**Vocabulary Reference**

**As dead as a doornail**

**Meaning**
completely dead
not working (of electrical equipment)

**Examples**

* Old Marley was **as dead as a doornail** (Charles Dickens)
* Oh no! I forgot to charge my phone. It's **as** **dead as a doornail.**

**Extra vocabulary**

**to hit the nail on the head**
to be exactly right

**to hammer something home**
to make certain something is understood

**to nail it**
to complete a task successfully

**dead easy**
very easy

**dead to the world**
sleeping deeply

**drop-dead gorgeous**
very very attractive

**I wouldn’t be seen dead...**
I would never do it, usually because it would be too ​embarrassing.
**Note:** This phrase is followed by verb-ing or preposition + noun phrase.

**a dead ringer for...**looks very similar to...
**Note:**This phrase is usually followed by a person.

**over my dead body!**
I will never let that happen!

[**Practise**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/course/shakespeare/unit-1/session-2) using **As dead as a doornail**

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**I'll send him packing**

**Meaning**
I'll send him away

**Examples**

* I've no patience when people try to sell me things at the door. I usually **send them packing**.
* This is our chance to do it and we should **send them packing** with their tails between their legs.

**Extra vocabulary**

**rehearse**
practise a play or piece of music for later public performance.

**Synonyms for 'send someone packing'**

**get rid of someone**
**show someone the door**
**send someone on their way**

**Ways to say 'go away':**

**get out of my sight!**
**get lost!**
**sling your hook!**
**on your bike!**
**jog on!**
**do one!**

[**Practise**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/course/shakespeare/unit-1/session-3) using **I'll send him packing**

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**All that glisters is not gold**

**Meaning**
The phrase **all that glisters is not gold** warns us not to be fooled by people or things that look good - because they might not be as good as they look on the surface!

**Example sentence**

* Well that car looks fantastic, but **all that glitters is not gold**. Check the engine before you buy it.

**Note**
In modern English, the word **glisters** is often changed to **glistens** or **glitters**.

**Extra vocabulary**

**don’t judge a book by its cover**
you shouldn’t judge the value of something or someone based on their appearance

**looks can be deceiving**
people and things are often different from how they appear

**beauty is only skin deep**
a person’s character is more important than their appearance

**every cloud has a silver lining**
there’s a positive side to every sad or difficult situation

**as good as gold**
very, very good

**worth its weight in gold**
very useful or valuable

[**Practise**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/course/shakespeare/unit-1/session-4) using**All that glisters is not gold**

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**Strange bedfellows**

**Meaning**
These days, the phrase **strange bedfellows** describes two people or groups that are connected in a particular activity, even though they are very different and are not usually seen together.

**Example sentence**
You think Miley Cyrus and Michael Bublé should write a song together? Well, they'd be strange bedfellows… but it might just work.

**Note**
**Strange bedfellows** is often used for political alliances.

**Example sentence**

* Israel, Hamas **strange bedfellows** when it comes to reining in ISIS in Gaza.

**Extra vocabulary**

**like chalk and cheese**
an expression to describe two people who are very different from each other

**an odd couple**
two people who are in a relationship, but seem very different and not well-suited

**a match made in heaven**
a perfect combination of people or things

**made for each other**
a perfect match

**two of a kind**
two people with very similar characters

**tempest**
violent storm

**gaberdine**
a type of large raincoat

**fellow(s)**
a person/people who belong to the same group or who share a situation

**bedfellows**
people who share a bed or who are closely involved with each other in a particular situation

[**Practise**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/course/shakespeare/unit-1/session-6) using**Strange bedfellows**

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**Though this be madness, yet there is method in't**

**Meaning**
The modern version of the phrase is: **there's method in his madness** – or her madness, or my madness – and it means: there's a sensible reason for something that seems crazy.

**Example sentence**

* My mum's desk is covered in papers. **There's method in her madness,** though. She knows where everything is!

**Notes**
We can also say there's method **to** his madness.

**Mad** means **crazy, silly** or **stupid** in British English.

In American English, **mad** means **angry** or **upset.**

**Extra vocabulary**

**rehearsal**
a practice of a play for later public performance

**tragedy**
a terrible situation, often involving suffering or death

**revenge**
harm that you do to someone because they have harmed you

**Informal ways to say that someone's idea or behaviour is really strange or outrageous:**

**You're out of your mind!**
**You're absolutely bonkers!**
**You're off your rocker!**
**You're nuts!**
**You're losing it!**
**You're losing the plot!**
**You're losing your marbles!**

[**Practise**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/course/shakespeare/unit-1/session-7) using **There's method in his madness**

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**Wild-goose chase**

**Meaning**
In modern English, a wild-goose chase isn't about horses, or geese: it describes a situation where you foolishly chase after something that is impossible to get - or doesn't exist at all.

**Example sentence**

* We looked for the restaurant for hours, but it was a wild-goose chase: turned out that it closed down years ago!

**Extra vocabulary**

**star-crossed lovers**
very unlucky lovers

**to have a crush on someone**
to like someone - in a romantic way

**unrequited love**
when someone is in love with someone who doesn't feel the same way

**a rat race**
a way of modern life in which people compete for wealth and power

**to have a whale of a time**
to enjoy yourself very much

**to be in the doghouse**
to be in trouble - normally with your partner!

**pigs might fly!**
that will never happen!

**hold your horses!**
wait! Be patient!

**to be on your high horse**
to behave in a superior or conceited manner

**get off your high horse!**
stop behaving in a superior manner!

**don't count your chickens...**
don't make ​plans that ​depend on something good ​happening before you ​know that it will really happen

[**Practise**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/course/shakespeare/unit-1/session-8) using **Wild-goose chase**

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**What's done is done**

**Meaning**
People still use Shakespeare's exact phrase: what's done is done, usually to say that there's no benefit in feeling bad for a long time about past mistakes.

**Example sentence**

* Just explain you meant to send the email to a different Sophie - and then forget about it. What's done is done.

**Extra vocabulary**

**a superstition**
a supernatural belief that certain things will bring good or bad luck

**to get over something**
to accept something that happened in the past and move on

**to have your eye on someone**
to admire someone in a sexual way

**don't cry over spilt milk**
don't waste your time worrying about small mistakes or accidents that you cannot change

**let bygones be bygones**
forget about disagreements that happened in the past

**guilt-free**
not causing any guilt

**guilty pleasure**
something you enjoy, but feel guilty or embarrassed about liking

**to guilt-trip someone**
to make someone feel bad about something they have done, so that they then do something that you want them to do

**a guilty conscience**
a feeling of guilt when you have done something wrong

[**Practise**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/course/shakespeare/unit-1/session-9) using **What's done is done**

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**The world's mine oyster**

**Meaning**
Today, the phrase has become the world's my oyster - or your oyster - and it describes situations that contain wonderful opportunities. It can describe the opportunities that open up when you take risks, have money or learn new skills.

**Example sentence**

* If you learn foreign languages, the world's your oyster.

**Extra vocabulary**

**court**
(here) the place where a King or Queen and their family and servants are living

**reign**
the period of time that someone is a king or queen

**to do something behind someone's back**
to do something without letting someone know

**a pearl of wisdom**
a clever saying or a very good piece of advice

**to be in a world of your own**
to not be aware of what's happening around you

**what a small world!**
used to show surprise when you meet someone you know at an unexpected place

**to have the best of both worlds**
to have the advantages of two different things at the same time

**to do someone the world of good**
to make someone feel much healthier or happier

**to not be the end of the world**
to not be the worst thing that could happen

[**Practise**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/course/shakespeare/unit-1/session-10) using **The world's my oyster**

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**A tower of strength**

**Meaning**
The phrase **a tower of strength** describes someone who is strong, reliable, trustworthy, dependable and good in a crisis.

**Example sentence**

* My husband was a tower of strength when I had that operation - he really looked after me well.

**Extra vocabulary**

**a baddie**
a bad character in a story, film or play

**a battle**
a ​fight between ​armed ​forces

**to stick with someone through thick and thin**to support a friend or partner through difficult experiences as well as good ones

**to have got someone’s back**to be prepared and ready to support or defend someone

**to stand by someone**
to support someone

**my rock**
describes a person who is supportive and helps you when times are difficult

**to count on someone**
to depend on someone

**to be there for someone**
to be available to provide support and comfort for someone

**a pillar**
a large post that helps to hold something up

[**Practise**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/course/shakespeare/unit-1/session-11) using **A tower of strength**

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**Spotless reputation**

**Meaning**These days, the phrase **spotless reputation** describes a person or organisation that has a good, clean character and behaves decently and honestly.

**Example sentence**

* Another athlete caught taking drugs? I'm surprised at this one though – she always had a **spotless reputation.**

**Extra vocabulary**

**treason**
the crime of betraying one’s country, especially by attempting to kill or overthrow the king or queen

**plot (verb)**to make a ​secret ​plan to do something ​wrong or illegal

**to be spot on**to be completely accurate or correct

**to hit the spot**to be exactly right

**to tarnish someone's reputation**to damage someone's reputation

**to have a good track record**to have a good reputation, based on the things that you have done

**to be squeaky clean**to always behave in a completely moral and honest way

**someone's name is mud**describes someone who has a bad reputation or who people are angry with

**to lose face**to lose your status and the respect of others

**to give something / someone a bad name**to damage the reputation of something / someone

[**Practise**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/course/shakespeare/unit-1/session-12) using **spotless reputation**

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**The green-eyed monster**

**Meaning**
The phrase **the green-eyed monster** is still used today to describe the dangers of uncontrolled jealousy in relationships.

**Example sentence**

* I thought I'd got over my ex, but when I saw him with his new girlfriend, **the green-eyed monster** got me.

**Extra vocabulary**

**ale**
a type of beer

**to drown your sorrows**
to drink alcohol to forget your problems

**green with envy**
very angry and jealous because someone has something you want for yourself

**with flying colours**
very successfully

**off-colour**
unwell

**to feel blue**
to feel sad

**to see red**
to become angry

**the black sheep (of a family)**
someone who doesn't fit in with a group and often causes embarrassment.

**to catch (someone) red-handed**
to catch someone doing something wrong or illegal

**out of the blue**
unexpectedly or surprisingly

**a white lie**
a lie about something unimportant that is told to avoid hurting someone

**the grass is always greener on the other side**
other people always seem to be in a better situation than you

[**Practise**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/course/shakespeare/unit-1/session-13/activity-1) using **the green-eyed monster**

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**In a pickle**

**Meaning**
Nowadays, when someone says they are in a pickle they mean that they are in a mess - a very difficult situation.

**Example sentence**

* Most of the time if I'm in a pickle I'll call one of my brothers. They've usually got somewhat uplifting advice.

**Note**
Nowadays, people can say I'm pickled if they have drunk too much alcohol.

**Extra vocabulary**

**court**
(here) the place where a King or Queen and their family and servants are living

**a jester**
a man whose job was to entertain people by doing silly things and telling jokes

**tricky**
difficult

**in a sticky situation**
in a difficult situation

**in a tight spot**
in a difficult situation

**in a bind**
in a difficult situation

**between a rock and a hard place**
in a very difficult position, often facing a difficult decision

**he's legless**
he's completely drunk

**hammered**
completely drunk

**tipsy**
a little drunk

**merry**
a little drunk and feeling happy

[**Practise**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/course/shakespeare/unit-1/session-14) using **in a pickle**

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**Forever and a day**

**Meaning**
The phrase forever and a day means the same as it did in Shakespeare's day: something – either good or bad – will last indefinitely, or for a very, very long time.

**Example sentence**

* Oh, look at that queue! We'll be waiting forever and a day. Let's come back tomorrow.

**Note**British English speakers sometimes write **forever** as two words: **for ever.**

**Extra vocabulary**

**in disguise**
the state of changing someone's appearance to hide their true identity

**pretend**
behave as if something is true when it is not true

**exaggerate**
make something ​seem ​larger, more ​important, ​better, or ​worse than it really is

**literal**
the most basic (meaning of a word)

**I nearly died of embarrassment**
I was very embarrassed

**killing me**
hurting me

**millions of**
many

**starving**
very hungry

**dying for**
need

**sick to death of**
fed up with

[**Practise**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/course/shakespeare/unit-1/session-15) using **forever and a day**

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**Give no words but mum**

**Meaning**
The phrase **give no words but mum** is usually simplified to just **keep mum**. It means: don't tell anyone - it's a secret.

**Example sentence**

* Mark Hamill to **keep mum** amid Star Wars Skywalker speculation

**Note**
Another version of the phrase is **mum's the word**.

**Example sentence**

* Don't tell anyone you saw me here. **Mum's the word**!

**Extra vocabulary**

**your secret’s safe with me**
I won't tell anyone your secret

**keep it under wraps**
keep it secret

**don't tell a soul**
don't tell anyone

**I won’t breathe a word**
I won't tell anyone your secret

**my lips are sealed**
I won't tell anyone your secret

**keep your mouth shut**
keep a secret

**blab**
reveal a secret

**let the cat out of the bag**
reveal a secret (usually by accident)

**let it slip**
reveal a secret (usually by accident)

**spill the beans**
reveal a secret

**give the game away**
reveal a secret

**a blabbermouth**
someone who reveals secrets

[**Practise**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/course/shakespeare/unit-1/session-16)using **mum's the word**

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**A pound of flesh**

**Meaning**
Modern English speakers use the phrase **a pound of flesh** when someone says they want justice, but the punishment they're asking for is so severe that it seems more like revenge.

**Example sentence**

* I apologised and paid for the repairs after I crashed his car, but it isn't enough for him. He wants his **pound of flesh**. I think he's going to call the police…

**Note**
In modern day usage, we can also use **a pound of flesh** to talk about something which is owed, but will be hurtful or difficult to provide.

**Example sentence**

* My boss is making me work so hard at the moment, he really wants his **pound of flesh**.

**Extra vocabulary**

**lend**
give something to someone with the understanding that it will be returned

**borrow**
receive something from someone with the understanding that it will be returned

**flesh**
the soft part of the human body

**revenge**something that you do to hurt or punish someone because they have hurt you or someone else

**court**a formal, legal meeting where decisions are made about a crime

**revenge is a dish best served cold**
it's more satisfying to wait until the time is right to get revenge

**don't get mad, get even**get revenge instead of getting angry about something

**get your own back**get revenge

**it's payback time**it's time to get revenge

**revenge is sweet**
it feels good to get revenge

**forgive and forget**
don't try to get revenge, forget and forgive people's mistakes instead

**price-fix scandal**an agreement between companies to keep prices high

[**Practise**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/course/shakespeare/unit-1/session-17/activity-1) using **a pound of flesh**

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**A fool's paradise**

**Meaning**
These days, the phrase a fool's paradise describes any situation that somebody thinks is good, without realising that it won't last – or that it's actually bad.

**Example sentence**

* Jack's work is terrible. He's living in **a fool's paradise** if he thinks he's getting a pay rise.

**Extra vocabulary**

**star-crossed lovers**
very unlucky lovers

**a fool**
a silly person

**fool someone**
trick or deceive someone

**have your way with someone**
have sex with someone

**do right by someone**
treat someone well and fairly

**come back to earth (with a bump)**
to accept reality again after a pleasant experience or a hopeful dream

**to have your head in the clouds**
to be unaware of what is happening around you in the real world

**a wishful thinker**
a person who has hopes and plans that are unlikely to happen in reality

**living in a dream world**
having ideas or hopes which are not practical and are not likely to be successful

**a pipe dream**
a hope or wish which is impossible to achieve or not realistic

**down-to-earth**
sensible and realistic

**level-headed**
someone who has the ability to think clearly and realistically and makes good decisions

**to have your feet on the ground**
to be sensible, practical and realistic

[**Practise**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/course/shakespeare/unit-1/session-18) using **a fool's paradise**

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**Not budge an inch**

**Meaning**
The phrase **not budge an inch** is used these days to describe objects that won't move, and also people who won't change their minds.

**Example sentence**

* That stupid dog refused to move. I kept pulling on the lead, but he **wouldn't budge an inch**.

**Extra vocabulary**

**an inch**
2.54 centimeters

**budge**
move

**the battle of the sexes**
the fight for power between men and women

**tame**
change something wild so that it is easier to control

**stubborn**
someone who refuses to change their ideas or behaviour

**strong-minded**
not easily influenced by others

**stand your ground**
refuse to change your opinion or plans, even when other people disagree with you

**dig your heels in**
refuse to change your ideas or behaviour

**back down**
admit that you are wrong

**No way!**
Definitely not!

**not even if you paid me!**
I would never do that, even if you gave me a lot of money

**it's out of the question**
it's impossible / I won't let it happen

**never in a million years**
absolutely never

**not in a month of Sundays**
absolutely not

**Oh go on then**
I agree to do or allow something that I didn't want to do before

**I suppose so**
I agree to something that I am not certain or happy about

[**Practise**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/course/shakespeare/unit-1/session-19)using **not budge an inch**

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**I must be cruel, only to be kind**

**Meaning**In modern English, Shakespeare's phrase is usually shortened to **I must be cruel to be kind.** Or just **cruel to be kind.** People say it when they do something unkind that will actually benefit someone.

**Example sentence**

* I know I upset her when I told her to get a haircut, but it was such a mess: **I had to be cruel to be kind.**

**Extra vocabulary**

**listen (here)**
to pay attention to what someone tells you and do what they suggest

**collocation**
the natural way words go together

**put down (an animal)**
kill in a humane way

**a vicious circle**
a repeating situation in which one problem causes another problem that makes the first problem worse

**tough love**
a strict way of dealing with someone who has a problem

**a cold-blooded killer**
a killer who shows no sympathy

**a nasty look**
looking at someone in a unkind way

**a harsh punishment**
make someone suffer in a cruel way for something bad that they have done

**a mean streak**
unkind behaviour which is part of someone's personality

[Practise](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/course/shakespeare/unit-1/session-20) using **I must be cruel, only to be kind**

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**Wear my heart on my sleeve**

**Meaning**
Nowadays, the phrase to wear your heart upon - or on - your sleeve still means: to make your feelings and emotions obvious, even if it makes you vulnerable.

**Example sentence**

* I **wear my heart on my sleeve**. If I'm in a mood, my mood shows.

**Extra vocabulary**

**in disguise**
the state of changing someone's appearance to hide their true identity

**loyal**
always reliable and very supportive

**vulnerable**
easily hurt or harmed

**a mask**
a covering used to hide or disguise your face

**bend the truth**
say something that is not true (usually not a serious lie)

**be economical with the truth**
say things that are not true, or to not tell everything that you know

**keep your cards close to your chest**
not tell people what you are thinking or planning

**a poker face**
a facial expression that doesn't show your thoughts or feelings

**lay/put (all) your cards on the table**
tell people exactly what you are thinking

**above board**
completely honest and legal

**upfront**
completely honest and not hiding anything

**an open book**
completely honest and not hiding anything

**pour your heart out**
tell someone all your secrets and worries

**my heart sank**
I suddenly felt very sad and disappointed

**his/her heart's in the right place**
he/she only has good intentions

**my heart's not in it**
I don't feel very interested and enthusiastic

**by heart**
from memory

**a heart of gold**
a kind and generous character

**a heart of stone**
an unfriendly and unkind character

[**Practise**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/course/shakespeare/unit-1/session-21) using**wear my heart on my sleeve**

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**Greek to me**

**Meaning**The phrase **It was Greek to me** has become **It's all Greek to me** in modern English, and it's used when something – not just a foreign language – is difficult to understand.

**Example sentence**

* I'll never understand the rules of cricket: out for a duck, silly mid-off, googlies… It's **all Greek to me**!

**Extra vocabulary**

**supernatural**things that cannot be explained by science

**fortune teller**someone who tells you what they think will happen to you in the future

**have your fortune told**have your future predicted

**astrologer**someone who studies the stars and planets and uses it to tell people how it will affect their lives

**crystal clear**very easy to understand

**get the gist**understand the general meaning

**as clear as mud**
very difficult to understand

**gobbledygook**very difficult to understand (often because there are too many technical words)

**go over somebody's head**be too difficult for someone to understand

**can’t make head nor tail of something**can't understand something

**get the picture**understand

**gibberish**
spoken or written words that have no meaning or are difficult to understand

**go Dutch**agree to share the cost of something, especially a meal

**talk for England!**talks a lot

**when in Rome...**when you are visiting another country, you should behave like the people in that country

**an Indian summer**a period of warm, dry weather that sometimes happens in the early autumn

**excuse my French**sorry for using a word that may be considered offensive (said humorously)

**Dutch courage**the confidence that some people get from drinking alcohol before they do something scary

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