busy with something Ex. (1) Now a days he is dealing in shoes. (2) Dealing in rhino horns is illegal.
- Democle's sword** – an impending danger Ex. The confidential report being prepared by our boss is the Democle's sword hanging over our heads.
- Die down** – reduce to zero slowly, to diminish and finish Ex. The fire will die down before the fire-brigade comes.
- Die hard** – customs that require a long period to die out Ex. Only a die hard optimist is likely to make it to the IIMs.
- Dirt cheap** – very cheap Ex. She got that car dirt cheap.
- Do away with** – reject, get rid of Ex. They did away with uniforms at that school years ago.
- Do one proud** – to give cause for feeling proud Ex. We always do them proud when they come to dinner.
- Do up** – put in better condition Ex. The mechanic promised her that he will do up her car.
- Down and out** – completely beaten Ex. Zimbabwe, considered down and out, staged a marvellous comeback.
- Draw in** – to pull into something Ex. The octopus will draw in its tentacles if disturbed.
- Dress down** – to scold, censure, rebuke Ex. His teacher gave him a dressing down for not doing his home-work.
- Dutch courage** – fictitious courage induced somehow Ex. He needs some Dutch courage before asking her to marry him.
- To be dashed to the ground** – to fail Ex. Even after the long efforts to clear his exams, his hopes were dashed to the ground.
- To dance attendance upon** – to wait on somebody always Ex. She expects everyone to dance attendance upon her.
- To dance to one's tune** – to carry out orders Ex. She makes everyone in the office dance to her tune.
- To decline with thanks** – to refuse or neglect Ex. He declined his boss' offer to go to U.S.A with thanks.
- To die in harness** – to die while working till death Ex. Jawaharlal Nehru died in harness due to the Chinese attack.
- To do full justice** – to have one's fill, to do a thing thoroughly Ex. She did full justice to the painting she was doing.
- To drive home** – to lay emphasis on, to make something very clear Ex. The manager drove home the need for everyone to try to save the firm's money.

"E"

- At the eleventh hour** – at the last moment Ex. Most jobs get done at the eleventh hour.
- Eat into** – to destroy Ex. The fire ate into the whole colony.
- Eat one out of house and home** – to eat in a gluttonous manner Ex. His wife's huge dog is eating him out of house and home.
- Eat one's heart out** – to worry excessively Ex. He ate his heart out at the bash.
- Eat one's words** – to take back one's words Ex. I'll make him eat his words !
- Eat out of one's hand** – give no trouble Ex. The strict administrator had the employees eating out of his hand.
- Enough and to spare** – in plenty Ex. Mr Das had made enough and to spare in his daughter's wedding.
- Every inch** – completely Ex. He is every inch a noble man.
- Eye for eye** – tit for tat Ex. She wants him to lose his job as he made her lose hers – she believes in the principle of an eye for an eye.
- Eye wash** – means of deceit Ex. The incentive is an eye wash – the real interest rate is too high.
- To eat humble pie** – to offer an humble apology Ex. You'll have to eat humble pie if he is proved right in the court.
- To eat one's words** – to go back on one's promise, to back out Ex. Financial contingencies forced him to eat his own words.
- To egg on** – to keep urging regarding something Ex. He egged on his friend to steal the radio.
- To end in smoke** – to come to nothing Ex. All her dreams ended in smoke.
- To extend the hand of friendship** – to express a desire for friendship Ex. It is apparently impossible for Pakistan to extend a hand of friendship towards India.

"F"

- A fair hand** – a beautiful and clear hand Ex. The boss in on the lookout for a fair hand for his toymaking unit.
- A fair weather friend** – a selfish friend Ex. As soon as he found himself in trouble over money, all his fairweather friends deserted him.
- A fatal disease** – a disease that ends in death Ex. AIDS is a fatal disease.
- A far cry** – a long way or distance Ex. This job is a far cry from the last one I had.
- A feather in one's cap** – another achievement to be proud of Ex. That prize he won was a feather in his cap.
- A fish out of water** – to be in an uncomfortable position Ex. The middle-aged woman felt like a fish out of water at her daughter's party.
- A flying visit** – a hasty and brief visit Ex. The Prime Minister gave a flying visit to the plane mishap site.
- A fool's paradise** – state of joy based on false hopes Ex. People who think the population situation will improve shortly are living in a fool's paradise.
- By fits and starts** – irregularly Ex. He did his work by fits and starts.
- Face to face** – personally Ex. They finally met face to face to discuss the problem.
- Fair play** – impartial treatment Ex. He's not involved in the contest – he's only here to see fair play.
- Fall flat** – collapse, flop, fail to generate interest Ex. His attempt at humour fell flat.

"G"

Fall foul of – to incur the disfavour of Ex. He fell foul of his boss by not doing the routine office work.

Fall over one another – to try and do something before others Ex. Both the accountants tried to fall over one another in order to influence the Manager.

Fall over oneself – to be extremely enthusiastic to do something Ex. As soon as the film star appeared in the restaurant, all the waiters fell over themselves to see that she had everything she wanted.

Fed up – to be tired of, to be sick of Ex. I am fed up with all this work !

Few and far between – few and rare Ex. Instances of bavery in public life and few and far between.

First and foremost – important Ex. First and foremost we must thank you for your help.

Flesh and blood – human nature Ex. Savagery cannot be tolerated by flesh and blood.

Fly at – attack Ex. The minister flew at the staffers.

Fly in the face of discretion – foolishly take a course that is not logical Ex. By resigning from the job now, you will be flying in the face of discretion.

Fly off at a tangent – to start discussing something totally irrelevant Ex. It is difficult to have a sensible conversation with her, as she heeps flying off at a tangent.

For good – for ever Ex. He is not going to France for a holiday – he is emigrating for good.

Foul play – bad intentions Ex. A man has been found dead and the police suspect foul play.

From hand to mouth – a miserable existence Ex. After her parent's death she lead a life from hand to mouth.

To face the music – to face trouble, to face consequences of one's actions Ex. He had to face the music as he was caught redhanded taking the bribe.

To fall out – to fight Ex. I have fallen out with my brother.

To fall through – to collapse Ex. We had planned to go to Paris but the plans fell through.

To fall to the ground – to come to nothing Ex. He fell to the ground in his business.

To fan the flames – to increase excitement Ex. Cinema fanned the flames of his passionate youth.

To feather one's nest – to care for one's selfish interest Ex. All the time he has been a member of the committee he has been feathering his own nest.

To feel at home – to feel happy or at ease Ex. I always feel at home in Korea when I go there on holiday.

To fight shy of – to attempt to avoid a thing or person Ex. He fought shy of introducing her to his wife.

To fish in troubled waters – to take advantage of the troubles of others Ex. During the war, his company had been quietly fishing in troubled waters by selling electronic communication systems to both sides.

To fizzle out – failed out gradually Ex. His enthusiasm gradually fizzled out as the rigorous training progressed.

To flog a dead horse – to waste one's energy and time Ex. Trying to revive old passions is akin to flogging a dead horse.

To fly in the face of – to insult Ex. He flew in the face of the manager in the annual general meeting.

To follow in the foot-steps of – to follow somebody's example Ex. When he joined the police force he was following in his father's footsteps.

To follow suit – to follow example of Ex. He went to bed and I followed suit after a few minutes.

To foot the bill – to pay the bill Ex. Everyone enjoyed the wedding except my father, who was footing the bill.

Gala day – a day of rejoicings Ex. My brother's wedding day was a gala day for me.

Gift of the gab – fluency of speech Ex. Politicians need to have the gift of the gab.

Give and take – the making of mutual concessions, *quid pro quo* Ex. There must be some give and take in discussions between trade unions and management.

Give currency to – to give wide publicity Ex. The media gave a currency to the Miss World show.

Go in for – to take up as an occupation Ex. My son is going in for Medicine.

Go off the deep end – to lose temper Ex. He really went off the deep end when he heard that she had not booked the tickets.

Go the rounds – be circulated Ex. His first novel went the rounds for a year before he finally found a publisher for it.

Grain of salt – to believe only a part of statement Ex. The public took the minister's speech with a grain of salt.

To be Greek – unintelligible, not clear Ex. The doctors were discussing my illness but what they were saying was Greek to me.

To be a good hand at – to be expert Ex. He is a good hand at carpentry.

To gain ground – to progress Ex. His views were once scoffed at but are now gaining ground rapidly.

To get at the bottom of – to find out the truth Ex. I'll get at the bottom of this affair even if it takes me a year!

To get away with – to do something without the fear of any repercussion Ex. He got away with the task of resigning from his old job.

To get back at – to retaliate Ex. He's likely to get back at you after his humiliating defeat at the hustings.

To get down to brass tacks – decide about the practical details Ex. Let's stop arguing about theories and get down to brass tacks.

To get into a mess – to get into muddle Ex. Due to their forged passports, they got into a terrible mess.

To get into a scrap – to be involved in a difficult situation Ex. She got into a scrap when she reached Dubai.

To get into hot water – to get into scrap, to get into trouble Ex. You will get into hot water if you are late again.

To get on one's nerves – to be a source of worry Ex. His behaviour really gets on my nerves.

To get the better of – to overpower, to defeat Ex. In the third round he began to get the better of his opponent.

To get the sack – to be dismissed Ex. I'll get the sack if I arrive at the office late !

To get the upper hand – to become stronger, to get the better position Ex. Our team managed to get the upper hand in the end.

To get wind of – to come to know of Ex. The police got the wind of an attempt to rob the bank, so they surrounded the building.

To gird up one's loins – to prepare oneself for a work Ex. Since the job had to be done, we girded up our loins and set to work.

To give a bit or a piece of one's mind – to rebuke; to scold Ex. If he does that again, she's going to give him a piece of her mind.

To give a person the cold shoulder – to show a person apathy Ex. All the neighbours gave her the cold shoulder because she ill-treated her children.

To give a slip – to escape Ex. The thief gave the policeman the slip.

To give a wide berth to – to avoid, to keep aloof from Ex. He gave a wide berth to his ex-wife.

To give away – to reveal, betray, disclose Ex. He gave away our hiding-place.

To give chapter and verse – to give full proof Ex. He wanted us to give him chapter and verse for our belief that his department spent too much.

To give in – to yield to pressure, to succumb Ex. The only way to win a war is to keep fighting and never think about giving in.

To give oneself airs – to assume a superior attitude, to feel proud Ex. She gives herself too much airs.

To give quarter to – to have sympathy with Ex. Due to her ill health everyone has given her a quarter.

To give the cold shoulder – to receive in a cold and careless manner Ex. To avoid getting entangled in an argument, he cold shouldered the shareholder.

To give way – collapse, replace by Ex. The old and lengthy course has given way to a new and short one.

To go against the grain – against one's likings Ex. It goes against the grain for me to tell lies.

To go all out for – to make the maximum possible effort Ex. You'll have to go all out for the victory.

To go by – to judge something by Ex. She decided to go by her own views.

To go easy – not to use excessively Ex. She went easy with her Law studies.

To go hand in hand – to go together Ex. Poverty and crime go hand in hand.

To go scot free – to escape unpunished Ex. The older of the two boys was fined but the younger got off scot free.

To go the whole hog – to go to the fullest extent; to agree Ex. I've bought a new dress – I think I'll go the whole hog and buy shoes and a hand bag.

To go through fire and water – to make every sacrifice Ex. She brought up a her child by going through fire and water.

To go to dogs – to be utterly ruined Ex. His business has gone to the dogs due to his apathy.

To go to the wall – to be ruined to, be hard pressed Ex. Several small firms went to the wall in the past financial year.

To go with the current – to follow the general trend Ex. All the students decided to go with the current.

To go without saying – to be clear Ex. It goes without saying that I didn't lose – I never lose.

To go home to – to appeal Ex. To win their confidence, you will have to go home to them.

To grease the palm – to bribe Ex. He greased the palms of the Income Tax officer to avoid being taxed.

"H"

A hair breadth escape – a narrow escape Ex. He had a hair breadth escape from the accident.

A hard nut to crack – a difficult problem, a stubborn person Ex. The Excise official was a hard nut to crack.

Hair standing on end – a sign of fear and surprise Ex. That horror film really made my hair stand on end.

Hale and hearty – very healthy and sound Ex. After coming back from U.S.A. she has become hale and hearty.

Hammer and tongs – with all might Ex. They fought for the country hammer and tongs.

Hand in gloves with – on very intimate terms Ex. Some well known politicians have been found to be hand in glove with leading gangsters.

Hang by a thread – to be in a miserable condition Ex. His life is hanging by a thread.

Hang heavy – difficult to pass Ex. The assignment is hanging heavy over my head.

Happy go lucky – careless, depending on good luck Ex. She is such a happy-go-lucky person.

Hard and fast – strict Ex. The rules of the school regarding the admissions are hard and fast.

Hard of hearing – somewhat deaf Ex. He is hard of hearing due to old age.

Hard up – in financial difficulty Ex. I am a bit hard up at the moment.

Haunted house – in which ghosts or spirits are supposed to live Ex. They say that the Mayor's bungalow is a haunted house.

Heads and shoulders above others – very superior Ex. He thinks himself to be heads and shoulders above others.

Heart and soul – with full energy Ex. I tried to settle the matter heart and soul.

Heels of Achilles – vulnerable point Ex. He was a ruthless businessman but his uncritical love for his daughter was his Achilles Heel.

Helter skelter – pell mell, to run in confusion Ex. Seeing the lion he ran helter-skelter.

Henpecked – a husband under the control or thumb of his wife Ex. He never does anything without asking his wife first – he's completely henpecked.

Herculean task – a work requiring great efforts Ex. Climbing the mountain was really a Herculean task.

High spirits – to be very happy Ex. You seem to be in high spirits today. What's the matter ?

High time – proper time Ex. It is high time that this job was finished.

Hobson's choice – no choice at all Ex. Since this is the only car I can find for sale it's a case of Hobson's choice.

Hold good – to be valid Ex. Does that rule hold good in every case?

Hold on – to continue efforts Ex. Hold on to those shares, they'll appreciate soon!

Hold out – not yield Ex. He says he knows nothing about it but I think he's holding out on us.

Hole and corner – secret and underhand Ex. I hate hole and corner affairs.

Horns of dilemma – to be in a fix Ex. His decision left her on the horns of dilemma as she could not decide whether to risk offending him or agree to something she disapproved of.

Hue and cry – to raise a great cry and or stir, to raise alarm Ex. There will be a great hue and cry about this decision.

Hush money – a bribe, price of silence Ex. The criminals gave the boy hush money when they realized that he had overheard their plans for the robbery.

To be hoisted with one's petard – to be killed with one's own sword Ex. The councillor who introduced parking restrictions to the town was hoisted with his own petard when he was himself fined for parking wrongly.

To hammer out – to plan, to devise Ex. It was hammered out that the enemy camp be attacked at midnight.

To hang in the balance – undecided Ex. His fate was hanging in the balance till the final verdict was passed.

To hang fire – delayed Ex. Our plans for the new factory are hanging fire at the moment.

To harp on the same string or scheme – to talk continuously of the same matter Ex. Don't harp on the same string – the consumer choice has changed.

To have a bee in one's bonnet – to take the remarks seriously Ex. She has a bee in her bonnet about going to America.

To have a finger in every pie – to interfere unnecessarily Ex. Before reforms, Indian business houses believed in having a finger in every pie.

To have a windfall – unexpected good fortune Ex. Getting the lottery draw on her name was a windfall for her.

To have an old head on young shoulders – ripe in wisdom but young in years Ex. He is just fifteen years old degree holder and thus has an old head on young shoulders.

To have one's hands full – to be overbusy Ex. She must have her hands full with those four children to look after.

To have one's way – to do one's own will Ex. That child always cries if he doesn't get his own way.

To hit below the belt – to be mean, to fight unfairly Ex. Offering your product below the cost price is like hitting your competitors below the belt.

To hit the ceiling – to give an outlet to anger Ex. The boss hit the ceiling when he came to know that the line staff was on strike.

To hit the nail on the head – to do what is proper at a proper time Ex. You hit the nail on the head when you described her as being naive.

To hold a brief – to support by action or influence Ex. He expects his father to hold a brief for him.

To hold a candle to – to be equal to, to be comparable to the other Ex. Our new manager is not fit to hold a candle to the previous one.

To hope against hope – to entertain hope when there is no hope Ex. Their cat had been missing for six weeks but they were still hoping against hope that it would come back to them.

To hold the baby – be burdened with a task that should be shared by others too Ex. No sooner had he said that we would do the job than he went abroad, leaving me holding the baby.

To hold one's own – to maintain one's position boldly Ex. The others tried to prove that he was wrong but he managed to hold his own.

To hold water – to be valid Ex. His explanation doesn't hold water.

"I"

An iron hand – severe hand Ex. India needs politicians willing to rule with an iron hand to rein in corruption.

An iron will – strong determination Ex. She left the house with an iron will.

An irony of fate – happening of events contrary to natural expectations Ex. It was an irony of fate that she lost her parents at such a young age.

In a nut-shell – briefly, as a summary Ex. It would take hours to describe exactly what happened but in a nutshell he tried to make us look silly and failed.

In black and white – in writing Ex. Would you put that down in black and white ?

In cold blood – cruelly Ex. He killed them in cold blood.

In full swing – in great progress Ex. The work of building roads was in full swing.

In the air – wide-spread, prevalent Ex. The news the bank robbery is in the air.

In the course of – during Ex. They served them hot and spicy food in the course of their dinner.

In the face of – in spite of Ex. He succeeded in the face of great difficulties.

In the guise of – in the dress of Ex. He tried to escape in the guise of a pathan.

In the light of – keeping in view Ex. The theory has been abandoned in the light of modern discoveries.

In the long run – in the end Ex. We find it difficult to save the money in the long run.

In the nick of time – just in time Ex. He arrived in the nick of time.

In the teeth of – in the face of Ex. They were walking in the teeth of a gale.

In the twinkling of an eye – in no time Ex. He arrived in the twinkling of an eye.

In the wake of – behind Ex. He made several valuable business deals in the wake of his appearance on television.

In tune with – in keeping with Ex. The sunny weather was in tune with his happy mood.

In vogue – to be in fashion Ex. This pattern of your dress is in vogue again.

Ins and outs – full details Ex. He alone knows all the ins and outs of this scheme.

Iron out – smoothen Ex. The inter-departmental meet was organised to iron out the differences between the employees.

To be in one's elements – in one's proper sphere Ex. He is in his element when he is organizing something.

"J"

Jack of all trades – a person supposed to know everything partially Ex. He is jack of all trades as he can do the work from laying concrete to mending cars.

Jail bird – a person who has been to jail many times Ex. He is not ashamed of taking bribe as he has become a jail bird.

Jump at – to accept immediately Ex. He jumped at the cakes which were offered to him.

Jump down one's throat – to reply in an angry manner Ex. She jumped down my throat before I had a chance to apologize.

Jump on – to scold severely Ex. She jumped on her son, who had told a lie.

Jump to the conclusion – to arrive at a conclusion soon Ex. Don't jump to conclusion on so little information, let me explain everything to you.

"K"

Keep to – stick to, adhere to Ex. Keep to the standard formula given.

Keep up with – to keep pace with Ex. If you wish to keep up with the world, regular reading is a must.

Kick up the dust – to create disturbance Ex. Please do not kick up the dust in the meeting.

Kith and kin – relatives Ex. All her kith and kins gave her full support.

To keep a good table – to entertain Ex. She keeps a good table whenever the guests comes to her house.

To keep a straight face – to avoid smiling or laughing Ex. She kept a straight face all through out the party.

To keep abreast of – to be familiar with Ex. I am keeping abreast of the latest developments.

To keep body and soul together – to remain alive Ex. He has to have a snack in the middle of the morning to keep body and soul together until lunch time.

To keep one's head – to remain mentally calm in an emergency Ex. She kept her head when she found the flats were on fire.

To keep one's head above water – to tide over difficulty, to escape debt Ex. We are not making lot of money in the shop but we are keeping our heads above water.

To keep the ball rolling – to maintain interest of a conversation Ex. He can be relied on to keep the ball rolling at parties.

To keep the powder dry – to be ready for any work Ex. In the office he keeps the powder dry.

To keep the wolf from the door – to keep away, hunger and starvation Ex. The job which I have will help me keep the wolf from the door.

To keep up appearances – to maintain outward show Ex. They haven't much money but they buy expensive clothes in order to keep up appearances.

To kick up a row – to make a great noise Ex. When the flight was cancelled without prior notice, the passengers kicked up a row at the airport.

To knock down – to defeat Ex. He was very angry when he was knocked down in the competition.

To knock off – to reduce; stop working Ex. What time do you knock off in this factory?

"L"

A left-handed compliment – a false praise Ex. He said he liked me a lot better than the last time he met me, which I thought was rather a left-handed compliment.

At a low ebb – on the decline Ex. She was at a low ebb after the operation.

Labour of love – work undertaken not for profit but for service Ex. It took her a long time to make her daughter's dress – but it was a real labour of love.

Laughing stock – an object of ridicule Ex. He always makes a laughing stock of himself by wearing absurd dresses.

Lay off – to remove from work Ex. The firm has decided to lay off a quarter of its workforce.

Leap in the dark – a careless action Ex. Since he was quite unknown as an artist, employing him to paint such an important picture was rather a leap in the dark.

Lend oneself to – allow to be carried away Ex. You should not lend yourself to emotional blabbering.

Let down – to fail to keep promise Ex. Do come for the party, otherwise you will let me down before everybody.

Let off – released Ex. Let off the calf, the cow is searching for it.

Let up – to be sluggish Ex. Don't let up just when victory is in sight.

Life and soul – main figure Ex. He sings, tells jokes and dances with all girls – he's the life and soul of the party.

Lion's share – a major share Ex. When his money was divided, his wife got the lion's share.

Live up to – to maintain certain standards Ex. Will it be possible for us Indians to live up to the ideals enshrined in our constitution?

Loaves and fishes – material comforts Ex. After lot of efforts she has gained loaves and fishes.

Lock, stock and barrel – with all belongings Ex. They moved the business lock, stock and barrel.

Look blue – to feel nervous or depressed Ex. She looked blue when she came to the office.

Look down one's nose – to regard others contemptuously Ex. His mother looks down her nose at his wife.

Look forward to – to expect with pleasure Ex. I am looking forward to seeing you.

Look on – watch carefully Ex. He promised that he will look on the new project.

Look out – take care Ex. She said she will look out for the new house.

Look to – to request for help Ex. The citizens look to their leaders in moments of crisis.

Look up – to verify Ex. Before signing the cheque, better look up the past record of the company.

Look up to – to admire something/someone Ex. We all look up to our leaders in crises.

To land an ear – to listen to Ex. If you will lend an ear, I shall explain the arrangements for our staff outing.

To land on one's feet – to be lucky Ex. He lost his job last year but he really landed on his feet as he got a better job.

To laugh in one's sleeves – to laugh in secret but not openly Ex. I had the feeling she was laughing in her sleeves at something I didn't understand.

To lead a cat and dog life – to lead a life of constant quarrelling Ex. Both the partners lead a cat and dog life.

To lead a dog's life – to lead a miserable life Ex. He leads a dog's life, living with his mother – she won't let him do anything she disapproves of.

To lead astray – to misguide Ex. He lead the investigators astray by giving them wrong information regarding the murder.

To leave in the lurch – to leave in time of difficulty and trouble Ex. Soon after their child was born he went off and left her in the lurch.

To leave no stone unturned – to make all possible efforts Ex. The police left no stone unturned to find the child.

To let bygones be bygones – to ignore the past Ex. They agreed to let bygones be bygones and not to refer to the incident again.

To let off steam – to react aggressively to release the tensions Ex. A noisy quarrel can be a way of letting off steam.

To lie in wait for – to wait for in concealment Ex. The police were lying in wait for the burglar when he turned up.

To live in glass-houses – to be open to criticism Ex. Don't comment upon others if you live in glass houses.

To lose head – to lose balance of mind, to be proud Ex. I must apologize – I rather lost my head when I thought you had burned the only copy of my manuscript.

"M"

A man of straw – a man with no voice or will of his own Ex. Our politicians are men of straw.

A mare's nest – an unfounded rumour Ex. He is not a very reputable researcher – he is always discovering mare's nest.

A moot point – a point or question still open to discussion Ex. Whether India is truly making any progress whatsoever is a moot point given the increasing population.

Maiden speech – a speech made for the first time Ex. He made a memorable maiden speech at the House of Commons.

Man in the street – an ordinary person Ex. The man in the street often has little interest in politics.

Man of letters – a scholar with literary tastes Ex. He is really a man of letters.

Man of moment – an important person Ex. Because of his frequent diplomatic missions to troubled parts of the world, he is often considered to be the man of the moment.

Man of word – a reliable person Ex. If he said he would come, he will come – he is a man of word.

Much ado about nothing – to make fuss Ex. The government's claims that the infrastructure sectors in India were rapidly developing was described by a scribe as much ado about nothing.

To make a clean sweep of – to remove Ex. South Africa made a clean sweep of the series against India.

To make a dash – to go quickly Ex. He made a dash to the accident spot.

To make a mark – to distinguish oneself Ex. He is beginning to make a mark as an actor.

To make a mess of – to bungle Ex. He made a mess of his work.

To make a mountain of mole hill – to exaggerate difficulties or trifles Ex. You don't have to assume that the child has had an accident just because he's late – you're always making mountains of mole hills.

To make a point of – to do something (certainly). Ex. I'll make a point of asking her today.

To make amends for – to compensate for damage or injury Ex. He gave her a present to make amends for his rudeness.

To make an example of – to punish someone to make it a warning to others Ex. The judge decided to make an example of the young thief and sent him to prison for five years.

To make away with – to carry off Ex. The thief made away with the suitcase full of currency notes.

To make both ends meet – to live within one's income Ex. The widow and her four children found it difficult to make both ends meet.

To make do without – to manage without something Ex. The meat is over, so we'll have to make do without it today.

To make free with – to take liberty with Ex. His wife suspected him of making free with the typists in the office.

To make hay while the sun shines – to make the best use of the opportunity Ex. We have been given an unexpected holiday tomorrow, so I think I'll make hay while the sun shines and get started on the spring-cleaning.

To make headway – to progress slowly and steadily Ex. We are not making much headway with this new scheme.

To make light of – to treat lightly, to attach no importance Ex. He had a bad fall but made light of his cuts and carried on.

To make much of – to make an issue of something trivial Ex. He made much of the fact that the salaries were paid earlier than the due date.

To make neither head nor tail of – not to understand Ex. I can make neither head nor tail out of the subject.

To make one's way – to succeed, to prosper Ex. They made their way towards the centre of the town.

To make the flesh creep – to cause horror Ex. That science fiction story really made my flesh creep.

To make the heart bleed – to be filled with sorrow or pity Ex. My heart really bleed for him when I heard he was now so poor he had to sell one of his four holiday homes.

To make up – to compensate Ex. Next week we'll try to make up for lost time.

To make up one's mind – to resolve Ex. He made up his mind to change the job.

To make up with – to compose one's differences Ex. Realizing his mistake, the husband finally made up with his wife.

To make way – to make room for others Ex. The crowd parted to make way for the ambulance.

Wide of the mark – irrelevant Ex. He answer was wide of the mark.

"N"

A narrow escape – to be saved with a great difficulty Ex. Thank God she had cancelled her ticket. – it was a narrow escape for her, because the bus met with an accident that day.

A necessary evil – something which cannot be avoided Ex. She had to make a necessary evil of telling a lie for her son's benefit.

Neck and neck – side by side; even in a race or contest Ex. The top two students were obviously neck and neck for the class prize.

Nook and corner – everywhere Ex. They searched for the diamond ring in every nook and corner.

Not worth the salt – good for nothing Ex. If he can't even do that, he's not worth his salt.

Now and again – occasionally Ex. I see him at the club every now and again.

Null and void – invalid, of no effect Ex. The law has become null and void now.

To nip in the bud – to destroy a thing at the very beginning Ex. The managers nipped the strike in the bud.

To nurse a grudge – to have jealousy or revenge Ex. She nurses a grudge against me – her action shows that.

"O"

Odds and ends – different things, big and small Ex. There were various odds and ends lying about on the table.

Off hand – without previous preparation Ex. He made an off hand remark.

Of no avail – of no use Ex. This scheme is of no avail.

Of one's own accord – of one's own free will Ex. France conducted the N-tests of its own accord.

On one's last legs – about to fall Ex. The company is on its last legs now.

On the sly – privately Ex. I think he's helping himself to the firm's stationery on the sly.

On the spur of the moment – without any deliberation, at once Ex. We decided to go to Paris on the spur of the moment.

Order of the day – something common or general Ex. Hats with feathers are the order of the day at fashionable weddings this year.

Out of pocket – without money, short of Ex. His last deal has left him out of pocket.

Out of the wood – out of danger or difficulty Ex. We're not out of the woods yet by a long way.

Once for all – finally Ex. Once for all, I refuse !

Out of joint – in disorder and confusion Ex. He has put all the matters out of joint.

On the face of it – apparently Ex. On the face of it, the problem was quite easy but it actually turned out to be very difficult.

On the ground of – for Ex. He took a leave from the office on grounds of his illness.

To be on the look out for – to be in the search of Ex. She is on the look out for a governess for her daughter.

To be on the right side of – to be less than or below Ex. The secret of his success is that he has always managed to be on the right side of the powers that be.

To be on the verge of – on the point of, about to Ex. She was on the verge of committing suicide when her mother reached there.

To be on the wane – to decline Ex. His power is on the wane.

To be on the wrong side of – to be more than Ex. Having found himself on the wrong side of the law, he meekly gave in.

"P"

- Pillar to post** – from one place of shelter to another Ex. He was driven from pillar to post in search of a job.
- Point blank** – frankly Ex. You can talk point blank with your boss for the raise in income.
- Pros and cons** – arguments for and against Ex. Let's hear all the pros and cons before we make a decision.
- To pay in the same coin** – to give tit for tat Ex. Vindictive people always try to pay back in the same coin.
- To pay lip service** – sympathy, to pretend to be faithful Ex. She has stopped even paying lip-service to the rules.
- To pay off old scores** – to have revenge Ex. I have to pay off some old scores to her.
- To play ducks and drakes** – to spend lavishly Ex. The govt. officials are not expected to play ducks and drakes with the funds.
- To play fast and loose** – to say one thing and to do another (be inconsistent) Ex. The cop threatened the thief not to play fast and loose with him.
- To play into the hands of** – to be under the control of Ex. By accepting the money he has played right into my hands.
- To play second fiddle** – to be in a subordinate position Ex. He disliked playing the second fiddle to anyone and soon left the firm to start his own business.
- To play to the gallery** – to appeal to lower taste Ex. The Director of the firm played to the gallery by misbehaving with his lady staff member.
- To play truant** – to stay away from class Ex. The teacher gave him a good scolding for playing truant.
- To plead guilty** – to confess one's crime Ex. At last the criminal pleaded guilty.
- To pocket an insult** – to bear insult quietly Ex. She pocketed all the insults just for the sake of her child.
- To poison one's ears** – to prejudice Ex. If you keep taking interest in the firebrand leader's parochial speeches, you are likely to poison your ears.
- To poke one's nose** – to interfere with Ex. He is always poking his nose into my affairs.
- To pull a long face** – to look sad and worried Ex. She pulled a long face as she was not selected for the Republic Day parade at Delhi.
- To pull one's legs** – to make a fool of Ex. You haven't really got a black mark on your face – he's only pulling your leg.
- To put a spoke in one's wheel** – to hinder one's progress Ex. It's time someone put a spoke in his wheel – he always seems to get what he wants.
- To put heads together** – to consult Ex. We can buy a good product if we put our heads together.
- To put one's foot down** – to show determination Ex. He wanted to go to Spain but I put my foot down and refused to let him to.
- To put the best foot forward** – to do one's best Ex. If you put your best foot forward you will complete the work in time.
- To put the cart before the horse** – to do things in a wrong manner Ex. Isn't it rather putting the cart before the horse to redecorate the bathroom when you are planning to put in a new bath soon?

"R"

- A rainy day** – a time of difficulty or poverty Ex. I don't spend my whole salary – I put some in the bank for a rainy day.
- A red letter day** – auspicious day of rejoicing, lucky and important day Ex. The day I won a prize on the football pools was a real red letter day.
- A red rag to a bull** – highly irritating, a cause for anger Ex. Criticizing the liberal party in front of him is like a red rag to a bull.
- A rolling stone** – one who is never constant to one work or the other Ex. He changes his job after every two months – he is a rolling stone.
- A rough diamond** – an illiterate but noble person Ex. The hero of a western film is often a rough diamond.
- A royal road** – an easy way to achieve an end Ex. There is no royal road to the IIMs.
- Rain or shine** – under all circumstances Ex. He goes for a long walk every morning, rain or shine.
- Red tapism** – official formalities causing excessive delays Ex. Red tapism has been the nemesis of many a project in India.
- Right hand man** – a very useful person on whom one can depend Ex. I couldn't do without William – he is my right hand man.
- Rise from the ranks** – to rise from a humble position Ex. Today he is a IAS officer but he has risen from the ranks.
- Root and branch** – completely, entirely Ex. This evil system must be destroyed root and branch.
- Run over** – go over Ex. Don't let the dog out of the garden or he'll get run over.
- Run to seed** – to become weak Ex. She has run to seed after her illness.
- The rank and file** – the masses Ex. The rank and file in a trade union do not always agree with their officials.
- To rack one's brains** – to think hard Ex. He racked his brains at the problem.
- To read between the lines** – to read carefully Ex. She said she was managing all right but reading between the lines I could see she was tired.
- To rest on one's laurels** – to rest satisfied with the honours already won Ex. I think it used to be a good school but it has been resting on its laurels for twenty years or so.
- To rest on one's oars** – to rest after hard work Ex. After the hard work of the last few weeks, I think I am entitled to rest on my oars for a day or two.
- To ride roughshod over** – to be inconsiderate or cruel Ex. He is so ambitious that he rides roughshod over everyone.
- To rise to the occasion** – to be found equal to the task Ex. He had never been asked to chair a meeting before but he rose to the occasion magnificently.
- To rub shoulders with** – to come in close touch with Ex. He rubs shoulders with some very strange people in his job.
- To run amuck** – to go mad Ex. She ran amuck with pain.
- To run down** – weak in health Ex. She has run down after malaria.
- To run riot** – to wander without restraint Ex. When the teacher left the room the children ran riot.
- To run the gauntlet** – to undergo severe criticism Ex. The government always has to run the gauntlet of the trade unions.

"S"

A sharp tongue – a bitter tongue Ex. He could bear his wife's sharp tongue no longer.

A sheet anchor – the chief support Ex. She is the sheet anchor of the company.

A square deal – a fair bargain, justice Ex. You always get a square deal in that shop.

A square meal – full meal Ex. Her children never seem to get a square meal.

A square peg in a round hole – a misfit Ex. The director of the firm dismissed him because he was like a square peg in a round hole.

A stepping stone – source of success or help Ex. This course is a stepping stone towards the battle ahead.

A storm in a tea cup – a quarrel for trifling reason Ex. We thought that they had decided not to get married but their quarrel was just a storm in a tea cup.

A stumbling block – a great obstacle Ex. The scheme would be excellent but its cost is the main stumbling block.

By the skin of one's teeth – very narrowly Ex. We escaped by the skin of our teeth.

Scapegoat – a person who is made to bear the blame of others Ex. She has become a scapegoat in the house.

Scot free – to go without punishment Ex. H Mehta apparently went scot free.

See through – understand Ex. We saw through him and his little plan.

Shake in the shoes – to be in a state of fear Ex. He shook in the shoe when he was brought before the Judge.

Shake off – to get rid of Ex. By running very hard he managed to shake off his pursuers.

Side issue – something not connected with the matter in hand Ex. Inflow of western culture due to economic reformisms a side issue.

Sing low – to express one's views in an inconspicuous manner Ex. Due to the belligerent nature of the boss, he sang low throughout the meeting.

Sink differences – to forget/overlook differences Ex. For the next six months, we are going to sink our differences and work together.

Smooth sailing – no difficulty Ex. Study meticulously and you'll have a smooth sailing for the rest for your life.

Snake in the grass – a hidden enemy, a deceitful person Ex. Beware of him – he's a real snake in the grass.

Sniff at – to show derision for Ex. Having stayed in the US for so long, it would be unfair of you to sniff at the way Indians live.

Spill one's sides – to laugh merrily Ex. She always spills on her sides whenever they have any function at home.

Stand by – to support Ex. She stood by him throughout his trial.

Steer clear of – to avoid, to keep aloof Ex. You should steer clear of her as she is not trustworthy.

Sum and substance – gist, purport Ex. The sum and substance of the meeting was that the company did not want to go in for the JV.

Sweet tooth – liking for sweetmeat Ex. My friend has a sweet tooth, so I always give her chocolates.

Swelled head – pride Ex. He got a swelled head when he got the position of a Manager in the firm by setting aside his seniors.

Sword of Damocles – an impending danger Ex. The sword of Damocles has been hanging over us ever since we discovered my husband has cancer.

To do a snow job – to fool someone Ex. The salesman did a snow job when he offered 30% discount for an obsolete product.

To sail in the same boat – to be equally exposed to risk Ex. India and Pakistan are sailing in the same boat.

To sail under false colours – to pretend to be what one is not, to try to deceive Ex. She was very polite to everyone today – she was sailing under false colours.

To save one's skin – to accept without loss Ex. When they were attacked by armed forces, he managed to save his skin by pretending to be dead.

To see a thing through coloured glasses – to see a thing with a prejudiced mind Ex. While comparing different cultures, we do have a tendency to see things through coloured glasses.

To set at naught – to disregard Ex. I set him at naught after hearing him.

To see eye to eye with – to agree Ex. We have never seen eye to eye about this matter.

To set Thames on fire – to try to achieve an impossible distinction Ex. By projecting a 300% growth in sales, you are trying to set Thames on fire.

To show a clean pair of heels – to run away Ex. The police caught one of the thieves but the other showed them a clean pair of heels and got away.

To show the white feather – to show signs of cowardice Ex. He refused to join the protest and the others accused him of showing the white feather.

To sing the blues – to exhibit a discouraged attitude Ex. When the govt. officials gave the project a negative appraisal, he began singing the blues.

To sit on the fence – to remain neutral Ex. You can't sit on the fence forever – sooner or later you'll have to commit yourself.

To sit pretty – to be in a safe and comfortable position Ex. He was sitting pretty after the court's verdict in his favour.

To sit up – to take notice of Ex. That'll make them all sit up !

To smell a rat – to suspect something Ex. The police set up a trap but the thieves smelt a rat and drove away.

To sow the wild oats – to indulge in youthful follies Ex. Students shouldn't waste time sowing their wild oats.

To speak one's mind – to speak frankly Ex. If you'll allow me to speak my mind, I think your plan is quite unsuitable.

To speak volumes – to bear sufficient evidence for or against Ex. She said nothing but her face spoke volumes.

To spill the beans – to give secret information Ex. By Monday it was evident that someone had spilled the beans to the newspapers.

To split hairs – to go into minute details Ex. There's no need to split hairs about who actually did what – we both had a hand in it.

To spread like a wild fire – to spread rapidly Ex. The news of the invasion spread like wildfire.

To stand in good stead – to be useful and serviceable Ex. His knowledge of French stood him in good stead when he lost his money in France.

To stand on one's own legs – to be independent Ex. Taking the university degree will surely help him to stand on his legs.

To stand on ceremony – to insist on formalities Ex. Please do not stand on ceremony with me – call me Buddy.

To stand up for – to support Ex. I thanked him for standing up for my proposals.

To stare in the face – to threaten Ex. The accumulated losses are staring the company in the face.

To steal a march – to get the advantage secretly Ex. We stole a march on our rivals by issuing our new formula shampoo two weeks before they launched theirs.

To stem the tide of – to check, to stop Ex. To stem the tide of immigrants, Australia has made extremely stringent laws.

To step into another's shoes – to take another's place Ex. I wouldn't like to step in your shoes when they find out what you have done.

To stick to one's guns – to stand firm, to stick to one's principles Ex. No one believed her story but she stuck to her guns.

To strain every nerve – to try one's best Ex. I strained every nerve to bring a compromise between them.

To stretch a point – to bend the rules Ex. The children are allowed only two sweets a day but we might stretch a point today.

To swallow the bait – to fall an easy victim to temptations Ex. I swallowed the bait when I saw my favourite sweet in the plate.

"T"

A thorn in the flesh – to be a source of anger or displeasure Ex. His sister is a thorn in his flesh.

A turncoat – a person who changes opinions Ex. His boss is a turncoat.

A turning point – anything that brings change Ex. Joining IIM was a turning point in her life.

On tenterhooks – in a state of suspense and anxiety Ex. We were all on tenterhooks waiting to hear the result of the general election.

Take ill – fall ill; consider unfavourably Ex. She will take ill if you refuse her invitation.

Take the cake – to be the topmost Ex. This moron really takes the cake.

Tall talk – boastful and exaggerated talk Ex. His tall talk impresses no one.

Thankless task – a selfless work for which we cannot expect anything Ex. Serving the poor and needy is always a thankless task.

The thin edge of the wedge – small beginning with bright future Ex. This demand is only the thin end of the wedge – soon they'll want more and more.

The three R's – reading, writing and arithmetic Ex. It is often said that modern education spends less time on the three Rs.

Through thick and thin – under all circumstances Ex. They were friends through thick and thin.

Tied to the apron string of – to be dependent upon somebody Ex. He is still tied to his mother's apron strings and is unable to think for himself.

To be on the right scent – to be going in right direction Ex. He has finished his BE and now he is doing MBA – he is on the right scent.

To be taken aback – to be extremely surprised Ex. I was taken aback when I saw the man whom I had heard was dead.

To take a fancy to – to like something Ex. He bought that house because his wife took a fancy to it.

To take a leaf out of another's book – to follow somebody's example Ex. It would be better if you take a leaf out of Pratima's book and arrive early.

To take a thing lying down – to pocket an insult without a murmur Ex. His boss scolded him in the party, which he took lying down.

To take after – to resemble in features Ex. She takes after her father.

To take an issue – to quarrel Ex. They were stopped from taking the issue again & again.

To take away one's breath – to surprise Ex. He nearly took away my breath when he landed up from USA without prior intimation.

To take by storm – to conquer rapidly Ex. The singer took the audience by storm.

To take exception to – to object Ex. The old lady took exception to the rudeness of the children.

To take French leave – leave without permission Ex. The soldier took French leave because he wanted to see his girl friend.

To take heart – to pluck up courage Ex. The soldiers took heart when they heard that reinforcements were coming.

To take off the hat to – to show respect Ex. I always take off the hat to my teachers.

To take one's cue – to take a hint Ex. You should take your cue and behave properly.

To take root – to become firmly established Ex. The new business took root.

To take stock of – to observe and estimate Ex. He had no time to take stock of the situation.

To take the bull by the horns – to face a difficulty boldly Ex. If you want to improve the situation you must take the bull by the horns.

To take the lead – to surge ahead in a competition Ex. Our country has taken a lead in the manufacturing of electronic goods.

To take the plunge – to take a bold decision Ex. She was hesitant about trying to learn French but finally decided to take the plunge.

To take time by the forelock – to act at once, to avoid delay Ex. Don't fight shy of the situation. Take time by the forelock.

To take to heart – to feel Ex. You mustn't take his unkind remarks to heart.

To take to heels – to run away Ex. The thief took to heels when the police arrived.

To take to task – to call to account, to scold, to require explanation Ex. She took him to task for his rudeness to her mother.

To take up the cudgels – to defend, to fight for somebody's claims Ex. She's taken up the cudgels on behalf of women's rights.

To talk shop – to discuss exclusively of one's business on profession Ex. We agreed not to talk shop at the party.

To talk (someone) into – persuade by talking Ex. She talked me into changing my job.

To talk (someone) out of – to discourage Ex. She tried to talk her husband out of going.

To talk through a hat – to exaggerate or bluff or make wild statement Ex. Don't believe what he says – he always talks through his hat.

To tax one's patience – to irritate Ex. She taxed my patience by not coming for the meeting on time.

To tell upon – to affect Ex. The strain of looking after her invalid mother is obviously telling upon her.

To thank one's stars – to consider oneself fortunate Ex. Thanks to my stars, I was not in the bus which met with an accident.

To the letter – completely Ex. He followed his father's instructions to the letter.

To the tune of – to the amount of Ex. He received the bills to the tune of Rs 100.

To throw cold water on – to discourage Ex. She often has good ideas but her boss throws cold water on all of them.

To throw down the gauntlet – to give an open challenge Ex. He threw down the gauntlet by calling his opponent a liar.

To throw mud at – to abuse, to vilify Ex. Ever since the politician's downfall people have been coming forward to throw mud at his achievements.

To tide over – to overcome Ex. The IMF promised a bridge loan to the govt. of India to help it tide over the forex crisis.

To tip off – to give a secret hint Ex. He tipped me off about her arrival.

To toe the line – to follow another's opinion or partly under pressure Ex. He isn't allowed to do as he likes in that firm – they make him toe the line.

To turn a deaf ear to – to refuse to listen to Ex. They tried to persuade her not to go but she turned a deaf ear to their advice.

To turn one's back on – to refuse to help Ex. All his friends turned their back on him when he went bankrupt.

To turn one's head – to be proud Ex. His success at the race course has turned his head.

To turn over a new leaf – a change for the better Ex. He has been in jail several times but now he seems to have turned over a new leaf.

To turn tail – to withdraw cowardly Ex. He turned tail to the war.

To turn the corner – to pass the critical stage Ex. He was very ill but he's turned the corner now.

To turn the tables on – to reverse the situation Ex. I'll turn the tables on you one day and I will be the boss.

To turn turtle – to upset, to capsize Ex. The boat turned turtle in the rough sea.

Tooth and nail – furiously, violently Ex. They fought tooth and nail.

True to one's salt – to be loyal to someone Ex. Many of them gave him big offers but he was true to his salt and thus rejected them all and continued with the old job.

Twinkling of an eye – very quickly Ex. He arrived in the twinkling of an eye.

"U"

An uphill task – a difficult work Ex. Making him speak the truth was an uphill task.

Under a cloud – in disfavour or disgrace Ex. He wasn't expelled from the firm but he certainly left under a cloud.

Under lock and key – carefully Ex. I always keep all my medicines under lock and key so the children can't get hold of them.

Under the thumb of – under the control of Ex. She is completely under the thumb of her husband.

Up and doing – active Ex. I like to be up and doing early when I have guests for lunch.

Up one's sleeves – something hidden but ready for use in reserve Ex. I am keeping this idea up my sleeves for the time being.

Up to the mark – up to certain standard Ex. His work hasn't been up to the mark for some time.

Ups and downs – good and bad times Ex. We all have our ups and downs.

Utopian scheme – a visionary scheme, not practicable Ex. Your old scheme has become an utopian scheme.

"V"

A vexed question – a question regarding which there has been much controversy but no solution has been arrived at Ex. We still have not solved the vexed question of who is to pay for the improvements of our school.

To vie with – to compete with Ex. Our company is going to vie with the Tatas.

"W"

A wet blanket – kill joy, a dull fellow who spoils our joy Ex. Don't ask him to the party – he's such a wet blanket.

A white elephant – an expensive burdensome but use less thing Ex. That enormous wardrobe your mother gave us has been nothing but a white elephant.

A white lie – a harmless lie Ex. I'd rather tell my mother a white lie than tell her the truth and upset her.

A wild goose chase – a foolish and useless search Ex. The false clue sent us north on a wild-geese chase, while the criminals escaped southwards.

A wolf in a sheep's clothing – a hypocrite, a deceiver Ex. I always suspected that his meek little wife was a wolf in sheep's clothing.

To be within an ace of – almost nearly Ex. He was within an ace of success.

To be worth its weight in gold – to be very precious Ex. This book is worth its weight in gold.

To wash one's dirty linen in public – to tell people about one's private matters Ex. If you contest the divorce case your wife is bringing against you, it will simply result in a lot of washing of dirty linen in public.

To wash one's hands of – to have no connection Ex. He told them that if they wouldn't listen to his advice, he would wash his hands of their schemes.

To weather the storm – to come out safely through a difficulty Ex. Next year or two will be very difficult for our firm but I think we will weather the storm.

To while away – to pass in amusement Ex. We whiled away our vacations.

To win laurels – to achieve success or win fame Ex. He won laurels for his family by getting selected in the R. D. parade.

To win the palm – to win a prize Ex. She won the palm in the debate competition.

To wind up – to bring to an end Ex. He will wind up his business and go to live with his son in America.

To worship the rising sun – to respect the man who is rising in power Ex. Indian politics is all about worshipping the rising sun.

Wait upon – to serve Ex. She waited upon them happily when they came to her house for dinner at an odd hour.

Walk over – very easy victory Ex. In the football match the A team walked over the B team, as the players in B team were new.

Wash out – quite dull Ex. The match was an entire wash out.

Ways and means – resources Ex. You must use any ways and means you can think of.

Wear and tear – decrease in value due to constant use Ex. I can't pay you more than Rs. 50 for this box, taking into consideration its wear and tear.

Wheels within wheels – complication Ex. It would seem reasonable to deal with the problem as you suggest but there are unfortunately wheels within wheels.

When all is said and done – as a conclusion Ex. Now let us stop discussing the matter – when all is said and done.

Wide of the mark – beside the purpose Ex. Please stop talking now, you are going wide of the mark.

Willy-nilly – somehow or the other Ex. I shall go and get the order willy-nilly.

Windfall – unexpected good fortune Ex. Her coming to my house was a windfall for me.

Wishful thinking – belief founded on wishes rather than facts Ex. His belief that she will marry a poor man like him is only wishful thinking.

With a grain of salt – with some reservation, not at the face value of Ex. Please take this assessment with a grain of salt.

With a vengeance – excessively Ex. If the plans for the redevelopment scheme are approved, they'll start knocking houses down with a vengeance.

With one accord – unanimously, with one voice. Ex. With one accord they stood up to cheer him.

With open arms – warmly and cordially Ex. They received their visitors with open arms.

Within an ace of – almost, to be nearly Ex. He was within an ace of success.

Word of mouth – a solemn promise Ex. This deal has been clinched only on the basis of word of mouth.