


## The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms (Oxford Quick Reference)

By Judith Siefring

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Did you know that 'flavour of the month' originated in a marketing campaign in American ice-cream parlours in the 1940s, when a particular flavour would be specially promoted for a month at a time? And did you know that 'off the cuff' refers to the rather messy practice of writing impromptu notes on one's shirt cuff before speaking in public? These and many more idioms are explained and put into context in this second edition of the Oxford Dictionary of Idioms.

This vastly entertaining dictionary takes a fresh look at the idiomatic phrases and sayings that make English such a rich and intriguing language. A major new edition, it contains entries for over 5000 idioms, including 350 new entries and over 500 new quotations.

The text has been updated to include many new idioms using the findings of the Oxford English Reading Programme, the biggest language research programme in the world. The entries are supported by a wealth of illustrative quotations from a wide range of sources and periods. For example: 'Rowling has not been asleep at the wheel in the three years since the last Potter novel, and I am pleased to report that she has not confused sheer length with inspiration.' - Guardian, 2003. 'I made the speech

of a lifetime. I had them tearing up the seats and rolling in the aisles.' - P.G. Woodhouse, 1940.

Many entries include boxed features which give more detailed background on the idiom in question. For example, did you know that 'taken aback' was adopted from nautical terminology, and described a ship unable to move forward because of a strong headwind pressing its sails back against the mast?

The text has been entirely redesigned so that it is both elegant and easy to use. Anyone interested in the quirky side of the English language will have hours of fun browsing through this fascinating and informative volume.

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### Editorial Review

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Oxford has published a second edition of a title that first appeared as a paperback in 1999. Promotional material declares that there are more than 5,000 definitions of idioms with 350 new idioms and "hundreds of new origin notes." The dictionary has been redesigned and visually improved with a two-column format interspersed with boxes that provide origin of the idioms. The idioms are arranged by keyword with a concise definition and sometimes the origin and an illustrative quotation. An index in which the idioms are grouped by subject--*Haste and speed, Jealousy and envy, Poverty, Weather*-- has been added. The book has a definite British-English and Australian tone. British spelling is used (*cheque, favours, labour*), and many of the idioms are unique to a particular country. Idioms that were not in the first edition or in other idiom dictionaries include *hot to trot, New York minute, and wazoo*. New illustrative quotations are included from Frank McCourt, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Guardian*. Surprisingly, *24/7* has not yet found its place in a dictionary of idioms. *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* is current, but the *American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms* (1997) concentrates on American English. *Oxford Reference Online* includes the first edition of the Oxford dictionary, and the second will probably appear soon. Libraries that need an up-to-date hardcover source for idioms should consider this new edition. *Christine Bulson*  
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### Review

'Anyone who is addicted to the richness of the English language or simply intrigued by the origin and meaning of an idiom like "teach your grandmother to suck eggs" will relish this work.' Library Journal

### About the Author

Jennifer Speake is a freelance writer and editor of reference books.

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