

★ AMERICAN ★

# IDIOMS

AND

## *Some Phrases Just for Fun*

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*eat one's words*

A guide to informal American English for ESL students

Idioms explained, "translated" into standard English, and repeated in example sentences that demonstrate their use in a variety of contexts

Exercises to help make you proficient in expressing yourself and comprehending informal American English

**BARRON'S**

## Section One

### American Idioms and Phrases Just for Fun

#### 1 About

You probably already know the preposition **about**, which has a meaning similar to **concerning** or **of**.

— This is a story about a family of lions.

It can also mean **approximately**.

— His daughter is about eighteen years old.

The word **about** also has a very special usage. It tells that someone or something is ready to begin an action. Note that in this usage it is followed by an infinitive.

— John's father was about to leave for work when the phone rang.

The film is about to start.

#### 2 Abroad/To Go Abroad

This phrase says that someone is **traveling to another country**.

— Maria and John love to go abroad. Their favorite city is Paris.

When **abroad** is used with other verbs, it shows that **someone is located in a foreign country**.

— Her brother is still abroad.

My parents have been living abroad for five years.

#### 3 To Be Afraid

You already know that **to be afraid** means that someone feels **fear**. But it is also often used to show **regret**.

— I'm afraid I can't help you today.

## All of a Sudden

This phrase is similar to the more common adverb **suddenly**, and can almost always be used in place of it.

— All of a sudden there was a loud knocking at the door.

## 5

**All Over**

This phrase is used in place of **over** when it is standing alone, and has the meaning of **ended** or **completed**.

Unfortunately, their relationship is all over. (ended)

It's all over. We can go home now. (completed)

## 6

**Not All There**

This phrase says that someone is **weak-minded or somewhat unable to think clearly**. In a crueler sense it means **crazy**.

— He spoke strangely. He did not seem to be quite all there.

## 7

**To Answer**

This word is usually used as the opposite of **ask** or **question**. As an idiom it is used mostly in three ways:

1. Someone hears a knock at the door, goes to it, and opens it.

— It was John who answered the door.

2. The telephone rings, and someone picks up the receiver.

— After the third ring, Grandmother answered the phone.

3. The doorbell is rung, and someone opens the door.

— I'm in the shower. Someone else will have to answer the bell.

## 8

**To Be Aware (Of)**

This phrase says that the speaker **already knows about** something. Use the preposition **of** when the phrase is followed by a noun or pronoun.

— Why must you remind me that it's raining? I'm aware of the storm.  
Jim wasn't aware that his shoes were untied.

9

### To Get on the Ball

This amusing little phrase says that someone needs to **improve** something.

— Your work is so sloppy. Get on the ball!  
Tom has been too lazy. He needs to get on the ball.

10

**To Make a Beeline For**

Use this idiom to mean that someone is **headed directly** toward some place. It also often suggests that **speed or haste is involved**.

Jack was hungry. He made a beeline for the cafeteria.

*A PHRASE JUST FOR FUN***ALL THAT**

This is a very youthful expression to say that someone is **very good-looking**. And it can be used with either men or women.

Anna is so pretty! She's really all that!

Stop bragging. You're not all that.

11

**On Behalf Of/On Someone's Behalf**

This phrase says that someone is doing something **for** someone else or **in the place of** someone else.

Mr. Brown cannot be here tonight, so I'll be speaking on his behalf.

On behalf of all the graduates, allow me to thank you.

12

**To Bet One's Bottom Dollar**

Use this expression to say that you are **absolutely certain** about something, so certain that you would bet your last dollar.

I'd bet my bottom dollar that the Bulls will win.

13

**Better**

You know this word to be the comparative of **good** but it also has a special usage that says that someone **should** do something or **ought** to do something. It also carries with it the idea of a slight **warning**. Use it with a verb or verb phrase.

You'd better be careful.

My brother better come home on time tonight or Dad will be furious.

14

**To Have the Blues/To Be Blue**

To many the color blue suggests coolness or calm, but in this idiom it means that someone is **sad** or **depressed**.

— Since Jane stopped dating Bob she's been very blue.  
Don't be blue. Think about all the happiness you've had.

15

**To Have a Bone to Pick with Someone**

This strange-sounding phrase means that someone is **upset** or **angry** with someone else and wants to **discuss the problem**.

— Don't leave just yet. I still have a bone to pick with you.  
Mom went back to the store. She has a bone to pick with the clerk.

16

**To Break Down**

Usually this expression is used to say that a machine has **stopped working**.

— The dishwasher has broken down again.

But when it is used with people, it says that someone has become very sad or upset and has **begun to cry**.

— Grandmother broke down upon hearing the news of the fire.  
The poor man couldn't control his tears and suddenly broke down.

17

**To Break the Ice**

This idiom really has nothing to do with ice; instead, it says that someone was the **first to approach** another person.

— The silence was long, but Maria broke the ice with a simple "hello."

18

**A Breath of Fresh Air**

Use this idiom to say that a **welcome change** has taken place. The change can be a person or a situation.

— No one spoke at first, then John's little joke came as a breath of fresh air.

The room was filled with napping old men. Mary's sudden appearance was a breath of fresh air.

19

**Under One's Breath**

This simply means **in a whisper** or **very quietly**.

— "This film is so boring," he said under his breath.

20

**To Brush up On**

This expression is used to say that someone should **study something again** or **finally learn it correctly**.

— The test is tomorrow. I'd better brush up on the last chapter.

You had problems at the last soccer game. You need to brush up on your basic skills.

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**A PHRASE JUST FOR FUN**


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**TO HANG OUT WITH**


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Don't let this unusual phrase puzzle you. It simply means **to spend time with** someone or **to go somewhere with** someone. It often means that a friendship is involved.

— I like hanging out with Anna. She's a nice girl.

— It was too hot to play ball, so Tom and I just hung out with one another.

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21

**To Butt In**

This phrase is often used in place of **to interfere**.

— It's none of your business. Don't butt in.

We were having a quiet talk. Then Bill arrived and tried to butt in.

22

**By the Way**

These three words probably don't give you a clue as to their combined meaning. This phrase is used when someone **doesn't want to forget to mention** something.

— By the way, I saw Mrs. Brown yesterday. She looked very sick.

I'm glad that you'll be at the party tonight. And, by the way, I'll be there, too.

23

**A Card**

This word describes a man (more rarely, a woman) who is very **funny** or **witty**.

— I like Jack. He's such a card.

You always make me laugh. You're a real card.

24

**To Catch (A Vehicle)**

Normally, you use this verb to say that you **captured** someone or that a **ball** was involved.

— They caught the robber in the basement.

That boy never could catch a ball. He's just no athlete.

But it is also used to show that someone has **arrived in time to take transportation**.

I have to go. I have to catch the next bus.

— Can you tell me where I can catch a cab?

If you don't hurry, you won't be able to catch the morning train.

25

**To Catch On**

When used with the preposition **on**, this phrase means the same thing as **understand**.

— This is a hard job, but she caught on fast.

I heard the joke twice, but I just didn't catch on.

26

**A Chip off the Old Block**

This strange combination of words means only that **the son** (rarely the daughter) is very much **like the father**.

— Look at Jim's eyes and nose. He's really a chip off the old block.

27

**A Cock-and-Bull Story**

Use this expression to say that what someone has said is **quite unbelievable** and perhaps even **a lie**.

He said he swam across the lake, but I think it's just a cock-and-bull story.

28

**To Come across As**

These words mean **to seem like**.

She came across as rather stupid, but she was one of the best readers in the class.

29

**To Come To**

This phrase means that someone has **awakened**, usually from an unconscious state or after a serious illness.

Mr. Jones was in a coma for a week. He finally came to this evening.

After the accident the fireman couldn't get the injured woman to come to.

30

**To Come to Know (Someone)**

This expression is used to say that you **became acquainted** with someone and had a special understanding of what that person was.

I came to know him him well after a long camping trip.

She was so quiet at first but when he came to know her, he discovered a very talkative girl.

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**A PHRASE JUST FOR FUN**


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**HOT**

You already know that this word is the opposite of **cold**. It can also suggest that someone is **sexually aroused**. However, here it means that some man or woman is **extremely good-looking**.

Look at that boy over there! He's really hot!

John continued to stare at the new girl in class. She was the hottest girl he had ever seen.

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31

**To Cope With**

This phrase means that someone is **handling a problem with difficulty**. The problem can be with a person, a thing, or a situation.

—His family had to learn to cope with his alcoholism.  
I just can't cope with John anymore. He's hopeless.

32

**Cut-and-Dried**

Use this expression when you want to say that something is **absolutely clear** to you or that **there is no questioning it**.

— There is a cut-and-dried solution to the problem. We have to build the dam.

33

**To Cut a Class**

Many languages have a special verb that says that a student **intentionally misses** a class. In English the verb is **to cut**.

— John hates history. He cut three classes this week.

34

**To Date (Someone)**

This verb says that someone is **seeing** another person **regularly**. They are becoming a couple, and their relationship is becoming **romantic**.

— Maria has been dating Thomas for two months already.  
I'm too busy. I don't have time to date.

35

**To Be up to Date/Out of Date**

These two phrases express the ideas that someone or something is **modern** or **old-fashioned**.

— She always has the latest clothes. She's really up to date.  
Don't you think disco is a little out of date?

36

**To Die Away**

Use this idiom to mean **to become quieter** or **to become weaker**. The word also suggests that this happens **gradually**.

— The sound of her voice died away as she disappeared into the fog.

**To Do Without**

This verb says that someone cannot **bear being without** a certain person or thing.

— I'm so depressed. I can't do without her.

During the war we learned to do without many luxuries.

38

**I Wouldn't Dream of It**

The infinitive form is rarely used with this expression. It appears mostly in its conjugated form and means that someone **is certain that he or she would not do** something.

— Me? Run a marathon? I wouldn't dream of it!

Jack wouldn't dream of going to the dance without me.

39

**To Eat One's Own Words**

This phrase says that someone **is wrong about what he or she has said** and now **has to admit it**.

— The meteorologist promised good weather, but now she's eating her own words. What a storm!

I was sure that Smith would win the election, but I suppose I'll have to eat my own words.

40

**To Keep an Eye On**

This unusual expression means that someone will **watch carefully** or **guard** something.

— Keep an eye on my car. I have to go to the bank.

I can't leave right now. I want to keep an eye on the pot on the stove.

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*A PHRASE JUST FOR FUN*

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**TO KICK THE BUCKET**

— This expression is usually used when someone speaks about someone else's **death** in a **casual** or even **comic** manner. Its synonym is **to die**.

— When you kick the bucket, you're going straight to hell.

— Her house was sold a couple of years after Granny kicked the bucket.

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41

**Face to Face**

This phrase means that two people are **together** and perhaps even **looking at one another**.

— The two leaders finally met face to face to discuss an end to the war.

42

**To Fall in Love/To Be in Love**

These idioms mean that someone is **gradually developing a romantic relationship** with another person. When the development is complete, they **are a couple**.

— I didn't want to fall in love with Mary, but she's so wonderful.  
My grandparents have been in love for fifty years.

43

**In the Family Way**

This phrase is used in the place of **pregnant** or **expecting a baby**. It can refer to the mother-to-be or to the couple.

— Anna is in the family way again. This is her fourth.  
They're so happy. They're finally in the family way.

44

**To Be Fed up With**

This unusual combination of words says that someone is **completely annoyed with** someone or something.

— I quit! I'm fed up with this job.  
Mom was finally fed up with the behavior of her neighbor's dog and called the police.

45

**To Feel Like**

This phrase has nothing to do with **feelings**. It is used in place of **to wish**. Note that it is usually followed by a gerund (going, walking, buying).

— Do you feel like taking a walk?  
I really don't feel like arguing about this again.

46

**To Fire (Someone)**

This verb is used to say that someone is being **discharged** or **losing his job**.

—

Bill came late to work again and was -fired.

The boss threatened to fire her because of her inefficiency.

47

**Fishy**

This little word gives the idea that information **smells bad** and that it is probably **false** information.

— The facts in his report were rather fishy to everyone in class.

48

**Fit As a Fiddle**

This phrase means that someone is **in good health** or **in good physical condition**.

— She was in the hospital for two weeks, but now she's fit as a fiddle.  
Tom exercises every day. He's fit as a fiddle.

49

**To Foot the Bill**

Use this expression to say that someone **has to pay the bill** but is probably **reluctant** to do so.

— Everyone left the restaurant in a hurry, so John was left to foot the bill.

50

**To Get It**

You are probably familiar with the verb **to get** and the many unusual ways it is used. Its basic meaning is **to receive** or **to become**.

— I got several presents for my birthday.  
I'll return to school after I get well.

Among its many other uses, **to get** is used to mean **to understand**, especially when talking about jokes or tricks.

— Everyone laughed loudly, but Maria just didn't get it.  
Say that again. I don't get your meaning.

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*A PHRASE JUST FOR FUN*

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**MAN!**

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You certainly know the meaning of the word **man**; however, it is often used to show **surprise, excitement, or enthusiasm**. It can be used when speaking to a man, a woman, or a group, but remember that it is a **very casual** expression and rarely heard in formal speech.

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Man! I didn't even see that bus coming!

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Oh, man! Just think! Two more hours and vacation starts!

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Man, what a day! It's perfect for a picnic.

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51

**To Get at (Something)**

This use of **to get** says that someone **is implying** something or **is trying to bring up a certain subject**.

— I don't know what you're talking about. What are you getting at?

If you're trying to get at the reason for my anger, you're going to have to speak more kindly.

52

**To Get over Someone/Something**

This use of **to get** says that someone is **no longer interested** in another person or a thing. It usually also gives the idea that there **used to be great interest** and there was some difficulty in losing that interest.

— He's having a hard time getting over her. They dated for two years.

I just can't get over Grandmother's death. I loved her so much.

53

**The Gift of Gab**

Use this idiom when you want to say that someone is a **very talented speaker** or has the **ability to convince** others of what he or she believes.

— Anna has the gift of gab. She was able to talk the policeman out of the traffic ticket.

You should be a car salesman. You really have the gift of gab.

54

**On the Go**

This phrase is usually used in place of **busy** and **in a hurry**.

— John is always rushing somewhere to work, then to school, then home again. He's always on the go.

Her busy job really keeps her on the go.

55

**To Go against One's Grain**

This strange combination of words means that someone or something is **annoying** or **irritating**.

— He talks too much. He really goes against my grain.

Gossip and rumors always went against her grain.

56

**To Go to the Dogs**

The meaning of this phrase actually has nothing to do with dogs. It is another way of saying that something **is in very bad shape** or **ruined**.

— During the depression, the whole country went to the dogs.

If you keep acting like that, your reputation is going to go to the dogs.

57

**With a Grain of Salt**

This phrase comes to English from an ancient source. It was originally used in Latin: *cum grano salis*. In English it means that someone **believes** something but is **skeptical** or **careful** in accepting the information given.

— The statements of the politician must sometimes be taken with a grain of salt.

Jane has often lied. I take everything she says with a grain of salt.

58

**To Guess So**

The verb **to guess** normally means that someone **draws a conclusion** or **makes presumptions** from certain information.

— If I had to guess your age, I'd say you are twenty.

He guessed right. The book was hidden in a drawer.

But this verb is also used in place of **to think** or **to believe** or **to suppose**.

— Do you want to go shopping? I guess so.

I guess Maria won't be going to school today. She's still sick.

59

**To Lend a Hand**

This idiom is a synonym for **to help** or **to aid**.

— You seem busy. Can I lend a hand?

Jane was always willing to lend her teachers a hand.

**To Happen (To Know/To Be/To Do)**

The verb **to happen** means **to occur**.

—It happened on Friday night.

What happened to you yesterday?

When followed by an infinitive phrase it means **by chance**.

— He happened to be at the same party.  
Do you happen to know where State Street is?

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### *A PHRASE JUST FOR FUN*

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#### **TO PAINT THE TOWN RED**

This amusing phrase says that someone or some group of people went out for a **long evening of fun**. It also means that the fun-seekers probably had **too much to drink**.

— The night of graduation the whole class went down to Main Street to paint the town red.

— He was suffering from a hangover this morning because last night he Painted the town red.

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61

#### **To Hitchhike/Hitchhiker/Hitchhiking**

This phrase describes **getting a free ride** in someone else's car. Hitchhikers usually stand at the side of a road, and wave their extended thumbs to passing cars as a signal that they need a **free ride**.

— Many people think hitchhiking is dangerous.

— My mother doesn't like me to hitchhike to school even though it saves a lot of money.  
I usually stop for hitchhikers if it's raining.

62

#### **To Hold One's Tongue**

This phrase is used in place of **to remain silent** or **not to speak**.

— Hold your tongue. Such language is disgraceful.

— Father told him to hold his tongue, but Jim continued to shout at him.

63

#### **Hot Air**

This is a funny expression that means something said is probably **a lie** or **a terrible exaggeration**.

— He said he bought a new car, but I think he's full of hot air.

— She says she has a lot of boyfriends but it's all hot air.

64

**To Be in Hot Water**

This is a synonym for **to be in trouble**.

— You broke Mom's vase. You're in hot water now!

65

**How About?**

This phrase should be used **to ask whether someone is interested in** doing something. Note that it is usually followed by a gerund (going, being, and so on) and is used in a question.

— How about going to a movie tonight?  
How about getting some lunch after the next class?

66

**To Be Ill at Ease**

This idiom says that someone **feels uncomfortable** in a particular situation, because that person **feels out of place or conspicuous**.

— You don't have to be ill at ease at the party. They're all very nice people.

67

**To Jump to Conclusions**

This phrase means that someone is **making quick assumptions** about a person or situation without knowing all the facts.

— You always jump to conclusions. I didn't tear the drapes. The dog did it!

68

**To Keep a Stiff Upper Lip**

This idiom means that someone **remains brave** throughout a difficult situation.

— Keep a stiff upper lip, Private. The battle will be won soon enough.

69

**To Keep in Mind**

A simpler synonym for this phrase is **to remember**.

Keep in mind that there'll be a test on this material tomorrow.

Can't you keep this information in mind for just one day?

70

**To Keep in Touch (With)**

This phrase means **to maintain communication** with someone whether by telephone, letter, or other means.

— After you move to New York, please keep in touch.  
I've kept in touch with my friends in Mexico for five years.

***A PHRASE JUST FOR FUN*****TO PULL SOMEONE'S LEG**

— This unusual phrase has nothing to do with the **physical pulling** of anyone's leg. It really means **to tease** someone or **to joke with** someone.

— He said he thought I could be a great musician, but when he laughed I knew he was just pulling my leg. She ran away with Jim? No! You're pulling my leg!

71

**On the Level**

This phrase is a synonym for **honest**.

— You can always trust John. He's always on the level.  
On the level! I didn't do it!

72

**To Be Liable**

Use this phrase when you want to say that **it is probable** that something will happen. Note that an infinitive usually follows this phrase.

— My sister is liable to say almost anything.  
It's liable to rain. You'd better take an umbrella.

73

**To Look Forward To**

This expression means that someone is **looking at the future with great expectation**.

The young girl was looking forward to the big dance.  
I'll be looking forward to seeing you again.

74

**Look Out!**

This idiom can stand alone as a brief sentence of warning **to be careful**.

- Look out! There's a bus coming!  
Look out! Don't fall!

75

**To Lose One's Temper**

Use this expression when you want to say that someone **is becoming angry**. It suggests that the person's anger has developed **suddenly**.

- I hate it when Mom loses her temper and punishes us.  
 James quickly lost his temper and began shouting at everyone.

76

**To Have a Lump in One's Throat**

This phrase is used to say that someone feels **great sadness** or **emotion** that causes a tightness in the throat. Often, tears well up in the eyes at the same time.

- I read the last several pages of Anne Frank's diary with a lump in my throat.  
 After the film he couldn't speak because he had a lump in his throat.

77

**To Make Believe**

This is a synonym for the verb **to pretend**.

- Let's make believe we're hunting in the jungle.  
 The children like to make believe.

78

**To Make Oneself at Home**

Use this expression to say that you are **so comfortable** in someone else's home that you feel that you are almost **in your own home**.

- Take off your shoes and make yourself at home.  
 They were so kind to me that they made me feel right at home.

**To Mind**

This phrase means that someone **cares about** or **is not indifferent to** or does not **agree with** what another person wishes.

— I don't mind. Go to the movies, if you want.

Do you mind if I sit here?

80

**To Make Someone's Mouth Water/Someone's Mouth Waters**

These expressions are used to say that someone suddenly feels **great hunger** or **is anticipating food** very eagerly.

— The smell of the turkey roasting made Tom's mouth water.  
I walked past the bakery with my mouth watering.

***A PHRASE JUST FOR FUN*****TO RAIN CATS AND DOGS**

— This expression has absolutely nothing to do with animals. Use it when you want to say that **it is raining very hard**.

— I'm not going out there. It's raining cats and dogs!

81

**In the Nick of Time**

This idiom says that someone is doing something **at the best possible time** and that what that person is doing is in the form of a **rescue**.

— The police arrived at the crime scene just in the nick of time.  
Bill stopped her from falling in the nick of time.

82

**To Pay through the Nose**

Use this funny little expression to say that someone is **paying far too much** for something.

— They finally got the room they wanted, but they had to pay through the nose to get it.  
You'll pay through the nose, if you go to that expensive store.

83

**Or So**

Add this short expression after a number or quantity to show that the amount is **approximate**.

— I arrived in Los Angeles a year or so ago.  
Get me a pound or so of flour and a stick of butter.

84

**Out of the Question**

This phrase means that something being discussed **is already decided** and **impossible to be considered any further**.

— You want to go at this late hour? Out of the question, young man!  
I'm afraid a vacation in Florida is out of the question this year.

85

**To Pass Away**

This is a synonym for **to die** and is used to speak about someone's death **more delicately**.

— Her grandfather passed away last month.  
I was shocked to hear that your sister had passed away.

86

**To Pay a Call On/To Pay Someone a Call**

These expressions mean that someone is **visiting** someone else.

— I was in the neighborhood so I paid a call on the Smiths.  
He often paid us a call without first phoning.

87

**To Give Someone a Piece of One's Mind**

This phrase means that someone is **angry** and **telling what he or she thinks** about a certain matter.

— He won't be asking for money again. Grandmother gave him a good piece of her mind and threw him out.

88

**To Poke Fun At/To Make Fun Of**

These two phrases are used as synonyms for **to ridicule** or **to tease**.

— Why must you poke fun at your little brother?  
The other children always made fun of the way she walked.

**To Pull Oneself Together**

Use this phrase to say that someone is **regaining control of himself** and is **correcting his or her previous behavior**.

— She cried for two hours but finally pulled herself together in time for school.

90

**To Put on Airs**

This phrase means that someone is **acting conceited** or **pretending to be far better than he really is**.

- When John drives his father's convertible, he always puts on airs.  
She was putting on airs at the party, but everyone knew she had no money.

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*A PHRASE JUST FOR FUN*

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**SCATTERBRAINED**

— This expression suggests that someone is **completely disorganized** or a **poor thinker**.

- She'll never finish that project. She's too scatterbrained. I doubt that Tom and Jack can fix the car. They're both so scatterbrained.
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91

**To Put up With**

This is a synonym for **to endure**.

- Mother won't put up with the noise for much longer.  
I've put up with your lies for the last time!

92

**Red Tape**

This expression is used to say that governments and other official institutions have **too many complicated procedures** or **too many difficult forms to be filled out** in order to use one of their services.

- All I want is a tax form why all this red tape?  
The administrator's office kept us tied up in red tape for hours.

93

**Right Away**

This is an adverbial expression that can be used as a replacement for **immediately**.

- I think you'd better get home right away. Mother is very sick.  
She said she wanted to return the gift right away.

94

**To Know the Ropes**

This phrase says that someone is **properly trained** and is **familiar with the procedures** of a particular job or task.

- Mary really knows the ropes around this office.  
 You should help him. I don't think he knows the ropes yet.

95

**To Run out Of**

This expression is used to say that someone has **exhausted the supply** of a certain product or that **it is used up**.

- I think we're about to run out of milk.  
 They ran out of gas just before getting to Chicago.

96

**From Scratch**

Use this prepositional phrase in place of **from the beginning**.

- I've lost count. I'd better start from scratch.

97

**To See Eye to Eye**

This phrase is used to mean that two people **agree** on something.

- I think we can sign the contract. I believe we see eye to eye on this matter.

98

**To Show Off**

This idiom means that someone is **acting in a way that makes a good impression** or is **acting in a way that makes his or her best characteristics apparent**.

- John was showing off to impress the others with his importance.  
 Don't show off. It doesn't impress anyone!

**To Be Sick Of**

This phrase means that someone finds something **unbearable** or can **no longer endure** it.

—She left him because she was sick of his constant complaining.

Will the sun never shine? I'm sick of this weather!

100

**To Spend (Time)**

You probably already know that the verb **to spend** is used to mean **to pay money**, but with expressions of **time** it means that someone is **passing time**. The expressions of time can be very brief or very long: a minute, an hour, three days, a vacation, and so on.

— We usually spend the winter in California.

Why do we have to spend so many days with these people?

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***A PHRASE JUST FOR FUN***


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**MANY HAPPY RETURNS OF THE DAY**

This phrase is used primarily in the form given above. It is used as a form of **congratulations** for a special day such as a birthday, anniversary, or wedding.

— The man walked up to the bride and groom and said joyfully, "Many happy returns of the day!"

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101

**A Stone's Throw**

This is a synonym for **near** or **nearby**.

— Their house is just a stone's throw from ours.

102

**A Swelled Head**

This unusual expression says that someone is **conceited** or **feeling over confident** about something.

— Don't flatter her. She already has a swelled head.

I said nothing about his good looks. I didn't want to give him a swelled head.

103

**To Take After**

This phrase says that someone is **very similar** to another person or **looks like** another person often a relative.

— With their red hair and green eyes, the children all take after their father.

104

**On the Tip of One's Tongue**

This clever phrase can be used when you wish to say that you **almost remember** someone or something.

— I know your face, and your name is on the tip of my tongue.

John stood silent before his teacher, although the answer was on the tip of his tongue.

105

**To Have a Sweet Tooth**

This phrase says that someone **enjoys sweet foods** such as candy or cake.

— Tom has a sweet tooth. He can't go past the bakery without stopping in to buy something.

106

**Topsy-Turvy**

This is used to say that something or some place is **in a terrible state** or **very disorganized**.

— Mother entered my room and became angry when she saw that everything was topsy-turvy.

107

**To Twist around One's Little Finger**

Use this phrase to mean that someone (usually a girl) has another person (usually a boy) **under her complete influence**. The boy will probably do anything the girl asks.

— Poor Jack. Anna has him twisted around her little finger.

They were very much in love, but Mother always had Father twisted around her little finger.

108

**Well Off**

This is a synonym for **rich** or **wealthy**.

— The Browns live in that big house over there. They're really quite well off.

109

**What on Earth?**

Use this emphatic question to show **great surprise** or to express **deep-felt shock**.

— What on earth?" he asked in alarm. "What was that loud noise?  
What on earth do you think you're doing?"

110

**A (Little) White Lie**

This idiom is used to make a **lie** seem **not quite so bad**. Rather than a **great lie** it's only a **small untruth**.

— Why was she so angry? It was only a little white lie.

Saying that I am younger than I am was just a white lie.

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*A PHRASE JUST FOR FUN*

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**TO BE BORN WITH A SILVER SPOON IN ONE'S MOUTH**

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This phrase is rather long, but it is used in place of much shorter ones: **born wealthy** or **born to a life of comfort**.

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What does she know about work? She was born with a silver spoon in her mouth.

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## More Phrases Just for Fun

### Six of One and Half a Dozen of the Other

This is another long phrase that replaces a simple idea. Use it to mean that **it's all the same** or **there is no difference**.

— I don't care if we go skiing or sledding. To me it's six of one and a half a dozen of the other.

### Stick-in-the-Mud

This phrase can mean that you are **just no fun** or **not able to change from your serious nature**.

— Don't invite Bill. He's such a stick-in-the-mud.

### That's the Straw That Broke the Camel's Back/That's the Last Straw

These two phrases are quite similar. They are used to say that something was **the final problem** and that someone **no longer has any patience to endure** it.

— You want another hundred dollars? Well, that's the straw that broke the camel's back!  
She lost her purse again. That's the last straw! I simply won't buy her another.

### To Talk Someone's Head Off

This phrase should be used when you wish to say that someone is **talking too much** to another person.

— John stood in the corner as the annoying woman talked his head off.  
Mary was embarrassed. Her husband had been talking Mrs. Smith's head off.

### To Tick (Someone) Off

This expression is very casual and indicates that someone is **angry**.

— If you say that again, you're going to tick me off.  
After the dog bit him, Dad became really ticked off.

## To Wet One's Whistle

This is an old expression that is still used very widely. It means **to have a drink** and often refers to alcoholic beverages.

— Let's stop at this bar and wet our whistles.  
 What a hot day. I need to wet my whistle.

## Whatever!

This is a rather up-to-date expression and is used **to end a conversation or a debate**. Its use suggests that the speaker is frustrated by the conversation and has no more patience with the other speaker.

— John: "You took my car and drove to the city, then you spent my money to buy yourself a dinner."  
 Mary: "Whatever!"

## What's Up?

Use this simple question to ask in very broad terms what someone **is doing now** or **has planned for later**, or to question **why someone has summoned you**.

— Hi, Tom. You look rather busy. What's up?  
 I hurried right over after I got your phone call. What's up?

## To Take Forty Winks

This is a synonym for **to take a nap**.

— I'm really tired. I need to take forty winks.