

Aa

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.*

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
 to 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.*

accounting

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on no account must/should sb do sth*formal*

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 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.*

get 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.*

- ▶ See also: **catch** sb in the act
clean up your 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

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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**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**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 school-teachers 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.* • *I get the feeling that change is 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.*

▶ See also: **clear** the air
 air your **dirty** laundry/linen in public
pluck sth out of 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

alert

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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**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 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.*

all told

in total • *There were 550 people there, all told.*

be all in *old-fashioned*

to be very tired and unable to do any more • *I've had six children to look after today and I'm all in.*

be all over sb

to touch and kiss someone sexually again and again in a public situation • *He was all over her at the party last night.* • (humorous) *It was disgusting, he was all over her like a rash.*

be all over the shop *British informal***be all over the lot** *American informal*

1 to be scattered in a lot of different places • *What have you been doing with your clothes? They're all over the shop!*

2 to be confused and badly organized • *I've been so unimpressed by their campaign. They're all over the shop.* • *How can I tell what's the best deal when lending rates are all over the lot?*

not be all there *informal*

to be slightly crazy • *Some of the things she said made me think she's not quite all there.*

be all very well**be all well and good**

if you say that something is all very well, you mean that although it is good in some ways, it is bad in some ways too • (usually + **but**) *Electric heating is all very well, but what happens if there's a power cut?*

be as [fast/hot/thin etc.] as all get**out** *American & Australian informal*

to be extremely fast, hot, thin etc. • *He's a terrific runner – as fast as all get out.*

be [faster/hotter/thinner etc.] than all get out • *It's hotter than all get out (= extremely hot) in here.*

give your all

to do everything you can in order to achieve something • *You've really got to give your all in the championships.*

give it your all

to do everything you can in order to achieve something • *I want the job badly and I'm prepared to give it my all.*

go all out

to use all your effort and energy to

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 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
 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

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economic policy at Princeton, her alma mater.

• *'Thank goodness we didn't go.' 'Amen to that!'*

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

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

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.
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
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!

après-ski

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

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a priori**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**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.*

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.*

In the following phrases, **arse** is used in British and Australian English, and **ass** in American English.

can't tell your arse from your elbow *very informal***not know 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*