Horse idioms

Here is a list of horse idioms.

**As strong as a horse/ox**
If somebody is as strong as a horse or an ox, they are very strong.

- He should be able to lift that box. He is as strong as a horse.

**As stubborn as a mule**
When you are as stubborn as a mule, you are very stubborn.

- If she has made up her mind, she will never change it. She is as stubborn as a mule.

**Back the wrong horse**
To back the wrong horse is to support someone who will not win.

- I don’t think Tom will be elected the chairman. You are backing the wrong horse.

**Beat a dead horse**
To beat a dead horse is to waste time doing something that has already been attempted.

- Do you think I should apply again for that position or am I just beating a dead horse?

**Bet on the wrong horse**
To bet on the wrong horse is to support a losing person or idea.

- Nokia bet on the wrong horse by continuing to use its own operating system when every other phone maker switched to Android.

**By shank’s mare**
By foot

- If we miss the last bus, we will have to go home by shank’s mare.

**Champ/chomp at the bit**
When you are chomping at the bit, you are eager to start an activity.

- I had promised to take my kids to the park and when I arrived home late they were chomping at the bit with impatience.

**Change horses in midstream**
To change horses in midstream is to make major changes in your plan after you have started an activity.
Changing lawyers isn’t advisable at the moment. We can’t change horses in midstream.

**A dark horse**

A dark horse is a relatively unknown person who has considerable skills and potential.

- Stephen is a dark horse. Although he has been working with us for a while, none of us knew that he could play four instruments really well.

**Eat like a horse**

To eat like a horse is to eat a lot.

- I was very hungry. I ate like a horse.

**Flog a dead horse**

To flog a dead horse is to attempt to do something when there is no chance of success.

- I don’t know why I have been denied the promotion. Do you think I should ask for an explanation or am I flogging a dead horse?

**Get off your high horse**

To get off your high horse is to stop acting as if you are better or more intelligent than others.

- I really wish my boss would get off his horse and start listening to us.

**Get on your high horse**

To get on your high horse is to behave arrogantly.

- Tony is the least popular guy in our office. He always gets on his horse and tells us what to do.

**Hold your horses**

To hold your horses is to act patiently.

- Hold your horses while I am getting ready.

**Horse around**

To horse around is to play around.

- The children horse around whenever their mother is away.

**A horse of a different color**

If something is a horse of a different colour, it is an altogether different matter.

**Horse sense**

Common sense
- You lack horse sense. You make the wrong decisions all the time.

**Look a gift horse in the mouth**

To look a gift horse in the mouth is to complain that the gift is not perfect.

- You should not look a gift horse in the mouth. At least they took the time and trouble to buy you a gift and you have to appreciate it.

**Straight from the horse`s mouth**

If you hear something straight from the horse, you hear it from a reliable source.

- The company is planning to lay off people. I heard it straight from the horse’s mouth.

**Work like a horse**

To work like a horse is to work hard.

- When he was younger he used to work like a horse.

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**Cow idioms**

Here is a list of idioms using the words cow and bull.

**As awkward as a cow on roller skates**

When you are as awkward as a cow on roller skates, you look very awkward.

- The girl looked as awkward as a cow on roller skates while giving a speech in front of her teachers and classmates.

**A bull in a china shop**

This expression is used to refer to a person who is very clumsy or careless or who lacks tact.

- Martha is like a bull in a china shop. You can’t expect her to properly deal with a delicate situation like this.
- My boy is a like a bull in a china shop. He breaks at least two glasses a week.

**A cash cow**

A cash cow is a hugely profitable product or service.

- Her family treated her as a cash cow.
**Have a cow**
When you have a cow you become very angry or upset.

- My brother had a cow when I told him that I had crashed his car.

**Hit the bull’s-eye**
To hit the bull’s-eye is to reach the main point of something.

- The Chief Justice hit the bull’s-eye when he said that greedy politicians were the bane of our society.

**A sacred cow**
A sacred cow is a person or thing that is never criticized.

**Take the bull by the horns**
To take the bull by the horns is to act decisively.

- James was always coming home late. At last Maria decided to take the bull by the horns and asked him what he was up to.

**Until the cows come home**
Until very late

- We worked in the yard until the cows came home.

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**Dog idioms**

**Here is a list of dog idioms.**

**As clean as a hound’s tooth**
If something is as clean as a hound’s tooth, it is very clean. A hound is a hunting dog.

- We didn’t rest until the house was as clean as a hound’s tooth.

**As crooked as a dog’s hind leg**
If somebody is as crooked as a dog’s hind leg, they are very dishonest.

- My former employer was as crooked as a dog’s hind leg. I am glad to have left his company.
As sick as a dog
When you are as sick as a dog, you are very sick.

- She was as sick as a dog when she got home from work.

Bark is worse than bite
If someone’s bark is worse than their bite, their words are worse than their actions.

- Don’t worry about what my mother said. Her bark is worse than her bite and she is actually a caring person.

Bark up the wrong tree
To bark up the wrong tree is to put the blame on the wrong person.

- You are barking up the wrong tree by accusing me of poisoning your dog. I didn’t do it.

Call the dogs off
To call the dogs off is to stop haunting someone.

- They will not come out of their hideouts until the police call the dogs off.

Dog and pony show
A dog and pony show is a highly promoted, over-staged performance organized with the sole objective of impressing people. This expression has a negative connotation. It is not used to talk about a campaign that you approve of.

Dog-eat-dog
Used to refer to a situation where people are ready to hurt others to get what they want.

- It is a dog-eat-dog world. If you aren’t competitive, you won’t get anywhere.

Dog in the manger
Used to refer to a person who keeps something they don’t want in order to prevent others from having it.

- Sam is such a dog in the manger. He wouldn’t let his brother ride his bike though he doesn’t use it himself.

Every dog has his day
Used to mean that everybody will get an opportunity

- Don’t worry about these setbacks. Every dog has his day. Someday, you too will get an opportunity to prove your mettle.
**Fight like cats and dogs**
To fight like cats and dogs is to fight violently all the time.

- My boys are always fighting like cats and dogs.

**Go to the dogs**
If a company or a country is going to the dogs it is becoming less successful than it was.

- His career has gone to the dogs because of his drinking problem.
- A lot of things in our country have gone to the dogs during the last few years.

**In the doghouse**
When you are in the doghouse, you are in trouble.

- The president’s secretary is in the doghouse over some controversial remarks she made to the press.
- I am in the doghouse with my boss. I missed an important deadline.

**Lead a dog’s life**
To lead a dog’s life is to lead a miserable life.

- Janet leads a dog’s life. She works three jobs in a day.

**Let sleeping dogs lie**
Don’t create trouble when you do not have to.

    Janet: I was again late for an appointment. Should I ask the boss if he is angry about that?

    Maria: If he hasn’t said anything about it, let sleeping dogs lie.

**Put on the dog**
To put on the dog is to wear expensive dresses.

- She is putting on the dog for the party.

To put on the dog is to try to appear richer than you are.

- Maria likes to put on the dog in front of her neighbours.

**Rain cats and dogs**
To rain cats and dogs is to rain very hard.

- It has been raining cats and dogs since yesterday.

**A shaggy dog story**
A long and pointless story
• He told me a shaggy dog story about how he got his first job.

**The tail is wagging the dog**

When the tail is wagging the dog, a person who occupies an insignificant position controls everything in an organization.

• There is no point in talking to the manager. You should talk to his secretary. The tail is wagging the dog in this company.

**Top dog**

The top dog is the most important person in a company.

• My dad is the top dog in his company.

**Work like a dog**

To work like a dog is to work very hard.

• She works like a dog to raise her four children.

**You can’t teach an old dog new tricks**

• Your dad is too old to learn driving now. You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.

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**Idiomatic expressions using the word account**

Here is a list of idiomatic expressions using the word account.

**Bring / hold / call someone to account**

To bring someone to account is to force them to publicly explain why they committed a crime or made a mistake.

• The opposition has decided to bring the minister to account.
• The Principal who misappropriated the funds was called to account by the Vice Chancellor.

**By all accounts / from all accounts**

This expression is used to suggest that you are saying something based on what people say.

• He is, by all accounts, the best footballer of our times. (= Everybody says that he is the best footballer of our times.)
• Martin is, by all accounts, the most ambitious person I have ever known.

**By your own account**

According to what you yourself have said.

- By his own account, he was not keen on joining the company.

**Give a good account of yourself**

To give a good account of yourself is to perform or behave well.

- The team couldn’t win the championship but they gave a good account of themselves coming second overall.

**Of no account / of little account**

If something is of no account, it is not important.

- We are looking to recruit candidates who can deliver exceptional performance. Their race or nationality is of no account.

**On someone’s account**

If you do something on someone’s account, you do it because you think they want you to do it.

- You don’t have to make any special arrangements on my account.
- We prepared a lavish dinner on his account.

**On account of**

On account of means because of

- He retired at forty on account of ill-health.

**On no account**

This expression is used to say that something must not happen or must not be done.

- On no account should the captain be blamed for the loss.
- On no account can the doctor be blamed for the death of the patient.

**On your own account**

When you do something on your own account, you do it by yourself or for yourself.

- He works at a supermarket and earns $500 a week on his own account.
- He joined the army on his own account.

**Settle an account / settle accounts with**

To settle accounts with somebody is to get revenge on them.
The goon threatened to settle accounts with anyone who challenged him.

**Take account of something / take something into account**

To take account of something is to consider it.

- The government has to take account of environmental issues before going ahead with its plan to build the dam.
- The government has to take environmental issues into account before ....
- When you build your retirement fund, you must take inflation into account.
- You must take into account the fact that he is a postgraduate before offering to appoint him as your peon.

**Turn something to good account**

To turn a situation or experience to good account is to make good use of it.

- She had a flair for words and turned it to good account by becoming a journalist.
- He turned his retirement time to good account by cultivating some highly profitable hobbies.

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**Phrasal verbs beginning with letter F**

Here is a list of phrasal verbs beginning with letter F.

**Fade away**

When noise, music or hope fades away, it becomes weaker and weaker. The phrasal verb die away means the same as fade away.

- After a while, the noise faded away.
- If you don’t want to fade away, you should start eating properly.
- Fashions fade away within days or weeks.

**Fall apart**

When a relationship or marriage falls apart, it fails.

- His marriage fell apart when his wife discovered that he had an affair with one of his colleagues.

When things fall apart, they disintegrate into pieces.
**Fall back on**
When you fall back on somebody / something you turn to them when you are in trouble because you have no other choice.

- If my acting career fails, I will fall back on my degree in finance.
- When you live in a foreign city on your own, it is great to have a good friend or a relative to fall back on.

**Fall behind**
When you fall behind, you fail to do something on time or fast enough.

- You have fallen behind with your schoolwork.
- I am desperate to find a new job. I have fallen behind with my mortgage payments.

**Fall down**
When you fall down, you fall accidentally.

- She tripped over the cat and fell down.

**Fall for somebody**
To fall for somebody is to fall in love with them.

- I don’t understand why she always falls for the wrong men.

**Fall for**
When you fall for something, you are deceived by it.

- She fell for his scheme and lost millions.

**Fall off**
When you fall off a bike or a horse, you fall from it.

- He fell off the horse and broke his back.

**Fall out**
When people fall out, they quarrel with one another.

- You shouldn’t have fallen out with Shyam over a silly misunderstanding.
- She fell out with her boyfriend when he said something nasty about her mother.

**Fall over**
When you fall over, you fall to the ground.

- Babies fall over a lot when they learn to walk.
Fall through
When a project or scheme falls through it fails.

- The deal fell through at the last minute.
- The sale fell through for reasons that are best known to the seller.

Fed up with
When you are fed up with something, you are tired of it. When you are fed up with somebody, you are no longer interested in them.

- I am fed up with you. Why don't you learn to behave?
- I am fed up with the rampant corruption.

Fight off
When you fight an illness or an infection off, you are trying to get rid of it.

- When you have a cold, you should increase your intake of Vitamin C. It will help you fight off the infection.

Figure out
To figure something out is to understand it.

- I can’t figure out what she wants.

Fill in for
When you fill in for somebody you do their work temporarily.

- Who will fill in for you when you go on holiday?

Fill in
To fill in a form or a questionnaire is to complete it with correct information.

- Fill in the blanks with the appropriate form of the verb given in the brackets.

Fill up
To fill up a glass or a container is to make it full.

- Here is my glass. Please fill it up.

Find out
To find something out is to discover information.

- How will she react when she finds out what his true motive was?
- We must find out what he wants.
Phrasal verbs beginning with letter E

Here is a list of phrasal verbs beginning with letter E.

Ease off
When pain or discomfort eases off, it becomes less severe.

- The tablets couldn’t ease off the pain.
- The heavy rain showed no sign of easing off, so we stayed indoors.

 Ease up has the same meaning as ease off.

Eat away
When A eats B away, A destroys B or makes it less strong, prominent or important.

- Labor unrest has been eating away our profits.

Eat in / eat out
To eat in is to eat at home. To eat out is to eat in a restaurant.

- I thought we could eat out tonight.
- I don’t feel like going out. I would rather eat in tonight.

Eat up
To eat something up is to consume it.

- ‘Where are the cookies?’ ‘I ate them up.’

If a car eats up fuel, it consumes too much fuel.

- My car eats up petrol. I should buy a more fuel-efficient one.

When mosquitoes eat you up, they bite you all over.

- Don’t forget to apply some insect repellant cream when you go hiking. Otherwise, the bugs will eat you up.

When an idea eats you up, it becomes an obsession.

- The desire to become an actress was eating her up.

Egg on
To egg somebody on is to encourage them to do something (silly).
They egged him on to jump across the stream.

**Eke out**
To *eke something out* is to make it last longer.

- We will need to develop renewable energy sources if we want to eke out our natural resources.

To *eke out a living* is to earn enough to live.

- It simply isn’t easy to eke out a living with a part time job.

**End up**
This is an inseparable phrasal verb. To *end up somewhere* is to end there after a series of events.

- He frequently had trouble with the law so when he ended up in prison nobody was surprised.
- He ended up marrying his ex-girlfriend.

**Explain away**
To explain something away is to give an excuse for something you have done.

- He couldn’t explain away his absence from work.

**Eye up**
To eye somebody up is to look at them in a certain way that shows you are interested in them.

Sally knew Martin was eyeing her up, but she chose to ignore him.

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**Phrasal verbs beginning with letter D**

Here is a list phrasal verbs beginning with the letter D.

**Dash off**
This is an inseparable phrasal verb. To *dash off* is to leave in a hurry.

- Before I could say anything he dashed off.

**Dash something off**
This is a separable phrasal verb. To *dash a letter or an email off* is to send it in a hurry.

- Before dashing off that letter, you should proofread it.
**Dawn on**
When an idea dawns on you, it occurs to you suddenly.

- Suddenly an idea dawned on me.
- The truth never dawned on him.
- Suddenly it dawned on me that I hadn't locked the door.

**Die away**
When light or sound dies away, it becomes weaker and disappears completely.

- The noise slowly died away.

**Die down**
This is an inseparable phrasal verb. When a wind, storm, gossip or rumor dies down, it becomes less noticeable.

- The excitement soon died down.

**Die out**
When a custom or tradition dies out, it disappears gradually. When a species dies out, it becomes extinct.

- Several tribal communities are dying out.
- The Asiatic Lion is in danger of dying out.

**Dig something over**
To dig soil over is to break the ground with a spade.

- I got this bangle while digging over the garden.

**Dig up**
To dig up facts or information is to search for it and find it. The phrasal verbs dredge up and rake up have very similar meanings.

- Past is past. Why do you want to dig it up?

**Do away with**
To do away with a practice is to abolish it.

- Human rights activists have been demanding that the death penalty should be done away with.

**Do somebody in**
When something does you in, it traps you or makes you unable to do something.

- I won’t be able to join you. I am completely done in after working in the garden all day.
- I think it was the alcohol that did him in.

**Do up**
To do up a house or an apartment is to decorate it.
- We have hired an interior designer to do up our flat.

**Doss down**
This is an inseparable phrasal verb. To doss down is to sleep somewhere temporarily. The phrasal verb *kip down* has very similar meanings.
- I don’t mind dossing down on the floor.

**Doze off**
This is an inseparable phrasal verb. To doze off is to fall into a light sleep.
- I dozed off while watching TV.

**Drag on**
This is an inseparable phrasal verb. When things drag on, they last longer than they should.
- Indian television serials often drag on for years.

**Drag up**
To drag something up is to mention unpleasant facts from the past. The phrasal verb *bring up* has very similar meanings.
- You must not drag up that old argument.

**Dredge up**
To dredge something up is to remind people of unpleasant things that occurred in the past.
- There is no point in dredging up the past.

**Dress down**
This is an inseparable phrasal verb. To dress down is to wear less formal or more casual clothes.
- In my opinion, all organizations should allow their employees to dress down.

**Dress up**
This is an inseparable phrasal verb. To dress up is to wear your best clothes for a special occasion.
- He doesn’t like to dress up.
- They dressed the baby up in her best clothes.
- Every girl wants to dress up on her wedding day.
Drop in
To drop in on somebody is to pay them a short visit.

- Sam would drop in whenever he was in town.
- We may drop in on Maria next week.

Drop off
To drop off is to fall asleep.

- After spending a lot of time tossing and turning in bed I finally dropped off.

When temperatures, numbers or attendance drop off, they become less or fewer.

- Temperatures are expected to drop off in the next few days.
- Attendance tends to drop off at weekends.

To drop somebody off is to stop your vehicle to leave them at a place.

- He offered to drop her off at her office, but she refused.
- Get in. I will drop you off at the railway station.

Drum up
To drum something up is to gain support and make people interested in it.

- Animal rights activists have been trying to drum up support for their campaign against the insensitive killing of stray dogs.

Trouble
The word trouble is mainly used as an uncountable noun. That means it does not have a plural form. Also it is not normally used with numbers or the article a/an.

- Incorrect: Most children who run away from their homes have had troubles with a close relative or family member.
- Correct: Most children who run away from their homes have had trouble with a close relative or family member.
- Incorrect: If you don’t want to have troubles with the law, you should mend your ways.
- Correct: If you don’t want to have trouble with the law, you should mend your ways.

Trouble is commonly used as the object of the verbs get into and cause. Note that in this case, it is always used in the singular.
• Martin’s parents are influential people. They bail him out whenever he **gets into trouble**. (NOT .... he gets into troubles.)

• At that time I didn’t realize **the trouble** I had caused. (NOT ... the troubles I had caused.)

The plural form **troubles** can be used to refer to all the problems that a person experiences. It is usually used with the possessive determiner **my, his, her, their or our**.

• She seemed brooding over her troubles.

**Expressions with trouble**

**Put someone to a lot of trouble:**

• I will never forgive him. He put me to a lot of trouble.

**Take the trouble to do something**

• You may organize the party, but you will have to take the trouble to clean up before you leave.
• Thank you for taking the trouble to visit me.

**Take trouble over something / take trouble with something**

• She doesn’t take much trouble over / with her appearance.

**Take a lot of trouble to do something**

• She took great trouble to make the party a success.

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**Object pronouns after as and than**

Read the sentences are given below.

1. She is taller **than me**.
2. She is taller **than I**.
3. I earn as much **as him**.
4. I earn as much **as he**.

If you still learn English using old grammar books you might assume that the sentences 2 and 4 are the correct ones. Yes, they were once considered correct, but now the rules have changed.

In educated use, **object pronouns** are now used after **as and than**.

Note that **subject pronouns** are still used if the pronoun is followed by a verb.

• I earn as much **as he does**. OR I earn as much **as him**.
She is taller than he is. OR She is taller than him.

**Object pronouns after prepositions**

Consider the two sentences given below.

1. Nobody loves you **except me.**
2. Nobody loves you **except I.**

Which of these two sentences are correct?

Here the second sentence can be completed to read ‘Nobody loves you **except I do.**’

However, when the verb is not mentioned, you should use the object pronoun.

The noun or a pronoun that follows the preposition is its object, and objects have to be in object form.

- **There are no secrets between him and me.** (NOT There are no secrets between he and I.)

Here the pronouns him and me are the objects of the preposition ‘between’.

- **She sat beside him.** (NOT She sat beside he.)

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**Is 'get' acceptable in formal writing?**

Ask any ESL student and they will readily admit that English grammar is confusing enough. What makes this even more confounding is the fact that it is changing continuously.

Some of the strict grammar rules that you memorized at school are no longer valid.

You might think you are speaking ‘perfect English’ by following these rules, but you will sound stuffy and pedantic.

In this article, we will take a look at some current trends in modern English usage.

**The growing popularity of get**

**Get** is one of the commonest words in English. It still isn’t considered appropriate in formal and academic writing. However, the truth is that it is becoming more common.

Puritans still insist that **get** has only one meaning, namely – **obtain.** But consult any modern dictionary and you will find that **get** has scores of different meanings.

**Get** can, for example, mean ‘**acquire**’, ‘**become**’, ‘**earn**’, ‘**bring**’, ‘**fetch**’ and similar ideas.
You can *get angry, get tired, get drunk or get sick.*

Examples are given below.

- If you drink too much wine, you will **get drunk**. (= you will become drunk.)
- He **gets** 300 dollars a week. (= He earns 300 hundred dollars a week.)
- He **got** angry when I told him that he was a stupid.

While this usage of *get* is perfectly acceptable in informal speech and writing, you should try and use more precise vocabulary when you write a formal letter or academic essay.

Compare:

- Merlin **got** a strong British accent while holidaying in London. (Very informal)
- Merlin **acquired** a strong British accent while holidaying in London. (Formal)