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)

accident
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.

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.

account
be brought/called 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. ● (often + that) 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!’

ace
an ace in the hole American
an advantage that you have that other people do not know about ● The local team has an ace in the hole with their new player.

come within an ace of sth/doing sth
to almost achieve something ● Linford Christie came within an ace of the world indoor record for the 100m last night.

be within an ace of sth/doing sth
● Her ambition to star in a musical is within an ace of being (= is almost) fulfilled following talks with a West End producer.

have an ace up your sleeve
to have an advantage that other people do not know about ● The new game show has an ace up its sleeve. It will allow viewers to play from home and win prizes.

play your ace
to do the thing that you know will bring you success ● The prosecutor played her ace, the results of the DNA tests on samples taken from the victim’s clothing.

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.

got 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.

got in 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

action

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.

actions

Actions speak louder than words.

something that you say which means that what you do is more important than what you say • Of course the government have made all sorts of promises but as we all know, actions speak louder than words.

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

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

go against the grain
against (all) the odds

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
high on 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**

*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**

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 • *The other children started calling her ‘princess’ because of her airs and graces.*

• *It’s no good putting on airs and graces with me. I knew you when you were working in a shop!* • *Look at you giving yourself airs and graces – think you’re better than us, do you?*

**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.*

**aisles**

► 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.*

*à la carte* • *I’m just going to pick a starter and a main course from the à la carte menu.*

**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.*

*à la mode*

*à la mode* fashionable • *Velvet trousers are à la mode this season.*

**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 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

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.

Quadrophonic sound is alive and well and making money for its inventor.

be alive with sth
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.

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

it's all (that) sb can 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 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 I've never [felt/heard/seen etc.] sth in all my (born) days! be all ears if all else fails all eyes are on sb/sth 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
go it 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 alone British, American & Australian
leave/let well enough alone American
to leave something the way it is, because trying to improve it might make it worse ● In cases of back trouble, it’s difficult to know whether to operate or leave well alone. ● 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!’

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

amiss
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
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 someone 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. (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** humorous
to be a very bad example of something. • That old thing is an apology for a car.

**appearances**

See: keep up appearances

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**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!

**après-ski**

the social activities that take place in the evening at hotels and restaurants in towns where people go to ski. • If it’s après-ski you’re after, this town with its hundred or so bars is the resort for you.

**Bars and dancing are among the après-ski activities for the adults.**
a priori

formal
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 gran’s hat was straight out of the ark.

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
change 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.

armpit

be the armpit of the world/universe humorous
to be a very unpleasant and often dirty place • For some people it’s an exciting, big city – for others it’s the armpit of the universe.

arms

be up in arms
to be very angry • (often + about) The students are up in arms about the standard of teaching at the college. • (often + over) Local traders are up in arms over the effect of the new parking regulations on their businesses.

around

have been around (a bit) informal
if someone has been around, they have had a lot of experience of life and know a lot of things • She’s been around a bit – she should know how to look after herself.

arse

arse about face British & Australian very informal
if something is arse about face, it is placed or arranged the opposite way to the way it should be • No wonder it doesn’t look right, mate, you’ve got the whole frame in arse about face.

arse over tip British very informal
arse over tit British & Australian very informal
if you go arse over tip, you turn upside down with your feet above your head • He put on the front brake too hard and went arse over tip over the handlebars.

be (right) up sb’s arse British very informal
to be driving too close to the car in front of you • That police car’s been up my arse since we left London.

> See also: can’t tell your arse from your elbow

can’t tell your arse from your elbow very informal
if you can’t tell your arse from your elbow, you are stupid and become confused about simple things • It’s no