A

from A to Z
including all the facts about a subject
● This book tells the story of Diana’s life from A to Z.

get/go from A to B
to travel from one place to another place
● When I’m travelling, I try to work out the quickest way of getting from A to B.

about
► See: About time too!

about-face
an about-face mainly American
a sudden and complete change of someone’s ideas, plans, or actions
● In an about-face on the morning of his trial, the accused changed his plea to guilty.
● Both papers did an about-face and published a condemnation of his actions.

above
above and beyond sth
more than
● The support given to us by the police was above and beyond what we could have expected.
● She doesn’t receive any extra money, above and beyond what she’s paid by the council.
● The number of hours she puts into her job is definitely above and beyond the call of duty.
(= more than is expected of her)
► See also: be above board

absence
Absence makes the heart grow fonder.
something that you say which means being apart from someone that you love makes you love them even more
● ‘My boyfriend’s going to South America and I won’t see him for six months.’ ‘Ah well, absence makes the heart grow fonder.’

accept
► See: accept/take sth as gospel (truth)

calendar
an accident waiting to happen
a very dangerous situation in which an accident is very likely
● The speed that people drive along this road, it’s an accident waiting to happen.

(whether) by accident or design
whether intended to be this way or not
● The system, whether by accident or design, benefits people who live in the cities more than people who live in the country.

more by accident than (by) design
because of luck and not because of skill
● I kicked the ball and, more by accident than design, it found its way into the net.

accident
accidentally
accidentally on purpose humorous
if you do something accidentally on purpose, you intend to do it but you pretend that it was an accident
● If I, accidentally on purpose, forget to bring her address with us, we won’t be able to visit her after all.

accidents
accidents will happen
something that you say in order to make someone feel less guilty when they have just damaged something that does not belong to them
● Oh well, accidents will happen. I can always buy another bowl.

accord
of your own accord
if you do something of your own accord, you do it without being asked to do it
● She left of her own accord. I didn’t tell her to go.

account
be brought/called to account formal
be brought to account
formal
be forced to explain something you did wrong, and usually to be punished
● What concerns us most is that the people responsible for the violence should be brought to account.

on sb’s account
if you do something on someone’s account, you do it because of that person
● Don’t cook anything special on my account. I’m not even very hungry.
on no account must/should sb do sth
if you tell someone that on no account must they do something, you mean that they must never, for any reason do that thing.

On no account must the contents of this document be shown to any other person.

on your own account
if you do something on your own account, you do it by yourself or for yourself.

I decided to ask a few questions about the accident on my own account.

take sth/sb into account
take account of sth/sb

to think about something or someone when you are making a decision or a judgement.

I hope they’ll take her age into account when they’re judging her work.

They took into account that he’d never been in trouble before.

Her book takes no account of (= does not consider) recent research carried out in America.

accounting

There’s no accounting for taste!
something that you say when you cannot understand why someone likes something or someone.

‘I love having a cold shower before breakfast.’ ‘Well, there’s no accounting for taste!’

aces

have/hold all the aces
to be in a strong position when you are competing with someone else, because you have all the advantages.

In the battle between road builders and environmentalists, the road builders seem to hold all the aces.

Achilles

an Achilles’ heel
a small fault in a person or system which might cause them to fail.

Achilles was a man in Greek mythology (= an ancient set of stories) who was killed when he was injured on the heel. This was the only part of his body where he could be harmed.

As a team they’re strong on attack but they have a weak defence that might prove to be their Achilles’ heel.

Vanity was his Achilles’ heel.

acid

an acid test
a test which will really prove the value, quality, or truth of something.

The new show was well received but viewing figures for the next episode will be the real acid test.

The acid test for the product will be whether people actually buy it.

across

See: across the board

act

Act your age!
something that you say to someone who is being silly to tell them to behave in a more serious way.

Oh, act your age, Chris! You can’t expect to have your own way all the time.

I always want to tell middle-aged men in sports cars to act their age.
a balancing/juggling act

a difficult situation in which you try to achieve several different things at the same time. It's so exhausting having to perform the balancing act between work and family. Keeping both sides in the dispute happy was a difficult juggling act which required an extraordinary degree of diplomacy.

be a hard/tough act to follow

to be so good it is not likely that anyone or anything else that comes after will be as good. Last year's thrilling Super Bowl, when the New York Giants beat the Buffalo Bills 20-19 will be a hard act to follow. The new Chairman knows his predecessor is a tough act to follow.

get your act together informal
to organize your activities so that you do things in an effective way. If these people could ever get their act together, they could produce unbeatable wines. You'd better get your act together and start looking for a job.

gain on the act

to become involved in something successful that someone else has started so that you can become successful yourself. We ran a successful local delivery business until other local companies started trying to get in on the act.

act/play the fool

act/play the goat

actions

be out of action

1 if a machine or vehicle is out of action, it is not working or cannot be used. I'm afraid the TV's out of action.

put sth out of action

• The freezing weather has put many trains out of action.

2 if someone who plays sport is out of action, they are injured and cannot play. Towers is out of action with a broken wrist.

put sb out of action

• A bad fall put him out of action for 2 months.

a piece/slice of the action informal

being involved in something successful that someone else started. Now research has proved that the new drug is effective, everyone wants a piece of the action.

actress

as the actress said to the bishop humorous

used to show that someone has said something that could have another meaning connected to sex. It slides right in the hole, as the actress said to the bishop.

Adam

► See: not know sb from Adam

add

add fuel to the fire/flames

to make an argument or a bad situation worse. His mild words only added fuel to the fire. Isabelle was furious.

add insult to injury

to make a bad situation even worse for someone by doing something else to upset them. First of all he arrived an hour late and then, to add insult to injury, he proceeded to complain about my choice of restaurant.
ad hoc

**ad hoc**

an ad hoc organization or process is not planned but is formed or arranged when it is necessary for a particular purpose

- An ad hoc group of 75 parents is leading the protest to demand the resignation of the headteacher.
- He doesn’t charge a set amount for his work but negotiates fees on an ad hoc basis.

**ad infinitum**

if something happens or continues ad infinitum, it happens again and again in the same way, or it continues forever

- The TV station just shows repeats of old comedy programmes ad infinitum.
- Her list of complaints went on and on ad infinitum.

**ad nauseam**

if someone discusses something ad nauseam, they talk about it so much that it becomes very boring

- She talks ad nauseam about how brilliant her children are.

**ado**

**much ado about nothing**
a lot of trouble and excitement about something which is not important

- Much Ado about Nothing is the title of a famous play by Shakespeare.
- People have been getting very upset about the seating arrangements for the Christmas dinner, but as far as I’m concerned it’s all much ado about nothing.

**without further/more ado**

without any delay

- And so, without further ado, let me introduce you to tonight’s speaker.

**afraid**

**be afraid of your own shadow**
to be extremely nervous and easily frightened

- She’s always having panic attacks, she’s the kind of person who’s afraid of her own shadow.

**after**

- See: after a fashion

**against**

- See: against your better judgement

**age**

**come of age** slightly formal

1 to reach the age when you are an adult and are legally responsible for your behaviour
- So what of all the fifty-thousand youngsters who come of age this spring? Who will they be voting for?

2 something or someone that has come of age has reached full, successful development

- After years of sophisticated mimicry, Japanese design has come of age.

- See also: act your age!

**agenda**

**at the top of the/sb’s agenda**

if a subject or plan is at the top of someone’s agenda, it is the most important thing they want to discuss or deal with

- The government has put education at the top of its agenda.
- When the schoolteachers meet, classroom violence will be high on the agenda. (= one of the most important subjects to discuss)

**on the/sb’s agenda**

if a subject, plan, or activity is on the agenda, people are willing to talk about it, or to try to make it happen

- He made it clear that strike action was not on the agenda

**opposite**: **off the/sb’s agenda**

- Foreign travel is off the agenda (= not going to happen) until we’ve got some money together.

- See also: a hidden agenda

**set the agenda**

**agony**

- See: pile on the agony

**ahead**

- See: be ahead of the game

**be ahead of the pack**

**aid**

**What’s sth in aid of?** British & Australian informal

something that you say when you want to know why someone has done something

- I heard the shouting from the other side of the building. What was that in aid of?
- A present! What’s this in aid of?
### aide-mémoire

**an aide-mémoire**

Formal

A piece of writing or a picture that helps you to remember something. *I write notes to myself and put them on the board. It serves as an aide-mémoire.*

### ain’t

See: **If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.**

### air

**be floating/walking on air**

To be very happy and excited because something very pleasant has happened to you. *When the doctor told me I was going to have a baby, I was walking on air.*

**be in the air**

1. If a feeling, especially excitement, is in the air, everyone is feeling it at the same time. *There was excitement in the air as people gathered in the main square to hear the proclamation.*
2. To be going to happen very soon. *The daffodils are in flower and spring is definitely in the air.*

**be up in the air**

If a matter is up in the air, no decision has been made, often because other matters have to be decided first. *I may be moving to New Zealand, but it’s still up in the air.*

**airs and graces**

False ways of behaving that are intended to make other people feel that you are important and belong to a high social class.

### airy-fairy

**airy-fairy**

British informal

Not practical or not useful in real situations. *She’s talking about selling her house and buying an old castle in Ireland. It all sounds a bit airy-fairy to me.*

### aises

See: Have sb rolling in the aisles

### à la carte

**à la carte**

If you eat à la carte, you choose each dish from a separate list instead of eating a fixed combination of dishes at a fixed price. *I don’t know whether to have the set-menu or go à la carte.*

### Aladdin

**an Aladdin’s cave**

British

A place that contains many interesting or valuable objects. *(often + of)* We found a shop that was a real Aladdin’s cave of beautiful antiques.

### alarm

**set (the) alarm bells ringing**

If something sets alarm bells ringing, it makes you feel worried because it is a sign that there may be a problem.

*Symptoms which should set alarm bells ringing are often ignored by doctors.*

**ring/sound alarm bells**

The huge vote for fascist candidates should ring alarm bells (= cause people to worry) across Europe.

**alarm bells start to ring**

Alarm bells started to ring (= I became worried) when I found out that he still lived with his mother.

### albatross

**albatross**

**albatross around/round your neck**

Literary

Something that you have done or are connected with that keeps causing you problems and stops you from being successful. *An albatross is a large white bird. In the poem The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a man on a ship kills an albatross which is then hung round his neck to show that he has brought bad
luck. ● The company that he founded in 1983 is now an albatross around his neck, making losses of several hundreds of thousands a year.

**alert**

**be on full/red alert**

if soldiers are on full alert, they know that a situation is dangerous and are prepared to act immediately if necessary. ● The British flagship in the area went to battle stations and remained on full alert for twenty minutes.

**be put on full/red alert** ● The army was put on red alert as the peace talks began to break down.

**al fresco**

outside. ● We ate al fresco under the olive trees. ● An al fresco performance of The Tempest was the highlight of our visit.

**alive**

**be alive and kicking**

to continue to live or exist and be full of energy. ● She said she'd seen him last week and he was alive and kicking. ● Theatre in Madrid is alive and kicking.

**be alive and well**

to continue to be popular or successful. ● Despite rumours to the contrary, feminism is alive and well. ● (often + and doing sth) Quadrophonic sound is alive and well and making money for its inventor.

**be alive with sb**

to be covered with or full of something that is moving. ● Don’t sit there – the grass is alive with ants.

- See also: eat sb alive
- skin sb alive

**all**

**all in all**

thinking about all parts of a situation together. ● All in all, I think we can say the visit was a success.

**all or nothing**

completely or not at all. ● If she can’t be the best she won’t even compete. It’s all or nothing with her. ● Tom has an all or nothing approach to relationships.
achieve something • (often + to do sth)
They went all out to make the party a success. • (often + for) The team is going all out for victory.

d all-out • (always before noun) We made an all-out effort to finish decorating the hall by the end of the weekend.

t’s all (that) sb
do to do sth
if it’s all someone can do to do something, they just manage to do it although it is difficult • It was all I could do to stop myself screaming with pain.

It’s all the same to me. British, American & Australian
It’s all one to me. Australian
something that you say when it is not important to you what happens • ‘Would you prefer to go out for a meal or eat in?’ ‘It’s all the same to me.’

That’s sb all over! informal
something that you say when you are talking about something bad that someone has done and you want to say that it is typical of their character • She’s always complaining. That’s Claire all over.

to cap/crown/top it all
something that you say when you want to tell someone the worst event in a series of bad events that has happened to you • He spilled red wine on the carpet, insulted my mother, and to cap it all, broke my favourite vase.

See also: for all sb cares
be all in a day’s work
be all ears
if all else fails
be all eyes
be all fur coat and no knickers
It’s all go.
All in good time.
It’s all Greek to me.
be all heart
at all hours (of the day and night)
at all hours (of the night)
to all intents and purposes
and all that jazz
for all sb knows
be all in the/your mind
in all modesty

not be all moonlight and roses
be all mouth
in all but name
That’s all you need!
be all smiles
be all sweetness and light
all systems go
be all talk (and no action)
would not do sth for all the tea in China
be all things to all men
be all fingers and thumbs
go all the way
be all wet
All work and no play (makes Jack a dull boy).
That’s all she wrote!

alley
be (right) up sb’s alley informal
be (right) down sb’s alley American & Australian informal
if something is right up someone’s alley, it is exactly the type of thing that they know about or like to do • The job should be right up Steve’s alley – working with computers, software and stuff.

allow
See: allow/give sb (a) free rein
allow/give sth (a) free rein
allow/give sth full play

all-rounder
an all-rounder British & Australian
someone who is good at many different things, especially in sport • The most recent member of the England team is a good all-rounder.

all-singing
all-singing, all-dancing humorous
very modern and technically advanced • She showed us the new all-singing, all-dancing graphics software she’d bought for her computer.

alma mater
the alma mater American
the official song of a school, college or university • We ended our class reunion by singing the alma mater.
your alma mater formal
the school, college, or university where you studied • She has been offered the position of professor of international
alone

to do something by yourself and without help from other people • Honda has chosen to go it alone rather than set up a joint venture with an American partner.

leave/let well enough alone American

to leave something the way it is, because trying to improve it might make it worse • I’m not doing any more on that painting – it’s time to let well enough alone.

along

See: somewhere along the line

along the lines of sth along the way

altogether

in the altogether humorous

naked • He was just standing there in the altogether.

always

See: always the bridesmaid, never the bride

amber

an amber gambler British informal

someone who drives very fast past the lights that control traffic when the signal is about to tell them to stop • She’s an impatient driver – a bit of an amber gambler.

ambulance

an ambulance chaser informal

a lawyer who finds work by persuading people who have been hurt in accidents to ask for money from the person who injured them • He was a notorious ambulance chaser. He made millions out of other people’s misfortunes.

amen

Amen to that.

said to show that you agree strongly with something that someone has just said • “Thank goodness we didn’t go.” ‘Amen to that!’

be as American as apple pie

to be typically American • Country and western music is as American as apple pie.

not go amiss British, American & Australian informal

not come amiss British & Australian informal

if something would not go amiss, it would be useful and might help to improve a situation • (usually in conditional tenses) A word of apology would not go amiss. • Some extra helpers never come amiss.

amour propre

formal

the good feelings and respect you have for yourself • The critics’ negative reaction to his first novel wounded his amour propre.

another

See: be another/a different kettle of fish

live to fight another day another nail in the coffin but that’s another story another string to your bow be in another world

answer

the call of nature humorous

to urinate (= pass liquid from the body) • I had to go into the woods to answer the call of nature.

sb’s answer to sb/sth

someone or something that is just as good as a more famous person or thing in the place where it comes from • The Kennedy clan was America’s answer to the royal families of Europe.

the answer to sb’s prayers

someone or something that has needed very much for a long time • A new supermarket delivery service was the answer to my prayers.

not take no for an answer

if someone will not take no for an answer, they continue asking for something although their request has already been refused • I’ve told her again and again
that you’re too busy to see her, but she
won’t take no for an answer.
▶ See also: have a lot to answer for

ante
raise/up the ante
to increase your demands or to increase
the risks in a situation, in order to
achieve a better result. The ante is an
amount of money that must be paid in
card games before each part of the game
can continue. The government has
upped the ante by refusing to negotiate
until a ceasefire has been agreed.

ants
have ants in your pants humorous
to not be able to keep still because you
are very excited or worried about
something. She’s got ants in her pants
because she’s going to a party tonight.

any
▶ See: Any port in a storm.
(at any) price
(in) any way, shape, or form
no one will be any the wiser

anybody
anybody who is anybody humorous
if anybody who is anybody is doing
something, all the most famous and
important people are doing that thing.
Anybody who is anybody will be at the
Queen’s birthday celebrations.

be anybody’s guess
if a piece of information is anybody’s
guess, no one knows it. Why Becky left is
anybody’s guess. ‘So what’s going to
happen now?’ ‘That’s anybody’s guess.’

ape
go ape informal
go apeshit taboo
to become very angry. Vicky’ll go ape
when she sees this mess.

apology
be an apology for sth humorous
to be a very bad example of something
That old thing is an apology for a car.

appearances
▶ See: keep up appearances

appetite
▶ See: whet sb’s appetite

apple
An apple a day keeps the doctor
away, old-fashioned
something that you say which means
eating an apple every day will keep you
healthy. If ‘an apple a day keeps the
doctor away,’ then why have I got this
terrible cold?
the apple of sb’s eye
the person who someone loves most and
is very proud of. His youngest son was
the apple of his eye.

a bad/rotten apple
one bad person in a group of people who
are good. You’ll find the occasional rotten
apple in every organization.

applecart
▶ See: upset the applecart

apple-pie
be in apple-pie order
to be very tidy and in good order. Wendy
kept all her belongings in apple-pie order.

apples
apples and oranges American
if two people or things are apples and
oranges, they are completely different.
You can’t compare inner city schools and
schools in the suburbs – they’re apples and
oranges.
She’ll be apples. Australian informal
She’s apples. Australian informal
something that you say in order to tell
someone that they do not need to worry
and that everything will happen as it
should. ‘What if it rains for the wedding?’
‘Don’t worry, she’ll be apples.’
▶ See also: How do you like them apples!

aprés-ski
the social activities that take place in the
evening at hotels and restaurants in
towns where people go to ski. If it’s
aprés-ski you’re after, this town with its
hundred or so bars is the resort for you.
Bars and dancing are among the aprés-
ski activities for the adults.
a priori

accepted without being thought about or questioned • The existence of God is a priori for most people with a religious faith. • In a court of law, a priori assumptions about guilt and innocence can be dangerous.

argue

argue the toss British & Australian informal to disagree with a decision or statement • Are you prepared to argue the toss when you might have to go to court to prove it?

argy-bargy

British informal loud arguments • Did you hear all that argy-bargy outside the Kingston Arms last night?

ark

be out of the ark British & Australian to be very old-fashioned • My granny's hat was straight out of the ark.

went/had gone out with the ark British & Australian humorous if an object or method went out with the ark, it is not used any more • These old manual printing presses went out with the ark – everything's computerized these days.

arm

hold/keep sb at arm's length to not allow someone to become too friendly with you • I always had the feeling she was keeping me at arm's length.

put the arm on sb American informal to try to force someone to do something • If he won't pay up, we'll get Rick to put the arm on him. • See also: could do sth with one arm/hand tied behind their back chance your arm cost (sb) an arm and a leg twist sb’s arm

armed

be armed to the teeth if a person or a country is armed to the teeth, they have many weapons • We walked past a group of soldiers, armed to the teeth.