

PREFACE

Scholars, students, and teachers of English everywhere will welcome Dr George L. Nagy's new *Thesaurus of English Idioms* as a splendid addition to the reference resources for the study and understanding of English. Its coverage is comprehensive; the presentation and organization of information constitute a model of clarity and user-friendliness.

Idioms are among the most difficult aspects of a language for learners to come to grips with, while at the same time presenting formidable obstacles for lexicographers who attempt to encapsulate them in a reference work. By a mixture of common sense and ingenuity, the present work overcomes these obstacles with the kind of apparent effortless that in reality masks hours of careful thought and experimentation. Always, the user's interests are at the forefront. There are no tiresome abbreviations, while the technical terminology of linguistics is kept to an absolute minimum. The explanations are extremely lucid, offering a range of alternative expressions that realize roughly the same meaning as the idiom being defined.

A reader who does not know the meaning of *come to grips with something* will find this expression clearly explained under both *come* and *grips*. Not only that, but also a selection of somewhat less idiomatic synonymic phrases is offered (*be able to cope with/deal with/live with something*), together with an informal equivalent (*get a handle on something*).

Because this is not merely an explanatory dictionary but also a thesaurus, readers will find plentiful information about equivalent terms. Thus, a person who *wouldn't hurt a fly* (informal) may also be called *as gentle as a lamb* or referred to as a *pussycat* (slang). This aspect of the thesaurus is particularly useful for both language scholars and public speakers and writers seeking just the right expression at just the right level of (in)formality.

It is a characteristic of idiomatic phrases that they are used in non-standard language. Within four broad stylistic levels (formal, neutral, informal, and slang), the *Thesaurus of English Idioms* provides a great deal of useful information about the use of phrases and idioms, for example that a *landslide victory* is, typically, a political term, that the proverb *empty vessels make the most sound* was used by (and no doubt owes much of its popularity to) Shakespeare, that *casting pearls before swine* is of Biblical origin, and that *keep your pecker up* is jocular slang with vulgar connotations. The Thesaurus is frank and straightforward about taboo expressions, without dwelling unnecessarily on them.

Idiomatic phrases mean more than the sum of their parts. Thus, for example, a naïve reader could be pardoned for believing that there is nothing more to the catch phrase *it seemed like a good idea at the time* than the literal meaning of the words.

However, Dr Nagy correctly explains that the expression is used to refer to an action of which it was impossible to foresee the consequences at the outset, and that those consequences are usually trouble.

The *Thesaurus of English Idioms* is easy to use. It is easy to find the information you are looking for. Dr Nagy's keen sensitivity to language, his unbounded energy, and his skill in organizing complex data so that it is easily accessible have combined to create a work that enhances our understanding of natural phraseology in English, bringing together a wealth of synonymic idioms and phrases and glossing them with exemplary clarity.

Patrick Hanks, Berlin, September 2005

INTRODUCTION

The *Thesaurus of English Idioms* is the first attempt in the English language to construct a dictionary of synonymous idioms. The collection contains 21,500 entries, including about 12,500 idioms, over 9,000 cross-references, some 22,000 example sentences, and over 100,000 synonymous words and phrases.

The book has been designed for five distinct audiences:

1. students of English who would like to build a strong idiomatic vocabulary;
2. native speakers who wish to expand their phraseological vocabulary;
3. teachers of ESL (English as a Second Language) throughout the world;
4. members of the general public, wishing to use the collection as a comprehensive reference guide to figurative English;
5. lexicographers doing research in the field.

The *Thesaurus of English Idioms* will also serve as a cultural document, reflecting the idiomatic vocabulary of an educated American at the beginning of the new millennium.

The most unique feature of the dictionary is its consistent application of Total Quality Management. TQM means that consumer satisfaction takes precedence over cost considerations. There are four important TQM features which set this work apart from most other idiom dictionaries:

1. Cross-references are built into the main body of the dictionary. This eliminates the need for a phrase finder index at the end of the book.
2. All cross-references are supplied with synonymous translations, and almost 90 percent of them include examples as well.
3. There are virtually no abbreviations throughout the dictionary. This ensures even greater clarity.
4. The examples used are short and to the point, taken from everyday life rather than lengthy published sources. They include over 3,000 short dialogues.

How to Locate an Idiom

The *Thesaurus of English Idioms* is a noun-priority dictionary. If the phrase to be located contains a noun, it will be listed under that noun. Sometimes there are two nouns of equal value in a phrase, in which case the second noun is cross-referenced. Second priority is given to verbs, followed by adverbs, adjectives, and numerals.

Binomials are listed under the first of the two key elements, with cross-references made to the second element and any other parts of the phrase. Thus, the phrase *go to rack and ruin* is listed under *rack* as the main entry, with cross-references and additional examples given under *ruin* and *go*.

All cross-referenced phrases contain one or more words in *italics* which guide the reader to the main entry. Main entries always provide additional examples, and occasionally even additional information.

Prepositions rarely qualify as main entries, because the noun or the verb *be* takes precedence over them. For instance, the phrase *be at stake* can be found under *stake* (main entry) and the verb *be (at)* (cross reference). This is a major departure from many other phraseological dictionaries, which treat prepositions as main entries.

Scope of the Dictionary

The Thesaurus of English Idioms covers several stylistic levels ranging from lofty and formal phrases to rather course forms of slang. Thematically, the dictionary is strong on legal, business, and political terms, which frequently occur in the daily press. The author has incorporated in the book hundreds of never before published phrases, collected from the American news media in recent years.

Next to the most recent slang, the reader can find idioms and proverbs dating back to biblical times, and classical antiquities. The classification, accompanying most entries, gives the user a clear idea of the stylistic category to which the phrase belongs. Some classifications refer to origin (i.e. proverb, catch phrase), others provide a grammatical or structural note (i.e. adverb, binomial), yet others caution against use in formal communications (i.e. cliché, rough slang). As a result of this system, an idiom may have more than one comment next to it. For instance, the phrase *few and far between* contains three notations: *binomial* (structure), *informal* (stylistic level), and *adverb* (grammatical function).

Statistically, the idiomatic categories covered in the collection can be broken down into the following groups and roughly estimated totals:

Phrasal verbs	3,000	Catch phrases	700
Clichés	1,800	Proverbs/ Sayings	700
Binomials	900	Word Collocations	
Adverbial phrases	800	Verb-Noun	1,200
Similes	700	Adjective-Noun	400
		Noun Phrase	300

What Is an Idiom

An idiom is a fixed expression whose literal translation is different from its actual meaning. Of course, if we limited ourselves to this narrow definition, we would have to eliminate a considerable part of similes, speech conventions, proverbs, catch phrases, adjective-noun combinations, and noun phrases, such as

<i>it makes you think, doesn't it?</i>	(catch phrase)
<i>honesty is the best policy</i>	(proverb)
<i>(as) white as a sheet</i>	(simile)
<i>the outside world</i>	(adjective-noun combination).

None of these expressions convey a figurative message. They have been included in the dictionary because they fall in the category of fixed phrases, which must be mastered by non-native speakers of English if they wish to become fully proficient. Fixed phrases provide instantly usable building blocks for the language learner. No part of the phrase can be substituted or replaced. For instance, in the phrase *tamper with a witness*, the word *tamper* cannot be changed to *tinker*, *meddle*, *mess with*, or any other synonym of the verb. Likewise, the phrase *a splitting headache* would not sound "native" if we replaced *splitting* with the adjective *piercing*, *cutting*, *biting*, or *sharp*.

How to Read a Typical Entry

All main entries and cross-references are alphabetized under the key words they contain. Thus, the idiom *wear one's heart on one's sleeve* can be found under *heart* (main entry), the noun *sleeve*, and the verb *wear* (cross-references). The cross-references contain all explanatory notes, and there are examples illuminating the expressions under each noun. The synonymous translations are arranged in a declining stylistic order, i.e. lofty, formal, standard, informal, slang, and rough slang.

HEART

wear one's heart on one's sleeve · (*informal*) to make no secret of one's feelings/ thoughts; to be blunt/ plain-spoken/ straightforward; (*informal*;) not to mince (one's) words; to be open and aboveboard; to make no bones about it; (*slang*;) to tell it/ call it like it is; to lay it on the line; to shoot straight

My boss wears his heart on his sleeve. If he doesn't like something, he tells you to your face.

- the key word appears in capital letters
- the bullet (·) marks common phrases
- the word in italics gives the stylistic level
- the first set of explanations is followed by three informal and three slang synonyms
- the example selects a typical setting in which the phrase might be used

Stylistic Level

Almost all idioms are accompanied by notations describing their stylistic level. There are four basic levels, and several sub-groups under each of them:

Level	Sub-Group	Example
I. FORMAL	lofty, poetic, literary business, legal solemn	<i>the dawn of a new day</i> <i>to all intents and purposes</i> <i>from this day forward</i>

II. NEUTRAL	there is no stylistic notation with standard English	<i>an exception to the rule enjoy good health</i>
III. INFORMAL	conversational, folksy, jocular, catch phrase, cliché	<i>are you ready for this? need it like a hole in the head put someone on a pedestal</i>
IV. SLANG	slang, rough slang, vulgar, obscene	<i>get into someone's jeans be (all) fucked up</i>

Formal and neutral (standard English) idioms are appropriate for business communication, official correspondence, creative writing, newspaper articles, college term papers, lectures, reports, negotiations, court proceedings, and legal documents.

Informal idioms are more likely to occur in oral communication among friends, family members, coworkers, and neighbors. These phrases should be used sparingly in official correspondence. However, the language of journalism does not shy away from informal or even slang expressions because of their colorful imagery.

Slang expressions are strictly conversational, and they should be used only in closed circles of intimate friends. The excessive use of slang may reflect negatively on an individual, and should be avoided. Nevertheless, it is absolutely essential to have a good grasp of slang in order to understand television dialogues, personal conversations, movies, and even the daily press.

Classification of Phraseological Units

I. PHRASAL VERBS

One of the most challenging tasks facing the language learner is coping with the large number of phrasal verbs found on all stylistic levels of English. The typical phrasal verb is comprised of a verb and a particle, which is usually a preposition or directional adverb. Almost all phrasal verbs are concentrated around one-syllable verbs, such as *be, go, put, take, get, keep, sit, break, kick*, to mention only a few.

Phrasal verbs are the fastest-growing phraseological elements of the language. New combinations are created every day, and many of these begin to double as nouns. For instance, in *cave-in, mix-up, break-in, and write-up*, a hyphen is still present, but in many others, such as *breakup, makeup, roundup, and buildup*, the hyphen disappears and a new compound noun emerges. Below is a list of the 44 most frequently used particles in the formation of phrasal verbs:

<i>about</i>	<i>back</i>	<i>from</i>	<i>through</i>
<i>above</i>	<i>before</i>	<i>in(to)</i>	<i>to</i>

<i>across</i>	<i>behind</i>	<i>near</i>	<i>together</i>
<i>after</i>	<i>below</i>	<i>next</i>	<i>toward</i>
<i>against</i>	<i>beside</i>	<i>of</i>	<i>under</i>
<i>ahead</i>	<i>between</i>	<i>off</i>	<i>un(til)</i>
<i>along</i>	<i>beyond</i>	<i>on</i>	<i>up(on)</i>
<i>among</i>	<i>by</i>	<i>open</i>	<i>upward</i>
<i>apart</i>	<i>down</i>	<i>out(side)</i>	<i>with</i>
<i>around</i>	<i>for</i>	<i>over</i>	<i>within</i>
<i>away</i>	<i>forward</i>	<i>past</i>	<i>without</i>

A considerable portion of phrasal verbs is separable. These units contain a transitive verb which may attract a direct object, separating the verb from its particle. Such separable phrasal verbs are clearly identified in the dictionary with both structures listed, as in:

<i>write off someone/ something</i>	<i>write someone/ something off</i>
<i>take back something</i>	<i>take something back</i>
<i>fill out something</i>	<i>fill something out</i>
<i>make up something</i>	<i>make something up</i>
<i>keep up something</i>	<i>keep something up</i>
<i>figure out something</i>	<i>figure something out</i>

The phrasal verb is always inseparable if it contains an intransitive verb which cannot attract a direct object, as in:

<i>go to pieces</i>	<i>carry on</i>	<i>burst out crying</i>
<i>be in luck</i>	<i>jump at the chance</i>	<i>walk away with something</i>

There are several phrasal verbs which add a preposition to the particle, thereby giving the expression a new meaning. Note how drastically the meaning changes if we change the preposition added to the phrasal verb:

<i>stand up for someone</i>	(to express support for someone)
<i>stand up to someone</i>	(to be unafraid to resist/ challenge someone)
<i>get back at someone</i>	(to retaliate against someone)
<i>get back to someone</i>	(to report back to someone)
<i>be in for it</i>	(to be punished for something)
<i>be in on it</i>	(to be an accomplice in something)

II. CLICHÉS

Clichés are trite, hackneyed, unimaginative, commonplace idioms which have lost their luster over time due to overuse. They span the entire spectrum of phraseology. Many proverbs, binomials, catch phrases, sayings, and even phrasal verbs can be classified as clichés. Since these are the most widely understood phrases in

the language, students should not frown upon them. The extensive use of clichés, however, may create the impression that the speaker is lazy, insincere, or poorly educated. Clichés should be avoided in official documents, scientific studies, term papers, and business correspondence. The *Thesaurus of English Idioms* offers the reader several synonymous alternatives as substitutes for trite phrases:

Cliché	Substitute
<i>last but not least</i>	finally; in conclusion; to end the presentation
<i>put someone on a pedestal</i>	to idolize/ extol/ glorify/ exalt/ worship someone
<i>move in the right direction</i>	to embark on the correct course; to act properly
<i>by the same token</i>	using the same argument; for the same reason; on the same basis; likewise; similarly

III. BINOMIALS

Binomials are idioms containing two distinctly recognizable elements for the purpose of enhancing effect. The sequence of the twin elements is irreversible. The technical tools employed are rhyme, alliteration, repetition, contrast, alternative, and enumeration:

Binomial	Effect-enhancing Tools
<i>do or die</i>	alternative, alliteration
<i>neck and neck</i>	repetition, alliteration
<i>near and dear</i>	rhyme, enumeration
<i>make or break</i>	rhyme, alternative
<i>back and forth</i>	contrast, enumeration
<i>(as) sure as death and taxes</i>	parallel, enumeration

Binomials are often clichés, and they account for about seven percent of the phraseological material in this dictionary.

IV. ADVERBIAL PHRASES

Adverbial phrases modify the verb of their clause. They can be classified into numerous sub-groups based upon meaning. The table below shows the most common types and the questions they answer:

Idiom	Meaning	Answers the Question	Type of Adverb
<i>by word of mouth</i>	orally, verbally	how	adverb of means
<i>on a cold day in hell</i>	never	when	adverb of time
<i>at the back of beyond</i>	very far	where	adverb of place
<i>by leaps and bounds</i>	rapidly, swiftly	how	adverb of manner
<i>in a state of flux</i>	under constant change	in what condition	adverb of condition

V. SIMILES

Similes conjure up the visual image of one thing in order to magnify the image of another by equating the two. Very often, the compared objects have no relationship to each other, and they can be likened only by a stretch of our imagination. The vast majority of similes are introduced by the word "as" (*as fit as a fiddle*), and a fair number includes the word "like" (*like shooting fish in a barrel*). Metaphors are shortened similes, sometimes taking the form of adjective-noun combinations (*an empty suit; a dead duck*) or noun phrases (*a wolf in sheep's clothing; a pain in the neck; a blessing in disguise*).

VI. CATCH PHRASES

Catch phrases are fashionable expressions created and popularized by the mass media, public figures, advertisers, and entertainers. Along with phrasal verbs, these expressions represent another rapidly growing element of phraseology. Catch phrases are the standard idioms of the future at an early stage of formation. Some survive for a long period, some disappear altogether, and others are suddenly brought back from oblivion:

Catch Phrase	Popular Since	Popularized by
<i>the buck stops here</i>	the 1950's	a sign on President Truman's desk
<i>a sixty-four dollar question</i>	the 1960's	a quiz game on American radio
<i>make someone an offer</i>		
<i>he can't refuse</i>	the mid 1970's	the movie "The Godfather"
<i>where's the beef?</i>	the early 1980's	a hamburger commercial
<i>spin doctor</i>	the 1990's	political talk shows on television

VII. PROVERBS

The proverb is a folk wisdom or universal truth handed down from ancient times. A large number of proverbs are Biblical in origin, while others have crossed geographic, cultural, and linguistic barriers to find their way into the English language. Most often, the author of proverbs is unknown. They are used to underscore the arguments made by the speaker or writer, making his or her assertions more credible.

Because of overuse, many proverbs have become clichés, reducing their effectiveness. A number of proverbs have become proverbial phrases, loosening their rigid form:

Proverb	Proverbial Phrase
<i>don't put the cart before the horse</i>	to put the cart before the horse
<i>don't make a mountain out of a molehill</i>	to make a mountain out of a molehill
<i>it is useless to flog a dead horse</i>	to flog a dead horse
<i>it is easy to be wise after the event</i>	to be wise after the event
<i>don't wash your dirty linen in public</i>	to wash one's dirty linen in public

The effectiveness of the proverb is enhanced by its brevity, a variety of technical tricks, and its figurative imagery. The proverb is capable of expressing even the most profound philosophical truths in a clear and concise fashion:

Proverb	Technical Tool
<i>least said, soonest mended</i>	no superfluous words used
<i>more haste, less speed</i>	contrast
<i>haste makes waste</i>	alliteration, rhyme
<i>like father, like son</i>	repetition
<i>look before you leap</i>	alliteration

VIII. SAYINGS

Sayings, adages, and aphorisms convey witty comments and observations about life, in general. They tend to be philosophical in nature because a large number of them have their origin in works of literature. Similar to proverbs, their form is not subject to change by the user:

The cure is worse than the disease.
The left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing. (Biblical)
If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him. (Voltaire)
Frailty, thy name is woman! (Shakespeare)

IX. WORD COLLOCATIONS

Word collocations are figurative expressions, which follow a fixed pattern. They are important building blocks involving combinations of verbs, adjectives, and nouns:

A. Verb–Noun Combinations

<i>have a fit</i>	<i>give someone hell</i>	<i>learn one's lesson</i>
<i>keep one's word</i>	<i>speak one's mind</i>	<i>meet someone halfway</i>

B. Adjective–Noun Combinations

<i>small talk</i>	<i>tall order</i>	<i>tight spot</i>
<i>cold turkey</i>	<i>cold fish</i>	<i>necessary evil</i>

C. Noun Phrases

<i>meeting of minds</i>	<i>a busman's holiday</i>	<i>grist to the mill</i>
<i>Hobson's choice</i>	<i>mind games</i>	<i>a game plan</i>

X. NON-IDIOMATIC COMBINATIONS

All key parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) may attract particles or prepositions. Most of these combinations are not considered idiomatic in nature. They have to be memorized by the students just like irregular verbs. Only a handful of the rather complex Preposition – Noun (– Preposition) combinations have found their way into this collection. Here are the five groups of non-idiomatic combinations:

A. Preposition – Noun – Preposition

<i>at odds with</i>	<i>in cahoots with</i>	<i>on behalf of</i>
<i>by means of</i>	<i>in exchange for</i>	<i>on the basis of</i>
<i>by virtue of</i>	<i>in honor of</i>	<i>on the advice of</i>
<i>for the sake of</i>	<i>in need of</i>	<i>with regard to</i>
<i>in accordance with</i>	<i>in place of</i>	<i>with respect to</i>
<i>in charge of</i>	<i>in possession of</i>	<i>with the exception of</i>
<i>in consideration of</i>	<i>in return for</i>	

B. Preposition – Noun

<i>at a loss</i>	<i>by the way</i>	<i>on/ in time</i>
<i>at fault</i>	<i>in case</i>	<i>on trial</i>
<i>at heart</i>	<i>in any case</i>	<i>on schedule</i>
<i>at length</i>	<i>in public/ private</i>	<i>out of practice</i>
<i>at the moment</i>	<i>in theory</i>	<i>out of breath</i>
<i>at times</i>	<i>in name</i>	<i>out of work</i>
<i>by chance</i>	<i>in force</i>	<i>out of fashion</i>
<i>by heart</i>	<i>on fire</i>	<i>out of character</i>

C. Verb – Preposition

<i>agree to/ with</i>	<i>cooperate with</i>	<i>listen to</i>
<i>amount to</i>	<i>correspond with/ to</i>	<i>look for/ at</i>
<i>approve of</i>	<i>deal in/ with</i>	<i>object to</i>
<i>ask for</i>	<i>depend on</i>	<i>participate in</i>
<i>believe in</i>	<i>die of/ from</i>	<i>recover from</i>
<i>belong to</i>	<i>differ from</i>	<i>refer to</i>
<i>benefit from</i>	<i>dispense with</i>	<i>resign from</i>
<i>beware of</i>	<i>dispose of</i>	<i>refrain from</i>
<i>care for</i>	<i>excel in</i>	<i>result in</i>
<i>coincide with</i>	<i>glance at</i>	<i>send for</i>
<i>comment on</i>	<i>hope for</i>	<i>specialize in</i>
<i>compete with</i>	<i>indulge in</i>	<i>survive on</i>
<i>compete with</i>	<i>insist on</i>	<i>thrive on</i>
<i>confess to</i>	<i>interfere with</i>	<i>vote for</i>
<i>consist of</i>	<i>laugh at</i>	<i>wait for</i>

D. Adjective – Preposition

<i>afraid of</i>	<i>equal to</i>	<i>precious to</i>
<i>anxious about</i>	<i>faithful to</i>	<i>proud of</i>
<i>aware of</i>	<i>famous for</i>	<i>ready for</i>
<i>capable of</i>	<i>fond of</i>	<i>similar to</i>
<i>certain of</i>	<i>full of</i>	<i>sorry for</i>
<i>close to</i>	<i>grateful for/ to</i>	<i>strange to</i>
<i>confident of</i>	<i>guilty of</i>	<i>sufficient for</i>
<i>content with</i>	<i>independent of</i>	<i>suitable for</i>
<i>contrary to</i>	<i>jealous of</i>	<i>superior to</i>
<i>convenient for</i>	<i>kind to</i>	<i>sure of</i>
<i>dependent on</i>	<i>obedient to</i>	<i>useful to</i>
<i>different from</i>	<i>popular with</i>	<i>worthy of</i>

E. Preposition – Adjective/ Adverb

<i>above all</i>	<i>as yet</i>	<i>for now</i>
<i>after all</i>	<i>as well</i>	<i>from now on</i>
<i>all at once</i>	<i>as usual</i>	<i>in general</i>
<i>all along</i>	<i>at all</i>	<i>in short</i>
<i>all told</i>	<i>for ever</i>	<i>in full</i>
<i>at first</i>	<i>for good</i>	
<i>at last</i>	<i>for once</i>	
<i>at once</i>	<i>by far</i>	

English grammar can be mastered relatively easily. But that is only a modest first step. True learning begins with the in-depth study of figurative expressions, phrasal verbs, and word collocations. In addition, the student must cope with a standard group of speech conventions, which are only partially figurative, yet extremely important. To illustrate this, let us take a look at some of the speech conventions found under the key word SAY: *anything you say* (as you wish); *having said that* (in view of this); *I don't know what to say* (I am deeply touched); *I say!* (I am impressed!); *if you say so* (you probably know better than I); *it's hard to say* (it is difficult to determine). Some of these expressions can have multiple meanings depending upon the intonation, context, gestures, and facial expressions accompanying them. This part of the language can be learned only through regular interaction with native speakers.

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George L. Nagy, Ph.D.
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A

A

(everything) from A to Z (*informal*) **1.** everything conceivable; a great variety/ large selection of items; (*informal:*) everything from soup to nuts; **2.** from the beginning to the end; from cover to cover; to the last letter; **3.** completely; every nook and cranny; thoroughly; from top to bottom; from stem to stern

1. *In our parts store, we carry everything from A to Z.*

2. *I have read your report from A to Z.*

3. *We have turned the whole place upside down and checked everything from A to Z.*

give someone an "A" for effort (*informal*) to give someone credit for trying hard; to recognize that, in spite of his modest performance, someone had done his best

A: How is Johnny doing in school?

B: I would give him an "A" for effort. He is trying.

ABACK

be taken (a)back (by something) to be surprised/ stunned/ shocked/ appalled/ repelled by something

I was taken aback by Tony's vulgar language.

ABC

(as) simple/ easy as ABC (*informal, simile*) easy to do/ comprehend; (*informal:*) it's child's play; there's nothing to it; (as) easy as pie; (*slang:*) a piece of cake

Once you learn the standard shift, driving is as easy as ABC.

the ABC's of something (*informal*) the basic concepts/ principles/ fundamentals/ (*informal:*) the meat and potatoes/ (*slang:*) the nitty-gritty of something

Mr. Lee will teach you the ABC's of self-defense.

ABANDON

abandon ship (*informal*) to drop out/ pull

out of something; to withdraw/ retire from something; to give up on something; to back away from one's responsibility; (*informal:*) to throw in the towel

Rats abandon the sinking ship (*proverb*) Disloyal people quickly abandon their friends in trouble.

with reckless abandon (*adverb*) without restraint; with blind enthusiasm; furiously; with great fervor/ ardor/ passion/ zeal; with heedless ferocity; (*informal:*) with a vengeance; headlong

To get the equalizer, the Miami Dolphins attacked with reckless abandon.

ABDICATE

abdicate one's responsibilities to fail to live up to/ meet/ carry out one's obligations; to neglect one's duties; (*slang:*) to lie down on the job

This deadbeat has abdicated his responsibilities as father.

ABET

aid and abet someone (*legal term, binomial*) to help someone commit a crime; to lend the criminal a hand before, during, or after the crime

ABIDE

abide by one's promise/ agreement/ word, etc. to do as promised; to keep one's word; to be a man of his word; to live up to the conditions agreed upon

Both parties must abide by the terms of the contract.

The service station failed to abide by its promise to replace the muffler free of charge.

abide by the rules/ the law; to be law-abiding • to obey/ observe/ follow/ respect the rules; to play by the rules; to be obedient to the law

Those who fail to abide by the rules will be ejected from the game.

I have always been a law-abiding citizen.

ABILITY

do something to the best of one's ability • to try as hard as one can; to do one's best; to make an all-out effort; (*informal:*) to bend over backward; to go all out; (*slang:*) to do one's darnedest

I expect you to carry out your duties to the best of your ability.

ABJECT

live in abject poverty to live in utter deprivation/ misery; to live from hand to mouth

A

ABLAZE

set something ablaze to burn something down; to set fire to something; to send something up in flames

ABLE

be ready, willing, and able (to do something) · (*cliché, trinomial*) to be fully prepared/ eager/ in the right mood/ favorably inclined (*informal:*) all set/ itching to do something

Some welfare recipients are ready, willing, and able to contribute to society.

ABOARD

all aboard! (*informal, conversational*) everyone get in the car/ on the boat! (*informal:*) let's go!

We are ready to leave. All aboard!

welcome aboard! (*catch phrase, conversational*) we are pleased to have you; we receive you with open arms; we are glad that you have joined us

ABOUT

be about to do something · to have the intention of/

to be on the verge of doing something

I was just about to call you.

I hope you are not about to give up.

be out/ up and about (*binomial*) to feel better; to be able to get up and go outdoors; to be no longer bed-ridden

come about · to happen/ develop/ come into being/ occur/ transpire/ come to pass/ take place

go about doing something · to find the proper way to do something; to approach a problem

have one's wits about one (*informal:*) to use one's head; to be quick on the uptake/ smart as a whip/ sharp as a tack; (*slang:*) to be on the ball

that's about it · (*informal, conversational*) that's the whole story; there is nothing more to tell; (*informal:*) that's about the size of it

A: What else can you tell us about this incident?

B: That's about it.

ABOUT-FACE

do an about-face to reverse one's position completely; (*informal:*) to flip-flop on an issue; to make a U-turn/ a 180-degree turn; to go back on one's word

After the election, the governor did an about-face on his promised tax cut.

ABOVE

above all · especially; most of all; most importantly; chiefly; first of all; first and foremost; mainly

above and beyond the call of duty · (*binomial*) in excess of one's job requirements; more than morally obligated to do

Roger was decorated for "bravery above and beyond the call of duty."

be above board · (*informal*) to be honest/ sincere/ (*informal:*) up front/ straight as an arrow; (*slang:*) on the level; on the up-and-up

over and above something · (*binomial, adverb*) on top of/ in addition to/ in excess of/ besides something

Our raise was 2 percent over and above inflation.

ABOVEBOARD

open and aboveboard · (*binomial, informal*) honest and straightforward; sincere; frank; (*informal:*) straight from the shoulder; (*slang:*) on the level; up front; on the up-and-up

I like to deal with a man who is open and aboveboard.

ABRASIVE

an abrasive remark an annoying/ aggressive/ rough/ rude/ brash/ offensive/ biting/ piercing comment

I am getting fed up with your abrasive remarks.

ABREAST

keep abreast (of something) · to keep oneself informed about something; to keep up with something; (*informal:*) to stay on top of things

You should keep abreast of the latest research in your field.

ABSENCE

Absence makes the heart grow fonder. (*proverb, cliché*) If two lovers are apart, their affection grows.

be conspicuous by one's absence (*cliché*) it is glaringly obvious to everyone that someone is not attending the event; someone's absence raises some questions/ eyebrows

The Defense Minister was conspicuous by his absence at the meeting.

ABSENT

The absent are never without fault, (nor the present without an excuse) (*saying by Benjamin Franklin*) The absent party always gets the blame. People like to gossip about those who are not present.