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| a bear with a sore head | irritated/bad mood |
| a bit of a dark horse | person with hidden abilities |
| a bitter pill to swallow | a difficult fact to accept |
| a different kettle of fish | a totally different situation from the one just mentioned |
| a dog's life | a difficult, hard life |
| a fish out of water | sb who feels uncomfortable |
| a long shot | a wild guess/ a risk |
| a memory like a sieve | a poor memory |
| a night owl | person who enjoys staying up late |
| a pain in the neck | annoying person/thing |
| a piece of cake | sth very easy to do |
| a red rag to a bull | action, comment, etc. liable to provoke sb |
| a red-letter day | a very important day |
| a sitting duck | an easy target |
| a storm in a teacup | a lot of fuss about sth that is not important |
| a wild-goose chase | a hopeless search |
| above board | honest |
| Achilles heel | weakest point of sb's character |
| against all odds | despite the difficulties |
| agree to disagree | stop arguing because there is no chance of agreement |
| all along | from the beginning until now |
| all but | nearly, almost |
| all in | exhausted |
| all in all | when everything is considered |
| all the same | yet, however |
| all told | altogether; in total |
| an old wives' tale | false belief |
| an unknown quantity | person or thing that one has no experience of |
| as a last resort | when all else has failed |
| as the crow flies | in a direct line/ by a direct route |
| at close quarters | from a short distance |
| at large | free, not caught |
| at the cutting edge | at the forefront of |
| bark up the wrong tree | have a false idea about sth |
| be ahead of one's time | have modern ideas |
| be all at sea | be in a state of confusion |
| be all fingers and thumbs | be awkward, clumsy |
| be all very well | appear satisfactory but in fact not be |
| be as busy as a bee | very busy |
| be as thick as a brick | be stupid |
| be beside oneself with anger | to be extremely angry |
| be born yesterday | be easily deceived/ naive |
| be broke | have no/very little money |
| be caught red-handed | be caught while committing a crime |
| be dying for sth | really want sth |
| be fit for | be good enough for |
| be for the high jump | about to be punished |
| be full of beans | be very lively |
| be green | be inexperienced |
| be in a quandary | be confused; undecided |
| be in sb's black books | out of favour |
| be in sb's shoes | be in sb's position |
| be in the dark about sth | be unaware of sth |
| be in the doghouse | be out of favour, in trouble |
| be in the know | be well-informed |
| be in the same boat | be in the same (usually bad) situation |
| be in two minds about sth | not be able to decide what to do |
| be on the cards | be likely to happen |
| be on the defensive | protect oneself because one feels insecure or threatened |
| be on the up and up | improve steadily |
| be out of practice | lacking practice |
| be over the moon | be elated |

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| be second to none | be the best |
| be sound asleep | sleep deeply |
| be the apple of sb's eye | be very precious to sb; be sb's favourite |
| be the perfect image of sb | look exactly like sb |
| be the splitting image of sb | look exactly like sb |
| be thrown off balance | be surprised |
| be tickled pink | be really pleased |
| be up and about | have recovered from an illness |
| be up in arms | be very angry |
| be worn out | be very tired |
| be/get soaked to the skin | be/get very wet |
| be/have a close shave | barely avoid an accident/ a bad situation |
| bear fruit | be successful |
| beat about/around the bush | avoid saying what one means directly |
| beat sb black and blue | hit sb repeatedly until bruised |
| before one can say Jack Robinson | extremely quickly |
| beg the question | makes people want to ask a particular question |
| behind bars | in prison |
| behind the scenes | in secret |
| below the belt | cruel and unfair |
| bide one's time | wait for a good opportunity |
| big cheese | person with important job/position |
| big-headed | conceited; boastful |
| bite off more than sb can chew | try to do sth which is too difficult |
| black and blue all over | covered with bruises |
| black tie | formal clothing |
| blaze a trail | discover sth new |
| blessing in disguise | sth which appears bad at first but then turns out favourably |
| blow a fuse | become very angry |
| blue-eyed boy | a favoured person |
| bolt from the blue | suddenly |
| brainwave | sudden clear idea/thought |
| break even | show neither loss nor profit |
| break the ice | ease the tension when one first meets people |
| bring sth home to sb | make sb understand how important or serious sth is |
| bring to one's knees | destroy, humble |
| browned off | fed up; bored |
| bury one's head in the sand | avoid or ignore reality/responsibility |
| butter sb up | flatter sb |
| by and large | generally speaking |
| by definition | having a quality simply because of what it is |
| by force of habit | used to doing sth without thinking |
| by trial and error | learning from one's mistakes |
| call it quits | give up/stop |
| call sb names | insult sb |
| cast aspersions | criticise |
| catch sb red-handed | be caught while committing a crime |
| chair a meeting | preside over a meeting |
| chip off the old block | sb who is very like one of his parents |
| chop and change | keep changing (your mind) |
| claim to fame | thing which makes sb unusual |
| clear the air | remove suspicion/bad feeling |
| come clean | admit the truth |
| come out of one's shell | gain personal confidence |
| come to a head | reach a critical point |
| come to a standstill | not progress/stop |
| come to terms with | accept a difficult situation |
| come to the fore | become important or popular |
| come to the point | reach the main point in a discussion |
| cook one's goose | end one's plans abruptly |
| cost a bomb | very expensive |
| cost an arm and a leg | be very expensive |

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| cramp one's style | restrict one's behaviour in some way |
| crocodile tears | false tears |
| cross one's mind | think of sth |
| cry over spilt milk | grieve over sth that can't be put right |
| cut corners | be less thorough |
| cut sb dead | ignore sb |
| cut sb to the quick | deeply hurt sb's feelings |
| cut to the bone | reduced to the minimum |
| deal a blow to | damage one's hopes |
| different as chalk and cheese | totally different |
| does it show? | is it obvious? |
| dog eat dog | ruthless competition, rivalry |
| dog-eared | (of books) with the corners bent and turned down through use |
| don't give up your day job | continue to do sth you know rather than trying sth new |
| don't hold your breath | don't wait for sb/sth anxiously |
| donkey work | boring, monotonous work |
| donkey's years | a long time |
| down in the dumps | depressed/miserable |
| down the drain | wasted; lost |
| drive a hard bargain | be a tough businessman |
| drive sb up the wall | make sb angry/annoy sb |
| drop a brick | say sth tactlessly |
| drop sb a line | send sb a letter |
| ease off | reduce in degree, speed or intensity |
| eat one's heart out | feel jealous/ sad about sth |
| every nook and cranny | everywhere |
| face the music | be criticised or punished for sth you have done |
| fair and square | within the rules |
| fall head over heels | fall in love quickly |
| fall into place | become clear |
| feel down in the mouth | feel discouraged/depressed |
| feel in one's bones | feeling sth instinctively |
| feel one's ears burning | have a feeling that sb is talking about you |
| few and far between | scarce/rare |
| fight like cat and dog | disagree violently |
| fine kettle of fish | confused state of affairs |
| flat broke | penniless |
| flog a dead horse | waste time doing sth useless |
| fly off the handle | quickly become very angry |
| fly on the wall | see/hear sth in a situation which does not involve you |
| for all | in spite of |
| for all I care | I don't care |
| for all I know | as far as I know |
| for donkey's years | for a very long time |
| for the time being | temporarily |
| frosty welcome | unfriendly reception |
| gatecrasher | sb attending a party without an invitation |
| get a bit hot under the collar | get angry, upset or embarrassed |
| get a move on | hurry up |
| get a problem off one's chest | tell sb else about your problem |
| get cold feet | lose courage to do sth |
| get cold feet | be nervous or frightened because sth might fail |
| get nowhere fast | make no progress |
| get off on the wrong foot | argue or disagree at the beginning of a relationship |
| get on one's nerves | irritate/annoy sb |
| get out of bed on the wrong side | be in a bad mood |
| get out of hand | become out of control |
| get rid of sth | give sth unwanted away |
| get the hang of it | get in the habit of doing sth |
| get the sack | be dismissed from one's job |
| get the wrong end of the stick | misunderstand completely what has been said |
| get wind of | receive information about sth indirectly |

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| get your own back | take/get revenge |
| give and take | compromise |
| give chapter and verse | give every exact detail |
| give sb the cold shoulder | ignore sb |
| give sb the slip | escape from sb |
| give the green light to sth | give permission to proceed with sth |
| give vent to | express sth freely |
| give way to | give in/yield |
| go back on one's word | not fulfil a promise |
| go by the board | be rejected |
| go for a song | be sold very cheaply |
| go to any lengths | do anything necessary to get sth you want |
| go to one's head | make conceited |
| go to the dogs | worsen |
| go without saying | be a foregone conclusion |
| golden opportunity | the best chance to gain sth |
| grease sb's palm | bribe sb |
| green belt | the area on the outskirts of a town adjoining the country |
| green with envy | very jealous |
| grey matter | brains; intelligence |
| grow out of sth | become too big for sth |
| hand in glove with sb | be in very close contact with sb |
| have a bee in one's bonnet | have an obsession about sth |
| have a frog in one's throat | inability to speak due to nervousness |
| have a job to do sth | find sth difficult to do |
| have a sharp tongue | tend to say unkind or hurtful things |
| have a yellow streak | be a coward |
| have an early night | go to bed early |
| have an eye for | be a good judge of sth |
| have an eye for | be good at judging the worth of sth |
| have at one's fingertips | have easily available |
| have butterflies in one's stomach | be very nervous about sth |
| have kittens | be nervous/anxious about sth |
| have many irons in the fire | have lots of plans in progress at the same time |
| have no fixed abode | be homeless |
| have no option but | must; have no choice |
| have one's heart in one's mouth | be extremely anxious about sth |
| have sb's hands full | be very busy with sth |
| have the cheek | dare to do sth |
| have the gift of the gab | be able to talk well |
| have time on one's hands | have free time |
| have words with sb | have an argument |
| hear it through the grapevine | find out information indirectly |
| hit the nail on the head | say exactly the right thing |
| hit the roof | get very angry |
| hit the sack | go to bed |
| hold one's horses | wait; be patient |
| ill at ease | embarrassed; uncomfortable |
| in a flash | very quickly |
| in a nutshell | briefly; in few words |
| in a rut | be stuck in a monotonous routine |
| in a tick | shortly, soon |
| in abeyance | halted temporarily |
| in arrears | have not paid the money they owe |
| in black and white | in writing |
| in broad daylight | in full view of the public |
| in clover | living a luxurious and comfortable life |
| in deep water | in trouble/difficulty |
| in full flow | talking at length |
| in public | in the presence of other people |
| in the abstract | in a general way |
| in the act of | while performing the act |

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| in the air | uncertain |
| in the balance | uncertain |
| in the black | not owing anybody any money |
| in the flesh | in person |
| in the long run | after a long period of time |
| in the nick of time | just in time |
| in the offing | likely to happen |
| in the red | owe money to a bank |
| it stands to reason | it is logical |
| it's all Greek to me | sth new or foreign; not easily understood |
| jack of all trades | sb who is able to do a variety of jobs |
| keep a straight face | manage to look serious under difficult circumstances |
| keep an eye on sth | guard/protect sth |
| keep in check | control |
| keep one's chin up | not be discouraged |
| keep one's fingers crossed | hope that sth will turn out well |
| keep one's wits about one | be alert and able to deal with difficulties |
| keep oneself to oneself | live quietly, privately |
| keep sth quiet | keep sth secret |
| keep sth under one's hat | keep sth secret |
| keep up with the Joneses | compete with others in status/material goods |
| kick the bucket | die |
| kill time | pass time while waiting for sb/sth |
| kill two birds with one stone | achieve two things with one action |
| know the ropes | know all the details of sth |
| lay bare | make public |
| lay the table | set the table for a meal |
| lend an ear | listen to sb in a careful and sympathetic way |
| lend sb a hand | give help to sb |
| let sleeping dogs lie | avoid mentioning a subject which could cause trouble |
| let the cat out of the bag | reveal a secret |
| like a bull in a china shop | behave in a clumsy/awkward way |
| like the back of one's hand | be very familiar with sth |
| like water off a duck's back | having no effect |
| live out of a suitcase | travel often/not have a permanent home |
| look at sth though rose-coloured spectacles | see sth from an unrealistically positive point of view |
| look down one's nose at sb | feel/act superior to sb |
| lose heart | become discouraged |
| lose one's head | lose self-control |
| lose one's nerve | lose courage |
| lost cause | hopeless situation or case |
| make a clean breast of | confess |
| make a dog's dinner | make a mess of sth |
| make a flying visit | make a quick trip |
| make a fool of oneself | make oneself look stupid |
| make a killing | have a sudden, great success |
| make a living | earn money |
| make a mountain out of a molehill | cause a fuss about a trivial matter |
| make a name for oneself | become famous/respected for sth |
| make allowances for | take special circumstances into consideration |
| make amends for | try to compensate for a past action |
| make common cause with sb | act together to achieve aim |
| make hay while the sun shines | take advantage of favourable circumstances |
| make head nor tail of | understand sth |
| make light of | treat sth as unimportant |
| make money hand over fist | make a lot of money quickly and easily |
| make one's blood boil | cause sb to become very angry |
| make one's getaway | escape |
| make quite a scene | become angry in a dramatic way |
| make sb's day | make sb very happy |
| make waves | cause trouble |
| meet behind closed doors | meet secretly |

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| moon around | look miserable |
| more to sb than meets the eye | sb is more important or interesting than is first seen |
| mutton dressed as a lamb | dress in a style younger than or inappropriate to your age |
| no room to swing a cat | no room at all |
| no wonder | not surprising |
| not all it's cracked up to be | not as good as people say it is |
| not be one's cup of tea | not suit one's taste |
| not count one's chickens before they hatch | not assume sth before it happens |
| not have it both ways | refuse to make a decision between two pleasant things |
| not have the foggiest idea | not know sth at all |
| not hold water | not seem reasonable or in accordance with the facts |
| not lose any sleep over sth | not worry about sth |
| null and void | invalid; not legally binding |
| of all people | used to express annoyance/surprise |
| of its own accord | automatically |
| of no consequence | of no value |
| off colour | look/be slightly unwell |
| off the cuff | without preparation |
| off the point | irrelevant |
| off the record | unofficial(ly) |
| on a shoe string | on a very small budget |
| on account of | because of |
| on edge | tense/nervous/ anxious |
| on no account | under/in no circumstances |
| on second thoughts | having changed one's mind |
| on the air | broadcasting |
| on the alert | watchful and prepared |
| on the ball | alert |
| on the blink | stop working properly (of electrical equipment) |
| on the dole | receiving unemployment benefit/social security |
| on the dot | punctual, exact on time |
| on the face of it | judging by how sth appears |
| on the level | honest/sincere |
| on the quiet | secretly |
| on the spur of the moment | without thinking about sth |
| on this/that account | for this/that reason |
| once and for all | for the last time |
| once in a blue moon | very rarely |
| one's flesh and blood | family member |
| open to debate | not decided/settled |
| out and about | outdoors; travelling from one place to another |
| out in the open | (of secrets) revealed, known |
| out of bounds | prohibited, forbidden (place) |
| out of print | (of books) not available anymore |
| out of the blue | suddenly and unexpectedly |
| out of the frying pan into the fire | from a situation to a worse/similar one |
| out of the question | impossible |
| out of turn | not in the correct order/time |
| out-and-out | complete, total |
| paint the town red | have a great time |
| part and parcel of | basic part of |
| part company with | end association |
| pay sb's way | contribute your shares of a bill |
| pick someone's brains | ask sb to help with a problem |
| pitch black | very dark |
| play cat and mouse with sb | keep sb in a state of uncertain expectation treating them alternatively cruelly and kindly |
| play it by ear | act in a situation by responding to events rather than according to plan |
| play one's cards right | act cleverly |
| play truant | stay away from school without permission |
| plenty more fish in the sea | many more opportunities in life for love |
| point the finger of suspicion | blame sb for sth |
| pop the question | make a proposal of marriage |

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| pull a few strings | use influential contacts in order to obtain an advantage |
| pull one's leg | tease or trick sb |
| pull one's socks up | make a greater effort |
| put a damper on | ruin sth or make it less enjoyable |
| put down roots | settle down |
| put on a brave face | try to hide one's disappointment |
| put one's foot down | insist on sth |
| put one's foot in it | make a tactless comment |
| put one's heart and soul into sth | be devoted to sth |
| put sb's name forward | nominate sb |
| put the cat among the pigeons | cause trouble/controversy |
| put two and two together | arrive at the truth by looking at facts |
| put words into one's mouth | pretend that sb has said sth that they haven't actually said |
| rack sb's brains | think very hard about sth |
| rain cats and dogs | rain heavily |
| red herring | sth which distracts you from sth important |
| red tape | unnecessary bureaucracy |
| ring a bell | remind sb of sth |
| rise to the challenge | act and be successful even though sth is new |
| see eye to eye with sb | agree with sb |
| see fit | think suitable or right |
| see red | suddenly become very angry |
| see the back of | be glad to see sb leave |
| set in one's ways | fixed in one's habits |
| shed light upon | give new/further information |
| short and sweet | brief but pleasant (usually ironic) |
| show one's true colours | reveal one's real character |
| sleep like a dog | be sound asleep |
| sleep on it | think about sth |
| slip one's mind | forget about sth |
| slow on the uptake | slow to understand |
| smell a rat | suspect that sth is wrong |
| sour grapes | say unpleasant comments because of jealousy |
| speak volumes | be strong evidence of sb's feelings or merits |
| spill the beans | reveal a secret/the facts |
| stand in sb's way | prevent sb from doing sth |
| status symbol | property/possession that shows sb's high social rank wealth etc. |
| stay clear of | avoid sb/sth |
| stew in one's own juice | suffer the consequences of one's own action |
| sth comes in handy | be very useful/practical |
| straight from the horse's mouth | from the most direct source |
| strike a chord | make sb feel sympathy |
| strike gold | come across sth useful |
| sweet tooth | enjoy eating sweet things |
| swim like a fish | swim very well |
| take it easy | not work too hard/relax |
| take one's time | not to hurry |
| take sb for granted | not appreciate sb |
| take sth into account | consider sth |
| take sth on the chin | bravely accept criticism |
| take sth to heart | take personally/be influenced by |
| take sth with a pinch of salt | not believe sth completely |
| take the bull by the horns | deal with sth boldly and directly |
| take things to pieces | dismantle things |
| take to one's heels | run away |
| talk the hind legs off a donkey | talk for a long time, uninterrupted |
| the black sheep of the family | a disgraced family member |
| the ins and outs | the details of an activity |
| the last straw | the last and worst episode in a chain of bad experiences |
| the life and soul of sth | the most lively and amusing person present somewhere |
| the lion's share | the biggest part/portion |
| the pot calling the kettle black | accusing sb of a fault one has oneself |

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| the rat race | the competitive nature of modern urban life |
| the tip of the iceberg | small evident part of a much larger, concealed situation |
| the year dot | a long time ago |
| thick-skinned | insensitive |
| through thick and thin | whatever happens |
| throw a party | have/hold a party |
| to no effect | unsuccessful |
| tongue in cheek | not serious, ironic |
| tooth and nail | fiercely |
| touch and go | with uncertain result |
| turn a blind eye to sth | ignore |
| turn over a new leaf | make a new start |
| under the weather | depressed/unwell |
| until one is blue in the face | as hard/long as one possibly can |
| until the cows come home | for a long time |
| up and coming | likely to be successful |
| up in the air | existing, but not talked about |
| ups and downs | good things with bad ones |
| wash sb's hands of sb | refuse to be involved with sb |
| wet behind the ears | inexperienced |
| wet blanket | dull person who spoils people's happiness |
| whet sb's appetite | make sb eager to have/experience more |
| white elephant | useless/unwanted possession |
| white-collar job | office/clerical work |
| with a view to doing sth | with the intention or hope of doing sth |
| with flying colours | with great success |
| without fail | do sth no matter what |
| work a miracle | make sth almost impossible happen |
| work to rule | adhere strictly to the rules as a form of protest |