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1. A hot potato

**Meaning:** Something that is difficult or dangerous to deal with.

**Example:** Terrorism is a political hot potato in Afghanistan.

2. A penny for your thoughts

**Meaning:** Way of asking what someone is thinking.

**Example:** After several minutes of silence he finally looked at her and said, “A penny for your thoughts, Lily.”

3. Actions speak louder than words

**Meaning:** What you do is more significant than what you say.

**Example:** He: I’m sorry. I’ll try to be a better person henceforth.

She: Actions speak louder than words.

4. Add insult to injury

**Meaning:** To make a bad situation worse.

**Example:** Their basement was flooded, and then, to add insult to injury, a pipe burst in the kitchen.

5. An arm and a leg

**Meaning:** A lot of money.

**Example:** It’s the best cruise in the world, but it will cost you an arm and a leg.

6. At the drop of a hat

**Meaning:** Immediately; without any hesitation

**Example:** Ellie was always ready to go shopping at the drop of a hat.

7. Back to the drawing board

**Meaning:** Start something all over again.

**Example:** I failed this semester, but now I am back to the drawing board.

8. Ball is in your court.

**Meaning:** It is up to you to take the next step

**Example:** I've made my decision, now the ball is in your court.

9. Barking up the wrong tree

**Meaning:** Looking in the wrong place; accusing the wrong person.

**Example:** He did not commit the crime, you're barking up the wrong tree.

10. Be glad to see the back of

**Meaning:** Be glad to see someone leave.

**Example:** I never liked her. I'll be glad to see the back of her.

11. Beat around the bush

**Meaning:** Avoid answering a question; not speaking directly about the issue.

**Example:** Tell me what the problem is, stop beating around the bush.

12. Best of both the worlds

**Meaning:** Situation wherein one can enjoy two different opportunities.

**Example:** She had the privilege of a professor and freedom of a student. She had the best of both worlds.

13. Best thing since sliced bread

**Meaning:** A good idea or plan; an excellent new invention.

**Example:** I love your idea. It's the best thing since sliced bread.

14. Bite off more than you can chew

**Meaning:** To take on a task that is way too big.

**Example:** Our boss bit off more than she could chew when she promised the client we'd have the project ready by next week.

15. Blessing in disguise

**Meaning:** Something good that isn't recognized at first.

**Example:** Ashok's losing his job was a blessing in disguise; it gave him an opportunity to pursue higher studies.

16. Burn the midnight oil

**Meaning:** To stay up working, especially studying, late at night.

**Example:** She's been burning the midnight oil for the last few months; her hard work will definitely pay off in the coming exams.

17. Don't judge a book by its cover

**Meaning:** Don't judge something primarily by its appearance.

**Example:**

She: He doesn't look intelligent.

He: You can't judge a book by its cover.

18. Caught between two stools.

**Meaning:** When someone finds it difficult to choose between two alternatives.

**Example:** He had committed to both and now he's caught between two stools.

19. Cross that bridge when you come to it.

**Meaning:** Deal with a problem if and when it becomes necessary.

**Example:** He: I think I need to hire a lawyer.

She: Cross that bridge when you come to it.

20. Cry over spilled milk

**Meaning:** To be unhappy about something that cannot be undone.

**Example:** It can't be helped, don't cry over spilled milk.

21. Curiosity killed the cat

**Meaning:** Being too curious can get you into trouble.

**Example:** Don't ask about his divorce—curiosity killed the cat!

22. Cut corners

**Meaning:** To take shortcuts; when something is done badly to save money.

**Example:** They always put quality first; they won't cut corners just to save money.

23. Cut the mustard

**Meaning:** Perform satisfactorily; to succeed.

**Example:** We need a better catcher; this one just doesn't cut the mustard.

24. Devil's advocate

**Meaning:** To present a counter argument

**Example:** The teacher always played devil's advocate to provoke discussion in the classroom.

25. Don't count your chickens before the eggs have hatched.

**Meaning:** Don't make plans for something that might not happen.

**Example:** You might not win the prize and you've already spent the money? Don't count your chickens before the eggs have hatched.

26. Don't give up the day job

**Meaning:** You're not very good at something. You could definitely not do it professionally.

**Example:** Why did you invest in business even after failing in it in the past? Don't give up the day job!

27. Don't put all your eggs in one basket

**Meaning:** Don't focus all of your attention on one thing or one area.

**Example:** I know you love Harvard, but don't put all your eggs in one basket. Apply to other colleges too.

28. Drastic times call for drastic measures

**Meaning:** When you're extremely desperate you need to take drastic actions.

**Example:** Yes we had to let go of five of our workers! Drastic times call for drastic measures.

29. Elvis has left the building

**Meaning:** The show has come to an end. It's all over.

**Example:** We waited for another performance by the band but it looked like Elvis had left the building.

30. Every cloud has a silver lining

**Meaning:** Be optimistic, even difficult times will lead to better days.

**Example:** I'm sorry your business is going badly, but remember every cloud has a silver lining.

31. Far cry from

**Meaning:** A thing that is very different from something else.

**Example:** What you did was a far cry from what you said you were going to do.

32. Feel a bit under the weather

**Meaning:** Feeling sick or unhealthy.

**Example:** I'm not coming to office today, I'm feeling a bit under the weather.

33. Give the benefit of doubt

**Meaning:** Believe someone's statement without proof.

**Example:** I knew him since the past 5 years, so I gave him the benefit of doubt.

34. Hear through the grapevine

**Meaning:** To hear news from someone who heard that news from someone else

**Example:** I heard through the grapevine that she's pregnant.

35. Hit the nail on the head

**Meaning:** To do or say exactly the right thing.

**Example:** You've spotted the flaw, Robert. You've hit the nail on the head.

36. Hit the sack/sheets/hay

**Meaning:** To go to bed.

**Example:** I'm exhausted. I think I'll just hit the sack.

37. In the heat of the moment

**Meaning:** Overwhelmed by what's happening at the moment.

**Example:** He doesn't hate you. He just said that in the heat of the moment.

38. It takes two to tango

**Meaning:** Both people involved in a bad situation are responsible for it.

**Example:** He blamed her for his lack of attention; well it takes two to tango.

39. Jump on the bandwagon

**Meaning:** Join a popular trend or activity.

**Example:** So many people are playing that game that I might as well jump on the bandwagon and check it out.

40. Keep something at bay

**Meaning:** Keep something away

**Example:** A good way to keep your anxiety at bay is through meditation.

41. Kill two birds with one stone

**Meaning:** To solve two problems at a time with just one action

**Example:** John practiced his words while peeling the potatoes. He was killing two birds with one stone.

42. Last straw

**Meaning:** The final problem in a series of problems

**Example:** This is the last straw. I'm calling the police.

43. Let sleeping dogs lie

**Meaning:** Leave something alone if it might cause trouble.

**Example:** I thought I would ask him if he wanted me to pay him back right away, but then I decided to let the sleeping dogs lie.

**44.** Let the cat out of the bag

**Meaning:** To share information that was previously concealed.

**Example:** It's our secret. Don't let the cat out of the bag.

**45.** Make a long story short

**Meaning:** Come to the point – leave out the details.

**Example:** And – to make the long story short – I never got back the money I lent him.

**46.** Method in the madness

**Meaning:** A purpose in what one is doing, even though it seems to be crazy.

**Example:** What I'm doing might seem strange, but there is method in my madness.

**47.** Miss the boat

**Meaning:** To miss out on something.

**Example:** Pay attention, John, or you'll miss the boat and never learn algebra.

**48.** Not a spark of decency

**Meaning:** A person who has no manners

**Example:** Her brother has not a spark of decency. I don't like the way he acts in public.

**49.** Not playing with the full deck

**Meaning:** Someone who is mentally, psychologically or intellectually deficient.

**Example:** He's an intelligent guy, but with all that crazy things he does, I wonder if he's not playing with the full deck.



50. On the ball

**Meaning:** When someone understands a situation well; attentive.

**Example:** If you were on the ball, this wouldn't have happened.

51. Off the record

**Meaning:** Not made as an official or attributable statement; unofficial; confidential

**Example:** He accepted his fault off the record and hence it could not be used by the prosecutor in the court.

52. Oldest trick in the book

**Meaning:** A well known and much used trick/method

**Example:** Oldest trick in the book to treat cold and cough is drinking turmeric milk.

53. Off the cuff

**Meaning:** Without preparation; spontaneous

**Example:** She has a reputation of handling off the cuff interviews very well.

54. Old habits die hard

**Meaning:** People find it difficult to change their accustomed behavior.

**Example:** She retired last month, but still gets up at the same time in the morning. Old habits die hard.

55. Once in a blue moon

**Meaning:** Very rarely

**Example:** Jill has a very rocky relationship with her father. She speaks to him once in a blue moon.

56. Open the floodgates

**Meaning:** Release something that was previously under control

**Example:** Economists fear that relaxing price control will open the floodgates to inflation.

57. Out of the blue

**Meaning:** Happen unexpectedly

**Example:** She had given up all hope when out of the blue she got a call from Harvard.

58. Out on a limb

**Meaning:** Do something risky or something that others do not support (leaving the doer in a difficult situation)

**Example:** She was out on a limb with her project – nobody supported her idea.

59. Over the top

**Meaning:** Totally excessive and not suitable for the occasion.

**Example:** Her sari was way over the top for a sombre occasion like this.

60. Pen is mightier than the sword

**Meaning:** Words and communication have a greater effect than war

**Example:** A simple handwritten note put an end to their week long cold war – pen is mightier than the sword.

61. Push one's luck

**Meaning:** Trying to obtain more than what one has (risk spoiling the current situation)

**Example:** You have my permission to go to your friends' place but don't push your luck by planning a night out.

62. Raining cats and dogs

**Meaning:** Raining heavily

**Example:** We'll have to cancel the trip, it's raining cats and dogs here.

63. Reap the harvest

**Meaning:** Benefit or suffer as a direct result of past actions.

**Example:** When he cleared IIT-JEE, he reaped the harvest of all his hard work.

64. Roll up one's sleeves

**Meaning:** Get ready for hard work

**Example:** My brother said he would roll up his sleeves and do whatever it takes to support the family.

65. See eye to eye

**Meaning:** To be in agreement with

**Example:** She was glad her roommate saw eye to eye on the choice of the flat.

66. Shot in the dark

**Meaning:** A complete guess (may or may not be close to the truth)

**Example:** He didn't know too much about programming, so answering the interviewer's question was merely a shot in the dark.

67. Sink your teeth into

**Meaning:** Do something with a lot of energy and enthusiasm.

**Example:** Robin immediately sank his teeth into his new job.

68. Skating on thin ice

**Meaning:** Do or say something risky or something that could cause trouble.

**Example:** Don't say anything that hurts her self esteem or you could be skating on thin ice.

69. Stand in a good stead

**Meaning:** To be useful or be of good service to someone.

**Example:** Being fluent in German will stand you in a good stead when applying for an MS in Germany.

70. Strike while the iron is hot

**Meaning:** To act at the right time

**Example:** The price of gold is at a 10 year low, strike while the iron is hot and invest in it right away.

71. Take a back seat

**Meaning:** Choose to be less important in a role

**Example:** He finally decided to take a back seat and let his son run the family business.

72. Take with a grain/pinch of salt

**Meaning:** To doubt the accuracy of information

**Example:** A lot is said about the celebrities in media, but that information should be taken with a grain of salt.

73. Take a nosedive

**Meaning:** Rapid drop or decrease in value

**Example:** The share prices took a nosedive when there were rumors of the company's CEO resigning.

74. Take the plunge

**Meaning:** Venture into something of one's interest despite the risks involved

**Example:** Jack finally took the plunge and opened a restaurant.

75. Taste of one's own medicine

**Meaning:** Treat people the same (unpleasant) way they treated you

**Example:** People who often disregard others should be given a taste of their own medicine.

76. Think the world of

**Meaning:** Admire someone very much

**Example:** Emily is a wonderful teacher – children think the world of her.

77. Tight spot

**Meaning:** A difficult situation

**Example:** The recent lawsuit has put the firm in a tight spot.

78. Tongue in cheek

**Meaning:** (of a remark) Supposed to be taken in funny or ironic sense

**Example:** Her comment was taken more seriously than intended. It was supposed to be tongue in cheek.

79. Turn a blind eye

**Meaning:** Pretend not to notice

**Example:** People tend to turn a blind eye to crime against women.

80. Walk on eggshells

**Meaning:** Be extremely cautious about one's words or actions

**Example:** Celebrities are scrutinized by the media for all their actions so they're required to walk on eggshells.

**81.** Want someone's head on a platter

**Meaning:** Want someone to be punished severely

**Example:** "I want that murderer's head on a platter!", said the Chief of police.

**82.** Watch (someone) like a hawk

**Meaning:** Keep eyes on or watch carefully

**Example:** The examiner watched the test takers like a hawk.

**83.** Water under the bridge

**Meaning:** Something bad that happened in the past but is no longer important

**Example:** The couple had a serious fight in the past but that water is under the bridge now.

**84.** Wave a dead chicken

**Meaning:** Do some useless, unhelpful thing in the hope that it will solve a problem

**Example:** Restarting the laptop once the motherboard has crashed is like waving a dead chicken.

**85.** Weak in the knees

**Meaning:** Barely able to stand because of emotion, fear or illness

**Example:** The shock of being summoned by the Supreme Court made me go weak in the knees.

**86.** Wear many hats

**Meaning:** Do many different types tasks

**Example:** We have such a small number of employees that one is often supposed to wear many hats.

87. Weather the storm

**Meaning:** Succeed in surviving a difficult period of time

**Example:** Given the current global market conditions, the Indian economy is weathering the storm pretty well.

88. Wet behind the ears

**Meaning:** Inexperienced and immature

**Example:** Instead of a full time job, she should be offered an internship as she is still wet behind the ears.

89. Whale of a time

**Meaning:** Enjoy a lot

**Example:** She had a whale of a time in Goa with her girl gang.

90. Whistle in the dark

**Meaning:** Pretend to be brave in a scary situation

**Example:** Upon being attacked, she blew a whistle in the dark which surprised her attackers.

91. Why keep a dog and bark for yourself

**Meaning:** If someone or something can do a job for you, why do it yourself?

**Example:** My sister has a printer but she continues to write notes manually. Why keep a dog and bark for yourself?

92. Wide off the mark

**Meaning:** Incorrect; Inadequate; Not what is expected

**Example:** Her answer was wide off the mark, it was impossible for me to give a better rating to it.

93. Wild goose chase

**Meaning:** Waste time looking for something that has little chance of being found

**Example:** She tried to find out who the anonymous caller was, but it turned out to be a wild goose chase.

94. Wipe the slate clean

**Meaning:** Make a fresh start

**Example:** When Mike was leaving home, he decided to wipe the slate clean with his dad.

95. Wolf in sheep's clothing

**Meaning:** Dangerous person pretending to be harmless

**Example:** I thought she was a good person, but I realized that she was a wolf in a sheep's clothing when she backstabbed me during the selection process.

96. Work your fingers to the bone

**Meaning:** Extreme hard work

**Example:** She totally deserves the success; she worked her fingers to the bone when she started out as a model.

97. Worm's eye view

**Meaning:** A perspective seen from below or from a low or inferior position

**Example:** The trainees get only a worm's eye view of the corporate structure.

98. Worth one's salt

**Meaning:** Good or competent at the job or profession specified

**Example:** She deserves respect as she is totally worth her salt.



**99.** Wrap one's brain around

**Meaning:** Concentrate on something in an effort to understand

**Example:** I really need to wrap my brain around this concept before the exam.

**100.** Zero in on something

**Meaning:** Focus all attention onto one thing

**Example:** The teacher immediately zeroed in on the weaker students of the class.