

Idiomatic Creativity

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Appendix C:
List of SPF-idioms

Selection of idiomatic expressions

SPF-idioms used for analysis were selected from the *Collins Cobuild Dictionary of Idioms (CCDI)* (1995). To extract the set of idioms from the *CCDI*, I read through the whole dictionary and chose all expressions whose meaning referred to one of the following categories:

Success:

- to achieve something that you hoped, tried, or wanted to do (even if it seemed difficult):
e.g.: *put something to bed, go the (full) distance, make the grade*, etc.
- (cause) an activity, event, method, or plan, etc. (to) succeed(s), i.e. (to) produce(s) successful results or happen(s) the way you wanted:
e.g.: *bring home the bacon, come up roses, come up trumps, prime the pump*, etc.
- defeat one's competitors in a competitive situation
e.g.: *pip sb. at the post, move in for the kill, be on top of something*, etc.
- (cause to) be successful (of a company, product, activity etc.), be successful again
e.g.: *alive and kicking, on the up and up, raise from the dead*, etc.
- start to be successful or start successfully:
e.g.: *get sth. off the ground, start off on the right foot*, etc.
- work very hard to become successful:
e.g.: *go the extra mile, bend over backwards, leave no stone unturned*, etc.
- be likely to be successful in the future
e.g.: *on the right track, up and coming/running*, etc.
- (cause/be in) a favourable situation or (make use of) an advantage which makes a given configuration become successful:
e.g.: *hold all the aces, in the groove, have a card up one's sleeve*, etc.
- deal effectively with /tackle a problem and thus be likely to become successful
e.g.: *grasp the nettle, take the bull by the horns*, etc.
- be or become effective and lead to success:
e.g.: *the wheels are turning, pick up steam*, etc.

Progress/stagnation:

- (cause) to develop gradually towards achieving something that you want to achieve
e.g.: *the wheels are turning, gain ground, grease the wheels, etc.*
- to develop continually or very rapidly
e.g.: *show a clean pair of heels, the fast track, in the works, etc.*
- (cause) to develop slowly or not at all
e.g.: *spin one's wheels, be on the rocks, throw a spanner in the works, etc.*
- (be in) a good situation or advantage in which further progress can be made
e.g.: *on a roll, on an even keel, etc.*
- (cause) a bad situation or problem in which no progress can be made or in which progress which has already been made is lost.
e.g.: *skate on thin ice, lose ground, in the doldrums, etc.*

Failure:

- fail in something one is trying to do (this includes: having the opposite result)
e.g.: *come a cropper, hit rock bottom, crash and burn, fall by the wayside, etc.*
- (cause) an activity, event, method, or plan etc (to) fail(s), i.e. it does not produce what it was intended to achieve
e.g.: *can't stand the pace, on your last legs, down for the count, bump along the bottom, etc.*
- be defeated in a competitive situation
e.g.: *meet your Waterloo, get the wooden spoon, etc.*
- reach the point of failure:
e.g.: *hit the buffers, a blind alley, etc.*
- (be in) a bad situation which is likely to cause failure
e.g.: *go through hell, between a rock and a hard place, walk a tightrope, etc.*
- (cause) problems that spoil chances of success and are likely to cause failure
e.g.: *stir up a hornet's nest, cut one's own throat, etc.*

This list does not include expressions referring to the more specific or related meanings:

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- flatter another person to become successful
e.g.: *lick sb.'s arse/boots*, etc.
- (become or) be a successful, powerful person
e.g.: *a big cheese*, *a big fish in a small pond*, *hit the big time*, etc.
- be much better than another person:
e.g.: *knock spots off sth.*, etc.
- be very good at something (referring to competence rather than success in an activity)
e.g.: *have something down to fine art*, *get the hang of something*, etc.
- work hard (in general, unrelated to success):
e.g.: *pull up your sleeves*, etc.
- be happy due to success
e.g.: *be in seventh heaven*, *be in clover*, etc.
- to lose one's job:
e.g.: *get the marching orders*, *give sb. the boot*, etc.
- to be criticized for one's failure:
e.g.: *take it on the chin*, etc.

The above definitions make it clear that the word-field SPF is characterised in relatively broad terms to guarantee the systematic modeling of the corresponding idiomatic constructions on the basis of a cognitive linguistic framework. On the basis of these selection criteria the following British English idioms (including proverbs) were selected.

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Idiom	Meaning periphrasis
<i>the ace in your hand</i>	sth. you can use to gain advantage when you need it
<i>come within an ace of something / be within an ace of something</i>	very nearly succeed in doing sth.
<i>play your ace</i>	do sth. clever or unexpected which gives you an advantage
<i>hold all the aces</i>	be in a very strong position
<i>get in on the act / be in on the act</i>	start sth. which was first done by someone else in order to have the same success
<i>get your act together</i>	take control of oneself and organize oneself more efficiently in order to become successful
<i>a hard act to follow</i>	be so impressive or effective that it is difficult for others to be as successful
<i>(want) a piece of the action / a slice of the action</i>	want to get involved in a exiting, successful, and profitable activity
<i>alive and kicking</i>	be active or existing although people thought it had stopped to exist
<i>a blind alley</i>	a useless way of working or thinking that is not leading to anything worthwhile
<i>raise the ante / up the ante</i>	take more risk
<i>upset / overturn the applecart</i>	do something which causes trouble or spoils a satisfactory situation
<i>chance your arm</i>	do something risky
<i>have an axe hanging over something / someone</i>	be likely to be destroyed soon (be likely to lose one's job)
<i>have your back to the wall</i>	be in a very difficult situation that is hard to deal with
<i>put your back into something</i>	work very hard to do sth. successfully
<i>bend over backwards</i>	try very hard to do something in order to help or please someone, even if it causes difficulties
<i>save someone's bacon</i>	help someone out of a difficult or dangerous situation
<i>(be) in the bag</i>	feel certain that you are going to achieve sth. or have achieved it
<i>(hang/ remain) in the balance / throw off balance</i>	not be clear what is going to happen in a particular situation
<i>a new ball game / a different ball game</i>	a new situation to demands novel strategies to deal with
<i>on the ball</i>	be alert/deal with sth. in an intelligent way
<i>set/start the ball rolling</i>	start an activity, do sth. which other people will join in later
<i>take the ball and run with it / pick up the ball and run</i>	take up an idea or plan that someone else has started to see if it will be successful or useful
<i>the balloon goes up</i>	situation has become very serious or something bad has just happened
<i>keep the balls in the air / juggle the balls in the air</i>	deal with many different things a the same time
<i>jump on the bandwagon</i>	adopt another idea or ideology that you do not believe in but which you think is likely to become successful
<i>bang goes something</i>	it has become obvious that sth. cannot be achieved or become successful

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<i>(happen) not with a bang but a whimper</i>	sth. is less effective or existing as people had expected it to be
<i>have someone over a barrel</i>	have someone in a position where he/she cannot possibly win
<i>(not) get to first base</i>	not make progress with your plans
<i>a basket case</i>	a country/organization with a very bad economy or financial state
<i>take an early bath</i>	stop doing an activity before you have finished it
<i>take a bath</i>	lose a lot of money in an investment, fail
<i>fight a losing battle</i>	try to achieve something which is not very likely to succeed
<i>win the battle, lose the war / lose the battle, win the war</i>	although someone has been successful in a minor conflict, they have been defeated in a more important one
<i>not miss a beat</i>	be able to take advantage of every situation
<i>put something to bed</i>	achieve a plan and complete it successfully
<i>saved by the bell</i>	be in a difficult situation until something happens that allows you to escape from it
<i>be a good/safe bet</i>	be a sensible or useful thing to do
<i>hedge your bets</i>	avoid making decisions or commit oneself to make more than one thing in order not to make a mistake
<i>the early bird catches the worm</i>	to do sth. successfully one should start as soon as one can
<i>kill two birds with one stone</i>	achieve two things successfully at the same time
<i>bite off more than one can chew</i>	do something that is far to difficult to achieve/manage
<i>a second bit of the cherry / two bites of the cherry</i>	have a second chance to do something after having failed the first time
<i>put your head/neck on the block</i>	risk your reputation by taking a particular course of action
<i>off/out of the blocks/starting blocks</i>	succeed in doing sth. starting sth. despite difficulties
<i>a stumbling block</i>	a problem which stops you in achieving sth.
<i>new blood, fresh blood</i>	people who are brought to a company to make it more efficient and successful
<i>scent blood / taste blood</i>	sense a weakness of your opponent and take advantage of it
<i>strike a blow for something / strike a blow against something</i>	support something or make it more likely to succeed
<i>back to the drawing board</i>	plan something anew that has failed
<i>go by the board/boards</i>	an unsuccessful plan or activity is abandoned and forgotten
<i>sweep the board</i>	win all the prizes in a competition/election, be successful
<i>in the same boat</i>	be in the same unpleasant or difficult situation
<i>rock the boat</i>	cause trouble or upset a stable situation
<i>a body blow</i>	cause great disappointment or difficulty

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<i>off the boil</i>	not be as successful as one was in the past
<i>on the boil</i>	perform very successfully
<i>have shot your bolt</i>	have done everything to become successful, but have failed
<i>put a bomb under something</i>	destroy sth. that is inefficient in order to start it anew
<i>step into someone's boots / fill someone's boots</i>	become as successful as one's predecessor
<i>pull yourself up by your bootstraps</i>	free oneself free a difficult situation without the help of anyone else
<i>bump along the bottom</i>	be very unsuccessful (e.g., the economy of a country)
<i>cast your bread upon the waters</i>	risk something without expecting too much in return
<i>make bricks without straw</i>	do something which is likely to end in failure
<i>cross that bridge when you come to it</i>	deal with a problem when it happens, rather than worry before
<i>go for broke</i>	risk everything in the hope that you will be successful
<i>the bubble has burst / prick the bubble</i>	a situation that has been very successful has suddenly stopped (been stopped) to be successful
<i>nip something in the bud</i>	stop a bad situation before it can become worse
<i>hit the buffers</i>	experience difficulties which cause a situation, plan, etc. to fail
<i>take the bull by the horns</i>	act decisively in order to deal with a difficult problem
<i>bite the bullet</i>	accept a difficult situation
<i>drop your bundle</i>	give up something after having failed
<i>burn your bridges / burn your boats</i>	do sth. which forces you to continue with a particular course of action, spoil one's chances of returning to an earlier stage of development
<i>(put soth.) on the back burner / on the front burner</i>	stop the development of a project or issue because you consider it unimportant, unsuccessful
<i>press the right button / push the right button</i>	do the right things for a situation to become successful
<i>a close call</i>	a very near accident or disaster
<i>burn the candle at both ends</i>	cause yourself problems because you are doing too much
<i>cannot hold a candle to someone</i>	the other person is much better than the first
<i>not worth the candle / the game is not worth the candle</i>	something is not worth the trouble it takes to achieve it
<i>play your cards right</i>	use one's skills in order to succeed or gain an advantage
<i>carry all before you</i>	be successful in an activity, and defeat one's rivals
<i>put the cat among the pigeons</i>	cause trouble or upset a satisfactory/peaceful situation
<i>a Catch 22</i>	an extremely frustrating situation
<i>a poisoned chalice</i>	a job or opportunity that seems very attractive but is likely to lead to failure

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<i>have an eye for the main chance</i>	look for an easy opportunity to make money or improve one's situation
<i>pull someone's chestnuts out of the fire</i>	save someone from a very difficult situation, solve their problems
<i>don't count your chickens before they are hatched</i>	do not make plans for the future because you do not know how a particular situation will develop
<i>keep your chin up</i>	stay calm in a difficult situation
<i>a chink in someone's armour</i>	a weakness that can be taken advantage of
<i>have had your chips</i>	have completely failed in something one was trying to do
<i>when the chips are down / the chips are down</i>	(when) being in a difficult situation
<i>close but no cigar / nice try but no cigar</i>	point to someone that they have failed in what they have tried to achieve
<i>the wheel has turned full circle</i>	something is back at the same position as it was a long time ago
<i>a vicious circle</i>	an extremely difficult situation
<i>go/run (a)round in circles / go round in circles</i>	not make progress, not achieve very much
<i>in the clear</i>	be no longer in danger or trouble
<i>box clever</i>	show cunning behaviour in a difficult situation
<i>on the coat-tails of someone</i>	do something on the basis of the success or popularity of another person or trend, rather than on the basis of one's own efforts
<i>come in from the cold / bring someone in from the cold / be left out in the cold</i>	become popular, accepted, or active again after a long period of unpopularity or lack of involvement
<i>with flying colours</i>	very successfully
<i>come out swinging/fighting</i>	show that you are prepared to do everything in order to win, be successful
<i>that's the way the cookie crumbles</i>	accept the way things are even if they turn out badly
<i>too many cooks spoil the broth</i>	a plan or project fails because there are too many people involved in it
<i>earn your corn</i>	be successful and therefore worth the money one has spent on them
<i>in a corner / in a tight corner / out of a corner</i>	be in a difficult situation
<i>paint into a corner / box into a corner</i>	force you into a difficult situation
<i>turn the corner</i>	recover from a difficult situation
<i>count the cost</i>	consider the extent of the damage or harm that has been done
<i>be down for the count</i>	have failed in something one has been doing
<i>on course for sth.</i>	be likely to achieve sth.
<i>run its course / take its course</i>	develop gradually and come to a natural end of its own accord
<i>stay the course</i>	finish an unpleasant and difficult task although others have discouraged you from doing so
<i>fall through the cracks / slip through the net</i>	fail because the system does not help you properly

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<i>crash and burn</i>	fail badly
<i>up the creek / up the creek without a paddle / up shit creek</i>	be in a very difficult situation
<i>on the crest of a wave / ride the crest of a wave</i>	be very successful with sth.
<i>go critical</i>	reach a stage where sth., e.g. a company, can run smoothly and successfully
<i>come a cropper</i>	suffer a sudden an embarrassing failure
<i>have a cross to bear</i>	suffer from an unpleasant, inconvenient situation
<i>when it comes to the crunch / the crunch comes / crunch time</i>	when a situation becomes difficult or critical
<i>bring the curtains down on sth. / the curtain comes down</i>	an event, process, or state of affairs has come to an end
<i>it's curtains, mean curtains, spell curtains</i>	a career, period of success, etc. has come to an end
<i>not be cut out for sth.</i>	not be the sort of person to succeed in a particular thing or activity
<i>put a dampener on sth.</i>	stop sth. being successful
<i>lead you a merry dance / chase</i>	make it difficult for sb. to achieve sth.
<i>past your sell-by date / pass your sell-by date</i>	have passed the period of being useful and successful
<i>a false dawn</i>	a situation that seems to be an improvement but is none
<i>have had your day</i>	having passed the period in which one was most successful
<i>beat the living daylights out of someone</i>	defeat sb. totally in a competition or contest
<i>someone's days are numbered</i>	not be likely to survive or be successful any longer
<i>come back from the dead / rise from the dead / raise something from the dead</i>	become active and successful again after a long period of inactivity
<i>be dead in the water</i>	have failed with little chance of becoming successful in the future
<i>a death blow</i>	cause that brings a situation, process, event to an end
<i>fight to the death</i>	try very hard to achieve sth, not give up easily
<i>sign your own death warrant</i>	behave in a way that brings about one's own ruin
<i>plumb the depths</i>	experience a difficult situation to an extreme degree
<i>between the devil and the deep blue sea</i>	be in a very difficult situation
<i>load the dice against someone</i>	bring a person in a situation where everything works against him/herself
<i>no dice</i>	have no success or luck with something
<i>go the distance / go the full distance</i>	complete what you are doing and reach the goal
<i>last ditch (attempt, effort)</i>	last escape left to avoid disaster, complete failure
<i>pay dividends</i>	bring advantages at a later stage
<i>just what the doctor ordered</i>	extremely pleasant or useful thing to improve a bad

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	situation
<i>dog-eat-dog</i>	a situation in which everyone wants to succeed without paying attention to morality
<i>every dog has its day</i>	everyone can be successful at some time in their life
<i>go to the dogs</i>	have become less successful, efficient, powerful
<i>out of the / in the doldrums</i>	become successful again / not be very successful
<i>as one door closes another one opens</i>	if you fail with something, there is another way which might be more successful
<i>close the stable door after the horse has bolted/gone</i>	try to solve a problem when it's too late already
<i>push at an open door</i>	find it very easy to achieve one's aims
<i>the revolving door</i>	a situation where solution to a problem only lasts for a short time
<i>be down and out</i>	have failed, be beaten in a contest
<i>down the drain/tubes/the pan</i>	get worse, be close to failure, be close to being destroyed
<i>drag your feet/heels</i>	delay a decision that is important to progress
<i>be like a dream</i>	something happens very easily, successfully
<i>beyond your wildest dreams</i>	succeed in something better than one expected
<i>a dead duck</i>	a complete failure
<i>in the dumps / down the dumps</i>	do badly, be unsuccessful (e.g., economy or country)
<i>bite the dust</i>	fail, cease to exist
<i>gather dust</i>	stagnate, not be dealt with for a long time
<i>come down to earth / come down to earth with a bump / bring someone back to earth</i>	face the reality of real life after a period of great success and excitement
<i>at a low ebb, at your lowest ebb</i>	be very unsuccessful
<i>in eclipse</i>	be much less successful than one used to be
<i>give sb. a cutting edge</i>	give someone the opportunity to be more successful
<i>lose your edge</i>	lose one's talents, advantages, special skills
<i>take the edge off something</i>	weaken the effect, intensity unpleasantness of a given situation
<i>fray at the edges</i>	become weaker, less certain or stable, gradually being damaged or destroyed
<i>run on empty</i>	not be successful, because having run out of ideas
<i>lead to a dead end</i>	a plan, etc. that has no future, will not develop any further
<i>the end of the road / the end of the line</i>	the point of a situation where one can no longer continue or survive
<i>in at the deep end</i>	start sth. with its most difficult part without any preparation
<i>on the wrong end of something</i>	be unsuccessful in a particular activity or situation

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<i>to the bitter end</i>	do sth. although it becomes extremely difficult
<i>be in the eye of the storm</i>	be involved in a very difficult situation
<i>keep / take your eye off the ball</i>	not pay attention to something and fail
<i>up to your eyes (in work)</i>	deeply involved in an unpleasant situation
<i>blow up in your face / explode in your face</i>	sth. goes wrong or fails unexpectedly
<i>come face to face with sth. / bring someone face to face with sth.</i>	be forced to experience an unpleasant thing or problem
<i>(do sth.) until you are blue in the face</i>	be likely to fail no matter how hard you try
<i>be heading for a fall / be riding for a fall / be headed for a fall</i>	do sth which is very likely to cause failure or unpleasant consequences
<i>seal someone's fate</i>	make it certain that a person fails
<i>tempt fate/providence</i>	take unnecessary risk
<i>keep your feet on the ground</i>	act sensibly even though one has become successful or powerful
<i>find your feet</i>	get to grips with, become able to progress in a new situation
<i>get your feet wet / have your feet wet</i>	experience sth. (an unpleasant situation) for the first time
<i>land on your feet / fall on your feet</i>	find oneself in a good situation because of luck
<i>be under someone's feet</i>	gets into a person's way when he/she tries to achieve something
<i>lead the field</i>	be the best or most successful in an activity or competition
<i>get your fingers burned / burn your fingers</i>	do sth. wrong which causes unpleasant consequences
<i>keep your finger crossed / cross your fingers / fingers crossed</i>	hoping for luck or success in something
<i>hang on by your fingertips / hang on by your fingernails</i>	manage to survive, but be close to failure
<i>play with fire</i>	behave very riskily
<i>fan the flames</i>	do sth. which makes a bad situation worse
<i>go up in flames / go down in flames</i>	fail, come to an end
<i>a flash in the pan</i>	a very short success or achievement to is not likely to be repeated
<i>fall flat</i>	be completely unsuccessful
<i>fall flat on your face</i>	fail in an activity
<i>drop like flies</i>	fail within a short period of time
<i>the fly in the ointment</i>	a thing or person that prevents a particular situation from becoming as successful as it could be
<i>fool's gold</i>	plan that is foolish to be carried out because it is sure it will fail
<i>the boot is on the other foot</i>	a situation has been completely reversed: the successful ones are in a worse position, while the previously unsuccessful ones are better off

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<i>have a foot in the door</i>	have made a successful start in trying to get involved in sth.
<i>get off on the wrong foot</i>	start sth. badly or in an unfortunate way
<i>not put a foot wrong</i>	not make any mistakes
<i>put your best foot forward</i>	work hard on something to make it a success
<i>shoot yourself in the foot</i>	do or say sth. stupid which causes problems and harms the chances of success
<i>start off on the right foot</i>	start something with immediate success
<i>be in the frame / the name in the frame</i>	be very likely to become successful
<i>go into freefall / in freefall</i>	deteriorate very quickly
<i>bear fruit</i>	produce good/successful results
<i>out of the frying pan into the fire</i>	from a bad situation into a worse one
<i>add fuel to the fire / add fuel to the flames</i>	make a bad situation worse
<i>be ahead of the game</i>	be well prepared to deal with any change that happens in an activity
<i>beat someone at their own game</i>	be more successful than those who usually do it
<i>play a waiting game</i>	delay decisions
<i>get into gear / be in gear</i>	begin to operate effectively and successfully
<i>give up the ghost</i>	fail, stop trying to do sth. because you do not believe it will succeed
<i>an own goal</i>	a course of action that fails completely
<i>strike gold</i>	find, do, produce something that brings a lot of money or success
<i>you can't keep a good man/woman down</i>	good people will recover fast from difficulties or setbacks
<i>cook your goose / your goosed is cooked</i>	do something which spoils your chances of success
<i>kill the goose that lays the golden eggs / kill the golden goose</i>	destroy ones source of income or success
<i>make the grade</i>	succeed at something
<i>dig your own grave</i>	do foolish things that lead to your failure
<i>be in the groove</i>	have a continuous series of success
<i>gain ground</i>	make progress, become more powerful
<i>get in on the ground floor</i>	be involved from the beginning in a process which is likely to become successful
<i>get something off the ground / get off the ground</i>	succeed in starting something after a long time of preparation
<i>lose ground / make up lost ground</i>	lose some power or advantage
<i>prepare the ground</i>	prepare sth. for a future event, course of action
<i>up a gum tree</i>	be in a very difficult situation

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<i>go great guns</i>	be very successful
<i>the halcyon days of sth.</i>	the time when sth. was very successful
<i>go off half-cocked / go off at half cock</i>	be very unsuccessful due to a lack of preparation
<i>(do sth.) with one hand tied behind your back / with your hands tied behind your back</i>	suffer from a disadvantage which makes it unlikely for you to succeed
<i>play into someone's hands</i>	make a foolish mistake to the advantage of one's rival
<i>hang up your boots</i>	give up an activity
<i>batten down the hatches</i>	prepare for a difficult situation
<i>make hay while the sun shines</i>	take advantage of a good situation which is not likely to last
<i>get in over your head / be in over your head</i>	be deeply involved in a situation which is difficult to deal with
<i>hang over your head</i>	sth. bothers you because it may cause sth. bad to happen to you in the future
<i>have your head in the clouds</i>	be out of touch with reality, have impractical ideas about achieving success
<i>keep your head above water</i>	struggle to survive a difficult situation
<i>put your head in a noose / stick your head in a noose</i>	do something which will put you in danger or a difficult situation
<i>make headway</i>	make progress
<i>move heaven and earth</i>	do everything to achieve sth.
<i>the dizzy heights / dizzying heights</i>	have reached a very high level of success, which makes failure more likely
<i>go through hell / put someone through hell</i>	go through a very unpleasant period
<i>hell on earth / a living hell</i>	a very unpleasant situation
<i>the road to hell is paved with good intentions</i>	one can only become successful if one carries out one's plans
<i>(have been) to hell and back / through hell and back</i>	have had a horrible experience which is now over
<i>leave someone high and dry</i>	leave someone in a difficult situation
<i>ride high</i>	be very popular or successful
<i>(do sth.) hit and miss / hit or miss</i>	do sth. uncarefully so that it is unlikely to succeed
<i>in a hole / out of a hole</i>	in a difficult or embarrassing situation
<i>bring home the bacon</i>	win, do something very well
<i>be home and dry / home and hosed</i>	have achieved victory or success
<i>the home stretch/straight</i>	the last stage of a difficult activity
<i>get off the hook</i>	manage to get out of an awkward situation
<i>jump through hoops / go through hoops</i>	be forced to do a lot of difficult things to achieve a certain aim

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<i>stir up a hornet's nest</i>	cause a lot of problems or controversy
<i>flog a dead horse, beat a dead horse</i>	waste one's time by trying to achieve sth. useless
<i>a one-horse race</i>	competition with an obvious winner
<i>a house of cards</i>	an organization, situation that is likely to fail or collapse
<i>over the hump</i>	over the worst part of a difficult situation
<i>skate on thin ice</i>	be in a difficult situation which may have serious consequences
<i>have a good innings</i>	do something successfully for a long time
<i>strike while the iron is hot</i>	act immediately while one has the best chance of succeeding
<i>have a lot of irons in the fire</i>	be involved in a lot of good situations / have a lot of advantages so that it is likely that one is going to succeed
<i>hit the jackpot</i>	be very successful / earn a lot of money
<i>do a job on someone</i>	defeat another person
<i>the joker in the pack</i>	a thing or person who/that is different from the other things or people and whose influence on future events cannot be guessed
<i>on an even keel</i>	progressing steadily, especially after a period of troubles or difficulties
<i>put the kibosh on sth.</i>	prevent something from happening, continuing, or being successful
<i>in at the kill / in on the kill</i>	participate in the decisive stages of a contest/activity
<i>move in for the kill / go for the kill</i>	act decisively to defeat one's opponent
<i>blow someone to kingdom come</i>	defeat sb. completely
<i>bring sth. to its knees / be on its knees</i>	force into / be in a very weak position
<i>sound the death knell for sth. / the death knell sounds for sth.</i>	cause an activity or organization to fail, end
<i>like a hot (knife) through butter</i>	overcome a difficulty without any problems
<i>on a knife edge / walk a knife-edge</i>	be in an undecided and difficult situation
<i>cut the Gordian knot</i>	solve a very difficult situation, problem
<i>be in the fast/slow lane, the slow lane</i>	live one's life full of/without activity and pressure
<i>stick to your last / let the cobbler stick to his last</i>	do what you can in order not to fail
<i>have the last laugh</i>	become successful while other have predicted your failure
<i>look to your laurels / not rest on your laurels</i>	work hard to remain successful
<i>go down like a lead balloon / a lead balloon</i>	be completely unsuccessful
<i>(get) a new lease of/on life</i>	become successful again
<i>not have a leg to stand on</i>	be in a very weak position, be close to failure

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<i>have legs</i>	an idea, plan, etc. that is likely to work
<i>(be) on your last legs</i>	be no longer useful, successful, or strong
<i>risk life and limb</i>	do something very dangerous/risky
<i>the light at the end of a tunnel</i>	the end of a difficult or unpleasant situation
<i>in the front line, on the front line</i>	be in the most important position to defend or achieve sth
<i>on the right lines / along the right lines</i>	behave in a way that is likely to result in success
<i>put your head into the lion's mouth</i>	deliberately place yourself in a difficult or dangerous situation
<i>walk into the lion's den / Daniel in the lion's den</i>	place oneself in extreme danger, a difficult situation
<i>half a loaf is better than none</i>	be satisfied with what you have, because one could have less
<i>cut your losses</i>	stop spending energy on an unsuccessful activity or situation
<i>be quick/first/slow off the mark</i>	be quick in understanding sth., take advantage of an opportunity
<i>go the extra mile</i>	make a special effort to achieve sth.
<i>go through the mill / put through the mill</i>	go/force through a period of great difficulty or hard training
<i>a millstone around your neck</i>	a very unpleasant problem
<i>miss the boat / bus</i>	fail to take advantage of an opportunity, lose the chance to do sth.
<i>put the mockers on sth.</i>	prevent sth. from becoming successful
<i>have a mountain to climb</i>	be difficult for someone to achieve sth.
<i>not cut the mustard</i>	not be as good or successful as expected
<i>catch someone napping</i>	not be prepared for sth. and lose an advantage as a result
<i>risk your neck</i>	do sth. very dangerous
<i>foul your own nest</i>	do sth. which damages your chances of success
<i>slip through the net, fall through the net</i>	fail because the supporting system is not efficient enough
<i>grasp the nettle</i>	deal with a problem or unpleasant task in a determined way
<i>a back number</i>	an unsuccessful, useless thing
<i>great oaks from little acorns grow</i>	successful things begin in a small and insignificant way
<i>strike oil</i>	become successful in doing sth.
<i>you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs</i>	you cannot achieve sth. without accepting negative side effects
<i>be one up on someone / get one up on someone</i>	have an advantage over another person
<i>put one over on someone / get one over on someone</i>	gain advantage or victory over another person

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<i>a tall order</i>	a difficult task to achieve
<i>go in overdrive / be in overdrive</i>	work very hard to perform intensely and very well
<i>can't stand / take the pace</i>	not function effectively and not be able to compete or do things as well as others
<i>put someone through their paces</i>	show someone person how well he/she can do sth.
<i>be ahead of the pack</i>	be more successful than one's competitors
<i>growing pains</i>	an organization, etc. suffers from temporary difficulties and problems as it develops to become stronger
<i>open a Pandora's box</i>	cause a lot of problems
<i>below par / under par / not up to par</i>	below the standard, unsuccessful
<i>be par for the course</i>	not be pleased with something because it turned out the way you expected
<i>seek greener pastures</i>	search for a better situation
<i>move to pastures new, fresh</i>	move on to a better situation
<i>break a path</i>	find a new and more successful way of dealing with sth.
<i>keep your pecker up</i>	remain cheerful in a difficult situation
<i>knock you off your perch / fall off your perch</i>	fail, damage your status or position
<i>be shot to pieces</i>	be ruined, have failed completely
<i>swallow a bitter pill / a bitter pill to swallow</i>	accept an unpleasant or difficult situation
<i>in the pipeline</i>	be in progress
<i>a place in the sun</i>	a job or situation in which you are happy and well-off
<i>go places</i>	show a lot of talent or ability and be likely to become successful
<i>the plot thickens</i>	a difficult situation becomes more complicated
<i>score points off sb.</i>	gain an advantage over someone
<i>move up the greasy pole</i>	reaching a more successful position as a result of hard work
<i>be in pole position</i>	be in a very strong position in a competition or competitive situation
<i>be a port in a storm</i>	a person, place, or organization that can help you in a difficult situation
<i>be first past the post</i>	finish or achieve sth. first
<i>pip someone at the post</i>	narrowly beat so. in a competition
<i>keep the pot boiling</i>	do sth. to continue a developing process
<i>sit on a powder keg</i>	be in a very dangerous situation
<i>sit pretty</i>	be in a comfortable, good, and safe situation
<i>prime the pump</i>	take action to help something succeed or grow

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<i>rags to riches / riches to rags</i>	from being poor to becoming successful
<i>jump the rails</i>	go wrong, fail
<i>go off the rails</i>	start to go wrong, become unsuccessful
<i>stay on be rails / be back on the rails</i>	be successful (again)
<i>be (the pot of gold) at the end of the rainbow</i>	be very difficult to achieve
<i>chase rainbows</i>	try to achieve sth. you can never have
<i>get out of the rat race</i>	get out of a competitive job or way of life
<i>reap the harvest</i>	suffer or benefit from past actions
<i>get a free ride</i>	get some benefit without putting any effort into achieving it
<i>be a rough ride / a bumpy ride / an easy ride</i>	(not) cause a lot of problems, (not) be difficult to achieve for sb.
<i>between a rock and a hard place</i>	be in a very difficult situation
<i>hit rock bottom / reach rock bottom / at rock bottom</i>	be very unsuccessful, be in a hopeless situation
<i>on the rocks</i>	be in great difficulties and likely to fail
<i>make a rod for your own back</i>	do something which causes many problems for you
<i>be on a roll</i>	make a lot of progress in a particular situation
<i>put down roots</i>	become firmly established in a situation, so that it is likely to last and be successful
<i>be on the ropes</i>	be very close to failing or being defeated
<i>come up smelling of roses / everything is coming up roses</i>	be in a better situation after having been in difficulties, have a lot of success
<i>a hard row to hoe, a tough row to hoe</i>	be in a very difficult situation
<i>run before you can walk</i>	do something very difficult before you can deal with the easier thing
<i>ride high in the saddle</i>	be very successful currently and show this in your attitude
<i>play it safe / play safe</i>	not take any risks
<i>not be plain / clear / smooth sailing</i>	be difficult to achieve
<i>trim your sails</i>	adapt your behaviour to a difficult situation
<i>the last chance saloon / drinking in the last chance saloon</i>	the final opportunity to succeed
<i>build something on sand</i>	do something without a proper basis, be likely to fail or come to an end
<i>come apart at the seams / fall apart at the seams</i>	be in a very bad state, be about to collapse and fail completely
<i>sow the seeds of something / plant the seeds of something</i>	start an action which causes future effects
<i>a shadow of your former self</i>	be less powerful and successful than one used to be

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<i>a close shave</i>	a near disaster, defeat
<i>jump ship / abandon ship</i>	leave an organization, because it is about to fail
<i>a sinking ship / abandon a sinking ship / like a rat leaving a sinking ship</i>	leave a failing organization
<i>when your ship comes in</i>	when you become successful, rich
<i>in the shit / in deep shit</i>	be in a difficult situation
<i>the shit hits the fan</i>	a situation becomes very bad or difficult
<i>dead men's shoes</i>	a situation in which people cannot make progress in their careers
<i>be in someone's shoes / in someone's boots</i>	be in the same situation as another person
<i>step into someone's shoes / fill someone's shoes</i>	take over a job or position and do it as well as the predecessor
<i>give sth. your best shot</i>	try very hard to achieve sth.
<i>a long shot</i>	a way of solving a situation or problem that is very unlikely to succeed
<i>have only one shot in your locker</i>	have only one means left to achieve success
<i>get the show on the road / keep the show on the road</i>	put a plan or idea into action
<i>(have sth.) on your side</i>	have sth. that gives you an advantage
<i>a silver lining / every cloud has a silver lining</i>	even a bad situation can have a positive side effect
<i>sink or swim</i>	fail or succeed in doing sth. on one's own
<i>be on the skids</i>	be doing very badly and be likely to fail
<i>put the skids under something</i>	cause sb. or sth. to do badly or fail
<i>the sky's the limit</i>	it is very likely that something or someone becomes very successful
<i>have something/an ace/a card up your sleeve</i>	have a secret idea or plan that can be used to gain an advantage
<i>have your ass in a sling</i>	be in a very difficult situation
<i>there is many a slip twixt cup and lip</i>	any plan can go wrong before it is fully completed
<i>go up in smoke</i>	fail without having achieved anything
<i>throw a spanner in the works / put a spanner in the works</i>	cause problems which prevent something from happening, becoming successful
<i>bring sth. up to speed / get up to speed</i>	make sth. reach the highest level of efficiency
<i>put a spoke in someone's wheel</i>	make it difficult for someone to do/achieve what they have planned to do/achieve
<i>get the wooden spoon</i>	fail, be the worst in a particular activity
<i>hit the spot</i>	be very good and succeed in pleasing people
<i>sb. puts you on the spot</i>	sb. puts you into a difficult situation
<i>be up the spout</i>	be in great difficulty

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<i>back to square one / back at square one / from square one</i>	have failed completely, so you have to start all over again
<i>reach for the stars/the sky/the moon</i>	try hard to achieve sth. although it may be difficult
<i>pick up steam</i>	become stronger and more active
<i>run out of steam</i>	a process becomes weaker and less active
<i>in a cleft stick</i>	in a difficult situation
<i>take the sting out of something</i>	make an unpleasant situation better
<i>leave no stone unturned</i>	do everything possible to achieve sth.
<i>the calm/lull before the storm</i>	very quiet period before a very intense/difficult one
<i>take somewhere by storm</i>	be very successful and popular at a particular place
<i>weather the storm / ride out the storm / ride the storm</i>	survive a difficult situation without any harm
<i>the last straw / the final straw / the straw that breaks the camels back</i>	the latest in a series of unpleasant events that makes a situation intolerable
<i>clutch at straws / grasp at straws / a drowning man will clutch at a straw</i>	rely on ideas, etc. that are unlikely to be successful
<i>be streets ahead</i>	be much better than another person
<i>take something in your stride / take something in stride</i>	deal with a particular situation calmly and successfully
<i>three strikes against someone / two strikes against someone</i>	two, three factors which make it impossible for someone to become successful
<i>another string to your bow / many strings to your bow</i>	have more than one skill or ability you can use to become successful
<i>an Indian summer</i>	a late success in one's career or life
<i>one swallow doesn't make a summer</i>	although sth. good has happened one cannot rely on the situation becoming better in general
<i>get into the swing of sth.</i>	start doing sth. well and successfully
<i>in full swing</i>	operating fully/successfully rather than being at an early stage
<i>swings and roundabouts</i>	disadvantages and advantages
<i>what you lose on the swings you gain on the roundabouts</i>	while one situation might be successful and bring advantage, the other can be disadvantageous
<i>have the Sword of Damocles hanging over their heads</i>	be in a situation in which a very bad thing could happen
<i>turn the tables</i>	change a situation so that you gain an advantage
<i>chase your own tail</i>	spend a lot of energy on something without succeeding
<i>with your tail up</i>	be very confident about one's chances of success
<i>teething problems/troubles</i>	problems at the very early stages of a project
<i>stand the test of time</i>	have not failed or gone out of fashion for a long time
<i>hang by a thread</i>	be very likely to fail

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<i>cut your own throat</i>	make a mistake that might cause a disaster for you
<i>walk a tightrope</i>	be in a very difficult situation which needs careful measures
<i>hit the big time</i>	become famous and successful
<i>the tip of the iceberg</i>	the small part of a serious problem
<i>dip your toe in the water</i>	start something slowly, because you are not sure if it will be successful
<i>be on top of something</i>	deal with a thing successfully
<i>throw in the towel, sponge</i>	stop something, because you know that it cannot succeed
<i>the fast track</i>	the quickest way of achieving something
<i>have the inside track</i>	have an advantage (e.g., insider knowledge)
<i>on the right track /on the wrong track</i>	acting or progressing in a way that is likely (unlikely) to succeed
<i>stop something (dead) in its track</i>	stop a process or activity
<i>blaze a trail</i>	discover a new an important way to achieve sth.
<i>the top of the tree</i>	the highest level in the career
<i>a trump card / play your trump card</i>	(use) a decisive advantage over other people
<i>come up trumps</i>	have achieved an unexpectedly good result
<i>bloodied but unbowed</i>	have passed a bad experience without being defeated or destroyed
<i>come unstuck</i>	fail
<i>be on the up / on the up and up</i>	become very successful
<i>up and coming</i>	likely to become very successful in the future
<i>be up and running</i>	working and functioning successfully
<i>hitch your wagon to someone / hitch your wagon to a star</i>	try to become more successful by forming a relationship with a successful person
<i>bang your head against a brick wall / a wall / come up against a brick wall</i>	not make any progress, because another person/problem hinders you
<i>hit the wall</i>	reach a point where you cannot progress any further
<i>in deep water</i>	in a very difficult situation
<i>tread water</i>	be in an unsatisfactory situation and not progressing
<i>meet your Waterloo</i>	suffer a very severe defeat or failure
<i>fish in troubled waters</i>	be involved in a difficult situation which could cause problems
<i>catch the wave</i>	seize an opportunity
<i>pave the way</i>	make it easier for sth. to succeed
<i>fall by the wayside</i>	have failed in something, and given up trying to

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	achieve success in it
<i>a dead weight</i>	something that makes change or progress very difficult
<i>oil the wheels / grease the wheels</i>	help a thing to develop smoothly or successfully
<i>set the wheels in motion</i>	do what is necessary to start a project
<i>spin your wheels</i>	not progress / fail to achieve anything satisfactory
<i>the wheels are turning</i>	a situation or process is continuing to develop or progress
<i>(lose, etc.) by a whisker</i>	achieve something, but almost fail
<i>come within a whisker of something</i>	almost succeed in doing something
<i>on a sticky wicket / bat on a sticky wicket</i>	be in a difficult situation
<i>sail close to the wind</i>	take a risk by doing something which may get you into trouble
<i>a second wind</i>	a new motivation, strength
<i>spit in the wind</i>	try to achieve something which has little chance of succeeding
<i>take the wind out of someone's sails</i>	prevent someone or sth. from progressing successfully
<i>twist / swing in the wind</i>	be in a very weak position to the advantage of another person
<i>try your wings</i>	try something new to see if you can succeed
<i>out of the woods</i>	out of a difficult situation
<i>have your work cut out</i>	have a very big problem to deal with
<i>in the works</i>	being planned or in progress
<i>come down in the world / come up, go up / move up in the world</i>	lose / gain social status
<i>the world is your oyster</i>	have the opportunity to achieve great success in your life
<i>the best of both worlds / the worst of both worlds</i>	all the benefits (problems) and (dis)advantages from two different things
<i>go through the wringer / be put through the wringer</i>	go through a very difficult period or situation
<i>a zero-sum game</i>	a situation from which one gains advantages as well as disadvantages