DICTIONARY OF SLANG

John Ayto

The world's most trusted reference books
SLANG

Containing over 10,000 words and phrases, this is the ideal reference for those interested in the more quirky and unofficial words used in the English language. Including surprisingly old words such as booze and guzzle to the most up-to-date words like humongous and lunchbox, this fascinating book is sure to provide a stonking good read for all.

- Thematically arranged by chapter for easy browsing
- Words are arranged chronologically within their theme to show how the language has changed
- Contains word origins, illustrative examples from literature, and an easy-to-use A-Z index

‘hours of happy browsing for language lovers’
Observer
The Oxford Dictionary of Slang

JOHN AYTO


OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
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Our longstanding love affair with the undignified bits of our language—the unguarded vocabulary of conversation, the quirky slang of in-groups, the colourful outbursts of lexis in extremis—has assured us a continuing tradition of collecting such words together in dictionaries. From the earliest exposés of underworld cant from writers such as John Awdelay and Thomas Harman in the sixteenth century, through Francis Grose’s pioneering *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (1785), J. S. Farmer and W. E. Henley’s seven-volume *Slang and its Analogues* (1890–1904), and Eric Partridge’s influential *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (1936), to Jonathan Lighter’s *Historical Dictionary of American Slang* (1994– ), the development of colloquial English vocabulary has been voluminously and enthusiastically documented.

However, almost all of this documentation has been—not surprisingly—in alphabetical format: extremely convenient for looking up individual words, but not so useful if you are interested in the language of a particular area of activity, or if you want to find a word for a concept. That’s the traditional role of the thesaurus. Thesauruses group words thematically, not alphabetically—so words expressing, for instance, ‘anger’ or ‘similarity’ can all be found together. What better format for looking at the history of English vocabulary topic by topic? That’s where the *Oxford Dictionary of Slang* comes in: taking in turn each area of life and each aspect of the world that generates significant amounts of slang, it plots its lexical development over time, recording the arrival of each new item on the scene and building up a picture of how our off-guard speech has changed down the years. (If you need to access the book alphabetically, there is a full index at the back.)

Each entry has a date after it. This represents the earliest written record we have of the appearance of that word, or that meaning of that word, in English. It’s important to remember that it does not necessarily mean that the word came into the language in that year. Indeed, as far as slang is concerned, it’s more often than not the case that new usages have a lengthy currency in the spoken language before they start to appear regularly in print. Before dates, the letter *a* stands for ‘before’ and the letter *c* stands for ‘approximately’.

Most entries also detail the origin of the word, if it is known, and any noteworthy features of its usage; particularize its meaning, if this is more specific than is indicated by the grouping of words to which it belongs; and illustrate it with an example taken in most cases from the *Oxford English Dictionary* or its files.

The contents of the book are based on the *Oxford Dictionary of Modern Slang*, but the number of entries has been considerably expanded, to cover more extensively that uncertain borderland between slang and colloquial usage. One person’s slang is another’s colloquistialism, but the wider scope of this dictionary should ensure that few genuine candidates for ‘slang’ status escape its net. At the same time, its range is circumscribed by its format: areas rich in slang are included, but those which can barely scrape together a handful of slang terms are not. Do not expect to find every single piece of English slang here.

The dictionary concerns itself largely with words that have been current during the past hundred years or so, but some words and usages that died out earlier than that are included if they are important in illustrating the development of a particular semantic field.

My grateful thanks are due to John Simpson, chief editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and to his staff on the *OED*, particularly Michael Proffitt, Sue Baines, Anthony Esposito, Jennie Miell, Hania Porucznik, Peter Sweasey, and Tania Young, for their invaluable help in scouring the files of the *OED* for information not reliably available elsewhere on the dating of English slang.

John Ayto
London, 1998
The Body and its Functions

1. The Body and its Parts

(See also under Fatness p. 12 and Nakedness p. 11)

Head

noddle (1599) Origin unknown • independent.
There are not many opportunities for them now to use their noodle rather than do what the FA tells them to do. (1991)

block (1635) Especially in the phrase knock someone's block off strike someone powerfully on the head • H. G. Wells: Many suggestions were made, from 'Knock his little block off', to 'Give him more love'. (1939)

nob (a1700) Probably a variant of knob; latterly (now dated) especially in the phrase bob a nob, a shilling a head, a shilling each

knob (1725) Dated • Richard Whiteing: They invariably... 'ketch it in the knob' in the form of a bilious headache. (1899)

napper (1785) British; origin unknown • G. M. Wilson: If anyone ever asked for an orangeade bottle on his napper, Fruity did. (1959)

pimple (1818) Dated • Racing Song: Sharp brains in my noble pimple. (s1887)

nut (1846) • Swell's Night Guide: She's getting groggy on her pins, and if you don't pipe rumbo, she'll go prat over nut (head over heels). (1846)

chump (1859) British; from earlier sense, lump of wood • Vladimir Nabokov: Think how unpleasant it is to have your chump lopped off. (1960)

twopenny, tuppenny (1859) Dated; from twopenny loaf = loaf of bread, rhyming slang for head; compare loaf (below) head • C. E. Montague: 'Into it, Jimmy,' I yelled. 'Into the sewer and tuck in your tuppenny.' (1928)

noggin (1866) Orig and mainly US; from earlier sense, small mug • P. G. Winslow: A rap on the back of the noggin that knocked her out. (1975)

filbert (1886) From earlier sense, hazel nut; compare nut (above) head

bonce (1889) British; from earlier sense, large playing-marble • Len Deighton: This threat... is going to be forever hanging over your bonce like Damocles' chopper. (1962)

bean (1905) Orig US • R. D. Paine: If these Dutchmen get nasty, bang their blighted beans together. (1923)

beezzer (1915) Perhaps from Spanish cabesa head

lemon (1923) • Coast to Coast: If you had any brains in that big lemon you'd wipe me. (1952)

hat-rack (1942) • L. Hairston: If you spent half as much time tryin' to put something inside that worthless hat-rack as you did having your brains fired. (1964)

Uncle Ned (1955) Rhyming slang • Listener: I have spent an hour fixing the big, loose curls on top of my Uncle Ned. (1964)

cruet (1966) Australian; origin uncertain; there may be some connection with crumpet (below) head, and compare Australian slang crudget head, recorded once, in 1941, of unknown origin • R. Beilby: 'Where did he get it?' 'Through the cruet.' (1977)

Head as repository of sanity and source of common sense

(See also under Sanity pp. 301–6)

onion (1890) Especially in the phrase off one's onion mad, crazy • H. G. Wells: He came home one day saying Tono-Bungay till I thought he was clean off his onion. (1909)

crumpton (1891) British; especially in the phrase balmy or barmy on (or in) the crumpton mad, crazy • R. H. Morrieson: It's Madam Drac, gone right off her crumpton at last. (1963)

panniki (1894) Mainly Australian; from earlier sense, metal drinking-vessel; in the phrase off one's panniki mad, crazy • C. J. Dennis: Per'aps I'm off me panniki wiv' sittin' in the sun. (1916)

noodle (1914) Compare earlier sense, fool • M. Trist: Take no notice. . . . She's off her noodle. (1945)

loaf (1925) Probably from loaf of bread, rhyming slang for head; especially in the phrase use one's loaf • Jewish Chronicle: Use your loaf. Didn't Sir Jack Cohen of Tesco... start the same way? (1973)

scone (1942) Australian & New Zealand; from earlier sense, metal drinking-vessel; in the phrase off one's scone mad, crazy • H. G. Wells: Many suggestions were made, from 'Knock his little block off', to 'Give him more love'. (1939)

barnet (1969) British; from earlier sense, hair • George Sims: 'Use your barnet!' Domino said. (1969)

Hair

barnet (1931) British; short for Barnet fair, rhyming slang for 'hair', from the name of the London borough of Barnet • Frank Norman: They send you to a doss house, so that you can get lice in your barnet. (1962)
Hair colour

bluey (1918), blue (1932) Australian & New Zealand; a nickname for a red-haired person; origin unknown

Bald person

slaphead (1990) British

Face

phiz (1688) Archaic; shortened from physiognomy

mug (1708) Perhaps from the drinking mugs made with a grotesque imitation of the human face that were common in the 18th century
  ■ L. Cody: What! Miss a chance to get your ugly mug in the papers! (1986)

phizog (1811) Now dated or jocular; shortened from physiognomy
  ■ Radio Times: The phizog is definitely familiar... 'I get recognized wherever I go.' (1980)

dial (1842) British; from a supposed resemblance to the dial of a clock or watch; compare clock (p. 2) face
  ■ L. A. G. Strong: You should have seen the solemn dials on all the Gardas and officials. (1958)

mooey, moey, mooe (1859) Dated; from Romany mooi mouth, face
  ■ Peter Wildeblood: All nylons and high-heeled shoes and paint an inch thick on their mooeys. (1955)

mush, moosh (1859) British; from earlier sense, soft matter, apparently with reference to the soft flesh of the face
  ■ T. Barling: A big grin all over his ugly mush. (1974)

chivvy, chivy, chivey (1889) British; short for Chevry Chase, rhyming slang for face
  ■ John O'London's: Before you know it you'll be out on your earhole. (1962)

chivvy chase (1897)

puss (1890) Mainly US; from Irish pus lip, mouth
  ■ Carson McCullers: When you looked at the picture I didn't like the look on your puss. (1961)

kisser (1892) From earlier sense, mouth
  ■ Damon Runyon: He is a tall skinny guy with a long, sad, mean-looking kisser, and a mournful voice. (1938)

map (1908) Dated; from James Curtis: What d'you want to sit there staring at me for? I'm not a bloody oil-painting. You ought to know my map by now. (1936)

clock (1918) Compare dial p. 2 face
  ■ J. I. M. Stewart: His clock was still the affable Brigadier's, but you felt now that if you passed a sponge over it there'd be something quite different underneath. (1961)

pan (1923) Compare dead-pan
  ■ Eric Linklater: I never want to see that pan of yours again. (1931)

boat, boat-race (1958) British; rhyming slang
  ■ Robin Cook: We've seen the new boat of the proletariat, all gleaming eyes. (1962)

Eyes

lamps (1590) Dated; orig. poetical
  ■ F. D. Sharpe: He had his lamps on the copper. (1938)

peeps (a1700) From earlier sense, person who peeps
  ■ Observer: Or is it Liz Hurley? So hard to tell now the old Pendennis peepers have started to fail spectacularly. (1997)

goggles (1821) Dated; from goggle look with wide eyes + -rs
  ■ W. M. Thackeray: Her ladyship... turning her grey gogglers up to heaven. (1840)

mince-pies (1857), minces (1937) Rhyming slang
  ■ Robin Cook: A general look of dislike in the minces, which tremble a bit in their sockets. (1962)

saucers (1864) Dated; from the comparison of wide eyes with saucers, first recorded in the 14th century

Having bulging eyes

bug-eyed (1922) Orig US; from the verb hug
  ■ Raymond Chandler: An angular bug-eyed man with a sad sick face. (1943)

Ear

lug (1507), lughole (1895) lug from earlier sense, flap of a cap, etc., covering the ears; perhaps of Scandinavian origin
  ■ Taffrail: Give 'im a clip under the lug! (1916)

listener (1821) Dated, mainly boxing slang; from earlier sense, person who listens
  ■ Pierce Egan: Hooper planted another hit under Wood's listener. (1827)

tab (1866) Orig dialect
  ■ New Statesman: Dad was sitting by the fire, behind his paper with one tab lifted. (1959)

earhole (1923)

Ear swollen by blows

cauliflower ear (1896) From the distorted ear's shape
  ■ George Melly: Bouncers with cauliflower ears circling the dance-floor in evening dress. (1955)

thick ear (1909) British; especially in the phrase give (someone) a thick ear, hit someone hard (on the ear)
  ■ Taffrail: I sed I'd give yer a thick ear if yer went on worryin' me. (1916)

tin ear (1923)

Nose

smeller (a1700) Dated, mainly boxing slang; from earlier sense, one who smells
  ■ Nation: He would rather not have to draw his clarinet and close his peepers and mash his smeller and break his breadbasket. (1984)

snitch (a1700) From earlier sense, a blow on the nose; ultimate origin unknown
  ■ L. Marshall: I'm not curious. I never had a long nose. ... Peter... had a very long snitch. He had to push it into things that shouldn't have bothered him. (1965)

beak (1715) Jocular; from earlier sense, bird's bill
  ■ E. C. Clayton: A large, fat, greasy woman, with a prominent beak. (1865)
nose (1771) Dated; from earlier sense, small spout or mouthpiece; ultimately a diminutive of garlic.

hooter (1969) Dated; probably from the sound honker (1948)

schnoz, schnoz (1942) US; apparently from head, but this beezer

sniffer (1858) Dated; probably an alteration of raspberry.

razzo (1899) Dated; probably an alteration of raspberries.

snoozle, schnozzola (1930) US; used especially as a nickname for the entertainer Jimmy Durante.

shank (1938) From earlier sense, Jew; from the stereotypical view of Jews having large noses.

snorkel (1935) Dated; from earlier sense, small spout or mouthpiece; ultimately a diminutive of garlic.

snout (1861) Dated; probably an alteration of race.

schnoz (p. 3) nose • Tamarama Review: What a way to louse up this new magenta outfit—streaming eyes, a shiny schnozzola! (1959) • Hebrew amens are breathed through Yiddish schnozzles. (1977)

scent-box (1826), snuff-box (1829) Dated; probably from the earlier sense, person who sniffs.

snuff-box. (1853)

snout • I. & P. Opie: Habitual grumblers in London's East End receive the poetic injunction: 'Oo, shut yer moanin' ole.' (1959)

trap (1776) Especially in the phrase shut one's trap, keep silent; compare potato trap.

schnozzola (1930) From earlier sense, Jew; from the stereotypical view of Jews having large noses.

schnozz (1942) US; apparently Yiddish; compare German Schnauze snout • Roy Hayes: 'You remember what our boy looks like? 'Grey hair, widow's peak, big schnozz, red ski parka and no luggage.' (1973)

honker (1948) Dated; probably from the sound made by blowing the nose • R. Park: It's yer own fault for having such a God-forgotten honker [sc. a large nose]. (1948)

hooter (1958) Probably from the sound made by blowing the nose • Times: Derek Griffiths is a young coloured comedian with a face like crushed rubber . . . and a hooter to rival Cyrano de Bergerac. (1972)

Mouth

gob (a1550) Mainly British; perhaps from Gaelic and Irish gob beak, mouth, or from gab talk

hooter (1958) Probably from the sound made by blowing the nose • Times: Derek Griffiths is a young coloured comedian with a face like crushed rubber . . . and a hooter to rival Cyrano de Bergerac. (1972)
district in north London. Robin Cook: The rot had set in something horrible with her Hampsteads and scotch. (1962)

tats, tattys (1906) Australian; applied especially to false teeth; from earlier sense, dice; ultimate origin unknown. R. Park: He heard her calling after him, ‘Hey, you forgot yer tats! Don’t you want yer teeth?’ (1949)

pearlies (1914), pearly whites (1935) Thomas Pynchon: Secretaries . . . shiver with the winter cold . . . their typewriter keys chattering as their pearlyles. (1973)

snappers (1924) Applied especially to false teeth. Listener: Do your snappers fit snugly? (1958)

choppers (1940) Orig US; applied especially to false teeth. Sun: A set of false choppers were once found in the grounds of Buckingham Palace, after a Royal Garden Party. (1985)

Men’s facial hair

face-fungus (1907), fungus (1925) jocular. Listener: Svenagi . . . with his face-fungus and rolling eyes. (1959)

door-mat (1909) British, dated. J. R. Ware: Door-mat, the name given by the people to the heavy and unaccustomed beards which the Crimean heroes brought home from Russia in 1855–56. . . . By 1882 the term came to be applied to the moustache only. (1909)

five o’clock shadow (1937) Applied to a growth of stubble which becomes visible in the late afternoon on the face of a man who has shaved earlier in the day. New Yorker: Mr. Nixon, however, was given a deep five-o’clock shadow by the Rumanian artist. (1969)

bum fluff (1961) British; applied to the incipient growth of hair on the face of an adolescent boy. New Musical Express: You must be a pretty crap Satan if you can only appeal to bumfluff-faced adolescent, social inadéquates out to shock their mums. (1995)

Beard


Moustache

tash, tache (1893) Abbreviation. Roger Simons: ‘E’ad a little tash, just under ’is nose. (1965)

mo (1894) Australian & New Zealand; abbreviation. K. Garvey: His mo he paused to wipe. (1981)

walrus moustache (1918) Applied to a large moustache which overhangs the lips; from its similarity to the whiskers of a walrus. Theodora Fitzgibbon: I remember Conan Doyle as a large man with sad thoughtful eyes and a walrus moustache. (1982)

soup-strainer (1932) Jocular; applied to a long moustache. Ellis Lucia: A soulfully humming male quartet in soup-strainers and sideburns. (1962)

cookie-duster (1934) US, jocular

stash (1940) US; abbreviation. Time: Sandy is a superannuated swinger; complete with stash, burns and a 17-year-old hippie on his arm. (1971)

taz (1951) Variant of tash moustache. Kenneth Giles: He read one of those Service ads. . . . You know, a young bloke with a mash telling to troops to go plunging into the jungle. (1969)

mush (1967) Shortening and alteration of moustache. Kenneth Giles: There were more than forty thousand of us—weirdies and bearides, colonels and conches, Communists and Liberals. (1960)

Arm

wing (1823) Sun (Baltimore): He came up with a bad arm during the season, and had been troubled before with it. If the big man’s wing behaves this year he should be of considerable value. (1947)

Hand

paw (1605) Often jocular; from earlier sense, animal’s foot. Ernie Money: He stuck out his paw, and said Good-bye. (1887)

mauler (1820) Often applied specifically to the fists; compare earlier sense, one who mauls; also obsolete slang maulie hand, probably from the verb maul, but perhaps connected with Shelta malya, said to be a transposition of Gaelic lamh-hand. John Rossiter: You keep your big maulers off this. (1973)

flipper (1832), flapper (1833) Dated; compare contemporary sense, broad fin of a fish, etc. W. H. Smyth: The boatswain’s mate exulted in having ‘taken a lord by the flipper’. (1867) Lessons of Middle Age: Come, Frank, and extend the flapper of friendship. (1888)

mud-hook (1850) Dated

duke, dook (1859) Often applied specifically to the fists; probably short for Duke of Yorks, rhyming slang for forks fingers. Jessica Mitford: The funeral men are always ready with dukes up to go to the offensive. (1963)

mitt (1896) Orig US; from earlier sense, mitten. Raymond Chandler: ‘Freeze the mitts on the bar.’ The barman and I put our hands on the bar. (1940)

meat-hook (1919)
Left-handed person

**molly-dook, molly-dooker, molly-duce** (1941) Australian; probably from obsolete slang molly effeminate man, from the female personal name Molly, a pet form of Mary + dook, variant of duke hand; compare earlier Australian mauldy left-handed, molly-hander left-hander. Northern Daily Leader (Tamworth): Five of the top seven batsmen doing battle for Australia are left-handers. Kepler Wessels, Wayne Phillips, etc. . . are all molly dockers. (1983)

**Fingers**

**forks (a1700)** Dated; applied especially to the fingers as used for picking pockets; from earlier sense, prongs of a fork. Harrison Ainsworth: No dummy hunter had forks so fly. (1834)

**pink. pinkey (1808)** Mainly North American & Scottish; applied specifically to the little finger; from Dutch pinükje, diminutive of pink little finger. W. H. Auden: O lift your pin-kie, and touch the win-ter sky. (1962)

**Breasts**

**titties (1746), tits (1928)** tit, variant of teat; titty, originally a dialectal and nursery diminutive of teat, now as a diminutive of tit. Oz: Mary Anne Shelley, with the best tits off-off-Broadway. (1969) Screw: Man, those nice firm buttocks and titties filled that bikini to overflowing. (1972)

**charlies (1873)** Unexplained use of the male name Charlie, diminutive of Charles. Peter Wildeblood: Carrying her famous bosom before her like the tray of an usherette she was disconcerted to hear . . . a nasal cry of: 'Coo, look at them charlies!' (1957)


**boobs (1929), boobies (1934)** boob, probably shortened from booby; booby, probably alteration of dialectal bubbly breast. Guardian: The characters were constantly referring to her large bosom (even descending to calling them ‘big boobies’). (1968) Daily Mirror: If people insist on talking about her boobs, she would rather they called them boobs, which is a way-out word . . . rather than breasts. (1968)

**knockers (1941)** Perhaps from the notion of pendulous breasts knocking together. M. J. Bosse: I’m jealous. She has those big knockers, and I’m afraid you like them. (1972)

**jugs (1957)** Orig US; perhaps from the notion of a jug as a receptacle for milk or other liquids. Tom Wolfe: She must allow him the precious currency he had earned, which is youth and beauty and juicy jugs and loamy loins. (1987)

**bristols (1961)** British; short for Bristol Cities, rhyming slang for titties; from the name of the Bristol City Football Club. Robin Cook: These slag girls used to go trotting upstairs . . . arses wagging and bristols going. (1962)

**norks (1962)** Australian; origin uncertain; perhaps from the name of the Norco Co-operative Ltd., a butter manufacturer in New South Wales. Australian (Sydney): The minimum requirement is an ‘Aw, whacko, cop the norks!’ followed by at least a six decibel wolf whistle. (1984)

**bazookas (1963)** Applied especially to large breasts; from earlier sense, portable rocket launcher, but presumably suggested mainly by bazooks

**melons (1972)** Orig US; applied especially to large breasts. Pussycat: Her full and shapely melons swung and swayed . . . as she moved. (1972)

**bazongas, bazoongas, bazonkas (1972)** US; probably a jocular alteration of bazookas

**dingleberries (1980)** From the earlier US sense, a cranberry, Vaccinium erythrocarpum, of the south-eastern US. The origin of dingle is uncertain. British Journal of Photography: Daddy says knockers and jugs and bazooks and dingleberries. . . And then he laughs and goes ‘wuff wuff!’ (1980)

**Large-breasted**

**stacked, stacked up, well stacked (1942)** Orig US; used as a term of male approval. B. Shannon: A cute little blond chick . . . really stacked. (1981)

**Ribs**

**slats (1898)** Orig and mainly US. John Masefield: Billy bats Some stinging short-arms in my slats. (1911)

**Abdomen**

**victualling office (1751)** Dated, mainly boxing slang; from earlier sense, office concerned with providing naval food supplies. Sporting Magazine: Spring put in a heavy claim on his opponent’s victualling office. (1820)

**bread-basket (1753)** From earlier sense, receptacle for bread; now often used with reference to the abdomen as the target for a punch or shot. John Bristed: Our landlady, who was standing . . . with her mouth wide open, and her hands locked together . . . resting on her prominent breadbasket. (1803)

**bingy, bingee, bingie, bingey, binjy (1832)** Australian; from Aboriginal (Dharuk) bindi

**tummy (1869), tum (1864), tum-tum (1869)** tummy representing a childish alteration of stomach; tum shortened from tummy; tum-tum reduplication of tum. James Joyce: Cissi pokéd him out . . . of fun in his wee fat tummy. (1921) Time: To re-establish old wisdom and simple certitudes: hot chestnuts in the hand, calories in the tummy. (1977)

**Derby Kelly, Darby Kelly, Derby Kel (1906), Kelly (1970)** British; rhyming slang for belly. Terence Rattigan: Just that ride home. Cor, I still feel it down in the old derby kel. (1942) Alfred Draper: My old kelly was rumbling and I fancied a pie and chips. (1970)
Maconochie (1919) Dated British services’ slang, jocular; from earlier sense, stewed meat

amidships (1937) Used to refer to the striking of a blow in the abdomen; from earlier sense, in the middle of a ship, implying the most crucial or vulnerable part • Times: Buss hit him painfully amidships and he had to leave the field. (1961)

puku (1941) New Zealand; Maori • P. Grace: Your puku’s getting in the way. (1978)

beer belly (1942), beer gut (1976) Used to refer to an abdomen enlarged by drinking beer • Rolling Stone: Woods pauses to tuck his shirt between a beer belly and a silver belt buckle. (1969) • Los Angeles Times: Fregosi took to wearing the jacket . . . when he began to develop a beer gut while trying to play for the Mets. (1986)

Ned Kelly (1945) Australian; rhyming slang for belly; from the name of Ned Kelly (1857–80), Australian bushranger • Barry Humphries: If I don’t go to school with your belly-button knockin’ against your backbone, I’m not going to computer with your bellowin’ against my bunket. (1986)

Navel

belly button (1877) • J. B. Priestley: If you’d ever gone to school with your belly-button knockin’ against your backbone. (1946)

Waist

middle (971) • George Borrow: He has got it buckled round his middle, beneath his pantaloons. (1842)

Heart
ticker (1930) Orig US; from the resemblance of the beating of the heart to the steady ticking of a clock • J. Cartwright: Put something at the bottom about your heart. Say, ‘The ticker seems to be a little dodgy at the moment’. (1980)

Intestines

guts (a1000) Orig a standard term, but now colloquial when applied to human beings

inside (1741), insides (1840) • Charles Kingsley: So now away home, my inside cries cupboard. (1855)

innards (1825) Dialect pronunciation of inwards intestines, from noun use of inward internal • J. T. Farrell: His innards made slight noises, as they diligently furthered the process of digesting a juicy beefsteak. (1932)

shitbags (1937) Dated

comic cuts, comics (1945) Australian; rhyming slang for guts; from comic cuts, originally the name of a children’s paper, later applied to strip cartoons • F. A. Reeder: I got a bit crook in the comic cuts and had to run for the latrine about ten times a day. (1977)

kishke, kishka, kishkeh, kishker (1959) From earlier sense, sausage made with beef intestine; from Yiddish • Leo Rosten: I laughed until my kishkas were sore. (1968)

Womb

oven (1962) Especially in expressions suggesting pregnancy, in allusion to have a bun in the oven be pregnant • David Fletcher: She’s in the club, you know. Got one in the oven, eh? (1976)

Pubic hair

pubes First recorded in the late 16th century as a two-syllable word adopted from Latin pubes pubic hair; the slang usage, pronounced [pjubz], is a comparatively recent development • International H & E Monthly: If I did shave my pubes I would end up sporting lots of elastoplast in all the places where I had cut myself. (1990)

bush (c1650) • Anthony Powell: He insisted on taking a cutting from my bush—said he always did after having anyone for the first time. (1973)

thatch (1933) • C. McKay: Looking to the stand where the girls were, Tack, indicating Rita, said, ‘And thas’s a finer piece a beauty than thasere. Man! Man! Oh how I’d love to get under her thatch.’ (1933)

Genitalia

thing (c1386) Euphemistic; applied especially to the penis • J. P. Donleavy: Men wagging their things at you from doorways. Disgusting. (1955)

privates (1602) Shortened from earlier private parts; first recorded as a pun on the sense ‘intimate friends’ in Shakespeare Hamlet 2 ii: ‘In the middle of her favour . . . her privates, we’ • Ted Allbeury: The narrow white briefs that barely captured her sex. (1977)

Sex (1938) • Herbert Gold: His eyes turned to his pants, gaping open, and his sex sick as an overhandled rattler gaping through. (1956) • Ted Allbeury: The narrow white briefs that barely captured her sex. (1977)

Male genitals

jock (a1790) Origin unknown; perhaps from an old slang word jockum, -am penis • Ian Cross: Sprigs clattering on the floor, knees, jocks, backsides and shouting as everybody dressed. (1960) • J. Mitchell: This one’s [sc a horse] a gelding. . . . He lost his crown jewels. (1986)

lunchbox (1992) British, mainly applied to the genitals visible through tight clothing • Guardian: ‘What is Linford
Penis

**weapon (a1000)**  
H. & R. Greenwald: This sexual thrill still comes over me whenever I see a horse flashing his weapon. (1972)

**yard (1379)**  
Dated; from earlier sense, rod; compare Latin virga rod, penis  
John Payne: Aboulhusn . . . abode naked, with his yard and his arse exposed. (1884)

**cock (c1450)**  
Probably from the notion of the cock as the male bird  
Landfall: 'She had her hand on his cock.' 'There's no need to be crude.' (1969)

**tool (1553)**  
Leonard Cohen: You uncovered his nakedness!—You peeked at his tool! (1966)

**prick (1592)**  
Ed McBain: Jocko had . . . a very small prick. (1592)  
Probable from the notion of the machine (1749)  
Dated

**meat (1595)**  
See also **beat the meat** under To masturbate at **Sex** (p. 79)  
Black Scholar. She was in his arms . . . and grabbing his erect meat. (1971)

**needle (1638)**  
Dated  
Erica Jong: 'Won't ye have a Needlecock?' cries the second Tart, '... a Needlewoman fer yer e'er-loving Needle?' (1980)

**pego (1680)**  
Origin unknown  
H. R. F. Keating: There's some as likes . . . her dirty old fingers round their pego. (1974)

**pudding (1719), pud (1939)**  
From earlier sense, sausage; see also **pull one's pudding** under To masturbate at **Sex** (p. 79)  
James Joyce: There's a lot of erect penis  
Black Scholar. She was in his arms . . . and grabbing his erect meat. (1971)

**machine (1749)**  
Dated  
Philo cunnus: I then seized his stiff machine in my grasp. (c1863)

**root (1846)**  
Kate Millett: It measures intelligence as masculinity of mind, condemnodesmiid:m: authors for 'dead-stick prose', praises good writers for setting 'virile example' and notes that since 'style is root' (penis), the best writing naturally requires 'huge loins'. (1970)

**Johnson, Jim Johnson (1863)**  
Arbitrary use of the surname **Johnson**  
Screw. So I went to take my turn with the hopes of somehow getting my Jim Johnson wet. (1972)

**John Thomas (1879), John, John (1934)**  
Arbitrary use of a male name  
Times Literary Supplement. The grotesquely coy accounts of sex, during which Tony tells us that his 'John Thomas' was 'up and raring to go.' (1972)  
David Ballantyne: How often did the nurse find him with his old John lying limply? (1948)

**dick (c1888)**  
Pet form of the male forename Richard; compare earlier sense, riding whip  
Philip Roth: You might have thought that . . . my dick would have been the last thing on my mind. (1969)

**dong (a1900)**  
Mainly US; compare earlier sense, whatchamacallit  
Philip Roth: I was wholly incapable of keeping my hands off my dong. (1969)

**pisser (1901)**  
Now mainly in pull someone's pisser pull someone's leg; see under **To make fun of someone or something** at Ridicule (pp. 330–1).

**old man (1902)**  
Brian Aldiss: She had been opening up her legs before the reprise. Those glorious mobile buttocks. . . I felt my old man perking up again at the memory. (1971)

**pecker (1902)**  
Mainly US; perhaps from the earlier phrase keep one's pecker up remain brave or optimistic  
N. Levine: Ground sunflower seeds. . . This will make your pecker stand up to no end of punishment. (1958)

**peter (1902)**  
From the male forename  
Joseph Wambaugh: If you look very closely you can see a gerbil's dick, but not a parakeet's peter. (1977)

**rod (1902)**  
Applied especially to the erect penis  
Ezra Pound: His rod hath made god in my belly. (1934)

**organ (1903)**  
Euphemistic; often in the phrase **male organ**  
M. Campbell: He had the largest organ that anyone had ever seen. It was a truncheon. (1967)

**willy, willie (1905)**  
British; from a pet form of the male forename William  
P. Angadi: We used to hold each other's willies. . . We didn't know about sex then. (1985)

**micky (1922)**  
From a pet form of the male forename **Michael**  
James Joyce: I'll put on my best shift and drawers to let him have a good eyeful out of that to make his micky stand for him. (1922)

**middle leg (1922)**  
Dylan Thomas: Men should be two tooled and a poet's middle leg is his pencil. (1935)

**tube (1922)**  
James Joyce: Men should be two tooled and a poet's middle leg is his pencil. (1935)

**whang, wang (1935), whanger, wanger (1939)**  
Orig and mainly US: wang from earlier sense, thong  
G. Hammond: Maybe you're not as ready with your wang as you were, or maybe you couldn't keep it up. (1981)  
Milton Machlin: She didn't get the idea so fast, so he whipped the old whanger out of his union suit and laid it on the table in front of her. (1976)

**pencil (1937)**  
Dick Francis: That Purple Emperor strain is as soft as an old man's pencil. (1967)

**dingdong (a1900)**  
US; compare earlier sense, whatchamacallit  
Mainly US; origin uncertain; perhaps from Dong, name coined by Edward Lear (1877) for an imaginary creature with a luminous nose  
Philip Roth: I was wholly incapable of keeping my hands off my dong. (1969)

**whatchamacallit (c1888)**  
US; compare earlier sense, whatchamacallit  
David Ballantyne: How often did the nurse find him with his old John lying limply? (1948)

**screw (c1900)**  
Mainly US; compare earlier sense, whatchamacallit  
James Joyce: I suppose the people gave him that nickname [sc. Mr de Kock] going about with his screw. (1985)

**os (1822)**  
D. Williamson: Raylene's a hell of a nice girl but the word... is she's not a great one for hiding the sausage. (1977)
plonker (1947) Not recorded in print before 1947, but reported in use around the time of World War I; origin unknown; compare dated Australian slang plonker explosive shell

■ Loaded: An apposumage of some magnificence, news of his powerhouse plonker brought the groupies . . . ever-knocking at the Hendrix bedroom door. (1996)

todger, tadger (1951) Origin unknown

■ Sunday Sport: My todger stood to attention as she joked: "I'm sure that it winked at me then!" (1954)

winkle (1951) From earlier sense, small mollusc; applied especially to a small boy's penis

■ Ted Hughes: O do not chop his winkle off His Mammy cried. (1970)

■ Spectator: A man with one leg and a vermillion bladder, violet stomach and testicles and a scarlet dork is seen putting it into another amputee. (1984)

stalk (1961) Applied especially to the erect penis

■ Alan White: I had a stalk on me as long as my arm. A right handful, that one. (1976)

rig (1964) ■ Martin Amis: All weekend I cried, . . . thought of ways of committing suicide, . . . considered lopping off my rig with a razor-blade. (1973)

wee-wee (1964) From earlier sense, urination

■ Screw: [The] self-righteous defender of what he thought to be his threatened wee wee, could not contain his machismo. (1977)


swipe (1967) US, Black English ■ I. Slim: Slim, pipping ain't no game of love, so prat 'em and keep your swipe outta 'em. (1987)

ding-a-ling (1968) ■ R. H. Rimmer: My damned ding-a-ling was pointing my bathrobe into a tent. (1975)

prong (1969) ■ Martin Amis: This old prong has been sutured and stitched together in a state-of-the-art cosmetics lab. (1984)

tonk (1970) Compare earlier, mainly Australian senses, fool, homosexual man ■ John Carey: Most of his boyhood was spent worrying about the size of his 'tonk' (as he disarmingly dubs it). (1980)

■ Loaded: An apposumage of some magnificence, news of his powerhouse plonker brought the groupies . . . ever-knocking at the Hendrix bedroom door. (1996)


shaft (1971) ■ Brian Aldiss: It was never enough merely to lower your trousers—they had to come off, . . . so that you could crouch there naked but for your shirt, frantically rubbing your shaft. (1971)

chopper (1973) ■ Jonathon Green: We all know who's got the big choppers, and there's no way you can have a big chopper and money and power. (1983)

dipstick (1973) From earlier sense, rod for measuring depth liquid, especially engine oil; probably reinforced by dip one's wick (of a man) have sex. ■ Maladicta: I overheard in a cinema once the cry 'Keep your lipstick off my dipstick.' (1980)

An erection of the penis

horn (1785) ■ Guardian: Dirty old goat. . . . He only bows his head to get his horn up. (1972)

cock-stand, stand (1866) ■ Angus Wilson: Marcus . . . found, as his eyes took in the young man's flirtatious glance, that he was beginning a cock-stand. (1967) ■ Index Expurgatorius of Martial: Maeuves, who while sleeping only gets A piss-proud stand that melts away on waking. (1868)

hard-on, hard (1893) ■ Screw: Billy and I talked down our hardons and . . . went downstairs to load the truck. (1972)

ramrod (1902) ■ Alan Sillitoe: I'd undone my belt and zip on our way across, and fell onto her with my ramrod already out. (1979)

rise (1949) Usually in get a rise ■ Martin Amis: 'Have you fucked Sue? . . . What was it like?' . . . 'It was okay, except I couldn't get a proper rise.' (1973)

stiff (1980)

Testicles

stones (1154) Originally in standard use, but now slang

balls (a1325) From their approximately spherical shape ■ D. H. Lawrence: She . . . gathered his balls in her hand. (1928)

bollocks (1744), ballocks (1382) ■ Diment: I... wished I had followed up my elbow in the throat . . . it is sometimes necessary to kick them in the goolies. (1984)

knackers (1866) From earlier sense, castanets, from knack make a sharp cracking noise ■ Graham Greene: I may regret him for a while tonight. His knackers were superb. (1989)

nuts (1915) ■ Roger Busby: Russell got a boot in the nuts. (1973)

cobbler's (1936) British; short for cobbler's (or cobblers') awls, rhyming slang for balls ■ James Curtis: Well, they got us by the cobblers. (1936)

gooilies (1937) Apparently of Indian origin; compare Hindustani gol! bullet, ball, pill ■ Guardian: To get a performance out of them [sc actors] . . . it is sometimes necessary to kick them in the gooilies. (1971)

pills (1937) From earlier sense, ball ■ Adam Diment: I . . . wished I had followed up my elbow in the throat with a hefty boot in his peasant pills. One in the balls is worth two in the teeth—a motto of unarmed combat instructors. (1968)

rocks (1948) See also get one's rocks off under To have sex (with) at Sex p. 76 ■ John Braine: I'd get a swift kick in the rocks. (1975)

dingdongs (1957) US, jocular; compare dingdong p. 7 penis
**cojones** (1966) From Spanish, plural of cojón: testicle. ■ Truman Capote: The baseball field was mud up to your cojones. (1966)

Female genitals

**cunt** (c1230) Middle English cunt, count(e), ultimately from Germanic *kuntōn*: ■ Henry Miller: O Tania, where now is that warm cunt of yours? (1934)

**hole** (1582) ■ Thomas D’Urfe: It has a Head much like a Mole’s. And yet it loves to creep in Holes: The Fairest She that e’er took Life, For love of this, became a Wife. (1719)

**meat** (1611) ■ Germaine Greer: It would be unbearable, but less so, if it were only the vagina that was belittled by terms like meat. (1970)

**slit** (1648) ■ *Rolling Stone*: What am I going to call it? Snatch, Twat? Pussy? Puss puss, nice kitty, nice little animal that’s so goddam patronizing it’s almost as bad as saying ‘slit’. (1977)

**twat** (1656) **twot** (1927) US, mainly Black English: from earlier sense, a brief fondle or act of sexual intercourse. ■ Maya Angelou: Momma had drilled into my head: ‘Keep your legs closed, and don’t let nobody see your pocketbook.’ (1969)

**zatch** (1950) Perhaps an alteration of satchel in similar slang sense. ■ Robert Dentry: Scotsmen playing the bagpipes give me a pain in the prick. . . . Pathan tribesmen playing them is enough to make the harlot of Jerusalem snatch her zatch! (1971)

Clitoris


**little man in the boat** (1979)

Buttocks

**arse** (Old English). ■ *Ass* (1860) ■ ass (1860) ■ as; ass mainly US; original in standard use, but now slang. ■ Guardian: Bush’s rhetoric has occasionally dropped to the level of schoolboy abuse: ‘Saddam is going to get his arse kicked.’ (1991)

**tail** (1303) Now mainly US; now mainly in figurative phrases, such as work one’s tail off, or applied to a woman’s buttocks and genital area regarded as an object of sexual desire. ■ William Faulkner: This is the first time you’ve had your tail out of that kitchen since we got here except to chop a little wood. (1942)

**Transatlantic Review**: He had been after her tail for months, but Judy, being an old-fashioned girl, declined his advances. (1977)

**bum** (1387) Mainly British; origin unknown. ■ Looks: Begin with a warm-up and concentrate on your bum and thighs, and work on your boobs and tum as well when you turn the poster over. (1989)

**butt** (c1450) From probable earlier sense, broader end of something; originally in standard use, but now slang, mainly US. ■ John Bartlett: The word is used in the West in such phrases as, ‘I fell on my butt,’ “He kicked my butt”. (1860)

**backside** (c1500) From earlier sense, rear part. ■ Gentleman’s Magazine: He shall fall on his back-side. (1827)

**prat** (1567) Orig criminals’ slang; origin unknown. ■ David Delman: I’m a shmo about tennis, so if I fall on my prat a time or two you have to bear with me. (1972)

Cheeks

**cheeks** (a1600) Used especially with reference to the two halves of the buttocks. ■ Norman Mailer: A car . . . is already a girl . . . . The tail-lights are clouchal, the rear is split like the cheeks of a drum majorette. (1959)

**moon** (1756) Dated; from the shape of the buttocks; used in the singular and the plural with the same meaning. ■ Samuel Beckett: Placing her hands upon her moons, plump and plain. (1938)

**rass** (1790) Jamaican; by metathesis of arse. ■ A. Salkey: You class-war rass hole, you! (1959)

**rear** (1796) Euphemistic. ■ N. R. Nash: Just once is enough, Baby. (She slaps her on the rear) Come on—get to work. (1949)

**pocketbook** (1942) US; from earlier sense, purse or handbag; probably either from the supposed resemblance between the labia and a closed or folded purse, or from the notion of the vagina as a receptacle (compare box p. 9). ■ Maya Angelou: Momma had drilled into my head: ‘Keep your legs closed, and don’t let nobody see your pocketbook.’ (1969)

**jelly roll** (1927) US, mainly Black English; from earlier sense, cylindrical cake containing jelly or jam. ■ Bernard Malamud: Irene Lost Queen I miss To be between Your Jelly Roll. (1971)

**gash** (c1866) From earlier sense, a brief fondle or act of sexual intercourse. ■ James Joyce: Two lads in scout’s breeches went through her . . . before she had a hint of hair at her fanny to hide. (1939)

**honey-pot** (1709) ■ Germaine Greer: If a woman is revealed twat. (1973)

**muff** (1699) From the supposed resemblance between the pubic hair and a fur muff. ■ Henry Miller: The local hookie’s got Polaroids of her flashing her muff. (1973)

**prat** (CI450) From probable earlier sense, broader end of something; originally in standard use, but now slang. ■ Gentleman’s Magazine: He killed about five prostitutes, cut them to pieces and stuffed various objects up their pussies. (1976)

**ass** (1860) ■ as; ass mainly US; originally in standard use, but now slang. ■ John Bartlett: The word is used in the West in such phrases as, ‘I fell on my butt,’ “He kicked my butt”. (1860)

**Clitoris**


**clitoris**

**bump** (1387) Mainly British; origin unknown. ■ Looks: Begin with a warm-up and concentrate on your bum and thighs, and work on your boobs and tum as well when you turn the poster over. (1989)

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behind (1830) Euphemistic • George Bernard Shaw: You can say 'If I catch you doing that again I will... smack your behind.' (1928)
duff (c1835) US; origin unknown
buns (1877) US; from the hemispherical shape of the buttocks • Elnore Leonard: She saw... a white band below his hips, sexy, really nice buns. (1985)
jacksy, jacksie, jaxey, jaxie, jacksy-pardo, jacksy-pardy (1896) From the male personal name Jack + -sy • Alfred Draper: The amount of love in our house you could stick up a dog's jacksie and he wouldn't even yelp. (1970)
can (1914) Orig and mainly US • John McCormick: A toilet bowl in the comer with a scratched metal lid that freezes your can when you do sit on it. (1967)
tochus, tochas, tochess, tuchus, tuchas, tokus, tocus, etc. (1914) Mainly North American; from Yiddish tochus, tochas, tochess, tuchus, tuchas, tokus pinched all over the place. (1952)
fanny (1919) Orig and mainly US; origin unknown • Nevil Shute: I'd never be able to think of John and Jo again if we just sat tight on our fannies and did nothing. (1960)
beam (1929) From earlier sense, width of a ship; used especially with reference to the width of the hips and buttocks • Mrs Hicks-Beach: A cast-off of Jim's. He's grown too broad in the beam for it. (1944)
keister, keester, keyster (1931) US; origin unknown; compare earlier senses, bag, strongbox • New Yorker: Just put your keyster in the chair and shut your mouth. (1985)
bim (1935) Alteration of bum • Cecil Day Lewis: He slid gracefully down it on his bim. (1948)
slats (1935) Orig and mainly US; usually in the phrase a kick in the slats • Business Week: Unless we get a new kick in the slats from inflation next year, I would look for continued relative restraint in settlements. (1975)
posterior (1936) Euphemistic or jocular; the plural posterior was used for 'buttocks' between the 17th and the 19th centuries • Sea Spray (New Zealand): It is soft so that a crewman winding the spinnaker sheet winch down aft can rest his posterior on it. (1976)
quoit, coit (1941) Australian; from earlier sense, rope ring, in allusion to the anus • John Bailey: I think he needs a good kick up the coit,' says Cromwell. (1972)

Khyber Pass, Khyber (1943) British; rhyming slang for arse; from the name of the chief pass in the Hindu Kush mountains between Afghanistan and north-west Pakistan • Crescendo: If we sit on our Khybers, we will miss out on all the things that make our lives the richer. (1968)
chuff (1945) Origin unknown • Observer: It was two hours of unmitigated boredom, that could only have been enjoyed by people too lazy to get off their chuffs and book themselves on a real tour of stately homes. (1996)
zatch (1950) Perhaps an alteration of satchel in similar slang sense • E. B. White: You are just sticking out your zatch, and many a tosspan and strutfair will run you through. (1950)
bronze, brona, bronzo (1959) Australian; from earlier sense, anus • Les Ryan: Go and sit on your bronze while we give scabs your jobs. (1975)
tush, tushie, tushy (1962) Mainly North American; alteration or diminutive of tochus buttocks • Pix (Australia): Pretty young girls who walk around... with their tushes out there asking for it. (1970)
acre, acher (1965) Australian, euphemistic; from acre measure of area, from the notion of a large expanse of buttocks; the spelling acher perhaps inspired by the notion of a 'pain in the arse' • Frank Hardy: Wiping between his toes and falling on his acre. (1971)
heinie, hiney (1982) US; perhaps from behind, influenced by heinie German (soldier) • New Yorker: I could tell how tight that girl's shorts were. I could see her heinie clear across the square. (1985)
Anus
arsehole (1400), asshole (1935) asshole. mainly US • Ezra Pound: Faces smeared on their rumps... Addressing crowds through their arse-holes. (1930)
hole (1607) • Leonard Cohen: Don't give me this all diamond shit, shove it up your occult hole. (1966)
shithole (1937)
ring (1949) From its annular shape • R. Stow: I bet I would have booted him in the ring if he hadn't run. (1965)
ort (1952) Australian; also applied more broadly to the buttocks; origin unknown • J. Wynnum: Take it from me, there's more ways of killin' a cat than fillin' its ort with sand. (1962)
bronze, brona, bronzo (1953) Australian; from its colour • D'Arcy Niland: I know the one with an ugly face like a handful of bronzas. Who's the other? (1957)
freckle (1967) Australian; from previous sense, brown mark on the skin • Barry Humphries: I too believed that the sun shone out of Gough's freckle. (1978)
The rectum
back passage (1960) Euphemistic • F. Falconer: As she sucked, so her fingers reached his back passage. Uninvited, she positioned two fingers at the entrance of his ort with sand. (1976)
Legs
stumps (a1460) Jocular; from earlier sense, remaining part of an amputated limb; now mainly in stir one's stumps act quickly
pins (1530) From earlier sense, peg • Daily Mirror: You look a bit wobbly on your pins, pet. (1976)
timbers (1807) From earlier sense, wooden leg • John Clare: Boys, miss my pegs... and hit my legs, My timber well can stand your gentle taps. (1821)
props (1828) Dated • Sportsman: There are those... who assert that with such 'props' he will never successfully negotiate the Epsom gradients. (1981)
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pegs (1833) Jocular; often also applied to a wooden or other artificial leg. Thomas Hood: The army-surgeons made him limbs: said he,—‘They’re only pegs’. (1845)


benders (1849) Orig US. H. W. Longfellow: Young ladies are not allowed to cross their benders in school. (1849)

Scotch peg (1857) Rhyming slang. Ward Muir: If he had occasion to allude to his leg he would probably have called it ‘Scotch peg’. (1917)

stems (1860) Vanity Fair, among some of Conway’s more famous expressions are: ‘... stems’ and ‘Gambs’ (legs). (1927)


Shortness of legs

duck’s disease, ducks’ disease, duck-disease (1925) Jocular. B. Marshall: Plinio, the barman with duck’s disease, came running up. (1960)

Knees

benders (1925) Orig US. A. S. M. Hutchinson: They say family prayers there with the servants every night, all down on their benders. (1925)

2. Nakedness

Naked

in one’s birthday suit (1753) Guardian. The sight of me in my bathing-suit might tip the balance in a world already veering towards collapse. Ditto, me in my birthday suit. (1992)

in the altogether (1894) From the notion of being ‘altogether’ or ‘completely’ naked. Nigel Balchin: Should I get a kick out of just seeing a girl in the altogether? (1947)


starkers (1923) British; from stark (naked) + -ers. Guardian. There was no stripping... The girls were starkers all the time. (1983)

starko (1923) British; from stark (naked) + o. J. Pudney: Leave him in his birthday suit. Miss bloody Garth can walk back to Midsomer starko and explain to the folks that she’s been a man all the time. (1961)

in the raw (1941) From earlier (mainly metaphorical) use of the raw to denote exposed flesh. Evelyn Waugh: Auberon surprised her in her bath and is thus one of the very few women who can claim to have seen his great-great-grandmother in the raw. (1944)

Feet

tootsy, tootsie, tootsy-wootsy, tootsy-wootsee, etc. (1854) Jocular; alteration of foot + diminutive suffix -sy. Mary Wesley: You can rest your tootsies while I listen to music. (1983)

mud-hooks (1850) Dated.

plates of meat (1857), plates (1896), platters of meat (1923), platters (1945) plates/platters of meat, rhyming slang. Cecil Day Lewis: ‘Your clodhopping feet.’ ‘Plates of meat,’ murmured Dick Cozzens, who is an expert in slang. (1948). P. Branch: He... took off his shoes. ‘Heaven!’ he sighed. ‘My plates have been quite, quite killing me.’ (1951)

beetle-crushers, beetle-squashers (1860) Jocular. Anthony Gilbert: He looked down... at his own enormous beetle-crushers in bright tan Oxfords. (1958)

dogs (1913) John Steinbeck: We ain’t gonna walk no eight miles... tonight. My dogs is burned up. (1939)

Skin

hide (1800) From earlier sense, animal’s skin; originally in standard use, but now jocular, especially in metaphorical expressions. Lord Lytton: The poor fellow meant only to save his own hide. (1873)

Breath

puff (1827) From earlier sense, short emission of air. W. C. Baldwin: Sustaining three more savage charges, the last... far from pleasant, as my horse had all the puff taken out of him. (1863)

No clothing

not a stitch (1885) Alan Bennett: And he will insist on not wearing a stitch. Zoe gets quite agitated. Normally, you see, they wear what I believe is called a posing pouch. (1972)

The bare skin

the buff (1654) Now mainly in the phrases in the buff naked and to the buff so as to be naked; from earlier sense, buffalo-skin (leather). Vivian Jenkins: They went swimming, sunbathed, did their training stripped to the buff. (1956). Rolling Stone: The girls call themselves the Groupies and claim they recorded their song in the buff. (1969)

To undress

peel (1785) Often followed by off; originally used in boxing slang, referring to contestants getting stripped ready to fight. Variety: The gals are peelin’ in 23 clubs through Los Angeles County. (1950)
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To go naked

**skinny-dip** (1966) Orig US; applied to swimming naked; from the notion of swimming only in one’s skin. ■ Lisa Birnbach: Once every summer, teenagers are caught skinny-dipping after dark. (1980).

Hence **skinny-dipper** (1971)


Hence **streaker** (1973) ■ John Irving: A young woman had reported that she was approached by an exhibitionist—at least, by a streaker. (1978)

**slug** (1931) ■ L. & P. Opie: The unfortunate fat boy . . . is known as . . . slug. (1959)

**fatso** (1933) Often used as a derisive nickname; probably from the adjective fat or the designation Fats. ■ Len Beighton: I began to envy Fatso his sausage sandwiches. (1962)

**lard-ass** (1946) Mainly North American, orig nautical; often applied specifically to a large-buttocked person, or to the buttocks themselves. ■ R. A. Hill: All they do is eat and sit on their lard asses around the guns. (1959)

**middle-age spread**, **middle-aged spread** (1931) Applied to paunchiness in a middle-aged person. ■ John o’London’s: Join the happy throng who have learnt to control the ‘middle-age spread’ by wearing the . . . supporting belt. (1937)

**puppy fat** (1937) Applied to fatness in a young person, which supposedly soon disappears

**flab** (1958) ■ Kenneth Giles: She looks pretty good . . . no flab round the thighs yet. (1966)

**spare tyre** (1961) Applied to a roll of fat around the midriff

**beef to the heel(s)** (1867) ■ James Joyce: Transparent stockings, stretched to breaking point. Not like . . . the one in Grafton street. White. Wow! Beef to the heel. (1922)

**hefty** (1871) From earlier sense, weighty. ■ E. F. Norton: The bucolic bumpkin with coarse features and slow brain fails no less than the hefty giant. (1925)

**thin**

**skinny** (1605) From earlier sense, like or consisting of skin. ■ Saturday Review: A chicken . . . sometimes skinny and often ill-kept. (1879)

**spindly** (1827) From earlier sense, (of plants) growing weakly. ■ Bayard Taylor: Therefore I’ve worn, like many a spindly youth, False calves these many years upon me. (1872)

**weedy** (1852) Used to denote unhealthy thinness and weakness; from earlier sense, like a weed
4. Sight, Vision

A look, a glance

squint (1673) • G. M. Fenn: Better get back to him as soon as you’ve had your squint round. (1894)

deck, dekh (1853) • Orig Anglo-Indian, dated; from Hindustani dekhā sight, dekhō see, look at
• E. Milne: Cinkey, have a deck at Ronald Colman! (1951)

look-see (1883) • Pidgin-like formation from the noun or verb look + the verb see • Adam Diment: I took a long looksee through my... binoculars. (1968)

decko, dekko (1894) • British, orig army slang; from Hindustani dekhō imperative of dekhō to look • Observer: Once I’d grabbed hold of the script and taken a good dekko at it, my worst fears were confirmed. (1956)

double O (1913) • US; applied to an intense look; from the resemblance to a pair of staring eyes • R. A. Heinlein: The cashier came over and leaned on my table, giving the seats on both sides of the booth a quick double-O. (1956)

squiz, squizz (1913) • Australian & New Zealand; probably a blend of squint and quiz • K. Smith: Hey, youse blokes! Come over here and take a squiz at this! (1965)

gander (1914) • Orig US; from the verb gander • Scientific American: Take a gander at the see-through door below. (1971)

gig (1919), gig (1924), gink (1945) • Australian; from British dialect verb gook peep, look • Robert Close: Get a gink at that chin, mates! (1961)

Captain Cook (1932) • Australian; rhyming slang for look; from the name of James Cook (1728–79), British navigator and explorer • D. O’Grady: Got a Captain Cook at your dossier—it’s thicker than your frickin’ head. (1974)

butcher’s (1936) • British; short for butcher’s hook, rhyming slang for look • Kingsley Amis: Have a butcher’s at the News of the World. (1960)

bo-peep (1941) • Australian & New Zealand; extension of peep, after bo-peep nursery game • Landfall: Take a bo-peep at old Lionel. (1969)

shufti, shufity (1943) • British, orig army slang; from Arabic šuťi have you seen?, from šaj see • Richard Adams: Let’s ‘ave a crafty shufti round with that in mind. (1980)

To see

lay eyes on (a1225), clap eyes on (1838) • Walter Besant: I never clapped eyes on you before to my knowledge. (1887)

To look at

twig (1764) • Dated; origin unknown • Charles Dickens: ‘They’re a twiggin’ of you, sir,’ whispered Mr. Weller. (1837)

pipe (1846) • Origin uncertain • H. J. Parker: During the daytime wandering about the area, ‘pipe-ing’, looking over a car, became a regular practice. (1974)

gander (1887) • US; from the resemblance between a goose and an inquisitive person stretching out the neck to look

get an eyeeful (1899) • Nigel Balchin: He thought to himself this is a bit of all right and started right in to get an eye-ful, see? (1947)

eyeball (1901) • Orig US; from the noun eyeball • Listener: This movie is so richly risible that I advise all, in John Wayne’s phrase, to go down to the Warner and eyeball it. (1968)

take a lunar (1906) • Dated; from earlier sense, observe the moon • John Guthrie: Charles took a lunar. (1950)

get (1911) • Used to denote looking at or noticing especially someone who is conceited or laughable; usually used in the imperative with a pronoun as object • News Chronicle: If he is conceited the girls mutter get yew! (1958)

lamp (1916) • Orig US; compare lamps p. 2 eyes • Roger Busby: I’d like to know how the coppers got on to us. They couldn’t have lamped us on the road. (1969)

screw (1917) • Orig Australian • J. North: From the way he was screwin’ her phiz. (1922)
**Stake out (1942)** Orig US; perhaps from the notion of observing someone in order to time their actions. *Sunday Express Magazine*: Our waiter... was so busy clocking him that he spilt a precious bottle of appleade over the table cloth. (1986)

**Get a load of (1929)** Orig US • Dennis Bloodworth: Get a load of that chick over there. (1972)

**Goggle (1938)** From earlier sense, look with wide eyes. *Listener*: The contemporary reader... has better eyes to do than goggle into the dim past. (1965)

**Squizz, squizz (1941)** Australian & New Zealand; from the noun squiz look. • C. B. Maxwell: He only wanted to squiz at the beach from the best vantage point of all. (1949)

**Shufti, shufty (1943)** British, dated; from the noun shufti

To appraise visually

**Give someone or something the once-over (1915)** Orig US; once-over from the notion of a single rapid all-encompassing glance • *New Yorker*: He gave it his display of perfect strawberries the once-over. (1977)

**Give something the up-and-down (1923)** From the notion of 'looking something up and down' • P. W. Wodehouse: ‘Read this letter.’ He gave it the up-and-down. (1923)

**Eye someone up (1982)** • Sun*: Modest John likes to play down his good looks and says he gets a bit embarrassed when girls eye him up. (1992)

To keep watch, be observant

**Stag (1796)** Dated; probably from the noun stag

**Keep one’s eyes peeled (1853)** or skinned (1833) Orig US; from the notion of having the eyelids open • C. B. Maxwell: Keep your eyes peeled for a break in the mist. (1974)

**Keep tabs on, keep (a) tab on (1889)** Orig US; from tab an account, a check • Dorothy Sayers: The one person... likely to have kept tabs on Mr Perkins... was old Gaffer Gander. (1932)

**Keep nit (1903)** Australian; from earlier obsolete use as a warning that someone is coming; nit perhaps a variant of nix used to warn of someone’s approach • B. Scott: They’d pick a couple of the mob to keep nit then they’d hoe into the corn. (1977)

**Stake out (1942)** Orig US; used to denote placing somewhere under surveillance; probably from the notion of surrounding a place as if with stakes • Len Deighton: When... the French police staked out the courier routes, they found... 50,000 dollars of forged signed travellers’ cheques. (1962). Hence staked out placed so as to maintain surveillance (1951) • Henry Kissinger: David Bruce... came to the Embassy through the front door where the press was staked out. (1979)

**Keep yow (1942)** Australian; origin unknown • Graham McInnes: Molly kept a look-out (‘kept yow’, as we used to say). (1965)

**Observation**

**Obbo, obo (1933)** Abbreviation of observation; applied especially to police surveillance of a person, building, etc. • Busby & Holtham: Now I got a fix on the place I got to do some obo first. (1968)

**Stake-out (1942)** Orig US; applied to a period of (especially police) surveillance; from the verb stake out • Raymond Chandler: Somebody stood behind that green curtain... as silently as only a cop on a stake-out knows how to stand. (1943)

**Obs (1943)** Orig services’ slang; abbreviation of observation • Olive Norton: Hurry up. I’m keeping obs. (1970)

To catch sight of, spot

**Twig (1796)** Dated; from earlier sense, look at • FitzWilliam Pollok: I twigged the tigress creeping away in front of us. (1879)

To stare inquisitively or in astonishment

**Gawp (1682)** Perhaps an alteration of gape • *European*: St Tropez is packed with these threadbare tourists who gawp at sights they have long only heard about—especially the topless bathers on the beaches. (1991)

**Gawk (1795)** Orig US; perhaps from the noun gawk awkward person, but perhaps an iterative from the obsolete verb gaw stare (with suffix as in talk, walk, lurk), from Old Norse gâ head. • C. D. Eby: Gawking in wonder at the falling bombs. (1985)

**Rubberneck (1896)** Orig US; from the notion of someone with a flexible neck who looks this way and that • *Daily Telegraph*: Hortensio was rubbernecking like an American tourist, admiring the scenery, sniffing the breeze. (1969)

To hallucinate visually

**See things (1922)** • Douglas Rutherford: Was I seeing things or was that Sally driving your truck? (1977)

A person who looks

**Gongoozler (1904)** Applied to a person who stares idly or protractedly at something, originally at activity on a canal; origin uncertain, but compare Lincolnshire dialect gawn stare vacantly or curiously, and gooze(n) stare aimlessly, gape • *New Yorker*: I stopped off in the Galeana sports park... to watch a game on one of the three huge outdoor screens that the city had supplied for gongoozlers like me. (1986)

**Glasses**

**Specs, specks (1807)** Abbreviation of spectacles • Don Delillo: Peter, her son... reddish hair, wire-frame specs. (1982)
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gig-lamps (1853) Dated; from earlier sense, lamp at the side of a gig

goggles (1871) From earlier sense, spectacles for protecting the eyes

cheaters (1908) US, orig gamblers’ slang

- Raymond Chandler: The eyes behind the rimless cheaters flashed. (1949)

bins (1981) British; first recorded in print in 1981, but other evidence (e.g. obsolete Cockney rhyming slang Errol Flynn's spectacles) suggests much earlier use; abbreviation of binoculars

- John McVicar: Frank gives me the once-over and pushes the bins back tight on my eyes. If George saw my minces, he might pull the deal. (1992)

Sunglasses


A monocle

window-pane (1923) Dated • P. G. Wodehouse: Freddie no longer wore the monocle. His father-in-law had happened to ask him one day would he please remove that damned window-pane from his eye. (1966)

5. Hearing

To listen, hear

get an earful (1917) • Frank Sargeson: I tried to get an earful when I heard somebody out on the landing-place. (1946)

earwig (1927) Often jocular; used to denote eavesdropping. • Guardian: Anyway, apparently you sometimes get a Miss Millett ‘earwigging’ in a dark corner, so she was paraded towards me for a formal introduction. (1992)

get a load of (1929) Orig US; often used ironically in commenting on what someone has said

earhole (1958) Used to denote listening, and often specifically eavesdropping • Frank Norman: You can always shoo the screw if any screws are earholing. (1958)

To have delusions of hearing

hear things (1991) First recorded in 1991, but certainly older than that; hear voices = ‘imagine one hears voices’ dates from the late 19th century • Ticket: Three and a bit minutes later it’s wheedled its way into your mind, where it burrows away with sitars and voices so buried in the mix you wonder whether you’re hearing things. (1994)

Listening attentively

all ears (1865) Earlier all ear • Guardian: We've been hearing a lot about the Government having to listen, and he's all ears. (1992)

Deaf

def as a post (1845) Denoting extreme deafness

Mutt and Jeff (1960) Rhyming slang; from the names of two characters called Mutt and Jeff in a popular cartoon series by H. C. Fisher (1884–1954), American cartoonist • Bowlers’ World: They don’t hear the cry ‘Feet!’ sometimes on account of being a bit ‘Mutt and Jeff’. (1992)

cloth-eared (1965) From cloth ears • George Melly: It was more difficult for a band on the road to know what was going on than for the most cloth-eared member of a provincial jazz club. (1965)

Impaired hearing

cloth ears (1912) Often used to criticize an inattentive listener

A deaf person

dummy (1874) Applied to a deaf-mute • Carson McCullers: But a dummy! . . . ‘Are there any other deaf-mute people here?’ he asked. (1940)

cloth ears (1965) From earlier sense, impaired hearing; mainly used as a derogatory form of address to an inattentive listener • New Statesman: I’ve told you once, cloth-ears. (1965)
6. Smell

A smell

**funk** (1623) Applied to a strong, usually unpleasant smell, and also to an oppressively thick atmosphere, especially one full of tobacco smoke; from the obsolete verb funk blow smoke on, probably from northern French dialect funkier, from Latin *fūmicāre, fūmigāre* smoke ▪ Martin Amis: The darts contest took place, not in the Foaming Quart proper (with its stained glass and heavy drapes and crepuscular funk), but in an adjoining hall. (1989)

**niff** (1903) British; often applied specifically to an unpleasant smell; perhaps from the noun niff ▪ Draconian: The customary Oxford autumn niff, usually readily recognisable, redolent as it is of bonfires and long grass. (1975)

**hum** (1906) British; applied to an unpleasant smell; from the verb hum smell bad ▪ W. E. Collinson: An awful pong or hum. (1927)

**pong** (1919) Applied to an unpleasant smell; origin unknown ▪ Gwen Moffat: She's burning the feathers.... She only does it when the wind takes the smell away from us.... The pong's not bothering us. (1973)

**stiir** (1902) British; from the verb stiir smell bad ▪ Daily Telegraph: When the wind drops this stuff really hums. (1970)

**niff** (1927) British; from the noun niff ▪ Kenneth Giles: It smelled.... ‘Niffs, don’t it?’ said one of the youths. (1967)

**pong** (1927) From the noun pong bad smell ▪ Ruth Rendell: The place... just pongs of dirty clothes. (1979)

**stink** (or smell) to high heaven (1963) ▪ F. Richards: I probably smell to high heaven of insect repellent. (1963)

Smelly

**loud** (1641) Now mainly US ▪ G. B. Goode: The natives... prefer to have the meat tainted rather than fresh, declaring that it is most tender and toothsome when decidedly ‘loud’. (1887)

**funkey** (1784) Now only US; from funk bad smell + -y ▪ James Baldwin: They knew... why his hair was nappy, his armpits funkey. (1962)

**whiffy** (1849) From whiff impression of an (unpleasant) smell + -y ▪ Rose Macaulay: ‘A bit whiffy,’ Hero said, as they passed among the cottages that encircled the muddy... pool. (1934)

**niffy** (1903) British; from niff (bad) smell + -y ▪ Baron Corvo: The niffy silted-up little Rio della Croxe. (1934)

**pongy** (1936) From pong bad smell + -y ▪ Graham McLinnes: Dad... kept turning up... with loot from the Prahran market: strings of saveloys and frankfurters, pongy cheeses,... and huge Portuguese sardines. (1965)

**on the nose** (1941) Australian ▪ Frank Huelin: He removed his boots and the narrow strips of rag wrapped round his feet. ‘By cripes! They’re a bit on the nose,’ said my mate, wrinkling his nose. (1973)

7. Bodily Functions

To urinate or defecate


**go** (1926) Euphemistic ▪ Time: I took off all my clothes but my drawers and—well—I had to go. (1935)

**spend a penny** (1945) British, euphemistic; often applied specifically to urination; from the necessity in former times of inserting a penny in a slot in the door to gain admission to a cubicle in a public lavatory ▪ People's Journal (Inverness & Northern Counties ed.): Anyone on the Islands... after that time who wants to ‘spend a penny’ must make a 10-minute walk... to the public toilets. (1973)

An unintentional act of urinating or defecating

**accident** (1899) Euphemistic ▪ Nation: Then a new child had, as Mabel calls it, ‘an accident’. She may have been afraid of asking to go out. (1926)

To have an urgent need to urinate or defecate

**be caught (or taken) short** (1890) ▪ Private Eye: Taken badly short when on his way to work, and finding that both of the public lavatories in Putney were closed, Mr. Peter Herring entered a police station and asked if he could use their convenience. (1977)

Urination

**number one** (1902) A children's word or euphemism; contrasted with number two defecation ▪ Angus Wilson: This little ginger (kitten) is going to do a number one if we're not careful. (1967)

**pee** (1902) From the verb pee urinate ▪ Daily Telegraph: If people came in just to use the lavatory, he would ask them for their address 'in case I need a pee when I'm passing your house'. (1973)

**pee-wee** (1907) Mainly a children's word or euphemism; reduplicated form of pee; see also wee ▪ Simon Raven: Don't forget the little dears do a pee-wee before they go to bed. (1962)
piss (1916) From earlier sense, urine  ■ Philip Larkin: Groping back to bed after a piss. (1974)

wet (1925) From the verb wet urinate  ■ Jon Cleary: The children want to wet. . . Come on, love. Have your wet. (1975)

leak (1934) From the verb leak urinate  ■ Graham Greene: All these hours of standing without taking a leak. (1969)

piddle (1937) From earlier sense, urine  ■ E. Burgess: Take the poodle for its piddle. (1959)

Jimmy Riddle, jimmie (1937) Rhyming slang for piddle  ■ Douglas Clark: Mrs. D. was in there having a jimmie. (1971)


slash (1950) British; perhaps from obsolete slash a drink, of uncertain origin  ■ N. J. Crisp: He decided to risk a quick slash, which . . . he needed. (1977)

widdle (1954) Imitative; compare piddle and wee  ■ Alan Coren: Love is . . . mekkin’ sure yer betrothed ‘as a pensionable position wi’ luncheon vouchers an’ gets out of ‘is bath when he wants a widdle. (1977)

run-off (1961)  ■ H. W. Sutherland: What with the cold and the beer she was bursting for a run off again. . . . The nearest ladies she knew was at Pier Head. (1967)

tinkle (1965) From the verb tinkle urinate  ■ Ernest Brawley: And went over and had a tinkle. (1974)

whizz, whiz (1929)  ■ R. B. Parker: I wondered if anyone had ever whizzed on Allan Pinkerton’s shoe. (1976)


tinkle (1960) Orig US  ■ Ed McBain: I’m looking for the loo. . . . I really have to tinkle. (1976)

strain the potatoes (or spuds) (1965)  ■ P. Burgess: Keep Ted’s chair for him. He’s only gone out to strain the spuds. (1982)

syphon the python (1968) Jocular, orig Australian; used of males  ■ D. Ball: Brooks was struck with an overwhelming desire to piss. Syphon the python, he thought. (1978)

widdle (1968) From the noun widdle urination  ■ W. Harris: He headed straight for me. . . . I damn near widdled. (1983)

Urine

piss (1290) Ultimately (through French and Latin) from the sound; also in the phrase piss oneself wet oneself  ■ J. Barnett: You’ve pissed yourself . . . you dirty bastard. (1978)

leak (1596)  ■ Jack Kerouac: The prowl car came by and the cop got out to leak. (1957)

pluck a rose (1613) Dated, euphemistic; applied to a woman

pee (1788) Orig transitive, in the sense ‘make wet by urinating’; the intransitive use emerged later (1880); from the sound of the first letter of piss  ■ Mary McCarthy: ‘My God’, you yell . . . ‘can’t a man pee in his own house?’ (1948)

pump ship (1788) Orig nautical  ■ Douglas Rutherford: A couple of men had come in to pump ship at the stand-up urinals. (1973)

piddle (1796) Perhaps from piss + the verb piddle (compare widdle); probably not the same word as earlier piddle work or act in a trifling way  ■ Richard Adams: I have no idea what portents he employs—possibly the bear piddles on the floor and he observes portents in the steaming what-not. (1974)

wet (1925) Also in the phrase wet oneself urinate involuntarily (1922)  ■ Virginia Woolf: The marmoset is just about to wet on my shoulder. (1935)  ■ Times Literary Supplement: She also sweats, weeps, vomits and wets herself. (1976)

whizz, whiz (1929)  ■ R. B. Parker: I wondered if anyone had ever whizzed on Allan Pinkerton’s shoe. (1976)

wee-wee (1916) Or British euphemism  ■ P. Burgess: Keep Ted’s chair for him. He’s only gone out to strain the spuds. (1982)

waterworks (1902) British euphemistic  ■ Wallace Hildick: I’d been plagued for a long time . . . by—well—let’s call it waterworks trouble. (1977)

The urinary system

pissabed (1643) Literally ‘piss in bed’; the word existed earlier as a name for the dandelion, so called after its diuretic properties  ■ Roy Fuller: He beat me at the beginning of term for peeing on my bed. . . . Now he thinks of me as a pissabed. (1959)
Defecation

**number two (1902)** A children's word or euphemism; contrasted with number one urination. ■ Mary McCarthy: When I had done Number Two, you always washed them out yourself before sending them to the diaper service. (1971)

**crap (1926)** From the verb crap defecate. ■ Brendan Behan: And then, God of war, did I want a crap. (1959)

**shit, shite (1928)** From the verb shit defecate. ■ Rosanne Barr: Daddy will go over and he'll turn on the TV and then he'll go take a shit, like he always does. (1989)

**dump (1942)** From the verb dump defecate. ■ W. H. Auden: To start the morning With a satisfactory Dump is a good omen All our adult days. (1966)


**biggies (1953)** British; a children's word or euphemism; contrasting the physical and psychological weight of defecation with the lesser importance of urination. ■ Angus Wilson: He's a bit erratic where he does his biggies, now he's a grown up parrot. (1967)

To defecate

**shit, shite (c1308)** Also used transitively to mean 'defecate in' (1877) and reflexively to mean 'make oneself dirty by defecating' (1914); from Old English scitan, recorded in the past participle be-sciten

**do one's business (1645)** Dated euphemistic

**crap (1846)** Probably from the noun crap defecation, although this is not recorded until later. ■ Alexander Baron: They'd crapped on the floor, in the same rooms they'd slept in. (1953)

**poop (1903)** From earlier sense, fart. ■ Cape Times: Five-year-old eyes grow round with wonder at the memory of the elephant 'pooping' on the carpet. (1974)

**dump (1929)** Orig and mainly US; probably from earlier sense, deposit rubbish

**do (go, make, etc.) poop-pooh(s) (1976)** Mainly a children's term; compare poop-pooh excrement. ■ Mother & Baby: Show her the nappy and tell her that she can do her wee-pee and poo-poo (or whatever your family words are!) in the potty instead of the nappy now that she is a big girl. (1988)

**pooh, poo (1980)** Euphemistic, orig a children's word; from the noun pooh excrement. ■ Clive James: The citizens of Munich are ... dog-crazy ... but have somehow trained their pets not to poo. (1982)

Excrement

**turd (c1000)** Applied to a piece of excrement; from Old English tord. ■ Nadine Gordimer: It was true that it was difficult to get the children to remember to bury the paper along with the turd. (1981)

**dirt (a1300)** Now euphemistic, but orig a standard term; now applied mainly to animal excrement; by metathesis from Middle English drit, probably from Old Norse drit excrement

**shit, shite (a1585)** From the verb shit defecate. ■ Erica Jong: In general the toilets run swift here and the shit disappears long before you can leap up and turn around to admire it. (1973)

**crap (1889)** First recorded in 1889, but implied in the earlier adjective crappy (see below); from earlier sense, chaff, refuse from fat-boiling; ultimately from Dutch krappe. ■ J. D. Salinger: There didn't look like there was anything in the park except dog crap. (1951). Hence crappy made dirty by excrement. (1846)

**mess (1903)** Euphemistic; applied mainly to animal excrement. ■ Woman's Own: It's the dog. It made a mess on the carpet. (1960)

**dingleberry (1938)** Orig US; applied to a piece of dried faecal matter attached to the hair around the anus; from earlier US sense, a cranberry. Vaccinium erythrocarpum, of the south-eastern US; the origin of dingle is uncertain

**road apples (1942)** North American; euphemistic; applied to horse droppings. ■ J. H. Gray: The best pucks were always those supplied by passing horses, 'road apples' we called them. (1970)

**doo-doo (1948)** Orig and mainly US; a children's word or euphemism; reduplication of do excrement

**poop (1948)** From the verb poop defecate. ■ Telegraph (Brisbane): A young woman claims a 'bird poop treatment' has cured her of a chronic dandruff... She's been free of dandruff since a mynah bird relieved himself on her head during lunch one day. (1976). Hence poopy (1988) US; denoting being made dirty with excrement

**poopy, poopie (1955)** Mainly a children's word; from poop + -y

**pooh, poo, pooh-pooh, pooh-pooh (1960)** Mainly a children's word; from the exclamation pooh expressing disgust at an unpleasant smell. ■ Independent Magazine: Mashed carrots today can resemble brightly coloured babies' poo (and when you contemplate some of the bottled vegetable purées people feed them with, it is little wonder). (1996)

**doings (1967)** British, euphemistic; from earlier more general application to something unspecified. ■ Paul Beale: There's a lump of bird's doings on the windowsill. (1984)

**do, doo (1972)** Mainly a children's word or euphemism; first recorded in 1972, but implied by the earlier doo-doo, and remembered in use since c1920 (private letter to the editor of the Oxford English Dictionary); from the verb do (compare doings). ■ Time Out: 'Eat crap!' barked the film director. And suddenly Divi was up to his dentures in doggy doo. (1985)

Diarrhoea

**squitters (1664)** From the obsolete verb squitter squirt, have diarrhoea, probably of imitative origin. ■ Lord Harewood: We went incessantly to those over-public latrines... My squitters were at their worst. (1973)

**the squits (1841)** British, euphemistic; from the obsolete dialectal verb squat squat

■ David Lodge:
'Olive oil does agree with me.' 'Gives you the squits, does it?' (1988)

the trots (1904) Euphemistic; from the notion of having to move hurriedly to the lavatory  ■ Colleen McCullough: 'Go easy on the water at first,' he advised. 'Beer won't give you the trots.' (1977)

gippy tummy, gippy tummy (1943) Applied especially to diarrhoea suffered by visitors to hot countries; gippy from gip(s) + -y, influenced by Egyptian  ■ G. E. Egmont: Always take ... whatever is your favourite antidote to gippy tummy when you go abroad. (1961)

Delhi belly (1944) Applied to diarrhoea suffered by visitors to India; Delhi from the name of the capital of India

the shits (1947) ■ Zigzag: 'I've had the shits,' he cried. 'You want to avoid the food.' (1977)

Aztec hop, Aztec revenge, Aztec two-step (1953) Applied to diarrhoea suffered by visitors to Mexico; Aztec from the name of a former native American people of Mexico; two-step from the name of a type of dance  ■ Joseph Wambaugh: So long, Puerto Vallarta! With his luck he'd die of Aztec Revenge anyway, first time he had a Bibb lettuce salad. (1978)

Montezuma's revenge (1962) Applied to diarrhoea suffered by visitors to Mexico; from the name of Montezuma II (1466–1520), Aztec ruler at the time of the Spanish conquest of Mexico  ■ Times: England's World Cup football squad suffered their first casualty in Mexico on Wednesday, when 20-year-old Brian Kidd was struck down by what is known as 'Montezuma's Revenge'—a stomach complaint. (1970)

the runs (1962) Euphemistic; from the notion of having to run to the lavatory  ■ Bernard Malamud: Sam Clemence, a witness from Harlem U.S.A., despite a bad case of the runs ..., stands up for his friend Willie. (1971)

A lavatory

jakes (1538) Dated; origin uncertain; perhaps from the male forenames Jacques or Jack  ■ James Joyce: He kicked open the crazy door of the jakes. (1922)

bog (1789) British; short for bog-house, of uncertain origin  ■ New Left Review: Toilet paper in the bogs. (1960)

shit-house (1795) ■ P. Cave: 'Nothing wrong with it—safe as a brick-built shithouse,' I assured her. (1978)

can (1900) US  ■ J. D. Salinger: She kept saying ... corny ... things, like calling the can the 'little girls' room'. (1951)

place (1901) Euphemistic  ■ James Joyce: They did right to put him up over a urinal. ... Ought to be places for women. (1922)

rear (1903) Orig school and university slang; often used in the plural; perhaps from their position behind a building  ■ Bruce Marshall: And now let's raid the rears and rout out any of the other new swine that are hiding there. (1946)

lav (1913) British; abbreviation of lavatory  ■ June Thomson: Gilbert Leacock went out to the lav. ... I heard the chain being pulled. (1973)

dyke, dike (1923) From earlier sense, ditch  ■ Jon Cleary: I learned ... to respect her privacy. And I don't mean just when she went to the dike. (1967)

crapper (1927) From crap defecate + -er  ■ Chester Himes: Go to the crapper? What for? They weren't children, they didn't pee in bed. (1969)

lat (1927) Usually used in the plural; abbreviation of latrine  ■ J. I. M. Stewart: Turk says that conscientious objectors have to clean out the lats in lunatic asylums. (1957)

john, johnny (1932) Mainly US; compare earlier cujo! lavatory (1735)  ■ Colin McInnes: 'You poor old bastard,' I said to the Hoplite, as he sat there on my john. (1959)  ■ D. Conover: Why, oh, why, do little boys (and big ones) rush to a johnny when nature provides opportunity everywhere? (1971)

dunny, dunnee (1933) Australian & New Zealand; orig applied specifically to an outdoor earth-closet; from British dialect dunnekin privy, of unknown origin  ■ Private Eye: It seems a bit crook for old bazza to spend the night in the dunnee! (1970)

loo (1940) British; origin uncertain; perhaps from Waterloo  ■ Peter Wildblood: The loo's on the landing, if you want to spend a penny. (1957)

shouse, shoust, sh'touse (1941) Australian; syncopated form of shit-house  ■ Thomas Keneally: I'd like some trees on it, pines and gums, so you don't have to see your neighbour's shouse first thing each morning. (1968)

recess (1950) Criminals' slang; applied to a prison lavatory; usually used in the plural  ■ Observer: Locked in their cells sc. in Winson Green Prison, Birmingham at 5.30., with one opening later to go to the recesses (lavatories) and to have a hot drink. (1974)

W (1953) Abbreviation of W.C.  ■ E. Malpass: A small garden of weeds, with a cinder path leading to a W. (1978)

House of Lords (1961) British, euphemistic or jocular  ■ Listener: When you need the House of Lords, it's through there. (1967)


lavy (1961) British; from lav + -y  ■ Guardian: A house where the lavy is behind an arras. (1971)

toot (1965) Australian; probably from British dialect tut small seat or hassock  ■ J. Rowe: Waldon added over his shoulder, 'Gobind's in the toot. He'll be right out.' (1978)

A lavatory pan or other receptacle

jerry (1859) Probably an abbreviation of jeroboam very large wine bottle, from the name of Jeroboam king of northern Israel, described in the Bible (1 Kings xi. 28) as a 'mighty man of valour'; compare W. Maginn: The naval officer ... came into the Clarendon for a Jerry = jeroboam of punch. (1827)  ■ George Orwell: A bed not yet made and a jerry under the bed. (1939)

po (1880) Applied to a chamber-pot; from French pot (de chambre)  ■ Punch: 'I keenin' by de bed ... peein' in de smart Victorian po. (1974)
thunder-mug (1890) Applied to a chamber-pot

article (1922) British, euphemistic; applied to a chamber-pot
  Joanna Cannan: How could he be so rude, she asked, when he said 'pot' instead of 'bedroom article'. (1958)

throne (1922) Often jocular  J. J. Rowlands: Our plumber . . . revealed that the water level in the ‘throne’ works just like the old glass water barometer. (1960)

honey-bucket (1931) North American; applied to a container for excrement  Bears (Winnipeg, Manitoba): A woman taxi driver tells me most houses have honey-buckets, and galvanized bath tubs filled by hand. (1969)

thunder-box (1939) Applied to a portable commode, and hence to any lavatory  Evelyn Waugh: If you must know, it's my thunderbox. . . . He . . . dragged out the treasure, a brass-bound, oak cube. . . . On the inside of the lid was a plaque bearing the embossed title Connolly's Chemical Closet. (1952)

potty (1942) Applied to a chamber-pot; from pot + -y  W. H. Auden: Lifted off the potty, infants from their mothers Hear their first impartial Words of worldly praise. (1971)

shitter (1969) From shit + -er  Black Scholar: He lit a square and sat down on the shitter and tried to collect his thoughts. (1971)

pooperscooper, pooperscoop (1976) Applied to a small shovel carried to clear up (a dog's) excrement from the street, etc.  Joseph Wambaugh: Bring your pooper-scoopers, boys. The dogs are dragging out the treasure, a brass-bound, oak cube. . . . On the inside of the lid was a plaque bearing the embossed title Connolly's Chemical Closet. (1952)

To vomit

spew (c897) Old English; orig a standard usage, but 'not now in polite use' (Oxford English Dictionary)

puke (1600) Probably imitative

whip the cat (1622), shoot the cat (1785) Dated

cat (1785) Probably from shoot the cat

throw up (1793)  A. E. Fisher: Ogy got drunk and threw up in the backyard. (1980)

turn up (1882) Used to denote making someone vomit or feel sick  Stella Gibbons: Turns you up, don't it, seein' ter-day's dinner come in 'anging round someone's neck? (1932)

sick up (1924) Used intransitively and transitively  Rudyard Kipling: I have ate grass and sicked up. (1930)  Charles Sweeney: He goes for the big spit and accidentally entombs a nice old lady and her dog in tepid chuck. (1970)

blow (1950) US; used transitively with usually a metaphorical object (e.g. one's lunch) denoting broadly 'vomiting'

chunder, chunda (1950) Australian; probably from rhyming slang Chunder Loo spew, after a cartoon character Chunder Loo of Akin Foo originally drawn by Norman Lindsay (1879-1969) and appearing in advertisements for Cobra boot polish in the Sydney Bulletin between 1909 and 1920  Private Eye: Many's the time we've chundered in the same bucket. (1970)

barf (1956) Orig and mainly US; not recorded until 1956, but implied in earlier rare US slang barf; used as a term of abuse (1947); origin unknown; perhaps imitative  Chicago Sun-Times: If you are Princess Diana, you have to stay home and do needlepoint until all danger of barfing in public is past. (1982)

chuck (1957) Often followed by up; based on throw up  Swag (Sydney): The Pommy bird woke up and chuckled all over the multi-coloured woollen blanket. (1968)

go for the big spit (1960) Australian  Private Eye: He goes for the big spit and accidentally entombs a nice old lady and her dog in tepid chuck. (1970)

upchuck (1960) US  Tobias Wells: Anyway, Natalie had to upchuck, it's that kind of bug. (1967)

ralph (1967) Orig and mainly US; often followed by up; apparently a use of the personal name, but perhaps imitative of the sound of vomiting  Village Voice: He ralphs up the downers and the quarts of beer. (1974)

Vomiting

technicolor yawn, technicolour yawn (1964) Australian  Bulletin (Sydney): The sick-making sequences will probably have less impact in this country because we've all been well initiated with Bazza McKenzie and his technicolour yawns. (1974)

chuck (1966) Australian; from the verb chuck vomit  Kings Cross Whisper (Sydney): He sat down in the gutter to have a bit of a chuck and flaked out. (1966)

chunder (1967) Australian; from the verb chunder vomit

Vomit

sick (1959) From the adjective sick nauseated  Listener: There's blood on the windscreen, sick on the trousers. (1977)

chunder (1960) Australian; from the verb chunder vomit  C. Kelen: Wiping the chunder from his mouth. (1980)

puke (1961) From the verb puke vomit  New Society: At the Black Raven, by Liverpool Street station, . . . there is a slight odour of puke and disinfectant. (1975)

barf (1974) US; first recorded in 1974, but implied in earlier metaphorical use referring to disgusting foodstuffs (1962); from the verb barf vomit  New York Times: Whereas the horror film was once spooky, now it is nauseating, measured by the barf, rather than the shiver. (1981)

chuck (1976) Australian; from the verb chuck vomit  McDonald & Harding: Were there chuck stains around the toilet? (1976)

A fart

raspberry tart (1892) Dated; rhyming slang
**breezer** (1973) Australian  ■ Gerald Murnane: Barry Launder has ordered every boy to write in his composition at the picnic I let a breezer in my pants, or else be bashed to smithereens after school. (1974)

**To belch**

**gurk** (1923) British; imitative  ■ New Statesman: They grunted and gurked with an unconcern that amazed me. (1966). Hence **gurk a belch** (1932)

**burp** (1929) Orig US; imitative  ■ W. R. Burnett: He belched, 'it's an old Arab custom.... You no like food—no burp—host insulted.' (1953). Hence **burp a belch** (1932)  ■ Vladimir Nabokov: A comfortable burp told me he had a flask of brandy concealed about his warmly coated person. (1962)

**To spit**

**gob** (1872) Now mainly British; from the noun gob slimy lump  ■ Dylan Thomas: And they thank God, way'as she called it. (1980)  ■ Arthur Haley: Trying futilely to breathe through snotte, snot, Middle High German snutz  ■ Arthur Haley: Trying futilely to breathe through nostrils nearly plugged with snot, he gaped open his cracked lips and took a deep breath of sea air. (1976). Hence **snotty running with or dirty with nasal mucus** (1570)  ■ I. M. Gaskin: A baby can seem snorty and snotty, but sometimes it sounds worse than it is. (1978)

**Nasal mucus**

**snot** (c1425) Probably from Middle Dutch, Middle Low German snotte, Middle High German *snuz*  ■ Arthur Haley: Trying futilely to breathe through nostrils nearly plugged with snot, he gaped open his cracked lips and took a deep breath of sea air. (1976). Hence **snotty running with or dirty with nasal mucus** (1570)  ■ I. M. Gaskin: A baby can seem snorty and snotty, but sometimes it sounds worse than it is. (1978)

**bogy, bogey** (1937) British; applied to a piece of dried nasal mucus; compare earlier sense, policeman  ■ David Pinner: He . . . removed wax from ears, bogeys from nose, blackheads from chin. (1967)

**Sexual secretions**

**come, cum** (1923) Usually applied specifically to ejaculated semen; from the verb come have an

**orgasm**  ■ Miss London: His attitude to sex is ambivalent. 'Each night I had to clean the come off the back seat of the cab,' he remarks in reasonable disgust. (1976)

**love juice** (1965)  ■ Pussycat: I could feel his lovejuice so hot, trickling down into the start of my stomach. (1972)

**scum** (1967) Mainly US; applied specifically to semen

**Menstruation**

**the curse** (1930) Euphemistic; from the oppressive nature of menstruation  ■ Graham Greene: I forgot the damn pill and I haven't had the curse for six weeks. (1969)

**rag** (1948) Euphemistic; applied to a sanitary towel; mainly used in various phrases denoting menstruation, such as be on the rag, have the rag(s) on, and ride the rag.  ■ Maladicta: There were several references to menstuous conditions or activities, found equally commonly in both male and female rest rooms ('Sue Ellen's on the rag'), etc. (1978)

**jam-rag** (a1966) Applied to a sanitary towel  ■ Viz. The new Vipsre Shadow jam rag is designed to suit your lifestyle, with a wrap-a-round gusset flap to keep the blood off your knicker elastic. (1992)

**visitor** (1980) Euphemistic; applied to a menstrual discharge; compare obscene visit in the same sense  ■ New Yorker: Girls used to say they had the curse. Or they had a visitor. (1984)

**Dilatation and curettage**

**scrape** (1968)  ■ Margaret Drabble: She was having a D and C, a routine scrape. (1980)

8. Pregnancy & Childbirth

**Pregnant**

**in the (or a, that) way** (1742) Euphemistic  ■ J. Rose: She suspected herself of being pregnant, 'in the way' as she called it. (1980)

**gone** (1747) Used to specify the length of pregnancy  ■ Winifred Holtby: Brought her to the Home, four months gone, and won't be fifteen till next March. (1931)

**in the family way** (1796) Euphemistic  ■ Listener: Wretched little dramas of scruffy girls in jeans being aborted after men with sideburns... had got them in the spud line. (1967)

**expecting** (1890) Euphemistic  ■ R. Longrigg: 'Make him do a Charleston.' 'Have a heart,' said Sue. 'I'm expecting.' (1957)

**in pod** (1890)  ■ Melvin Bragg: Your working-class lad is still a bit worried if he gets his girl in pod. (1968)

**in the (pudding) club** (1980) Euphemistic  ■ J. N. Smith: When the doctor told me I was in the club I told him he was daft—that I'd never—well, you know. (1969)

**Dilatation and curettage**  ■ Lionel Davidson: 'Was she in the pudding club?' . . . 'Probably. They aren't saying.' (1978)

**in trouble** (1891) Euphemistic  ■ Daily News: She said she consented to come to London to be married to the prisoner as she believed she was in trouble. (1981)

**up the pole** (1922) Euphemistic; from earlier sense, in difficulty  ■ Flann O'Brien: To say nothing of being aborted after men with sideburns... had got them in the spud line. (1967)

**up the spout** (1922) Euphemistic; from earlier sense, spoiled, ruined  ■ S. Troy: Up the spout, isn't she? I thought Michel would have had more bloody savvy. (1970)

**in the spud line** (1937) Euphemistic  ■ H. W. Sutherland: It couldn't have been himself that put Kathleen Ertall in the spud line. (1957)
preggy, preggie (1938) Euphemistic; from pregnant + -y • Star (Sheffield): Final fling for noisy Parkers shows Michael and preggie June back in England. (1976)

up the duff (1941) Mainly Australian; from duff (pudding made of) dough, from the same notion as pudding club and bun in the oven.
- Robert Denny: 'There was a strong suspicion that one of the women was preggers.' 'Eh? 'Up the duff, sir.' (1971)

up the stick (1941) Euphemistic • J. I. M. Stewart: Do you know what it's like, Cyril, to be a decent and penniless young man who isn't sure he hasn't got his girl up the stick? (1976)

preggers (1942) British; from pregnant + -ers (as in bonkers, crackers, etc.) • Monica Dickens: Let anyone mention in her hearing that they felt sick, and it would be all over the hospital that they were 'preggers'. (1942)

in pig (1945) From earlier standard use, applied to a sow • Dorothy Halloway: Since when had her mother paid the slightest attention to anything her darling daughter said or did, except to do her level best to keep her from marrying anything less than a duke, until she had to get herself in pig. (1976)

preggo (1951) Australian; also used as a noun, denoting a pregnant woman; from pregnant + the Australian suffix -o • Patrick White: 'Can't resist the bananas.' 'Yeah. They say you go for them like one thing when you're preggo.' (1965)

preg (1955) Often euphemistic; abbreviation of pregnant • London Magazine: A bit of news which may just interest you, I am P-R-E-G and not by Roy. (1967)

up the creek (1961) Euphemistic; from earlier sense, in difficulty • E. Lambert: I know a girl who thinks her bloke may have put her up the creek. (1963)

To make pregnant

knock up (1813) US • H. C. Rae: He screwed her, knocked her up first go and ... married her ... before she could even contemplate abortion. (1971)

stork (1936) US; from the noun stork, with reference to the nursery fiction that babies are brought by the stork • Rex Stout: 'Didn't she stop because she was pregnant?' ... 'Yes,' he said. 'She was storked.' (1968)

A conceived child in the womb

a pudding in the oven (1937) Compare in the (pudding) club p. 21 • Joyce Porter: 'None of us ever suspected that she'd got a pudding in the oven.' 'She was going to have a baby?' asked Dover. (1965)

a bun in the oven (1951) • Nicholas Monsarrat: 'I bet you left a bun in the oven, both of you,' said Bennett thickly. ... Lockhart explained ... the reference to pregnancy. (1951)

Unplanned pregnancy

afterthought (1914) Applied to the youngest child in a family, especially one born considerably later than the other children; from the supposition that the birth of such a child was not envisaged when the older children were conceived • Graham McInnes: Terence was the youngest child. ... (I'm a little afterthought.) (1965)

accident (1932) • Margaret Drabble: I had two, and then Gabriel was an accident. (1967)

A miscarriage

miss (1897) Abbreviation • Dell Shannon: She had a miss, that time, lost the baby. (1971)

A premature birth or baby

preemie, premie, premy (1927) North American; (alteration, after American pronunciation, of premature + -ie • Time (Canada edition): The preemie's sense of security is further heightened by the recorded sound of a pregnant mother's heartbeat piped into the artificial womb. (1975)

A Caesarian section

Caesar (1952) • Guardian: One Roman Catholic doctor ... will awaken this convenient custodian of his conscience with the words: 'I'm doing a fourth Caesar.' (1964)

Midwifery, a midwifery case

midden (1909) From midwifery + -er • M. Polland: Although he ... did his medicine in Edinburgh, he came here to the Rotunda for his midder. (1965)

Contraception

Vatican roulette (1962) Jocular; applied to the rhythm method of birth control, as permitted by the Roman Catholic Church; by analogy from Russian roulette; from the method's unpredictable efficacy • David Lodge: That's another thing against the safe method there are so many things that can affect ovulation. ... No wonder they called it Vatican Roulette. (1985). See also Contraceptives under Sex (p. 79)

9. Tiredness

Tired

fagged (1780) British; often followed by out; from the past participle of the obsolete verb fog tire, of unknown origin • Edward Pennell-Elmhirst: I have seldom seen so many fagged faces as on Saturday. (1883)

beat (1832) From past participle of the verb beat; usually in the phrase dead beat • Pamela Frankau: I was too beat and hazy to take anything in. (1954)

tuckered (c.1840) US; often followed by out; past participle of the verb tucker tire • S. W. Baker: The old bear got regularly tuckered-out. (1890)
jiggered up (1862) Orig dialect; jiggered probably a euphemistic substitution for buggered
bushed (1870) North American; from earlier sense, lost in the bush • Castle & Bailey: You thought you’d reached the end then—completely bushed, with not another ounce left in you. (1958)

stove-up (1901) North American; stowe from irregular past participle of the verb stave crush inwards • Harper Lee: Mr Avery’ll be in bed for a week—he’s right stove-up. He’s too old to do things like that. (1960)

all in (1902) • Marghanita Laski: You look all in. . . . Been doing too much, that’s what it is. (1952)

stonkered (1918) Mainly Australian & New Zealand; past participle of the verb stonker kill, defeat • Peter Carey: She ate heartily—only announcing herself stonkered after scraping clean the large monogrammed plate of steaming pudding. (1985)

whacked (1919) Mainly British; often followed by out • John Snow: I was whacked when I arrived back in England from the MCC tour. (1976)

creased (1925) Mainly US; from earlier sense, stunned, killed

shattered (1930) • Listener: I came in at tea-time, I sat down and I was absolutely shattered. (1968)

euchred (1932) Australian; from earlier US sense, outwitted, originally in the card game euchre • J. Morrison: This man has worked hard in Australia for forty years, but he’s euchred now. . . . All he asks for is the old age pension. (1973)

pooped (1932) Orig US; past participle of the verb poop tire; often followed by out • J. T. Farrell: Studs took a large rocker, and carried it slowly downstairs. . . . When he set it down in the alley, he was breathless, and all pooped out. (1934)

shagged (1932) Often followed by out; origin uncertain; perhaps related to the verb shag have sex with • G. W. Target: The two other-rankers were now sitting in the back of the jeep, with all of ’em looking shagged out. (1975)

shot (1939) From earlier sense, worn out • Joseph Gores: He. . . . [was] literally too tired to move. . . . Shot, utterly shot. (1972)

like death warmed up (1939) Used to denote extreme or prostrating exhaustion • J. Pendower: It damned near killed me. . . . I still feel like death warmed up. (1964)

whipped (1940) US; sometimes followed by up • G. Lea: ‘Oh sure.’ He pulled in his feet, hugged his knees, yawned. ‘I’m whipped.’ (1958)

rooted (1944) Australian; from past participle of the verb root ruin • J. Hibberd: Er, why don’t you grab a pew, Valhalla. You must be rooted. (1982)

buggered (1947) From past participle of the verb bugger ruin • H. C. Rae: He was so utterly buggered that he had no hunger left. (1968)

knackered (1949) Past participle of the verb knacker tire • Times: I kept thinking I should whip up the pace and then I’d think I’m knackered, I’ll leave it for another lap. (1971)

wiped (1958) Orig US; usually followed by out • Margaret Atwood: ‘Christ, am I wiped,’ he says. ‘Somebody break me out a beer.’ (1972)

zonked (1972) From earlier sense, intoxicated; often followed by out • Daily Telegraph: ‘Faintly zonked’ by his non-stop 17 weeks of filming, he is recharging himself for the next stage. (1980)


Tiredness

the bonk (1952) Applied to (a sudden attack of) fatigue or light-headedness sometimes experienced by especially racing cyclists; origin unknown • Watson & Gray: The British call this attack of nauseous weakness the ‘Bonk’. (1978)

To tire, exhaust

finish (1816) Often followed by off

saw up (1837) From earlier sense, tire out a horse

tucker (c.1840) US; from the verb tuck put tucks in • Turnover: Set us to runnin’, an’ I could tucker him— (1853)

do in (1917) From earlier sense, ruin, kill • Edmund Hillary: For the first time I really feel a bit done in. (1955)

poop (1932) Orig US; often followed by out; origin unknown • Time: Pheidippides . . . was so poop’d by his performance that he staggered into Athens. (1977)

knacker (1946) From earlier sense, kill, castrate, from the noun knacker horse-slaughterer

10. Sleep

bye-bye, bye-byes (1867) Used as a nursery word for ‘sleep’, and sometimes also for ‘bed’; often in the phrase go to bye-byes go to sleep or to bed; from earlier use as a sound to lull a child to sleep • Michael Harrison: You tucked up for bye-byes all on your little ownsome. (1939)

beddy-byes, beddy-bye (1906) Used as a nursery word for ‘sleep’, and sometimes also for ‘bed’; often used to indicate to a child that it is time for bed; from bed + y + bye • Sarah Russell: Mrs. Chalmers rolled up her knitting and said she supposed it was time for beddy-byes. (1946)
sack time (1944), sack drill, sack duty
(1946) Orig US services; also applied more broadly to time spent in bed; from sack bed

(A period of) sleep
kip (1893) From earlier sense, bed • Brian Aldiss: I had to stay with the captain... while the other lucky sods settled down for a brief kip. (1971)

skimmer (1935) British; applied to an act of sleeping rough; esp. in the phrase to do a skimmer; from earlier sense, sleeping place for a vagrant • Observer: There are not enough beds. Many will be turned away and have to do a 'skimmer' in station, park or ruin. (1982)
	nod (1942) Applied to a state of drowsiness brought on by narcotic drugs; esp. in the phrase on the nod • Kenneth Orvis: While I was on the nod. (1962)

A short sleep
snooze (1793) From the verb snooze • J. R. Rees: With a warm ejaculation on his tongue, the interrupted sleeper returns to his snooze. (1886)

twenty winks (1872) • George Sims: I’m tired, and I want my twenty winks. (1889)

caulk (1917) Nautical; from the obsolete verb caulk to sleep, perhaps from a comparison between closing the eyes and stopping up a ship’s seams • H. C. Bailey: ‘Having a caulk’ where he sat and... he woke at eight. (1942)

zizz, ziz (1941) From earlier sense, buzzing sound, with reference to the sound of snoring • M. Tabor: Philip’s having a zizz. He can’t stay awake. (1979)

snore-off (1950) Mainly Australian & New Zealand; applied esp. to a nap after drinking • D. O’Grady: He emerged from his plonk-induced snore-off. (1968)

A rest
lie-down (1840) Applied to a rest on a bed or similar • M. Birmingham: I won’t risk our clients to you in your concussed state... Why don’t you go and have a little lie-down? (1974)

sit-down (1861) Applied to a rest on a chair • Nicolas Freeling: The sit-down had done his leg... some good. (1967)

To sleep
snooze (1789) Origin unknown; applied esp. to light or brief sleeping • Catherine Gore: She withdrew, leaving him to snooze beside the fire. (1842)

kip (1889) From the noun kip • J. Curtis: I’m kipping here tonight and all. (1938)

pound one’s ear (1899) Dated, orig US • M. Walsh: ‘Only just awakened,’ I admitted... and how are my comrades in misfortune?’... ‘Still pounding their ears, no doubt.’ (1926)

zizz (1942) From the noun zizz; applied especially to light or brief sleeping • D. Moore: Reckon this sector’s safe. Might as well zizz. (1961)

catch (or get, bag, etc.) some z’s (1963) US; from the use of z (usually repeated) to represent the sound of snoring • Alan Dundes: Got to go... cop me some z’s. (1973)

To go to bed

turn in (1695) Orig nautical • Nat Gould: It’s late... and quite time we turned in. (1981)

doze (1789) British; in earliest usage, usually spelt doz; probably of the same origin as obsolete doze ornamental covering for a seat-back, etc., from Old French dos, ultimately from Latin dorsum back; often used with down; often applied specifically to sleeping rough or in cheap lodgings • Daily Express: If he wants to be on his way by daybreak, he dozes down with his face to the east. (1932)

kip down (1889) From the noun kip bed • Weekly News (Glasgow): A driver whose van broke down near Bristol, decided to kip down in the driver’s seat. (1973)

hit the hay, hit the sack (1912) Orig US; hay from the notion of a bed made of hay • Arthur Miller: ‘Well, I don’t know about you educated people, but us ignorant folks got to hit the sack.’ (1961)

crash (1943) Often used with out; often applied specifically to sleeping for a night in an improvised bed • Guardian: The homeless one was sure that someone would always offer him a place ‘to crash’. (1970)

down (1946) Mainly US; from the noun sack bed • Daily Telegraph: Many young travellers... are faced with the choice of curling up in a doorway or ‘sacking out’ in one of London’s parks. (1971)

sack down (1956) From the noun sack bed • E. V. Cunningham: I lost a night’s sleep... How about I sack down for a few hours? (1978)

To go to sleep

drop off (1820) British • Charles Dickens: Whenever they saw me dropping off, [they] woke me up. (1982)

nod off (1845) • New York Times: Children merely fall asleep when they are sleepy. Within minutes of seating themselves in the car, they both nodded off. (1991)

go off (1887) British • Daily News: He... began inhaling, and soon ‘went off’ to his entire satisfaction. (1896)

zonz out (1970) From zonz lose consciousness • New York News Magazine: If mothers zonz out at three in the afternoon every day, they may continue that pattern after it’s no longer necessary. (1984)

To snore

saw gourds (1870) US; from the sound of snoring

To awaken

knock up (1663) British; used to refer to waking someone by knocking on their door or window • New Scientist: If then the police did arrive to knock him up at three o’clock in the morning, he would react with amazement and dismay to the news that they would be bringing. (1991)
Waking up

wakey-wakey, wakee-wakee, waky-waky (1941) Orig services’ slang; applied to reveille, and also used as a command to wake up; often combined with the phrase rise and shine. ■ Martin Woodhouse: ‘Wakey-wakey,’ he said. ‘Stand by your beds.’ (1968)

To get up or leave one’s room in the morning

surface (1963) ■ Roger Simons: ‘Has there been any sign of that damned Tebaugh woman yet?’ ‘Afraid not… She still hasn’t surfaced.’ (1968)

To remain in bed late in the morning

sleep in (1888) Orig nautical

lie in (1893) ■ E. M. Clowes: On Sunday her husband and son ‘lay in’, as she called it, till midday, while she gave them their breakfast in bed. (1911). So the noun lie-in applied to a period of remaining in bed late (1867) ■ Gillian Freeman: I’m going to ‘ave a bit of a lie in… seeing I’m on ‘olday.’ (1959)

sack in (1946) Orig US: from the noun sack bed ■ Tobias Wells: Benedict’s call, at about nine o’clock, woke me up… I’d planned to sack in till about eleven. (1967)

A place to sleep

doss (1744) British: applied especially to a bed in cheap lodgings; also with a suffixed adverb; from the verb doss ■ Enid Blyton: Only an old fellow who wants a doss down somewhere. (1956)

letty (1846) Applied to a lodging or bed; from Italian letto bed ■ John Osborne: Jeany, We can’t all spend our time nailing our suitcases to the floor, and shin out of the window. Archie: Scarper the letty. (1957)

spike (1866) British; applied to a doss-house ■ George Orwell: ‘D’you come out o’ one o’ de London spikes (casual wards), eh?’ (1933)

kip, kip-house, kip-shop (1883) British; from earlier sense, brothel ■ Leon Griffiths: Half of the time they’re tucked up in their kip reading the Mirror and drinking cups of tea. (1985)

Uncle Ned, uncle (1925) Rhyming slang ■ J. Scott: You did right, showing him back in his uncle. (1982)

mick (1929) Nautical; applied to a hammock; origin unknown

hot bed (1945) US: applied to a bed in a flop-house which is used continuously by different people throughout the day, and hence to a flop-house containing such beds

pit (1948) Orig services’ slang ■ D. Tinker: In our pits at night we always get rattled around a bit. (1982)

wanking pit, wanking couch (1951) From wank masturbate

Sleeping soundly

like a log (1886)

well away (1927) ■ Joyce Porter: Many great men… can drop off to sleep at any time, and Chief Inspector was no exception. He was well away by the time MacGregor climbed back into the car. (1973)

Bedding

weeping willow (1880) British, dated; rhyming slang for pillow ■ Noel Streatfield: Time young Holl was in bed. … Hannah wants your head on your weeping willow, pillow to you. (1944)

nap (1892) Australian; applied to blankets or other covering used by a person sleeping in the open air; probably from knapsack ■ Coast to Coast 1944: If you carry enough nap, you goes hungry; if you carry enough tucker you sleeps cold. (1945)

Sleeping-pill


Sleepy

dopey, dopy (1932) Orig US; from earlier sense, stupefied by a drug; from dope + -y ■ E. Eager: The four children… went on being dopey and droopy and sleepy all afternoon when they did get up. (1957)
11. Illness

queer (1781) From earlier sense, abnormal  ■ F. Parrish: Jake's off queer, wi' a rumblin' stummick. (1978)

peaky (1821) From peak become weak or ill, of unknown origin; used to denote slight illness or sickness  ■ E. J. Warboise: The second child has sickened, and the third is reported to be looking 'peaky'. (1881)

all-overish (1832) Dated; from the notion of a feeling affecting the whole body; used to denote an indefinite unlocalized malaise

under the weather (1850) Orig US ■ F. R. Stockton: They had been very well as a general thing, although now and then they might have been under the weather for a day or two. (1887)

seedy (1858) From earlier sense, shabby, ill-looking; probably from the notion of a plant that has run to seed  ■ Jerome K. Jerome: We were all feeling seedy, and we were getting nervous about it. (1889)

off colour (1876) From earlier sense, not of the usual or proper colour; used to suggest slight indisposition  ■ Anthony Fowles: 'Where's Christine?' he said. 'Over her mum's. Her mum's off colour. She's staying... till she picks up.' (1974)

rotten (1881) From earlier, more general sense, bad  ■ Dmitri Nabokov: She was feeling rotten, was in bed with a hot-water bottle and spoke to him in a singsong through the door. (1986)

dicky, dickey (1883) British; from earlier sense, of poor quality; ultimate origin uncertain; perhaps connected with the phrase as queer as Dick's hatband  ■ Sir John Astley: Poor 'Curly' was Dick's hatband for someone about to unleash himself on the world, Eddie was looking rough. (1991)

fragile (1883) From earlier sense, liable to break

rough (1893) Orig dialectal  ■ Joseph O'Connor: For someone about to unleash himself on the world, Eddie was looking rough. (1991)

funny (1898) From earlier sense, strange  ■ On The Edge: My body felt a bit funny still, still a bit gibbery, but I was happier. (1995)

crook (1908) Australian & New Zealand; from earlier sense, of poor quality  ■ A. J. Holt: I'm crook in the guts now. (1946)

icky-boo, icky-poo (1920), icky, ikky (1939) icky probably a baby-talk alteration of sick or sickly  ■ Berkeley Mather: Call the airline office ... and tell 'em you're feeling an icksy bit icky-poo and want a stopover. (1961)

lousy (1933) From earlier sense, of poor quality  ■ Patricia Moyes: A brink, pretty, coloured nurse came in ... 'Ah, you're awake. ... How do you feel?' 'Lousy,' said Henry. (1973)

like death warmed up (1939)  ■ J. Pendower: It dammed near killed me. ... I still feel like death warmed up. (1964)

ropy, ropey (1945) From earlier sense, of poor quality  ■ Sunday Express: I feel a bit ropey. ... I think I've picked up some sort of virus. (1961)

green about the gills (1949), pale about the gills (1959) Often applied specifically to feeling nauseous; from the notion of a pale face as a sign of illness; compare obsolete white and yellow about the gills, current in the same sense in the 19th century  ■ New Age Journal: [With] 110 pesticdes in nonorganic raisins, 80 in the nonorganic apple, and 29 in the whole milk, ... it's a wonder that Junior doesn't come home looking green around the gills. (1991)

peculiar (1954) From earlier sense, strange  ■ R. Elliot: I admit I felt a little peculiar for a while, but whatever it was has passed and I'm absolutely fine now. (1992)

butcher's hook, butcher's (1967) Australian; rhyming slang for crook ill  ■ Barry Humphries: Still feeling butcher's after your op, are ya? (1981)

on the sick (1976) Used to denote incapacity due to illness, and receipt of sickness benefit  ■ Leslie Thomas: I took it [an allotment] on ... but then I was on the sick for months ... and the council ... takes it off me. (1976)

grim (1984) First recorded in 1984, but in use earlier  ■ B. Rowlands: Dora must be feeling pretty grim at the moment. Perhaps we shouldn't have left her on her own. (1993)

An illness

woofits (1918) Used to denote an unwell feeling, especially in the head, or moody depression; origin unknown  ■ Neil Shute: Getting the woofits now, because I don't sleep so well. (1959)

crud (1932) Orig army slang; used to denote any disease or illness; variant of curd  ■ Frank Shaw et al.: I got Bombay crud, I am suffering from looseness of the bowels. (1966)

lurgy, lurgi (1954) British; used to denote a fictitious, highly infectious disease; usually in the phrase the dreaded lurgy; coined by the writers of The Goon Show, British radio comedy programme first broadcast in 1951  ■ Hamish MacInnes: I was beginning to feel weak and knew that I had caught the dreaded swamp lurgy. (1974)

A sick person

wreck (1795) ■ W. R. H. Trowbridge: I think I am in for influenza. I feel a perfect wreck. (1901)

martyr (1847) Applied to someone who is habitually a prey to a particular ailment  ■ Law Times: The deceased ... had been a martyr for years to rheumatic gout. (1892)

To suffer illness

come over (1922) Used to denote the sudden onset of symptoms  ■ N. F. Simpson: There was
nothing wrong with him . . . and then next day he came over funny at work. (1960)

To injure

do in (1905) • Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary. He did his back in lifting heavy furniture. (1995)

To cause pain to

kill (1800) Originally Irish English • Joyce Porter: The long cold walk . . . did nothing to lighten Dover’s mood. His feet were killing him. (1965)

Bruising

mouse (1854) Applied especially to a black eye • S. Moody: Touched the mouse under her eye. She just hoped a Vogue photog wasn’t going to show up. (1985)

shiner (1904) Applied to a black eye • G. F. Fiennes: Out shot a telescopic left, and I had the shiner of all time for weeks. (1967)

Cancer

big C (1964) Euphemistic • Time: John Wayne: . . . accepted the news with true grit. ‘I’ve licked the big C before,’ he said. (1979)

Cold

snuffles (1770), sniffles (1825) Applied to a slight cold characterized by nasal congestion and discharge • Thomas Bryant: The snuffles in infancy are very characteristic. (1878)

To catch a bad cold

catch one’s death (1712) Short for catch one’s death of cold • Graham Greene: She had walked in the rain seeking a refuge and ‘catching her death’ instead. (1951)

Cramp

Charley-horse, charley-horse (1888) North American; applied to cramp in the arm or leg, especially in baseball players; origin uncertain • Globe & Mail (Toronto): Rookie centre Gordon Judges departed in the second half suffering a severe charley horse in his left thigh. (1968)

Diarrhoea

See under Bodily Functions pp. 18–19

Dizzy

woozy, whoosy, whoozy, woozey (1897) Orig US; origin unknown • Black Mask: I got hit. It made me woozy for a minute. (1937)

slug-nutty (1933) US; applied to dizziness caused by punching; from slug blow with the hand • Ernest Hemingway: He’s been beat up so much he’s slug-nutty. (1950)

slap-happy (1936) Applied originally to dizziness caused by punching; from slap blow with the hand • Detective Tales: He was a little slap-happy from a decade of slug-festing. (1940)

A fit, a sudden feeling of illness

turn (1775) Dated or jocular • Edith Wharton: Her mother . . . sat in a drooping attitude, her head sunk on her breast, as she did when she had one of her ‘turns’. (1913)

spazz out, spaz out (1984) US; used to denote someone suffering a spasm, losing physical control; spazz short for spasm

A haemophiliac

bleeder (1803)

A headache

thick head (1991) Often applied specifically to a headache caused by alcohol; first recorded in 1991, but in use earlier • P. Wilson: Should you decide to stick to sherry and branch out into the heavier oloroso you will have a thick head tomorrow and we will have an entertaining evening. (1993)

Nitrogen narcosis

the narks (1962) Used by divers, who are prone to nitrogen narcosis, which is caused by breathing air under pressure; from narc (short for narcosis) + -s • J. Palmer: It’s lucky the ship lies in such shallow water. We shan’t get the ‘narks’. (1967)

Paralysis

Saturday night palsy (1927) Jocular; mainly US; applied to temporary local paralysis in the arm, usually as a result of sleeping on it after hard drinking; from Saturday night, the traditional evening for enjoying oneself • Elliot Paul: Berthe was suffering from what is known in the United States as Saturday-night paralysis, . . . when drunken men go to sleep in gutters, with one arm across a sharp kerbstone. (1951)

Rheumatism

screwmatics, screwmaticks (1895) Dated; humorous alteration of rheumatics after (presumably earlier) screws • E. V. Lucas: Wet, and rats, . . . and dirt and screwmatics. (1916)

the screws (1897) Perhaps from the notion of a twisting pain • Lionel Black: Any rheumatism? An occasional touch of the screws, she admitted. (1976)

A spot, pimple

hickey, hickie (1934) US; origin unknown; compare earlier sense, gadget • Herbert Gold: A woman is not just soul and hickie-squeezing. (1956)

zit (1966) Mainly North American; origin unknown • Courier-Mail (Brisbane): You know playing with teenagers will give you zits. (1980)

Stomach pain

belly-ache (1552) • Michael Bishop: A few months back, it turned where I couldn’t listen to . . . any of them ‘ere comedy people ‘thout coming down with a bellyache. (1992)

gripes (1601) From the notion of a ‘clutching’ pain; originally a standard usage • John Baxter:
Excess of green food, sudden exposure to cold, are... occasional causes of gripes. (1846)

mulligrubs (1802) Dated; from earlier sense, fit of depression; originally a fanciful coinage
■ George Colman: His Bowels; Where spasms were... Afflicting him with mulligrubs and colic. (1902)

collywobbles (1823) Fanciful formation based on colic stomach pain and wobble, or perhaps an alteration of colera morbus ■ F. T. Bullen: He laughingly excused himself on the grounds that his songs were calculated to give a white man collywobbles. (1901)
gut-rot (1979) British; compare earlier sense, unwholesome liquor or food ■ Independent: Next day I developed gut rot, so I can’t say I gave Puerto Rico a fair chance. (1989)

Trembling

the shakes (1782) Often applied specifically to delirium tremens ■ Martin Woodhouse: It was like getting the shakes on an exposed pitch of rock. (1966) ■ New Yorker: Have you ever had the D.T.s? The shakes? (1977)

See also under The effects of drinking (too much) alcohol under Alcohol p. 154.

Tropical diseases

yellow jack (1836) Dated; applied to yellow fever

Unconscious

out like a light (1934) ■ Billie Holiday: When it came time to come out for the third curtain call I said, ‘Bobby, I just can’t make it no longer,’ and I passed out like a light. (1956)

spark out (1936) From earlier sense, completely extinguished ■ Margery Allingham: He’s spark out, only just breathin’. Bin like that two days. (1952)

To become unconscious

flake out (1942) From earlier sense, become limp; flake originally a variant of flag ■ Barry Crump: I flaked out more thoroughly than a man who is blind drunk. (1960)

Venereal diseases

pox (1503) Altered plural of pock spot, pustule; applied especially to syphilis ■ Jimmy O’Connor: Wally... strangled a prostitute for giving him a dose of the pox. (1976)

clap (1587) Old French clapoir venereal bubo; applied especially to gonorrhoea ■ Adam Diment: Rocky Kilmarry is about as good for you as a dose of clap. (1967)

dose (1914) Applied to a bout of venereal infection ■ Bill Turner: She’s riddled with pox. I know four blokes who’ve copped a dose from her. (1968)

syph, siph, siff (1914) Abbreviation of syphilis ■ C. Willingham: Why don’t you tell us about that time you got siff from your nigger maid? (1947)

load (1937) Applied to a bout of venereal infection ■ Frank Sargeson: They displayed their rubber goods, and... were doubly protected against finding themselves landed with either biological consequences or a load. (1965)

jack (1954) Australian; short for jack in the box, rhyming slang for pox ■ N. Medcalf: Got malaria, beri-beri, malnutrition and probably a dose of jack. (1985)

Protection against venereal disease

propho (1919) Dated; orig US; abbreviation of prophylaxis ■ John Dos Passos: That’s one thing you guys are lucky in, don’t have to worry about propho. (1921)

Wounds

Blightly, Blightly one (1916) British; from earlier sense, Britain; used in World War I to denote a wound sufficiently serious to warrant return to Britain ■ W. J. Locke: Mo says he’s blistering glad you’re out of it and safe in your perishing bed with a Blightly one. (1918)

strawberry (1921) North American, dated; used to denote a graze on the skin

homer (1942) Australian & New Zealand; from home + -er; used in World War II to denote a wound sufficiently serious to warrant repatriation ■ Richard Biely: She’s apples. Now you just lie back an’ take it easy. Ya got a homer, mate, you arsey bastard. (1977)

road rash (1970) Used to denote cuts and grazing caused by falling off a skateboard

Disability: Lame

gambar (1879) British; dialectal derivative of game lame, crippled, perhaps from French gambi crooked ■ D. M. Davin: That gammy foot of mine. (1947)

gimp (1925) Orig US; applied to a lame person or leg; also used as a verb, in the sense ‘to limp, hobble’; origin uncertain; perhaps an alteration of gammy ■ New Yorker: He’d just kick a gimp in the good leg and leave him lay. (1929) ■ P. Craig: I gimped back on deck. (1969). So the noun and adjective gimp a cripple; lame, crippled. (1925)

A disabled person

wingy (1880) Applied to a one-armed person; from wing arm + -y ■ Dean Stiff: Missions are very anxious to recruit the ‘wingies’ and ‘armies’, or the one-armed hobos. (1931)

basket case (1919) Orig US military slang; applied especially to someone who has lost all four limbs; from the notion of someone who has no mobility and has to be carried around ■ Mario Puzo: ‘Hunchbacks are not as good as anyone else?’ I asked... ‘No... nor are guys with one eye, basket cases and... chickenshit guys.’ (1978)

wheelie (1977) Australian; applied to someone in or confined to a wheelchair; from wheel + -ie
fit as a fiddle (1882) From earlier sense, in excellent condition; from the phrase in the pink of condition etc., from pink flower, hence finest ■ P. G. Wodehouse: ‘Oh, hallo!’ I said. ‘Going strong?’ ‘I am in excellent health, thank you. And you?’ ‘In the pink. Just been as right as a trivet before ninepence in due course. (1980) ’

cabbage (1887) Applied to someone incapacitated through brain damage or brain malfunction; compare earlier sense, inactive and intellectually inert person ■ Irvine Welsh: Poor Ma, still blaming her self fr that fucked up gene that caused ma brother Davie tae be born a cabbage. Her guilt, a’f the struggling wi him fr his life, at pittin him in the hospital. (1993)

Germs

bug (1919) From earlier sense, (harmful) insect ■ Joyce Cary: May I get into your bed, Harry?—I’m freezing. I won’t breathe any of my bugs on you. (1941)

wog (1941) Australian; from earlier sense, (harmful) insect ■ C. Green: A ‘flu wog’ struck, and several families of children were absent with . . . ‘terrible hackin’ coughs’. (1978)

Sick leave

sickie (1953) Australian & New Zealand; applied to a day’s sick leave, especially one taken without valid medical reason; from sick + -ie ■ Courier-Mail (Brisbane): A part-time fireman’s sense of duty cost him his job after he answered an emergency call when he was taking a ‘sickie’ from work. (1981)

In good health

right as a trivet (1837), right as ninepence (1890), right as rain (1909) ■ George Sanders: It scared him to pull round again; but I’ll bet on his not being alive over to America. ’ (1923)

fit as a fiddle (1882) From earlier sense, in excellent condition

in the pink (1914) From earlier sense, in good condition; from the phrase in the pink of condition etc., from pink flower, hence finest ■ P. G. Wodehouse: ‘Oh, hallo!’ I said. ‘Going strong?’ ‘I am in excellent health, thank you. And you?’ ‘In the pink. Just been as right as a trivet before ninepence in due course. (1980)

Recovering health

on the mend (1802) ■ John Barth: Heart-scared still, but on the mend, doing nicely, thanks. (1994)

pull round (1891) ■ Pall Mall Magazine: He thinks he’s going to pull round again; but I’ll bet on his not being alive this day week. (1896)

Medical practitioners and nurses

medico (1689) From Italian medico physician ■ Nature: The twenty thousand or so scientists, engineers, medics and so on on the staff of British universities. (1973)

medic (1823) From Latin medicus medical person; in standard use in the 17th century, and revived in American college slang ■ Evening Standard: Dr Brian Warren, Mr Heath’s personal physician, called to see him at Downing Street—but as a friend, not as a medic. (1974)

zambuk, zambuc, zambuck (1918) Australian & New Zealand; applied to a first- aider, a St. John Ambulance man or woman, especially at a sporting event; from the proprietary name of a brand of antiseptic ointment

prick-farrier (1961) Services’ slang; applied to a medical officer; from prick penis and farrier horse-doctor, in allusion to the examinations for venereal disease carried out by medical officers

physio (1962) Applied to a physiotherapist, and also to physiotherapy; abbreviation ■ Times: I remember we didn’t have a physio of our own, so we had to go to the athletics one. (1971)

Doctors

pill-pedder, pill-pusher, pill-roller, pill-shooter (1857) Also applied to chemists ■ James Curtis: He was damned if he let a lousy pill-roller know just how bad he felt. (1936) *

croaker (1859) Now mainly US; applied especially to prison doctors; from croak, perhaps with ironic reference to the sense ‘kill’ + -er; compare also obsolete slang crocus quack doctor, perhaps from the Latinized surname of Dr Hilkiah Crooke, a 17th-century surgeon ■ Mezrow & Wolfe: The most he needed was some bicarbonate of soda and a physic, not a croaker. (1946)

pill (1860) Dated; also applied to (a member of) the Royal Army Medical Corps

quack (1919) Orig Australian & New Zealand; from earlier sense, an unqualified doctor, a charlatan; also applied in services’ slang to a medical officer ■ John Iggulden: I’ll get the quack at the Bush Hospital to have a look at it in the morning. (1960)

vet (1925) Jocular; from earlier sense, veterinary surgeon ■ Anthony Powell: Saw my vet last week. Said he’d never inspected a fitter man of my age. (1975)

right croaker (1929) Dated; applied by criminals to a doctor who will treat criminals without informing the police, or supply drugs

Surgeons

sawbones (1837) Also applied to physicians ■ Rider Haggard: I found her the affianced bride of a parish sawbones. (1898)

orthopod (1960) Applied to an orthopaedic surgeon; alteration of orthopaedic ■ Dick Francis: I telephoned to the orthopod who regularly patched me up after falls. (1969)

gynae (1982) Shortening of gynaecologist ■ Barr & York: Sloane who aren’t producing will go to their sweet gynae, who will tell them to stand on their heads afterwards. (1982)

Medicine

pick-me-up (1900) Applied to a tonic medicine; from earlier sense, any stimulating drink

jollop (1955) Applied especially to a purgative; alteration of jalap type of purgative obtained
from a Mexican plant, ultimately from Jalapa, Xalapa name of a city in Mexico, from Aztec Xalapan sand by the water • D’Arcy Niland: He nutted out some jollop for her cough. (1955)

Hospital

in/out of dock (1785) Denoting in/out of hospital, receiving/after treatment • News Chronicle: He’s just out of dock after the old appendix. (1960)

Ambulance

blood wagon (1922) • Stirling Moss: Out came the ‘blood wagon’ and to the ambulance station in the paddock I went. (1957)

meat wagon (1925) Mainly US • Hartley Howard: She hadn’t deserved to become a parcel of broken flesh and bone in the meat wagon. (1973)

Medical examination

short-arm (1919) Orig & mainly military slang; applied to an inspection of the penis for venereal disease or other infection; from the notion of the penis as an additional (but shorter) limb • Mario Puzo: Before you go to bed with a guy, give him a short arm. ... You strip down his penis, you know, like you’re masturbating him, and if there’s a yellow fluid coming out like a drippage, you know he’s infected. (1978)

12. Death

Death

curtains (1901) Orig US; from the notion of the closing of the curtain at the end of a theatrical performance • Wallis & Blair: If the Party ever got on to it... it would be curtains for Kurt. (1956)

wooden cross (1919) Services’ slang; applied ironically to death in battle, from the notion of a medal awarded for merit; from earlier sense, cross of wood marking a soldier’s grave • A. Murphy: There is no other branch of the army that offers so many chances for the Purple Heart, the Distinguished Wooden Cross, the Royal Order of the Mattress Covers. (1949)

deep-six (1929) Orig & mainly US; usually in the phrase give someone the deep-six kill someone; probably from the custom of burial at sea, at a depth of six fathoms • S. Palmer: My old lady went over the hill with my bank account before I was out of boot camp. I’d have given her the deep-six if I coulda got a furlough. (1947)

thirty (1929) US; used by journalists, printers, etc.; from earlier use of the figure 30 to mark the end of a piece of journalist’s copy • Sun (Baltimore): Newsmen... mourned today at the bier of Edward J. Neil, ... who was killed by sharpnel while covering the civil war... in Spain. Prominent... was a shield of white carnations with a red-flowered figure ‘30’—the traditional ‘good night’ in the lore of the fourth estate. (1938)

Medical treatment: Surgery

op (1925) Abbreviation of operation • G. L. Cohen: The probationers agreed that minor ops gave the most trouble. (1964)

Gynaecology

gynaecology (1933) Shortening (and alteration) of gynaecology • G. L. Cohen: ‘We didn’t come across any horrors,’ said Dr. Duncum... ‘unless you count adolescent girls in gynaec wards.’ (1964)

Injection

jab (1914) Orig US drug-users’ slang • Times: The visitor must... take precautions and submit to a variety of jabs. (1973)

Nursing

special (1961) Used of a nurse, to attend continuously to (a single patient) • Nursing Times: A nurse will have to ‘special’ the patient to make the necessary observations. (1967)

Autopsy

post (1942) Abbreviation of post-mortem; also used as a verb, in the sense ‘perform an autopsy on (someone)’ • F. Richards: She died last night. Overdose, probably. They’re doing a post. (1969)

the big sleep (1938) Orig US; popularized by the name of the novel The Big Sleep (1938) by Raymond Chandler, and probably coined by Chandler himself

the chop, the chopper (1945) Orig services’ slang; usually in the phrase get the chop, originally denoting being killed in action, specifically by being shot down, and subsequently more generally, being killed • Aidan Crawley: ‘The chop’ in Buchenwald meant execution or the gas chamber. (1956)

Dead

off the hooks (1840) Dated • John Galsworthy: Old Timothy; he might go off the hooks at any moment. I suppose he’s made his Will. (1921)

bung (1882) Australian & New Zealand; also in the phrase go bung die; from Aboriginal (Jagara) ba* napoo, na poo, napooh (1919) Dated; alteration of French {il n'y e)n a plus there is no more • Laurence Meynell: Prudence... fell down dead in the croupier’s bag. Fini. Napoo. (1973)

loaf o(f) bread (1930) British; rhyming slang • Auden & Isherwood: O how I cried when Alice died The day we were to have wed! We never had our Roasted Duck And now she’s a Loaf of Bread. (1935)

brown bread (1973) British; rhyming slang
(To be) dead and buried

under the daisies (1866) • Sherrard Vines: I think she's drinking herself under the daisies, so to speak. (1926)
push up (the) daisies (1918) • Guardian: In ten years time I think I should be pushing up daisies. (1970)
six feet under (1942) • J. Gerson: In Islay . . . we make sure the dead are stiff and cold and six feet under. (1979)

To die

pop off (1764) • Dorothy Sayers: Perhaps it's just as well he popped off when he did. He might have cut me off with a shilling. (1926)
kick the bucket (1785) Perhaps from obsolete bucket beam from which something may be hung (perhaps from Old French bucket balance), from the notion of an animal hanging up for slaughter kicking in its death throes • Salmon Rushdie: Pinkie was a widow, old Marshal Aurangzeb had kicked the bucket at last. (1983)

hop the twig (or stick) (1797) • Mary Bridgman: If old Campbell hops the twig. (1970)
croak (1812) • John Welcome: Your old man has croaked and left you the lot. (1961)
turn up one's toes (1851) • Daily Chronicle: It is . . . quite a commonplace remark to hear young men boast of the time when 'the old man turns up his toes', and they can 'collar the chips'. (1905)

peg out (1855) Apparently from the notion of reaching the end of a game of cribbage • European: You state that she is 'an ancestor of Fabius Maximus, five times consul of Ancient Rome'. He pegged out in 203 BC. (1981)

pass (or hand) in one's chips (1879) Orig US: from the notion of exchanging counters for money at the end of a gambling game

cash in, cash in one's chips, cash in one's checks (1884) Orig US: from the notion of exchanging counters for money at the end of a gambling game • Desmond Varadax: Because of the size of the dead animal, at first I thought it to be buffalo. 'Poor Bill or Phyl, cashed in?' (1968)

snuff it (1885) From the notion of extinguishing a candle • M. Gee: I mean, he didn't let the grass grow under his feet, it wasn't much more than a year after the first Mrs Tatlock snuffed it. (1981)

stop (1901) Denoting being hit and killed by a bullet, shell, etc.; often in the phrase stop one be killed in this way • Hugh Walpole: Maurice stood there wishing that he might 'stop one' before he had to go over the top. (1933)

hand (or pass, turn) in one's dinner-pail (1905) • P. G. Wodehouse: My godfather . . . recently turned in his dinner pail and went to reside with the morning stars. (1964)
pass (chuck, etc.) in one's marble (1908) • Dal Stivens: I'm not going to pass in my marble just yet. (1951)

get his, hers, theirs, etc. (1909) Orig & mainly services' slang; denoting being killed • Norman Mailer: He was going to get his, come two three four hours. That was all right, of course, you didn't live forever. (1959)
go west (1915) Perhaps from the notion of the sun setting in the west • Eugene Corr: I shall once again be in the company of dear old friends now 'gone West'. (1915)

buy it (1920) Orig British, services' slang; originally and mainly applied to being killed in action, often specifically to being shot down; mainly used in past tenses • J. E. Morpurgo: I'm afraid we want you elsewhere. . . . Jim Barton bought it, and you'll have to take on his troop. (1944)
kick off (1921) Orig US • Robert Lowell: The old bitches Live into their hundreds, while I'll kick off tomorrow. (1970)

off it (1930) From earlier sense, depart

seven out (1934) US; from earlier sense, in the game of craps, throw a seven and so lose one's bet • Saul Bellow: 'Why do you push it, Charlie?' he said. 'At our age one short game is plenty. . . . One of these days you could seven out.' (1975)
go for a Burton (1941) British, services' slang; applied to a pilot being killed in an air crash; origin unknown; perhaps connected with Burton type of beer from Burton-on-Trent

kiss off (1945) US

buy the farm (1958), buy the ranch (1963) US, orig services' slang; originally denoting being killed (in action), and hence more generally dying; from earlier sense, crash in an aircraft

kark, cark (1977) Australian; often in the phrase kark it; perhaps from Australian cark caw, from the association of crows with death • Sydney Morning Herald. We talked parties, weddings, people karking it and the attendant floral arrangements. (1982)

keel over (1977) From earlier sense, fall to the ground • Daily Mail: The moment when the hero's uncle ground • Daily Mail: The moment when the hero's uncle keeled over in the lobby of the Ritz Hotel with a fatal heart attack. (1991)

Doomed to die

one's number is up (1899) • J. Aiken: He'd got leukaemia. He knew his number was up. (1975)

Someone who has died

goner (1847) From gone + -er • Boys' Magazine: When I found the car burnt out I thought you were a 'goner'. (1933)

stiff (1859) From the effects of rigor mortis • Thomas Pynchon: Ten thousand stiffs humped under the snow in the Ardennes take on the sunny Disneyfied look of numbered babies under white wool blankets. (1973)

floatar (1890) US; applied to a dead body found floating in water • Jessica Mitford: Floaters . . . are another matter, a person who has been in the Bay for a week or more . . . will decompose more rapidly. (1963)
A coffin

box (1864) W. Henry: Personally, I'll believe he's dead when the box is shut and covered up. (1957)

wooden overcoat (1903), wooden kimono (1926), wooden suit (1968) Mezzrow & Wolfe: I expected the man to turn up . . . with his tape measure to outfit me with a wooden kimono. (1946) Guardian: The paratroops were edgy and the one who let me through the barricade reckoned I would come out in a wooden overcoat. (1971)

pine drape (1945) US; drape = curtain

A cemetery

marble orchard (1929), marble town (1945) US; from the marble used for the headstones

B. Broadfoot: A couple more punches and it would have been the marble orchard for him. (1973)

A hearse

meat-wagon (1942) Compare earlier sense, ambulance

Stephen Longstreet: The band would march out behind the meat-wagon, black plumes on the hearse horses. (1956)

To bury

plant (1855) Orig. US Roderic Jeffries: The funeral must be fixed up at once. Where did non-Catholics get planted? (1974)

Rigor mortis

rigmo (1966) British; used by undertakers, embalmers, etc.; shortening Observer: Embalmers’ aids like the Natural Expression Former (a plastic device which, inserted into the mouth after rigmo—as we call it in the trade—sets in, can produce a seraphic smile on the deceased face). (1975)
People and Society

1. Ethnic & National Groups

English people

tyke (a1700) British; applied to a person from Yorkshire; from earlier sense, dog, from Old Norse tik bitch. P. Ryan: The Yorkshire terrier seems fitter mate for the volatile Taffy than for the taciturn Tyke. (1967)

Limy (1888) Applied originally, mainly in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, to a British immigrant, and subsequently (1918) in the US to a British person (originally a sailor) or ship; abbreviation of obsolete limejuicer, from the former enforced consumption of lime juice as an antiscorbutic in the British Navy. John Steinbeck: Fights in the bar-rooms with the goddam Limyes. (1952)


pommy, pommie, pom (1912) Mainly Australian & New Zealand; from pongo (1942). Mainly Australian & New Zealand; from the former enforced consumption of lime juice as an antiscorbutic in the British Navy. John Steinbeck: Fights in the bar-rooms with the goddam Limyes. (1952)

Scouse (1945) Used as an adjective and noun denoting ‘Liverpudlian’, and also applied to the dialect of English spoken in Liverpool; abbreviation of lobscouse. Guardian: Scouse House was the tongue-in-cheek name given to the Merseyside Development Office. (1973) Times: A roly-poly, amiable Liverpudlian, with the Scouse’s seemingly god-given gift of being able to send up an overblown... occasion. (1980). Hence Scouser a Liverpudlian (1959) Liverpool Echo: It’s pretty well established that where there’s a ship there you’ll find a Scouser. (1976)

loomer (1950) Applied to an inhabitant of Leeds, West Yorkshire; origin unknown. P. Ryan: I ran through the ranks of rumbling loiners and out into the eternal, grey twilight of Leeds. (1967)

French people

frog, Frog (1778) Applied derogatorily to a French person and (1955) to the French language; from French people’s reputation for eating frogs. Iris Murdoch: Not that I want you to marry a frog, but she sounded quite a nice girl. (1962)

froglodyte, Frogg, froggee (1872) Applied derogatorily to a French person, and also used adjectively; from frog + -y. Guardian: A group of stage-type Limys spend a weekend in France where they mix with a series of stage-type Froggies. (1965) Iris Murdoch: What about that froggy girl, the one you met in Singapore? (1962)

French, Frenchie (1883) Applied derogatorily to a French person or French Canadian; from earlier adjective Frenchy French-like, from French + -y. Maclean’s: i was constantly laughed at, pointed at and corrected, as a stupid Frenchy. (1966)

German people

sausage (1890) Dated: from the prevalence of sausages in the German diet

Dutchy, Dutchee, Dutchie (1835) Orig US; used derogatorily; from Dutch German (immigrant in the US) + -y

Hun (1902) Applied derogatorily to a German, especially a German soldier of World War I; from earlier sense, member of a warlike Asian
tribe; the application was inspired by a speech delivered by Wilhelm II to German troops about to leave for China on 27 July 1900, exhorting them to be as fierce as Huns. Times: Supposed statements... of American 'advisers'... simply smell of Hun propaganda. (1918)

squarehead (1903) Mainly US; applied derogatorily to a foreigner of Germanic extraction, specifically a German soldier in World War I. H. C. Witwer: The English call 'em 'Uns... we call 'em squareshead. (1918)

Heinie, Heine, Hiney (1904) North American; applied especially to a German soldier; from the German male personal name Heinrich. Listener: It's not the Russians we should be congratulating... but the Heinies. Sure, we got Von Braun, but the Russians grabbed all the rest of the German rocket guys. (1961)

Boche (1914) Applied derogatorily to a German, especially a German soldier, or to Germans collectively; from French slang boche rascal, applied to German soldiers in World War I. E. F. Davies: If the Boche wanted a rough-house he could rely on Pickering to give it to him. (1952)

Fritz (1915) Mainly derogatory; applied especially to a German soldier of World War I; from German Fritz, nickname for Friedrich. Jack Thomas: I gathered he was more of a collaborateur than anything else. He praised you Fritzes up to the skies. (1955)

Kraut (1918) Applied derogatorily to a German, specifically a German soldier; abbreviation of sauerkraut, from its prevalence in the German diet. Thomas Pynchon: Maybe... he should have been in a war, Japs in trees, Krauts in Tiger tanks. (1952)

Boche (1919) A French term of abuse for a foreigner of Germanic extraction, specifically a German soldier in World War I; from German Fritz, nickname for Friedrich. Dorothy Sayers: A man... called him sale Boche—but Jean knocked him down. (1934)

Erich, Eric (1985) British; applied to a male German, usually derogatorily; from the German male forename Erich.

Gibraltarians

scorpion (1845), scorp (1912) British services' slang; from earlier rock scorpion in same sense. W. Tute: Perks and privileges for the ruling classes. Fifteen in a room for the poor-quality 'Scorps' whose Rock it was. (1957)

Greeks

bubble and squeak, bubble (1938) British, derogatory; rhyming slang for Greek. Robin Cook: All the best Anglo-Saxon grafters come from mine [ac: my school], and the Bubbles and the Indians from the other. (1962)

Irish people

bog-trotter (1682) Derogatory; from the boggy nature of some Irish terrain.

Paddy, paddy (1780) Often used as a nickname; often derogatory; from the common Irish male personal name Padraig Patrick. Bernard Shaw: Paddy yourself! How dar you call me Paddy? (1907)

Pat (1806) Used as a nickname; compare Paddy p. 34


harp (1904) US; from the harp as a symbol of Ireland. John Dos Passos: The foreman was a big loudmouthed harp. (1936)

Turk, turk (1914) Mainly US; applied, usually derogatorily, to a person of Irish birth or descent; perhaps from Irish torc boar, hog, influenced by Turk Turkish person, but compare Turkey.

Observer: Their backs are to the wall in a desperate tyre-chain feudal war to protect the integrity of their declining manor against the invasion of 'bubbles and squeaks' (Greeks and Cypriots), 'turks' (Irish) and 'spades' (coloureds). (1959)

turkey (1932) US; applied to an Irish person, especially an Irish immigrant in the US.

See also Taig at Religion (p. 129).

Italians

macaroni (1845) From the Italian origin of the foodstuff macaroni. Denys Hamson: They dropped us practically on to the Italian garrison at Karpenisi... Doug was playing hidey-ho with a couple of macaronis, taking potshots round bushes at each other. (1946)

wop (1914) Orig US; applied derogatorily to an Italian and to the Italian language, and also occasionally to any southern European; origin uncertain; perhaps from Italian guappo bold, showy, from Spanish guapo dandy, from Latin vappa sour wine, worthless fellow. Ernest Hemingway: Wops, said Boyle, I can tell wops a mile off. (1924)

Evelyn Waugh: You'll find her full of wop prisoners. (1955)

A. Melville-Ross: There's a lot of chat in Wop which I doesn't understand. (1982)

Eyetie, Eyety, Eyetye, Eytie, Eytio (1925) Derogatory; from Eyetalian, representing a non-standard or jocular pronunciation of Italian. E. H. Clements: The Yugoslavians, the two Eyeties, some West Germans. (1958)

ginzo, guinzo (1931) US; applied derogatorily to someone of Italian extraction; perhaps from Guinea Italian or Spanish immigrant. Wallace Markfield: I have a boss, a ginzo—though he speaks a great Jewish. (1984)

spaghetti (1931) Derogatory; from the Italian origin of the foodstuff spaghetti.

spag (1967) Australian, derogatory; applied to an Italian immigrant; short for spaghetti. Bulletin...
Welshy Welshie (1951)  Welsh
From + -y Welsh people
Scottish form of the male personal name John.  ■ Berkeley Mather: We'd knocked off quite a few of their side so far, and even dedicated Jocks could be expected to show a little exacerbation under the circumstances. (1968)

Rusky, Roosky, Russki, Ruski (1858) Also applied to the Soviets; from Russian Ruskii Russian.  ■ Colin MacInnes: We've got to produce our own variety, and not imitate the Americans—or the Ruskis, or anybody. (1959)

Scandinavians
squarehead (1903) Mainly US, derogatory
herring-choker (1944) US; from their supposed predilection for herrings

Scots
Jock (1788) Scottish form of the male personal name Jack.  ■ New Statesman: Why can't the Jocks support their team without dressing up like that? (1965)

Welsh people
Taffy (1700). Taff (1929) Often derogatory; often used as a nickname; Taffy representing a supposed Welsh pronunciation of the name Dovy = David (Welsh Dafydd).  ■ Brendan Behan: 'Welsh are the most honest of the lot,' murmured Knowlesy, 'you never see a Taffy in for knocking off.' (1958)

Ivan (1925) Applied especially to a Russian soldier; from the Russian male personal name Ivan, equivalent to English John.  ■ Berkeley Mather: We'd knocked off quite a few of their side so far, and even dedicated Ivans could be expected to show a little exacerbation under the circumstances. (1968)

Von (1819) Mainly German, derogatory
Hunk (1888) Applied derogatorily to a Spaniard, dago (1832)

Russians

Taffia, Tafia (1980) Applied jocularly to any Taff, Taffy.  Often derogatory; (a1700), Taffy often used as a nickname; Taffy representing a supposed Welsh pronunciation of the name Dovy = David (Welsh Dafydd).  ■ Brendan Behan: ‘Welsh are the most honest of the lot,’ murmured Knowlesy, ‘you never see a Taffy in for knocking off.’ (1958)

Americans

Polack (1898) Mainly derogatory; ultimately from Polish Polak a Pole.  ■ S. K. Padover: You cowardly little sneak! It's craven pups like you that make the Polacks trample on us! If we Jews would learn to ... kill . . . like they do, the Polacks would grovel at our feet! (1933)

Hunk (1888) Applied derogatorily to a Spaniard, dago (1832)

Americans

Paul (1939) Applied derogatorily to an immigrant of Italian or Spanish origin; from earlier sense, person of mixed black, white and Indian ancestry; short for Guin negro slave imported from Guinea or elsewhere on the West Coast of Africa.  ■ John O'Hara: Tony Murasco, who up to that time had been known only as a tough little guinny, was matched to fight a preliminary bout at McGovern's Hall. (1934)

grease-ball (1922) Applied derogatorily to someone of Mediterranean origin; from the association of oil with the cuisine and other cultural aspects of such countries

grill (1957) Australian, derogatory; from a perceived abundance of Greeks and other southern Europeans as proprietors of cafés

Central and Southeastern Europeans

hunk, hunkey, hunky, hunkie (1896) North American; applied derogatorily to an immigrant from central or southeastern Europe; see bohunk

bohunk (1903) North American; applied derogatorily to an immigrant from central or southeastern Europe, especially one of inferior class, and often specifically to a Hungarian; apparently from Boh(hemian) + -hunk, alteration of Hungarian.  ■ John Dos Passos: Bohunk and polak kids put stones in their snowballs. (1930)

hunyak, honyock (1911) US; a synonym of hunk; alteration of Hungarian based on Polack

Egyptians

gippy, gyppie, gypsy (a1889). gippo, gyro, gyp (1916) Usually derogatory; applied especially to a native Egyptian soldier; shortening and alteration of Egyptian.  ■ Evelyn Waugh: ‘What's to stop him coming round the other side?’ asked Tommy. 'According to plan—the Gypsos,' said the Brigadier. (1955)

Chinese

pigtail (1858) Derogatory or offensive, orig Australian, dated; from the former stereotype of a Chinese male wearing a pigtail.  ■ C. MacAlister: The fall broke the poor 'pigtail's' neck. (1907)

chow (1864) Derogatory, mainly Australian; short for chow-chow medley, assortment, from Pidgin English (Indian and Chinese)  ■ Patrick White: Like one of the Chinese beans the Chow had given them at Christmas. (1970)

Chinkey, Chinkie, Chinky (1878) Derogatory or offensive; as Chink + -ie  ■ Norman Mailer: A certain Chinkie. (1959)

(Sydney): But the migration level had fallen under Labor. 'No, y'know, those coons and spags.' (1974)

Poles

Polack (1898) Mainly derogatory; ultimately from Polish Polak a Pole.  ■ S. K. Padover: You cowardly little sneak! It's craven pups like you that make the Polacks trample on us! If we Jews would learn to ... kill . . . like they do, the Polacks would grovel at our feet! (1933)

Hunk (1888) Applied derogatorily to a Spaniard, dago (1832)

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Polack (1898) Mainly derogatory; ultimately from Polish Polak a Pole.  ■ S. K. Padover: You cowardly little sneak! It's craven pups like you that make the Polacks trample on us! If we Jews would learn to ... kill . . . like they do, the Polacks would grovel at our feet! (1933)
Vietcong soldier; from black or coloured person

Victor Charlie (1966) US services' slang; from the communications code-names for the initial letters of Viet Cong. (1966)

Pong (1906) Australian, derogatory or offensive; probably a mixture of pong 'stink' with Chinese surnames such as Wong. (1966)

Filipinos

Flip (1931) US, often derogatory; from a casual pronunciation of the first two syllables of Filipino

Japanese

Jap (c1880) Mainly derogatory or offensive; abbreviation of Japanese. (1942)

Tojo (1942) Services' slang; applied to a Japanese soldier, or to Japanese forces collectively

Nip (1942) Mainly derogatory or offensive; abbreviation of Nipponese Japanese. (1942)

Charlie, Charley (1965) US services' slang; applied to a Japanese soldier, or to Japanese forces collectively

Vietnamese

Paki (1964). Pak (1965) Derogatory or offensive; often applied specifically to an immigrant from Pakistan. (1965)

Vietnamese

Charlie, Charley (1965) US services' slang; usually applied specifically to North Vietnamese or Vietcong soldier(s); short for Victor Charlie

Victor Charlie (1966) US services' slang; usually applied specifically to North Vietnamese or Vietcong soldier(s); from the communications code-names for the initial letters of Viet Cong. (1966)

dink (1967) US services' slang, derogatory; perhaps from earlier obsolete Australian slang dink East Asian person, of unknown origin

nog (1969) Australian, derogatory; usually applied specifically to a North Vietnamese or Vietcong soldier; from nig-nog black or coloured person

East Asians

yellow peril (1900) Applied to the military or political threat regarded as emanating from Asian peoples, especially the Chinese

slant-eye, slant-eyes (1929) Orig US, derogatory or offensive; also applied more broadly to anyone of a race with slanting eyes

slope, slopy, slopey (1948) US, derogatory or offensive; in later use often applied specifically to Vietnamese; from Asians' stereotypically slanting eyes

moose (1953) US, services' slang; applied to a young Japanese or Korean woman, especially the wife or mistress of a serviceman stationed in Japan or Korea; from Japanese musume daughter, girl

Americans, the US

Yankee, (dated) Yankey, Yank (1765) Often derogatory; in early use, applied to New Englanders or inhabitants of the northern states generally; perhaps from Dutch Janke, diminutive of Jan John

Yank (1778) Often derogatory; in early use, applied to New Englanders or inhabitants of the northern states generally; abbreviation of Yankee

Sammy (1917) British, dated; applied during World War I to a US soldier; from Uncle Sam personification of the US government

prune picker (1918) Dated; applied to a Californian

snow-bird (1923) US; applied to someone from the Northern states who goes to live or work in the South during the winter
septic tank (1967), septic (1976) Mainly Canadian; applied to a French-Canadian, and subsequently (1849) to Canadians in general; also applied to the French-Canadian patois—perhaps a variant of Hawaiian kanaka South Sea Islands—French-Canadians and South Sea islanders—having been employed together in the Pacific Northwest fur trade—later re-analysed as Canadian + an arbitrary suffix

Canuck (1835) In US, sometimes derogatory; originally applied specifically to French-Canadians, and subsequently (1849) to Canadians in general; also applied to the French-Canadian patois—perhaps a variant of Hawaiian kanaka South Sea Islanders—French-Canadians and South Sea islanders—having been employed together in the Pacific Northwest fur trade—later re-analysed as Canadian + an arbitrary suffix

pea-soup (1896), pea-souper (1942) North American, derogatory; applied to a French-Canadian, and also to the French-Canadian patois—often in the Ottawa between pea-soup and English-speaking gangs. (1965)

herring-choker (1899) Canadian; applied to a native or inhabitant of the Maritime Provinces; from their supposed predilection for herrings

Spud Islander (1957) Canadian; applied to a native or inhabitant of Prince Edward Island; from the island's reputation for fine potatoes

Joe (1963) Canadian; applied to a French-Canadian

Native Americans

nitchie (1850) Canadian, usually derogatory; from Ojibwa ničiti; friend • R. D. Symons: 'Quick, you fellows,' he said, 'them Nitchies are crawling up all around.' (1973)

Latin Americans

greaser (1836) US, derogatory; from the association of oil with the cuisine and other cultural aspects of Latin American countries • R. May & J. Rosa: Mexicans... and... Latin temperaments did not always sit well with Texans who were open in their dislike of 'greasers'. (1980)

spiggotty, spiggity, spigotti, spigoty (1910) US, dated, derogatory or offensive; perhaps an alteration of spika de, as in no spika de English '(I do) not speak the English', supposedly representing a common response of Spanish-Americans to questions in English • Rex Stout: 'He's a dirty spiggotty.' 'No, Archie, Mr Manuel Kimball is an Argentine.' (1934)

spic, spick, spig, spik (1913) US, derogatory or offensive; applied to a Latin American, and also to the Spanish-American language; abbreviation and alteration of spiggotty • Donald Westlake: You'd put your kid in a school with a lotta niggers and kikes and wops and spics? (1977)

wetback (1929), wet (1973) US; applied to an illegal immigrant from Mexico to the US, and hence to any illegal immigrant; from the practice of swimming the Rio Grande to reach the US • G. Swarthout: Why doesn't this [system] detect every wet who puts a toe across the line? (1979)

grease-ball (1943) US, derogatory; from earlier sense, someone of Mediterranean origin; compare greaser • I. Wolfert: Love thy neighbor if he's not... a moccie or a slicked-up greaseball from the Argentine. (1943)

Australian

pure merino (1826) Australian; applied to a (descendant of a) voluntary settler in Australia (as opposed to a transported convict), especially one who finds in this a basis for social pretension; from merino type of sheep introduced into Australia in the early years of settlement • Daily Mail (Sydney): Will pure merino progressives invade city fold? (1922)

cornstalk (1827) Australian, dated; applied originally to a native-born, non-aboriginal Australian, and subsequently specifically to someone from New South Wales • Sydney Hart: 'Never say that to anyone in New South Wales, or you'll be laid out flat as a pancake!' he warned me... Couldn't the Cornstalks take a joke? (1957)

gumsucker (1855) Australian; applied to someone from Victoria, and more broadly to any native-born, non-aboriginal Australian; from the notion of sucking the juice of gum-trees • W. Lawson: Some men... called them 'gumsuckers', and a few other things. (1936)

tothersider (1872) Australian; applied to someone from the eastern states of Australia; from tother the other + -sider; from these states being viewed as 'on the other side' of the continent from Western Australia • Sydney Morning Herald: Kalgoorlie was a huge seat with a big population of radical T'Othersiders miners. (1983)

Bananalander (1887), Banana-bender (1976) Australian, jocular; applied to someone from Queensland; from the abundance of bananas grown in that state • K. Denton: I c'n tell a bananalander any time. I c'n pickem. You come from Queensland 'n' I know it! (1968)

sand-groper (1896) Australian; applied to a non-Aboriginal person, native to or resident in Western Australia
Groper (1899) Australian; applied to a Western Australian, especially a (descendant of an) early settler; short for sand-groper

Tassie, Tassey, Tassy (1899) Australian; applied to a Tasmanian; from earlier sense, Tasmania ■ S. Weller: You know, I can always pick a Tassy. (1976)

digger (1916) Often applied specifically to an Australian or New Zealand soldier in World Wars I and II, especially a private; from earlier sense, one who digs for gold, from the high profile of such people in late 19th-century Australia ■ Roderick Finlayson: Put your bag under the seat, digger. (1948)

dig (1916) Australian & New Zealand; abbreviation of digger ■ Graham McInnes: Often they shouted at us ... 'Howsit up in the dress circle, dig?' (1965)

ocker, Ocker (1916) Australian; used originally as a nickname for an Australian man, and hence (1968) for a typically rough or aggressively boorish Australian; often used adjectivally; originally a variant of names like Oscar and O'Connor, and in later use from the name of a character devised and played by Ron Frazer (1924–83) in the Australian television series 'The Mavis Bramston Show' (1965–8) ■ Telegraph (Brisbane): It is no use telling Australians to wake up; it is not in the ocker character. (1976). Hence ockerism (1974), ockerdom (1975)

Aussie (1917) Used as a noun and an adjective to denote 'an (Australian)'; from Aus(tralian) + -ie ■ S. Hope: Most Aussies, contrary to popular belief, are town-dwellers. (1957)

Ozzie (1918) Orig Australian; a repelling of Aussie, after Oz Australia ■ Nation Review (Melbourne): Sydney Femme, 27, bored by ozzie ockers and oedipal neurotics, desires to develop dynamic dalliance with ... male human beings. (1973)

Oz (1971) Orig Australian; applied as an adjective and noun to (an) Australian; from earlier sense, Australia ■ Sunday Telegraph: These Oz intellectuals fell over themselves in a desperate parade of learning heavily-worn. (1996)

Barcoo salute (1973) Australian; applied to a gesture with which one brushes flies from one's face, considered to be typical of Australians; from Barcoo river and district in Queensland ■ Sydney Morning Herald: The Barcoo salute ... is also the feature of Australia most often commented on by overseas visitors. (1974)

Aboriginals

Mary (1830) Australian; applied to an Aboriginal woman or other non-white woman; from the female personal name ■ Coast-to-Coast 1961–2 Some of the older marys did not remove frayed or dirty skirts. (1962)

Jacky, Jacky-Jacky (1845) Australian, derogatory; from the male personal name ■ K. J. Gilbert: As the blacks are quick to point out, you don't get to be a councillor unless you are a good jacky who is totally under the manager's thumb. (1973)

binghi, Binghi (1902) Australian, derogatory; from Aboriginal (Awabakal and neighbouring languages) bigay (elder) brother ■ M. Durack: Before long every white family in Broome had acquired a mission educated 'binghi' couple. (1984)

abo, Abo (1908) Australian, now mainly derogatory; shortened from aboriginal ■ Bulletin (Sydney): The idea of better housing for the abos. (1933)

boong (1924) Australian, derogatory; applied to an Australian aboriginal, and also to a New Guinean; from Aboriginal (Wemba Wemba dialect of Wemba) bey man, human being

New Zealanders

kiwi (1918) Orig applied specifically to New Zealand troops, and subsequently often to New Zealand sports teams; from the name of the flightless bird, thought of as symbolic of New Zealand ■ R. France: Laurie was not a real Kiwi, or hard-bitten New Zealander. (1958)

Arabs and other Middle Eastern peoples

Abdul (1916) Applied to a Turkish man or Arab, often specifically a Turkish soldier, especially in World War I; from the Arabic male forename Abdul ■ G. Berrie: I'd give a quid to be planted somewhere where I could watch some Abdul go in. (1949)

camel jockey (1965) US, derogatory; from the use of the camel as a method of transport (and allegedly as a vehicle for sexual gratification) in the Middle East ■ Observer: The British papers quickly followed the American lead. Although none quite sank to the level of 'Camel jockeys killed your kids' ... the British tabloids were not far behind. (1986)

Jews

Jew boy (1796) Derogatory or offensive; applied to a Jewish male ■ Observer: Mrs Lane Fox dismisses what she calls the country set, who call their children 'the brats', talk about 'thrashing them into shape', support Enoch Powell and still refer to 'jew boys'. (1972)

sheeny, shen(e)y, sheeney, -ie (1816) Derogatory or offensive; origin uncertain; compare Russian zhid, Polish, Czech žid (pronounced [ʒid]) a Jew ■ Honolulu Star-Bulletin: Hey mom, there's a couple of sheenies at our door with a turkey. (1976)

ikey, ike, iky (1835) Dated, derogatory or offensive; abbreviated form of the male personal name Isaac

Yid (1874) Derogatory or offensive; back-formation from Yiddish ■ Vladimir Nabokov: Then she went and married a yid. (1963)

goose (1898) US, derogatory or offensive; perhaps from earlier sense, tailor's smoothing-iron (so called from the resemblance of the handle to a goose's neck), in allusion to the traditional Jewish occupation of tailoring
Yahudi, Yehudi (1900) Mainly US; also used adjectivally to denote ‘Jewish’; from Arabic yahudi, Hebrew yehudi, Jew; in earlier non-slang English use (1823–) referring to Jews in Arabic-speaking or Muslim countries  

Ian Jeffries: As far as the Yehudis were concerned I knew the dirt that was being done. (1959)  
Washington Post: I see the hate in your eyes, you Yahudi (Jewish) whore, and when we go to work on you, you’ll be sorry. (1977)

kike (1904) Derogatory or offensive, mainly US; said to be an alteration of θκι (or θκυ), a common ending of the personal names of Eastern European Jews who emigrated to the US in the late 19th and early 20th centuries  
Spectator: He knocks down Stern’s wife, calls her a kike. (1963)

five-to-two (1914) British, derogatory or offensive; rhyming slang  
Sunday Times: He said that all the Australians were white trash. (1973)

shonicker, shonikher, shonicker (1914) US, derogatory or offensive; origin uncertain; perhaps from Yiddish shonikher itinerant trader  
T. J. Farrell: Two hooknoses... did come along. Andy and Johnny O’Brien... stopped the shonickers. (1932)

ikeymo (1922) Dated, derogatory or offensive; from ikey + Moses  
I. Wolfert: I’m a Hackney Jew, Dave. At school they called us Ikeymos and Jewboys. (1954)

mocky, mockey, mocky (1931) US, derogatory or offensive; origin uncertain; perhaps from Yiddish makeh boil, sore  


jew, Dave. At school they called us Ikeymos and Jewboys. (1954)

yok (1923) Derogatory; Yiddish. goy ‘Gentile’ reversed with unvoicing of final consonant  
R. Samuel: There were five Jewish boys in the gang— I was the only ‘Yok’. (1981)

White people

white trash (1831) Applied to the poor white population of the Southern States of America, and hence, contemptuously, to white people in general  
Sunday Times: He said that all the Australians were white trash. (1973)

gringo (1849) Used contemptuously by Spanish-Americans to refer to English people or Anglo-Americans; from Mexican Spanish gringo gibberish  
Aldous Huxley: Annoying foreigners and especially white Gringos is a national sport in Honduras. (1933)

Mary (1853) Australian; applied to a white woman, especially in the phrase white Mary; compare earlier sense, Aboriginal woman  
N. Cato: They made their usual inquiries, saying they were investigating the death of a ‘white mary’ at the coast. (1974)

jeff, Jeff Davis (1870) US Black English, used contemptuously or dismissively; from Jefferson Davis (1808–89), president of the Confederate States 1861–5

white nigger (1871) Contemptuous or dismissive, orig US; applied to a white person who does menial work; compare earlier sense, a servile black

combo, comboman (1896) Australian; applied to a white man who lives with an Aboriginal woman; from combination + -o

kelch, kelt, -tch, keltz (1912) Contemptuous or dismissive; origin unknown  
Chester Himes: Then he met a high-yellah gal, a three-quarter keltz, from down Harlem way. (1938)

ofay (1925) US derogatory, mainly Black English; applied contemptuously or dismissively to a white man who lives with an Aboriginal woman; from combination -o  
R. Samuel: There were five Jewish boys in the gang— I was the only ‘Yok’. (1981)

Miss Ann, Miss Anne, Miss Annie (1926) US Black English; applied to a white woman

Charlie, Mr. Charlie, Boss Charlie (1928) US Black English; applied contemptuously to white men considered as oppressors, and subsequently (1964) to any white man  
Guardian: Stokely Carmichael was there promising ‘Mr. Charlie’s’ doomsday. (1967)

peckerwood, peckawood (1929) US; applied especially to a poor white; from earlier sense, woodpecker  
William Faulkner: Even a Delta peckerwood would look after even a draggle-tail better than that. (1942)

peck (1932) US Black English; abbreviation of peckerwood  
C. Brown: A poor white peck will cuss worse’n a nigger. I am talking about white men who ain’t poor like them pecks. (1969)
wonk (1938) Australian, contemptuous or dismissive; applied to a non-Aboriginal; compare earlier sense, inexperience person
- E. Webb: Sometimes whites would get out of cars along the road and walk over to the Camp and peer inside the humpies, or rough bough shelters, curious to see how the abos lived. . . . One of the boys naived a board up on a tree near the road with 'wonks—keep out!' on it. (1959)

white meat (1940) Mainly US; applied to white women considered as sexual conquests or partners - Michael Maguire: I'm off white meat. I have a good thing going with a negro film editor. (1976)

pink toe, pink toes (1942) US Black English; applied to a young white woman - Chester Himes: When Word whispered it about that even the great Mamie Mason had lost her own black Joe to a young Pinktoe, the same panic prevailed among the black ladies of Harlem as had previously struck the white ladies downtown. (1965)

Whitey, Whitie (1942) Contemptuous or dismissive, mainly Black English; from white + -y - Charles Drummond: Get to hell away from me! You Whities stink! (1967)

Babylon (1943) Black English, mainly Jamaican, contemptuous or dismissive; applied to anything which represents the degenerate or oppressive state of white culture, especially the police or a policeman, (white) society or the Establishment; earlier applied to any great luxurious city (e.g. Rome or London), after the Biblical city - G. Slovo: My father him work as a labourer for thirty years in Babylon. (1986)

grey (1944) US Black English; also used adjectivally to denote 'white-skinned'
- O. Harrington: The year was 1936, a bad year in most everybody's book. Ellis the cabdriver used to say that even the grays downtown were having it rough. (1985)
- Ed Lacy: Funny thing with grey chicks.... They're always so sure their white skin is the sexiest ever. (1965)

pale-face (1945) US Black English, used contemptuously or dismissively

pink (1945), pinky, pinkie (1967) US Black English; from the colour of white people's skin - Trevanian: P'tit Noel shrugged. 'All pinks sound alike.' (1973)

Jumble (1957) Black English; alteration of John Bull - Monica Dickens: Get all you can out of the Jumbles. (1961)

the man, the Man (1963) US Black English; from earlier sense, people in authority
- Guardian: Rius is not Uncle Tomming it around Harlem with 'the Man'. He has brought a foreign visitor. (1972)

ridge-runner (1966) US Black English; from earlier sense, hillbilly

honky, honkey, honkie (1967) US Black English, contemptuous or dismissive; origin unknown - Bernard Malamud: Mary forcefully shoved him away. 'Split, honky, you smell.' (1971)

roundeye (1967) Applied by Asians to a European, in contrast to slant-eye, slopehead, etc.
- John Le Carré: In the East a roundeye could live all his life in the same block and never have the smallest notion of the secret tic-tac on his doorstep. (1977)

Amerika, Amerikkka (1969) Derogatory, orig US; applied to American society viewed as racist, fascist, or oppressive, especially by black consciousness; from German Amerika America; variant form Amerikka with the initial letters of Ku Klux Klan - Black Panther. The political situation which exists here in Nazi Amerikkka. (1973)

Coloured people

darky, darkie (1775) Orig a neutral colloquial use, but now derogatory or offensive; from dark
- John Le Carré: Was it something about not taking the darkies on as conductors? (1983)

skepsel, schepsel (1844) South African; applied derogatorily or offensively to a Black or Coloured person; from earlier sense, creature, from Afrikaans skepsel, Dutch schepen; from scheppen create

black velvet (1899) Australian & New Zealand, offensive; applied to a black or coloured woman, especially as the sexual partner of a white man - G. Casey: Did you see the girls, when you were out there? . . . The sort of black velvet that sometimes makes me wish I wasn't a policeman. (1958)

wog (1929) British, derogatory or offensive; often applied specifically to Arabs, but also widely used to denote blacks and other dark-skinned people; also applied to the Arabic language; origin unknown; often said to be an acronym (e.g. 'worthy Oriental gentleman'), but this is not supported by early evidence - J. Savarin: He hated Arabs. . . . They were all wogs to him. (1982)
- William Haggard: 'I've picked up a few words of wog, sir'. . . . The driver spoke terrible barrack-room Arabic. (1982)

boong (1943) Australian, derogatory or offensive; from earlier sense, Aboriginal

darky bunny (1966) Derogatory or offensive
- New Society: White South Africans who wanted to gamble, buy Playboy . . . and go to bed with a 'jungle bunny'. (1974)

Black people

Sambo (1704) A nickname and, more recently, a derogatory or offensive term for a black; origin uncertain; perhaps from Spanish, person of mixed race, or from an African language (e.g. Foulah, uncle)

nigger (1786) Now mainly derogatory or offensive when used by white people, but neutral or approving in Black English; alteration of obsolete neger black person, from French nègre - L. Hughes: A clansman said, 'Nigger, Look me in the face—And tell me you believe in The great white race.' (1964)

nig (c1832), nig-nog (1959) Derogatory or offensive; nig, abbreviation of nigger; nig-nog, reduplicated abbreviation of nigger - R. Gadyne: Judd read National Front puts Britain First. Someone had scribbled Nigs Out. (1974)
- Julian Symons: He wanted to
send the nig nogs and the Pakis back where they belong, in the jungle. (1975)

coön (1834) Orig US, derogatory or offensive; abbreviation of raccoon. ■ Oz: You might... deplore the way that the publicity was angled—poor old coön, he’ll thank us in the end. (1969)

Jim Crow (1838) Derogatory or offensive, orig and mainly US; from the name of a black character in the early 19th-century plantation song ‘Jim Crow’. ■ Saturday Review: Jim Crow works at the depot. (1948)

sooty (1838) Derogatory or offensive, orig US ■ Sunday Express: I am not racist, but I can’t bear to watch the sooties any more—it’s like Uncle Tom’s Cabin. (1986)

dinge (1848), dingy (1895) US, derogatory or offensive; also used adventitiously, especially with reference to a jazz style developed by black musicians; dinge back-formation from the adjective dingy dark. ■ Ernest Hemingway: That big dinge took him by surprise... the big black bastard. (1933)

kink (1865), kinky (1926) US, derogatory or offensive, dated; in allusion to blacks’ tightly curled hair

shine (1908) US, derogatory or offensive ■ Raymond Chandler: His voice said bitterly: ‘Shines. Another shine killing. That’s what I rate after eighteen years in this man’s police department.’ (1940)

jigaboo, jiggabo, jijjiboo, zigabo, etc. (1909) US, derogatory or offensive; origin unknown; compare jigg and bugabo ■ Lawrence Sanders: The tall one... was a jigaboo. (1970)

smoke (1913) US, derogatory or offensive ■ Lawrence Sanders: Five men. One’s a smoke. (1970)

boogie (1923) US, derogatory or offensive; perhaps an alteration of bogey ■ Ernest Hemingway: I see that big boogie there mopping it up. (1937)

jazzbo, jasbo (1923) US; from earlier sense, vaudeville act ■ Jack Kerouac: He dodged a mule... was a jazzbo. (1937)

jig (1924) US, derogatory or offensive; origin unknown; compare jigabo ■ Ernest Hemingway: This jig we call Othello falls in love with this girl. (1935)

spade (1928) Derogatory or offensive, orig US; from the colour of the playing-card suit ■ N. Saunders: On Saturdays try Brixton market—nearly as big, more genuine, lots of spades. (1971)

jit (1931) US, derogatory or offensive; origin unknown

peola (1942) US Black English; applied to a light-skinned Afro-American, especially a girl; origin unknown ■ Z. N. Hurston: Dat broad I seen you with wasn’t no pe-ola. (1942)

pink toe(s) (1942) US Black English; applied to a light-skinned Afro-American woman

nigra, nigrum (1844) US; from the name of the hero of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, a novel (1851–2) by Harriet Beecher Stowe. ■ New Statesman: The old ‘munt’, as the African is still widely and insultingly termed. (1977)

sputter (1954) Mainly Black English, origin unknown ■ A. Young: Nobody want no nice nigger no more... They want an angry splib A furious nigrah. (1969)

munt (1948) South African, derogatory or offensive; from Bantu umuntu person ■ New Statesman: The old ‘munt’, as the African is still widely and insultingly termed. (1962)

spook (1945) Derogatory or offensive, orig and mainly US ■ Elmore Leonard: We almost had another riot... The bar-owner... shoots a spook in his parking lot. (1977)

boot (1954) Mainly Black English, sometimes derogatory ■ H. Simmons: A lot of paddy studs still didn’t know that boots were human. (1962)

schwartz (1954) Mainly Black English, origin unknown ■ V. Bellerby: The ‘dinge’ piano trill, deriving from the efforts of the early Negro instrumentalists to sing through their instruments, instinctively holding the rich overtones of Negro speech. (1958)

kink (1865), kink (1926) US, derogatory or offensive, dated; in allusion to blacks’ tightly curled hair

kinky (1926) US, derogatory or offensive; origin unknown ■ Lawrence Sanders: The tall one... was a jigaboo. (1970)

jungle. (1975)

spade (1928) US, derogatory or offensive; origin unknown; compare jigg and bugabo ■ Lawrence Sanders: The tall one... was a jigaboo. (1970)

vogue (1923) Mainly Black English, origin unknown ■ V. Bellerby: The ‘dinge’ piano trill, deriving from the efforts of the early Negro instrumentalists to sing through their instruments, instinctively holding the rich overtones of Negro speech. (1958)

pink toe(s) (1942) US Black English; applied to a light-skinned Afro-American woman

nigra, nigrum (1844) US; from the name of the hero of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, a novel (1851–2) by Harriet Beecher Stowe. ■ New Statesman: The old ‘munt’, as the African is still widely and insultingly termed. (1958)

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kink (1865), kink (1926) US, derogatory or offensive, dated; in allusion to blacks’ tightly curled hair

shine (1908) US, derogatory or offensive ■ Raymond Chandler: His voice said bitterly: ‘Shines. Another shine killing. That’s what I rate after eighteen years in this man’s police department.’ (1940)

jigaboo, jiggabo, jijjiboo, zigabo, etc. (1909) US, derogatory or offensive; origin unknown; compare jig and bugabo ■ Lawrence Sanders: The tall one... was a jigaboo. (1970)

smoke (1913) US, derogatory or offensive ■ Lawrence Sanders: Five men. One’s a smoke. (1970)

boogie (1923) US, derogatory or offensive; perhaps an alteration of bogey ■ Ernest Hemingway: I see that big boogie there mopping it up. (1937)

jazzbo, jasbo (1923) US; from earlier sense, vaudeville act ■ Jack Kerouac: He dodged a mule wagon; in it sat an old Negro plodding along... He slowed down the car for all of us to turn and look at the old jazzbo moaning along. (1957)

jig (1924) US, derogatory or offensive; origin unknown; compare jigabo ■ Ernest Hemingway: This jig we call Othello falls in love with this girl. (1935)

spade (1928) Derogatory or offensive, orig US; from the colour of the playing-card suit ■ N. Saunders: On Saturdays try Bixton market—nearly as big, more genuine, lots of spades. (1971)

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nigra, nigrum (1844) US; from the name of the hero of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, a novel (1851–2) by Harriet Beecher Stowe. ■ New Yorker: Pryor goes through his part pop-eyed, playing Uncle Tom for Uncle Toms. (1977). Hence Uncle Tom to act like an Uncle Tom (1947) ■ Punch. An obligation... applies constantly to all underdog groups, constantly tempted by rewards to uncle-tom, to pull the forelock. (1967)

pink chaser (1926) US; from Black English pink white person ■ Carl Van Vechten: Funny thing about those pink-chasers the ofays never seem to have any use for them. (1926)

A subservient black person

white nigger (1837) Orig US

Uncle Tom (1822) Orig US; applied to a servile black man; from the name of the hero of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, a novel (1851–2) by Harriet Beecher Stowe. ■ New Yorker: Pryor goes through his part pop-eyed, playing Uncle Tom for Uncle Toms. (1977). Hence Uncle Tom to act like an Uncle Tom (1947) ■ Punch. An obligation... applies constantly to all underdog groups, constantly tempted by rewards to uncle-tom, to pull the forelock. (1967)
tom, Tom (1959) US; short for Uncle Tom
■ Publishers Weekly: By installing ‘American Nigger Toms’ as the Third World élite, the U.S. has controlled the angry hunger of the poor populace. (1975). Hence tom, tom it (up) to behave servilely to someone of another (especially white) race (1963) ■ M. J. Bosse: Vergil just smiled, Tomming it up. (1972)
oreo (1969) US; ‘the term comes from a standard commercially prepared cookie which has two disc-shaped chocolate wafers separated by sugar cream filling. An “oreo” is thus brown outside but white inside’ (Alan Dundes, Mother Wit from the Laughing Ballool (1973))
This is the year of the Bionic Black, and porkchop nationalists have lost prestige. (1977)
coconut, coconut head (1988) From the notion of the coconut’s brown exterior and white interior ■ Daily Telegraph: Mrs Boateng, former member of Lambeth council’s social services committee, has been barred from Brent’s Black Section for two years after being branded a ‘coconut’. (1988)

Gipsies
didicoi, didskai, -kei, diddekai, diddicoy, didkeki, -ki, -kie, -ky, didicoy, didikai, -koi, didycoy (1853) Romany
gippo, gypo, gyppo (1902), gippy, gyppy, gyppy (1913) From gipsy + -oj-y, influenced by Egyptian ■ Dylan Thomas: Ducking under the gippo’s clothespegs. (1953)

Foreigners
dago (1903) Derogatory or offensive; from earlier sense, person of Spanish or Italian extraction ■ Ngaio Marsh: ‘Such indiscretion has doubtless been suitably chastised,’ remarked the Russian. . . . Charles Rankin . . . slipped his arm through Nigel’s. ‘Not a very delicious gentleman, that dago,’ he said loudly. (1934)
wog (1942) Derogatory or offensive; from earlier sense, coloured person ■ C. Hollingworth: King Zog Was always considered a bit of a Wog. Until Mussolini quite recently Behaved so indecently. (1942) ■ Times Literary Supplement: We have travelled some distance from the days when Wogs began at Calais. (1958)
gook (1959) US, derogatory or offensive; from earlier sense, Asian person

Johnny Foreigner (1990) British, usually derogatory; used as a personification of a foreign person, usually with ironic reference to British xenophobia; first recorded in 1990, but in use earlier ■ Sunday Times: When Moore was arrested on a trumped-up charge in Bogota just before the 1970 World Cup, we all knew that it was a dastardly ruse by Johnny Foreigner, and so it proved. (1993)

An immigrant
Jimmy Grant, jimmygrant (1845) Australian, New Zealand & South African; rhyming slang ■ F. Clune: More and more Crown land was taken up by the ever-arriving ‘jimmygrants’ who had government help and favour. (1948)
ethno (1976) Australian; from ethn(e) + -o
See also bohunk (p. 35), guinea (p. 35), hunk (p. 35), kipper (p. 33), Paki (p. 36), snow-bird (p. 36), turkey (p. 34), wetback (p. 37).

A person who wears a turban
rag-head (1921) North American, derogatory or offensive ■ Canadian Magazine: East Indians are called ‘rag-heads’ if they continue to wear the traditional turban of the Sikh religion. (1975)
towelhead (1985) Derogatory or offensive ■ Observer: If you did a brain scan of the British racist mentality, you find that, on the whole, we reckon the ‘towelheads’ have a pretty rough time of it. (1991)

A supporter of racial segregation
seg, seggie (1965) US ■ New Yorker: Fulbright for the first time openly appealed for black votes, because he believed that he couldn’t win without them and that the ‘seggies’ . . . would vote against him no matter what he did. (1970)

cuss (1775) Orig US, mildly derogatory; applied to a person of the stated sort; probably an alteration of curse (although not recorded in that sense until later), but widely apprehended as being short for customer ■ Economist: This American computer company’s successes include a profitable joint venture with Romania, an awkward cuss by any standards. (1988)

stick (1785) Often mildly derogatory; applied to a person of the stated sort ■ Guardian: He could easily convey the impression of being a dry old stick: but he had a heart of gold, a gentle, mocking humour and a genuine love for people of all sorts, all ages. (1992)

article (1811) Now mainly jocular derogatory; applied mainly to a person of the stated sort

2. People

A person
customer (1589) Usually mildly derogatory; applied to a person of the stated sort; from earlier sense, person with whom one has dealings ■ F. D. Davison: He was a mean customer, . . . a petty bureaucrat, and a smooger, to boot. (1940)

fish (1770) Mainly derogatory; applied to a person of the stated sort ■ F. Scott Fitzgerald: I’m tired of being nice to every poor fish in school. (1932)
■ Listener: The old man is revealed as having been a very cold fish. (1958)

what’s-your-name (1757) Used in addressing a person whose name is not known or remembered ■ William Faulkner: Is that so? Look here, Mister What’s-your-name. (1942)
beggar (1833) British, often mildly derogatory; applied to a person (typically a man or boy) of the stated sort; from earlier sense, mendicant, partly as a euphemistic substitute for bugger. ■ Norman Stone: In the old days, I played squash reasonably well, but gave it up on reaching age 41, when my small boy was born—it is a dangerous sport for over-weight middle-aged chaps who smoke too much, and I have a duty to see the little beggar through until his first divorce. (1992)

guy (1847) Orig USA; orig and mainly applied to a man, but in modern use also employed with reference to women, especially in the plural; from earlier sense, grotesque-looking person, object of ridicule (in allusion to the effigies of Guy Fawkes burnt on 5 November) ■ Daily Mail: The way Alan Rickman plays villains, nice guys are lucky to come second. (1991) ■ Washington Post: Former LPGA winners, like Meg Mallon and Beth Daniels, invaded the interview room to kid: 'It's hard for me to talk with you guys around,' said Sheehan, quietly. (1993)

specimen (1854) Mainly derogatory; applied to a person of the stated sort. ■ D. H. Lawrence: I am assiduously, admirably looked after by Mrs Bolton. She is a queer specimen. (1926)

egg (1855) Applied to a person (typically a man) of the stated sort. ■ Compton Mackenzie: It doesn't look a hundred quid to a tanner on his blue. Bad luck. He's a very good egg. (1914) ■ P. G. Wodehouse: She's a tough egg. (1938)

outfit (1867) Mainly US, usually derogatory, dated. ■ C. E. Mulford: You ain't believin' everythin' this outfit tells you, are you? (1924)

sort (c1869) Applied to a person of the stated sort. ■ Cecil Roberts: On the whole he was not a bad sort. (1891)

duck (1871) US, usually derogatory; in modern use applied mainly to a person (typically a man) of the stated sort; from earlier sense, foolish or eccentric person. ■ W. H. Smith: As you said, Goldsby, Slosher's a slick duck. (1904)

baby (1880) Mainly US; compare earlier use as a term of address. ■ Alan Lomax: Some terrible babies who make a living using it. (1966)

individual (1888) Mildly derogatory; applied to a person of the stated sort; from earlier standard English sense, person. ■ Guardian: They are almost invariably quite dull and friendless individuals who use hospital radio as a surrogate social life. (1991)

artist (1890) Applied to a person devoted to or unusually proficient in the stated (reprehensible) activity. ■ D. M. Davin: A real artist for the booze, isn't he? (1949) ■ M. Sayle: Education, if he [sc. the Australian worker] thinks of it at all, seems to him a childish trick whereby the 'bullshit artist' seeks to curry favour with the boss and thus get a better job. (1960)

possum (1894) Australian; usually applied to a person of the stated sort, but also used as a term of address; from earlier sense, small marsupial. ■ R. Hall: Goodness what an ugly little possum you've turned into. (1982)

perisher (1896) Usually implying contempt or pity (generally the former if not further qualified); compare earlier, obsolese sense, something extreme. ■ R. Park: He had no name. In the thaw they buried him in the pass, and his epitaph was Some Poor Bloody Perisher. 1864. (1957)

babe (1898) Orig & mainly US; applied to both men and women; compare earlier baby in same sense. ■ Stanley Kauffman: This Mrs. Adair . . . has such hotsy-totsy cottages. . . . Yesterday this Adair babe has an ad in the paper. (1952)

whatsit (1898) Used for referring to someone whose name is not known or remembered; often following a title; from earlier use referring to something the name of which is not known or remembered.

scout (1912) Applied to a person (typically a man) of the stated sort. ■ John Le Carré: I've got nothing against old Adrian. He's a good scout. (1965)

merchant (1914) Applied to a person devoted to or unusually proficient in the stated (reprehensible) activity; from earlier sense, fellow, chap. ■ Railway Magazine: One wonders how many drivers, other than the confirmed speed merchants, will even attempt to run the 8.20 a.m. from Kings Cross from Hitchin to Huntingdon in 24 min. (1957) ■ George Sims: Sorry to be such a grom merchant. But . . . we're broke, you see. (1971)

cookie (1917) Orig USA; usually applied to a person of the stated type; apparently from earlier sense, small cake. ■ W. R. Burnett: He's a real tough cookie and you know it. (1953)

animal (1922) Applied to a type of person; mainly in the phrase there is no such animal. ■ Times Review of Industry: Computer makers would therefore have us believe that there is no such animal as a typical programmer. (1963)

type (1922) Usually applied to a person (typically a man) of the stated sort or belonging to the stated organization. ■ D. E. Westlake: I was not alone in the room. Three army types were there . . . tall, fat, khaki-uniformed. (1971) ■ M. Hebben: 'Type over here. . . . He recognises it.' The 'type over here' was a man about thirty-five with long blond hair. (1981)

whosis, whoosis (1923) Used for referring to someone whose name is not known or remembered; often following a title; representing a casual pronunciation of who is this? ■ Ian Fleming: Don't forget one thing, Mister Whoosis. I rile mighty easy. (1965)

job (1927) Applied to a person (typically a pretty girl) of the stated sort. ■ Gen: A 'ropey job' is likely as not to be a blonde who proved uncollaborative. (1942)

character (1931) Often mildly derogatory; from earlier sense, personage. ■ Joanna Cannan: The character who owns Mab . . . leaves his gear out in her. (1962)

tod (1933) British; short for body. ■ Crescendo: The show-tune formula is quite simple—I know dozens of bods who make a living using it. (1966)
bleeder (1938) British; often used in commiseration; from earlier sense, unpleasant person. Alexander Baron: She’ll kill the poor little bleeder. (1952)

so-and-so (1943) Usually applied to a person (typically a man) of the stated sort; from earlier sense, unpleasant person. Ann Bridge: The Countess is a hard-baked, publicity-minded old So-and-so, with about as much consideration for other people as a sack of dried beans! (1958) John Cleese: Eric wrote on his own, poor so-and-so. (1990)

face (1944) Orig US, Black English. John Morgan: Now this face was the ideal man for me to have a deal with. (1967)

whosit, whoosit, whozit, whoozit (1948) Used for referring to someone whose name is not known or remembered; often following a title; representing a casual pronunciation of who is it? Josephine Tey: Someone, say, insists that Lady Whosith never had a child. (1951)

gunk (1964) US, derogatory; compare earlier sense, viscous or liquid material. P. Marlowe: A couple of gunks who used to be bouncers at the ‘Golden Pagoda’. (1968)

An old person

See under Old (p. 369).

A promiscuous person

See under Sex (pp. 66–8).

A severe, hard, or uncompromising person

See under Severity, Oppressiveness (p. 428).

An ugly person

See under Beauty & Ugliness (p. 219).

An unpleasant or despicable person

See under Unpleasantness (p. 223).

One self

one’s arse, (mainly US) one’s ass (1698) Orig used in imprecations; in modern use usually with get and an adverb or adverb phrase, as a synonym for come or go. Language: Get your ass in here, Harry! The party’s started! (1972)

number one (1704) Often in look after number one and similar phrases. John Hall: Bennet, who always looks after number one, is wearing Scapa scanties next to the skin. Long underpants and a long-sleeved vest made of thick, oily wool. (1964)

us (1828) Used in dialectal and non-standard English in place of me. Guardian: You knock on three or four doors at once, out they all come... It’s ‘Give me six Lemons’. ‘I don’t want none.’ ‘Give us four Cola.’ ‘Give us six mixed.’ (1991)

yours truly (1833) From its use preceding the signature at the foot of a letter. K. Munroe: Are you willing to work in cahoots with yours truly? (1889)

jills (1906) Used with a possessive adjective: my jills = I, his jills = he, etc.; from Shelta

ego (1913) British public schools’ slang, dated; used instead of if in answer to the question quis? who?, especially when claiming an object; from Latin ego I

this baby (1919) Mainly US. Richard Gordon: Some skippers cook the log, but not this baby. (1953)

Terms of address to a person

See under Unisex at Terms of Address (p. 54).

A male person; a fellow

lad (1553) British; applied to a lively (young) man, especially a highly sexed one; the 16th-century record of the usage is an isolated one, and the modern use (mainly in the phrases a bit of a lad and quite a lad) appears to be an early 20th-century creation; also used in the phrase the lads, denoting the men in one’s team or social circle. Harry Carmichael: Bit of a lad is Mr. Alan Clark... running round fancy-free for years. (1960) Daily Mail: I couldn’t have asked for a better start. The lads have made it easy for me to settle in and it’s looking good. (1991)

gent (1564) Short for gentleman; early examples are probably simply written abbreviations rather than representations of a spoken shortened form. South China Morning Post: ‘How did they get my name?’ wailed a gent who shall remain anonymous. (1992)

cove (1567) Now mainly Australian; from Romany kowa thing, person. Advertiser (Adelaide): You Aussie coves are just a bunch of drongoes. (1969)

dog (1618) Dated; applied to a man of the stated type. Punch. Algý... You lucky dog, you possess all the accomplishments I lack! Jim... Oh, nonsense! Why, you’re making me out a regular Crichton! (1890)

what’s-his-name (1697) Used as a substitute for a man’s name that is not known or remembered. S. Wilson: Marilyn. What is going on? Brian. Same old thing: raising the whatsis-name-the Antichrist. (1979)

chap (1704) Now mainly British; from earlier sense, buyer, customer (compare the similar sense development of customer); ultimately short for chapman merchant. Elizabeth Oldfield: I don’t suppose the poor chap can help looking like God’s gift to women. (1983)

joker (1810) Mainly Australian & New Zealand; from earlier sense, one who jokes. G. H. Fearnside: You think we married jokers have got no lives of our own. (1965)

chappie, chappy (1821) Orig Scottish; from chap + -ie. P. G. Wadehouse: It was one of those jolly, peaceful mornings that make a chappie wish he’d got a soul or something. (1925)

feller (1825) Representing a colloquial pronunciation of fellow; in modern usage often used with the implication ‘young man’ (as
contrasted with ‘young woman’, in the context of (potential) sexual contact, and sometimes specifically ‘boyfriend, male lover’ ■ ** Petticoat**: If we did walk into a pub alone and not one feller blinked an eyelid we’d probably think there was something wrong with us. (1971)

**bird** (1843) ■ J. B. Priestley: He’s one of them queer birds that aren’t human until they’re properly pickled. (1939)

**Joe, joe** (1846) From the male personal name Joe ■ **Publishers Weekly**: The average Joe probably thinks that cyclists . . . are eccentric folk. (1973)

**blope** (1851) Now mainly British; sometimes applied specifically to a boyfriend or male lover; from Shelta ■ **Alan Blassdale**: Do you know I followed a blope to court one morning . . . and sat there and watched while he . . . pleaded guilty to the offences I was still following him for. (1983)

**rye** (1851) Dated; from Romany rai gentleman

**bugger** (1854) Applied to a man of the stated type, often in commiseration or affection; from earlier sense, unpleasant man ■ **Frederic Manning**: Not when there are two poor buggers dead, and five more not much better. (1929)

**omee, omie** (1859) Orig showmen’s slang, an omee; used to indicate that one is not concerned about the finer points of a situation.

**plug** (1863) Derogatory, mainly US; from earlier sense, undistinguished or incompetent person

**fella, (dated) fellah** (1864) Representing a colloquial pronunciation of fellow; in modern usage often used with the implication ‘young man’ (as contrasted with ‘young woman’, in the context of (potential) sexual contact), and sometimes specifically ‘boyfriend, male lover’ ■ **Sapper**: ‘An engaging fellah,’ said Hugh. ‘What particular form of crime does he favour?’ (1920) ■ **Surf**: The only thing I think could come close to the thrill [sc. of bungee-jumping] would be to be a Page Seven Fella. (1992)

**outfit** (1867) Mainly US, usually derogatory

**dude** (1883) Orig & mainly US; from earlier sense, over-roused man, dandy ■ **Martin Amis**: I think my dog go bite one of them white dudes. (1984)

**snoozer** (1884) Orig US; from earlier sense, sleeper ■ **Harry Marriott**: Zim was a tough old snoozer. I know that he cut his knee open with an axe and sewed it up with some worsted yarn and his wife’s darning needle. (1966)

**geezer, geesser, geyzer** (1885) In earliest use applied only to old men; representing a dialectal pronunciation of guiser mummer ■ **New Statesman**: I have my hands full with his china who is a big geezer of about 14 stone. (1965)

**gazebo, gazabo** (1889) Orig & mainly US, often derogatory; perhaps from Spanish gazapo sly fellow ■ **Henry Miller**: But there was one thing he seldom did, queer gazabo that he was—he seldom asked questions. (1953)

**josser** (1890) British; usually mildly derogatory; from earlier sense, fool ■ **Vance Palmer**: We’ve no call to worry about the big jossers putting the screw on us; we’ve the legal titles to our leases and can get our price for them. (1948)

**jasper** (1896) US, derogatory; often applied specifically to a country bumpkin; from the male personal name Jasper ■ **Mark Corrigan**: If that dark jasper calls on you again, try and keep him here. (1963)

**blighter** (1904) British; applied to a male person of the stated type; from earlier sense, unpleasant man ■ **Guardian**: Jack Good . . . may be 60, but he’s an energetic, opinionated old blighter. (1992)

**gink** (1906) Orig US, mainly derogatory; origin unknown ■ **Alfred Draper**: George wasn’t the most talkative gink alive. (1970)

**gunzel, gonsil, gunshel, gun(t)zel, gunzl** (1910) US; applied to a ( naïve) young man; from Yiddish genzel, from German Gänsllein goesling

**bimbo** (1918) Orig US, mainly derogatory; from Italian bimbo little child, baby ■ **Raymond Chandler**: There’s a thousand berries on that bimbo. A bank stick-up, ain’t he? (1936)

**bastard** (1919) Usually applied to a male person of the stated type; from earlier sense, unpleasant man ■ **Keith Weatherly**: ‘You’re not a bad bastard, Hunter,’ he said, ‘in spite of your lousy cooking.’ (1968)

**cat** (1920) Orig US, Black English ■ **Colin MacInnes**: The coloured cats saw I had an ally, and melted. (1959)

**gee** (1921) US; from the pronunciation of the initial letter of guy ■ **Simon Chalils**: ‘Just a minute, this ain’t O’Brien.’ ‘No. This is some other gee.’ (1968)

**stud** (1929) US, mainly Black English; from earlier sense, man of sexual prowess ■ **Dan Burley**: If you’re a hipped stud, you’ll latch on. (1944)

**sod** (1931) Applied to a male person (or animal) of the stated type, often in affection or commiseration; from earlier sense, unpleasant man ■ **D. Wallace**: That’s a shame, the poor little dawg, but if that was mine I’d hev that put down. That can’t help but make no end o’ work, the poor little sod. (1959)

**Joe Blow** (c1941) US; applied to a hypothetical average man ■ **Billie Holiday**: But just let me walk out of the club one night with a young white boy of my age, whether it was John Roosevelt, the President’s son, or Joe Blow. (1956)

**Joe Public** (1942) Orig US, theatrical slang, often mildly derogatory; applied originally to (a member of) the audience, and hence to (a typical male member of) the general public ■ **Denis Norden**: We’ve really got to provide Joe Public with some sort of ongoing visual reference-point. (1978)

**Joe Doakes, Joe Dokes** (1943) US; applied to a hypothetical average man ■ **Jazz Monthly**: All these items are essentially jazz-tinged versions of Joe Doakes’s favourite melodies. (1968)

**ou (plural ouens, ous)** (1949) South African; from Afrikaans ■ **J. Drummond**: I ought to keep you locked up. The ou that shot Loder . . . he’s dangerous. (1979)

**son-of-a-bitch, sonofabitch, sonuvabitch**, etc. (1951) Now mainly US; from earlier sense, unpleasant man ■ **Arthur Hailey**: Besides, the son-of-a-bitch had guts and was honest. (1979)
Joe Soap (1966) Applied to a hypothetical average man; from earlier sense, gullible person.

Guardian. Socialists have become . . . over-eager to find out what Joe Soap is doing in order to tell him not to do it. (1969)

whatsisface, whatzisface (1967) Orig & mainly US; used as a substitute for a man’s name that is not known or remembered; representing a casual pronunciation of what’s-his-face, alteration of earlier what’s-his-name.

Joseph Wambaugh: They’re having another Save Harry Whatzisface party there today. (1977)

Joe Bloggs (1969) British; applied to a hypothetical average man.

Daily Telegraph: In too many cases these forms arrive on the desk of a busy executive who concludes that Joe Bloggs down the corridor must have signed the order. (1971)

pisser (1975) Orig US, derogatory; usually applied to a man of the stated type; compare earlier sense, someone or something extraordinary.

Melchior’s Sleeper Agent. The old pisser had not got away! (1975)

An old man

See under An old person at Old (p. 369).

A promiscuous man

See under Sex (pp. 66–7).

An unpleasant or despicable man

See under An unpleasant or despicable person at Unpleasantness (p. 223).

Terms of address to a man

See under Used to address a male at Terms of address (pp. 52–3).

Typical of a man

laddish (1841) In modern British use applied (often disapprovingly) to the behaviour of young men in groups; from lad + -ish.

Sunday Times: They could talk Shakespeare and football, be sensitive then brutal. Sure, David Baddiel and Frank Skinner were laddish together, but there was never anything vulgar. (1996) Hence laddishness (1886).

Guardian: All three drank heroically and took a lot of drugs. But can we truly trust these occasional manifestations of laddishness when weighed against a lifetime of writing. (1992)

blokeish, blokish (1957) British; applied to positive behaviour associated with men, especially straightforwardness, bluntness, and lack of affectation; from bloke + -ish.

Sunday Times: The Mayles then popped up in a restaurant in Provence, Lindsay Duncan all cutesy and John Thaw all blokeish. (“When you’re ready, maestro!”) (1993)

A woman

mot. (dated) mort (1561) Often with an implication of promiscuity; origin unknown.


faggot (1591) Derogatory; applied to a woman of the stated (undesirable) sort; often in the phrase old faggot; compare earlier sense, bunch of sticks.

Daily Mirror: ‘Urry up wi’ that glass o’ beer, you lazy faggot!’ (1969)

tit (1599) Derogatory, dated; compare earlier sense, small horse; apparently an onomatopoetic formation, as a term for something small.

E. R. Eddison: The Demons. . . . since they had a strong loathing for such ugly tits and stale old trots, would no doubt hang her up or disembowel her. (1922)

dame (1899) US, sometimes derogatory.

Joanna Cannan: I’ve never set eyes on the dame. (1962)

biddy (1786) In modern use mainly derogatory except in US Black English; originally applied, especially in the US, to an Irish maid-servant; from the female personal name Biddy, an abbreviated form of Bridget; see also biddy under An old woman at Old (p. 369). C. P. Snow: I believe she’s the bloodiest awful specimen of a party biddy. (1960)

gal (1795) Representing a colloquial or dialectal pronunciation of girl.

Guardian: My Mum, known as Annie but whose Hebrew name was Judith, was quite a gal and beautiful too. (1992)

buer (1807) British, orig northern dialect & tramps’ slang; often with an implication of promiscuity; origin unknown.

Graham Greene: ‘Christ,’ the boy said, ‘won’t anybody stop that buer’s mouth?’ (1938)

titter (1812) Dated; applied to a young woman or girl; origin uncertain; compare tit woman and tits woman’s breasts.

Landfall (New Zealand): Boys, she’s a larky little titter. (1953)

what’s-her-name (1816) Used as a substitute for a woman’s name that is not known or remembered.

Guardian: It makes one feel like What’s-her-name in the ‘Trovatore’. (1880)

sheila, sheelah, sheilah, shelah (1832) Now Australian & New Zealand; applied to a young woman, and sometimes specifically a girlfriend; probably from the generic use of the (originally Irish) female personal name Shelita.

H. Garner: If I was to fight over every sheila I’d fucked there’d be fights from here to bloody Darwin. (1965)

heifer (1835) Derogatory: from earlier sense, young cow, female calf.

Black World: That heifer that was to fight over every sheila I’d fucked there’d be fights from here to bloody Darwin. (1965)

bird (1838) Now mainly British; applied to a young woman, and sometimes specifically a girlfriend; a usage paralleled by (but not continuous with) Middle and early Modern English bird maiden, girl.

News Chronicle: Hundreds more geezers were taking their birds to ‘The Hostage’ and ‘Make me an Offer’. (1960) New Statesman: Victor is an ex-seaman in his twenties, who deserted in South Africa and got in law trouble out there for shaking up with a coloured bird. (1961)

bint (1855) Mainly derogatory; applied to a (young) woman, especially non-Caucasian; in
common use among British servicemen in Egypt and neighbouring countries during World Wars I & II; from Arabic bint daughter. Kingsley Amis: As the R.A.F. friend would have put it, you could never tell with these foreign bints. (1958)

quail (1859) US; applied to a (sexually attractive) young woman; compare 17th-century slang quail courteous. Time: A less active sport is ‘piping the flock’, when Cal males watch Cal ‘quais’ preening in the sun on the steps of Wheeler Hall. (1947)

popsy, popsie (1862) Applied to a (sexually attractive) young woman, sometimes specifically a girlfriend; apparently a nursery extension of pop an obsolete term of endearment for a girl or woman, with the suffix -sy. Marghanita Laski: American colonels with their poppies. (1944)

girls (1863) Applied, often jocularly, to women of any age, especially as a form of address; used mainly by men; from earlier girl female child, young woman. New York Times: She referred to the women accompanying Mr. Smith and Patrick Kennedy earlier in the evening as ‘you girls’. (1991)

femme, fem (1871) US; applied to a young woman; from French femme woman. American Speech: The organizer of a Brush-off-club ‘made up of moulant soldiers who were given the hemlock cup by femmes back home’. (1944)

dona, donah (1873) British, dated; often applied specifically to a girlfriend; from Spanish dona or Portuguese donna woman. J. Farrell: Blokes and donahs... of the foulest slums. (1887)

judy (1885) Sometimes applied to a wife or girlfriend; from the female personal name; compare earlier sense, ridiculous or contemptible woman, perhaps from the name of the wife of Punch. Guardian: During a strike a man whose judy is working is obviously better off than the man with a wife and three kids about the house. (1973)

chippy, chippie (1886) Orig US, usually derogatory; applied to a young woman; often with an implication of promiscuity; compare earlier obsolete sense, younger
totty (1890) British; applied to a young woman; often with an implication of promiscuity; from earlier sense, small child. Colin Watson: Showing off. Certainly, why not? There were a couple of totties just behind. (1977)

tootsy, tootsie, tootsy-wootsie, tootsie-wootsie, etc. (1895) Mainly US; applied to a young woman, and also specifically to a girlfriend; often used as a familiar form of address; compare earlier sense, foot. P. O’Connor: Two chicks. One for me. ... One of the hot-time tootsies. (1979)

chick (1899) Orig US; applied to a (sexually attractive) young woman; compare earlier use as a term of endearment for a young child. It: Jackie, always a ‘with-it chick’. (1971)

frail (1899) Mainly US; from earlier, obsolete sense, prostitute. Eric Linklater: Bullets whistling through the air to... threaten widowhood for the ravished frail. (1931)

jane (1906) Orig US; applied to a (young) woman, sometimes specifically a girlfriend; from the female personal name Jane. Eric Stanley Gardner: ‘Who was this jane? Anybody I know? ’ ‘No one you know. ... She had been a nurse in San Francisco.’ (1967)

tom (1906) Australian, dated; applied to a (young) woman, sometimes specifically a girlfriend; short for obsolete Australian Tom-tart, rhyming slang for sweetheart. Norman Lindsay: Who’s yer tom? She must be yer sweetheart. Why don’t yer up an’ kiss her? (1933)

frippet (1908) Derogatory; applied to a frivolous young woman; origin unknown. Elizabeth Taylor: ‘Mistress!’ he thought... It was like the swine of a man to use such a word for what he and Edwards would have called a bit of a frippet. (1945)

broad (1911) Orig & mainly US, usually derogatory; often with an implication of promiscuity, especially in early use; compare obsolete US broadwife female slave separated from her husband, from abroad + wife. Eric Linklater: Slummock... had got into a jam with a broad; no ordinary broad, but a Coastguard’s broad. (1931)


muff (1914) Orig US; usually with an implication of promiscuity; from earlier sense, female genitals

tabby (1916) Applied to an (attractive) young woman; from earlier obsolete sense, (catty) older woman. John Wain: ‘I said, is it true what Joe says that you’ve got yourself fitted out with a tabby? ’ ‘My humble roof,’ said Robert... is shared by a distinguished actress.’ (1956)

deb, debby (1917) Orig US; applied to a débutante; first attested in sub-deb, and not recorded independently before 1920; abbreviation of débutante. Sunday Dispatch: The impossibility of parents doing any of the old kind of chaperonage in the hours kept by the present day (or night) ‘debbies’ during their present season. (1928)

John Batjieman: The debbs may turn disdainful backs On Pearl’s uncouth mechanic slacks. (1966)

sub-deb (1917) Dated, mainly US; applied to a girl who will soon come out as a débutante, and hence broadly to a girl in her mid-teens. Time: The season’s débutantes danced their way into society while eager sub-debs looked on. (1947)

tab (1918) Australian, dated; applied to a (young) woman; compare earlier sense, old woman. H. Simpson: We don’t need to go mackin’ round with Chinks and wimmen’s earnings. We pay our tabs... when we want ‘em, and tell ‘em to get to hell out of it when we don’t. (1932)

number (1919) Usually applied to a woman of the stated type. William Gaddis: Have you seen a little blond number named Adeline? (1955)
bimbo (1920) Orig US; often with an implication of promiscuity; compare earlier sense, fellow, chap • Detective Fiction Weekly: We found Durken and Frenchy LaSueur, seated at a table... with a pair of blonde bimboses beside them. (1937)

wren (1920) US; applied to a (young) woman; from earlier sense, small bird ▪ Arthur Conan Doyle: Scanlan has... married his wren in Philadelphia. (1929)

clicklet, chiclet (1922) US; applied to a (sexually attractive) young woman; from chick young woman + diminutive suffix -let, punningly after Chiclets, name of a brand of chewing gum

bit (1923) British, mainly derogatory; applied to a (young) woman; probably short for bit of fluff, goods, etc., woman viewed as a sex object ▪ Barbara Gooden: If I want a common little bit for a best girl that’s my look-out, too. (1953)

quiff (1923) Orig dialect; applied to a young woman, often with an implication of promiscuity; origin unknown ▪ L. Smelling: If only there was some other quiff about I might be able to deal with her indifference. (1973)

wimp (1923) British, dated; origin uncertain; perhaps an abbreviated alteration of woman

twist-and-twirl (1924), twist (1926) Mainly US, often derogatory; applied to a young woman; twist-and-twirl rhyming slang for girl ▪ Ross Macdonald: I hate to see it happen to a pretty little twist like Fern. (1953) ▪ Herbert Gold: I’m just as good as any of those Pittsburgh twist-and-twirls. (1956)

bim (1925) US; applied to a young woman; often with an implication of promiscuity; short for bimbo ▪ J. T. Farrell: Studs Lonigan capped off a bim whose old man is lousy with dough. (1935)

poule (1926) Applied to a (sexually attractive) young woman; often with an implication of promiscuity; from French poule hen ▪ J. B. Priestley: He is probably amusing himself somewhere with that little brown poule of his. (1949)

sort (1933) Orig Australian; applied to a (young attractive) woman, sometimes specifically a girlfriend ▪ Kit Denton: They’d told me, ‘Don’t worry about bringing anything except a bottle. The sorts are laid on.’ (1960)

potato (1957) Australian; short for potato peeler, rhyming slang for sheldr ▪ Germaine Greer: Terms... often extended to the female herself. Who likes to be called... a potato? (1970)

mole (1965) Australian, usually derogatory; perhaps a variant of moll female companion ▪ R. D. Jones: Give us a hand you lazy mole! (1979)

chapeps (1966) British, jocular; from chap + female suffix -ess ▪ Independent: There are plenty of leisure interest groups catering for the brighter than average, from the Conan Doyle Society to the Sundial Society, from the queen’s English Society to the Society for Psychical Research—all packed with bright chaps and chapesses eager to discuss matters of mutual interest with similar with a view to forming a lasting relationship. (1996)

quim (1935) Often used collectively with reference to women, often with an implication of promiscuity; from earlier sense, vulva, vagina ▪ Saturday Night (Toronto): The key to success in this contest is a flashy car; and if the car is both expensive and impressive ‘you have to beat the quim off with a hockey stick’. (1974)

split (1935) North American, derogatory; probably from the notion of the vulva as a slit; compare gash p. 47 and quim p. 48 ▪ Globe & Mail (Toronto): An announcement was posted that the force’s first female officer Constable Jacqueline Hall, had been hired. ‘He’s gone and hired another split, as if we don’t have enough whores and splits in the department already,’ Mrs. Nesbitt quoted the sergeant as saying. (1975)

chaps (1936) Dated; applied to a lady; from rye man + mort woman ▪ James Curtis: Anyone taking a quick look at her might think she was on the up-and-up. She would give that impression too, to anyone who heard her talk and saw her act. Though... she would have to give up that rye mort touch. (1936)

toots (1936) Orig & mainly US; applied to a young woman, and also specifically to a girlfriend; often used as a familiar form of address; probably an abbreviation of tootsy ▪ New Yorker: ‘Hi, toots,’ Ducky said in Donald’s voice a few minutes later to a tiny girl. (1975)

mystery (1937) British; applied to a young woman newly arrived in a town or city, or with no fixed address ▪ Observer: Many teddys, tearaways and mysteries (drifting girls) are put off by the typical orthodox youth club. (1960)

knitting (1943) British, naval slang; applied to a young woman or collectively to young women; from the stereotypical view of knitting as a woman’s occupation

Richard, richard (1950) British; short for Richard the Third, rhyming slang for bird ▪ G. F. Newman: I was just sleeping at this Richard’s place during the day... I didn’t know she was brassing. (1970)

trim (1955) US, mainly derogatory; often with an implication of promiscuity ▪ Ed Lacy: The broad isn’t worth it, no trim is. (1962)

chapeps (1966) British, jocular; from chap + female suffix -ess ▪ Independent: There are plenty of leisure interest groups catering for the brighter than average, from the Conan Doyle Society to the Sundial Society, from the queen’s English Society to the Society for Psychical Research—all packed with bright chaps and chapesses eager to discuss matters of mutual interest with similar with a view to forming a lasting relationship. (1996)

Betty (1989) US; applied to a (young attractive) woman; from the female personal name Betty
A female partner or companion

moll (1823) Applied to a criminal’s or gangster’s female companion; compare earlier sense, prostitute  ■ Ngaio Marsh: I can see you’re in a fever lest stick Ben and his moll should get back… before you make your getaway. (1962)


best girl (1887), best (1904) Orig US; applied to a girlfriend or female lover  ■ Saturday Review: To pluck a bouquet for his best girl. (1944)

best girl (1887), best (1904) Orig US; applied to a girlfriend or female lover • Saturday Review. To pluck a bouquet for his best girl. (1944)

dinah (1898) British, dated; applied to a girlfriend or female lover; alteration of donna woman, sweetheart, probably influenced by the female forename Dinah  ■ J. R. Ware: Is Mary your Dinah? (1909)

squirie, squarey (1917) Australian; from obsolete Australian slang square (of a woman) respectable + ve ■ Royal Australian Navy News: You bloody beaut… we’ll be back outside with our squaries! (1970)

patootie (1921) US; applied to a girlfriend or female lover; often in the phrases hot patootie, sweet patootie; probably an alteration of {sweet) potato ■ New Yorker: She was, successively,… the wife and/or sweet patootie of the quartet. (1977)

mamma, mama, momma (1926) US; applied to a girlfriend or wife; compare earlier sense, promiscuous woman

dumbl Dora (1922) Orig US; from the female personal name Dora  ■ Graham Melnhes: They [sic. hens] would then wait expectantly, heads cocked on one side with a sort of dumb-Dora inquisitive chuckle. (1965)

bimbo (1927) Orig US; applied to a young woman considered sexually attractive but of limited intelligence; compare earlier sense, woman  ■ W. Allen: Sure, a guy can meet all the bimbos he wants. But the really brainy women—they’re not so easy to find. (1976)

dumb blonde (1936) Orig US; applied to a conspicuously attractive but stupid blonde woman  ■ M. Derby: The dumb blonde to whom all instruments and machinery were insoluble riddles. (1959)

bimbette (1982) Orig US; applied especially to an adolescent or teenage bimbo; from bimb(o + diminutive -ette ■ Time: Serious actresses, itching to play something more demanding than bimbette and stand-by wives, love divine masochist roles. (1982)

An ugly woman

See under An ugly person at Beauty & Ugliness (p. 219).

An unpleasant or despicable woman

See under An unpleasant or despicable person at Unpleasantness (p. 223).

Terms of address to a woman

See under Used to address a female at Terms of Address (pp. 53-4).

3. Children

kid (1690) From earlier sense, young goat  ■ Lord Shaftesbury: Passed a few days happily with my wife and kids. (1841) ■ Guardian: The easy life suits me. I’ll like just being at home with my kids and grandchildren. (1991)

weeny (1844) North American; from weeny small ■ Ottawa Citizen: Our five-year-old granddaughter keeps asking when the trip is going to begin. Travelling with weenies is something that Mama and I have done for most of our lives. (1977)

shaver (1854) Dated; applied to a boy; mainly in the phrases young shaver, little shaver; from earlier sense, fellow, chap  ■ New Yorker: Sometimes I think of
your father when he was a little shaver of four or five setting
solemnly off. (1970)

nipper (1859) Mainly British; compare earlier obsolete senses, a boy who assists a
costermonger, carter or workman, a thief or pickpocket. ■ Times: When I was a nipper at school in
Glasgow etc. (1972)

kiddy, kiddie (1889) From kid + -y. ■ Economist: I bought the kiddies some computers for Christmas and wrote
them off against tax. (1988)

tyke (1894) Often (and probably orig) applied specifically to a mischievous child; often in the phrase little tyke; from earlier sense, boorish

kiddo (1896) From kid + -o. ■ John o’ London’s: When
mellie. (1974)

God forbid, Gawd forbid (1909) British; rhyming slang for kid. ■ Margery Allingham: You take
‘Er Ladship and the Gawd-ferbid to the party. (1955)

sprout (1945) British, orig nautical; compare earlier sense, new recruit, trainee. ■ Martin Amis:
Here I attempted a few minutes’ work, not easy because the fifty bawling sprogs had classes there in the afternoon.
(1973)

kiddywink, kiddiewinkie, kiddywinkle, kiddwyinkle (1957) Fanciful extension of kiddy. ■ Peter Bull: My performance . . . was pretty macabre, and
must have frightened the bejesus out of the kiddy-winks. (1959)

squirt (1958) US; compare earlier sense, insignificant (but presumptuous) person. ■ Bernard Malamud: George . . . remembered him giving him nickels
. . . when he was a squirt. (1958)

saucepan lid (1961) Rhyming slang for kid

littlety (1965) Australian; from little small, young + -y. ■ K. Denton: Mum used to tell me that when I was a littlety I wouldn't hold anyone's hand. (1976)

rug-rat (1968) US. ■ Terry McMillan: Me, Gloria, and
Savannah’ll help you do everything but breast-feed the little rug-rat when it’s born. (1992)

ankle-biter has its advantages. It keeps you out of museums, cathedrals and temples and shows you the raw side of life: playgrounds, supermarkets, laundrettes and public toilets. (1984)

A mischievous child

monkey (1819) Usually in the phrases little monkey and young monkey. ■ Charles Dickens: ‘Where have you been, you young monkey?’ said Mrs Joe, stamping her foot. (1861)

horror (1846) Often in the phrase little horror. ■ Spectator: Children adore reading about little horrors being
taken down a peg. (1958)

Peck’s bad boy (1883) Mainly US; applied to a
mischievous boy; from the name of a fictional character created by G. W. Peck (1840-1916). ■ Atlantic Monthly. [Governor George] Wallace’s motives—
go, a Peck’s-bad-boy desire to make trouble, a yen to see just what would happen if a presidential election were thrown into the House of Representatives, or a combination of all these—
do not actually matter. (1967)

perisher (1935) Usually in the phrase little perisher; from earlier use as a general term of contempt for someone. ■ Guardian: I taught the whole school . . . about Palm Sunday . . . Not one of the little perishers knew.

An illegitimate/legitimate child

illegit (1913) Abbreviation. ■ C. Carnac: Somerset
House . . . registers the illegits . . . as carefully as the rest. (1958)


A baby

snork (1941) Australian & New Zealand; from earlier sense, young pig, from the verb snort or grunt, probably from Middle Dutch or Middle Low German snorken. ■ B. Pearson: It’s better to knock it on the head at birth, isn’t it? Like a snork you
don’t want. (1963)

A teenager

teeny-bopper (1966) Applied to a young
adolescent; typically a girl, who follows the latest
fashions in clothes, pop music, etc.; from teen or
teen(ager + bopper) dancer to or fan of pop music;
influenced by teeny small, after
duke or grunt, probably from Middle Dutch or
Middle Low German snorken. ■ B. Pearson: It’s better
to knock it on the head at birth, isn’t it? Thus my teenybopper
daughter. (1979)

weeny-bopper (1972) Largely interchangeable
in meaning with teeny-bopper, although
sometimes notionally applied to younger
adolescents or pre-teens; from weeny small, after
weeny-bopper. ■ Evening News: Being a weeny-bopper can be
a problem when it comes to clothes . . . Our model, Karen,
early 13, got her mum to take her round the stores. (1975)

A person who has a sexual affair with someone
much younger

cradle-snatcher (1907), cradle-rober (1926) Derogatory, orig US. ■ R. Erskine: Crispin asked me
to dance. ‘Cradle-snatcher,’ said Miranda nastily. (1965)

baby-snatcher (1911) British, derogatory or
descriptive. ■ Victoria Sackville-West: You don’t imagine that
he really cared about that baby-snatcher? Good gracious me,
he was a year old when her daughter was born. (1930)
4. Relations

**folks** (1715) In American English often applied specifically to one’s parents. ■ US Today: While vacationing with his folks, 14-year-old Jerry Curran was hit on at a snack machine by a 16-year-old girl. (1991)

**tribe** (1833) Applied dismissively to a large family or group of relatives. ■ Blackwood’s Magazine: I could fancy her... writing lengthy epistles to a tribe of nieces. (1909)

**people** (1851) Dated: in British slang (orig public schools’) often applied specifically to parents and other immediate family sharing the same house. ■ Mrs. Dyan: I went down into Devonshire, for me to be introduced to my people-in-law, you know. (1984)

**clan** (1879) Jocular: from earlier sense, group of Scottish families. ■ Guardian: This country is at war, though you would never believe it from the shenanigans of some members of Her Majesty’s clan. (1991)

**Father**


**pappy** (1763), **pa** (1811), **pop** (1838), **poppa** (1887), **pops** (1928) Variants and abbreviations of archaic papa (1681), from French papa, ultimately from Greek papa. ■ H. E. Bates: Larkin, that’s me,’ Pop said. (1958) ■ Simon Harvester: Me a defenceless girl... without my Mom and Pops. (1976)

**governor, guv’nor** (1827) Cuthbert Bede: I suppose the bills will come in some day or other, but the governor will see to them. (1853)

**old man** (1892), **old boy** (1892), **old fellow** (1922) ■ Lonnie Donnegan: My old man’s a dustman. (1922)

**Mother**

**mam** (1500), **mammy** (1523) Perhaps imitative of a child’s ma, ma

**mummy** (1784), **mum** (1823), **mumsy** (1876), **mums** (1893) Imitative of a child’s pronunciation. ■ Agatha Christie: Poor Mumsy, she was so devoted to Dad, you know. (1933)

**ma** (1823) Abbreviation of archaic mama

**old girl** (1846), **old woman** (1892), **old lady** (1932) ■ J. D. Brayshaw: He lets aht that Liz an’ ‘er ole gal was going ter the Crystal Palace. (1888)

**momma** (1884), **mom** (1876), **mommy** (1902) US variant of mamma, mummy. ■ New Yorker: ‘Of course we will, Mom,’ I said, and I patted her hand. (1975)

**Spouse**

**better half** (1842) Orig used by Sir Philip Sidney in his Arcadia (1580): ‘Argalus to Parthenia, his wife’ ‘My dear, my better half [said he] I find I must now leave thee’; but latterly only in colloquial use; theoretically applied to husbands or wives, but in practice more often used of wives

**Husband**

**hubby** (1688) Abbreviation of husband. ■ Pall Mall Gazette: In disputes between a hubby and his better half. (1887)

**old man** (1768) ■ John le Carré: She was a sight better qualified than her old man. (1974)

**papa** (1904) US; also applied to a woman’s lover

**pot and pan** (1906) Rhyming slang for old man

**old pot** (1916) Mainly Australian; pot short for pot and pan

**monkey man** (1924) US; applied to a weak and servile husband

**Wife**

**old woman** (1775), **old lady** (1836), **old girl** (1853) ■ Jimmy O’Connor: If you went home and found someone indoors with your old woman, what would you do? (1976)

**missus, missis** (1833) Alteration of mistress ■ Daily Mirror: If you fancy taking the missus for a day out, you take her virtually free. (1975)

**dutch** (1889), **duchess** (1895) British; dutch, abbreviation of duchess (originally applied to costermongers’ wives), which itself may be an abbreviation of obsolete Duchess of Fife, rhyming slang. ■ Thomas Pynchon: Time for closeting, gas logs, shawls against the cold night, snug with your young lady or old dutch. (1973)

**trouble and strife** (1908) Rhyming slang ■ G. Fisher: it’s the old trouble and strife—wife. I want to see her all right. (1977)

**Mrs.** (1920) ■ Philadelphia Inquirer: You know, when I go home, the Mrs. says to me: ‘Well, what happened tonight, night clerk?’ (1973)

**ball and chain** (1921) From the ‘ball and chain’ attached to a convict’s leg to prevent escape, in humorous allusion to a wife’s restriction of her husband’s freedom. ■ Eastern Eye: Attractive Arabian Yemeni male... seeking a pretty Sunni Muslim female (18–30) that is pleasing to my eyes and heart for the intention of marriage, not the traditional classic old ball and chain routine. (1996)

**her indoors, ‘er indoors** (1979) British; applied to a wife or other live-in female partner, often with the implication of a domineering woman; popularized by the Thames TV series Minder (1979–88); applied by the character Arthur Daley to his wife, who never appears on screen. ■ Boardroom: How many punters, one wonders, soften the blow to ‘her indoors’ concerning the purchase of a new Comiche by also bringing home a snappy little Lotus in her favourite colour! (1989)
Brother

**bro (1937)** Used as a written abbreviation since the mid 17th century, but as a spoken form, introduced into British public school slang in the 1930s.

Sister

**sis (1656)** Abbreviation. Dulcie Gray: You’ll be wearing clothes at the Private View, won’t you, Sis? (1974)

skin and blister (1925) Rhyming slang
- George Ingram: I saw your skin and blister last night. (1935)

Grandfather

**grandaddy, grand-daddy (1769), grandad, grand-dad (1819), grandpa (1862), grandpop (1890), grandpappy (1919)**
- Nicholas Blake: Have a glass of port, won’t you? It’s rather delish. Grand-pop laid it down. (1953)

**gramp, gramps (1898)** Shortened from grandpapa.
- Linacre Lane: That ther kid’s ther dead spit of’is gramp. (1966)

Grandmother

**granny (1663), gran (1863), grandma (1867)**
- R. Daniel: By the time she gets back to ‘Mum’ and ‘Gran’ she’ll be wet through. (1960)

**nana, nanna (1844), nan (1940), nan-nan (1959)** Childish pronunciation.
- New Society. Jackie gets £1 a week off her grandmother, who owns a pub: ‘My nan’s got tons of money.’ (1975)

**nin (1958)** A Liverpool usage, from Welsh nain grandmother
- Peter Moloney: Every true wacker has three relations, viz. ‘Me Mar, Me Nin, an me Anti-Mury.’ (1966)

5. Terms of Address

**mate (c1450)** From earlier sense, companion; orig 'used as a form of address by sailors, labourers, etc.' (OED) Sydney Morning Herald. I asked a station attendant ... if the train was the North-West Mail. 'I wouldn't have a clue, mate,' was the reply. (1974)

**old boy (1601)** British
- C. H. Ward-Jackson: It's a perfect bind, old boy. (1943)

**bud (1614)** Recorded in British English in the 17th century, but now only used in American English, where it re-emerged in the mid 19th century; perhaps representing a childish pronunciation of brother; compare buddy
- W. R. Burnett: Gamblers ... would often hand him a quarter ... and say: 'Keep it, bud.' (1953)

**old cock (1639)** Compare cock
- Terence Rattigan: Good show, Count, old cock! (1942)

Aunt

**auntie, aunty (1792)** From aunt + -ie

A former spouse or lover

**ex (1929)** From earlier sense, one who formerly occupied a particular position, from the prefix ex.
- Ladies’ Home Journal. His ‘ex’ also got away with every stick of furniture and household equipment. (1971)

**pop the question (1826), pop (1867)** New York Times. Now’s the time to pop the question! 20% off diamond engagement rings. (1972)

**tie the knot (1717)** Independent. If he and Jill Morell decide to delight the tabloid press and tie the knot, they might like to draw up a prenuptial agreement. (1991)

**splice (1874)** Back formation from spliced married
- Tim Heald: If the old flapper spliced with the colonel she stood to lose a million dollars. (1981)

**spliced (1751)** From earlier sense, (of two ropes) joined together
- Christine Brooke-Rose: Yes, I worked in an office before I got spliced, didn’t you know, solicitors in the Strand. (1968)

**hitched (1857)** Orig US; from earlier sense, tied
- J. H. Fullarton: That’s the fifth o the old gang to get hitched up in five months. (1944)


**pal (1681)** Early vocative uses are difficult to distinguish from the primary sense 'friend' (see under A friend at Friends (pp. 62–3)); the neutral and hostile uses are a recent development
- New York Times. Kramer’s mantra, uttered whenever he was frightened or embarrassed or ashamed, is ‘humenahumenahumenahumenahmena’. Gleason, no longer capable of being any of these things, simply said, ‘Just wing it, pal’. (1992)

**mister (1760)** From earlier use as a title prefixed to a man’s name

**bo (1825)** Mainly US; probably a shortening of boy
- Judge: The man who tells the bootblack ‘Keep the change, bo’. (1919)

**baby (1835), babe (1906)** US; used between men; common especially in the 1960s
- Listener. The dialogue is over, baby. (1968)
cock (1837) British; compare old cock
George Mells: Smarten yourself up a bit, cock, before we go on! (1965)

boss (1839) Orig US; from earlier sense, master

bub (1839) US; perhaps representing a childish pronunciation of brother, or from German Bube boy
Chicago Star: Hey bub—can I get a squnt at yer uppurs? (1948)

dad (1847) Used originally to address an older man, from earlier sense, father; used from the 1920s (originally in jazz slang) to address any male
Time & Tide: Sunset Strip is real zoolie, dad. (1960)

buddy (1848) US; from bub + y, or from German Bube boy

guvner, guv’ner, guvnor, guv’nor (1852) British; used to a man of higher status; from earlier sense, boss
Listener: You can be sure that if somebody calls you ’mister’ on the railways he doesn’t like you. The term of endearment is ‘guv’nor’. (1968)

matey (1859) From mate + y
June Drummond: Right, matey, ’oo told you? (1973)

buster (1866) Mainly US; usually used disrespectfully; from earlier sense, riotous fellow (ultimately a dialectal variant of burster)
A. Shepard: ‘OK, Buster,’ I said to myself, ‘you volunteered for this thing.’ (1962)

chum (1867) From earlier sense, friend
William Deverell: And you’re still in a car turning on sirens, chum. When you’re not on job action. (1989)

doc (1869) US; now mainly in the phrase What’s up, Doc?, popularized as the catch-phrase of the Warner Bros. cartoon character Bugs Bunny; from earlier sense, doctor

sonny, sonnie (1870) Used to a small boy or, disparagingly, to a man younger than the speaker; from son + y
Robert Louis Stevenson: ‘Come here, sonny,’ says he. (1870)

buddy (1885) US; from earlier sense, male friend
Daily Express: When I went into the night nursery to get the boys up I was greeted with a shout of ‘Stick ’em up, buddy’. (1937)

old man (1885) Dorothy Sayers: Just brush my bags down, will you, old man? (1927)
cocker (1888) British; from cock + er
Arnold Wesker: It was good of you to help us cocker. (1960)

guv (1890) British; used to a man of higher status; short for guvner

old chap (1892) British
Len Deighton: Just tell me the whole story in your own words, old chap. (1962)

Sunny Jim, Sonny Jim (1911) Used mainly to a small boy: Sunny Jim coined in 1903 as the name of an energetic character used as the proprietary name for a US brand of breakfast cereal
Angus Wilson: Does your mother know you’re out, Sonny Jim? (1967)

cobber (1916) Australian & New Zealand; from earlier sense, friend
Bronze swagman book of bush verse: Come in, old cobber, and swallow a pot. (1976)

old bean (1917) British, dated
Jack Thomas: I say, old bean, let’s stick together. (1955)

big boy (1918) Orig US; usually used ironically
J. B. Priestley: ‘Am I right, sirs?’ ‘You sure are, big boy.’ (1939)

sport (1923) Mainly Australian
H. Knorr: Don’t get your knickers in a knot, sport! (1982)

old fruit (1928) British, dated
Terence Rattigan: You don’t mind me asking, did you, old fruit? (1951)

sonny boy (1928) Used to a small boy or, disparagingly or threateningly, to a man younger than the speaker; inspired by the song ‘Sonny Boy’ (1928), sung by Al Jolson & Ted Allbeury: What do you want, sonny boy? . . . I don’t trust you, you English bastard. (1978)

daddy (1927), daddy-o (1948) Dated, orig jazz slang; compare dad
Time & Tide: The walls are crazy... And the scene uncool for you, Daddy-o. (1960)

chief (1935) Orig US; from earlier use for addressing one’s superior

mush, mooosh (1936) British; perhaps from Romany mooch man
John Brown: Look, mooosh, you’ll strip off or I’ll take them off you. (1972)

pop (1943) Orig US; applied to an old man
Kylie Tennant: You’ve just told us, pop... that if the cops catch up on you, you’ll be lining a cell. (1943)

chummy (1948) British, police slang; applied to a person accused or detained; from earlier sense, friend
Douglas Clark: We could get Chummy into the dock and pleading guilty, but we’d not get a verdict. (1969)

tosh (1954) British; origin uncertain; perhaps from Scottish tosh neat, agreeable, friendly
M. Kenyon: ‘Sortin’ you out for a start, tosh!’ came a voice. (1978)

squire (1959) British; used to a man of higher status
Times: Tell you what, squire—keep the pension and I’ll take the cash. (1982)

mac, mack (1962) From earlier sense, someone whose name contains the Gaelic prefix Mac
John Wainwright: The bouncer... tapped him on the shoulder and said ‘Hey, mac’. (1973)

sunshine (1972) British
P. Cave: I turned back to the ticket man. ‘OK now, sunshine?’ (1976)

Used to address a female

missis, missus (1875) Alteration of mistress

girls (1906) Used to address a group of women of any age (and in ironic homosexual use to address men)
Stephen Gray: I was subjected to more exploratory innuendo than if I’d strolled in, slung my handbag on the reception desk, said ‘Well, hi girls!’ and primped my crewcut. (1988)

sister (1906)
R. Boyle: Come on, sister... Why won’t you stay and talk to me? I’m a nice guy. (1976)

ma (1932) Applied to an (older) married woman; from earlier sense, mother
6. Groups

A group of people

bunch (1622) • Dawn Powell: He liked knowing the 'Greenwich Village Bunch'. (1936)

mob (1688) Abbreviation of mobile, short for Latin mobile vulgus excitable crowd • Sylvia Ashton-Warner: I know one girl from another, course you do in my mob anyway. (1960)

and Co. (1757) Used to denote the rest of a group; from earlier use in the names of business companies • Listener: What Khrushchev and Co. might do is one thing. (1959)

crowd (1840) Orig US • Woman: She was going through a particularly rebellious phase and seemed to be in with a wild crowd. (1971)
gang (1945) Applied to a person’s group of friends or associates; from earlier sense, group of criminals  
Gillian Freeman: All the gang would be there, and she’d be ever so proud of him. (1955)

team (1950) Mainly applied to a gang of criminals  
Peter Laurie: We had a whisper about a team going to do a certain pay van. (1970)

rat pack (1951) Orig US; applied to a disorderly mob of youths

circus (1958) Applied to a group of people acting or performing together in some activity  
Observer. The Kramer circus comes to Britain this year immediately after Wimbledon. (1959)
posse (1986) Mainly US; applied to a gang of black (especially Jamaican) youths involved in organized or violent crime, often drug-related; from earlier sense, body of men summoned by a sheriff, etc. to enforce the law  
Boston: Enforcement agents blame Jamaican posses for some 500 homicides and ... gun-running. (1987)

A group walking two by two in a long file

crocodile (a1870) Usually applied to schoolchildren  
Melvyn Bragg: The crocodile rows of little children. (1968)

A group of things or people

Pip, Squeak, and Wilfred (1920) British; applied to a group of three things (often, specifically, three widely awarded World War I medals, the 1914–15 Star, the War Medal, and the Victory Medal, worn together) or people; from the names of three animal characters in a Daily Mirror children’s comic strip  
Times: That goes for Messrs Pip, Squeak and Wilfred, too. (1977)

7 Status

Status, reputation

cred (1981) British; applied to status among one’s peers; short for credibility  
Bob Geldof: ‘Cred’ was achieved by your rhetorical stance and no one had more credibility than the Clash. (1986)

street cred (1981) British; applied to status among one’s peers, especially in fashionable urban youth subculture  
International Musician: I know that walking down main street with an oboe in hand does nothing for the street cred. (1985)

That which is important

the be-all and end-all (1854) Applied to something regarded as the most important element in something; from Shakespeare Macbeth I. vii ‘That but this blow Might be the be all, and the end all.’ (1605)  
Daily Mail: He says ... he has lasted because he has never been obsessed with his work. That, for him, showbusiness has never been his ‘be all and end all’. (1981)

the business end (1878) Applied to the part of something which performs its main function  
Scientific American: The business end of the coronagraph is the quartz polarizing monochromator. (1955)

the half of it (1932) Applied to the most significant or important part of something; usually in negative contexts  
Marian Babson: ‘How awful,’ she said. ... I nodded, without telling her she didn’t know the half of it. (1971)

the nitty-gritty (1963) Orig US; applied to the most crucial or basic aspects of something; origin unknown  
Times: To get down to what the American will call the ‘nitty-gritty’ of the matter—the heart, sir, the heart. (1966)

An important statement

mouthful (1922) Orig US  
P. G. Wodehouse: ‘Nice nurse?’ ‘Ah, there you have said a mouthful, Pickering. I have a Grade A nurse.’ (1973)

When the most important point is reached

when the chips are down (1945) Orig US; applied to a crucial or decisive moment; from the notion of the irrevocability of laying chips on the table in a gambling game  
Spectator: For the fact is that when the chips are down, the Right wing of the Tory Party comes up. (1959)

A high-ranking or important person

bigwig (1703) From the large wigs formerly worn by men of high rank or importance  
Len Deighton: He was there to give the Cubans some advice when they purged some of the bigwigs in 1970. (1984)

tyee, tyhee (1792) North American; from Chinook jargon, chief  
Harry Marriott: The...
agricultural tyees in both Canada and the United States have taken a wise view. (1966)

big bug (1817) Orig and mainly US, often derogatory. ■ Evelyn Waugh: He seems to have been quite a big bug under the Emperor. Ran the army for him. (1932)

big gun (1834) Variant of earlier great gun in same sense. ■ Barbara Kimenye: Mrs. Lutanya’s set absolutely refused to accept this high-handed ruling, preferring to remain large fish in their own small pond, rather than compete with the big guns of Gumbi and Male villages. (1966)

big fish (1836) Orig US; often applied to the ringleader in an enterprise. ■ New Scientist: What with being a writer and a T.V. personality and a sort of know-all pundit A.L.W. was quite a big fish. (1991)

big dog (1843) US. ■ Guardian: ‘This is now the big boys’ play,’ said the divisional chief of staff, Col Keith Kellogg. ‘If you’re going to piss on a tree, you better be a pretty big dog.’ (1991)

brass (c1864) Orig US; applied to officers of high rank in the armed services; from the brass or gold insignia on officers’ caps. ■ A. C. Clarke: The general was unaware of his faux pas. The assembled brass thought for a while. (1959)

brass-hat (1893) Orig British; applied to an officer of high rank in the armed services; from the brass or gold insignia on officers’ caps. ■ A. Maclean: The German brass-hats in Norway may well be making a decision as to whether or not to try to stop us again. (1984)

big brass (1899), high brass (1941), top brass (1949) Orig US; applied to officers of high rank in the armed services, and hence to any group of people of high rank; from brass in same sense. ■ Life: I don’t suppose that Congress and the Big Brass would ever agree to that. (1945) ■ Economist: The ‘high brass’ of American business was also well represented at the meeting. (1951) ■ Patrick Ruell: What I’m going to tell you is restricted information. That means it’s only known to the Prime Minister, [and] security top brass. (1972)

big noise (1906) Orig US. ■ J. B. Priestley: He’s rather a big noise here. Landed man really, but has a seat on our Board, and a local J.P. (1942)

big cheese (1914) Orig US; compare main cheese boss; ultimately from cheese right or excellent thing, probably from Urdu chiz thing. ■ Guardian: I remember the day that Gordon Manning, then a big cheese at CBS News, . . . called up with the good news. (1991)

big boy (1924) Orig US. ■ Guardian: The Derbyshire girl was right up there with the big boys, Yves Saint Laurent and Giorgio Armani. (1991)

biggie (1926) Orig US; from big + -ie. ■ Melody Maker: It’s time for me to be a biggie. . . . My aim now is to get . . . on to the front page. (1969)

big shot (1927) Orig US; variant of earlier great shot in same sense. ■ New Statesman: On arrival I was asked to dine with Thomas Lamont, along with a number of big-shots in the American newspaper world, including . . . Henry Luce of Time-Life. (1960)

high-up (1929) ■ Physics Bulletin. Whitten and Popoff, both high-ups in NASA’s Ames Research Center, have filled the gap admirably despite their lack of academic background. (1971)

wheel (1933) Orig and mainly US. ■ A. Fox: Some Pentagon wheel’s flying in and Don feels he has to travel up there with him. (1980)

big wheel (1942) Orig and mainly US. ■ Monica Dickens: He was evidently quite a big wheel at the studio. (1958)

big daddy (1948) Orig US. ■ Spectator: Mr. Francis Williams, journalism’s Big Daddy. (1958)

big enchilada (1973) US

The most important or highest-ranking person; the person in charge.

guver (a1659) British; applied especially to one’s employer or superior; from earlier sense, elderly or respected man; ultimately probably a contraction of godfather. ■ Daily Mail: Daley was glad up to a frenzy in the dressing room by his manager, Ron Atkinson. ‘The guver has been driving home to me all week that Winterburn had a bad game against the Polish winger at Everton,’ he said. (1981)

guvnur, guv’ner, guvnor, guv’nor (1802) British; representing a casual pronunciation of governor. ■ Observer: Sometimes the peteman finds his own jobs and acts as guvnor of his own team. (1960)

old man (1830) Applied originally to a commanding officer or ship’s captain, and hence more generally to one’s employer or superior. ■ P. B. Yuill: Has the old man been on? He’ll be wanting to ask your old mates at the Yard for help. (1974) ■ D. MacNeil: The Old Man had commanded longer than most lieutenant-colonels. (1977)

skipper (1830) Applied to the captain of a sports team (originally a curling team), and hence (services’ slang) to a commanding officer in the army or the captain of an aircraft or squadron (1906) and (orig US) to a police chief (1929); from earlier sense, ship’s captain. ■ Daily Mail: Waqar Younis showed England skipper Graham Gooch that he will be just as hostile as Curtly Ambrose next summer. (1991) ■ R.A.F. News: The headmaster . . . will join his wartime Whitley skipper, Op Capt Leonard Chesire. (1977) ■ Dallas Barnes: Good piece of police work. . . . I’ll fill the skipper in. I’m sure he’ll be pleased. (1978)

prex, prexy (1858) Applied to the president of a college, corporation, etc.; alteration of president. ■ Cleveland (Ohio) Plain Dealer: While the NHL is controlled basically by the board of governors . . . the silver-haired prexy still wields a powerful stick when it comes to meting out fines and suspensions. (1974)

skull (1880) US & Australian; applied to a leader or chief, and also to an expert; compare earlier obsolete sense, the head of an Oxford college or hall. ■ G. H. Johnston: ‘Who does he fix the deal with?’ ‘God knows! D’ye think the skulls tell us that?’ (1948)

guv (1890) British; short for guvner. ■ N. Wallington: The Guv was seated at his desk. (1974)
the main squeeze (1896) US, dated n Dashiel Hammett: Vance seems to be the main squeeze. (1927)
top dog (1900) n Economist: Joint ventures often fall apart because one partner insists on being top dog. (1988)
the man, the Man (1918) US; applied to the person or people in authority n Guardian: 'The Man is repressive. The Man is fascist. . . . ' To the bombers and kidnappers the Man is authority. He is every policeman. He is President Nixon. He is Prime Minister Trudeau. (1970)
Mr. Big (1940) n A. W. Sherring: Hardly the kind of district one would expect to find Mr. Big of London's underworld. (1959)
chiefy (1942) Services' slang; applied to one's superior; from chief in same sense + -y n M. K. Joseph: The chiefy who done him out of his stripes. (1957)
honcho (1947) Orig and mainly US; from Japanese han't'cho group leader n New Yorker: I was the first employee who was not one of the honchos. (1973)
the pea (1969) Australian; applied to the person in authority, 'the boss'; from earlier sense, one likely to emerge as the winner n M. Calthorpe: 'For the time being, I'm satisfied.' 'You're the pea,' Mick said. (1969)
top banana (1974) Orig US; from earlier sense, leading comic in a burlesque entertainment n Washington Post: Clinton apparently doesn't see any problem in using a little influence with the top banana. (1993)
To raise to a higher status
kick upstairs (c)1697 Denoting promotion to a senior but less important job n William Cooper: The plot was devastatingly simple—Dibdin was to be kicked upstairs and Albert was to take his place. (1952)
Someone unimportant
spear-carrier (1960) Applied to an unimportant participant; from earlier theatrical slang sense, actor with a walk-on part n Sunday Sun-Times
(Chicago): By the time Breakfast at Wimbledon telecasts are beamed into the United States on Fourth of July weekend, American tennis pros Davis, Dunk and Hardie will have vacated their present lodging and be long gone from the venerable tournament that they graced momentarily as spear-carriers. (1982)
A title
handle (1832) Applied to an honorific title or similar distinction attached to a personal name (e.g. the Honourable, M.P., etc.); from the phrase handle to one's name a title attached to one's name n News of the World: 'I get very angry if people call me Lord David.' David . . . hates the sort of questions people ask once they find out about his 'handle.' (1977)
K (1910) British; abbreviation of knighthood n Times: There might not have been much merit in a political knighthood, but there was no harm in it, . . . The 'K', when it came, was a boon to the Member's wife, and a blessing to the Member himself. (1973)
A titled person
lifer (1959) Applied to a life-pee; compare earlier sense, prisoner serving a life sentence n Sunday Telegraph: I will not . . . turn out for Lifers. (1969)
Service ranks
super (1857) Short for superintendant n Guardian: He is well supported by Trevor Cooper as a beefily nervous Super and by Lorcan Cranitch as a thuggish Inspector. (1991)
sarge (1867) Orig US; short for sergeant; often as a term of address n M. K. Joseph: Hey, sarge, there's a title attached to one's name • Guardian: 'The Honourable, M.P.,' he called the Member himself. (1973)
Chief (1895) Nautical; applied to the chief engineer, or lieutenant-commander, in a (war)ship n Gilbert Hackforth-Jones: 'Chief,' he called down the voice-pipe to the engine-room, 'Knock her up to full speed or I'll come down and stoke myself.' (1942)
Loot (1898) US, military slang; applied to a lieutenant; shortened from North American pronunciation of lieutenant n J. G. Cozzens: Don't thank the loot! (1948)
Top (1898) US, military slang; short for top sergeant n T. Fredenburgh: The Top says he'll pass the sarge to one's name • Times: From general officer to buck private. (1962)
Chief (1889) Nautical; applied to the chief engineer, or lieutenant-commander, in a (war)ship n Gilbert Hackforth-Jones: 'Chief,' he called down the voice-pipe to the engine-room, 'Knock her up to full speed or I'll come down and stoke myself.' (1942)
To raise to a higher status
Kick upstairs (c)1697 Denoting promotion to a senior but less important job n William Cooper: The plot was devastatingly simple—Dibdin was to be kicked upstairs and Albert was to take his place. (1952)
Someone unimportant
Spear-carrier (1960) Applied to an unimportant participant; from earlier theatrical slang sense, actor with a walk-on part n Sunday Sun-Times
British, nautical; applied to a midshipman; said to be from midshipmen's use of the buttons on their sleeve for wiping their nose, from snotty running with nasal mucus n Peter Dickinson: A British Naval Party under the command of a snappily saluting little snotty. (1974)
corp (1909) Short for corporal; often as a term of address. ■ F. D. Sharpe: ‘We are going to Hendon, aren’t we, corp?’ The corporal replied: ‘Yes.’ (1938)

lance-jack (1912) British; applied to a lance-corporal or lance-bombardier; from lance- (corporal) + obsolete jack chap, fellow or the male personal name Jack. ■ Len Deighton: You’re not looking too good, Colonel, if you don’t mind an ex-lance-jack saying so. (1971)

Jimmy the One, Jimmy (1916) Nautical; applied to a first lieutenant. ■ Guardian: Smith told Petty Officer David Lewis, ‘We are going to have a sit-in and give the “Jimmy” a hard time.’ (1970)

llooey, looie, louie (1916) North American; applied to a lieutenant; shortened from North American pronunciation of lieu(tenant + -y)
■ Weekend Magazine (Montreal): One scrap of the rarely-talked-about reality: after being a private 14 months, Angus was commissioned in the field as second looey. (1974)

striper (1917) Applied to an officer in the Royal Navy or the US Navy of a rank designated by the stated number of stripes on the uniform, and in the army to a lance-corporal (one-striper), corporal (two-striper) or sergeant (three-striper)
■ Gilbert Hackforth-Jones: It made me remember how I felt when some pompous four-striper came slumming or snooping on board my submarine. (1950) ■ Anthony Price: A two-striper like himself. (1978)

citizen colonel (1918) US; applied to a US officer of the rank of full colonel; from a colonel’s insignia of a silver eagle. ■ Ernest Hemingway: Maybe they treat me well because I’m a citizen colonel on the winning side. (1950)

topper (1918) US, military slang; applied to a first sergeant; from top first sergeant + -er ■ Our Army (US): ‘I’m sure there’s no Lieutenant McGonigle here,’ replies the Topper. (1937)

quarter-bloke (1919) Services’ slang; applied to a quartermaster-sergeant. ■ Gen. Nicky overstepped the mark when he suggested to the quarter-bloke... that he was flogging the rations. (1944)

klick (1920) British, nautical; applied to a leading seaman; from earlier sense, leading seaman’s badge. ■ Tackline: Been in barracks for a matter of six months. Killik then, o’ course. (1945)

erk, irk (1925) British; applied (dated) to a naval rating and also (1928, R.A.F. slang) to someone of lowest rank, an aircraftman; origin unknown. ■ Brennan, Hesselyn & Bateson: The erks came running up to tell us that... the 109 had been diving down. (1943)

buck sergeant (1934) US; applied to an ordinary sergeant of the lowest grade; based on buck private. ■ H. Roth: He had acquired the rank of buck sergeant. (1955)

one-pipper (1937) British, services’ slang; applied to a second lieutenant; based on earlier obsolete one-pip (1919), from the single star on a second lieutenant’s uniform. ■ G. M. Fraser: Keith was a mere pink-cheeked one-pipper of twenty years, whereas I had reached the grizzled maturity of twenty-one and my second star. (1974)

plonk (1941) R.A.F. slang, dated; applied to an aircraftman second class; origin unknown. ■ J. R. Cole: I was only an A.C. plonk at the time. (1949)

snake (1941) Australian, military slang; applied to a sergeant. ■ E. Lambert: Baxter reckoned the officers and snakes are pinching our beer. (1951)

wingco, winco, winko (1941) R.A.F. slang; abbreviation of wing commander. ■ F. Parrish: There was a pub... taken over by a retired Wing Commander... The Winco, as he liked to be called, was a ready market. (1982)

chiefy (1942) R.A.F. slang; applied to a flight sergeant; from chief + -y ■ I. Gleed: To this day I can see distinctly ‘Chiefy’ N., stripped naked, putting on... a spotless clean tunic. (1942)

groupie (1943) R.A.F. slang; applied to a group captain; from group + -ie ■ I. Lambert: Groupie’s a devil for the girls. (1958)

buck general (1944) US; applied to a brigadier general; based on buck private, from its being the lowest grade of general

spec (1958) US; abbreviation of specialist enlisted man in the army employed on specialized duties. ■ Ed McBain: These are designations of rank. An E-3 is a Pfc, a Spec 4 is Specialist 4th Class, a corporal. An E-5 is a three-striper, and so on. (1977)

butterbar (1973) US; applied to a second lieutenant; from butterbars two gold bars worn as a badge of rank by a second lieutenant, from their yellow colour (not recorded before 1983 but apparently extant in the mid 1960s)

A badge or other insignia of rank

hash-mark (1909) US; applied to a military service stripe; apparently from the notion that each stripe (representing a year’s service) signifies a year’s free ‘hash’ or food provided by the government

killick (1915) British, nautical; applied to a leading seaman’s badge: from earlier sense, small anchor, from the fact that the badge of a leading seaman in the Royal Navy bears the symbol of an anchor; ultimate origin unknown

pip (1917) Applied to a star worn on an officer’s epaulette. ■ Peter Driscoll: The authority of the two pips shining on his shoulders. (1972)

scrambled egg (1943) Mainly services’ slang; applied to the gold braid or insignia on an officer’s dress uniform. ■ Monica Dickens: I don’t care about the scrambled egg, but it may be a bit tough at first, not being an officer. (1958)

tape (1943) British; applied to a chevron indicating rank. ■ R.A.F. Journal: I wouldn’t leave this unit for three tapes. (1944)
The upper classes

**the upper crust (1843)**  ■ *New Statesman: Views which are commonplace in upper-crust circles.* (1957)

A member of the upper classes

**royal (1774)** Applied to a member of the royal family; usually used in the plural  ■ *Daily Mail: A Buckingham Palace source said no one would be able to get near the Royals.* (1991)

**nob (1809)** British, often derogatory; applied to someone of wealth or high social position; variant of earlier Scottish *knabb*, nab; ultimate origin unknown  ■ *Independent: With Harvey Nichols sold this week for a cool £60m, there is a tussle of interest in the dwindling group of independent retailers to the nobs.* (1991)

**toff (1851)** British; applied to an upper-class, money, dandy: apparently nothing to do with 'port out, starboard home', of cabins on the sea-passage between Britain and India  ■ *P. G. Wodehouse: Practically every posh family in the country has called him in at one time or another.* (1923)  ■ *Hence push up smarten up, make posh* (1919)

**A snob**

**pure merino (1826)** Australian; applied originally to an Australian whose descent from a free settler (as opposed to a convict) gave him or her a basis for social pretension; from *merino* type of fine-wooled sheep introduced into Australia in the early years of settlement  ■ *Guardian: She used to boast that her ancestors had come out as free settlers... and that she was entitled to mix with the Pure Merinos.* (1953)

**high-hat (1923)** Orig US; from earlier sense, top hat, from the notion that such hats are worn by snobbish or pretentious people  ■ *G. B. Stern: That hot-tempered young high-hat.* (1931)

**toffee-nose (1943)** British; back-formation from *toffee-nosed*  ■ *Woman: People thought I was a bit of a toffee-nose for the first few months because I didn't speak to them.* (1958)

Snobbish, pretentious

**hoity-toity (1820)** From earlier sense, lordly, snobbish or pretentious person; imitative of a supposed typical utterance of such people  ■ *Guardian: He was... the American air-force sergeant with whom a duke's daughter, Anna Neagle, falls in love, his stuck-up, witless wife... in this desperate sitcom are too weedy even for the hard-of-hearing.* (1982)

**stuck-up (1829)**  ■ *Daily Mirror: The exchanges between the yobbish millionaire he plays and his stuck-up, witless wife... in this desperate sitcom are too weedy even for the hard-of-hearing.* (1982)

**snooty (1919)** From *snoot* 1. A snob 2. A self-important person 3. From earlier obsolete noun use, *treat as if snooty*. (1992)  ■ *Guardian: He was... the American air-force sergeant with whom a duke's daughter, Anna Neagle, falls in love, his pleasant American baritone providing welcome relief from the lah-di-dah accents.* (1991)

**snootty (1919)** From *snoot* 1. A snob 2. A self-important person 3. From earlier obsolete noun use, *treat as if snooty*. (1992)  ■ *Guardian: He was... the American air-force sergeant with whom a duke's daughter, Anna Neagle, falls in love, his pleasant American baritone providing welcome relief from the lah-di-dah accents.* (1991)

**county (1921)** British; from the notion of being typical of the country gentry (of a county)  ■ *Christopher Isherwood: Mummy's bringing her up to be very county.* (1937)

**toffee-nosed (1925)** Mainly British  ■ *T. E. Lawrence: A premature life' will do more to disgust the select and superior people (the R.A.F. call them the 'toffee-nosed') than anything.* (1928)

A self-important person

**I am (1926)** From earlier sense, Lord Jehovah, from Exodus iii.14 'And God said unto Moses, I am that I am: And he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you'  ■ *Nubar Gulbenkian: Cyril Radcliffe... did not take the short-cut favoured by so many of his colleagues who say... "I am the great I am, Queen's Counsel."* (1965)

Self-important

**uppity (1880)** Orig US; from up + -it- + -y  ■ *Sun (Baltimore): [She] could have plenty o' friends: The trouble
with her is she thinks folks too common to bother with unless they're too uppity to bother with her. (1932)

A lower-class person

pleb (1865) Short for plebian. ■ New Scientist: A German visitor lost his [nerve] in the silence of a British Rail first-class compartment and uncoupled the coach as a gesture of solidarity with the plebs in the second class. (1983)

prole (1887) Short for proletarian. ■ George Orwell: There's a lot of rot talked about the sufferings of the working class. I'm not so sorry for the proles myself. (1939)

Of or characteristic of the lower classes; ill-bred

hairy at (about, in, round) the heels, hairy-heeled, hairy (1890) ■ Ngaio Marsh: I always say that when people start fussing about family and all that, it's because they're a bit hairy round the heels themselves. (1962)

plebbly, plebbie (1962) From pleb lower-class person + -y. ■ James McClure: Portland Bill ... all coach parties and orange peel ... It does tend to be a bit plebbie. (1977)

To descend to the level of the lower classes

slum, slum it (1928) From earlier sense, visit slums (for charitable purposes, or out of curiosity). ■ Birds: It [sic: a rambling] was quite unabashed by the proximity of the feeding area to the back door and was happily 'slumming it' with the resident sparrows, chaffinches and greenfinches. (1981)

8. Social Categories

Lifestyle

empty nester (1962) Mainly US; applied to either member of a couple whose children have grown up and left home. ■ Sunday Times: Builders ... have ignored an increasingly important category of housebuyer—the busy, well-off executive couple who either have no children or whose children have grown up and left. Americans call them 'empty nesters'. (1980)

buppie (1984) Orig US; applied to a black city-dwelling professional person who is (or attempts to be) upwardly mobile; acronym formed on black urban (or upwardly mobile) professional, after yuppie. ■ Independent: Derek Boland—the ... rap singer Derek B—was present as a representative of 'buppies' (black yuppies). (1988)


yump, yumpie (1984) Orig US, dated; applied to a member of a socio-economic group comprising young professional people working in cities; acronym formed from young upwardly mobile people + -ie


yuppie, yuppy (1984) Orig US; applied to a member of a socio-economic group comprising young professional people working in cities; originally an acronym formed from young urban professional; subsequently also often interpreted as young upwardly mobile professional (or person, people). ■ Guardian: The yuppies themselves, in the 25–34 age group, supported Senator Gary Hart in the primaries. (1984)

guppie (1985) Applied to a yuppie concerned about the environment and ecological issues; blend of green and yuppie. ■ Daily Telegraph: The magazine claims that ... her fellow thinkers, whom it derides as green yuppies or 'guppies', have 'delivered the green movement into the lap of the industrialist'. (1989)

dinky, dinkie (1986) Orig North American; applied to either partner of a usually professional working couple who have no children, characterized as affluent consumers with few domestic demands on their time and money; acronym formed on double (or dual) income, no kids; the final y is sometimes interpreted as yet

woopie, woopy (1986) Orig North American; applied to an elderly person able to enjoy an affluent and active lifestyle in retirement; acronym formed on well-off old(er) person + -ie, after yuppie, probably reinforced by the exclamation whooppeel. ■ Daily Telegraph: We are in the age of the 'woopy' ... and it is about time we all recognised that fact, planned for our own future and helped them to enjoy theirs. (1988)

dink (1987) Orig North American; applied to either partner of a usually professional working couple who have no children, characterized as affluent consumers with few domestic demands on their time and money; acronym formed on double (or dual) income, no kids. ■ Chicago Tribune: The DINKS ... and empty-nesters now have a greater potential to travel off-season. (1990)

oink (1987) Jocular; applied to either partner of a couple with no children, living on a single (usually large) salary; acronym formed on one income, no kids, after dink. ■ Newsweek: in the 1980s cable has penetrated urban areas with more upscale viewers like DINKS ... OINKS ... and the standard-issue Yuppies. (1987)

chuppie, chuppy (1988) Orig and mainly North American; applied to a Chinese yuppie; blend of Chinese and yuppie. ■ Guardian: A backlash has built up in Vancouver ... against the 'Chuppies' (Chinese urban professionals) in the long established community. (1989)

To change in lifestyle

yuppify (1984) Orig US, often derogatory; denoting changing an area, building, clothing,
etc. so as to be characteristic of or suitable to yuppies; from yuppie + -ie • Observer. Their 'bashers' (shacks) will be forcibly removed by police to make way for developers who want to 'yuppify' the Charing Cross area. (1987)

Youth groups

bodgie (1950) Australian & New Zealand; applied to the Australasian equivalent of the Teddy-boy; perhaps from bodger inferior, worthless + -ie • New Zealand Listener. Every psychologist who has talked with bodgies will know that fear of an uncertain future is one of the factors in youthful misconduct. (1958)

widgie, weegie (1950) Australian & New Zealand; applied to an Australasian Teddy-girl, the female equivalent to a bodgie; origin unknown • Times. Gang delinquency . . . has made its mark around the world . . . in Australia the bodgies and widgies. (1977)

9. Conventionality

Conventional, conservative, respectable

starchy (1823) Orig US; applied to someone very formal, stiff, or conventional; from earlier sense, of or like starch (from its stiffening effect) • W. C. Hazlitt. My father . . . got into trouble by asking some rather starchy people to meet them at dinner. (1897)

corn-fed (1929) Orig US, jazz slang; applied to something banal or provincial; punningly from earlier sense, fed on corn (i.e. maize) and corn something hackneyed or banal • Architectural Review. Either way this is a rather negative formulation, part of the literary impedimenta of the modern movement, useful to the critic defending the Bauhaus to a cornfed audience of Ruskinians. (1954)

stick-in-the-muddish (1936) From stick-in-the-mud unadventurous person + -ish • A. Salkey. He's slow and easy and a little 'stick-in-the-muddish'. (1959)

square (1946) Orig US, jazz slang • Frederick Raphael. You know books. Those things with pages very square people still occasionally read. (1965)

straight (1960) Orig US; from earlier more specific senses, such as law-abiding and heterosexual • John Crosby. Few of the revolutionary youth . . . threw it all up and came back to the straight world. (1976)


A conventional person

stick-in-the-mud (1733) Applied to someone unprogressive, unadventurous, or lacking initiative • David Gervais. But if Betjeman was a 'stick-in-the-mud', like Larkin, he was an unusually exuberant one. (1993)

ted, Ted (1956) British; short for Teddy-boy • New Scientist. The gangs [of baboons] appeared to carry out his orders, roaming through the troupe like a bunch of leather-jacketed teds. (1968)

duck-tail (1959) South African; applied to the South African equivalent of the Teddy-boy; from earlier sense, type of hairstyle favoured by Teddy-boys • Guardian. He [sc. Dr. Verwoerd] described South Africa's overseas critics as 'the ducktails (Teddy boys) of the political world'. (1960)

sharpie (1965) Australian; applied to a young person who adopts styles of hair, dress, etc. similar to those of the British skinhead • Sunday Mail (Brisbane). Carmel says her mother accepted her being a sharpie—even a punk—till she shaved her hair off. (1977)

skin (1970) British; short for skinhead • Times. 'There's good and bad skinheads,' is as far as he will go. . . . The picture is complicated: there are black skins, and there are non-violent skins. . . . Certainly, many of the skins are thugs. (1981)

mossback, mossy-back (1878) Mainly North American; from earlier sense, large old fish • Trevanian. The moss-backs of the National Gallery had pulled off quite a coup in securing the Marini Horse for a one-day exhibition. (1973)

square John (1934) North American • Kenneth Orvis. I played it even safer with those uptown Square Johns. (1962)

shellback (1943) Applied to someone with reactionary views; from earlier sense, hardened or experienced sailor • Listener. I have no doubt a lot of right-wing shell-backs are now conceding, with blimphish magnanimity, that there's really something to be said for these young fellows after all. (1963)

square (1944) Orig US, jazz slang • Harold Hobson. The odd fifty million citizens who don't dig them are dead-beats—squares. (1959)

cube (1957) Orig US; applied to an extremely conventional or conservative person; from the notion of being even more conventional than a 'square' • G. Bagby. When I sang it to him . . . he told me I was a complete fool. Daisy Bell was for the cubes. (1968)

A conventional place or institution

squaresville, squareville (1956) Orig US; also used adjectively to denote conventionality; from square + the suffix -ville denoting a place with the stated characteristics • Ed McBain. This guy is from Squaresville, fella's, I'm telling you. He wouldn't know a '45 from a cement mixer. (1956) • Listener. And they went away, more than ever convinced that the war between the generations was for real. And through the window there floated a querulous, puzzled voice. 'A queer fish, real squaresville.' (1968)

auntie (1958) Used sarcastically as or before the name of an institution considered to be
conservative in style or approach, specifically
(British) the BBC or (Australian) the Australian
Broadcasting Corporation; from the notion of
an aunt as a comfortable and conventional
figure ■ J. Canaan: I saw about Uncle Edmund in auntie
Times. (1958) ■ Listener: The BBC needs to be braver and
sometimes is. So let there be a faint hurrah as Auntie goes
over the top. (1962)
cubesville (1959) Orig US; also used adjectivally
to denote conventionality; from cube very
conventional person + the suffix -ville denoting a
place with the stated characteristics ■ Woman.
No need to feel cubesville (that's worse than being a square) if
you don't follow Kookie patter; even many Americans reckon it
odd! (1961)

Unconventional, avant-garde

way out (1959) ■ J. Dunbar: One thing I like about
Cambridge, people don't try to be too way out. At places like
Oxford, or Reading, I've seen blokes going around barefoot and
wearing ear-rings. (1964)

far out (1960) ■ Science Journal. Talking with
computers, so much a far-out idea when this journal discussed
IBM's work on it four years ago, now seems quite
straightforward. (1970)

10. Friends

A friend

mate (c1380) From Middle Low German mate,
gemate, ultimately from a base related to meat
(the etymological sense being 'one who shares
meat (i.e. food)') ■ Observer: A 17-year-old boy... said,
'I haven't got a real mate. That's what I need.' (1966)
pal (1681) From Romany pal friend, brother,
ultimately from Sanskrit bhadr̥ brother ■ Mazo
de la Roche: I have talked to her... as I couldn't to anyone
else.... Well, she's been a complete pal—if you know what I
mean. (1936)

chum (1694) Originally applied to a roommate,
and not recorded in the independent sense
'friend' until the mid 19th century; probably an
alteration of an unrecorded chum, short for
chamber fellow roommate ■ Daily Mail: James will
see that he has a father who doesn't look like the fathers of his
school chums. (1991)

buddy (1788) Orig US, Black English; alteration
of brother ■ Nancy Mitford: Little Bobby Bobbin... is a
great buddy of mine. (1932)

matey (1833) Often used as a form of address;
from mate friend + -y ■ June Drummond: Right,
matey, 'oo told you? (1973)
cobber (1893) Australian & New Zealand;
perhaps from British dialect cob take a liking to
■ Maurice Shadbolt: Jack was my cobber in the timber mill.
Jack and I went on the bash every Saturday. (1959)

the lads (1896) British; applied to a group of
male friends ■ Independent: 'I wasn't one of the lads,'
his friend, decapitated. (1943)

baby (1901) Orig US; applied to a person's
sweetheart; often used as a term of address
■ Carl Sandburg: My baby's going to have a new dress.
(1918)
side-kicker (1903) US, dated; applied especially
to a subordinate companion

diekick (1906) Orig US; applied especially to a
subordinate companion; back-formation from
diekicker ■ J. McVean: It was the White House.... And
not just some little cotton-tail sidekick either, but counsel to
the President. (1981)

raggie (1912) Naval slang; applied especially to a
close friend or colleague on board ship ■ Taffrail:
Men who are friendly with each other are 'raggies', because
they have the free run of each others' polishing paste and rags;
but if their friendship terminates they are said to have 'parted
brass-rags'. (1916)

china (1925) British; short for china plate,
rhyming slang for mate ■ New Statesman: I have my
hands full with his china who is a big geezer of about 14 stone.
(1965)
palsy, palsie (1930) Orig US; from pal friend
+ -sy ■ E. Wilson: Ratoff appealed to him. 'Look, palsy,' he
said, 'what time I wawz in your house this morning?' (1945)

OOA (1936) Services' slang, orig US; applied to
someone's sweetheart; abbreviation of one and
only ■ Everybody's Magazine (Australia): All would refer
to a special girlfriend as their OOA—one and only. Probably,
the OOA was met on skirt patrol. (1967)
palsy-walsy, palsie-walsie, palsey-walsey
(1937) Orig US; often derogatory, connoting
excessive or conspiratorial friendship; fanciful
rhyming form based on palsy friend ■ H. Smith:
There was nothing to do but I must go along with them. I even
went into SRO with them. Talk about palsy-walsies! (1941)

oppo (1939) Orig services' slang; abbreviation of
opposite number ■ B. W. Aldiss: He's dotty on them Wog
gods, aren't you, Stubby, me old oppo? (1971)
winger (1943) British, mainly services' slang ■
Penguin New Writing: He had seen his 'winger', his best
friend, decapitated. (1943)
buddy-buddy (1947) Orig US; reduplication of
buddy friend ■ Len Deighton: This way they stopper up
the information without offence to old buddy buddies. (1962)
mucker (1947) British; probably from muck
in share tasks, etc., equally ■ Martin Woodhouse: 'Is
that my old mucker?' said Bottle. 'None other,' I said. (1972)
goombah, goomba, gumbah (1955) US;
applied to a close or trusted male friend or
crony; from Italian dialectal pronunciation of
godfather, male friend;
popularized by the US boxer and actor Rocky
Graziano on the Martha Ray Show ■ L. D. Estleman:
'I guess you two were pretty close.' 'He was my goombah. I
was a long time getting over it.' (1984)
good buddy (1956) US, mainly Southern; often as a term of address
homeboy, homegirl (1967) Orig and mainly US, orig Black English; from earlier sense, person from one's home town
main man (1967) US; applied to a person's best male friend
main squeeze (1970) US; applied to a man's principal woman friend; on earlier sense, important person
squeeze (1980) Mainly US; applied especially to a girlfriend or lover; shortened from main squeeze  R. Ford: I would love to grill him about his little seminary squeeze, but he would be indignant. (1986)

Having a friendly relationship; friendly
in with (1677) Often in the phrases get in with, keep in with, well in with  Richmal Crompton: So far County had persistently resisted the attempts of Mrs. Bott to 'get in' with its. (1925) P. M. Hubbard: We . . . go along to the Carrock for a drink . . . occasionally, but we're not really in with the people staying there. (1984) Joan Fleming: She was well in with what is now called the Chelsea set. (1968)
thick (1756) Robert Louis Stevenson: He and the squire were very thick and friendly. (1883)
chummy (1884) From chum friend + -y  Economist: Many fear that accountants are too chummy with the managers of the companies they audit. (1987)
pally (1895) From pal friend + -y  Scottish Review: She joined a Whist club and got very pally with another auld maid like herself. (1978)
matey (1915) From mate friend + -y  Warwick Deeping: Elizabeth would . . . want to be matey with people. (1929)
palsy-walsy, palsie-walsey, palsey-walsey (1947) Orig US; often derogatory, connoting excessive or conspiratorial friendship; from the noun palsy-walsy friend  John Wainwright: He's one of those matey types. . . . Very palsy-walsy. (1977)

To take a liking to someone
hit it off (1780) Compare earlier hit it in the same sense  T. S. Eliot: Mr. Kaghan is prejudiced. He's never hit it off with Lady Elizabeth. (1954)
take a shine to (1839) Orig US  Times Literary Supplement: If her [sc. Barbara Pym's] heroines were married, they were not unfaithful to their husbands, although they might take a shine to the curate. (1980)
cotton to (1840)  Rachael Praed: I object to you personally. I have never cottoned to you from the moment I set eyes upon you. (1881)

to form a friendship
take up (1619) Usually followed by with  Daily Express: The story is of a poor but pretty girl . . . who breaks her engagement to a morose butcher . . . and takes up instead with a feckless punter. (1977)
pal (1879) Now usually followed by up; from pal friend  Bruce Hamilton: I got tight one night with a chap I'd palled up with. (1958)
chum (1884) Now usually followed by up; from chum friend  A. L. Rowe: Hicks and Callice chummed up. (1955)
click (1915)  Constant Lambert: Receiving the glad eye from presumably attractive girls with whom he ultimately and triumphantly 'clicks'. (1934)
cobber up (1918) Australian & New Zealand; from cobber friend  Bill Pearson: It's natural for a young chap to cobber up with chaps his own age. (1983)
buddy (1919) US; usually followed by up; from buddy friend  Nelson Algren: My cot was next to his, and we started buddying up. (1948)

To associate with someone as a friend
pal around (1915) From pal friend  High Times: Lenny picked up part of his schtick from the characters that he pulled around with in New York. (1975)

An introduction to a person
knock-down (1865) US, Australian, & New Zealand  Sun-Herald (Sydney): That's a grouse-looking little sheila over there, Sal. Any chance of a knockdown to her later on? (1981)

11. Solitude

On one's own
like a shag on a rock (1845) Australian: denoting the isolation or unhappiness associated with solitude; from shag type of cormorant  K. Smith: It was the voice of Godley, in high gear, raised to compete with the noise around him, but suddenly left by itself like a shag on a rock, when everyone else quietened down in response to the gong. (1965)
on one's Jack Jones, on one's Jack (1925) Jack Jones partial rhyming slang for own  Alfred Draper: You're on your Jack Jones. Ben's deserted you. (1972)
single-o (1930) US, mainly criminals' slang; often applied specifically to working without an accomplice  Evening Bulletin (Philadelphia): Instead of working single-o as was his custom. Ernie used an accomplice to drive the getaway car. (1948)

on one's ownsome (1939) ownsome blend of own and lonesome ■ Gerald Seymour: He's been left on his ownsome, and doesn't like it. (1976)

Someone on their own

wallflower (1820) Applied to especially a woman sitting out at a dance for lack of partners; from such women sitting along the wall of the room in which dancing is taking place ■ TV Times: I used to go to dances when I was young but I was always the wall-flower, always the shy one. (1990)

loner (1947) Applied to someone who avoids company and prefers to be alone; from lone + -er ■ Daily Telegraph: On course, as in private life, he is a loner, a man of few words who finds it impossible to chat and joke with the crowds. (1970)

To act alone

paddle one's own canoe (1828) Applied to acting independently or making one's way by one's own unaided efforts ■ Time: They seem more interested in paddling their own canoes than shaping a strong third force that would be the best weapon against the communism they all hate. (1949)

12. Sex

Sexual desire

lech, lech (1796) Back-formation from lecher ■ Sunday Times: Many so-called platonic friendships . . . are merely one-way leches. (1972)

the glad eye (1911) Applied to a glance suggestive of sexual desire ■ Aldous Huxley: I do see her giving the glad eye to Pete. (1939). Hence the verb glad-eye (1935) ■ A. J. Cronin: Purves . . . 'glad-eyeing' Hetty, trying 'to get off with her'. (1935)

hot pants (1927) US; applied to strong sexual desire; usually in the phrase have (or get) hot pants ■ Stanley Price: You've got the hot-pants for some good-looking piece. (1961)

bedroom eyes (1947) Applied to eyes or a look suggestive of sexual desire ■ Jeremy Potter: George's wife had blue bedroom eyes. (1967)

the hots (1947) Orig US; applied to strong sexual desire: from hot lustful ■ Times Literary Supplement: It is Blodgett who has the hots for Smackenfelt's Supplement. (1935) ■ Ian Hamilton: She's a cheap thrill machine for the boys to stare at and perve on. (1972)

Feeling sexual desire, lustful

hot (1500) ■ William Hanley: 'I'm hot as a firecracker is what I am,' she said demurely. (1971)

randy (1847) Orig dialectal; from earlier sense, boisterous ■ Frank Sargeson: I was randy myself at your age. But be careful. These native girls can put you right into hospital if you don't take care. (1965)

red-hot (1887)

horney (1889) From horn erect penis + -y ■ Black World: Ain't that the horny bitch that was grindin with the blind dude. (1971)

horn-mad (1893) From horn erect penis ■ Roy Campbell: The evil-minded and horn-mad levantine. (1951)

sexed up (1942) Applied to someone who is sexually aroused ■ Nature: Erickson and Zenone tested the reaction of 35 males to two groups of females. . . . Males. . . . showed more aggression and less courtship towards the 'sexed up' females. (1976)

randy-arsed (1968) ■ H. C. Rae: Beefy, randy-arsed wives crying out for a length. (1976)

To experience sexual desire

lech, lech (1911) Back-formation from lecher ■ Guardian: A fortysix factory worker . . . lives with . . . an obsessively nubile sister whom he obviously leches after. (1973)

To ogle

perv, perve (1941) Mainly Australian; followed by at or on; from earlier sense, behave as a pervert; ultimately short for pervert ■ Ian Hamilton: She's a cheap thrill machine for the boys to stare at and perve on. (1972)
Infatuated

sweet on (1740) Dated • John Saunders: 'I'm a little sweet on her maid, slap-up creature, I can tell you.' (1876)

soft on (1840) • Theodore Dreiser: 'He's kinda soft on me, you know.' (1925)

spoons with (or about, on) (c1859) Dated; from spoon behave amorously, woo • D. C. Murray: Tregarthen... has gone spoons on the Churchill. (1883)

cunt-struck (c1866) Denoting infatuation with women • Frank Sargeson: We were all helplessly and hopelessly c... struck, a vulgar but forcibly accurate expression. (1965)

shook on (1868) Australian & New Zealand • B. Scott: Those stories you read about in books where two blokes get shook on the same Sheila. (1977)

gone on (1885) • Saul Bellow: I was gone on her and gave her a real embrace. (1978)

stick on (1886) Orig US • Alison Lurie: Sandy, who was rather pathetically stuck on her for a while, took her to hear The Magic Flute. (1974)

To be infatuated with

have a case on (1852) Dated, orig & mainly US • Story-Teller: By the end of the second year the girls were saying that Salesby had quite a case on Chips. (1931)

have got it badly (1911) • Webster & Ellington (song-title): I got it badly and that ain't good. (1941)

fall for (1914) • John Galsworthy: 'He's fallen for Marjorie Ferrar.' 'Fallen for her?' said Soames. 'What an expression!' 'Yes, dear; it's American.' (1926)

An infatuation

puppy love (1834) Applied to temporary affection between very young people; compare earlier calf love in same sense (1823) • Black Cat: He adored her with all the fatuous idolatry of puppy love. (1907)

spoons (1846) Dated; from spoon behave amorously, woo • Archibald Gunter: The moment he saw Ethel it became a wonderful case of 'spoons' upon his part. (1888)

crush (1895) Orig US; from earlier sense, person with whom one is infatuated • Victor Gollancz: It is common to make fun of schoolboy and schoolgirl 'pashes' and 'crushes'. (1952)

pash (1914) Applied particularly to a schoolgirl's infatuation; short for passion • Graham Greene: When you've got a pash for someone like I have, anybody's better than nothing. (1934)

thing (1967) Often applied to a love affair of limited duration • Dorothy Haliday: Janey... had obviously just finished a thing with Guppy Collins-Smith and was looking for new material. (1970)

A glance indicative of infatuation

sheep's eyes (1811) Earlier sheep's eye (a1529) • James Thurber: There was so much spooning and goo-goo eyes. (1959)

To flirt, woo, court

run after (1526) Denoting seeking someone's company with a view to a sexual relationship • D. H. Lawrence: I don't do any high and pure mental work, nothing but jolt down a few ideas. And yet I neither marrying nor running after women. (1926)

pick up (1698) Applied to forming a casual friendship with a view to sexual intercourse • D. Marlowe: Who was that old man?... He was trying to pick you up. (1976). Hence pick-up someone picked up for this purpose (1871) • Marguerite Yourcenar: She was fairly throbbing against me, and no previous feminine encounter, whether with a chance pick-up, or with an avowed prostitute, had prepared me for that sudden, terrifying sweetness. (1957)

spoon (1831) Dated; denoting (foolishly) amorous behaviour, or (in transitive use) sentimental wooing; probably from obsolete spoon simplexton, fool • Henry Williamson: It's like one of the Mecca coffee rooms in the City, where men go to spoon with the waitresses. (1957)

chat (1898) British; denoting flirtatious talking; often followed by up • Sunday Express: He saw a pretty girl... smiling at him. He smiled right back. 'Like chatting the birds,' he said. (1963) • Kingsley Amis: I must have spent a bit of time chatting 'em up. (1966)

track with (1910) Australian; applied to courting a potential sexual partner • D. Stuart: Maybe some married couple'll move in with a daughter for you to track with. (1978)

be all over someone (1912) Denoting a display of great or excessive affection • Agatha Christie: 'Were they friendly?' The lady was... All over him, as you might say.' (1931)

get off with (1915) Denoting becoming acquainted with someone with a view to sexual intercourse • F. Lonsdale: What fun it would be if one of us could get off with him. (1925)

pirate (1927) Australian; applied to forming a casual friendship with a view to sexual intercourse • N. Keeling: Who but a woman would complain that a man is a 'linen lifter', or is 'trying to pirate me'. (1982)

make time (1934) North American; denoting making sexual advances; usually followed by with • William Burroughs: At another table two young men were trying to make time with some Mexican girls. (1953)

trot (1942) New Zealand; applied to courting a woman; from earlier British trot out escort, trot • Weekly News (Auckland): I didn't know she was going steady with you... If I'd known you were trotting her [etc.]. (1964)

frat (1945) Applied (originally to Allied troops in West Germany and Austria after World War II) to a soldier establishing friendly and especially sexual relations with a woman of an occupied country; abbreviation of fraternize • M. K. Joseph:
'He was flattering, wasn't he?' 'Sure—dark piece, lives up the Ludwigsstrasse.' (1957), Hence the nouns fratter (1949) and fratt(e)ing (1945) • G. Cotterell: So he's married... I bet she doesn't know what a shameless old fratter you were. (1949)

horse (1952) Denoting amorous play or philandering; usually followed by around

- C. Smith: She'd be horsing around with Nicky, giving me grounds for divorce. (1956)

pull someone (1965), give someone a pull (1976) Applied to picking up a sexual partner

- Boyd & Parkes: Five years ago you did the big male-menopause bit, didn’t you? Skulking off to Paris to prove you could still pull the birds. (1973)

race off (1965) Australian; applied to seducing a woman

- M. Wilding: Perhaps Peter thought he would try to race her... off. He relished the phrase, race off. He had not heard it in England. (1967)

groove (1967) Denoting amorous play

- New Yorker: Sad Arthur put away his boots and helmet... to stay in Nutley and groove with the fair Lambie. (1970)

A person who flirts or courts

lady killer (1811) Applied to a man who is credited with a dangerous power of fascination over women

- Washington Post: Rebecca DeMornay... plays a confident criminal attorney who wears tight skirts and is easily duped by a lady killer (Don Johnson). (1993)

spoon (1882) Dated; from spoon behave amorously, woo

- D. H. Lawrence: He had lovely lips for kissing. (c.1921)

cock-teaser (1891) Derogatory; applied to a sexually provocative woman who evades or refuses intercourse

- James Baldwin: What are you, anyway—just a cock-teaser? (1962)

debs' delight, debbies' delight (1934) British, mainly derogatory; applied to an elegant and attractive young man in high society

- Ngaio Marsh: Lord Robert half suspected his nephew Donald of being a Debs' Delight. (1948)

prick-teaser (1961) Derogatory; applied to a sexually provocative woman who evades or refuses intercourse

- Frank Norman: That Gloria's a right prick teaser. She'll con 'im somethin' rotten. (1978)

Courtship

monkey parade, monkey's parade, monkeys' parade (1910) British derogatory, dated; applied to a promenade of young men and women in search of sexual partners. Hence monkey-parading (1934) • J. B. Priestley: A Sabbatarian town of this kind, which could offer its young folk nothing on Sunday night but a choice between monkey-parading and dubious pubs. (1934)

blind date (1925) Orig US; applied to a date with an unknown person

pass (1928) Applied to an amorous advance; especially in the phrase make a pass at

- Dorothy Parker: Men seldom make passes At girls who wear glasses. (1936)

skirt patrol (1941) Orig US; applied to a search for female sexual partners

- Everybody's Magazine (Australia): In each war, a new vocabulary is created. Today, in Vietnam, Australians are again catching up on American Army slang. ... All would refer to a special girlfriend as their OAO—one and only. Probably, the OAO was met on skirt patrol. (1967)

sexcapade (1965) Applied to a sexual escapade; blend of sex and escapade

- Honolulu Star-Bulletin: A generally less swinging group than the lone men off on sexcapades who helped give tourism a bad name. (1976)

Looking for sexual partners

on the make (1929) Orig US; Anne Blaisdell: You mean he was still on the make? At his age? (1973)

on the pirate (1946) Australian; from the verb pirate pick up a sexual partner

- G. Gelbin: They are on the pirate. We goes round St. Kilda and tries a few but we want three together. (1964)

on the pull (1990) From the verb pull pick up a sexual partner

- Guardian: It's easier to pick up four grand simply by smiling when Chris asks if you and Trevor ever go out on the pull. (1996)

One who interferes with courtship

gooseberry (1837) Applied to a third person present when two lovers wish to be alone together; often in the phrase play gooseberry; compare obsolete gooseberry picker chaperon, perhaps from the notion of one who ostensibly picks gooseberries while acting as chaperon

- Elizabeth Oldfield: She would be too busy to spend the day playing gooseberry to a pair of love-struck sixty-year-olds. (1983)

A promiscuous person

swinger (1964) Often applied specifically to someone who engages in group sex, partner-swapping, etc.; from swing + -er

- Time: Some operators have converted nudist colonies into 'swinger camps', the new rural retreats for the randy. (1977)

goer (1966) From earlier sense, one who goes fast

- Peter Willmott: 'She was a right banger,' said a 17 year old of one girl. 'A banger's a goer—a girl who'll do anything with anyone.' (1966)

swingle (1967) North American; applied to a promiscuous single person, especially one in search of a sexual partner; blend of swinging and single

- Chatelaine (Canada): When she went out with her women friends for an evening, their husbands felt she was luring their wives into swingle bars and white slavery. (1978)

raver (1971) Applied to a promiscuous (young) man or especially woman

A promiscuous man

goat (1675) Applied to a lecherous (older) man; often in the phrase old goat; from the male goat's reputation for sexual insatiability

- Independent: From naughty schoolboy to filthy old goat in the twinkling of an eye. (1991)
wolf (1847) Applied to a sexually aggressive man
  ■ Ellis Peters: He did not look like a wolf, but he did look like a young man with an eye for a girl. (1973)

Don Juan (1848) Applied to a man who has great sexual success with a large number of women: from the name of a legendary dissolute Spanish nobleman, popularized in Britain by Byron’s poem Don Juan (1819–24) ■ W. H. Auden: B . . . tries to be a Don Juan seducer in an attempt to compel life to take an interest in him. (1953)

chaser (1894) US; applied to an amorous pursuer of women ■ Sam Greenlee: The women thought him an eligible bachelor, if a bit of a chaser. (1969)

poodle-faker (1902) Mainly services’ slang; applied to a man who cultivates female society, especially for professional advancement; from the idea of fawning to be petted, like a poodle or lap-dog ■ Joyce Porter: There’s some blooming Parisian couturier coming to see her . . . to hear her talk you’d think a bunch of corn slicers and foreign poodle-fakers was more important than solving the crime of the century. (1977)

lounge lizard (1918) Derogatory; applied to a man who frequents fashionable parties, bars, etc. in search of a wealthy patroness ■ Times: The £50 a week contract which . . . lets her keep her lounge lizard husband, Queckett, in the manner to which he is accustomed, lacks conviction. (1973)

ram (1935) Applied to a virile or sexually aggressive man ■ Penguin New Writing: ‘Yes, it’s the Chalk all right,’ Willie said. ‘The old ram!’ he added, happily. (1945)


lech, lecher (1943) Back-formation from lecher ■ Guardian: A rich man can have a beautiful young wife even if he is a gropy old lecher! (1970)

lover boy, lover man (1952) Orig US; applied to a woman-chaser ■ Charles Williams: He’s a Lover Boy, one of those big, flashy, conceited types that has to . . . give all the girls a break. (1959)

A promiscuous woman

The distinction between words applied to professional female prostitutes and those applied insultingly to women considered sexually promiscuous is not always clearly drawn, and many can cross and re-cross the border-line. See further under Prostitutes at Prostitution (pp. 84–5).

chippy, chippie (1886) Derogatory, orig US, dated ■ Grace Metalious: Running out every night to go see that little chippy. (1956)

tart (1887) Derogatory; from earlier neutral sense, (young) woman ■ E. J. Howard: People don’t . . . call other people tarts because they go to bed with people without marrying them. (1965)

scrub (1900) Derogatory; compare earlier obsolete sense, insignificant or contemptible person ■ New Statesman: A ‘scrub’ is a Rocker girl; that is, someone not fond of washing, according to the Mods, and a bit of a tart. (1964)

floozie, floosie, floozy (1902) Derogatory; compare floozy fancy, showy, and dialect floozy fluffy ■ Len Deighton: Stinnes had reached that dangerous age when a man was only susceptible to an innocent cutie or to an experienced floozy. (1984)

man-eater (1906) Applied to a sexually voracious woman ■ D. Gray: ‘She’s pretty, you said?’ . . . ‘Very, sir.’ ‘And a man-eater?’ ‘I’d say so, yes, sir.’ (1968)

vamp (a1911) Dated; applied to a woman who intentionally attracts and exploits men (often as a stock character in plays and films); abbreviation of vampire ■ Times: Exotic red flowers like the lips of vamps. (1973)

tramp (1922) Orig US, derogatory; from earlier sense, vagrant ■ John Welcome: You can usually tell . . . the nice girls from the tramps. (1959)

mamma, mamma, momma (1925) Orig & mainly US; compare red-hot mamma earthy female jazz singer ■ Times: She denied ever being present at an impromptu or organized gathering where there was a ‘mama’ present, someone available to the whole group for sexual intercourse. (1980)

alley cat (1926) US; applied to an immoral frequenter of city streets, especially a prostitute: from the reputation of stray cats for promiscuity

round heels (1926) Derogatory, mainly US; from the notion of being unsteady on the feet, and hence readily agreeing to lie down for sexual intercourse ■ Raymond Chandler: You’d think . . . I’d . . . pick me a change in types at least. But little roundheels over there aren’t even that. (1944)

roach (1930) US, derogatory; compare earlier sense, cockroach ■ T. Morrison: They watched her far more closely than they watched any other roach or bitch in the town. (1974)

nympho (1935) Applied to a sexually voracious woman; short for nymphomaniac ■ D. Schwartz: Some girls at school said that Phoebe was a nympho. (1954)

low-heeled (1939) Australian, derogatory; perhaps, like round heels, from the notion of being unsteady on the feet, and hence readily agreeing to lie down for sexual intercourse ■ Barbara Pepworth: Juicy Lucy is the school bike, everyone’s ridden her. (1980)

lowie, lowey (1953) Australian, derogatory; from low-hell + -ie ■ Sydney Morning Herald: Harkins points out the ‘rev heads’ (fast driving teenage yobos) and the ‘lowies’ (equally fast young girls) he knows lolling about outside the Commercial Hotel. (1979)

slag (1958) Derogatory; compare earlier sense, contemptible or objectionable person

**punch-board** (1963) Derogatory; from the comparison between sexual penetration and punching holes, designs, etc.; compare earlier sense, gambling board with holes containing slips of punched paper. ▪ Germaine Greer: Girls who pride themselves on their monogamous instincts . . . speak of the ‘campus punchboard’. (1970)

**hot pants** (1966) US; applied to a highly sexed (young) woman; compare earlier sense, fashion shorts worn by young women. ▪ Kingsley Amis: It would help to hold off little hot-pants, and might distract him from the thought of what he was so very soon going to be doing to her. (1968)

**groupie, groupy** (1967) Applied to a young female fan of a pop group who follows them on tour and tries to have sex with them; from group + -ie. ▪ Times: His defence described the sisters as ‘groupies’, girls who deliberately provoke sexual relations with pop stars. (1970)

**puta** (1967) Derogatory; from Spanish puta whose...whore

**scupper** (1970) Derogatory; from earlier sense, prostitute

**slapper** (1992) British, derogatory; compare earlier, obsolete dialect sense, large or strapping person, especially female. ▪ Private Eye: Paula . . . is no run-of-the-mill slapper. (1996)

See also **bim, bimbo, broad, buer, mot, muff, poule, quiff, quim, totty, and trim** under A woman (pp. 46–8) at People.

To behave promiscuously

**cruise** (1674) Not in general use until the second half of the 19th century, when it was mainly applied to prostitutes soliciting for customers while walking the streets; latterly applied to walking or driving around the streets in search of sexual gratification; often followed by around; from the reputation of male cats for sexual voraciousness ▪ G. Thompson: A man who’s been tom-catting around with three women all day long. (1980)

**sleep around** (1928) Orig US. ▪ Marghanita Laski: I don’t think for a minute she’s been sleeping around . . . but you know what gossip is. (1952)

**fool around** (1937) Orig US; applied to having a casual (and often adulterous) sexual relationship ▪ G. Paley: I’d never fool around with a Spanish guy. They all have tough ladies back in the barrio. (1985)

**hawk** one’s mutton (1937) Applied disparagingly to a woman seeking a lover; from obsolete slang mutton female genitals. ▪ James Patrick: They’re aw cows hawkin’ their mutton. (1973)

**screw around** (1939) Orig US. ▪ Tim Heald: I’ve been sort of screwing around a little. . . . I don’t want to upset my husband, but a girl only has one life. (1981)

**put out** (1947) US; applied to a woman who offers herself for sexual intercourse; often followed by for. ▪ David Lodge: If she won’t put out the men will accuse her of being bourgeois and upright. (1975)

**swing** (1964) Often applied specifically to engaging in group sex, partner-swapping, etc. ▪ E. M. Brecher: If only one-tenth of one percent of married couples (one couple in a thousand) swing, however, the total still adds up to some 45,000 swinging American couples. (1970). Hence swinging promiscuous (1964)

**pull a train** (1965) Denoting sexual intercourse with a succession of partners ▪ H. L. Foster: Trains are pulled everywhere. . . . Selby . . . described Tralala pulling endless trains in Brooklyn. (1974)

A city characterized by licentiousness and vice

**sin city** (1973) Often jocular. ▪ A. Thackeray: What’s going to happen in Chicago? . . . All you want to do is run amok in ‘Sin City’. (1975)

Sex appeal

**it** (1904) Dated. ▪ L. P. Bachmann: She really had ‘it’, as it was called. (1972)

**S.A., s.a.** (1926) Abbreviation ▪ Edmund McGirr: I saw you and the dame go into her apartment. . . . I expected you to take longer. Losing the old s.a., Prion? (1974)

**oomph** (1937) Dated; imitative of energy and verve ▪ Guardian: A Lhasa belle, complete with high heels, lipstick, and ‘oomph’. (1960)

A sexually attractive person

**peach** (1754) Usually applied to a female; from the association of the peach with lusciousness ▪ Richmal Crompton: Now would you think that a peach like her would fail for a fat-headed chump like that? (1930)

**ripper** (1846) Now mainly Australian; usually applied to a female; from earlier, more general sense, excellent person or thing ▪ Bulletin (Sydney): The woman . . . will be Cynthia Morisey, a little ripper from Perth. . . . Miss Morisey, from every aspect, is almost derangingly beautiful. (1978)

**stunner** (1848) Daily Telegraph: The bride, of course, was a stunner—all demure in white broderie anglaise with a sweetheart neckline. (1981)

**scorcher** (1881) ▪ P. G. Wodehouse: When I’d had a look at the young lady next door and seen what a scorcher she is. (1935)

**a (little) bit of all right** (1898) From (probable) earlier, more general sense, something satisfactory ▪ Monica Dickens: ‘What’s she like?’ . . . ‘The daughter? Bit of all right, from her pictures.’ (1956)
hot stuff (1899) Usually also implying promiscuity  ■ M. Paneth: The men say of her, ‘Joan is hot stuff.’ (1944)

peacherino, peacherine, peacheroo (1900) Mainly US; from (probable) earlier, more general sense, excellent person or thing  ■ C. Rougie: When I was his age, they were having them out from under me. … And all young peacherinos, too. (1967)

cutie, cutey (a1904) Orig US; applied especially to women; from cute + -ie  ■ James Barbican: He goes about with a high-stepping cutie who’s ace-high on the face and figure. (1927)

corker (1909) From earlier, more general sense, excellent person or thing  ■ R. D. Abrahams: My girl’s a corker. (1969)

looker (1909) Orig US; applied especially to beautiful women; from earlier good looker  ■ Roger Parkes: Bit of a looker. … Otherwise … a ranking detective on a priority case, would hardly have bothered driving her home. (1971)

cracker (1914) British; from (probable) earlier, more general sense, excellent person or thing  ■ Mizz: Matt … also likes ‘girls, drinking, reading the NME and Goth clothes. I’d also like to pull a real cracker—I don’t have any special preferences looks-wise, I’d just like someone really special.’ (1992)

babe (1915) Orig US: applied originally to women and latterly (since the 1970s) also to men; from earlier sense, baby  ■ Observer: With her big eyes, handsome enbonpoint and handsap waist, Margaret Rose was a bit of a babe in her day, but this wasn’t enough to stop her being … ‘on the shelf’ at 29. (1997)

dish (1921) From the idea of an attractive or tasty dish of food  ■ Angus Wilson: That man I’ve been talking to is rather a dish, but I’m sure he’s a bottom-pincher. (1956)

heart-throb (1928) Orig US; applied especially to a male entertainer with whom many women fall in love; from earlier sense, thrill as if caused by a fast-beating heart  ■ Wall Street Journal: Robert Redford may be a heartthrob in Hollywood, but in this town he gives his neighbors heartburn. (1989)

dream-boat (1947) Orig US  ■ Terence Rattigan: I thought you’d be quite old and staid and ordinary and, my God, look at you, a positive dream boat. (1951)

smasher (1948) Mainly British; from earlier sense, something unusually excellent  ■ Angus Wilson: When the jeunes filles met Rodney, Jackie. . . . put her head on one side and said, ‘I say, isn’t he a smasher!’ (1957)

glamour puss (1952)  ■ Colin Maclnnes: ‘Now listen, glamour puss,’ I said, flicking his bottom with my towel. (1959)


sexboat (1962) US; applied especially to women  ■ Ed Lacy: I don’t buy the bit that every mademoiselle is automatically a sexboat because she’s French. (1962)

sex-bomb (1963) Applied especially to women  ■ P. Cave: Sex-bomb, Sonya Stelling might be. Oscar contender she was not. (1976)

spunk (1978) Australian; applied especially to a man; usually in the phrase young spunk; compare earlier senses, courage, spirit, semen  ■ Sunday Mail(Brisbane): No matter how skittish she might feel, old girls of 59 mustn’t even flutter an eyelash at a young spunk. (1986)

A sexually attractive man

stud (1895) Applied to a man of (reputedly) great sexual prowess; from earlier sense, horse kept for breeding  ■ Salman Rushdie: A notorious seducer; a ladies’-man; a cuckolder of the rich; in short, a stud. (1981)

beefcake (1949) Orig US; applied to (a display of) sturdy masculine physique; and hence to an individual muscular man; based jocularly on cheesecake  ■ Guardian: The other poster … shows Albert Finney in a beefcake pose with his shirt slit to the navel. (1963)

God’s gift (1953) Mainly ironic; applied to a man irresistible to women; from earlier more general sense, godsend  ■ Hugh Cleveley: It may do him a bit of good to find out he isn’t God’s gift to women walking the earth. (1953)

hunk (1968) Orig US; from earlier sense, very large person  ■ Mandy: I’m not losing my chance with a hunk like Douglas, for any boring old vow. (1989)

A sexually attractive woman

doll (1840) Orig US; often used as a form of address; from earlier sense, model of a human figure used as a toy  ■ Scope(South Africa): You don’t have to do it, doll. (1971)

jelly (1889) Dated; apparently from the wobbliness associated with buxom women  ■ William Faulkner: Don’t think I spent last night with a couple of your barber-shop jellies for nothing. (1931)

queen (1900) Dated  ■ J. T. Farrell: Wouldn’t it be luck if a ritzy queen fell for him! (1937)

cutie, cutey (a1904) Orig US; from cute + -ie  ■ James Barbican: He goes about with a high-stepping cutie who’s ace-high on the face and figure. (1927)

dolly (1906)  ■ Daily Mirror: He is very gone on girls, is always falling wildly in and out of love with dishy dollys. (1968)
cookie (1920) Orig US; compare earlier sense, person


patootie (1923) US; usually in such phrases as sweet patootie, hot patootie; from earlier sense, girlfriend, sweetheart. ■ Peter De Vries: You like to shake a leg with a hot patootie now and then, do you? (1958)

Ruby Queen (1925) Dated services’ slang; applied to an attractive young female nurse. ■ Edmund Blunden: With Ruby Queens we once crowned feasts of pork and beans. (1934)

tomato (1929) Orig US. ■ Howard Fast: This tomato is twenty-three years old and she’s a virgin. (1977)

cheesecake (1934) Orig US; applied to a display of sexually attractive females, especially in photographs, and hence to an individual attractive woman. ■ John Wain: She had a sexy slouch like a Hollywood cheesecake queen. (1958)

package (1945) US

nymphet (1955) Applied to a sexually attractive young girl; compare earlier sense, nymph; first used in this sense by Vladimir Nabokov in Lolita. ■ Joseph Di Mora: Most of the ‘sales executives’ had turned out to be eighteen- and nineteen-year-old nymphets. (1973)

gorgeous Gussie (1956) Applied to a glamorous and beautiful young woman; from the nickname of Gertrude (‘Gussie’) Moran, US tennis player; so called because of the frilly panties she wore on court. ■ People: Put a Gorgeous Gussie among a group of Plain Janes... and a whole office or factory routine can be upset. (1956)

sex kitten (1958) Applied to a young woman who asserts her sex appeal. ■ Guardian: Brigitte Bardot... the original sex kitten with the French charm. (1956)

fox (1961) US, orig Black English; back-formation from foxy sexually attractive. ■ L. H. hairston: Daddy, she was a real fox! (1964)

dolly-bird (1964) Mainly British. ■ Robert Crawford: You'll have to take... that dolly-bird you hide in Romford with you. (1971)

See also bimette, bimbo under A stupid woman at People (p. 49).

A sexually attractive thing or person

turn-on (1969) From turn on attract or stimulate sexually. ■ Judith Krantz: Masturbation isn’t a great big turn-on in my life. (1978)

Sexually attractive

stunning (1856) Usually applied to a female. ■ Listener: Yvonne Brathwaite Burke... the stunning and extremely saucy ‘Vice-Chairperson’. (1972)

husky (1869) Orig US; applied to a man who is big, vigorous and muscular; from earlier sense, like a corn-husk, from the toughness and strength of corn-husks

foxy (1895) US, mainly Black English; usually applied to a female; from earlier sense, amorous. ■ Easyriders: W/l [white female]... 21 years old and foxy, would like to hear from a gorgeous man with a terrific body. (1983)

tasty (1899) From earlier, more general sense, attractive. ■ R. Thomas: One of the women, a new actress with hopes of a plum part, turned to the other. ‘Tasty guy, wouldn’t you say, Dinah?’ (1984)

peachy (1926) From earlier sense, like a peach, from the lusciousness associated with peaches. ■ William Trevor: Your mum has a touch of style, Kate. I heard that remarked in a vegetable shop. I’d call her an eyeful, Kate. Peachy. (1976)

sexational, sexsational (1928) Orig US; applied to someone or something sexually sensational; blend of sex and sensational. ■ Time. Sexational, robustious Cinemactress Mae West appeared on a commercial broadcast for the first time in four years. (1937)


dreamy (1941) Orig US; usually applied to a male. ■ Monica Dickens: She said she had a date with a dreamy boy. (1953)

dishy (1961) From dish attractive person + -y. ■ John Gardner: ‘Mm, is that him?’ said the girl, all velvet. ‘He’s dishy.’ (1964)

glam (1963) Short for glamorous. ■ Celia Dale: She was... wearing eye-shadow and a great deal of lipstick. ‘You’re looking very glam,’ he said. (1964)

spunky (1975) Australian; from spunk attractive person + -y. ■ Sydney Morning Herald: Gynaecologists in Sydney have been known to leave their wives for younger, spunkier patients. (1984)

hunky (1978) Orig US; applied to a man who is ruggedly handsome and sexually attractive; from hunk attractive man + -y. ■ Sun. Sheer escapism for all the family with hunky Harrison Ford. (1986)


To attract or stimulate sexually

turn on (1966) Orig US. ■ J. I. M. Stewart: It’s a funny thing... how quite sure I was she wasn’t going to turn me on. (1975)

A person considered as an object of sexual desire or availability

crumpet (1936) British; used collectively, originally of women but latterly also of men; often in the phrase bit (or piece) of crumpet. ■ D. Lambert: Ansel... watched the couples wistfully. ‘Plenty of crumpet here, you know. Why don’t you chance your arm?’ (1969) ■ Observer: His performance as a trendy and
hung-up LA painter in ‘Heart-breakers’ made him the thinking woman’s West Coast crumpet. (1987)

make (1942) Orig US; applied to a sexual conquest, especially an easily seduced woman ■ Landfall: ‘A widow’s an easy make,’ He said, ‘you pedal and let her steer.’ (1951)

homework (1945) Usually applied to a woman; usually in the phrase bit (or piece) of homework ■ Julian Symons: He produced a dog-eared snap of a girl in a bikini. ‘How’s that for a piece of homework?’ (1968)

talent (1947) Used collectively, especially in the phrase local talent ■ Sunday Times: You can take a turn on the [sea-front and see what the talent is like. (1963)

A female sex object

cunt (1674) Often applied collectively to women; from earlier sense, female genitals

bit of fluff (goods, muslin, mutton, skirt, stuff, etc.) (1847), bit (1923) ■ Warwick Deeping: Got a little party on, you know, two bits of fashionable fluff. (1919) ■ Barbara Goodlen: If I want a common little bit for a best girl that’s my look-out, too. (1953) ■ B. W. Aldis: The infantry myth that one spent one’s whole leave yanking it up some willing bit of stuff in a pub yard. (1971) ■ J. I. M. Stewart: They mustn’t quarrel over a bit of skirt. (1977)

skirt (1914) Applied to a woman or collectively to women; often in the phrase bit of skirt ■ Kate Millett: The two patriarchs, never tired of chasing twenty-year-old skirts in their old age. (1974)

ass (1916) Orig US; applied to a woman or collectively to women; from earlier sense, woman’s buttocks and genital area, regarded as an object of sexual desire ■ John Updike: Then he comes back from the Army and all he cares about is chasing ass. (1960)

tail (1933) Applied collectively to women, often in the phrase bit (or tail) of tail; from earlier sense, woman’s buttocks and genital area, regarded as an object of sexual desire ■ John Updike: Where’s all the tail today? No Hermione, no Bunty, no Christabel. (1967)

quim (1935) Often applied collectively to women; from earlier sense, female genitals ■ Saturday Night (Toronto): The key to success in this contest is a flashy car, and if the car is both expensive and impressive ‘you have to beat the quim off with a hockey stick’. (1974)

brush (1941) Australian & New Zealand; applied collectively to women: perhaps from the female pubic hair ■ Sun-Herald (Sydney): He [was] intrigued by the younger men’s comments about the beautiful ‘brush’ (women) eager to be entertained by visiting trainers. (1984)

piece of ass (tail, etc.), piece (1942) Mainly US ■ G. V. Higgins: Him and four buddies want a little dough to get a high class piece of tail. (1972) ■ Judith Krantz: He ... thought she was a flaming, fabulous piece of ass. (1978)

crackling (1947) British; applied collectively to women, and in the phrase piece of crackling; from earlier sense, crisp skin of roast pork ■ Peter Dickinson: “You know her?” ‘I do, sir. Nice bit of crackling, she is.’ (1968)

poontang (1947) Sometimes applied collectively to women, and in the phrase piece of poontang; from earlier sense, sexual intercourse ■ Listener: Massa gonna smack yo black ass, nigger. You can’t go chasing white poontang all night long. (1972)

pussy (1959) Applied collectively to women; from earlier sense, female genitals ■ Guardian: This new Bugis Street, not old one; it government one, no girls, no good. You want pussy? Come, I take you there. (1992)

grumble (1962) British; applied collectively to women; shortened from grumble and grunt, rhyming slang for cunt ■ Melody Maker: American visitors are invariably delighted by references to birds, scrubbers, grumble. (1966)

bit of lumber (1966) Scottish; related to the verb lumber make sexual advances to, grope

beaver (1968) US; from earlier sense, female genitals or pubic area

spare (1969) Applied to an unattached woman, especially one available for casual sex; usually used collectively in the phrase bit of spare ■ Roger Bushby: ‘. . . got the impression Maurice was . . . on the look out for a bit of spare. . . . Some of the girls we get in here . . . don’t leave much to the imagination. (1978)

A sexual partner or partner in sexual intercourse

fancy man (1811) Derogatory; applied to a woman’s lover, often adulterous ■ Bill Naughton: You won’t get one husband in ten feels any thanks to the wife’s fancy man for the happiness he brings to the marriage. (1966)

cliner, clinah (1895) Australian, dated; applied to a girlfriend or female lover; probably from German kleine small ■ A. W. Upfield: ‘I eloped to get ’er clinah out of quod for what she and ’im did for me. (1928)

papa (1904) US; applied to a husband or male lover

patootie (1921) US; applied to a sweetheart or girlfriend, or to a pretty girl; probably an alteration of potato ■ New Yorker: She was, successively . . . the wife and/or sweet patootie of the quartet. (1977)

trick (1925) Orig & mainly US; applied to a casual sexual partner, often specifically a prostitute’s client; from earlier sense, act of sexual intercourse ■ Bill Turner: I doubt there’s one trick in twenty who isn’t a married man. (1968)

mamma, mama, momma (1926), red-hot mamma (1936) US; applied to a girlfriend or female lover; compare earlier sense, promiscuous woman

easy rider (1927) US, Black English; applied to a sexually satisfying lover

sweetback, sweetback man (1929) US; applied to a woman’s lover or to a ladies’ man

OAO (1936) Services’ slang, orig US; applied to someone’s sweetheart; abbreviation of one and only ■ Everybody’s Magazine (Australia): In each war, a new vocabulary is created. Today, in Vietnam, Australians are again catching up on American Army slang . . . All would refer
to a special girlfriend as their OAO—one and only. Probably, the OAO was on skirt patrol. (1967)

**sweet man** (1942) US; applied to a woman’s lover or to a ladies’ man

**shack-job** (1946) US; applied to a (temporary) sexual partner; from shack (up cohabit + job)

**shack** (1969)

**main squeeze** (1970) US; applied to a man’s principal woman friend; compare earlier sense, important person

**squeeze** (1980) Mainly US; applied to a close friend, especially a girlfriend or lover; shortened from main squeeze

**shack-up** (1969) Mainly US; applied to a (temporary) sexual partner; from shack up

**shack** (1969)

A person considered solely as a partner in sexual intercourse

**fuck** (1874) From earlier sense, act of sexual intercourse

**lay** (1932) Orig US: from the verb lay have sex with

**screw** (1937) From earlier sense, act of sexual intercourse

**root** (1961) Australian; applied to a woman; from earlier sense, act of sexual intercourse

**poke** (1968) From earlier sense, act of sexual intercourse

**hump** (1969) From earlier sense, act of sexual intercourse

An older sexual partner

**cradle-snatcher** (1907). **cradle-robber** (1926)

Jocular, orig US; applied to someone who enters into a sexual relationship with a much younger person

**daddy** (1909) US; applied to an older male lover

**baby-snatcher** (1911) Jocular; applied to someone who enters into a sexual relationship with a much younger person

**dirty old man** (1932) Applied to a lecherous older man

**.DOM** (1959) Abbreviation of dirty old man

**toy boy** (1981) Applied to a woman’s much younger male lover

A younger sexual partner

**jail-bait** (1934) Orig US; applied to a girl who is too young to have sex with legally; from the fact that sexual intercourse with such a girl may result in imprisonment

**banger** (1898) Applied especially to a violent kiss

**smacker** (1775)

**smack** (1604) Applied to a loud kiss

**peck** (1893)

**bender** (1898) Applied especially to a violent kiss

**smoosh** (1963) Australian; a variant of smooch

**grop** (c1250) Applied to fondling or attempting to fondle a person’s genitals or a woman’s
breasts. ■ Gerald Maclean: When he starts to grope another woman in church, she takes out a set of pins "to prick me if I should touch her again." (1994). Hence the noun grope applied to an instance of grooping someone, and hence to foreplay involving manual genital stimulation (1946). ■ Guardian: If everyone agrees that pushing girls around, looking up their skirts, taking a quick grope and talking in sexual innuendos is just boys being boys, then no one will take a stand. (1991)

■ independent: The great British tradition of peurute smut: 'Played cards with my girlfriend the other night.' 'Poker?' 'No, we just had a bit of a grope.' (1991)

ehistory (1903) Applied to kissing and caressing

John O'Hara: I was even surprised I could neck her at all. (1940) ■ John Le Carré: A loving couple necking in the back of a Rover. (1974)

bill and coo (1854) Applied to caressing and making other displays of affection; from the bonding behaviour of a pair of doves (bill from earlier sense, stroke each other's beaks, from bill beak)

canooodle (1859) Orig US, now mainly jocular; applied to kissing and cuddling; origin unknown. ■ Hugh Walpole: She's in there. . . . I'm off on some business of my own for an hour or two, so you can canoodle as much as you damned well please. (1921)

lallygag. lollygag (1868) US, dated; applied to amorous cuddling; from earlier sense, fool around

touch up (1903) Applied to fondling someone's genitals. ■ Clive Egleton: Good-looking tart. . . . I wouldn't have minded her touching me up. (1973)

clinch (1901) Orig US; applied to an embrace; from earlier sense, close-quarter grappling in a fight. ■ John Osborne: The 'King' and 'Queen' go into a clinch. (1959). So the verb clinch embrace (1899)

■ Punch: They . . . sit like lovers about to clinch. (1953)

footie, footy (1921), footsie, footsy (1944) Orig US; also used in reduplicated forms; applied to amorous play with the feet; jocular diminutive of foot ■ G. Fowler: I played footsie with her during Don José's first seduction by Carmen. (1944) ■ James Thurber: In a drawing. . . . showing a man and his wife and another woman at a table . . . the designing minx was playing footsy-footy with the husband. (1959)

slap and tickle (1928) British; denoting light-hearted kissing, caressing, etc. ■ Colleen McCullough: He'd woo her the way she obviously wanted, flowers and attention and not too much slap-and-tickle. (1977)

feel (1930) Applied to fondling someone's genitals; usually followed by up ■ Mordecai Richler: He literally bumped into Zippy feeling up the prettiest girl at the party in a dark damper. (1968). Hence the noun feel (1932) ■ Zeno: I gave her a feel, and she pulled away. (1970)

smooch (1932) Orig US; applied to kissing and caressing, especially while dancing to slow romantic music; variant of obsolete smouch kiss, related to German dialect schmutzen kiss, smile ■ Lewis Nkosi: Mary and Gama are sharing a studio couch on which they are smooching quietly. (1964). Hence the noun smooch applied to a fondling embrace or caress, and also to slow close dancing (1942)

■ Time: Ethel Merman and Fernando Lamas . . . found that their nightly onstage smooch grated too harshly on their star-crossed sensibilities. (1957)

mush (1939) Applied to kissing and caressing; from mush mouth. ■ Saul Bellow: There's plenty of honest kids to choose from, the kind who'd never let you stick around till one a.m. mushing with them on the steps. (1953)

snog (1945) British; applied to kissing and caressing; perhaps related to snug ■ Anthony Sampson: The cinema has lost its hold—except among unmarried teenagers, two-thirds of whom go at least once a week, perhaps to snog in the doubles. (1962) ■ Private Eye: Mirror cartoonist Griffin even put the hapless Parsons in last Friday's cartoon: a line of 'nutter's queuing for a turn to snog the Princess of Wales—an unshaven 'Chucky' at the tail end. (1995). Hence the noun snog a period or session of snogging (1959) ■ Martin Amis: They were enjoying a kiss—well, more of a snog really. (1973)

love-up (1953) Applied to an act of caressing, hugging, etc. ■ M. Allwright: He looked so beaten by the world that I wanted to gather him in my arms on the spot and give him a good love-up. (1968)

lumber (1960) Scottish; used of a man making (physical) sexual advances; origin uncertain; perhaps related to the noun lumber useless odds and ends and the verb lumber encumber ■ Alasdair Gray: 'Last Friday I saw her being lumbered by a hardman up a close near the Denistoun Palais.' 'Lumbered?' 'Groped. Felt.' (1981)

reef (1962) Applied to feeling a person's genitals; compare earlier sense, pick someone's pocket ■ Parker & Allerton: I enjoyed reefing girls much more than lessons. The girls enjoyed it too. (1962)

Sexual activity, sexual intercourse

it (1611) Euphemistic; applied to sexual intercourse ■ Francis Warner: He doesn't even know I'm overdue. And he hasn't had it for a week. (1972)

fuck (1680) Applied to an act of sexual intercourse; from the verb fuck copulate ■ E. J. Howard: Eat well, don't smoke, and a fuck was equal to a five-mile walk. (1965)

that there (1819) British, euphemistic; applied to sexual activity, especially in the catch-phrase you can't do that there 'ere; the catch-phrase derives from a popular song by Squiers and Wark, published in Feldman's 41st Song and Dance Album (1933). ■ Evening News: The British Government gives vent to a 'John-Bullism', and says, after the abduction of a Hindu girl from within the border, 'You can't do that there 'ere!' (1937)

the other thing (1846) Dated, euphemistic; applied to sexual activity ■ James Joyce: Besides there was absoluteness so long as you didn't do the other thing before being married. (1922)

frig (c1888) Applied to an act of sexual intercourse; from the verb frig copulate

greens (1888) Perhaps from the notion that sexual intercourse is as beneficial as eating
one's greens (i.e. cabbages and other green vegetables)  ■ Graham Greene: Why not go after the girl?  . . . She's not getting what I believe is vulgarly called her greens. (1967)

knee-trembler (1896) Applied to an act of sexual intercourse between people standing up  ■ B. W. Aldiss: They would be going to the pub for a pint and afterwards Nelson would get her against our back wall for a knee-trembler. . . . He claimed that knee-tremblers were the most exhausting way of having sex. (1971)

poke (1902) Applied to an act of sexual intercourse; from the verb poke have sex with  ■ Laurence Maynell: Landladies can nearly always be paid in kind. Services in lieu of rent. A poke a night. (1970)

tumble (1903) Applied to an act of sexual intercourse, especially in the phrase give a tumble; from the verb tumble have sex with  ■ J. Trench: He was . . . giving la Vitrey a tumble somewhere. (1954)

ass (1910) Orig US; applied to male sexual gratification; from earlier sense, woman's buttocks and genital area, regarded as an object of sexual desire  ■ R. D. Abrahams: When we got upstairs I threw her on the floor I was anxious to get some ass off that frantic whore. (1970)


the other (1922) Euphemistic; applied to sexual activity or intercourse, or occasionally to homosexual activities; short for the other thing  ■ Spectator: I've got to be noticed by any guy who's on the prowl away from home and looking for a bit of the other. (1974)

oats (1923) Applied to male sexual gratification; usually in such phrases as have or get one's oats; perhaps from sow one's wild oats commit youthful indiscretions  ■ John Wainwright: This wife he was lumbered with. Okay—he loved her. . . . But, even then he wanted his oats, occasionally. He was human. (1978)

jazz (1924), jazzing (1958) Orig Southern US Black English; applied to sexual intercourse  ■ Alan Lomax: Winding Boy is a bit on the vulgar side. Let's see—how could I put it—means a fellow that makes good jazz with the women. (1950)  ■ Murtagh & Harris: She asked if I wanted to do a little jazzing . . . I said, 'How much?' 'Two dollars,' she said. (1958)

trick (1926) Orig & mainly US; applied to an act of sexual intercourse, especially a prostitute's session with a client

jelly roll (1927) US, mainly Black English; applied to sexual intercourse; compare contemporary sense, female genitals  ■ Thomas Wolfe: 'What you want?' she asked softly. 'Jelly roll?' (1929)

nooky, nookie (1928) Applied to sexual intercourse; perhaps from nook secluded corner + y  ■ Anthony West: Still nooky was nooky he told himself, and who cared what the woman was like if the lay was good. (1960)

poontang (1929) US; applied to sexual intercourse; probably from French putain

screw (1929) Applied to an act of (casual or hasty) sexual intercourse; from the verb screw have sex (with)  ■ P. L. Caves: Five or six Angel birds sat around over cold cups of coffee waiting for a fast ride or a quick screw. (1971)

bang (1931) Applied to an act of sexual intercourse; from earlier sense, a pelvic thrust during intercourse  ■ John Updike: I bet she even gives him a bang now and then. (1968)

hump (1931) Applied to an act of sexual intercourse; from the verb hump have sex

jig-a-jig, jig-jig (1932) Applied to sexual intercourse; from earlier sense, jerking movement; of imitative origin  ■ Alexander Baron: He put his hand on her knee. 'You like jig-a-jig?' (1953)

jump (1934) Applied to an act of sexual intercourse  ■ Germaine Greer: A wank was as good as a jump in those days. (1970)

lay (1936) Applied to an act of sexual intercourse; from lay have sex with  ■ Bernard Malamud: Tonight an unexpected party, possibly a lay with a little luck. (1971)

shag (1937) Applied to an act of sexual intercourse; from shag have sex (with)  ■ B. W. Aldiss: It was not just a good shag I needed. It was romance. (1971)

hanky-panky (1938) Applied to surreptitious sexual activity; compare earlier sense, dishonest dealing  ■ New Yorker: They were still 'courting', still occupying separate quarters in Dr. Round's boarding house . . . where, according to Lunt, no 'hanky-panky' was permitted. (1986)

yum-yum (1939) Applied to sexual activity; from earlier sense, pleasurable activity  ■ Samuel Beckett: Come, ducky, it's time for yum-yum. (1967)

tail (1951) Applied to male sexual gratification; from earlier sense, woman's buttocks and genital area, regarded as an object of sexual desire  ■ Richard Gordon: Even if it was deciding whether to go out on the booze at night or have a bit of tail off of the wife. (1976)

naughty (1959) Mainly Australian & New Zealand: applied to (an act of) (illicit or surreptitious) sexual intercourse  ■ R. Beilby: It was also the opinion of the platoon, privately expressed, that Peppe had enjoyed more thoughts than naughty. (1977)

root (1959) Australian; applied to an act of sexual intercourse; from the verb root have sex (with)  ■ P. Kenna: Have you ever gone all the way with a girl? . . . You know what I mean. Have you ever had a real root? (1974)

trim (1961) US; applied to sexual intercourse; from earlier sense, woman  ■ H. L. Foster: Female student: 'Somebody always askin for some trim and haven't even got anything.' (1974)

one-night stand (1963) Applied to a brief sexual liaison or affair; from earlier sense, single theatrical performance
a length (1968) Applied to female sexual gratification; from earlier sense, an (erect) penis
H. C. Rae: Beefy, randy-arsed wives crying out for a length. (1968)

wham, bam (or bang), thank you ma'am (1971) Used with reference to sexual intercourse done quickly and without tenderness • Playgirl: Not all men are ‘wham bam thank you ma’am’ types. (1977)

zipless (1973) Used to denote a sexual encounter that is brief and passionate; coined by Erica Jong, ‘because when you came together, zippers fell away like petals’ • Gore Vidal: Girls who feared flying tended to race blindly through zipless fucks. (1978)

patha patha, phata phata (1977) South African; applied to sexual intercourse; from earlier sense, type of sensuous dance; ultimately from Xhosa and Zulu phatha phatha, literally ‘touch-touch’ • A. P. Brink: ‘Others looking for phata-phata’—illustrated by pushing his thumb through two fingers in the immemorial sign. (1979)

pussy (1978) Applied to sexual intercourse; from earlier sense, female genitals • Maclean's Magazine: As one blonde in a black leather coat bluntly replied, ‘I sell pussy, not opinions.’ (1979)

zatch (1980) Applied to an act of sexual intercourse, often in the phrase give a zatch; from earlier senses, buttocks, female genitals • Judith Krantz: You’re going to take her home and give her a zatch. (1980)

how’s your father (1983) British, jocular euphemism; applied to sexual intercourse; from earlier more general use as a word for something unnamed or whose name has been forgotten • Q. ‘The Princess and The Pea Brain’, as one paper ‘dubbed’ them, usurped Hugh Grant and Divine Brown as the premier concern of the nation’s gossipmongers. Naturally, both parties strenuously denied any how’s-your-father. (1996)

bonk (1984) British; applied to an act of sexual intercourse; from the verb bonk copulate • Sun: All they want is a quick bonk. (1993)

rumpy-pumpy, rumpy-tumpty, rumpe (1986) British; applied to (surreptitious) sexual intercourse; probably elaborated from rump buttocks, or a derivative • Guardian: One is ... an unimpressed bank manager (Richard Griffiths in fine form) in extra-marital pursuit of what he dubbs a bit of rumpy-pumpy. (1992)

Simulated sexual intercourse
dry fuck (1938) US; applied to a simulated act of sexual intercourse, without penetration, or to an unsatisfactory or anticlimactic act of intercourse. So the verb dry-fuck (c1937), dry-hump (1964)

To have sex (with), copulate (with)
fuck (c1500) Used transitively and intransitively; origin unknown • Ink: I don’t want to fuck anyone, and I don’t want to be fucked either. (1971)

ride (1520) Used transitively; formerly also used intransitively, since the Middle Ages • S. Allen: She mounted him and rode him... until they climaxed together. (1978)

bed (1548) In original use, mainly in the context of marrying a woman and taking her to bed on the wedding night • Sun. Albert—dubbed Dirty Bertie because of the 120 women he is said to have bedded—thinks Claudia is ‘fantastic’. (1992)

frig (1598) Mainly euphemistic; used transitively and intransitively; original sense, move restlessly; perhaps an onomatopoeic alteration of obsolete frike dance, move briskly • Mezzrow & Wolfe: High-pressure romancing (find ‘em, fool ‘em, frig ‘em and forget ‘em). (1946)

have (1594) Used transitively • Private Eye: He’s had more sheilas than you’ve had spaghetti breakfasts. (1970)

knock (1598) British; used transitively, of a male • David Pinner: I’ve knocked some girls in my time but I’ve never had such a rabbi as you. The cruder it is, the more you like it. (1967)

tumble (1602) Used transitively • Roy Lewis: Tommy Elia had tumbled the schoolgirl in the ferns. (1976)
do (c1650) Used transitively and also in the phrase do it have sex • Victor Canning: Some service-woman... did your mother in Cyprus... and then... made an honest woman of her. (1967)

bang (1698) Used transitively and intransitively • Jack Kerouac: He rushes from Marylou to Camille... and bangs her once. (1957)

roger, rodder (1711) Used transitively, of a male; apparently a metaphorical use of the male personal name; the noun roger penis is now obsolete (1700–1863) • Angus Wilson: I’m not at all sure about the Empress Theodora. I fancy she was rogered by an ape more than once in her circus acts. (1961)

screw (1725) Used transitively and intransitively • Thomas Pynchon: Santa’s bag is filled with all your dreams and in alphabetical order. (1965)

pump (1730) Used transitively and intransitively • James Patrick: Skidmarks had come by her name through the boys’ practice of kicking her naked behind after they had ‘pumped’ her. (1973)

tail (1778) Used transitively, of a male • John Wainwright: So, I tailed his wife... So what? (1973)

hump (1785) Used transitively and intransitively • Malcolm Bradbury: Story is he humped the faculty wives in alphabetical order. (1965)

shag (1788) Used transitively and intransitively; origin uncertain; perhaps from obsolete shag shake, waggle • Richard Adams: ‘He’s never absent.’ And the corporal next to Jack muttered, ‘Well, I ‘ope ‘e ain’t ‘angin’ around when I’m shaggin’ my missus.’ (1980)

poke (1868) Used transitively, of a male • John Braine: I wanted to poke Lucy so I poked her. (1962)

diddle (1870) Now mainly US; used transitively and intransitively; from earlier sense, move jerkily from side to side • William Faulkner: ‘I’ll find all three of them. I’ll— ‘What for? Just out of curiosity to find
out for certain just which of them was and wasn’t dildiling her? (1940)

do over (1873) Used transitively, often with the implication of violent seduction. ■ John o’ London’s: A truly Moravian rape-scene in a ruined church, with Casira and Rossetta both done over by a screeching pack of Moroccan gouns. (1961)

goose (1879) Dated; sometimes denoting specifically anal intercourse; compare obsolete goose and duck act of copulating, rhyming slang for fuck. ■ F. Griffin: It’s the commonest thing possible in the army. As soon as . . . I had learned the goose-step, I had learned to be goosed. (1881)

get into (c1888) Used transitively, of a man ■ Jack Kerouac: I’ve just got to get into her sister Mary tonight. (1957)

get some (1889) Euphemistic, orig US; applied especially to having sex with a woman on a regular basis, or to succeeding in finding a sexual partner. ■ Judith Krantz: Since his last visit she was getting some, somewhere, he’d bet his life on it. (1978)

plug (1901) Used transitively, of a male ■ American Spectator: I plugged her last night. (1977)

take (1915) Used transitively, of a male ■ Ted Allbutry: She lay with her eyes open as he took her. (1978)

go all the way (or the whole way) (1924) Euphemistic; applied to having sexual intercourse, as opposed to engaging only in kissing or foreplay. ■ W. J. Burley: The things we found in her room! I mean it was obvious she was going all the way and her not fifteen! (1970)

make (1926) Orig US; used transitively, often denoting success in persuading someone to have sex; from earlier sense, make (successful) sexual advances to. ■ E. Goffman: James Bond makes the acquaintance of an unattainable girl and then rapidly makes the girl. (1969)

jazz (1927) Used transitively and intransitively; from jazz sexual intercourse. ■ H. MacLennan: My sister was being jazzed by half the neighbourhood cats by the time she was fifteen. (1948)

mollock (1932) Used intransitively; apparently invented by Stella Gibbons [Cold Comfort Farm], and perhaps influenced by moll prostitute, female companion. ■ W. Bawden: And yet, here they were, not more than a foot away, bedhead to bedhead, merrily rocks off. (1948)

lay (1934) Orig US; used transitively, or (of a woman) intransitively, denoting having or willingness to have sex. ■ Philip Roth: All I know is I got laid, twice. (1969) ■ John Updike: You’ve laid for Harrison, haven’t you? (1960)

boff (1937) Usually used transitively; from earlier sense, hit hard. ■ Observer: They’re the only two decent-looking people on Brookside. Who on earth else would they want to boff? (1986)

have it off (or away) (with) (1937) British ■ George Melly: I derived iconoclastic pleasure from having it off in the public parks where fifteen years before my brother and I . . . accompanied our nurse on sunny afternoons. (1965) ■ R. Perry: No one would dream of having it away with his mistress. (1972)

make out (1939) Orig US; often stressing success in achieving sexual intercourse with a woman; usually followed by with. ■ Times: The detailed accounts of how he ‘made out’ sexually and emotionally with some sixteen different girls. (1961)

tear it off a bit (or piece) (1941) Orig Australian; applied to a man having sex with a woman. ■ Custom Car: Italian wives must sit and suffer if the men tear off a bit on the sly. (1977)

get one’s rocks off (1948) Orig US; applied to a man obtaining sexual release by copulation and ejaculation; from rocks testicles

slip someone a length (1949) Used of a man; from length (erect) penis. ■ Christopher Wood: Come on, Suggy, you’re 'is batman, 'e's never slipped you a crafty length ‘as' e? (1970)


ball (c1953) Orig US; used transitively and intransitively, especially of a man; perhaps an extension of ball enjoy oneself; influenced by balls testicles. ■ Gore Vidal: And you can tell the world all about those chicks that you ball. (1978)

make it (1957) Usually followed by with; from earlier sense, be successful. ■ Times Literary Supplement: He finally makes it with long-desired Rachel. (1973)

dip one’s wick (1958) Used of a man; from the notion of inserting the penis. ■ Robert Barnard: None of your barmaids or local peasant wenches for Pete. He’s very calculating where he dips his wick. (1981)

root (1958) Australian; used transitively and intransitively, especially of a man; also in the phrase root like a rattlesnake (i.e. vigorously); compare root penis. ■ K. Cook: We found this bloody little poofton down on the beach fiddling with a bird. . . . Couldn’t even root her. (1974)

nail (1960) US; used transitively, usually of a man, often with the implication of aggression. ■ R. Grossbach: Who would you rather marry, then—the publishing cupcake in the Florsheims who nailed you on the couch and then fired you? (1979)

score (1960) Used intransitively or transitively, of a male; usually used to imply success in persuading a woman to have sexual intercourse. ■ Germaine Greer: The boys used to go to the local dance halls and stand around . . . until the . . . sexual urge prompted them to score a chick. (1970) ■ David Craig: They talk about ‘taking’ a woman. . . . Or, ‘Did you score last night?’—like some great goal, scheming and forcing. (1978)

stuff (1960) Used transitively, of a male ■ Sunday Times: He was sacked from Eton for stuffing the boys’ maids. (1983)

naughty (1961) Mainly Australian & New Zealand; used transitively; from the noun
naughty (act of) sexual intercourse  ■ C. Klein: He didn’t want to do the hard word on her, last thing he had on his mind was to try and naughty her. (1977)

saw a chunk (etc.) off (1961)  ■ John Wainwright: The act is . . . known, in polite circles, as ‘copulation’. Known, in less polite circles, as . . . ‘sawing a length off’. (1977)

make time (1962) North American; often used to denote success in persuading someone to have sex; usually followed by with; from earlier sense, make (successful) sexual advances to
■ Dell Shannon: Frankly, he’d have liked to make time with that girl, but she’d turned up her nose at him. (1971)

trick (1965) US; used intransitively; applied to having casual sex, especially for money; usually followed by with; from the noun trick sexual intercourse (with a prostitute)  ■ Joseph Wambaugh: He tricked with a whore the night before in the Orchid Hotel. (1973)


lay pipe (1967) US; used of a man, implying vigorous copulation  ■ Arthur Hailey: It made him horny just to look at her, and he laid pipe, sometimes three times a night. (1971)

shtup (1969) Used transitively and intransitively; from earlier sense, hit (or) one’s nuts off (1970) • J. Barnett: Maybe we sex together at yo’ place. (1980)

shaft (1970) Used transitively, of a male; compare shaft penis  ■ B. W. Aldiss: How sinful he looked, squatting there by the water while his wife was being shafted by some dirty big Mendip only a few feet away! (1971)


bonk (1975) British; used transitively and intransitively; from earlier sense, hit resoundingly or with a thud  ■ Daily Telegraph: Fiona . . . has become so frustrated that she has been bonking the chairman of the neighbouring constituency’s Conservative association. (1986)

get (or have) one’s end away (1975) British; usually used of a man  ■ Guardian: They called him Grandad, asked him how his girlfriends were. ‘Are you getting it?’ they kept repeating. ‘Getting your end away?’ (1995)

get (have, etc.) one’s leg over (1975) Used of a man; compare 18th-century lift a leg over (someone) in same sense  ■ D. Kartun: Daft spending like that on a tart like her. Half the garrison have had their leg over. (1987)

Having sex

up (1937) Applied to a man having sex with (someone)  ■ James Patrick: We’ve aw been up her. (1973)

on the job (1966) Applied to someone engaged in sexual intercourse  ■ Daily Telegraph: ‘Why the hell did you play Eric Clapton’s Easy Now? . . . Didn’t you realise it was all about some guy on the job?’ And I said, ‘Yeah. How many songs aren’t?’ (1972)

To achieve orgasm

come (c1600) Sometimes followed by off  ■ D. H. Lawrence: And when I’d come and really finished, then she’d start on her own account. (1928)

spend (1662)  ■ R. L. Duncan: He felt himself spending at the very moment she contracted around him. (1980)

go off (c1866)  ■ Henry Miller: Bango! I went off like a whale. (1949)

come off (1973) Denoting experiencing orgasm by means of something  ■ Newton Thornburg: And the shrink getting off on it all, sitting there with one hand stuck in his fly. (1976)

Multi-sex

daisy chain (a1927) Applied to sexual activity involving three or more people  ■ Saul Bellow: You have to do more than take a little gas, or slash the wrists. Pot? Zero! Daisy chains? Nothing! Debauchery? A museum word. (1964)

gang-shag (1927) US; applied to an act of or occasion for multiple intercourse, especially one in which several men in succession have sex with the same woman

gang-bang (1945) Orig US; applied to an act of or occasion for multiple intercourse, especially one in which several men in succession have sex with the same woman  ■ Bill Turner: What’s the next arrangement to be? A gang-bang for the whole Vice Squad? (1968). Hence the verb gang-bang (1949)

French slang in the same sense  ■ Wayland Young: And when I’d come and really finished, then she’d start on her own account. (1928)

To perform oral sex (on)

gamahuche, gamaruche (1865) Dated; from French slang gamahucher in the same sense  ■ P. Perret: My dear, do you know, this is my only ambition! To gamahuche a lady of fashion! (1888)

eat (1916) Orig US  ■ Lisa Alther: ‘Eat me,’ he said, seizing my head with his hands and fitting my mouth around his cock and moving my head back and forth. (1974)

French slang in the same sense  ■ Kate Millett: I do not want her body. Do not want to see it, caress it, go down on it. (1974)

French (1923) From the noun French oral sex

French slang in the same sense  ■ Wayland Young: In England . . . we call . . . cunt-licking Frenching. (1965)

suck (1928) Used intransitively or (usually followed by off) transitively  ■ Guardian: One American GI is forcing a Vietnamese woman to suck him off. (1971)  ■ E. Hannon: White chicks dig suckin, that’s a fact. That’s cause suckin’s sophisticated. (1975)

plate (1961)  ■ Fabian & Byrne: I wondered whether I should plate him. I hadn’t done much of that, but I knew guys on the scene liked it because Nigel had told me so. (1989)
give head (1967) Orig US.  ■ Independent. A scene in which Wesley Snipes refuses to accept that cunnilingus can be a fulfilling alternative to intercourse has raised many eyebrows, not least for including the line, ‘Black guys don’t give head’. (1992)

Oral sex

sixty-nine, 69 (1888) Applied to mutual oral stimulation of the genitals; literal translation of French soixante-neuf in same sense. ■ D. Lang: We spent many hours lying on her bed, more or less in the classical 69 position, but motionless. (1973)

soixante-neuf (1888) Applied to mutual oral stimulation of the genitals; French, literally sixty-nine; from the position of the couple ■ Martin Amis: The other couple were writhing about still, now seemingly poised for a session of fully robed soixante-neuf. (1973)

French (1916) From the supposed predilection of the French for oral sex. ■ Tony Parker: There’s two things I won’t let her do though, that’s French and sadism. (1969)

To perform cunnilingus

eat pussy (1938) Orig US; also used more generally to denote sexual intercourse. ■ M. McClure: When we talk about eating pussy we make it sound as dirty and vulgar as possible. (1967)

A cunnilinguist


To fellate

blow (1930) Orig US; from an analogy with playing a musical wind instrument. ■ Philip Roth: ‘I want you to come in my mouth,’ and so she blew me. (1969)

nosh (1965) From earlier sense, eat

Fellatio

blow job (1942) Orig US. ■ P. Booth: Turning the other cheek was for girls who hadn’t had to give blow jobs to tramps in exchange for a few pieces of candy. (1986)

A fellator or fellatrix

prick-sucker (1868) ■ New Directions. From then onward she became an ardent Prick-sucker. (1974)

cock-sucker (1891) ■ Playboy. I know one women’s lib leader who, friends tell me, is a great cock-sucker. (1971)

Someone with unconventional sexual tastes

perv, perve (1944) Orig Australian; short for pervert ■ E. Lambert: He was a perv. Special attention given to small boys. (1959). Hence pervy (1944) ■ G. F. Newman: Twenty maximum security, the lights never out, pervy screws watching every movement. (1970)

seko (1949) Australian; applied to a sexual deviant or sex offender; from sex + -o ■ W. Dick: You look like you’d be the sorta bloke who’d take little kids down a lane and give ‘em two bob, yuh bloody seko. (1969)


J. Ripley: I have known queers. I have known kinks. (1972). So the adjective kinky (1959) ■ Francis Warner: Kinky sex makes them feel inadequate. (1972)

nonce (1975) British, prisoners’ slang; applied to someone convicted of a sexual offence, especially child-molesting; origin uncertain; perhaps from nancy male homosexual, but compare British dialect nonce good-for-nothing fellow ■ Sunday Telegraph: As what prisoners call a ‘nonce’, he now faces years of solitary confinement and regular assaults from fellow inmates. (1986)

Sado-masochism

fladge, fladj, flage (1958) Applied to flagellation as a means of sexual gratification, and also to pornographic literature concentrating on flagellation; shortened from flagellation ■ J. I. M. Stewart: I have some damned odd fantasies when it comes to quiet half-hours with sex. Flage, and all that. (1975)

Anal sex

postilion, postillion (1888) Denoting stimulating a sexual partner anally with the finger

ream (1942) US; denoting having anal sex with someone; from earlier sense, widen a hole ■ Tom Wolfe: The man reams him so hard the pain brings him to his knees. (1979)

rim (1959) US; denoting licking the anus, especially before sexual intercourse; probably a variant of ream ■ Martin Amis: Skip’d rim a snake so long as someone held its head. (1975)

fist-fuck (1972) Orig US; used as a noun and a verb to denote the insertion of the hand into the rectum as a means of sexual gratification. Hence the nouns fist-fucking (1972), fisting (1981)

To expose one’s genitals as a means of sexual gratification

flash (1846) Used of a man; from the brevity of the exposure ■ Gore Vidal: Men stared at me. Some leered. None, thank God, flashed. (1978). Hence flasher a man who does this (1962) ■ Anthony Powell: He was apparently a ‘flasher’, who had just exposed himself. (1976)

Autoeroticism

scarfing (1994) British; applied to the practice of auto-asphyxiation for sexual stimulation

To masturbate

rub up (1658) In earliest use transitive; not recorded intransitively until the 20th century ■ Compton Mackenzie: Just as I was going down the steps into our area B—asked me if I ever rubbed up. . . . In bed that night I tried the experiment recommended by B—. (1963)
frig (1680) From earlier sense, have sex (with)
- My Secret Life: I have frigged myself in the streets before entering my house, sooner than fuck her. (c1888)

toss off (1879) ■ D. Kavanagh: Would you like me to toss you off? . . . It's ten if you're worried about the price. (1981)

pull off (1922) ■ Leonard Cohen: Can an old scholar find love at last and stop having to pull himself off every night so he can get to sleep? (1966)

diddle (1934) From earlier sense, have sex (with)
- Kate Millet: Paraphernalia with the scarf. . . . Supposed to diddle herself with it. Male fantasy of lonely chick masturbating in sad need of him. (1974)

jerk off (1937) ■ Bernard Malamud: The mother . . . dies unattended, of malnutrition, as Herbert jerks off in the hall toilet. (1971)

pull one's pudding (or wire) (1944) ■ Wilbur Smith: Jesus. . . . That was ugly. I felt like a peeping tom, watching someone, you know, pulling his pudding. (1970)

wank (1950) Often followed by off; origin unknown


beat the (or one's) meat (1967) ■ Org US; from meat penis ■ Julia O'Faolain: What did people do in a place like this? Beat their meat probably. (1980)

whack off (1969) US ■ Transatlantic Review: 'What-in-hell you do for sex anyway?' he asked the boy one night. 'Whack off into the tin pot where they keep the mashed potatoes?' (1977)

Masturbation

pocket billiards (1940) Org schoolboys' slang; applied to playing with the testicles with one's hands in one's trouser pockets, for masturbatory stimulation; often in the phrase play pocket billiards

wank (1948) Applied to an act of (male) masturbation; origin unknown ■ Sniffin' Glue: Behind that bog door are you thinkin', readin' or just havin' a wank? (1977)

hand-job (1969) ■ D. Leavitt: First he had been satisfied with the films alone; then a quick hand-job in the back row. (1986)

Contraceptives

French letter, french letter (c1856)
- Frenchy, frenchy, Frenchie (1953) Mainly British; applied to a condom; letter perhaps = hinderer, from let hinder ■ J. R. Ackerley: My elder brother Peter was the accident. 'Your father happened to have run out of french letters that day.' (1968)

Tom Sharpe: You can't feel a thing with a Frenchie. You get more thrill with the pill. (1976)

safe (1897) Applied to a condom ■ E. Koch: Just in time he remembered his safe. He took it out of his pants pocket. (1979)


frog, froggie (1952) Australian; applied to a condom; from frog French (person), in allusion to French letter condom ■ A. Buzo: 'Jeess I forgot the frog,' he said. . . . I was disgusted. I put my pants back on and told him to take me home immediately. (1969)

skin (1960) Orig US; applied to a condom ■ Tom Sharpe: 'You got those rubbers you use?' he asked suddenly. . . . 'I want those skins.' (1976)

johnny (1965) British; applied to a condom; from the male personal name ■ Times Educational Supplement: [A mark of] 100 . . . my informant wrote, 'is rightly reserved for full intercourse without a Johnny.' (1970)

scumbag (1967) Mainly US; applied to a condom; from scum semen + bag ■ Time Out: Young blades carried their sheaths or condoms or . . . 'scumbags' in their wallets. (1974)


Pornographic, erotic

naughty (1882) Euphemistic ■ Guardian: A News of the World reporter had approached her first husband . . . asking if he had any 'naughty photographs' of her. (1991)

hot (1892) ■ J. T. Farrell: A burlesque show. The hottest . . . of Cleland's great collection of feelthy books down here—including a first edition of Cleland's Fanny Hill, or the Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure. (1963)


feelthy (1933) Jocular imitation of a foreign pronunciation of filthy ■ B. S. Johnson: Maurie has a great collection of feelthy books down here—including a first edition of Cleland's Fanny Hill, or the Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure. (1963)

jerk-off (c1957) From jerk off masturbate; from the notion of such material as a stimulus to masturbation

adult (1958) Euphemistic, org US; from the unsuitability of such material for children ■ Tampa (Florida) Tribune: Rentals for adult videos outstrip purchases by 12 to 1. (1984)

porny (1961) From pornographic + -y ■ J. Wilson: You make it sound like one of those porny books—'His hand caressed her silken knee' and all that rubbish. (1973)

beaver (1967) Applied to photographs, films, etc. that feature the female genitals and pubic area; from the noun beaver female genitals or pubic
virility (1972) Applied to someone sexually suggestive, salacious, or bawdy; from earlier sense, despicable, grubby. ■ D. Anthony: If you mean Couplings, I liked it... I happen to like raunchy films. (1977)

steamy (1970) ■ R. McInerney: It was a moral outlook, one that had never... been disturbed by the steamy fiction that was her steady diet. (1980)

split beaver (1972) Applied to photographs of the female genitals that show the inner labia

tit(s) and ass (or arse), tits and bums (1972) Denoting the crude display of female sexuality on stage, in films, newspapers, magazines, etc. ■ Sunday Times: Ugly George, America’s prime TV porn artist (who invites women to undress for his video camera), with his ‘tit n’ ass’ cable channel. (1982)

Pornography

leg art (1940) Orig US; applied to portrayals of scantily clad or naked women

pornie (1966) Applied to a pornographic film; from pornographic + -ie ■ Publishers Weekly. A nice California kid until she was conned into filming pornies to pay off her lover’s addict brother’s connection. (1975)

schmutz, shmutz (1968) Mainly US; from earlier sense, dirt, filth, from Yiddish or German schmutz. ■ Mordecai Richler: ‘Of my son’s ability there is no question.’ ‘—and, em, the contents of your son’s novel. You see—’ ’Shmutz,’ Daniels shouted at Katansky. ‘Pardon?’ ‘Filth. Today nothing sells like filth.’ (1968)

See also cheesecake at Sexually attractive man (p. 69); cheesecake at Sexually attractive woman (p. 70).

To make more sexy

sex up (1942) ■ Observer. Reads rather like an old-time boy’s book sexed up and sadisticised for the 1950s. (1958)

Virginity

cherry (1918) Orig US; often in the phrase lose one’s cherry; also applied to a virgin (1935); from the red colour of the vagina or of the blood from the ruptured hymen. ■ R. H. Rimmer: The day I lost my cherry didn’t amount to much, anyway. (1975)

■ Mordecai Richler: Gin excites them. Horseback riding gives them hot pants too. Cherries are trouble, but married ones miss it something terrible. (1959)

Virility

lead in one’s pencil (1941) Often in the phrase put lead in one’s pencil enable one to have an erection. ■ Dan Lees: The coscouis is supposed to put lead in your pencil but with Daria I needed neither a talking point nor an aphrodisiac. (1972)

Relationships

old flame (1840) Applied to a former lover; from earlier more general use of flame for ‘lover’ ■ Sun: You walk into a pub or a party and see an old flame standing there with someone new. (1992)

bach, batch (1855) North American, Australian, & New Zealand; abbreviation of bachelor. Hence the verb bach, batch live alone and do one’s own cooking and housekeeping (1862) ■ D. Ireland: How are you getting on, batching? Are you going to get married again? (1971)

split up (1903) Denoting ending a relationship ■ W. Corlett: ‘He thought his parents were... splitting up?’ ‘Divorce? ... he thought it was on the cards.’ (1976)

sleeping dictionary (1928) Applied to a foreign woman with whom a man has a sexual relationship and from whom he learns the rudiments of her language

seven-year itch (1936) Applied jocularly to an urge to infidelity after seven years of marriage ■ Patricia Moyes: There’s something called the seven-year itch... middle-aged men quite suddenly cutting loose. (1980)

item (1970) Orig US; applied to a pair of lovers regarded (especially socially acknowledged) as a couple. ■ Kurt Vonnegut: I hadn’t realized that he and she had been an item when they were both at Tarkington, but I guess they were. (1990)

To have a sexual relationship (with)

carry on (1856) Often followed by with: ■ W. S. Maugham: It was impossible that she could be ‘carrying on’ with Lord George. (1930)

go with (1892) ■ H. K. Fink: I was going with girls... and I didn’t feel the urge to play with myself. (1954)

go steady (1905) Orig US; denoting having a regular boyfriend or girlfriend ■ Fay Weldon: I’m going steady with one of the young doctors. (1978)

shack up, be shackled up (1935) Applied to people who cohabit, especially as lovers; usually followed by with or together. ■ David Lodge: Philip Swallow is shackled up with Melanie at that address. (1975)

have something going (1971) Denoting having a close (sexual) relationship; often followed by with ■ Philadelphia Inquirer: Is it true that Sammy Davis Jr. has something going with Linda Lovelace? (1973)

An expert on sexual matters

sexpert (1924) Orig US; blend of sex and expert ■ Radio Times: Every other interviewed sexpert seemed to come from California where... you can graduate in any old spurious subject. (1979)
13. Sexual Orientation

Homosexual

queer (1922) Mainly derogatory; also in the phrase as queer as a coot. ■ Alan WHITE: 'I say, Peter, you're not turning queer by any chance, are you?' The thought that I might be queer had haunted me. (1976)


bent (1959) Derogatory; from earlier sense, out of order. ■ Frederick RAPHAEL: 'Great thing about gay people. . . . 'Gay?' Tessa said. 'Bent, queer, you know. Homosexual.' (1960)

that way (a1960) Euphemistic. ■ J. R. ACKERLEY: I divined that he was homosexual, or as we put it, 'one of us,' 'that way,' 'so,' or 'queer.' (a1967)

A homosexual

homo (1929) Mainly derogatory; also used as an adjective; abbreviation. ■ Listener: Sally's breathless confession to Dr Dale about hubby being a homo must have caused many a benighted bigot's heart to stop. (1957)

one of those, one of them (1933), one of us (1961) Euphemistic. ■ J. R. ACKERLEY: I divined that he was homosexual, or as we put it, 'one of us.' (a1967)

Gay News: Her husband ... probably fits none of the stereotypes whereby she would normally identify 'one of those.' (1977)

queer (1935), queerie (1938) Mainly derogatory; applied especially to male homosexuals; from the adjective queer. ■ Angus WILSON: I quite like queers if it comes to that, so long as they're not on the make. (1952)

■ Bruce Rodgers: That little "queerie" is the only one I know who shoots Sal Hepatica. (1972)

ginger-beer, ginger (1959) Also used as an adjective; rhyming slang for queer m. ■ A. Williams: 'Unless you prefer ginger.' 'Ginger?' 'Beer, dear.' . . . 'You ever meet an Aussie who was queer?' (1968)

A male homosexual

sod (c1855) Derogatory; abbreviation of sodomite. ■ Percy Wyndham LEWIS: When you come to write your book, its scene our day to day life, I should put in the sods. Sartre has shown what a superb figure of comedy a homo can be. (1949)

poof, pouf, pouff, poove (1860) Derogatory; also applied more broadly to an effeminate man; probably an alteration of puff braggart. ■ A. Richards: A young man . . . had been heard in the showers to refer to Elgar as 'a bit of a poof.' (1976). Hence the verb poof, etc., denoting behaving effeminately or like a male homosexual. (1971)

Mary Ann, Mary (1880) Derogatory; from the female personal name(s)

wife (1883) Applied to the passive member of a homosexual partnership. ■ Joseph HYAMS: The group's leader [a homosexual]. . . . made his 'wife' head of production. (1978)

pretty-boy (1885) Mainly derogatory; also applied more broadly to an effeminate man

fairy (1895) Derogatory; applied to an effeminate male homosexual; from earlier sense, woman. ■ Evelyn WAUGH: Two girls stopped near our table and looked at us curiously. 'Come on,' said one to the other, 'we're wasting our time. They're only fairies.' (1945)

fruit (1900) Derogatory, orig US. ■ Guardian: He is a fruit, which means . . . that he is a queer. (1970)

puff (1902) Derogatory; also applied more broadly to an effeminate man; compare pouf. ■ H. W. Sutherland: He'd be a puff boy, this Magnie, and God knows what entertainment he laid on for Arthur. (1967)

poof, poofah, pooferoo (1903) Derogatory, mainly Australian; extension of puff. ■ Ian Fleming: 'You pommy poofah.' . . . Bond said mildly, 'What's a poofah?' 'What you'd call a pansy.' (1964)

nancy, nancy-boy (1904) Derogatory; also applied more broadly to an effeminate man; from obsolete slang Miss Nancy effeminate man, from pet-form of the female forename Ann. ■ Lawrence Durrell: I can't stand that Toto fellow. He's an open nancy-boy. (1958). Hence nancified (1937)

■ Kenneth Giles: Beautiful smooth dark rum, not like that nancified white stuff you poms put in your cokes. (1967)

punk (1904) Mainly US; applied to a passive male homosexual, or to a tramp's young male companion

lizzie, lizzie boy (1905) Applied to an effeminate young man; abbreviation of the female forename Elizabeth. ■ N. L. McClung: She's married to a no-good Englishman, a real lizzie-boy. (1912)

faggot (1914) Orig and mainly US, derogatory; from earlier derogatory application to a woman. ■ Harry Kane: Duffy was no queen, no platinum-dyed freak, no screaming faggot. (1962). Hence faggoty (1927)

■ A. Binkley: Albie in his faggoty silk pajamas. (1968)

wolff (1917) Orig US; applied to a male homosexual seducer or one who adopts an active role with a partner. ■ K. J. Doer: In prisons the 'wolff is the active homosexual, and does not reverse roles with his partners. (1978)

gunsel, gonsil, gunshel, gun(t)zel (1918) US; applied to tramp's young male companion or lover; and hence to any homosexual youth; from earlier sense, a naive youth

faggot (1921) US, derogatory; abbreviation of faggot. ■ Lesley Egan: You can't tell the fags from outside looks. (1964). Hence faggoty (1951). ■ John Le Carré: 'I had such a good time,' says Grant, with his quaint, rather faggoty indignation. (1986)

nance (1924) Derogatory; short for nancy. ■ Frederick Forsyth: We're looking for a fellow who screwed the arse off a Baroness . . . not a couple of raving nances. (1971)

queen (1924) Applied especially to a passive or effeminate homosexual; compare quean. ■ Evelyn
Waugh: 'Now what may you want, my Italian queen?' said Lottie as the waiter came in with a tray (1930). Hence queeny (1936) • Graham McInnes: Thereafter he said he'd rather play football with the other fellows: reading aloud was a bit 'queeny'. (1966)

bum-boy (1929) Derogatory: applied to a young male homosexual, especially a prostitute; from bum buttocks. • Dylan Thomas: A ruddy and dainty gesture copied from some famous cosmopolitan bumboy. (1938)

moffie, mophy (1929) Mainly South African; perhaps a shortening and alteration of hermanphrodite; compare Afrikaans moffiedaar, dialectal variant of hermanphrodiet. • Post (South Africa): The life of Edward Shadi—described as a beautiful, sexy moffie with a sweet soprano voice—was a strange affair. (1971)

moffie (1929) Mainly South African: used as an adjective • John Betjeman: There Bignose plays the organ. And the pansies all sing flat. (1960) • Edmund Crispin: I'd want her to be walking out with a decent lad, not a pansy little foreign gramophone-record. (1951). Hence pansy (up) (1946) used to denote dressing or adorning affectedly or effeminately • John Wainwright: Originally, his hair had been mousy brown. He'd tried to pansey himself up—and failed. (1966)

pansy (1932) British, derogatory; also applied more broadly to an effeminate man; from earlier sense, pimp • Nik Cohn: Mods thought that Rockers were yobs, Rockers thought that Mods were pansies. (1969). Hence ponce about (1954) denoting behaving in an effeminate way

pansy, pansy-boy (1929) Derogatory; pansy also used as an adjective • John Betjeman: There Bignose plays the organ. And the pansies all sing flat. (1960)

quean (1935) Applied to an effeminate male homosexual; the original sense of quean is 'woman', and it was generally used as a term of abuse, 'strumpet, harlot, etc.'; it is not clear whether queen represents the older form (it is certainly the commoner spelling), and whether queen is just a purist's respelling. • J. R. Ackerley: I did not want him to think me 'queer' and himself a part of homosexuality, a term I disliked since it included prostitutes, pansies, pouffs and queans. (1954)

tart (1935) Applied to the young homosexual companion of an older man, or loosely to a male prostitute • Times Literary Supplement: The boys that Isherwood and his friends picked up were not professional tarts only out for what they could get. (1977)

trade (1935) Applied to someone picked up for homosexual activity, or to such people collectively; especially in the phrase rough trade a rough or especially lower-class person (or people) engaged in homosexual prostitution • Jeremy: These are men who because they are too old, or unattractive, cannot pick up free 'trade'. (1969) • Playboy: The gay boys call us 'rough trade'. 'We're the ones they date. . . We're the ones they buy presents for. (1965)

iron (1936) Derogatory; short for iron hoof, rhyming slang for foot. • Eric Partridge: Gorblimey, 'e's an iron, didn't he know? (1961)

sister (1941) Orig US; applied to a fellow homosexual, or to a homosexual who is a friend rather than a lover

swish (1941) US, derogatory; also applied more broadly to an effeminate man • J. F. Burke: [He] dresses mod, and he talks like some kind of a swish. (1975). Hence swishy (1941) • Christopher Isherwood: You thought it meant a swishy little boy with peroxided hair, dressed in a picture hat and a feather boa, pretending to be Marlene Dietrich? Yes, in queer circles, they call that camping. (1954)

puddy (1942) Also applied more broadly to an effeminate man or boy; from earlier sense, woman • Lawrence Durrell: 'I first met Henry James in a brothel in Algiers. He had a naked houri on each knee.' 'Henry James was a pussy. I think.' (1958)

tonk (1943) Mainly Australian; compare earlier sense, fool • TV Times (Australia): There was also a homosexual (who was referred to as a 'tonk')—thereby dating Mr Porter rather badly. (1970)

wonk (1945) Australian, derogatory; also applied more broadly to an effeminate man; from earlier sense, white man • Patrick White: I'd have to have a chauffeur to drive me around—with a good body—just for show, though. I wouldn't mind if the chauffeur was a wonk. (1970)

white-shoe (1957) Derogatory, mainly US; used as an adjective to denote effeminacy

jessie, jessy (1958) Derogatory; from earlier sense, cowardly or ineffectual man • Kingsley Amis: Darling, you really don't have to convince me that you're not a jessie. (1958)

steamer (1958) Applied especially to a homosexual who seeks passive partners; perhaps from earlier sense, gullible person • Times Literary Supplement: Terry . . . spending his time among the young homosexuals and their 'steamers'. (1958)

arse bandit (1961) Derogatory; applied especially to homosexual sodomists • Private Eye: The Chief Rabbi . . . is very sound in . . . things like cracking down on the arsebands. (1969)

twinkie, twinky, twink (1963) US, derogatory; also applied more broadly to an effeminate man; probably related to the verbs twink 'twinkle' and twinkie, though popularly associated with the proprietary Twinkie, a brand of cupcake with a creamy filling
weeny (1963) US, derogatory; applied to an effeminate man; from earlier sense, girl

shirtlifter (1966) Australian, derogatory  ■ Barry Humphries: When I first seen them photos of him in his ‘Riverina Rig’ I took him for an out-of-work ballet dancer or some kind of shirtlifter. (1974)

palone, polone, polony (1969) Derogatory; applied to an effeminate man; from earlier sense, young woman

nelly, nellie (1970) Applied especially to an ostentatious homosexual; from earlier senses, sly person, effeminate man  ■ C. Wittman: There is a tendency among ‘homophile’ groups to deprecate gays who play visible roles—the queens and the nellies. (1973)

woofah (1977) Derogatory; fanciful alteration of ‘poofter’  ■ Observer: A figure straight out of a P. G. Wodehouse story who . . . would be happy to give you his considered view that the BBC is run by a bunch of woofahs in the pay of Moscow. (1996)

bufu (1982) US; probably from butt-fucker

she-male (1983) Applied to a passive male homosexual; from earlier US colloquial sense, woman

guppie (1984) Jocular or derogatory; applied to a homosexual yuppie; blend of gay and yuppie

friend of Dorothy (1988) From the name, Dorothy, of the heroine of L. Frank Baum’s Wizard of Oz (1900). Judy Garland’s performance in the role in the film version (1939) subsequently achieved cult status among gays  ■ Private Eye: Just because you don’t go on holiday with her doesn’t mean you’re a friend of Dorothy. (1990)

A female homosexual

buck (1925) Derogatory; applied to a lesbian with masculine tendencies  ■ J. Rechy: On the dance-floor, too, lesbians—the masculine ones, the bulldikes—dance with hugely effeminate queens. (1964)


bulldagger (1938) US, mainly Black English, derogatory; applied to a lesbian with masculine tendencies; variant of bull-dyker (an intermediate form was bull-digger (1929))

lesbo, lesbie (1940) Mainly derogatory; from lesbian + -o  ■ Chester Himes: ‘One was a man; a good-looking man at that.’ ‘Man my ass, they were lesbos.’ (1969)

leso, lezo, lezzo (1945) Australian, mainly derogatory; from lesbian + -o  ■ National Times (Sydney): And Gay! What an insult to the poofs and lezzos who made this country what it is today! (1983)

lizzie (1949) Mainly derogatory; probably an alteration of lesbian, assimilated to the female personal name Lizzie  ■ Julian Symons: You’d never have thought I was a lizzie, would you? And butch at that. (1970)

butch (1954) Orig US; applied to a lesbian with masculine tendencies; also used adjectivally; from earlier sense, tough young man  ■ New Statesman: One of the femmes, secure in the loving protection of her butch. (1966)

femme (1957) Applied to a lesbian who adopts a passive, feminine role; from French femme woman  ■ W. Brown: A step upward on the social ladder are the female transvestites and their ‘femmes’ who congregate in the ‘gay’ bars of Greenwich Village. (1961)

diesel, diesel dyke (1958) Orig US; applied to a lesbian with aggressively masculine tendencies; from the stereotypically male associations of diesel engines, vehicles, etc.

Places of homosexual assignation

cottage (1932) British: applied to a public lavatory or urinal used by male homosexuals for assignations  ■ Guardian: Wakefield’s answer to Danny La Rue trips out of a little hutch at the side of the stage labelled ‘Ye Olde Camp Cottage’. (1968)

tea room (1970) US; applied to a public lavatory used by homosexuals for assignations

Concealment and revelation

come out (1941), come out of the closet (1971) Orig US; used to denote open admission of one’s homosexuality  ■ Literary Review: Old Cheever, crowding seventy, has gone Gay. Old Cheever has come out of the closet. (1985)

closet queen (1959) Applied to a secret male homosexual  ■ Mail on Sunday: His colleagues’ retort is that Jimmy is a closet queen because he doesn’t live with a woman. (1984)

out (1979) Used to denote open acknowledgement of one’s homosexuality; from the notion of being ‘out of the closet’  ■ Venue: Homosexuals find it easier to be ‘out’ than bisexuals. (1987). Hence the verb out reveal someone’s homosexuality (1990)  ■ Los Angeles Times: Instead of . . . outing this congressman, I . . . called to his attention the hypocrisy that he had been legislating against gays. (1990)

A homosexual’s pimp

poofah rorter (1945) Australian; from poofah male homosexual + rorter fraudster

A woman who habitually consorts with homosexual men

fag (1969) Derogatory, orig and mainly US; rhyming formation on fag male homosexual + hag woman; compare earlier US fag hag woman who chain-smokes  ■ Armistead Maupin: Do you think
I'm a fag hag? . . . Look at the symptoms. I hardly know any straight men anymore. (1978)

Assault on homosexuals

* queer-bashing (1970)  
  Times: Four of 12 youths said to have taken part in a 'queer-bashing' expedition on Wimbledon Common on September 25 were found guilty of murder. (1970). Also *queer-basher* (1970)  
  New Wave Magazine: To fight the National Front, the queer-bashers and any other diseases. (1977)

(A) heterosexual

* straight (1941)  
  Orig US; San Francisco Examiner: A lot of us have 'straight' friends. (1965)  
  Gay News: It was a campaign shared and supported by a number of gays—even straights. (1977)

(A) bisexual

* ambi-sextrous (1928)  
  Jocular; blend of *ambi* and *sex*; *Spectator*: She avoids ever producing her ambi-sextrous young publisher. (1960)

* AC/DC, AC-DC (1954)  
  Euphemistic, orig US; from the abbreviations A.C. 'alternating current' and D.C. 'direct current', suggesting contrasting options  
  • Kate Millett: You can also tell Time Magazine you're bisexual, be AC-DC in the international edition. (1974)

* bi (1956)  
  Abbreviation of *bise*xual; *Listener*: Some were gay, many apparently bi, and a few were so hard that they would be given a wide berth in a Gorbals pub. (1983)

* versatile (1959)  
  Euphemistic; *Muriel Spark*: Dougal was probably pansy. 'I don't think so.... He's got a girl somewhere.' 'Might be versatile.' (1960)

* switch-hitter (1960)  
  US, euphemistic; from earlier sense, ambi-sextrous baseball batter  
  • *PussyCat*: The buddy would shove cock to me. I can still remember the first switch-hitter. (1972)

* ambi-sextrous (1966)  
  Euphemistic, orig US; from earlier sense, able to use right and left hands equally well

14. Prostitution

Prostitutes

The distinction between the terminology applied to professional female prostitutes and sexually promiscuous women is very fine. Words denoting the former tend to be applied insultingly to women perceived as the latter, and words originally denoting the latter are frequently extended to the former. The same considerations apply to the terminology of male prostitutes and promiscuous homosexuals. See further under A promiscuous woman at *Sex* (pp. 67-8).

* moll (1604)  
  Dated; pet form of the female personal name Mary

* hooker (1845)  
  Mainly US; from the notion of 'hooking' clients  
  • John Dos Passos: Ain't you got the sense to tell a good girl from a hooker? (1932)

* bi-guy (1973)  
  Applied to a bisexual male  
  • Gay News: Good looking bi-guy, 30s . . . wants friendship with similar couple. (1977)

* gender-bender, gender-blender (1980)  
  Applied to someone, especially a pop singer or follower of a pop cult, who deliberately affects an androgynous appearance by wearing sexually ambiguous clothing, make-up, etc. Hence *gender-bending, gender-blending*

To be bisexual

* swing both ways (1972)  
  • J. G. Vermander: As for the mystery that still surrounded Robin Aseltine's death, the police had picked up and questioned several former girl and boy friends, Robin having been found to swing both ways. (1972)

A transvestite

* drag queen (1941)  
  Applied to a male homosexual transvestite; from *drag* women's clothing worn by men + *queen* male homosexual  
  • *Listener*: He met . . . the prototype for Terri Dennis—the real-life drag queen being an altogether less arch, more interesting individual. (1984)

* TV (1965)  
  Orig and mainly North American; abbreviation of *transvestite*  
  • *The Magazine*: We get a lot of TVs in and a few of the leather boys of course. (1983)

* she-male (1983)  
  From earlier colloquial US sense, woman

* trannie (1983)  
  From *transvestite* feminine, abbreviation of *transvestite*  
  • Gay Times: By 11pm they seem drunkenly immune to the influx of trannies, trendies, and other creatures of the night. (1990)

* frayl (1846)  
  Dated; short for *frail sister*, obsolete euphemism for prostitute

* chromo (1883)  
  Australian; abbreviation of *chromolithograph*; picture lithographed in colours, with reference to the 'painted' face of the prostitute  
  • John Iggulden: Some rotten poxy bitch of a chromo dubbed them in. (1960)

* chippy, chippie (1886)  
  Orig US, dated; from earlier sense, sexually promiscuous) young woman
  • *Times Literary Supplement*: Opal and other 'chippies' at Moll's 'sporting house'. (1938)

* tart (1894)  
  From earlier sense, sexually promiscuous) woman  
  • Graham Greene: A woman policeman kept an eye on the tarts at the corner. (1936)

* broad (1914)  
  Orig and mainly US; from earlier sense, woman  
  • John o'London's: Prostitutes are variously termed tarts, toms, broads. (1962)
gash (1914) From earlier sense, woman
muff (1914) Orig US; from earlier sense, (sexually promiscuous) woman ■ Louis Jackson & C. R. Helley: 'The muffs are cruising on the drag tonight', i.e. soliciting on the street. (1914)
hustler (1924) From earlier sense, person who lives by dishonest or immoral means ■ John Steinbeck: They would think she was just a buzzed old hustler. (1952)
lady of the night (or evening) (1925)
Euphemistic ■ Gainesville (Florida) Sun: Around Subic Bay in the Philippines, the U.S. military men outnumber the licensed ladies of the night by 20,000 to 8,000. (1984)
prosty, prostie (1930) US; abbreviation of prostitute ■ J. Hayes: If she was a prostie, he couldn’t afford her fee. (1976)
quiff (1931) Compare earlier dialectal sense, young woman, and the obsolete slang verb quiff copulate, of obscure origin
brass (1934) British; short for brass nail, rhyming from earlier Australian sense, prostitute ■ Frank Norman: His old woman who was a brass on the game. (1958)
supper (1935) From earlier sense, hole in a ship’s side to carry away water
pro (1937) Abbreviation of (professional) prostitute ■ Ed McBain: Benny already had himself two girls . . . experienced pros who were bringing in enough cash each week to keep him living pretty good. (1976)
pross, pros (1937) Abbreviation of prostitute ■ J. Seabrook: She’s been hanging round the Cherry Tree— that’s the pub where all the old prosesses go—and she’s been going down there since she was thirteen. (1973)
bimbo (1937) From earlier sense, (sexually promiscuous) woman ■ Stanley Kauffmann: Not that you were just a bimbo to me. . . . I’ve discovered that I’m a little in love with you too. (1952)
mystery (1937) Applied to a young or inexperienced prostitute; from earlier sense, girl newly arrived in a town or city ■ G. F. Newman: Instead of calling a couple of mysteries, he called a cab. (1974)
prossy, prossie, proozy (1941) Orig Australian; from pross + -y ■ Frederick Raphael: An experienced pro who was hermaphrodite— that’s what’s a prossie’s telegram? Answer, ‘Come at once.’ (1971)
tom (1941) British; from earlier Australian sense, woman or girlfriend ■ Macdonald Hastings: I’ll bet she’s holding out on us. We know these toms, sir. (1955)
pusher (1944) From earlier sense, young woman ■ Alan Wykes: A pusher for me. I’m off the beer, but I could use a judy. (1944)
poule-de-luxe (1946) French, ‘luxury hen’ ■ Times Literary Supplement: Returns to France to find that his wife has remained and that his daughter is in business as a poule de luxe and doing very well. (1976)
twopenny upright (1958) From the charge made for an act of sexual intercourse standing up out of doors ■ Maladicta: At the turn of the century, an Iowa woman was awarded $200 for being called a ‘whore’, while in England, at about the same time, a woman was denied any award for being called a ‘two-penny upright’. (1978)
scraper (1959) Perhaps from earlier Australian sense, animal that runs wild in ‘scrub’ country, or (from the related sense, slovenly woman) from the notion of one who ‘scrubs’ hard to clean ■ Robin Cook: This aged scrubber, Mrs. Marengo . . . she was so old, forty. (1962)
slag (1959) ■ Wayland Young: The slag is afraid of disease, and afraid of the sex maniac who thinks it’d be fun to strangle her. (1965)
yum-yum girl, yum-yum tart (1960) Euphemistic; from yum-yum sexual activity ■ Art Buchwald: Don’t let her kid you. All her girls are really yum-yum girls from the dance halls. (1962)
pavement princess (1976) Citizens’ band; applied to a prostitute who trolls for business over the radio network
Male prostitutes
renter (1893) ■ Oscar Wilde: I would sooner be blackmailed by every renter in London, than have you bitter, unjust, hating. (1893)
bum-boy (1929) From bum buttocks
rough trade (1935) Applied to male homosexual prostitute practices, or to someone picked up for these; from earlier sense, the tough or sadistic element among male homosexuals ■ Cecil Beaton: He made friends too easily with the ‘rough trade’. (1978)
trade (1935) Also used as a collective term for male prostitutes ■ Jeremy: These are men who because they are too old, or unattractive, cannot pick up free ‘trade’. (1969)
pimp (1942) US; from earlier sense, procurer
rent (1967) Used adjectively to denote a male prostitute ■ Gay News: A word of warning about the Strand Bar in Hope Street. . . . It’s rough and some of the people there are rent. (1977)
rent-boy (1969) ■ Deakin & Willis: Between the ages of fifteen and twenty he had been a rent boy, a boy prostitute living and working in the West End. (1976)
chicken (1988) Applied to a young inexperienced male prostitute; compare earlier services’ slang sense, young male companion ■ Guardian: The chickens . . . these days are much wiser. They don’t hang around Euston Station, they come straight to
the places they have read about where they know they can do business. (1988)

Working as a prostitute

**on the turf** (1860) J. O'Donoghue: 'I might have been one of Ma Dolma's brasses for all you know.' 'Come off it. You've never been on the turf.' (1984)

**on the game** (1898) Mainly British; compare 'Set them down for slutlish spoils of opportunity, and daughters of the game', Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida* (1606). Tony Parker: Betty's on the game, isn't she? Has she got you at it too. (1969)

**on the bash** (1936) British. *Streetwalker* [Anon.]: From the hours you keep... I'd say you were on the bash. (1959)

**on the knock** (1969) *Knock* from earlier sense, copulation. Desmond Bagley: Maybe she was on the knock. (1969)

To work as a prostitute

**hustle** (1930) Orig US; probably a back-formation from hustler. *Listener*: She... revolted in revenge against her family, 'hustled' in Piccadilly, hated men as clients, took a ponce. (1959)

**hawk one's mutton** (1937) From obsolete slang mutton female genitals. *James Patrick*: They're aw cows hawkin' their mutton. (1973)

**hook** (1959) Back-formation from hooker. *Disch & Sladek*: Bessie's girls didn't have to go out hooking in hotel lobbies or honkytonks, no indeedy. (1969)

**tom** (1964) From the noun tom prostitute. *Z. Progl*: They were perfectly willing to go 'tomming' on the streets to earn a few quid, but I never could. (1964)

Prostitution

**the trade** (1860) Eric Partridge: *The trade is prostitution*: late C. 18–19. (1937). K. A. Porter: Two inordinately dressed-up young Cuban women, frankly ladies of trade, had been playing cards together in the bar for an hour before the ship sailed. (1962)

An assignation with a prostitute

**trick** (1926) Orig & mainly US; from earlier sense, a robbery; especially in the phrase *turn a trick* (of a prostitute) have a session with a client. *Time*: Some of the young prostitutes live at home and turn tricks merely for pocket money. (1937)

**short time** (1937) Used to denote a brief visit to a prostitute, or a brief stay in a hotel for sexual purposes. *Guardian*: Miles of girlee bars, short time hotels. (1971)

**business** (1983) John Ayto: Prostitutes’ use of *business* both to designate their occupation and as a shorthand euphemism for their services—as in ‘You want business, love?’ (1993)

A prostitute's client

**short-timer** (1923) Applied to someone who visits a prostitute or stays briefly at a hotel for sexual purposes. Graham Greene: The shabby hotel to which 'short timers' come. (1939)

**trick** (1925) From earlier sense, assignation with a prostitute. Bill Turner: I doubt there's one trick in twenty who isn't a married man. (1968)

**sugar daddy** (1928) Orig US; applied to an elderly man who lavishes gifts on a young woman (in return for sex). *Times*: Norma Levy, a prostitute, had a 'sugar daddy' called Bunny who paid her rent and gave her a Mercedes car. (1973)

**john, John** (1928) Orig US; from the male personal name *John*. *New York* Many working girls, when they are new in the city, spend at least a few months with a madam to meet the better Johns. (1972)

**score** (1961) George Bax: I got my hot tail out of there. I heard the score yelling. (1972)

Brothels

**kip, kip-house, kip-shop** (1766) British; dated; compare Danish *kippe* brothel

**crib, crib-house, crib-joint** (c1857) Mainly US; from obsolete slang *crib* house, pub, etc. *Peter Gammond et al.*: Forced into dives and crib-joints of the red-light district of New Orleans. (1958)

**drum** (1859) Mainly US; from earlier sense, place where someone lives. *Giniro Rohan*: Each one of these houses was that dreariest, dullest, loneliest and ugliest institution in the whole history of harlotry—the one-woman drum. (1963)

**knocking-shop** (1860) From knock have sex with. *Ludovic Kennedy*: Yes, it seems that some of the girls are running a knocking-shop on the side. (1969)

**parlour-house** (1872) Mainly US; applied to an expensive type of brothel

**hook-shop** (1889) From hooker prostitute. John Steinbeck: This kid could be pure murder in a hook-shop. (1954)

**meat-house** (1896) From obsolete slang *meat* prostitute

**meat-market** (1896), **meat rack** (1972) Applied to a place or area where prostitutes ply their trade, and to a place frequented by people (heterosexuals or homosexuals) in search of sexual partners; from obsolete slang *meat* prostitute. *John Osborne*: Every tart and pansy boy in the district are in that place.... It's just a meat-market. (1957)

**creep-house** (1913). **creep joint** (1921) US; applied especially to a brothel or other place where prostitutes rob their clients. Alan Lomax: Creep joints where they'd put the feelers on a guy's clothes. (1950)

**slaughter-house** (1928) Applied to a cheap brothel. William Faulkner: Both of you get to hell back to that slaughterhouse. (1962)

**cat-house** (1931) Compare obsolete slang cat prostitute. *George Orwell*: He's took her abroad an' sold her to one o' dem flash cat-houses in Parrus. (1935)
notch-house (1931) notch perhaps an alteration of nautch dancing (girl), from Urdu nāch
■ Herbert Gold: Nancy ran a notch-house for travelers who loved to see things. (1956)

peg-house (1931) US; from earlier sense, public house; also applied to a meeting-place for male homosexuals

juke, jook, jouk, juke-house, juke-joint (1935) Orig US; also applied more generally to an establishment providing food and drink and music for dancing ■ Stephen Longstreet: Juke from juke box came from juke house—which was once a whorehouse. (1956)

whore-shop (1938) ■ Angus MacVicar: I hate the Golden Venus. ... It's just a whoreshop. (1972)

joy-house (1940) ■ Berkeley Mather: All right—so you're a sailor in a joy-house with a sore foot. (1970)

rib-joint (1943) US ■ C. Colter: Forty-third Street, ... the street of rib joints and taverns. (1965)

chicken ranch (1973) US; claimed to be from the name of an actual brothel in La Grange, Texas, which was the subject of the musical The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas ■ Stephen King: Someone finally found a way to clean up the dope in Boston's Combat Zone and the chicken-ranch business in Times Square. (1990)

Pimps

ponce (1872) British; perhaps from pounce spring upon someone ■ Germaine Greer: The role of the ponce ... is too established for us to suppose that prostitutes have found a self-regulating lifestyle. (1970)

mack, mac (1887) Short for obsolete mackerel pimp, from Old French maquerel pimp, of uncertain origin ■ Washington Post: Now comes 'The Mack', a movie about the rise and fall of a sweet pimp named Goldie. (1973)

bludge (1898) Shortened from bludgeon someone armed with a bludgeon ■ Observer: They are strikingly different to the white prostitutes who ply their trade for coloured bludgers. (1960)

daddy (1924) US; from earlier sense, male lover, boyfriend

sweetback, sweetback man (1929) US ■ Blesh & Janis: The dapper, topish 'macks' or 'sweet-back men' ... got their gambling stakes from the girls. (1950)

jelly bean (1935) US; from earlier sense, unpleasant person

To act as a pimp

pimp (1636) From the noun pimp ■ New Yorker: I also especially enjoyed Roscoe Onnan as Pretty Eddie, the 'happy dust' addict who pimps for his girl. (1976)

bludge (1947) Back-formation from bludgeon:
A group of prostitutes working for the same person or organization

string (1913) US; from earlier sense, set of horses kept together ■ L. Block: She wants out of my string of girls. (1982)

stable (1937) From earlier sense, set of horses kept together ■ J. Crai: He ... now runs a 'stable' of white women for coloured seamen in Cardiff. (1940)

The vice squad

pussy posse (1963) From pussy female genitals

probably from British dialect crank infirm, sick ■ Jack Lindsay: Not that I believe in anything crank. (1958)


bent (1914) Orig US ■ Sunday Pictorial: A 'bent screw' ... a crooked warder who is prepared to traffic with a prisoner. (1948)

Dishonestly or illegally acquired or produced

sly (1828) Mainly Australian ■ Bulletin (Sydney): The Board of Works has actually asked people to dob in their neighbours for sly watering. (1973)

crooked (1864) ■ Daily Chronicle: In the event of his being found ... to be dealing in 'crooked' things, or refusing to give information as to where he got his stuff. (1902)

shonky, shonkie (1970) Australian: perhaps from shonk Jew or from British dialect shonk smart + y ■ Australian: The woman ... was forthright about the cut-price air fares. ... 'We call these tickets shonky,' she said. (1981)
hooky (1985) British; applied to something stolen or counterfeit; probably from hook (from the notion of not being straight—compare bent, crooked) + y; compare obsolete hookey-crokey dishonest. n Guardian: Does a fake Renoir matter any more than a hookey Rolex? (1996)

See also bent, hot, and kinky under Stolen (p. 96).

Not illegal

legit (1908) Abbreviation of legitimate; also in the phrase on the legit within the law. n Hartley Howard: This dough isn’t strictly legit. (1973)

Dishonest or corrupt activity

hanky-panky (1841) An arbitrary formation, probably related to hocus pocus; compare obsolete sense, sleight of hand, jugglery. n Economist: Several of the lists of signatures required to enable a candidate to run in Texas appear to have forged names on them—Mr Dole, Mr Haig and Mr du Pont. This does not mean hanky-panky in the Dole campaign, since the task of collecting the signatures had been contracted out. (1988)

shenanigan, shenanigin(g), shennan-, etc. (1855) Orig US; now usually used in the plural; origin unknown. n Ridge Citizen (Johnston, South Carolina): We don’t condone whatever wrongdoing or shenanigans that may have taken place at Watergate or anywhere else. (1974)

graft (1865) Orig US; from graft act dishonestly. n Daily Telegraph: Victims in a wave of graft, corruption and fear were making regular payments for protection. (1970)

funny business (1891) Applied to illegal, underhand, or deceitful dealings; from earlier sense, jesting, nonsense. n Olivia Manning: Our permits . . . are issued on the understanding that we do not get mixed up in any funny business. (1960)

lurk (1891) Australian & New Zealand; applied to a profitable stratagem of questionable honesty; from earlier obsolete slang sense, method of fraud. n Barbara Cooper: She was a very rich girl indeed, and Hilary, with considerable influence over her, might well be on to a very good ‘lurk.’ (1966)

jiggery-pokery (1893) British; applied to deceitful or dishonest dealing; compare Scottish jokery-pokery clever trickery, from jok dodge, skulk. n Gladys Mitchell: Business reasons could make any alliance respectable . . . so long as there was no jiggery-pokery. (1973)

grift (1914) US; perhaps an alteration of graft. n Raymond Chandler: Hello, I thought he sold reefer. With the right protection behind him. But hell, that’s a small-time racket. A peanut grift. (1940)

jobs for the boys (1950) Derogatory; applied to appointments given preferentially to one’s own associates or supporters. n Michael Gilbert: ‘It wasn’t exactly a popular appointment, was it?’ ‘It certainly wasn’t,’ said the General. . . . ‘Jobs for the Boys.’ (1955)

mumping (1970) British; applied to the acceptance by the police of small gifts or bribes from tradespeople; from obsolete mump beg

To act dishonestly or corruptly

graft (1859) Orig US; from British dialect sense, dig. n John Morgan: They used to graft together . . . they pulled one or two big capers. (1967)

grift (1915) US; denoting small-time dishonest or criminal undertakings; from grift dishonest activity. n Herbert Gold: How long you been grifting? (1956)

rort (1919) Australian; denoting engaging in corrupt practices; from rorty boisterous. n Sunday Mail (Brisbane): Overseas tax havens and ‘rorting’ claimed. $3,000,000 a year in tax dodges. (1980)

spiv (1947) British; denoting making one’s living as a spiv; from the noun spiv. n Times: Instead of that brave new Britain all they had left was a land fit for bookies to spiv in. (1947)

To put to a dishonest or corrupt use; to induce to behave corruptly

noble (1856) British; often denoting specifically inducing a jury to return a corrupt verdict; from earlier sense, drug or lame a racehorse to prevent its winning. n Michael Underwood: What about the rest of the delegation? . . . No chance of nobbling one of them? (1973)

bend (1864) n Observer: There are honest landladies in districts like Victoria who let a flat to someone they think is an ordinary girl, who then proceeds to “bend” it: uses it for prostitution. (1956)

A criminal undertaking

job (1722) Often applied specifically to a robbery. n Daily Express: Bird asked Edwards: ‘Can you do a job on my old woman?’ Edwards is said to have replied: ‘No sweat.’ The trial continues. (1984) n Cosmopolitan: Sadie, the barmaid, was saying: ‘Hey, Bob, that bank job was a bit cheeky, wasn’t it?’ (1990)

caper (1867) From earlier more general sense, course of action, undertaking. n Jack Black: If anything had gone wrong with this caper and we had to take a pinch. (1926)

frame-up (1900), frame (1911) Orig US; applied to a (criminal) conspiracy or plot. n A. L. Rowe: Their signatures were very cleverly forged. Coming at such a moment it looks like a frame-up. (1956)

inside job (1908) Applied to a crime committed by or with the connivance of someone living or working in the place where it happened. n Dorothy Sayers: You seem convinced that the murder of Victor Dean was an inside job. (1933)

outside job (1925) Applied to a crime committed by someone not otherwise associated with the place where it happened. n Agatha Christie: The police are quite certain that this is not what they call an “outside job”—I mean, it wasn’t a burglar. The broken open window was faked. (1931)

single-o (1930) US; applied to a crime committed without an accomplice.

tickle (1938) Applied to a successful crime or illegal deal. n D. Webb: If there is a good tickle, say for as
A dishonest or corrupt person

**shyster (1844)** Orig & mainly US; applied to someone who uses unscrupulous methods; origin unknown

**grafter (1886)** Orig US; often applied specifically to a politician, official, etc. who uses his or her position in order to obtain dishonest gain or advantage; compare earlier sense, small-time criminal  
- A. J. Cronin: They’ve always been a set of grafters down there; local government has been one long sweet laugh. (1935)

**spiv (1934)** British; applied to a man, often flashily dressed, who makes a living by illicit or unscrupulous dealings; origin uncertain; perhaps from spiff smarten up, spiffy smart, handsome  
- *Cornish Guardian*: Metrcation will be an open invitation for every spiv and racketeer to cheat the British public. (1978)

**lurkman (1945)** Australian; applied to someone who lives by sharp practice; from lurk scheme, dodge + man  
- L. Horsphol: I felt strangely sorry for the old man. Lurkman he might have been. (1978)

See also **crook** under A criminal (p.89).

A criminal

**hustler (1825)** Applied to someone who lives by stealing or other dishonest means  
- William Burroughs: *Pop corn*, someone with a legitimate job, as opposed to a ‘hustler’ or thief. (1953)

**grafter (1866)** US, dated; applied to a small-time criminal, such as a pickpocket or thief  
- Josiah Flynt: Graftor, a pickpocket. (1899)

**crook (1877)** Orig US; originally applied to a dishonest or corrupt person, and hence to a professional criminal  
- Michael Innes: ‘The fact is that a gang of crooks—’ I beg your pardon? Miss Candleshoe is wholly at sea. ‘The fact is that a band of robbers is prowling about outside this house now.’ (1953)

**talent (1879)** Australian; applied collectively to (members of) the criminal underworld  
- Dymphna Cusack: He’d learn responsibility quicker married than he would knocking about the ports with the rest of the talent. (1953)

**punter (1891)** Applied to any of various types of criminal, especially one who assists as a confederate; compare earlier sense, gambler  
- S. J. Baker: We [in New Zealand] have also acquired [this century] some underworld slang of our own: . . . punter, an assistant of a pickpocket who diverts the victim’s attention while robbery is committed. (1941)

**streetman (1908)** US; applied to a petty criminal who works on the city streets, especially as a pickpocket or drug pedlar  
- *Publishers Weekly*: He is playing partner to the pusher whose street man is keeping the girl hooked. (1974)

**crim (1909)** US & Australian; abbreviation of criminal  

**kink (1914)** US

**grifter (1915)** US; applied to a small-time criminal; from grift act dishonestly + -er  
- R. O’Connor: He lived off the horoscope trade until the World Fair of 1893 suggested a move to Chicago, as it did to thousands of other . . . grifters. (1965)

**punk (1917)** Mainly US; applied to a young hooligan or petty criminal; compare earlier senses, rotten wood, something worthless  
- C. R. Cooper: ‘The punks’, as youthful offenders are often called. (1939)

**urger (1919)** Australian; applied to someone who obtains money illegally or by deceit, especially as a tipster at a racecourse  
- *Bulletin* (Sydney): He was a tout or an urger, I gathered. ‘Mixed up in racecourses,’ was the way she put it. (1934)

**inside man (1935)** US; applied to someone involved in any of various special roles in a confidence trick or robbery  
- F. D. Sharpe: When the ‘mug’s’ name is announced in the restaurant by the page, he is followed to the telephone by the ‘inside man’ and identified. (1938)

**wheelman (1935)** Orig US; applied to the driver of a criminals’ getaway vehicle  
- Kenneth Orvis: Later on, . . . he began driving a cab. Also being a wheel-man for the mobs. (1962)

**baddy (1937)** Orig US; applied especially to a villain in a play, film, etc.; usually used in the plural; from bad + -y  
- *European*: His thin legs seem to shuffle at the sight of a linebacker, as if they were Tintin’s running away from the baddies. (1991)

**juvie, juvey (1941)** US; applied to a juvenile delinquent; abbreviation of juvenile  
- *Time*: Los Angeles County police went after the ‘juvies’ (minors under 18), began carting them off by the bushload. (1966)

**ram (1941)** Orig & mainly Australian; applied to an accomplice in petty crime; origin uncertain; perhaps simply a transferred use of rom male sheep  
- S. J. Baker: The ram would say, ‘Give the old boy a fair go; he’s nearly too old to spin them!’ (1968)

**chummy (1948)** British, police slang; applied to someone suspected or accused of or charged with a crime; from earlier sense, friend  
- Douglas Clark: We could get Chummy into the dock and pleading guilty, but we’d not get a verdict. (1969)

**slag (1955)** Applied to a petty criminal, or to such people collectively  
- Peter Laurie: I could get them up the nick and take their prints with ink, but that’s really for slag. (1970)

**villain (1960)** British; from earlier sense, wicked person, wrongdoer  
- *Sunday Telegraph*: A flying squad officer said: ‘As far as we know these are no ordinary villains. We believe they are Irish IRA.’ (1975)

**scammer, skammer (1972)** Orig US; applied usually to a petty criminal; from scam swindle + -er  
- *Rolling Stone*: Trader Red was a dope smuggler, or skammer as he preferred to be called. (1974)

A rogue, ne'er-do-well

skeezicks, -sicks, -zacks, -zecks (1850) US; dated; probably a fanciful coinage  ■ P. A. Rollins: Eb Hawkins, that o’ skeezicks you met on th’ railway train an’ liked, is th’ fellow that’s acted as th’ owners’ agent in sellin’ rights to your uncle. (1939)

chancer (1884) British; applied to someone who does outrageous or dishonest things at high risk of discovery; from the verb chance + -er  ■ J. Milne: If you’re a detective where’s your warrant card? I don’t think you’re a detective at all. You’re just a chancer. (1986)

wide boy (1937) British  ■ Val Gielgud: Blackmailed—for the murder? Not even the widest of the local wide-boys could have got on to it. (1960)

Jack the Lad (1981) British; applied to a (brash) young male rogue or villain; apparently the nickname of Jack Sheppard, a celebrated 18th-century thief  ■ Interview: The East End urchin Tony, later a Jack-the-lad and Jack-of-all-trades. (1991)

scally (1986) Liverpool and Manchester slang; shortened from scallywag  ■ Independent: I think McCartney has the philosophy that he was one of four scalies who did it all with no assistance. (1990)

A member of a criminal gang

moll (1823) Applied to a gangster’s or other criminal’s female companion; compare earlier sense, prostitute  ■ Ngaio Marsh: I can see you’re in a fever lest slick Ben and his moll should get back . . . before you make your getaway. (1962)

mug (1890) US; applied to a thug; compare earlier sense, fool

mobster (1917) Orig US; from mob criminal gang, often specifically the Mafia + -ster  ■ D. E. Westlake: I was afraid to think about Viganò and his mobsters. (1972)

minder (1924) Applied to a bodyguard hired to protect a criminal  ■ Edmund McGirr: Comes of a whole family of wrong ‘uns. . . . A high class ‘minder’ around the big gambling set. (1973)

hood (1930) US; abbreviation of hoodlum  ■ P. G. Wodehouse: The hood was beating the tar out of me. (1966)

goombah, goomba, gumbah (1969) US; applied to a member of a gang of organized criminals, often specifically a maﬁoso, and also to a gangland boss; from an Italian dialectal pronunciation of Italian compar godfather, male friend, accomplice  ■ Washington Post: My father was the boss, and in those days, your father got to pick your goomba (godfather). (1978)

made (1969) Orig & mainly US; applied as an adjective to someone who has been initiated into the Mafia  ■ C. Sifakis: Jack Dragna . . . presided over the Weasels’ initiation as a made man in the Los Angeles crime family. (1987)

yardie (1986) Applied to a member of any of a number of West Indian, and especially Jamaican, gangs engaged in usually drug-related organized crime; from West Indian yard dwelling, home + -ie  ■ Financial Times: The so-called Godfather of Britain’s Yardie gangs . . . was deported to Jamaica, for questioning about murders. (1988)

A criminal gang

mob (1927) US; applied to an organization of violent criminals, often specifically the Mafia; from earlier sense, (unruly) group of people  ■ Guardian: The Mob from its Chicago headquarters runs the subcontinent. (1969)

An armed criminal

gun moll (1908) US; applied to an armed female thief or other criminal, and also to the female companion of a male gunman or gangster  ■ Arthur Koestler: Fierce-lookin’ Yemenite gun-molls, Sephardi beauties. (1949)

gun-slinger (1928) Mainly US; often applied specifically to a western gunfighter  ■ Boston Sunday Herald: The gunslinger . . . comes to town, cigar between teeth, his prowess with a gun for sale. (1967)

rodman (1929) Mainly US; applied to a gunman; from rod gun + -man  ■ John o’London’s: Robert is victim number two of this assassination, the only witness who could identify the rod-man. (1962)

torpedo (1929) US; applied to a professional gunman  ■ Raymond Chandler: There’s yellow cops and there’s yellow torpedoes. (1940)

gunsel, gunshell, gun(t)zel, gunzl (1943) US; applied to a gunman or armed thug; from earlier sense, young man, influenced by gun, gunslinger, etc. and apparently also by its use in the film The Maltese Falcon (1941) (e.g. ‘Let’s give them the gunsel. He actually did shoot Thursby and Jacoby, didn’t he?’) applied to a young male armed criminal  ■ Wallace Markfield: After all, didn’t Ben Gurion himself hand her a blank cheque, should she have what to hire a couple gunsels? (1964)

A criminal’s equipment

dub (a1700) Dated: applied to a key used by a burglar; from the verb dub open, probably an alteration of obsolete dup open, from do up

twirl (1879). twirler (1921) Applied to a skeleton key  ■ P. Kinsley: She scarcely heard him open the old lock . . . with the set of ‘twirls’. (1980)  ■ Jeffrey Ashford: Weir, who was an expert with the twirlers, forced the lock in six seconds. (1974)

squeeze (1882) Applied to an impression of an object made for criminal purposes  ■ G. D. H. & M. Cole: Where did the dummy keys . . . come from? . . . If they were forgeries it would be simpler, for Sir Hiram might remember if anyone had handled his keys long enough to take a squeeze. (1930)

ripper (1889) Applied to a tool for opening safes, etc.
can-opener (1912) Applied to a tool for opening safes, etc.; from earlier sense, tin-opener ■ R.I. McDavid: The use of stew is declining, modern heavy gees preferring to use a stick, ripper or can opener on laminated safes. (1963)

iron (1941) Applied to a jemmy used in housebreaking

laid, 'loid (1958) Applied to a celluloid or plastic strip used by thieves to force locks; shortened from celluloid ■ Bill Turner: ‘Have you got keys to all Creedys’ places?’ ‘Beatty has. I use a loid myself.’ He showed a tapered wedge of blank celluloid. (1968)

shim (1968) Mainly US; applied to a plastic strip used by thieves to force locks; from earlier sense, thin slip used to fill up or adjust the space between parts; ultimate origin unknown ■ Lesley Egan: Denny and I went to Nonie’s place, and he used a shim to get us in. (1977)

To reconnoitre with a view to committing a robbery or other crime

case (1914) Orig US; perhaps from gamblers’ slang keep cases on watch closely ■ M. Gair: What he was doing was casing the gaff, or, in police terms, ‘loitering with intent to commit a felony’. (1957)

prowl (1914) US ■ Raymond Chandler: I went back to the kitchen and prowled the open shelves above and behind the sink. (1943)

drum (1933) British; denoting ringing or knocking on the door of a house to see if it is unoccupied before attempting a robbery, and hence more generally, reconnoitring with a view to robbery; probably from earlier sense, knock

A criminals’ look-out or sentinel

cockatoo (1934) Australian ■ Telegraph (Brisbane): They watched Foster (the ‘cockatoo’ or spy) point out our punters who had laid a large bet. (1966)

An area frequented by criminals

tenderloin (1887) US; applied to a district of a city where vice and corruption are rife; from earlier sense, undercut of a sirloin steak; originally applied specifically to a district of New York City, from the notion that the proceeds from corruption made it a ‘juicy’ morsel for the local police

Costa del Crime (1984) British, jocular; applied to the south-east coast of Spain, as used by several British criminals as a bolt-hole to escape British justice; Costa from Spanish, coast, with reference to the names of various holiday coastlines in Spain, e.g. Costa Brava

A victim of crime

fly-flat (1864) British, dated; applied to someone taken in by confidence tricksters; from fly knowing, alert + obsolete flat gullible person ■ Joyce Cary: ‘I don’t see why we should consider the speculators: ‘A lot of fly-flats who thought they could beat us at the game.’ (1938)

mark (1883) Orig US; applied to the intended victim of confidence tricksters; often in the phrase a soft (or easy) mark ■ Edmund McGirr: In the twenties it was the Yanks who was the suckers, but now . . . it’s us who are the marks. (1973)

package (1933) Mainly US; applied to a kidnap victim ■ Sun (Baltimore): The ‘package’, as the kidnapped victim is called, is rushed across the State line and delivered to the ‘keepers’. (1933)

A getaway after committing a crime

stoppo (1935) British; now mainly used attributively with reference to a quick getaway by car from the scene of a crime ■ Michael Kenyon: Walk, then, to the stoppo car. . . . And wait. . . . Till Slicker comes. (1975)

Stealing, theft

hoist (1790), hoisting (1936) Applied to shoplifting; hoist often in the phrase on the hoist engaged in shoplifting; compare lift steal ■ Frank Norman: My old woman’s still out on the hoist now. (1958) ■ New Statesman: You know Annie Ward, well she’s on the hoisting racket. (1968)

on the game (1739) Dated, mainly British; applied to someone actively engaged in burglary

dragging (1812) Dated; applied to stealing from a vehicle ■ James Curtis: I'm a screwsman and not on the dragging lark. (1936)

bust (1859) Applied to a burglary ■ Science News: The back of a pub where you and a 'screwer' . . . had decided to 'do a bust'. (1947)

dip (1859) Applied to pocket-picking; usually in the phrase on the dip picking pockets

trick (1865) US; especially in the phrase turn a trick commit a successful robbery ■ Donald MacKenzie: Campbell's claim was that he hadn't turned a trick in a year but the money had to be coming in from somewhere. (1979)

blag (1885) British; applied to an act of robbery (with violence); origin unknown ■ Observer: The top screwing teams, the ones who went in for the really big bags, violent robberies. (1960)

stick-up (1887) Orig Australian, now mainly US; applied to an armed robbery; from stick up rob at gunpoint, knifepoint, etc. ■ Sun (Baltimore): The bank manager told police that the bandit . . . drew a gun and said: ‘This is a stickup.’ (1944)

roadwork (1925) Dated; applied to the work of a travelling thief ■ Publications of the American Dialect Society: Because of the stresses and strains of road work, he is usually a sharp, alert thief. (1955)

whizz, whiz (1925) Orig & mainly US; applied to the practice of picking pockets; mainly in the phrase on the whizz engaged in picking pockets; perhaps from the swift movement involved in removing the contents of pockets ■ James Curtis: They might pinch him for being on the whizz. (1936)
crease (1928) Orig US; applied to stealthy robbery; mainly in at (or on) the creep engaged in such robbery; from creep stealthy robber  ■ F. D. Sharpe: Billy's at 'the Creep' means that Billy earns his living stealing by stealth from tills whilst a shop is momentarily unwatched, or from a warehouse. (1938)

pick-up (1928) From pick up steal, rob  ■ F. D. Sharpe: He had been persuaded to try his hand at 'the pick up' (stealing from unattended motor cars). (1938)

heist (1930) US; applied to a robbery or hold-up; representing a local US pronunciation of heist  ■ Elleston Trevor: A heist was when you took a motor with the idea of doing a repant and flogging it with a bent log-book you'd got from a breaker. (1968)

sting (1930) Mainly US; applied to a burglary or other act of theft, fraud, etc., especially a complex and meticulously planned one carried out quickly  ■ Courier-Mail (Brisbane): A transaction between a jewellery salesman and a professed buyer with $230,000 in his pocket was intercepted yesterday by a cab driver who made off with the cash. Investigators believe the theft was a set-up 'sting'. (1975)

knock-off (1936) Applied to a robbery; also in the phrase on the knock-off, denoting someone engaged in stealing; from knock off steal, rob  ■ James Curtis: They [sc. gloves] . . . gave away the fact that he was still on the knock-off. (1936)  ■ John Gardner: The really profitable knock-offs, like the Train Robbery. (1969)

five-finger discount (1966) US, euphemistic, mainly CB users' slang; applied to the activity or proceeds of stealing or shoplifting  ■ Lieberman & Rhodes: The perfect 'gift' for the 'midnight shopper' looking for a 'five-finger discount'. (1976)

fingers in the till (1974) Applied to stealing money from one's place of work or money for which one is responsible  ■ Sunday Times: Occasionally, a cabinet minister will be caught with his fingers in the till. (1993)

steaming (1987) British; applied to a gang rushing through a public place, train, etc. robbing bystanders or passengers by force of numbers; probably from the notion of a train proceeding 'at full steam'  ■ Independent: Hard policing is sought to deal with 'steaming' attacks, Yardies, proceeding 'at full steam'. (1991)

wilding (1989) US; applied to rampaging by a gang of youths through a public place, attacking or mugging people along the way; originally associated with an incident in New York City's Central Park in April 1989; probably from the adjective wild + -ing  ■ New York Times: There has been little response by the city government to the widespread concern over wilding in general. (1990)

ram-raiding (1991) British; applied to smash-and-grab raiding in which access to the goods is obtained by ramming a vehicle into the shopfront  ■ Daily Telegraph: The ram-raiding started about five years ago, they say, going first for soft targets like tobacconists and off-licences, then later for television shops and jewellers. (1991)

To steal; to rob

thieve (a901) Old English ðēofian, from ðōf thief; originally a standard usage; not recorded between the 10th century and the 16th century, when it was again a standard usage; it apparently came to be regarded as slang in the 19th century  ■ Pall Mall Gazette: The prisoner . . . said it was the first time he had 'thieved' anything. (1867)  ■ Independent: When I started thieving on my own, my stepdad would slip me £25 and take what I'd pinched off my hands. (1991)

lift (1526) Denoting stealing and in modern use (1892) also, more specifically, plagiarizing  ■ John Wainwright: Lift a bleedin’ gun from somewhere. (1973)  ■ A. Cross: Fran has lifted the perfect phrase for the occasion from a recent Iris Murdoch novel: Sic biscuitus disintegrat: that's how the cookie crumbles. (1981)

nip (c1560) Now US; denoting stealing or snatching  ■ Columbus Dispatch: A business man . . . from whom he nipped a $250 shirt stud. (1894)

stall (1592) Dated; denoting surrounding, decoying, jostling, or distracting someone whose pocket is being picked; from obsolete stall decoy-bird

pinch (1656) Denoting stealing and also (formerly) robbing  ■ Daily News: Brown was . . . alleged, in sporting phrase, to have 'pinched' the defendant out of £6 10s. (1869)  ■ Listener: 'This was by car I take it—was there petrol?' 'Well, we somehow managed to pick it up.' 'You mean pinch it?' (1969)

cabbage (1712) British, dated; originally applied specifically to a tailor stealing some of the cloth provided for him to make up into a garment; from the noun cabbage off-cuts of cloth appropriated by a tailor, perhaps from Old French cabas theft

walk off with (1727) Often implying appropriating to oneself something lent or entrusted to one by another  ■ Economist: The department stood by while sharp men at Lloyd's of London walked off with millions. (1988)

knock (1767) Denoting robbing especially a safe or till  ■ Times: The appellant had replied: 'Aye but you will never prove that I got it by knocking a safe.' (1963)

pick up (1770) Dated; denoting stealing or robbing  ■ Detective Fiction Weekly: Gentleman George . . . would mark down his traveler, knowing him to be in possession of jewelry or other valuables, and tirelessly follow him until the opportunity arose to 'pick-up' his all-important bag. (1928)

do (1774) Denoting burgling or robbing a place  ■ H. R. F. Keating: My Billy noticed the set in a shop-window. . . . He did the place that very night. (1968)

snavel, snavel (a1790) Now mainly Australian; denoting stealing or grabbing; perhaps a variant of obsolete slang sable plunder, mug or snaflle seize  ■ Vance Palmer: They're booming the notion o' a new township and snavelling all the land within a mile o' it. (1948)
Attract (1891) Now Australian; denoting stealing or robbing; compare earlier obsolete shake someone out of something; rob someone (15th & 16th centuries)  ■ Ted Schumman: ‘You’re not going to take his pliers!’ ‘Heck, I’m only borrowing them, not shaking them.’ (1979)

Stick up (1846) Orig Australian; denoting robbing a place (or in early use also a person) at gunpoint, knifepoint, etc. ■ S. Brill: They had served time for sticking up a variety store in Akron, Ohio. (1978)

Knock down (1854) US; denoting stealing or embezzling especially passengers’ fares ■ J. Evans: Some . . . clerk who was knocking down on the till. (1949)

Bust (1859) Denoting breaking into and robbing a place ■ Edgar Wallace: There’s a little house just outside of Thatcham . . . me and Harry . . . thought we might ‘bust’ it and get a few warm clothes. (1927)

Duff (1859) Australian; denoting stealing cattle, sheep, etc., often altering their brands; probably a back-formation from duffer such a thief ■ H. C. Baker: Complaining to the police that his stock was being duffed. (1978)

Whip (1859) British; denoting stealing or taking roughly or without permission ■ M. K. Joseph: ‘Where’s your hat, Barnett?’ . . . ‘Dunno, Someone musta whipped it.’ (1958)

Go through (1861) Orig US; denoting searching and robbing a person or place ■ R. W. Service: The girls were ‘going through’ a drunken sailor. (1945)

Mug (1864) Denoting attacking and robbing someone; from earlier obsolete boxing slang sense, hit in the face, from the noun punch ■ Daily Telegraph: Judge Hines, Q.C., jailed three youths for three years for ‘mugging’ a middle-aged man and stealing £7 from his wallet. (1972)

Nick (1869) Denoting stealing; from earlier more general sense, take ■ Courier Mail (Brisbane): Nicking toys from chain stores. (1973)

Roll (1873) Denoting robbing someone, especially someone who is asleep, drunk, or otherwise incapacitated ■ Raymond Chandler: Here we are with a guy who . . . has fifteen grand in his pants. . . . Somebody rolls him for it and rolls him too hard, so they have to take him out in the desert and plant him among the cactuses. (1939)

Crook (1882) US; denoting stealing

Swipe (1889) Denoting stealing or taking roughly or without permission; apparently from earlier sense, hit ■ T. Roethke: That beautiful Greek anthology you sent me some student swiped. (1970)

Attract (1891) Euphemistic; denoting stealing ■ E. Cambridge: He ‘attracted’ some timber and built a boat house. (1933)

Glom (1897) US; denoting stealing; variant of Scottish glaum snatch, from Gaelic glam grab ■ G. H. Mullin: I learned that stealing clothes from a clothesline is expressed in Hoboland by the hilarious phrase, ‘Glomming the grape-vine’. (1926)

Reef (1903) Denoting pulling up a pocket-lining to steal the contents, or to steal from a pocket, or more broadly to steal or obtain dishonestly ■ Times: As the talent suckers chummy, the wire reefs his leather . . . A slick pickpocket team has a private language for its dirty work. (1977)

Rip (1904) Denoting stealing ■ Telegraph (Brisbane): They believe some have ripped millions of dollars from Medibank since it began. (1976)

Snitch (1904) Denoting stealing; compare earlier sense, inform on someone ■ Milton Machlin: How about that guy who snitched a whole D-9 tractor, brand-new? (1976)

Snipe (1909) Mainly North American; denoting stealing or taking without (official) permission; often used in the context of gold prospecting ■ New Yorker: He ‘snipped’ a lot of his gold—just took it from likely spots without settling down to the formalities of a claim. (1977)

Hot-stuff (1914) Dated services’ slang; denoting stealing or scrounging; probably from hot stuff stolen goods (compare hot stolen) ■ H. Rosher: I at once hot-stuffed one of his inlet valves and set the men to working changing it. (1914)

Knock something off (1919) Denoting stealing or robbing ■ Observer: The boys either knocked off a hut where they knew gelly was kept or straightened it. (1960) ■ Alan Hunter: Just met a bloke . . . in the nick . . . Him what was in there for knocking-off cars. (1973)

Rat (1919) Mainly Australian & New Zealand; denoting searching someone, their belongings, etc. for something to steal, or more broadly to robbing or pilfering surreptitiously ■ Kylie Tennant: Some thieving (adjective) robber was ‘ratting’ his tucker-box. (1941)

Souvenir (1919) Euphemistic, orig services’ slang; denoting taking something as a ‘souvenir’, and hence pilfering or stealing ■ Frank Clune: I dug up his body, souvenired his false teeth and diaries, and reburied him in whiteman fashion. (1944)

Drum (1925) British; denoting stealing from an unoccupied house, room, etc.; probably from earlier sense (not recorded till later), find out if anyone is at home before attempting a robbery

Half-inch (1925) British; denoting stealing; rhyming slang for pinch steal ■ Times: If people are going to go around half-inching planets the situation is pretty serious. (1972)

Kick something in (1926) US; denoting breaking into a building, room, safe, etc. ■ Detective Fiction Weekly: Harold G. Slater’s big jewelry store safe had been ‘kicked in’ and robbed of twelve thousand dollars. (1931)

Take (1926) Denoting robbing ■ Damon Runyon: Someone takes a jewellery store in the town. (1930)

Knock something over (1928) Denoting robbing or burgling a place ■ Illustrated London News: The job looks easy enough—a big hotel at Tropicana Springs that any fool could ‘knock over’. (1940)

Work the tubes (1929) Denoting picking pockets on buses or at bus-stops; from tube bus
Denoting stealing; origin unknown

**wog (1971)**

*take US, off (1970)*

Someone or something

Mainly Australian & New Zealand;

tickle (1945)

Denoting breaking open a lock

**loid, 'loid (1968)**

Denting breaking open a lock or holding up; representing a local US pronunciation of *hoist steal*

**hot-wire (1966)**

Orig North American; denoting stealing an

dodge (1965)

P molecule, 'loid break into and steal from a house (said to be from the notion of hoisting an accomplice up to a window left open)

**score (1942)**

Orig US; denoting stealing or robbing; compare *lift* still; there is no documentary evidence of any connection with the much earlier *hoist*, hoisting shoplifting or with the obsolete 18th-century slang *loid* break and steal from a house (said to be from the notion of hoisting an accomplice up to a window left open)

**blag (1933)**

British; denoting robbing (with violence) or stealing; from *blag* robbery

**rabbit (1943)**

Australian nautical slang, dated;
denoting stealing; from earlier sense, drive sheep or cattle

**liberate (1944)**

Euphemistic or jocular; applied to looting or stealing

**tickle (1945)**

Mainly Australian & New Zealand; denoting scrugging or stealing; compare earlier *rabbit* something smuggled or stolen

**peter (1962)**

Denoting blowing open a safe in order to steal from it; from the noun *peter* safe

**score (1942)**

Orig US; denoting stealing; from earlier sense, make dishonest gain

**hoister (1790)**

Applied to a shoplifter or *hoists* to be found in Hoxton.

**cracksman (1812)**

Dated; applied to a housebreaker; from obsolete slang

**screwsman (1856)**

Applied to a thief who robs an unoccupied

**staller (1812)**

Dated; applied to a pickpocket's

**duffer (1844)**

Applied to a thief or pilferer, and subsequently to a pickpocket, often specifically a stealer of pocket-watches; from obsolete hook steal (stealthily) (from the notion of snatching an article with a hook) + -er

**hooker (1567)**

Dated; applied originally to any thief or pilferer, and subsequently to a pickpocket, often specifically a stealer of pocket-watches; from obsolete hook steal (stealthily) (from the notion of snatching an article with a hook) + -er

**hoist (1931)**

Dated; applied to a shoplifter or *pickpocket* • *F. D. Sharpe*: Gangs of women shoplifters or 'Hoisters' are to be found in Hoxton.

**cracksman (1812)**

Dated; applied to a housebreaker; from obsolete slang

**screwsman (1856)**

Applied to a thief or pilferer, and subsequently to a pickpocket's

**staller (1812)**

Dated; applied to a pickpocket's accomplice; from stall distract someone whose pocket is being picked + -er

**duffer (1844)**

Australian; applied to someone who steals stock, often altering their brands; perhaps from earlier sense, one who sells trashy goods as valuables, under false pretences

**drummer (1856)**

British; in recent use applied especially to a thief who robs an unoccupied house • *Observer*: Nobody wanted to know the drummers, those squalid daytime operators who turn over empty semi-detached villas while the housewives are out shopping.

**dip (1859)**

Applied to a pickpocket • *Daily Telegraph* New Yorkers who have had their pockets picked or handbags rifled on the city's Underground in recent years learned yesterday that the person responsible was probably a professional 'dip'.

**rampman (1859)**

Applied to someone who commits robbery with violence; from *ramp* swindle + *man* • *Michael Crichton*: Barlow was a deformed buzzer turned rampman—a pickpocket who had degenerated to plain mugging.
**buzzer (1862)** Applied to a pickpocket; from obsolete buzz pick someone's pocket (of unknown origin) + -er

**hook (1863)** Applied to a thief or pickpocket; originally denoting specifically someone who stole from a pocket while the victim’s attention was distracted by someone else; compare obsolete hook steal (stealthily) — G. J. Barrett: We've nothing on him. But then we’ve nothing on half the hooks in Eastport. (1968)

**dancer (1864)** Dated; applied to a thief who gains entry through upper-storey windows — Edgar Wallace: There were active young men who called themselves dancers, and whose gift was to get into first-floor flats and get out quickly with such overcoats, wraps, and moveables as could be whisked away in half a minute. (1930)

**mugger (1865)** Applied to someone who commits robbery with violence in a public place; from mug rob in this way + -er — Sun: Muggers attacked detective. (1973)

**pennyweighter (1899)** US; applied to a jewel thief; from pennyweight unit in the Troy system of weight measurement + -er — Daily News: In the American description of her she was said to be a ‘penny weighter’ . . . That is, one who goes into a jeweller's shop, inspects jewellery, and by means of some sticky substance on the fingers, manages to palm an article, and deposits it beneath the counter for a confederate to pick up. (1905)

**peterman (1900)** Applied to a safe-breaker; from Peter safe + -man — Bruce Graeme: The wall safe was distracted by someone else; compare already denoting specifically someone who steals from open buildings • Edmund Crispin: Since he was a stair dancer, a walk-in thief, judges had been inclined to be lenient until the last occasion, when his offence had been aggravated by his having broken a window to 'effect an entrance'. (1977)

**prop-getter, prop-man (1901)** Dated; applied to a pickpocket; from prop diamond or valuable piece of jewellery

**tea-leaf (1903)** British; rhyming slang for thief — Douglas Clark: A tea-leaf wouldn’t find the key on your person if he broke in. (1977)

**houseman (1904)** US, dated; applied to a burglar

**creep (1914)** Orig US; applied to a stealthy robber, or to a sneak thief, especially a prostitute who steals from her clients while they are asleep or unconscious — Observer: A creep is a highly expert thief . . . He is so quiet that he can move about a house for hours without waking anybody. (1960)

**prat-digger (1908)** US, dated; applied to a pickpocket; from prat hip-pocket

**heel (1916)** US derogatory criminals' slang, dated; applied to a sneak thief or pickpocket

**finger (1925)** Applied to a pickpocket — K. Hopkins: He's a finger, works in Fulham mostly. Small profits, quick returns. (1960)

**whizzer (1925), whizz, whizz boy (1931), whizz man (1932)** Orig US; applied to a pickpocket; from whiz pocket picking

**blagger (1938)** British; from blag rob + -er — D. W. Smith: Reluctant though I am to say so, the blaggers have pretty well stuffed us on this one. . . . We've done a lot of bloody good police work for sweet Fanny Adams. (1968)

**tool-man (1949)** Applied to a lock-picker or (US) a safe-breaker — Kyril Bonfiglioli: Every sound, professional team of thieves has . . . a 'toolman' who knows how to neutralize burglar-alarm systems and to open locks. (1979)

**moll (1955)** US; applied to a female pickpocket or thief; from earlier sense, gangster’s female companion

**stair dancer (1958)** Applied to a thief who steals from open buildings — Edmund Crispin: Since he was a stair dancer, a walk-in thief, judges had been inclined to be lenient until the last occasion, when his offence had been said . . . to have been aggravated by his having broken a window to 'effect an entrance'. (1977)

**klepto (1958)** Abbreviation of kleptomaniac — E. V. Cunningham: You got it . . . right out of Helen Sarbine’s purse. . . . What are you—some kind of nut or klepto? (1964)

**steamer (1987)** British; applied to a member of a gang engaged in stealing — Sunday Times: Last November, steamers . . . let crowds outside a rock concert at Hammersmith Odeon. (1988)

**ram-raider (1991)** British; applied to a perpetrator of ram-raiding
Inclined to steal

light-fingered (1547) Euphemistic Washington Post. They maintain Bodie in a state of 'arrested decay', an oxymoron that means fending off vandals and light-fingered tourists. (1993)

thieving (1598) Originally a standard usage Evening Standard. It is filled with ... constant collisions between pregnant daughters, thieving accountants, snotty bankers, dumb sidekicks, hysterical wives, saucy maids. . . . (1991)

sticky-fingered (1890) Daily Telegraph. Mr Steel announced menacingly that a list of sticky fingered policemen had been made available. (1982)

Stolen

hot (1925) Applied especially to stolen articles that are easily identifiable and therefore difficult to dispose of H. L. Lawrence: You come here, in a hot car. . . . And the police know. (1960)

bent (1930) Orig US; from earlier sense, dishonest Peter Wildeblood: He had got a short sentence for receiving stolen goods, which he swore he had not known to be 'bent'. (1955)

kinky (1927) Orig US; Collier's: 'Why, you can't tell me that you didn't know those five big cars were kinky.' 'Kinky?' . . . Those cars were bent.' (1927)

Stolen property

swag (1794) J. Fenton: And there were villains enough, but none of them slipped away with the swag. (1982)

take (1888) Mainly US; applied to money acquired by theft or fraud C. F. Cole: After the stick-up . . . Carrots . . . can watch the take till I send the porter over after it. (1927)

score (1914) Applied to the proceeds of a robbery New Yorker. A million dollars from a computer crime is considered a respectable but not an extraordinary score. (1977)

kinky (1927) Orig US; American Mercury. The titles of every car Joe sold could be searched clear back to the factory. . . . Yet the cars were strictly kinkies. (1941)

the goods (1900) Applied especially to stolen articles as evidence of guilt R. D. Paine: You have caught me with the goods, Wyman. It was my way of getting a slant on you. (1923)

rabbit (1929) Naval slang & Australian; applied to something smuggled or stolen F. H. Burgess: Rabbit, an article unlawfully obtained and smuggled ashore. (1961)

knock-off (1963) From knock off steal Australian T.V. Times: Knock-off, loot or illegally found goods. (1983)

A hiding-place for stolen goods

lumber (1753) British, dated; applied to a house or room where stolen goods are hidden; from earlier sense, pawnbrokering establishment; ultimately a variant of obsolete Lombard pawnbrokering establishment, bank, etc., from the traditional role of natives of Lombardy as bankers and pawnbrokers

trap (1930) US Time. Other mobsters keep their escape money in bank safe-deposit boxes or hiding-places called 'traps'. (1977)

drop (1931) American Mercury. The immediate problem after a trucking theft is to unload the merchandise and abandon the empty truck. For this purpose the gang must have a 'drop' where the loot can be stored until the fence can arrange for its sale and distribution. (1947)

run-in (1959) D. Warner: Sapper Neal and a bunch of the Sparrow boys been seen cruising around this manor in a car like they was looking for something. Is the run-in round here? (1962)

To handle or sell stolen goods

fence (1610) Saul Bellow. After stealing your ring, he didn’t even know how to fence it. (1989)

A dealer in stolen goods

fence (1700) From fence deal in stolen goods B. Reid: She’d had a fence living in while I was away, and she’d flogged my expensive wedding presents. (1984)

drop (1915) Kenneth Orvis: You say you buy expensive jewels. You say you pay better prices than ordinary drops do. (1962)

placer (1969) British Peter Laurie: There are thieves and dealers—we call them placers. (1970)

Possession of stolen or illicit goods

petition (1700) Orig US; often applied specifically to the possession of illegal drugs R. L. Simons: What’s a few years in the cooler for possession? (1973)

Extortion

shakedown (1902) Orig & mainly US; applied to an instance of extortion; from shake down extort money from S. Brill: While the shakedown was proved, it was never shown that the money went to Presser personally. (1978)

bagman (1928) Orig & mainly US; applied to someone who collects or administers the collection of money obtained by racketeering and other dishonest means; from the bag supposedly carried to hold the money collected; compare earlier sense, commercial traveller National Times (Australia): The money is always paid in cash, by personal contact in a pub or a car. The police 'bag man' will call once a month to collect. (1973)

racket (1928) Orig US; applied to a criminal scheme for extorting money, etc., especially in organized crime; from earlier sense, plan, scheme Times: Ulster by the middle of 1974 was suffering from rackets and violent crime on a scale equal to some of Europe's most notorious cities. (1977)

juice (1935) US; applied to protection money Estes Kefauver: When the combine's books finally were seized, examination disclosed recorded payments totalling $108,000 for the service known as 'juice', which is the
California gambling profession’s euphemism (in Florida the term is ‘ice’) for ‘protection’ money. (1951)

**ice** (1948) US; applied to protection money

- *Economist*: Gross... who had confided to paying this sum in ‘ice’ for the protection that made it possible for him to earn $100,000 a year. (1951)

See also **hurtle**, **ramp**, and **scam** under Deception, swindling, fraud at Deception, Cheating (pp. 282–3).

To extort money from

**shake** someone **down** (1872) Orig & mainly US

- Jonathan Ross: Sickert had been shaken down for protection money. (1976)

**sting** someone **for** (1903) Orig US

- Ngaio Marsh: We hope to sting Uncle G. for two thousand [pounds]. (1940)

To blackmail

**put the black on** (1924)

- J. B. Priestley: Got a lovely pub... and yet wants to start putting the black on people! (1951)

**black** (1928)

- George Sims: He... took naughty photos of them and then blacked them. (1964)

Rape and sexual assault

**date rape** (1983) Orig US; applied to the rape by a man of his partner on a date

A sex offender

**nonce** (1975) British, prisoners’ slang; applied especially to a child-molester; origin uncertain; perhaps from *nancy* effeminate man, but compare British dialect *nonce* good-for-nothing fellow

- *Sunday Telegraph*: As what prisoners call a ‘nonce’, he now faces years of solitary confinement and regular assaults from fellow inmates. (1986)

**beast** (1989) Prisoners’ slang

- *Daily Telegraph*: The arrival of a police van at a prison might often be accompanied by comments such as ‘a couple of beasts for you’, with the result that the prisoners are immediately identified. (1989)

Illegal falsification or misrepresentation:

**Counterfeit**

**queer** (1740) From earlier sense, odd

- Raymond Chandler: If it was discovered to be queer money, as you say, it would be very difficult to trace the source of it. (1941)

**flash** (1812) Dated; compare earlier sense, gaudy, showy

- Thomas Hood: ‘A note’, says he... ‘thou’st took a flash ‘un.’ (1837)

**snide** (1885) Dated; applied to counterfeit jewellery or money; from **snide** counterfeit

**stumer, stumor** (1890) Applied to a counterfeit coin or banknote or to a worthless cheque; from earlier; more general sense, something worthless

- *Daily News*: I did pass a bad florin, guv’nor, but I did it innocent. I didn’t know it was a stumer. (1912)

**tweedle** (1890) Dated; applied to a counterfeit ring used in a swindling racket; probably from the verb *tweedle*, a variant of *twiddle* twist, twirl

**schlenter** (1882) South African; applied especially to a fake diamond; from Afrikaans,

- *Economist*: The best Schlenters in South West are made from the marbles in the necks of the lemonade or mineral-water bottles that can be found in dozens at the old German diggings. (1969)

**dud** (1895) British; from earlier sense, something worthless or spurious

**dud** (1897) Applied to a counterfeit coin, banknote, etc.; perhaps from earlier *dud* ragged garment

**wooden nickel, wooden money** (1915) US; applied to a counterfeit or worthless coin or money

**slush** (1924) Dated; applied to counterfeit banknotes

- D. Hume: We’ve been handling slush lately—ten bobs and quids. Where they were printed doesn’t matter to you. (1933)

**funny money** (1938) Orig US

A fraudulent substitute

**ringer** (1890) Orig US; applied originally to a horse, player, etc. fraudulently substituted in a competition to boost the chances of winning, and in recent use (1962) to a false registration plate on a stolen vehicle; from *ring* substitute fraudulently + -er

- E. Parr: The car is now driven to a ring or placard on a stolen vehicle; from

**switch** (1918) Australian; applied especially to a fraudulent substitution in a race

**dud** (1903) From the noun *dud* a counterfeit

To counterfeit, forge

**scratch** (1859) US, dated; denoting forging banknotes and other papers. (Flynn's Magazine.) Well, scratch th' note an' we'll blow. (1926)

**phoney** something up (1942) Mainly US; from phony spurious. (Daily Telegraph: Furs are often not clearly labelled. Cat skins could be passed off as 'bunny'. You can phoney anything up. (1977)

To pass counterfeit money, cheques, etc.

**drop** (1926). Lionel Black: The known value of counterfeit fivers dropped is more than double that. (1968)

To substitute fraudulently

**ring** (1812) In recent use (1967) denoting specifically the fraudulent changing of the identity of a car; from ring sound of a bell. (1977)

To misrepresent or fraudulently alter

**cook** (1636) Denoting surreptitious or fraudulent alteration or falsification; in modern use often in the phrase cook the books falsely financial accounts. (Daily Telegraph: When the spending got out of hand and the money was not coming in, 'the only thing to do was to cook the books'. (1991)

**salt** (1852) Denoting originally the misrepresenting of the value of a mine by introducing ore from elsewhere, and hence (1882) misrepresenting the contents of an account by adding ghost entries, falsifying details, etc.; from the notion of adding salt to a dish

**launder** (a1961) Denoting changing something illegally to make it acceptable or legitimate, and hence (from the use of the word in connection with the Watergate inquiry in the United States in 1973–4) transferring funds, especially to a foreign bank account, in order to conceal a dubious or illegal origin; from earlier sense, wash linen. (Globe & Mail (Toronto): Kerr concedes U.S. criminals 'launder' money in Ontario. (1974) New York Times: Unscrupulous dealers. . . . 'launder' the mileage of cars. (1985)

**skim** (1966) US; denoting concealing or diverting some of one's earnings or takings, especially from gambling, to avoid paying tax on them. (Mario Puzo: Gronewelt felt that hotel owners who skimmed money in the casino counting room were jerks, that the FBI would catch up with them sooner or later. (1978)

**mule** (1935) Orig US; applied to someone who trafficks in illicit liquor, drugs, etc.; from earlier standard sense, smuggler of contraband, guns, etc. (Tom Tullett: Members of the gang, known as 'runners', were sent to Paris, or Marseilles, to pick up the drug. (1983)

**runner** (1930) Mainly US; applied to someone who deals in illicit liquor, drugs, etc.; from earlier standard sense, smuggler of contraband, guns, etc. (Tom Tullett: Members of the gang, known as 'runners', were sent to Paris, or Marseilles, to pick up the drug. (1983)

**torch** (1931) Orig US; denoting deliberately setting fire to something, especially in order to

To contrive fraudulently

**rort** (1980) Australian; denoting manipulating a ballot, records, etc. fraudulently; from earlier sense, engage in corrupt practices. (Bulletin (Sydney): A plan to rort the roll could involve isolating the names of members who are listed under out-of-date addresses. (1985)

To contrive fraudulently
claim insurance money  ■ Time: Griffith relied on an arsonist turned informant ... who worked as a 'broker' for landlords eager to torch their property. (1977)

An arsonist

torch (1938) US  ■ Reader's Digest: The torch is now serving a 20-year sentence. (1938)

Joyriding

hotting (1991) British; applied to joyriding in stolen high-performance cars, especially dangerously and for show; from hot stolen, perhaps reinforced by hot-wire steal a car by bypassing the ignition system  ■ Observer: What started as a campaign against 'hotting'—displays of high-speed handbrake turns in stolen cars—has turned into a dispute over territory. (1991). Hence hotter someone who does this (1991)

To incriminate

plant (1865) Denoting hiding stolen goods, etc. in order to incriminate the person in whose possession they are found; used from 1601 with no sense of ulterior incriminating motive  ■ Times Literary Supplement: The nephews ... sought to clinch the available, and misleading, evidence by planting the victim's dental plate on the spot. (1930)

fit (1882) Orig Australian; denoting (attempting to) incriminate someone, especially by planting false evidence; often followed by up; from obsolete British fit punish in a fitting manner  ■ G. F. Newman: Danny James might have fitted him, Sneed thought, but immediately questioned how. (1970)

fit-up (1939) British; applied to an illegal search of a suspect's property by agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation for the purpose of copying or stealing incriminating documents

An act of unjust incrimination

frame-up (1908), frame (1929) Orig US; from earlier sense, (criminal) conspiracy  ■ While serving a six month sentence ... Ian learned a lot about frame-ups, about prison conditions. (1971)  ■ J. Evans: He ... wasn't a killer but just the victim of a frame. (1948)

set-up (1968) Orig US; applied to a scheme or trick by which an innocent person is incriminated; from set up incriminate  ■ John Gardner: Arthur's clean. ... It was a set-up. ... I had him checked like you'd check a dodgy engine. (1978)

bag job (1971) US; applied to an illegal search of a suspect's property by agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation for the purpose of copying or stealing incriminating documents

stitch-up (1984) British; applied to an act of unjustly transferring blame to someone else; from stitch up incriminate  ■ Guardian: There's obviously been a stitch-up and it leaves Calcutt with egg on his face. (1992)

fit-up (1985) From fit (up) incriminate  ■ Roger Busby: We was fitted, you ratbag! ... Nothing but a lousy fit-up! (1985)

Something incriminating

plant (1926) Applied to something hidden in a person's clothing, among their possessions, etc. in order to incriminate them; from plant hide in such a way  ■ G. Vaughan: 'Heroin!' the detective shouted. ... Yardley had never seen the package before. ... He said: 'That stuff's a plant.' (1978)

verbal (1963) Orig & mainly British; applied to an incriminating statement attributed to an arrested or suspected person; from verbal spoken

A scapegoat for a crime or misdemeanour

fall guy (1904) Orig US  ■ Spectator: Ward began to hear from friends that he was being cast for the part of fall guy (I know of no equivalent expression here) by Profumo's friends. (1963)

To suspect of a crime

suss, suss (1953) British; abbreviation of suspect  ■ D. Webb: He turned to Hodge and said, 'Who's sussed for this job?' (1953)

Suspicion of having committed a crime

suss, suss (1936) British; often in the phrase on sus; abbreviation of suspicion or suspicious  ■ G. F. Newman: Chance nickings in the street, from anything on sus, to indecent exposure. (1970)

Someone suspected of a crime

suss, suss (1936) British; abbreviation of suspect

■ Kenneth Giles: Sorry, old man, they found your chief sus. with his neck broken. (1967)
To raid; to search

**turn** something or someone **over** (1859)
Denoting ransacking a place, usually in order to commit robbery, or searching a person
- Laurence Maynell: 'What about that girl's bedroom that got turned over?' (1981)

**shake** something or someone **down** (1915)
Orig & mainly US; applied especially to the police searching a place or person
- Desmond Bagley: Once Mayberry had been shaken down the guards were taken from Penny and Gillian. (1977)

**bust** (1971) Applied to the police searching a place for drugs, stolen property, etc.; from earlier noun sense, police raid

A (police) raid; a search

**shake-down** (1914) Orig & mainly US
- Landfall: But about nine o'clock, without any warning, there was a shake-down [of prisoners]. (1958)

**bust** (1938) Orig US
- It At the moment, there are over a hundred of our kids in nick as a result of the busts at 144 Piccadilly & Endell Street. (1969)

To follow

**tail** (1907) Orig US; denoting following a criminal, suspect, etc. secretly
- S. Brill: 'I'm not gonna let you tail me like some kinda cop. (1978)

**dead to rights** (1859) British; applied to a criminal who is caught red-handed
- A. A. Fair: 'We've got her this time dead-to-rights.' (1947)

**collar** (1871) Orig US; applied to an arrest; from the notion of seizing someone by the collar
- New York Review of Books: The only guys that want to have the law on someone are the guys who are looking for the overtime. (1977)

**hot beef** (1879) British, dated; rhyming slang for 'Am I going to turn you over?' 'No, you're not.' (1970)

**bang to rights** (1904) British; applied to a criminal who is caught red-handed
- Frank Norman: One night a screw looked through his spy hole and captured him bang to rights. (1958)

**bust** (1926) Mainly US; applied to a false charge

**hummer** (1932) Mainly US; applied to false or mistaken arrest

**bust** (1938) British; applied to a remand in custody

**sting** (1976) Mainly US; applied to a police undercover operation to catch criminals
- Observer: His second reaction was to inform the American authorities and get their approval for an elaborate and costly 'sting'. (1983)

**nab** (1868) Origin uncertain; compare obsolete slang nap seize, preserved in kidnap
- Boston Sunday Herald: Town marshall is slain and a former lawman nabs the killer. (1967)

**have someone** **up** (1749) Originally denoting bringing someone before a court to answer a charge
- Mrs Humphrey Ward: 'This is a murder charge. There is no certainty that you will be done for murder.'... He did not say that Kelly would only be 'done' for robbery and not murder. (1963)

**have the law** on (or (dated) of) someone (1800) Denoting reporting someone to the police
- Anne Barton: When the gentlemen... steal his best silver-gilt goblet, Candido has the law on them. (1993)

**nick** (1806) From earlier sense, catch, take hold of someone
- John Wainwright: I am talking to you, copper... either nick me... or close that bloody door. (1973)

**pull** (1811) G. F. Newman: They... pulled drunks and bathed tramps, saw children across the road and directed traffic. (1970)

**pull someone** **up** (1812) Dated

**pinch** (1837) H. L. Foster: A traffic policeman had stopped us. But not to pinch us for speeding. (1925)

**book** (1841) Denoting the official recording of the name of someone who has committed an offence; from the notion of writing the name down in a book
- P. Barry: If you hadn't been a learner driver... I'd have booked you for that! (1961)

**cop** (1844) From earlier sense, catch, lay hold of
- Pall Mall Gazette: Prisoner said, 'Yes, I am the man. I am glad you have copped me.' (1888)

**lag** (1847) Dated; from earlier sense, imprison
- Augustus Mayhew: They tell him adventures of how they were nearly 'lagged by the constables'. (1858)

**fully** (1849) Dated; denoting committing someone for trial; from the adverb fully, in the phrase 'fully committed for trial'
- James Curtis: They'll fully me to the Old Bailey, I reckon. (1936)

**cuff** (1851) Denoting handcuffing someone; from cuffs handcuffs; previously used in the 17th century to denote restraining someone with wrist-fetters
- Wall Street Journal: It's very, very rare that you would arrest anyone, cuff them in public and take them from their offices. (1989)

**collar** (1853) Dated; from earlier sense, take hold of (as if) by the collar

**run someone** **in** (1859) New Yorker: 'Am I going to have to run you in?' the policeman asked. (1951)

**haul someone** **up** (1865) Denoting bringing someone before a judge or other person in authority in order to answer a charge, and hence arresting or charging someone
- Daily Mail: Lou Micallleff took his go-kart for a spin in his
people and society

neighbourhood cul-de-sac, and was hauled up by the local police for driving an uninsured, unregistered vehicle. (1991)

**put the collar on** someone (1865) US

**pick** someone up (1871) Orig US. ■ J. T. Farrell: He gazed around the church to see if any of the boys were present. Seeing none of them, he guessed that they must all have been picked up, and were enjoying Christmas Day in the can. (1934)

**fall** (1873) Denoting being arrested or convicted

**nail** (1889) From earlier sense, succeed in catching or getting hold of. ■ C. F. Burke: The cops... nail Ben for havin' the cup. (1969)

**pull** someone in (1893) ■ Dorothy Sayers: We could pull him in any day, but he's not the real big noise. (1933)

**blister** (1909) British; denoting arresting or summoning someone; from the noun blister

**summons** (1910) British; from earlier sense, stolen

**pull** someone in (1893) ■ Dorothy Sayers: We could pull him in any day, but he's not the real big noise. (1933)

**blister** (1909) British; denoting arresting or summoning someone; from the noun blister

summons • Herbert Hodge: When the policeman puts his notebook away again, we've usually been 'blistered'. During recent years, policemen have been blistering us over three thousand times in a twelvemonth. (1933)

**drag** (1924) British, dated ■ Edgar Wallace: If you particularly want him dragged, you'll tell me what I can drag him on. (1928)

**knock** someone off (1926) ■ R. V. Bestie: You're the sort who'd knock off his mother because she hadn't got a lamp on her bike five minutes after lighting up time. (1969)

**put the sleeve on** someone (1930) US ■ Damon Runyon: These coppers... know who he is very well indeed and will take great pleasure in putting the old sleeve on him if they only have a few charges against him, which they do not. (1930)

**lumber** (1931) British; from earlier sense, imprison ■ Barry Crump: We were sneaking into the church to bunk down last night when the Johns lumbered us. Which they do not. (1930)

**bust** (1940) Orig & mainly US ■ Landfall: The little man came out of his cell... 'This your first time busted?' (1958)

**take** someone in (1942) ■ Janwillem van de Wetering: You’re not taking me in, sheriff. (1979)

**feel** someone's collar (1950) British. ■ Daily Telegraph: Will old-timers be able to play dominoes or cribbage without the risk of having their collars felt? (1985)

** Arrested

**popped** (1960) US; sometimes applied to someone caught with illegal drugs in their possession

**Liable to arrest; wanted

**hot** (1931) Compare earlier sense, stolen ■ Patricia Moyes: Griselda was 'hot'. Griselda had to disappear. (1973)

**A summons

**blister** (1903) British. ■ Frank Sargeson: He'd been paying off a few bob every time he had a few to spare. And then he gets a blister! (1947)

**bluey** (1909) Australian & New Zealand; from the colour of the document ■ N.Z.E.F. Times: That speed cop, who gave me my last bluey on point duty. (1942)

**Handcuffs

**bracelets** (1816) Previously applied in the 17th century to iron wrist-fetters ■ Frederick Forsyth: Letting him run sticks in my craw. He should be on a flight Stateside—in bracelets. (1989)

**nippers** (1821) ■ Fortune: At 2145 one of the detectives put nippers on the prisoner's wrist. (1939)

**cuffs** (1861) Previously applied in the 17th century to iron wrist-fetters

**mittens** (1880) From earlier sense, type of glove

**snaps** (1895) ■ Maurice Procter: Sergeant, we'd better have the snaps on these three. (1967)

**An identification parade

**show-up** (1929) US ■ Sun (Baltimore): Lyman Brown... picked Graham out of a 'showup' of seven jail inmates. (1955)

**stand-up** (1935) US ■ Philadelphia Evening Bulletin: Jackson was brought to City Hall last night to take a look at Norman in a police standup, but he could not positively identify the prisoner. (1949)

A criminal record

**pedigree** (1911) ■ Dell Shannon: Dorothy had a little pedigree for shoplifting. (1964)

**previous** (1935) British; short for previous (criminal) convictions ■ G. F. Newman: 'Neither has any previous, Terry,' Burgess said. 'I thought perhaps the fella might have had a little bit,' he shrugged. (1970)

**mug shot** (1950) Orig US; applied to a police photograph of a criminal; from mug face

**form** (1958) British; from horse-racing use, a horse's past performance as a race-guide ■ Michael Underwood: He has form for false pretences, mostly small stuff. (1960)

**mug book** (1958) Applied to a book kept by the police containing photographs of criminals; from mug face

**sheet** (1958) US; applied to a police record of convictions ■ Carolyn Weston: Somebody scared him into it. Let's take a look at his sheet, I want to know who. (1976)

**rap sheet** (1960) Mainly US; applied to a police record of convictions; from rap criminal accusation or charge ■ G. V. Higgins: He was convicted. Two charges... were dismissed, but remained on his rap sheet as having been brought. (1976)

**prior** (1978) US; short for prior conviction; usually used in the plural ■ Joseph Wambaugh: Burglary... rarely drew a state prison term, unless you had a lot of priors. (1978)

Having a criminal record

Judges, magistrates, lawyers, etc.

beak (1838) British, dated; applied to a magistrate or justice of the peace; probably from thieves' cant, though derivation from beak bird's bill cannot be entirely discounted. D. W. Smith: Just tell me what I want to know and we'll tell the beak you were a good boy. Keep on like this and it's porridge for life. (1986)

shyster (1844) Orig and mainly US; applied to an unscrupulous lawyer; origin uncertain; perhaps related to German Scheisser worthless person, from Scheisse excrement. John Wainwright: The shyster lawyers... swear blind the client's been manhandled while in police custody. (1981)

mouthpiece (1857) Applied to a barrister, solicitor, etc.; from the lawyer's speaking in court for the accused. P. B. Yuill: The Abreys would subsequently used more broadly for killing; hanging (perhaps from an earlier notion of beheading, i.e. removing someone's top), while drunk in a tavern near London. (1992)

top (1718) Originally denoting execution by hanging (perhaps from an earlier notion of beheading, i.e. removing someone's top), but subsequently used more broadly for killing; often used reflexively to denote committing suicide. Listener: I have to try and get a key to it all, otherwise I'll just top myself. (1983)

16. Killing

To kill deliberately

brain (1382) Originally used in standard English to denote literally killing someone by smashing their brain, but latterly in slang use denoting more broadly killing someone by hitting them on the head. Guardian: Not for him the behaviour of his grandfather, of whom it is told that he brained a serving boy while drunk in a tavern near London. (1992)

top (1718) Originally denoting execution by hanging (perhaps from an earlier notion of beheading, i.e. removing someone's top), but subsequently used more broadly for killing; often used reflexively to denote committing suicide. Listener: I have to try and get a key to it all, otherwise I'll just top myself. (1983)

mouthpiece (1857) Applied to a barrister, solicitor, etc.; from the lawyer's speaking in court for the accused. H. E. Goldin: Roberts devoted the remainder of his... speech to remembering odd little incidents in the early career of the senior 'stip'. (1978)

directory (1929) US; dated; applied to a lawyer, especially a criminal lawyer; from the lawyer's speaking in court for the accused. H. E. Goldin: The lip took a hundred skins (dollars) and never showed (appeared) in court. (1950)

brief (1977) British; applied to an accused person's solicitor or barrister; from earlier sense, legal case given to a barrister to argue in court. Peter Whalley: Fair sang your praises he did. Said I could tell you things I wouldn't tell my own brief. (1986)

Criminal evidence

dabs (1926) British; applied to fingerprints. K. Farrer: You'll get his photo and dabs by airmail today. (1957)

make (1950) Orig US; applied to an identification of, or information about, a person or thing from police records, fingerprints, etc. R. K. Smith: We got a make on the Chewy... Stolen last week. (1972)

stretch (1902) Michael Gilbert: Once... Annie had a husband. She got tired of him, so she 'stretched him with a bottle'. (1953)

do in (1905) Listener: These were professional killers who 'did in' John Regan. (1963)

bump off, bump (1907) Orig US. Evelyn Waugh: They had two shots at bumping me off yesterday. (1932)

blow away (1913) Orig Southern US dialect, but given wider currency during the Vietnam War; usually applied to killing by shooting or explosion. Guardian: A gunman smiled as he shot dead a young policeman after being jilted by his girlfriend, the Old Bailey was told yesterday. 'I blew your copper away because my girlfriend blew me away,' Mark Gaynor... told officers later. (1991)


pop off (1824), pop (1940) Compare earlier pop off die. Edgar Wallace: You might have been 'popped off' yourself if you'd only got within range of a bullet. (1922)

rub out (1848) Orig US. Alan Lomax: The gangsters... had promised to rub him out if he didn't stop trying to hire away their star New Orleans side-men. (1950)

out (1900) From earlier sense, knock unconscious. Edgar Wallace: I've heard tellers in Dartmoor say that if ever they got the chance they'd 'out' him. (1927)

huff (1919) British, services' slang, dated

knock off (1919) Orig US; compare earlier sense, dispatch, dispose of. Hank Hobson: One of my boys
... got knocked off—an‘ nobody does a damn‘ thing about who knocked him off. (1959)

cool (1920) US  ■ John Morris: He wasn’t killed in any private fight... He was cooled by a Chinese agent. (1969)

tip off (1920) Dated; compare obsolete dialect tip off die. ■ Evening News: Jake’s sort o’ done me a good turn, getting himself tipped off. (1928)
do away with (1927) From earlier sense, get rid of; often used reflexively to denote committing suicide. ■ Guardian: Jeremy Irons led the way... as Best Actor for his performance as Klaus von Buloow, accused of doing away with his rich wife in real life as well as in Reversal Of Fortune. (1991)
take someone for a ride (1927) Orig US; denoting taking someone in a car to murder them. ■ Erle Stanley Gardner: These persons whispered that some day Carr would mysteriously disappear, and no one would ever know whether he had quietly faded into voluntary oblivion or had been ‘taken for a ride‘. (1944)
scurr (1930) US; from earlier sense, hang, garotte. ■ Reader’s Digest: If they aim at me they will find you ever since you set Doc over. (1944)
set over (1931) W. R. Burnett: I’ve been trying to get rid of; often used reflexively to denote committing suicide. ■ Guardian: A would-be assassin who considers it his mission to ‘ice the fascist pig police‘. (1973)
snuff out (1932), snuff (1973) Compare earlier sense, hit, thrash. ■ J. M. Fox: ‘He took out two people who could have involved him’... ‘Took out? You mean he killed them?’ (1967)
swear (1935) Mainly Australian. ■ American Speech: He [sc. S. J. Baker] gives examples of Australian argot, of which several follow... smear, to murder, [etc.]. (1944)
take out (1939) Orig US  ■ J. M. Fox: ‘He took out two people who could have involved him’... ‘Took out? You mean he killed them?’ (1967)

dust off (1940), dust (1972) Orig US; compare earlier sense, hit, thrash.
wash (1941) US; sometimes followed by away. ■ Ed McBain: ‘This Alfredo kid, he not such a bad guy.’ ‘He’s getting washed and that’s it.’ (1960)
zap (1942) Orig US; often applied specifically to killing with a gun; from earlier use representing the sound of a bullet, ray gun, etc. ■ Nicolas Freeling: Unbureaucratically, any mugger who shoots, you zap. (1982)

waste (1964) Orig & mainly US  ■ Carolyn Weston: They wasted Barrett because he blew their deal. (1975)
off (1968) Mainly US, Black English  ■ R. B. Parker: There were various recommendations about pigs [sc. police officers] being offed scrawled on the sidewalk. (1974)
wax (1968) US, orig services‘ slang; from earlier sense, beat, thrash  ■ L. Block: A whole family gets waxed because somebody burned somebody else in a coke deal. (1982)

wipe (1968) Often followed by out. ■ James McClure: Someone tried to wipe Bradshaw... The shot caught him here in the collar-bone. (1980)

ice (1969) US  ■ Guardian: A would-be assassin who considers it his mission to ‘ice the fascist pig police‘. (1973)

frag (1970) US, services‘ slang; denoting killing (or wounding) an officer on one’s own side, especially one considered too eager for combat, with a hand grenade; from frag, abbreviation of fragmentation (grenade)
terminate (dismiss, etc.) with extreme prejudice (1972) US; used in espionage slang to denote assassinating someone

nut (1974) Usually passive; sometimes followed by off. ■ E. Fairweather: He’s hated so much he knows he’d be nuted straight away. (1984)


To commit suicide

do a (or the) Dutch (act) (1902) Orig US; compare earlier sense, run away, desert. ■ M. A. de Ford: You can’t face it... so you’re doing the Dutch and leaving a confession. (1958)

Killing, murder

rub-out (1927) Orig US; applied especially to an assassination in gang warfare; from rub out kill. ■ Washington Post: Two hoodlums were gunned to death on Chicago’s West Side today and police said at least one of the executions was probably a crime syndicate ‘rubout’. (1959)

wipe-out (1968) Orig US; applied especially to an assassination in gang warfare; from wipe (out) kill. ■ M. Hebben: Think it was a gang wipe-out, Patron? (1984)
murder one (1971) US; applied to (a charge of) first-degree murder

A professional killer

hatchet man (1880) Originally applied specifically to a hired Chinese assassin in the US. ■ Pat Frank: He was a hatchet man for the NKVD.... He may have delivered Beria over to Malenkov and Krushchev. (1957)

hit-man (1970) ■ Daily Telegraph: Bryant is alleged to have been a ‘hit man’ (assassin) for drug traffickers and to have carried out a ‘contract’ to kill Finley. (1973)

mechanic (1973) ■ John Gardner: Bernie Brazier was Britain’s top mechanic. (1986)
17. Reprimanding & Punishing

An arrangement to kill someone professionally

**contract** (1940) Orig US; often in the phrase put a contract (out) on someone, arrange for someone to be killed by a hired assassin. **Maclean's Magazine.** Some policemen believe that a West End mobster named 'Lucky' has put a contract out for Savard. (1976)

To arrange for someone to be killed

**put someone on the spot** (1929) US. **Punch.** You get rid of inconvenient subordinates ... by 'putting them on the spot'—that is deliberately sending them to their death. (1930)

A list of people to be killed

**hit list** (1976) **Time:** One intelligence official ... bitterly labeled Counterspy's roster of CIA agents as nothing more or less than 'a hit list'. (1976)

Portraying the actual killing of a person

**snuff** (1975) Applied to a pornographic film, photograph, etc.; compare snuff it die, snuff out kill. **Sidney Sheldon:** For the last several years we have been hearing increasing rumors of snuff films, pornographic films in which at the end of the sexual act the victim is murdered on camera. (1978)

To execute or be executed

**swing** (1542) Denoting being killed by hanging. **Arthur Conan Doyle:** Yes, I am Bob Carruthers and I'll see this woman righted if I have to swing for it! (1905)

**stretch** (1595) Dated; denoting killing by hanging. **Irish Song:** The night before Larry was stretch'd The boys they all paid him a visit. (c1800)

**string up** (1810) Denoting killing by hanging.

**fry** (1928) US; denoting executing or being executed in the electric chair. **John Wyndham:** You'll hang or you'll fry, every one of you. (1956)

(Methods of execution)

**the rope** (1670) Applied to execution by hanging, and hence sometimes more generally to capital punishment.

**necktie party** (1882) Orig and mainly US; applied to a lynching or hanging; from the notion of putting a rope round someone's neck like a tie. **Listener:** A drunk or a loud-mouth could wind up like a rustler—the victim of a neck-tie party. (1973)

**the chair** (1900) US; short for electric chair. **J. J. Farnol:** I've left papers—proofs, 'n' it'd be the chair for yours—saw? (1917)

**Old Sparky** (1923) US; applied to the electric chair; the alternative Old Smokey was also formerly used. **New York Times:** Speed Graphic portrayals of an uncontrollable crime wave of mad-dog felons fairly begged Old Sparky denouements, if only in the interests of popular entertainment. (1994)

**the hot seat, the hot chair, the hot squat** (1925) US; applied to the electric chair; the alternative Old Smokey was also formally used. **New York Times:** Speed Graphic portrayals of an uncontrollable crime wave of mad-dog felons fairly begged Old Sparky denouements, if only in the interests of popular entertainment. (1994)

**ride the lightning** (1935) US; denoting being executed in the electric chair

A reprimand or instance of reprimanding

**rap** (1777) From earlier sense, sharp hit; often in the phrases a rap on the knuckles, a rap over the knuckles (1897). **Cumberland News:** A top Carlisle haulage firm got a council room rap yesterday for jumping the gun over planning. (1976). **Times:** Elsewhere all praise—and a rap on the knuckles for all those Stravinskyites who stayed at home. (1961)

**wiggling** (1813) From obsolete slang wig a rebuke (perhaps as administered by a bigwig) + -ing. **Guardian.** Ministerial expressions of dismay spilt out. The ambassador was summoned for a wiggling. (1992)

**going-over** (1872) Orig US. **Edward Blishen:** Sir, don't give me a going-over—but this desk's too small for me. Honest! (1969)

**what for** (1873) **Jacqueline Wilson:** She deserves to have her bottom smacked ... and I shall give young Alice what for too. (1972)

**pi-jaw** (1891) Dated; applied to a long sanctimonious moral lecture, as delivered by a school-teacher or parent; from pi sanctimonious + jaw talk

**bawl-out, ball-out** (1915) US; from the verb bawl out reprimand. **Jack Black:** I . . . don't want to . . . give myself a bawl-out in front of the woman. (1926)

**razz** (1919) Orig US; often in the phrase get the razz be reprimanded; abbreviation of raspberry. **Times Literary Supplement:** Even the peppiest, most two-fisted and up-and-coming suburban librarian would get the razz for buying it. (1977)

**raspberry** (1920), razzberry (1922) From earlier sense, contemptuous noise. **Muriel Spark:** The security officer mutters all the way to the electric chair; the alternative Old Smokey was also formerly used. **New York Times:** Speed Graphic portrayals of an uncontrollable crime wave of mad-dog felons fairly begged Old Sparky denouements, if only in the interests of popular entertainment. (1994)

**office hours** (1922) US, services' slang; applied to a disciplinary session. **A. Dubus:** He committed an offense, he was brought in to office hours. (1967)

**rollicking** (1932) British; probably a euphemistic substitution of rolicking (earlier sense 'boisterous play') for bollocking. **M. K. Joseph:** Someone's dropped a clanger. Someone's going to get a rolicking. (1958)
bollocking, bollocking (1938) British; from the verb bollock reprimand

**Times Literary Supplement**: Sir John French, CIGS, came down for open day at 'The Shop', gave everyone a bollocking for slackness and indiscipline, and shortly afterwards retired the Commandant. (1978)

**bottle** (1938) British, naval slang

G. H. Jones: Others came in to see me over-anxious to please, full of 'yes, sirs' expecting always to be given what is called a 'bottle'. (1950)

**rocket** (1941) Orig military slang

Iris Murdoch: Demoyte had pondered the outrage . . . made a mental note to give Mor a rocket when he next saw him . . . and felt immensely better. (1957)

**earful** (1945) Applied to a strong and often lengthy reprimand; from earlier sense, as much as one can hear.

**Times**: I used to put a bottle on the seat and if it rolled off when the pupil let his clutch out, he got an earful. (1964)

To reprimand

**blow someone up** (1712) Balcarres Ramsay: He began to blow me up for not having provided quarters for his men and horses. (1882)

**rap someone over the knuckles, rap the knuckles of someone** (1759)

Pierre Berton: Dr. A. J. Sparling felt the need to rap the knuckles of certain men of the cloth who, he said, were spending more time in the real estate offices than in visiting the homes of their congregations. (1973)

**haul someone over the coals** (1795)

From earlier fetch over the coals; from the former treatment of heretics. Frederick Marryat: Lest he should be 'hauled over the coals' by the Admiralty. (1832)

**give it to someone (hot/hot and strong)** (1831) James Cowan: I wish you'd give it to them hot and strong about the blasted 'kuris' worrying my sheep. (1930)

**pull someone up** (1836) John Hall: It is difficult . . . before the company, to 'pull up' a boy, or to lectre a girl. (1884)

**carpet** (1840) Compare on the carpet being reprimanded.

J. Kelman: It was a while since he had been carpeted. (1988)

**give someone a piece of one's mind** (1861)

Erle Stanley Gardner: He said I could wear what I had on, no matter where I went. And I certainly gave him a piece of my mind about that. (1946)

**jump down someone's throat** (1879)

Nicholas Blake: There's no need to jump down my throat. I was only trying to be helpful. (1940)

**come down on someone** (1888) Often in the phrase come down on someone like a ton of bricks

Graham Greene: If there's any fighting I shall come down like a ton of bricks on both of you. (1938)

**pi-jaw** (1891) British, dated; from the noun pi-jaw

A. S. M. Hutchinson: You . . . get me here to pijaw me about my duty to my pretty young wife. (1922)

**give someone gyp, give someone gip** (1893)

Gyp probably from gee-up

**bawl someone out, ball someone out** (1899) Orig US

L. A. G. Strong: He bawled him out. Gave him such a tongue lashing as the louse will remember to his dying day. (1942)

**tell someone where they get (or to get) off** (1900) Orig US

J. Trench: I'm sure you knew how to deal with the police. Told them where they got off, I expect. (1953)

**larn** (1902) Used as a threat of punishment; from earlier sense, teach, from a dialect form of learn

C. Blackstock: That'll larn you, you so-and-so. (1956)

**give** (1906) Used in threats of reprimanding or punishing someone with reference back to what the person has just said or done

D. H. Lawrence: Hark at her clicking the flower-pots, shifting the plants. He'd give her shift the plants! He'd show her! (1930)

**rap** (1906) Orig US; from the noun rap reprimand

**Trinidad & Tobago Overseas Express** (headline): Bar body raps Sir Hugh for attack. (1973)

**take someone (in) to the woodshed** (1907) North American; from the former practice of spanking a child in the woodshed, i.e. not in the presence of others

**Chicago Sun-Times**: Assuming the Fed is traditionally plant, why does not Reagan simply take Volcker to the woodshed and tell him to ease up? (1983)

**scrub** (1911) Services' slang, mainly naval, dated

**tick someone off** (1915) Orig services' slang

**Listener**: 'Ticked off' by one of the boys for leaving his car unlocked and complete with ignition key. (1957)

**roar someone up** (1917) Mainly Australian

N. Lindsay: Bill was able to roar him up, anyway, for having the blinkin' cheek to come shoving his nose into Bill's affairs. (1947)

**tell someone off** (1919) G. Arthur: 'It required a very great man,' said F. E. when he emerged from his interview, 'to resist the temptation to tell me off.' (1938)

**go someone scone-hot** (1927) Australian

Kylie Tennant: When my big brother Jim come home from work, he went Dad scone hot. (1967)

**give someone curry** (1936) Australian

**National Times** (Sydney): He used to play football, until he was sent down for giving curry to the ref. (1984)

**ruck** (1938) Variant of earlier rux reprimand (recorded once in 1899), of uncertain origin; perhaps related to ruction

Peter Willmott: The governor of my place is horrible. . . . He rucks you if you take more than ten minutes for a quarter of an hour's job. (1966)

**chew someone out** (1937) US, orig services' slang

**Guardian**: Gen Schwarzkopf also has a small personal office he sometimes uses for private discussions. It has also been used to chew out officers whose performance does not please him. (1991)

**bollock, ballock** (1938) British; from bollocks
testicles

Peter Wright: I got ballocked left, right and does not please him. (1991)

**tear a strip off someone, tear someone off a strip** (1940) Orig R.A.F. slang

L. P. Hartley: If my wife saw me wearing one, she would tear me off a strip. (1957)
sort someone out (1941)

bras someone off (1943) British, orig services' slang • Victor Canning: After I'd brassed you off for pinching my parking space. (1984)

word (1945) Australian; from earlier sense, speak to • J. Murray: The 'donahs' would grimace and giggle, and the boys would 'word 'em. (1973)

bottle (1946) British, naval slang; from the noun bottle reprimand

chew someone's ass (1946) US • Black Panther: Maybe if he saw it, some pig might ... get his ass chewed. (1973)

mat (1948) British; compare on the mat being reprimanded • William Haggard: The interviewer had been matted and now he was uncertain. (1969)

rocket (1948) Orig military slang; from the noun rocket reprimand • John Wainwright: The assistant chief constable was still rocketing Sergeant Sykes. (1971)

ream (1950) US; usually followed by out; compare earlier slang senses, cheat, have anal sex with • Arthur Hailey: A half-wit in my department has been sitting on the thing all morning. I'll ream her out later. (1979)

knock/bang people's heads together (1957) Used to denote reprimanding a group of people, often in order to get them to cooperate • Dennis Bloodworth: Provoking desperate people into believing that they can only bring about unity among men by knocking their moronic heads together. (1975)

rub someone's nose in it (1963) Used to denote reprimanding someone by reminding them humiliatingly of their error • P. M. Hubbard: I'm sorry. I've said I'm sorry. ... Don't rub my nose in it. (1963)

kick ass (1976) Orig and mainly US; used to denote aggressively assertive behaviour, including the reprimanding of subordinates or opponents • Guardian: A friend ... is wrongly implicated in the crime. Thus our hero is obliged to kick some ass as well as bust some heads. (1992)

Being reprimanded

on the carpet (1900) Orig US; probably from the notion of an employee, etc. standing on the carpet in front of a superior's desk when being reprimanded • Sketch: His manager had just had him on the carpet, pointing out that his work had been getting steadily bad for the last few months. (1936)

on the peg (1904) Services' slang; applied to someone who is on a charge

in the rattle (1914) British, naval slang; denoting being on the commander's report of defaulters, and hence more broadly in confinement or in trouble • John Hale: The Andrew, that had taken him round the world a few times, given him his good conduct stripes and removed them when he'd been in the rattle. (1964)

on the mat (1917) Orig military slang • J. R. Cole: Then I was on the mat again. Now it seems a wonder I kept out of trouble as long as I did. (1949)

on the pan (1923) US

Punishment

rap (1903) Orig & mainly US; applied to a criminal conviction; often in such phrases as bum rap undeserved punishment (1926), beat the rap escape punishment, especially a prison sentence (1927), take the rap accept responsibility and punishment, especially for a crime (1930) • William Burroughs: At the time, he was out on bail, but expected to beat the rap on the grounds of illegal seizure. (1953)

the book (1908) Orig US; denoting the maximum penalty: in such phrases as (US) get or do the book suffer the maximum penalty (1927) and throw the book at impose the maximum penalty on (1932); from the notion of a complete book detailing all possible penalties • Bruce Graeme: They'll dig out some old act that hasn't been repealed ... and then they'll throw the book at him. (1962)

See also fizzer and jankers under Discipline at Military, Maritime, & Airforce (p. 123).

Corporal punishment

toco, toko (1823) Dated; from Hindi ठोक, imperative of ठोकना beat, thrash • Joyce Cary: You'd better tell people how I took your trousers down last time and gave you toko. (1941)

swishing (1860) Used especially at Eton College: applied to a beating with a cane, etc.; from the sound of the cane • Athenaeum: Had not our young friend enjoyed better luck than he deserved, his visits to the 'swishing-room' would have been even more frequent. (1901)

six of the best (1912), sixer (1927) British; applied to six strokes of the cane as a school punishment; from six + -er • P. G. Wodehouse: He was ... an officious little devil who needed six of the best with a fives-bat. (1929) • Colleen McCullough: They all got sixers, but Meggie was terribly upset because she thought she ought to have been the only one punished. (1977)

cuts (1915) Australian & New Zealand: applied to corporal punishment, especially of schoolchildren • D. Adsett: If anyone was careless enough to use the wrong peg, their coat, hat and bag could be thrown to the floor without fear of getting the cuts. (1963)

Capital punishment

See Under To execute at Killing (p. 104).

To punish

weigh someone off (1925) Orig services' slang; mainly applied to sentencing someone to punishment • T. P. Morris: One young man ... commented that he had been 'weighed off at X Assizes by some old geezer tagged up like Father Christmas'. (1963)

To punish by hitting

box someone's ears (1601) • William Black: I've a good mind to box your ears. (1876)

tan someone's hide, tan someone's arse
18. The Police

A police officer

trap (1705) Now only Australian • K. Garvey: Muldoon heads for town and gets the traps. (1978)

horney, horney (1753) Dated; compare earlier sense, devil • James Joyce: Can't blame them after all with the job they have especially the young hornies. (1922)

pig (1811) Apparently not in use in the early 20th century; and the modern usage may be a recoinage • David Lodge: Any pig roughs you up, make sure you get his number. (1975)

nab (1813) From the verb nab arrest • John Wainwright: All the nabes in the world were in the downstairs front. (1971)

peeler (1817) British, dated; now only used jocularly; applied originally to a member of the Irish constabulary, and hence to any police officer; from the name of Robert Peel, who founded the Irish constabulary • Observer. The stately Conservative 'Sir' Gerald Nabarro (who, if memory serves, had a stupid handlebar moustache and was once apprehended by the Peelers driving a car the wrong way round a roundabout...). (1997)

bobby (1844) British; from Bobby, a pet form of Bob, itself a familiar form of the male personal name Robert, probably in allusion to Robert Peel who, as Home Secretary, founded the Metropolitan Police in 1828 • Washington Post. Some guards have always been armed, unlike traditional English bobbies. (1993)

copper (1846) Probably from cop arrest + -er • John Wainwright: And yet he was still Lennox; the man-hunter, the thief-taker, one of that very rare breed of men who are born coppers. (1980)

Johnny, Johnnie (1852) Dated; probably from the male personal name (compare John, policeman), but compare johndarm policeman

johndarm (1858) Dated; from French gendarme policeman • Herbert Hodge: A policeman is the usual cockney 'Grass'. . . . Or sometimes 'Johndarm'—thus proving we know French. (1939)

To undergo punishment

face the music (1850) Applied usually to accepting or facing up to the unpleasant consequences of one's own actions • J. Byrom: So the old bitch did recognize me! Mrs Kernan and I were pretty sure she had. That's why we did a bunk so hastily, leaving Byron to face the bill and the music. (1958)

To avoid punishment

walk (1858) US; denoting escaping legal custody as a result of being released from suspicion or from a charge • F. Kellerman: They plea bargained him down to the lesser charge... in exchange for the names of his friends. Old Cory's going to walk. (1986)

cop (1859) Probably short for copper • Len Deighton: A police car with two cops in it cruised past very slowly. (1983)

slop (1859) British, dated; modification of ecilop, backslang for police • H. G. Wells: 'Here's a slop. Don't let on I can you down. Haven't a lamp, you know. Might be a bit awkward, for me' Kipps looked up towards the advancing policeman. (1905)

scuffer, scuffer (1860) Mainly Northern; origin uncertain; perhaps from the noun scuff scuff of the neck (seized for lifting, etc.) or the verb scuff strike • Peter Moloney: Scuffer! Scuffer! on the beat, With thy elephantine feet, You can't see the way to go Cos yer 'at comes down too low. (1966)

nailer (c1863) Dated; from nail arrest + -er

flatty, flattie (1866) Orig US; often applied specifically to uniformed officers, as opposed to detectives; probably from flat-foot police officer (although not recorded until later) • P. G. Wodehouse: 'You know Dobbs?' 'The flatty?' 'Our village constable, yes.' (1949)

shoo-fly (1877) US; denoting escaping legal custody, usually in plain clothes, whose job is to watch and report on other police officers; from the interjection shoo! + fly, originally popularized by the song 'Shoo! fly! don't bother me!' • Ed Deighton: A police car with two cops in it cruised past very slowly. (1985)

scuff (1891) From earlier sense, informer • George Orwell: He would... exclaim 'Fucking toe-rag!'... meaning the 'split' who had arrested him. (1932)

bull (1893) US • Jack London: I noticed the bull, a strapping policeman in a grey suit... I never dreamed that bull was after me. (1909)
grasshopper (1893) British, dated; rhyming slang for copper. "Daily Chronicle": The criminal classes always speak of policemen as 'grasshoppers'. (1907)

rozen (1893) Origin unknown. "Observer": Horribly posh little monsters who are forever poking their noses into other people's business and turning common-as-muck smugglers over to the rozens. (1996)

sparrow cop (1896) US; applied to a police officer assigned low-grade duties such as patrolling parks


gendarme (1906) From French gendarme. (French) policeman. "Hart Crane": I am to sail to Mexico (damn the gendarmes!) next Saturday. (1931)

John Law (1907) US; used as a personification of the police; compare John policeman. "Jack London": A lot of my brother hoboes had been gathered in by John Law. (1907)

dick (1908) Dated, mainly US; compare contemporaneous sense, detective. "American Speech": 'Dick' and 'bull' and 'John Law' have become established as names for the police. (1924)

flat-foot (1912) Orig US; often applied specifically to uniformed officers, as opposed to detectives; from the alleged flatness of policemen's feet. "Cecil Day Lewis": Suppose the flatfeet got to hear of it? (1948)

Fed (1916) US; applied to an FBI agent; from "R. Banks": Study at the trooper academy down in Concord and become a statie. (1989)


gangbuster (1936) Orig and mainly US; applied to an officer of a law-enforcement agency noted for its successful (and often aggressive) methods in dealing with organized crime; from gang + -buster, popularized by the long-running US radio serial Gang Busters (1936–57). "Washington Post": In his floppy banana trench coat and fabulous matching fedora, Warren Beatty looks more like the fashion police than a gangbuster. (1950)

Jumbo (1938) Mainly Irish and Scottish; from earlier sense, the police. "Adelaide Lubbock": He's not a bad sort for a jonnop. (1963)

pounder (1938) US; perhaps from the notion of 'pounding' the beat

grass (1939) British; short for dated "grasshopper" police officer

law (1944) US; applied to a police officer, sheriff, or other representative of the law. "William Burroughs": We were in the third precinct about three hours and then the laws put us in the wagon and took us to Parish Prison. (1953)

walloper (1945) Australian; from wallop hit + -er. "O. G. O'Grady": Roeboume boasted one pub, one police station with two wallopers in it. . . and a hospital. (1968)

cozzer, kozzer (1950) British; probably an alteration of copper, but compare also Hebrew chazar pig, pork. "Guardian": I grin at the picture of Frank opening the door to a couple of kozzers asking him the name of the jibber who rang him on the day in question from the Cavendish Hotel. (1992)
brown bomber (1953) Australian; applied in New South Wales to a traffic warden or 'parking cop'; from the colour of their uniforms until 1975

Old Bill (1958) British; origin uncertain; perhaps from the cartoon character Old Bill, created by Bruce Bairnsfather (1888–1959), and portrayed as a grumbling old soldier with a large moustache • Guardian: He observed a couple of men supping nearby who looked suspiciously like plainclothes men. Coulson asked the landlord: 'Oh no,' he said, 'they're drinking pints. Old Bills only drink halves.' (1967)

cozzpot (1962) British; probably from the first syllable of cozzop police officer • pot person of importance • Jeffrey Ashford: The cozspots ain't givin' me a chance. (1969)

roller (1964) US • C. & R. Milner: Look, for a roller (policeman) to come to this door—he's insane, he's gotta be a nut. (1973)

woolly (1965) British; applied to a uniformed police officer; compare wolly • Private Eye: A small army of 'Woolies'—CID stang for uniformed officers—were summoned. (1984)

narc, nark, narco (1967) US; applied to a member of a federal, state, or local drug squad; abbreviation of narcotics agent (+ -o) • New Yorker: Bo, a rookie detective . . . is so confused by the Department's manipulations that he doesn't guess that she is an undercover narc. (1975)

wolly, wally (1970) British; applied to a uniformed police officer, especially a constable; origin uncertain; perhaps the same word as wally fool • J. B. Hilton: These traffic Wolves make sure it all goes down, once they've licked their pencils. (1983)

roz (1971) Abbreviation of rouzzer police officer • John Wainwright: The roz has removed his helmet. (1977)

Smoky Bear, Smoky Bear, Smokey the Bear (1974) US; applied to a state police officer, and sometimes also collectively to the state police; from the name of an animal character used in US fire-prevention advertising • O. McBain: That Smoky looking at us? (1928)

bear (1975) Orig and mainly US; applied mainly to a highway patrol officer or state trooper; usually used in the plural; short for Smokey Bear • Daily Province (Victoria, British Columbia): The Bear in the Air will be staying up there. (1977)

sky bear (1975) North American; applied to an officer in a police helicopter

plod, P.C. Plod (1977) British; in allusion to Mr Plod the Policeman in Enid Blyton's Noddy stories for children • Mail on Sunday: I might well have pulled out the big hammer at the thought of that distinguished plod, John Stalker, leading a team consisting of Loyd Grossman, Fred Housego and Peter Stringfellow in the investigation of dodgy customer practices. (1991)

noddy (1980) Applied to a motor-cycle police officer; from noddy (bike police motor-cycle)

woodentop (1981) British; applied to a uniformed police officer; from the notion that uniformed police officers have 'wooden tops' (i.e. are slow-witted), in contrast with the mental acuteness of detectives; probably a re-application of woodentops, the name of a BBC television children's puppet programme first broadcast in 1955 • John Wainwright: I'm a copper. An ordinary flatfoot . . . A real old woodentop. That's me. (1981)

A female police officer

Dickless Tracy (1963) Jocular, orig US; punningly from dick penis and the name of Dick Tracy US comic-strip detective introduced in 1931 by Chester Gould

A detective

D (1879) Abbreviation • F. D. Sharpe: They[sc crooks] very often know that a man is a 'D', as they call us, without being aware of his identity, because of the fact that he happens to be on the lookout. (1938)

tec, 'tec (1879) Abbreviation • Daily Mirror: Porn tec admits bribe plot. (1977)

dee (1882) The first letter of detective • Eric De Mauny: You've got to look out, if the dees come. (1949)

jack (1899) From earlier sense, police officer • John Wainwright: These county coppers . . . couldn't get their minds unhooked from the words 'New Scotland Yard'—as if every jack in the Metropolitan Police District worked from there. (1971)

demon (1900) Australian; from earlier sense, police officer • Sunday Mail Magazine (Brisbane): To the Australian criminal a demon is a . . . detective. (1967)

eye (1900) US; used originally in the phrase the Eye to denote the Pinkerton Detective Agency (from the Pinkerton trademark, an all-seeing eye), and hence applied to a Pinkerton detective or armed guard and more generally to any detective, especially a private one

busy (1904) British; from the adjective busy • Margery Allingham: I don't know 'ow long we've got before the busies come trampin' in. (1948)

Pink (1904) US; applied to a member of the Pinkerton detective agency; abbreviation of Pinkerton

gumshoe (1906) US; from the notion of someone who walks around stealthily wearing 'gumshoes' or galoshes: gumshoe from gum rubbery material + shoe • Dashiel Hammett: He . . . looked me up and down, growled: 'So you're a lousy gumshoe.' (1927)

dick (1908) Perhaps an arbitrary contraction of detective; perhaps a back-formation from Irish gypsy slang dicked being watched, from Romany dik look, see, from Hindi dekhā look (compare dekko) • Edgar Wallace: They'd persuaded a couple of dicks—detectives—to watch the barriers. (1928)

Richard, richard (1914) Mainly US; punningly from dick detective (also a familiar form of the name Richard) • Edmund McGirr: A surprisingly high proportion of well-to-do murderers hire private richards to delve into the demise of the victim. (1974)
fink (1925)
shamus, sharmus, shommus (1925) US; origin uncertain; see shamus under A police officer (p. 108) • New Yorker: I think my wife is having me tailed by a private shamus. (1977)

op (1926) Applied to a (private) detective; short for operative

The police

the boys (or gentlemen, men) in blue (1851) From the colour of police officers' uniforms • Sun: But BOLA, the bookie-funded flunkies, have called in 'the boys in blue'. (1992)

the polis (c1874) Mainly Irish and Scottish; representing a regional pronunciation of police • John Buchan: Ye'll get a good turn-out at your meeting . . . but they're sayin' that the polis will interfere. (1919)

the fuzz (1929) Orig US; origin unknown • P. G. Wodehouse: If the fuzz search my room, I'm sunk. (1971)

the law (1929) Orig US • Times: I inquired of the Law where I might cash a cheque, and was directed to the nearest travel agency. (1972)

the Sweeney, the Sweeney (1936) British; applied to the flying squad; short for Sweeney Todd, rhyming slang for flying squad; from the name of a London barber who murdered his customers, the central character of a play by George Dibdin Pitt (1799–1855) • Guardian Weekly: Was designed—as they say in the Sweeney—to put the frighteners on Labour knockers. (1977)

the man, the Man (1962) US; from earlier sense, people in authority

the filth (1967) British • John Wainwright: He's a big wheel in the filth, Mr Nolan. Y' know . . . assistant chief constable and all that. (1979)

the bill (1969) British; short for Old Bill • British Journal of Photography: There wasn't going to be no questions asked in the House about some working-class kid getting himself duffed up by the Bill if said Bill got his old man too chicken-shit to say a dicky-bird about it. (1979)

Old Bill (1970) British; from earlier sense, a policeman • New Statesman: If they were caught at it when the Old Bill . . . staged one of their frequent raids then we would all be up on a charge of 'maintaining a disorderly house'. (1976)

Old Meat Wagon (1974) British; compare earlier sense, prison manor (1924) British • Robin Cook: 'Then they whipped him down to the nick on the hurry-up. 'Which manor?' 'The local nick.' (1962)

A police station

factory (1891) • Roger Busby: Detectives relieved the tedious of observation duties by using the facilities of the local police stations, the ‘factory’ in the area they happened to be working. (1987)

cop-shop (1941) • Maureen Duffy: The blue light above the cop-shop door for once meant safety. (1962)

nick (1957) British; compare earlier sense, prison • Joan Lock: Back at the nick the station officer was very cross. (1968)

A police vehicle

pie-wagon (1898) US; applied to a police van or black Maria

paddy wagon (1930) US; applied to a police van or car • Chicago Tribune: He was informed by the pink faced lockup keeper that all Chicago's 'paddy waggons' are motor driven. (1932)

meat wagon (1954) Applied to a police van or black Maria • Listener: The bogeys . . . bundle us into the back of a meat-wagon. (1964)

squadrol (1961) US; applied to a small police van; from squad + pal rol

noddy bike, noddy (1964) Applied to a lightweight police motor-cycle; perhaps in allusion to noddy small elf-like boy in children's stories by Enid Blyton (1897–1968), from the toy-like characteristics of the motor-cycle (although said to be due to the rider's inability to salute safely, which necessitates nodding to acknowledge a superior officer) • Police Review: Making its debut appearance yesterday was the probable successor to the Noddy. (1972)

squad (1974) US; applied to a police car; short for squad car • Dell Shannon: Bill Moss, riding a squad on night watch, . . . picked up a man lying against the curb in the street. (1984)

sky bear (1975) North American; applied to a police helicopter

jam sandwich (1987) British; applied to a police car; from the car's colour: white bodywork with a horizontal red stripe • B. Whitehead: 'Look, there's a jam sandwich,' said Ann . . . 'Jam sandwich. Police car painted white and red. Don't they teach you colloquial English at your Swedish schools?' (1992)

A police bell

gong (1938) Dated; applied to a warning bell on a police car. Hence the verb bell denoting getting a driver to stop by sounding this bell (1934) • Tom Wisdom: He will then have to 'gong' you into the side on a busy trunk road. (1966)
19. Prisons

Police action

squeal (1949) Applied to a call for police assistance or investigation ■ Ed McBain: Parker's on the prowl, Hernandez is answering a squeal. (1960)

Police surveillance

obbo, obbo (1933) From ob(servation + o ■ Bruce Graeme: We're keeping a man, suspected of robbery . . . under obbo. (1972)

Police information

reader (1920) US, criminals' slang, dated; applied to a circular notifying police officers of a suspected criminal to be arrested

Prison

quod (1700) Often in the phrase in quod in prison; origin unknown ■ Listener: Now, one of this chap's maternal uncles . . . has got to pay a 50 quid debt or go to quod. (1968)

(the) clink (1785) From the name of a former prison in Southwark, London ■ Kylie Tennant: They'll only dock my pay or shove me in clink. (1946)

factory (1806) Australian, dated; applied to a women's prison

(the) jug (1815) Orig US; short for obsolete slang stone-jug prison, often applied specifically to Newgate, former prison in the City of London ■ Economist: Incarceration is incarceration; those in jug will care little whether they are said to have been punished or regulated. (1887)

mill (1851) Dated; from earlier sense, treadmill ■ J. Jones: 'You were here when one of the old ones was in the mill, weren't you, Jack?' 'Two,' Malloy said. 'Both of them during my first stretch.' (1951)

the booby hatch (1859), the booby (1929) US; compare earlier sense, hatch on a boat

the cooler (1872) Orig US; often also applied specifically to a solitary-confinement cell ■ C. Dickson: I am not at a time of life when one enjoys being chucked in the cooler for telling truths. (1943)

chokey, chokey (1873) British; originally Anglo-Indian, from Hindi cauki shed ■ F. Donaldson: I'll buck you up when I get home . . . that's to say if I'm not arrested and shoved in chokey. (1982)

nick (1882) From nick arrest ■ It: At the moment, there are over a hundred of our kids in nick as a result of the busts at 144 Piccadilly & Endell Street. (1969)

pen (1884) US; abbreviation of penitentiary ■ High Times: Right now I'm in east Tennessee facing a five-to-15 year term in the state pen for something I haven't done—mainly for selling a schedule-one drug to a narc. (1975)

rock pile (1888) US; applied metaphorically to a prison, from the convicts' task of breaking rocks in theConvicts' task of breaking stones ■ K. Eubank: We were . . . given 30 days on the rock pile or the privilege of leaving town on the first rattler out, which took us into Memphis. (1927)

potty (1932) Northeastern US; applied to a police officer's badge; from (the name of a squashed tin thrown instead of a stone in) a game similar to hopscotch ■ New York Herald Tribune: This boniface has been wearing his potty as house dick for only a brief time. (1952)

tin (1949) US; applied to a police officer's badge or shield ■ S. Marlowe: Mason Reed flashed the tin. 'Police officer. March right out of here.' (1975)

Military police

See under Military, Maritime & Airforce (p. 122).
new play to read weekends in the flowery... you can kid yourself you're having a Saturday night aht. (1970)

the glass-house (1925) British; applied to a military prison; from the name given to the detention barracks of the Aldershot Command at Woking, which had a glass roof; compare earlier sense, building with glass walls and roof

■ James Bertram: Someone with a lengthy 'crime sheet'—perhaps... a notorious frequent[er of the glasshouse. (1947)

the dummy (1936) New Zealand; applied to the punishment cell in a prison

■ O. Burton: The aggressor in this case was promptly led off and incarcerated in the 'dummy'. (1945)

the slammer, the slammers (1952) Orig US; perhaps from the slamming shut of cell doors

■ Desmond Bagley: This one's not for the slammer. He'll go to Broadmoor for sure. (1977)

the slam (1960) US; perhaps an abbreviation of slammer prison

■ Joseph Gores: You're going to the slam for fifteen. (1978)

juvie, juvey (1967) Applied to a detention centre for juvenile delinquents; abbreviation of juvenile

In prison

in lumber (1812) British; compare earlier dated slang lumber house used by criminals

■ J. Prescott: My poor old dad was in and out of lumber all his life. (1963)

in stir (1851) Origin uncertain; perhaps from Romany sturbin gaol

■ Edmund Crispin: You get better conditions than that in stir. (1977)

in hock (1860) From Dutch hok hutch, prison

inside (1888) ■ Charles Drummond: Over the years she had been convicted three times, spending in all four years 'inside'. (1972)

up the river (1891) Euphemistic, orig US; originally applied specifically to Sing Sing prison, situated up the Hudson River from the city of New York, and hence to any prison

■ P. G. Wodehouse: A member of the jury which three years before had sent him up the river for what the Press of New York was unanimously in describing as a well-earned sentence. (1951)

upstate (1934) US, euphemistic; from earlier sense, remote from centres of population, from the placement of prisons in areas remote from large cities

■ Ed McBain: She got married while I was upstate doing time. (1977)

behind bars (1951) ■ Borneo Bulletin: Now Hassan... who got $50 out of the deal, is behind bars for six months. (1977)

Imprisonment; a prison sentence

lag (1821) Dated; applied to a term of imprisonment or transportation; compare earlier sense, convict

stretch (1821) Sometimes used with a numeral denoting imprisonment for the stated number of years; also applied specifically to twelve months' imprisonment

■ P. Branch: He's in Joe Gurr again. He got nicked in Cardiff on a snout gaff... It's only a two stretch and a lot of the Boys had their collars felt. (1951)

moon (1830) Applied to a month's imprisonment

■ Kylie Tennant: I got a twelve moon. (1953)

time (1837) Especially in the phrase do time serve a prison sentence

■ E. St. Johnston: The Queen was much interested and amused for I don't expect she often lunches with someone who has 'done time'. (1978)

sixer (1849) Applied to six months' imprisonment or hard labour; from six + er

■ D. W. Maurer: Maybe he will get off with a bit... or a sixer, which is six months in jail. (1955)

solitary (1854) Short for solitary confinement

■ W. M. Raine: He's been in solitary for a week,' explained the warden. (1924)

bird-lime (1857) British; dated: rhyming slang for time prison sentence

■ Radio Times: In the past Charley's done his 'birdlime' but he was given time off for good behaviour. (1962)

bit (1866) ■ J. H. Smyth: The only question was how much of a bit Lucky would get. (1951)

a trey, a tray (1887) Applied to three years' imprisonment; from earlier more general sense, set of three; ultimately from Old French and Anglo-Norman trei, trei three (modern French trois)

■ Anthony Burgess: 'I know all about you. You did a tray on the moo.' 'It wasn't a tray... it was only a stretch.' (1960)

hard (1890) British; short for hard labour

■ John Braine: 'Oh my,' Roy said, 'strap me to the mast, said Ulysses. Almost worth ten years hard, isn't she?' (1957)

a neves, a nevis (1901) Applied to seven years' imprisonment or hard labour; back-slang for seven

■ Frank Norman: You're f—ing lucky, I'm doing a bleeding neves. (1958)

spot (1901) US; often used with a numeral to denote a sentence of the stated number of years

■ M. Breuer: He was serving a three spot for cunning.... He got into a row with one of the warders. (1966)

a carpet (1903) British; applied to three months' imprisonment; short for carpet-bag, rhyming slang for obsolete slang drag three months' imprisonment

■ James Curtis: Long enough to've been in Wandsworth and done a carpet. (1936)

life (1903) Applied to imprisonment for life

■ Edgar Wallace: He shot a copper and got life. (1924)

Kathleen Mavourneen (1910) Australian & New Zealand; applied to a prison sentence of indeterminate length: in allusion to the song 'Kathleen Mavourneen', in which the refrain runs 'It may be for years, it may be for ever'

■ H. C. Baker: The judge declared him an 'habitual criminal' and gave him a 'Kathleen Mavourneen'. (1978)

a sleep (1911) Orig US; usually applied to a comparatively short sentence

■ J. Phelan: I wasn't interested myself [in escaping]. Three years was nothing—just a sleep, as you chaps put it. (1938)
jolt (1912) Orig US • D. Hume: They are only too ready to turn King's evidence. . . . You'd take a very stiff jolt. (1936)

Paddy Doyle (1919) British services' slang, dated; usually in the phrase do a Paddy Doyle serve a term of confinement

bird (1924) British; often in the phrase do (one's) bird serve a prison sentence; short for bird-time • Listener: Having done his bird, as imprisonment is called in the best circles. (1953)

sawbuck (1925) US; applied to ten years’ imprisonment; from earlier sense, ten-dollar bill

double sawbuck, double saw (1930) US; applied to twenty years’ imprisonment; from earlier sense, twenty-dollar bill

a handful (1930) Applied to five years’ imprisonment; from the five fingers of the hand • Michael Gilbert: He's had a two-stretch. . . . He'll collect a handful next time. (1953)

a taxi (1930) US; applied to between five and fifteen years’ imprisonment; from the fares (in cents) displayed in New York taxis • Dell Shannon: Whalen had done a five-to-fifteen year stretch— that's a taxi. (1982)

stage (1932) Applied to a period of imprisonment during which privileges are allowed • Frank Norman: My punishment was three days bread and water . . . and twenty eight days stage. (1958)

fall (1933) US • R. Novak: Did a fall for armed robbery. (1974)

trick (1933) US • Joseph Gores: He got caught . . . and did a little trick at Quentin. (1975)

the clock (1950) Australian; applied to twelve months’ imprisonment; from the number of hours on a clock face • J. Alard: Anyhow I'd better stall; if I get picked up I'll at least get the clock. (1968)

a pontoon (1950) British; applied to twenty-one months’ imprisonment; from the name of the card game pontoon or vingt-et-un (French for "twenty-one") • Edmund Crispin: He had been put away three times . . . the third for a pontoon. (1977)

a rouf, a rofe (1950) British; applied to four years’ imprisonment; back-slang for four • Frank Norman: I tried to tell them that it had been a business deal, but you know what it's like talking to a moronic cozer, so that was it I got a rouf. (1958)

porridge (1954) British; perhaps influenced by earlier stir prison, imprisonment, and by conventional prison food • John Wainwright: D'you think I'd forget the frigging jack 'ut sent me down for two years' porridge? (1968)

seg (1974) Mainly US; applied to an isolation unit for difficult prisoners; abbreviation of segregation (unit) • New Society: He went straight into the segregation unit [at Wormwood Scrubs] . . . He continued his [hunger] strike simply in order to prevent an early return to 'seg'. (1977)

To send or be sent to prison

dub up (1753) Applied to locking someone up in a cell; from obsolete dub key • Frank Norman: Everybody in the nick had already been dubbed up for the night. (1958)

lag (1812) Dated; denoting sending someone to prison or transporting them; compare the noun lag prisoner

send down (1840) Orig US • P. B. Yull: 'Is there any chance he could go to gaol?' 'You'd like him sent down, would you?' (1976)

slough (1848) Dated; from slough soft muddy ground • Jack Black: They'll . . . haul us over to Martinez . . . an' slough us in the county jail. (1926)

send up (1852) Now US; denoting sending someone to prison

put away (1872) • W. M. Duncan: He was an inspector then. He put me away. (1973)

settle (1889) US • D. W. Maurer: Maybe he will get settled, or sent to prison. (1955)

.go down (1906) • Margery Allingham: He went down for eighteen months and is now in Italy pulling his weight, I believe. He's a crook, but not a traitor. (1945)

bang up (1950) British; probably from the slamming shut of a cell door (compare slammer prison) • Guardian: Stefan Kiszko, who was banged up for 16 years for a child murder he did not, in fact, commit. (1992)

A prisoner

jail-bird, gaol-bird (1618) Applied especially to someone who has been in prison a long time or is often sent to prison; from the notion of a caged bird • Guardian: One new prison rule would have appalled the most hardened jailbird. (1992)

lag (1812) Especially in the phrase old lag ex-convict or habitual convict; origin unknown; compare obsolete lag carry off, steal • Sunday Mail Magazine (Brisbane): The old lags inhabiting Queensland's prisons in 1885 must have been disappointed when the colony's official flogger, John Hutton, retired. (1989)

lifer (1830) Applied to a prisoner serving a life sentence (or earlier, someone sentenced to transportation for life); from life + -er • D. A. Dye: The swagger, clearly visible chevrons and pissed-off set to the man's jaw all spelled 'Lifer'. (1986)

con (1888) Abbreviation of convict • Frank Norman: I had three really good friends among the cons. (1958)

star (1903) British; applied to a convict serving a first prison sentence; from the star-shaped badge formerly worn by first-offenders in prison • A. Miller: Several . . . said that if that was what one-time Stars became, they were cured of returning. (1976)
ex-con (1906) Abbreviation of ex-convict. Jack London: I have known ex-cons who became dead for peeping. (1911)

loser (1912) US; often used with a numeral to denote someone who has been to prison the stated number of times. Houston (Texas) Chronicle: Bob, a three-time loser with a long line of busts and drug abuse . . . was sick of his life. (1973)

red band (1950) Applied to a privileged prisoner, allowed to carry out special duties.

yardbird (1956) US; compare earlier services’ slang sense, new recruit or one assigned to menial duties.

tobacco baron (1964) Applied to a prisoner who controls the supply of cigarettes to other prisoners, and so dominates them.

passman (1965) Applied to a prisoner allowed to leave his cell in order to enjoy certain privileges.

A prisoner-of-war

kriegie (1944) Applied to an Allied prisoner-of-war in Germany during World War II; abbreviation of German Kriegsgefangener prisoner-of-war. D. M. Davin: But there I was, a bloody kriegie for the rest of the war. (1956)

Prison staff

screw (1812) Applied to a prison warder; from earlier sense, (skeleton) key, from warders’ locking and unlocking of cell doors (compare standard English turnkey gaoler). G. F. Newman: The lights never out, pervy screws watching every movement. (1970)

twirl (1891) Applied to a prison warder; from earlier sense, (skeleton) key, from warders’ locking and unlocking of cell doors. John o’ London’s: Prison officers . . . are sometimes referred to as twirls. (1962)

ham and beef (1941) Dated; applied to the chief warder of a prison; rhyming slang for chief.

goon (1945) Applied by British and US prisoners-of-war to their German guards during World War II; from earlier sense, thug. Times: ‘Goon-baiting’, which was the favourite occupation of the prisoners. (1952)

Prison uniform

stripes (1887) US; from the stripes patterning such uniforms. Preston Sturges: He’s going to be in stripes, being in patches. (1962)

patch (1958) British; applied to any of a number of cloth pieces sewn on to a uniform in order to identify a prisoner as an escapee. S. McConville: He would be put on the ‘escape’ list and compelled to wear an easily identifiable uniform; this is known as being in patches. (1980)

Prison discipline

dry bath (1933) Applied to a search of a prisoner who has been stripped naked. New Statesman: Two or three times a week the Heavy Mob rushed into our cells and gave us a ‘dry bath’, which adequately describes the search of a man who is standing ‘starkers’ in the middle of his cell. (1965)

Communication inside prison

kite (1923) Applied to a letter or message smuggled into or out of prison; from earlier, more general sense, letter. Hence the verb kite to smuggle a letter or message into or out of prison. (1925)

floater (1933) British; applied to a book, newspaper, etc. passed surreptitiously from cell to cell. Frank Norman: It’s [sc. a book] a floater so you can sling it if you think you are going to get a turn over. (1958)

Parole

violate (1971) US; denoting accusing or finding a prisoner on parole guilty of violating the conditions of parole. H. B. Franklin: Living outside Los Angeles, with life going reasonably well, Brady suddenly found himself with a zealous new parole officer, who threatened to violate him for driving a car, for having a woman spend the night in his apartment, or for writing anything he disagreed of. (1978)

To leave prison

spring (1900) Orig US; used both transitively and intransitively, to denote release and escape. Daily Telegraph: Miss Mary Tyler, the English school-teacher who has spent more than four years in Indian jails awaiting trial, is to be returned to a high security prison this week in case militant Maoists try to ‘spring’ her. (1974)

hit the bricks (1931) US; denoting being set free.

have it away (1958) British; denoting escaping from prison or custody. Tony Parker: After I’d had it away three times, they decided it was no use bothering with me in these open places. (1969)

Leaving prison

spring (1901) Orig US; applied to a release or an escape; from the verb spring release, escape. F. Ross: Springing some bugger from the Scrubs—O.K. Not easy. . . . You can’t pull a spring like that without help on the inside. (1977)

Out of prison

on the grass (1885) Australian

Escaped from prison

over the wall (1935) Often in the phrase go over the wall escape from prison. Times: He knew it was an unwritten law that an escape extinguished such a debt, and so he decided to ‘go over the wall’. He gave himself up at
Vagrancy

A vagrant, tramp, etc.

mumper (1673) From obsolete mump beg + -er
- Countryman: Besides the gypsies there are many other pickers—tramps, mumpers, all sorts. (1972)

pikey (1847) Dated; applied to a gypsy or traveller; from pike turnpike - Peter Wildeblood: My family's all Pikeys, but we ain't on the road no more! (1955)

bum (1864) Orig and mainly US; probably short for obsolete bummer idler, loafer - Punch: The bums in the dosshouse have reached bottom. (1958)

dosser (1866) British; from dos sleep rough + -er
- Police Review: The tipple of the down-and-out itinerant, the 'dosser' or 'scat'. (1984)

vag (1868) Australian & North American; abbreviation of vagrant - M. Rutherford: The vag was a tramp's foot in place of a sock.

whaler, waler (1878) Australian; applied originally to a tramp whose route followed the course of a river; from their catching 'whales' (a type of freshwater fish) in the rivers they lived by - M. Rutherford: The whaler was a tramp who is habitually drunk; compare stewed drunk - B. Harwin: How come you to be a drunk damn' stew-bum when I found you? (1952)

jocker (1893) North American; applied to a tramp who is accompanied by a youth who begs for him or is his homosexual partner; from jock male genitals + -er

pikey (1847) Dated; applied to a gypsy or traveller; from pike turnpike - Peter Wildeblood: My family's all Pikeys, but we ain't on the road no more! (1955)

oomph (1891) Australian; applied to a tramp who travels on foot but has his swag carried on a wagon, and hence to one who obtains a lift; from earlier sense, assistant to the driver of horses, mules, etc. - T. Ronan: My... fellow swamper tossed his swag off [the mailman's truck] here; he was home. (1966)

gay-cat (1897) US; applied to a young or inexperienced tramp, especially one who has a homosexual relationship with an older tramp

drumman (1892) Applied to a tramp who travels on foot but has his swag carried on a wagon, and hence to one who obtains a lift; from earlier sense, assistant to the driver of horses, mules, etc. - T. Ronan: My... fellow swamper tossed his swag off [the mailman's truck] here; he was home. (1966)

gay-cat (1897) US; applied to a young or inexperienced tramp, especially one who has a homosexual relationship with an older tramp

drummer (1898) Applied especially to a migratory worker - Edmund Ward: The driver... reached out to pull

Vagrants collectively

bindle man. bindle stiff (1900) North American; from bindle tramp's bedding-roll

stew-bum (1902) US, dated; applied especially to a tramp who is habitually drunk; compare stewed drunk - B. Harwin: How come you to be a drunk damn' stew-bum when I found you? (1952)

dyno, dino (1918) US; apparently shortened from obsolete vagrants' slang dynamiter sponger

skipper (1925) British; from earlier sense, sleeping place for a vagrant - Guardian: It was the night of the big Government census of the 'skippers'—the people who sleep rough. (1965)

ring-tail (1927) US

saddle tramp (1942) North American; applied to a vagrant who travels on horseback - Radio Times: Kirk Douglas back on the range for King Vidor, in the one about the saddle tramp up against the barbed wire. (1979)

slug (1955) From earlier sense, objectionable person

toe-ragger (1891) Australian; from obsolete slang toe-rag tramp, from the rags wound round a tramp's foot in place of a sock

road kid (1970) Applied to a young tramp

bag lady (1972) Orig US; applied to a homeless woman who carries her possessions in shopping bags - Martin Amis: They even had a couple of black-clad bagladies sitting silently on straight chairs by the door. (1984)

sled (1897) Applied to the community of professional tramps; abbreviation of profession
Wagga, Wagga blanket, Wagga rug (1900)  

A vagrant’s possessions, equipment, etc.

**drum** (1866) Australian & New Zealand; applied to a swagman’s pack.  

**bluey** (1891) Australian; applied to a blanket as used by travellers in the bush; from its colour  

**Matilda, matilda** (1892) Australian; applied to a vagrant’s pack; from the female personal name Matilda; the reason for the application is unknown  

**nap** (1892) Australian; applied to blankets or other covering used by someone sleeping rough; probably from knapsack  

**shiralee, shirallee** (1892) Australian; applied to a traveller’s bundle of blankets and personal belongings; origin unknown  

**turkey** (1893) North American & Australian; applied to a bundle or holdall carried by itinerant workers, vagrants, etc.  

**bindle** (1900) North American; applied to a vagrant’s bedding-roll; probably an alteration of bundle, but compare Scottish bindle cord or rope that binds something  

**Wagga, Wagga blanket, Wagga rug** (1900) Australian; applied to an improvised covering, especially of sacking; abbreviation of Wagga

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### 21. Politics

Politicians and political activists

**politico** (1630) Usually derogatory; from Italian or Spanish politico politician  

**red** (1851) Derogatory; applied to an anarchist or republican, a Russian Bolshevik, or a Communist or extreme socialist; often in the phrase reds under the bed; from the association of the colour red with left-of-centre radicals  

**lump** (1912) US; applied to a parcel of food given to a tramp  

**hump** one’s swag (bluey, drum, knot, Matilda) (1851) Australian  

**waltz Matilda** (1893) Australian  

A place frequented by vagrants

**jungle** (1914) Orig US; applied to a camp for vagrants  

**stem** (1914) US; applied to a street frequented by vagrants  

**skid row** (1931) Mainly North American; applied to a part of a town frequented by vagrants, alcoholics, etc.; alteration of skid road in same sense, from earlier sense, part of town frequented by loggers (original sense, track formed by skids along which logs are rolled)  

**derry** (1968) Applied to a derelict building; from derelict + -y  

A place where vagrants sleep

See doss, doss-house, flop-house, kip, kip-house, kip-shop, skipper, spike at Place to sleep and hot bed at Bed, both under Sleep (p. 25).

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some local Russian embassy link. . . Any Reds under your bed . . . if I may ask? (1977)

**straddle-bug** (1872) US, dated; applied to a politician who is non-committal or who equivocates; from earlier sense, name of a type of beetle; from the notion of ‘straddling’ or being equivocal about an issue  

**high-binder** (1890) US; applied to a fraudulent politician; from earlier, more general sense, swindler  

**straddler** A. H. Lewis: He’s goin’ to take copies of th’ accounts that show what th’ Chief an’ them other high-binders at the top o’ Tammany have been doin’, (1903)
snollygoster (1895) US; applied to a shrewd unprincipled politician; from earlier, more general sense, shrewd unprincipled person; ultimate origin uncertain; perhaps connected with snollygaster, name of a monster supposedly found in Maryland, from German schnelle Geister quick spirits ■ Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch: A Georgia editor kindly explains that ‘a snollygoster is a fellow who wants office, regardless of party, platform or principles, and who, whenever he wins, gets there by the sheer force of monumental talknophical assumnacy’. (1895)

red-ragger (1916) Australian, derogatory; applied to a Communist or socialist; from the red flag that symbolizes the Communist movement ■ N. Medcalf: Bluey was considered a bit of a red-ragger. (1989)

Shinner (1921) Applied to a member or supporter of Sinn Fein; from Shinn- representing the pronunciation of Sinn + -er ■ Jennifer Johnston: I thought I’d heard it about that you were with the Shinners. (1974)

pink (1927) Derogatory; applied to someone who holds left-of-centre (but not far-left) views; also used as an adjective; from earlier sense, pale red, from the notion of red symbolizing Communism ■ R. Cassilis: One of those old-fashioned egalitarians, like the pompous Pinks who had once been the backbone of the . . . Labour Party. (1978)

parlour pink (1929) Derogatory; applied to someone whose professed left-wing principles are insincere or not matched by their lifestyle; from parlour used to characterize people of comfortable or prosperous circumstances who profess support, usually non-participatory, for radical, extreme, or revolutionary political movements + pink liberal socialist ■ News Chronicle: A wonderfully reactionary view of country life. It makes John Buchan look a ‘parlour pink’. (1960)

Colonel Blimp. Blimp, blimp (1934) Derogatory; applied to someone with reactionary views; from Colonel Blimp character invented by David Low (1891–1963), cartoonist and caricaturist, pictured as a rotund pompous ex-officer voicing a rooted hatred of new ideas ■ Daily Telegraph: His usual comic character of pub pundit or cockney blimp. (1968). Hence blimpish (1938) ■ Sunday Times: The few homosexuals attracted by the ‘progs’, as they are locally termed. (1977)

lefty, leftie (1935) Usually derogatory; applied to a left-winger; also used as an adjective; from left + -y ■ Kingsley Amis: I mean the kind of person who . . . buys unexamined the abortion-divorce-homosexuality-censorship-racialism-marijuana package; in a word, the Lefty. (1970)

poko (1936) Derogatory; applied to someone who holds left-of-centre or mildly Communist views; also used as an adjective; from pink liberal socialist + -o ■ Spectator: The statement ‘we are all guilty’ . . . is enough in itself to identify the speaker as a trendy poko. (1976) ■ Transatlantic Review: It’s the number three pinko parents subscribe to. (1977)

Commie (1939) Often derogatory; from Comm(unist + -ie; used as a noun and an adjective ■ Muriel Spark: After all, one might speak in that manner of the Wogs or the Commies. (1965)

Commo (1941) Australian, New Zealand & US, often derogatory; from Comm(unist + -o ■ Jon Cleary: I’ve been reading how the Commos have eliminated all the flies in China. (1959)


polly (1942) US & Australian; from pol politician + -y ■ Sunday Sun (Brisbane): The eight pols are members of an all-Party Parliamentary delegation led by Industry Minister Norm Lee. (1978)

shellback (1943) Applied to someone with reactionary views; from earlier sense, person (especially a sailor) with long experience ■ Listener: I have no doubt a lot of right-wing shell-backs are now condescending, with blimpish magnanimity, that there’s really something to be said for these young fellows after all. (1963)

prog (1958) Applied to someone who is progressive in their political or social views; abbreviation of progressive ■ Guardian Weekly: Liberal-minded South Africans cheered their favoured Progressive Federal Party. . . Much applause for the gains of the ‘progs’, as they are locally termed. (1977)

redneck (1960) Orig US; applied to a reactionary; from earlier sense, Southern rural white ■ Daily Telegraph: Was it because they might think his [sic] Governor George Wallace’s] reputation as a Right-wing ‘red neck’ a political embarrassment? (1975)

Trot (1962) Mainly derogatory; abbreviation of Trotskytie; also used as an adjective ■ Germaine Greer: The most telling criticisms will come from my sisters of the left, the Maoists, the Trots. (1970)

libber (1971) Applied to an advocate of liberation; often in the phrase women’s libber, and sometimes used elliptically for women’s liberator; from lib liberation + -er ■ Daily Telegraph: The . . . debate set things off by producing a truly appalling female whose anti-male views were so extreme and so crudely expressed that orthodox Libbers in the audience showed dismay. (1977)

Stickie, Sticky (1972), Stick (1978) Applied to a member of the official I.R.A. or Sinn Fein; from the verb stick + -ie; perhaps from the use of an adhesive Easter Lily badge by the official I.R.A., in contrast to the pin used by the Provisionals ■ D. Murphy: Her son . . . was ‘executed’ last year as a punishment for deserting from the Stickies. (1978) ■ An Phoblacht: In a typical pro-British statement . . . the Sticks’ chairman in South Antrim, Kevin Smyth, accused the IRA of ‘gross sectarianism’ in bombing the Lisburn premises. (1979)

pinky, pinkie (1973) Derogatory; applied to someone who holds left-of-centre or mildly
Communist views; from pink liberal socialist + y
Robert Barnard: He was always a drawing-room pinkie. ... As far as contact with the working-class movement was concerned, he hadn’t any. (1978)

wet (1980) British, derogatory; applied to a Conservative politician with liberal or middle-of-the-road views (often applied to those opposed to the monetarist policies of Margaret Thatcher); also used as an adjective. ■ Listener: In considering the promotion of wet (or wetish) Ministers, she will tell herself that Pope was right. (1982) ■ Economist: In September 1981, she sacked three ‘wets’ and banished their leader, Mr. James Prior, to Northern Ireland. (1987)

fundi, fundie, fundy (1982) Applied to a fundamentalist politician, specifically a member of the radical left wing of the German Green Party; from fund(a)mentalist + -(e), -y. ■ Daily Telegraph: The fundies are the purists who believe the only way to save the Earth is to dismantle industry. (1989)

dry (1983) British, derogatory; applied to a Conservative politician who advocates individual responsibility, free trade, and economic stringency, and opposes high government spending; also used as an adjective. ■ Sunday Telegraph: For ten years the Tory party has been split between Wets and Dries. (1987)

tanky, tankie (1985) Applied to a member of the former British Communist Party who supported hardline (especially interventionist) Soviet policies; usually used in the plural; from tank + -y, from the use of Soviet tanks to put down uprisings. ■ Guardian: The New Communist Party of Britain ... has issued this guidance to the world’s press. ‘Please do not describe the NCP as “Stalinists” or “Tankies”’. (1988)

Politically progressive

right-on (1970) Orig US; used approvingly to denote someone of politically progressive views; from right on an exclamation of solidarity and agreement. ■ Guardian: It is safe to say that Doris’s prune-faced PA, right-on toy-boy, gentleman-accountant and scumbag future editor may not be all they seem. (1991)

Administrators

lame duck (1910) US; applied to an office-holder who has not been, or cannot be, re-elected; from earlier, more general sense, disabled person or thing. ■ Economist: Johnson was a lame-duck president; his power over Congress had waned. (1988)

veep (1949) US; applied to a vice-president; shortened from the pronunciation of the initial letters V.P. ■ Fortune: His Makati business club constituents would be happy to nominate E.Z. for veep. (1983)

Whitehall warrior (1973) British; applied to a civil servant; from Whitehall name of a street in London where several principal government offices are situated. ■ Kenneth Giles: I’m Quarles, a battered old Whitehall Warrior. (1973)

Campaigning

on the stump (1891) Orig US; from the notion of standing on the stump of a large felled tree to address a crowd. ■ Economist: What he is really good at, even after 16 hours on the stump, is pressing the flesh; complete with trilingual small-talk. (1987)

press the flesh (1926) Orig and mainly US; applied to greeting potential supporters by shaking their hands. ■ National Observer (US): After the assassination of John Kennedy, some said no future President would be able to ‘press the flesh’. But both Lyndon Johnson and Gerald Ford felt that personal appearances were integral to campaigning. (1977)

demo (1936) Abbreviation of demonstration. ■ Guardian: She was fined £1 for obstruction in an anti-nuclear ‘demo’ this spring. (1961)

lib (1970) Applied to a campaign for political or social enfranchisement; usually with a modifier identifying the group of people involved; abbreviation of liberation. ■ Listener: With Scots Lib, it’s no good the oppressors expecting the past to be forgotten when convenient. (1974)

Elections

shoo-in (1948) US; applied to a candidate considered certain to win; from earlier sense, horse considered certain to win a race. ■ Economist: Governor Rockefeller became the Republicans’ leading presidential hopeful for 1964. The press thought him a shoo-in for the nomination. (1968)

Political corruption

graft (1865) Orig US; applied to (practices, especially bribery, used to secure) illicit political advantage; from the verb graft: make money dishonestly. ■ Daily Chronicle: During the hearing of the latest ‘graft’ scandal here [sc. in Philadelphia] evidence was given that sixty members of the City Council received 45,000 dollars as bribe money. (1908). Hence grafter a politician who uses his or her position to obtain dishonest gain or advantage. (1896) ■ A. J. Cronin: They’ve always been a set of grifters down there; local government has been one long sweet laugh. (1935)

sleaze (1983) Orig US; applied especially to the payment of money to politicians in return for political influence; from the earlier more general sense, squallor, sordidness. Ultimately a back-formation from sleazy. ■ Daily Telegraph: Although Tory disunity and uncertainty about Britain’s economic prospects are undoubtedly the main reasons underlying voter discontent with the Government, the ‘sleaze factor’ is almost certainly making an independent contribution. (1995)

See also pork barrel, slush fund at Money (p. 182).

Displaced persons

reffo (1941) Australian; applied to a European refugee, especially one who left Germany or German-occupied Europe before World War II; from refugee + o. ■ Patrick White: He was ... a blasted foreigner, and bloody reffo, and should have been glad he was allowed to exist at all. (1961)
22. Military, Maritime, & Airforce

Personnel

See also Service ranks at Status (pp. 57–8), and see brass, brass-hat, and top brass at A high-ranking or important person (p. 56), and the bloke, old man, and skipper at The most important or highest-ranking person (pp. 56–7), both at Status.

mustang (1847) Applied to an officer in the US forces who has been promoted from the ranks • New York Times Magazine: The most decorated enlisted man in the Korean War—the mustang everybody thought was the perfect combat commander. (1971)

pipes (1856) Naval slang; used as a nickname or pipes (1856) Naval slang; used as a nickname or pipes (1856) Naval slang; used as a nickname or

pill (1860) Applied to a medical officer or orderly in the services; often used in the plural as a facetious title or form of address; from earlier sense, small ball of medicine • Bartimeus: They seized the Young Doctor, who was a small man, and deposited him on the deck. 'Couldn't you see I was asleep, Pills?' demanded the other. (1915)

lamps (1866) Naval slang, dated; used as a nickname for a sailor responsible for looking after the lamps on board ship • Eugene O'Neill: Fetch a light, Lamps, that's a good boy. (1919)

Pay (1878) British, orig & mainly naval slang; used as a form of address for the paymaster • Taffrail: Cashley, the fleet pay-master, was vainly endeavouring to get up a four at auction bridge... 'Going to take a hand?'... 'Bridge, not to-night, Pay; thanks, all the same.' (1916)

red legs (1900) US; applied to an artilleryman • S. N. Spetz: Anyway, you'll get a chance to cool it down there, just guarding a bunch of Red Legs. (1969)

jaunty, jaundy, jonty (1902) British; applied to the navigator's assistant, or to the jonty (1902) British; applied to the navigator's assistant, or to the

plank-owner (1901) Naval slang, mainly US; applied to a member of the original crew of a ship, or to a long-serving marine • M. Dibner: He became her first gunnery officer as a 'plank owner'... at her commissioning. (1967)

Jack Shallow, Jack Shilloo (1904) Applied to an (excessively) easy-going naval officer; apparently an alteration of Jack Chellew, the name of such an officer in the Royal Navy

territorial (1908) British; applied to a Territorial; from terrier small dog, punning on the resemblance to Territorial • Times: More Terriers. The strength of the Territorial Army on December 31 last year was just under 62,000. (1980)

tank, tankie (1909) British, naval slang; applied to the navigator's assistant, or to the
captain of the hold; from tank + y; apparently from the care of the freshwater tanks, which was part of the tanky's duties • H. Tunstall-Behrens: The sharp-witted Amigo had the job of Mate's Tanky. (1956)

salt horse (1914) British, naval slang; applied to an officer with general duties; compare earlier sense, salted beef • D. Macintyre: Here was a simple 'salt-horse', indeed, and such were not often selected, in time of peace, for the higher ranks of the Service. (1957)

dug-out (1915) British; applied to a superannuated officer, etc. recalled for temporary military service; from earlier sense, person of old-fashioned appearance or ideas • W. J. Locke: The Colonel was immensely proud of them and sang their praises to any fellow dug-out who would listen to him. (1918)

guns (1916) British, naval slang; applied to a gunnery officer

paybob (1916) British, naval slang; applied to the paymaster • Navy News: The paybob and his chum never batted an eyelid as I signed my chit and I often wonder if they paid the difference. (1978)

red hat (1916) British; applied to an army staff officer; from the red cap-bands of senior officers in the British army • Auberon Waugh: A number of very high-ranking officers were invited. . . . The visiting red hats were not impressed. (1978)

Saturday night soldier (1917) Applied to a volunteer soldier or a Territorial

kiwi (1918) Applied to a non-flying member of an airforce; from the kiwi's flightlessness

guinness (1918) R.A.F. slang; applied to a non-flying member of an airforce, such as a member of a ground crew or (often specifically in early use) a member of the Women's Royal Air Force; from penguins' flightlessness • Guy Gibson: In the average Bomber Officers' Mess, . . . while penguins sing loudly in the mornings as they get up to shave, it was rather hard for the boys who had been up all night to get a good day's rest. (1944)

Wren, wren (1918) Applied to a member of the Women's Royal Naval Service, the women's service of the Royal Navy; from three of the initial letters of the service's name, assimilated to wren small bird

shoey (1919) British; applied to a shoeing smith in a cavalry regiment; from shoe + y • S. Mays: Shoey... Slap some shoes on my new horse. (1969)

Wraf (1921) Applied to a member of the Women's Royal Air Force, the women's corps of the Royal Air Force; pronounced /raef/; from the initial letters of the corps' name

erk, irk (1925) British; applied originally to a naval rating (now obsolete in this sense), and subsequently to a person of lowest rank in the R.A.F. (1928); origin unknown • Paul Brennan: The
erks came running up to tell us that... the 109 had been diving down. (1943)

**orderly buff** (1925) British, dated; applied to an orderly sergeant, the sergeant acting as officer of the day

**orderly dog** (1925) British, dated; applied to an orderly corporal, a corporal attending an officer to carry orders or messages. V. M. Yeates: Grey... was censoring the men's letters, being orderly dog for the day. (1934)

**ack emma** (1930) R.A.F. slang, dated; applied to an air mechanic; from the former military communications code-names for the letters a and m

**odds and sods** (1930) Applied to service personnel assigned to miscellaneous tasks or not regularly classified. Evelyn Waugh: They left me behind with the other odds and sods. (1955)

**ATS, Ats** (1941) Applied collectively to members of the Auxiliary Territorial Service, a British army corps consisting of women (1938–48); pronounced /æts/; singular forms AT, At; acronym from A.T.S., abbreviation of Auxiliary Territorial Service. John Betjeman: As beefy ATS without their hats Come shooting through the bridge. (1958)

**plumber** (1941) British; applied to an armourer or engineering officer. Flight I am not an engineer (or 'plumber', as the Royal Air Force equivalent is unoffically called). (1962)

**retread** (1941) Mainly US, Australian, & New Zealand; applied to a retired soldier recalled for service; from earlier sense, refurbished tyre. American Legion Magazine: Retreads will reunite: Retreads, men who served in both World Wars... will hold their first reunion... at Miami. (1948)

**snake** (1941) Australian; applied to a sergeant; probably from snake pit sergeants' mess. Eric Lambert: Baxter reckoned the officers and snakes are pinching our beer. (1951)

**tail-end charlie** (1941) R.A.F; slang; applied to a rear-gunner in an aircraft. Daily Mail. The average lifespan of a 'Tail-end Charlie' was reckoned as ten 'ops.' (1976)

**pin-party** (1942) Naval slang, dated; applied to a gang of flight-deck workers on an aircraft-carrier who prepare aircraft for take-off

**orderly pig** (1943) British, dated; applied to an orderly officer, the officer of the day

**pongo** (1943) British; applied to an army officer; compare earlier sense, soldier. Olivia Manning: What were you doing walking about holding on to that bloody little pongo? (1965)

**paddlefoot** (1946) US; applied originally to an infantry soldier, and subsequently (1948) to an airforce ground-crew member. Life: Murray was a paddlefoot in Europe. (1950)

**ping, pinger, ping-man** (1946) Naval slang, dated; applied to an Asdic (= Anti-Submarine Detection Investigation Committee) officer or rating; ping from the sound made by the Asdic signal

**staff wallah** (1951) British, derogatory; applied to a noncombatant army officer

**straight leg** (1951) US; applied to a member of the ground staff in an airforce, as opposed to one of the flying personnel. Everybody's Magazine (Australia): Today, in Vietnam, Australians are again catching up on American Army slang... An airborne soldier is called a Trooper, and he knows his counterpart on the ground as a Straight-leg. (1967)

**white hat** (1956) US, naval slang; applied to an enlisted man

**Wrac** (1956) Applied to a member of the Women's Royal Army Corps, the women's corps of the British Army; pronounced /ræk/; from the initial letters of the corps' name

**Whitehall Warrior** (1973) British; applied to an officer in the armed forces employed in administration rather than on active service; from Whitehall, name of a street in London in which several principal government offices (including the Ministry of Defence) are situated. W. White: I didn't want anybody to think I was a chairbound officer, a Whitehall Warrior. (1976)

An inexperienced serviceman or -woman; a recruit

See boot, Hun, ninety-day wonder, poodle-faker, poop-ornament, quirk, red-arse, rocky, rookie, shavetail, sprog, war baby, wart, wonk, and yardbird under Inexperienced person at Experience & Inexperience (pp. 365–6).

**Soldiers**

**doughboy** (1847) US; applied to a US infantryman, especially in World War I; perhaps from doughboy boiled flour dumpling, from a supposed resemblance to the large round buttons on US infantry uniforms in the Civil War. Anita Loos: During World War I, she dressed as a doughboy in olive drab. (1966)

**Tommy** (1884) Dated; applied to a British private soldier; short for Tommy Atkins, familiar form of Thomas Atkins, a name used in specimens of completed official forms.

**gravel-crusher** (1889), **gravel-grinder** (1890), **gravel agitator** (1888) Derogatory; applied to an infantry soldier, and also to a drill instructor; from the effect of service boots on parade-ground gravel

**leather-neck** (1890) Naval slang, dated; from the leather neck-piece formerly worn by soldiers

** poilu** (1914) Applied to a French soldier, especially in World War I; from French, literally 'hairy, virile'. John Dos Passos: The Boche scattered a few salvos of artillery... just to keep the poilus on their toes. (1966)

**P.B.I.** (1916) Abbreviation of poor bloody infantryman. Guardian: In the trenches the P.B.I... await the order to go over the top. (1972)
pongo (1917) British, naval slang; from earlier sense, anthropoid ape  ■ Daily Mail: fourteen youths ... went out looking for soldiers to beat up. ... Favourite expressions of the gang were 'squabbling bashing' and 'pongo bashing'. (1977)

old sweat (1919) Applied to an old soldier

dogface (1932) US; applied to a soldier, especially an ordinary infantryman, in the US army; compare earlier sense, ugly person  ■ Newsweek: No dogface who dug one [sc. a foxhole] will ever forget his blistered hands and aching back. (1958)

squadgie, squadgi (1933) British; applied especially to a private soldier; from squad + -ie, perhaps influenced by obsolete slang swabby soldier  ■ Ian Jefferies: I had a motley but effective army of luckless squadgies who had been selected by orderly sergeants. (1956)

brown job (1943) Orig R.A.F. slang; applied to a soldier, and hence collectively to the army; from the British Army’s khaki uniforms  ■ Economist: General Delacombe was a pretty undiplomatic brown-job. (1963)

choco, chocko (1943) Australian; applied to a militiaman or conscripted soldier; short for chocolate soldier soldier unwilling to fight (the Australian militia did not serve outside Australia and its territories in World War II)  ■ Geoffrey Dutton: You are all volunteers. Your country called you and you came. Not A choko amongst you. (1968)

doughfoot (1943) US; applied to a soldier, especially an ordinary infantryman, in the US army; suggested by doughboy

grunt (1962) North American; applied to an infantry soldier, especially in the Vietnam war; from earlier sense, unskilled or menial worker  ■ Ian Kemp: The sound of ... engines, among the most welcome of all music to the average infantryman—or 'grunt', as we were impolitely called—in Vietnam. (1969)

merc (1967) Applied to a mercenary soldier; abbreviation of mercenary  ■ Ted Willis: I'm a merc, a hired gunman. ... If I'm paid, I'm convinced. (1977)

See also Boche, Charlie, choom, dig, digger, Fritz, Heinnie, Hun, Jerry, kiwi, Kraut, Sammey, squarehead, Tojo, Victor Charlie, and Woodbine at Ethnic & National Groups (pp. 33–42).

Sailors


Jack-tar (1781) See tar  ■ Hart Crane: My old jack tar friend ... was back from his long trip ... so I just piked in and saw him. (1927)

salt (1840) Applied especially to an experienced sailor; often in the phrase old salt; from the saltiness of the sea  ■ Daily Telegraph: Cowes Week for the keen yachtswoman is not all grit and no glitz. The trick ... is how quickly you can make the switch from 'old salt' to svelte swinger. (1992)

soldier (1840) Orig & mainly US; applied to a worthless seaman; often in the phrase old soldier  ■ Bruce Hamilton: He's a bit of an old soldier, but a first-rate seaman, and a hundred per cent reliable at sea. (1950)

shellback (1853) Jocular; applied especially to a hardened or experienced seaman

farmer (1866) Applied to a sailor who has no duties at the wheel or on watch during the night  ■ P. A. Eaddy: I was a ‘farmer’ that night, ... not having any wheel or look-out. (1933)

gobby (1890) Dated; applied to an American sailor, or to a coastguard; perhaps from gob lump of slimy matter, from the notion of a typically pipe-smoking, spitting sailor

peggy (1902) Naval slang; applied to a sailor assigned to menial tasks, or to a mess-steward; from the female forename Peggy  ■ Stanley Waters: I was initiated into the mysteries of acting as ‘Peggy’. As the name implies this menial does all the domestic chores. (1967)

matelot, matlow, matlo (1903) British; from French matelot sailor  ■ Listener: Our screen matelots ... should be as reticent as ... Captain Horatio Hornblower. (1974)

gob (1915) Orig US; applied to an American sailor or ordinary seaman; compare gobby  ■ Terence Rattigan: Can you beat that—an earl being a gob. (1944)

old ship (1927) Naval slang; dated; applied to an old shipmate

Paddy Wester (1927) British, naval slang; dated; applied to an inefficient or novice seaman; supposedly from the name of a notorious Liverpool boarding-house keeper who betrayed his guests to the press-gangs for payment  ■ W. E. Dexter: They had a pack of fake seamen sailing on dead men’s discharges—a crew of ‘Paddy Westers’. (1938)

oily wad (1929) British, naval slang; dated; applied to a seaman with no special skill; from the amount of time they have to spend cleaning brass-work with oily wads

fowl (1937) Naval slang; applied to a troublesome or undisciplined sailor  ■ Giraldo: I was a ‘fowl’ of the first water. I was always getting ‘run-in’, always in trouble and had no zeal for the Navy whatsoever. (1938)

stripey (1942) British, naval slang; applied to a long-service able seaman, especially one with good-conduct stripes; from stripe + -y  ■ Tackline: Stripey was a small, middle-aged A.B. (1945)

The Navy

the Andrew (1867) Applied to the Royal Navy; short for earlier Andrew Millar or Miller, reputedly a notorious member of a press-gang  ■ Gillian Freeman: That’s ‘ow it is in the Andrew. ... That’s what we call the navy. (1955)
the Wavy Navy (1918) Applied to the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve; from the wavy braid worn by officers on their sleeves before 1956

the red duster (1925) Applied to the red ensign, the flag of the British merchant navy; red from its colour + British naval slang duster flag (1904), from earlier sense, cloth for wiping dust. ■ Daily Express: His papers have not yet come through allowing him to fly the White Ensign, so, meanwhile, the Vita sails under the 'red duster'. (1928)

Marines

jolly (1829) British, dated; from the adjective jolly ■ Rudyard Kipling: I’m a Jolly—Er Majesty’s Jolly-Soldier and Sailor too. (1896)

leather-neck (1914) US; compare earlier sense, soldier. ■ Richard West: The U.S. Marine Corps. These legendary troops, nick-named 'leathernecks'. (1968)

pongo (1917) British, naval slang, dated; from earlier sense, soldier

Airmen

modoc, modock (1936) US, derogatory, dated; applied to a man who becomes a pilot for the sake of pilots' glamorous image; origin unknown

fly boy (1937) US; applied to a member of an airforce, especially a pilot ■ Life: The generals are no full-throttle 'fly-boys'. (1948)

glamour boy (1941) British, dated; applied to a member of the R.A.F. from the glamorous reputation of R.A.F. pilots in World War II

Military police

jack (1919) Mainly Australian; from earlier sense, police officer ■ Bulletin (Sydney): Blue . . . looked up and saw two Jacks waiting. 'Where are you going?' demanded one M.P. (1930)

red cap (1919) British; from the colour of their caps ■ Jimmy O’Connor: She used to take me to night-policeman; from the white helmets of American military policemen

provo (1943) Australian; from provost-marshal officer in charge of military police + -o ■ J. McNeil: Our favourite provo, a bastard named Hunter. (1972)

snowdrop (1944) Applied to an American military policeman, and hence to any military policeman; from the white helmets of American military policemen

Batmen and other assistants

dog-robin (1853) Orig US; applied to a navy or army officer's orderly; from earlier sense, scavenger, scrounger
doggy, doggie (1909) Applied to an officer's servant or assistant ■ Arthur Grimble: My function would be to act as doggie—that is, clerical assistant and odd-job man—to . . . the District Officer. (1952)

Jack Dusty (c1931) Applied to a ship's steward's assistant

Units

crush (1916) Dated; applied to a body of troops or a unit of a regiment; from earlier, more general sense, crowd, group ■ Observer: The best recruiter is the man who is pleased with his 'crush'. (1927)

mob (1916) Applied to a military unit; from earlier, more general sense, group of people ■ Marshall Pugh: You must have heard of Sharjah and the Trucial Oman Scouts. This mob is modelled on them. (1972)

outfit (1916) Applied to a regiment or other military unit ■ F. A. Pottle: The bowlegged officer flew into a disciplinary rage and addressed the boy as follows: 'What outfit do you belong to? How long have you been in the army?' (1930)

To join the services

re-up (1906) US; denoting re-enlisting for service; from re- again + up (apparently from the notion of the recruit holding 'up' a hand when swearing the oath). ■ Black Panther: I was told to talk to a recruiter on base about re-enlisting. . . . He told me that if I re-up for the four-year reserve commitment he would fix it up so that I had a job waiting for me. (1974). Hence the noun re-up someone who re-enlists in this way (1953)

Conscription

nasho (1962) Australian; applied to compulsory military training; from national (as in national service) + -o ■ Q. Wild: One of the worst things . . . was something that happened in nasho . . . before there was any fighting or anything. (1981)

A conscript

zombie (1943) Canadian; applied derivatively to a man conscripted for home defence in World War II; from earlier sense, slow-witted person

nasho (1962) Australian; from nasho conscription ■ Bulletin (Sydney): The bulk of the Nashos—how the Army loathes that term—have little time for the 'protests'. (1966)

Leave of absence

leaf, leef (1846) Variant of leave ■ John Irving: A leaf, leef (1846)

Discharge

vet (1848) North American; applied to a former member of the armed forces; abbreviation of veteran ■ Listener. The scene is New York. . . . the academic 'host' is Columbia University, where a number of young Second World War vets . . . are making gestures at working for degrees. (1968)

short-timer (1906) US; applied to someone nearing the end of their military service ■ M. Russ: Being what is known as a short-timer . . . I'm at peace with service life. (1952)

Section Eight (1943) US; applied to discharge from the army under section eight of US Army
Regulations 615–360 on the grounds of insanity or inability to adjust to army life. Hence the verb section-eight to discharge on such grounds (1945) ■ Ernest Hemingway: You stay in until you are hit badly or killed or go crazy and get section-eight. (1950)

Marching and drill

'shun (1888) Used as a military command to come to attention; shortened form of attention ■ William Faulkner: 'Bridesman,' he said but at that moment the major said "Shun!" (1955)
square-bashing (1943) British; from square military parade ground ■ Gavin Black: Attached to a Malay regiment, supervising weapon training and square bashing. (1975)
tab (1982) British, used especially in the Parachute Regiment; denoting marching with heavy equipment over difficult terrain; origin unknown ■ McGowan & Hands: Paras referred to a forced march at speed in fighting order as 'tabbing'. The Marines instead went 'yomping'. (1983)
yomp (1982) British, used especially by the Royal Marines; denoting marching with heavy equipment over difficult terrain; origin unknown ■ Sunday Times: So the sweaty soldier yomping into battle ends up with blisters and a pool of water inside the boot. (1984)

Discipline

jankers (1916) British, services' slang; applied to punishment for a defaulter; origin unknown ■ Joyce Porter: I pulled her leg about it a bit, you know, said something about having her put on jankers if she was late again. (1965)

AWOL (1920) Orig US; acronym formed from absent without leave ■ P. G. Wodehouse: Nothing sticks to the gaff into your chatelaine more than a guest being reprimanded at a Prison (pp. 111, 112), on the peg and in the rattle under being reprimanded at Reprimanding & Punishing (p. 106).

Navigation

iron mike (1926) Applied to the automatic steering device of a ship

ham-bone (1938) Naval; applied to a sextant; from its shape ■ F. A. Worsley: What altitude have you got on that hambone, Stringer? (1938)

angels (1943) R.A.F. slang, especially in World War II; applied to altitude, and specifically to a height of 1000 feet; originally a radio communications code, perhaps based on the notion of the altitude at which angels live ■ Paul Brennan: We climbed into sun, Woody advising us to get as much angels as possible. (1943)

pipsqueak (1943) British, dated; applied to a radio transmitter used to establish an aircraft's position; from earlier sense, short, high-pitched sound

Bradshaw (1946) R.A.F. slang, dated; denoting following a railway line in flying; from the name of Bradshaw's Railway Guide, former British railway timetable originally issued by George Bradshaw (1801–53), printer and engraver ■ A. Phelps: Bradshawing can sometimes lead into trouble. ... I dislike following a railway except in extreme emergency when forced to fly low. (1946)

nav (1961) Mainly R.A.F. slang; applied to a navigator; abbreviation ■ Aviation News: Before long, the student 'nav' could attempt to identify ground features using fine scale maps. (1986)

Training

bull-ring (1899) Applied to a military training ground; from earlier sense, bullfight arena, with reference to bull excessive discipline or spit-and-polish ■ Erik de Mauny: Drawing equipment at the O.M., drilling on the bull-ring. (1949)

the Shop (1899) Used as a nickname for the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich ■ George M. Fraser: We treated each other decently, and weren't one jot more incompetent than this Sandhurst-and-Shop crowd. (1978)

boot camp (1916) US; applied to a centre for the initial training of US naval or Marine recruits

quirk (1917) R.A.F. slang, dated; applied to a type of slow, steady aeroplane used to train pilots; from earlier sense, inexperienced airman

mad minute (1942) Applied to a minute of frenzied bayonet-practice; compare earlier sense, minute of rapid fire ■ Brophy & Partridge: Mad minute... was also applied to the frenzied minute spent charging down the assault course, bayoneting straw-filled dummies, representing enemy soldiers. (1985)

TEWT, tewt (1942) British; an acronym formed from the initial letters of tactical exercise without troops, an exercise used in the training of junior officers ■ Evelyn Waugh: Leonard improvised 'No more TEWTS and no more drill, No night ops to cause a chill.' (1952)

boot (1944) US; applied to basic training received in a boot camp

perisher (1948) Applied to a qualifying course for submarine commanders; from earlier sense,
periscope  ■ D. Reeman: We did our Perisher together, and even when I got Tristram he was given Typhon. (1973)

Uniform


giggle (1940) Australian; applied to often badly fitting items of clothing of the type issued to Australian service personnel during World War II; from their supposedly amusing appearance  ■ S. O'Leary: Chrysalis soldiers in their ill-fitting giggle suits and floppy cloth hats. (1975)

square rig (1951) Applied to the uniform of a naval rating; from earlier sense, rig in which sails are suspended from horizontal yards  ■ Noel Coward: Attired as they were in the usual 'Square-Rig' of British Ordinary Seamen, they caused a mild sensation. (1951)

Identity discs

dog tag (1918) US  ■ Penguin New Writing: If I should die to-morrow, I suppose this is where my bones, if not my dog-tag, would lie for ever. (1947)

meat ticket (1919) From the notion of an identifying label tied to a carcass of meat, with reference to the use of the identity disc in identifying dead service personnel

Gas masks

nose-bag (1915) British, dated; from earlier sense, eating bag suspended round a horse's head  ■ Everybody's Weekly. Londoners call their masks 'Dicky-birds', 'Canaries' and 'Nose-bags'. (1940)

Decorations

come up with (or be given) the rations (1925) British, derogatory; applied to a service or other medal not awarded for gallantry  ■ John Braine: Lampton has no decorations apart from those which all servicemen who served his length of time are given, as they say, with the rations. (1957)

gong (1925) British; applied to a medal or other decoration; from its shape  ■ Monica Dickens: Other people came out of the war with Mentions and worthwhile gongs that tacked letters after their names. (1958)

rooty gong (1925) British, dated; applied to a medal formerly awarded to members of the British Army in India; from rooty bread + gong medal  ■ Frank Richards: The Good Conduct medal or 'Rooty Gong'... was so called because it was a regular ration-issue, like bread or meat or boots. (1936)

Mutt and Jeff (1937) British, dated; applied to a particular pair of medals worn together, especially the War Medal and the Victory Medal awarded to British service personnel who took part in World War I; from the names of two characters called Mutt and Jeff in a popular cartoon series by H. C. Fisher (1884-1954), American cartoonist

Pip, Squeak, and Wilfred (1937) British, dated; applied collectively to the 1914-15 Star, War Medal, and Victory Medal, three medals awarded to British service personnel who took part in World War I; from the names of three animal characters in a Daily Mirror children's comic strip

fruit salad (1943) Applied to a (copious or ostentatious) display of medals, ribbons, or other decorations; from the array of colours presented by an array of medal ribbons  ■ Nevil Shute: A red-faced old gentleman with... a fruit salad of medal ribbons on his chest. (1955)

ruptured duck (1945) US; applied to a button given on discharge from the services; from its eagle design  ■ William Faulkner: The ex-soldier or -sailor or -marine with his ruptured duck pushing the perambulator with one hand. (1959)

Spam medal (1945) Applied to a medal awarded to all members of a force, especially (British) the 1939-45 Star, awarded to British service personnel who took part in World War II; from the ubiquity of Spam as a foodstuff during World War II, and in the case of the 1939-45 Star perhaps also from the resemblance of the colours of the ribbon to those of the armbands of waitresses in NAAFI canteens, where Spam was a staple item

screaming eagle (1946) US; applied to a button given on discharge from the services; from its eagle design

Armaments: Bombs

pill (1921) From earlier sense, shell, bullet; sometimes used (in the phrase the pill) to refer to nuclear weapons  ■ P. G. Hart: When I got over the town I let my pills go. (1939)

bread-basket (1940) British, dated; applied to a large bomb containing smaller bombs

screamer (1942) Dated; applied to a type of bomb that makes a screaming sound as it falls

doodlebug, doodle (1944) Applied to a German V-1 flying bomb; compare earlier sense, tiger beetle, or the larva of this or various other insects  ■ Tony Parker: I left school in 1944, just after the doodle-bugs finished. (1963)

nuke, (US) nook (1959) Orig US; applied to a nuclear bomb, missile, etc.; abbreviation of nuclear  ■ Publishers' Weekly. They hijack a liner at sea and sink it with a baby nuke... He is given the job of detonating the big nuke. (1973)

lazy dog (1965) US; applied to a type of fragmentation bomb designed to explode in mid air and scatter steel pellets at high velocity over the target area

Bombing equipment

Mickey Mouse (1941) Dated; applied to a type of electrical bomb release; from the name of a mouse-like cartoon character created by Walt Disney (1901-66), US cartoonist (apparently in allusion to the complicated machinery portrayed in Disney's cartoons)
Mickey (1944) US; applied to a type of radar-assisted bombsight; from Mickey Mouse

Mortars, grenades, etc.

sausage (1915) Dated; applied to a type of German trench-mortar bomb; from its shape

pineapple, pineapple bomb (1916) Applied to a hand-grenade or light trench-mortar; from its shape • James Quartermain: ‘You... don’t want that old-time pineapple lobbed through your store window. You know what a pineapple is, Raven?’ ’A hand grenade.’ ’Right.’ (1972)

rum-jar (1916) Dated; applied to a type of German trench-mortar bomb

toc emma, tock emma, toch emma (1916) Dated; applied to a trench-mortar; from to and emma, the communications code-words for t and m, representing T.M., abbreviation of trench-mortar • R. C. Sherriff: Can’t have men out there while the toch-emma-ss are blowing holes in the Boche wire. (1928)

Minnie, minnie, minny (1917) Applied to a German trench-mortar, or the bomb discharged by it; abbreviation of German Minenwerfer trench-mortar

oil can (1917) Applied to a German trench-mortar bomb in World War I • E. A. Mackintosh: ‘Look out, sir, ... oil can coming over.’ Instantly self-preservation reasserted itself. (1917)

pill (1919) Applied to a hand-grenade; from earlier sense, shell, bullet • American Legion Weekly: Damn the Boche that threw the pill. (1921)

plum-pudding (1925) Dated; applied to a type of trench-mortar bomb

moaning minnie, moaning Minnie, Moaning Minnie (1941) Applied to a German trench-mortar, or the bomb discharged by it; moaning alluding to the sound made by the projectile in flight • G. Wilson: That bloody moaning Minnie... It’s a hell of a weapon. (1950)

red devil (1944) Applied to a type of Italian hand-grenade

Depth charges

pill (1917) From earlier sense, shell, bullet • P.S. Allen: The submarine proceeded to lie on the bottom... but one day they realized they were spotted. ’Pills’ kept dropping closer to them, and sending the water a-swish all round. (1917)

ash-can (1918) US; from its shape, like that of a dustbin (US ash-can) • Geoffrey Jenkins: ’I give it five minutes before the ash-cans come.’... Waiting for a depth-charge attack is probably as bad as the attack itself. (1959)

Ammunition

pill (c1626) Applied to a bullet, shell, or, in early use, cannon ball: used collectively in the plural to denote ammunition; from earlier sense, ball

ammo (1911) Applied especially to ammunition for small arms; from ammunition + o • Roy

Mickey Mouse: And we’ll hand in our Ammo and Guns As we handed them in once before. (1946)

woolly bear (1915) Dated; applied to a type of German high-explosive shell

pipsqueak (1916) Dated; applied to a small high-velocity shell; from earlier sense, someone small or insignificant • E. Thompson: The Turkish guns suddenly sent over a couple of pipsqueaks. (1927)

G.I. can (1918) US; dated; applied to a German artillery shell in World War I; from earlier sense, galvanized-iron can (= a dustbin), in allusion to its shape

plonker (1918) Australian, dated; applied to an explosive shell; from earlier dialect sense, something large or substantial of its type

Torpedoes

mouldy (1916) British, dated; origin unknown • Flight: At the same time, no doubt, the A.A. gunners on board are gleefully telling all and sundry how they simply riddled the ’Horsleys’ with shells before ever a mouldy was dropped. (1932)

tin fish (1925), fish (1928) • Penguin New Writing: The air seemed full of falling bombs, and tin fish like carelessly dropped cigarettes splashed among the crowded ships. (1943)

bill Knox: The Navy didn’t like losing a torpedo.... Each ‘fish’ represented some £3,000 in cash. (1967)

torp (1929) Abbreviation • Bill Knox: If anyone does find a stray torp, they’ll make damn’ sure it stays lost. (1967)

kipper (1953) • Geoffrey Jenkins: I evaluate its firing power at eighteen torpedoes— I think kipper is a distressing piece of naval slang—in thirty minutes. (1959)

Anti-aircraft fire

flaming onions (1917) Dated; applied to a projectile consisting of about ten incendiary shells shot upwards in quick succession; from its resemblance to a string of onions

triple-A (1983) Orig US; from earlier AAA, abbreviation of anti-aircraft artillery • Times: With triple-A coming at you, it concentrates the mind wonderfully. It was the longest minute of my life. (1991)

Weapon emplacements and defensive structures

elephant, elephant dug-out (1917) British, dated; applied to a dug-out with a semi-circular corrugated-iron lining

dustbin (1934) British; applied to the gun-turret of an aircraft, especially one beneath the fuselage; from its shape

asparagus-bed, asparagus (1939) British; applied to an anti-tank obstacle consisting of an array of strong metal bars set in concrete at an angle of 45 degrees; from the resemblance of the bars to asparagus growing thickly in a bed

An attack

hate (1915) British, dated; applied to an artillery bombardment; from the German ’Hymn of
To attack

RAF.

Dated; spike-bozzle, spike-boozle (1915)

Denoting making a (rapid) scramble (1940)

Applied to a military operation; often used in the plural; abbreviation of operation

Adam Hall: They’d been forced to set up the op. . . . The decision-making had been at Prime Minister level. (1973)

Applied to a (rapid) operational take-off by a group of aircraft


Applied to a military engagement

B. J. Ellan: I just fired when something came into my sights and then turned like hell as something fired at me! What a party! (1942)

Dated; applied to a low-level strafing raid

J. E. Johnson: Usually our Rhubarb efforts yielded little more than a staff car. (1956)

Dated

J. M. B. Beard: Right, paras get ready to lay an egg (1918)

Denoting dropping a bomb from an aircraft

Peter Bryant: The report on the . . . Russian I.C.B.M. site had removed his . . . doubt . . . whether his bombers could smear it before the missiles were fired off. (1958)

someone or something shoot

L. M. Boston: A squadron would roar over the house from which one plane swooped down to shoot us up. (1973)

Denoting making a (rapid) operational take-off; also used transitively, meaning ‘cause to make such a take-off’; from the noun scramble such a take-off

Brennan & Hesselyon: The signal to scramble came at about eleven o’clock . . . We rushed to our aircraft and in less than two minutes were off the ground. (1942)

Dated

Orig US; denoting making a sneak attack on someone; from the noun jap

Attrition: His defense was designed to attrit us . . . Every American you kill, it’s another family protesting the war. (1981)

US, dated; denoting making a sneak attack on someone from the noun nuke

His defense was designed to attrit us . . . Every American you kill, it’s another family protesting the war. (1981)

Parachuting: A parachute

Abbreviation

Times: Less than an hour later the big ship touches ground, the 32-foot-diameter chute billowing astern to brake it. (1958)

Mainly US; especially in the phrase take to or hit the silk bale out by parachute; from the use of silk for making parachutes

Ngaio Marsh: Over Germany . . . we got clobbered and I hit the silk. (1956)

US

J. Ditton: It takes ages to come down on an umbrella . . . Then you have to get rid of the chute. (1980)

British; from earlier sense, umbrella

J. M. B. Beard: I was floating still and peacefully with my ‘brolly’ canopy billowing above my head. (1940)

A paratrooper

Times: Skymen hit the target. (1964)

Usually used in the plural; abbreviation

J. Cartwright: Right, paras get ready to jump. (1977)

A parachute accident

Roman Candle (1943) Applied to a parachute jump in which the parachute fails to open
Evelyn Waugh: The first thing the commandant asked when I reported Crouchback's accident. 'A Roman Candle?' he asked. (1961)

cigarette roll (1962) US; applied to a parachute jump in which the parachute fails to open

To jump using a parachute

step out (1942) R.A.F. slang; denoting parachuting out of a (disabled) aircraft

Accommodation and catering

bivvy, bivy (1916) Applied to a small tent or any temporary shelter for troops; short for bivouac

D. M. Davin: Snow and me were sitting outside the bivvy. (1947)

stone frigate (1917) British; applied to a naval shore establishment or barracks

Mariner's Mirror. H.M.S. Thunderer (our title as a 'stone frigate') has since prospered. . . . It is planned amongst other things to produce a book on the history of the college. (1979)

Naffy (1937) British; a representation of the usual pronunciation of NAAFI, abbreviation of Navy, Army, and Air Force Institution, an organization providing canteens, shops, etc. for British forces personnel

snake-pit, snake-pen (1941) Australian; applied to a sergeant's mess

Wrennery (1943) British, jocular; applied to a building used to accommodate Wrens; from Wren + -ery, after rookery, etc.

Navy News: The work included ... the building of a Wrennery to accommodate 200 Wrens. (1964)

Terrorists
terr (1976) Applied in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) before independence to a guerrilla fighting to overthrow the White minority government; abbreviation of terrorist

Times: Infiltration over the Zambezi River by 'terrs'—or terrorists/freedom fighters, depending on your politics. (1980)

23. Espionage

A spy

spook (1942) Orig and mainly US; from earlier sense, ghost

L Pryor: 'My training was also in espionage at the CIA farm.' . . . 'A spook,' I said in wonder. (1979). Hence the adjective spooky (1975)

Jennie Melville: Somebody on the spooky side of the Embassy might have a view. (1980)

sleeper (1955) Applied to a spy or saboteur who remains inactive for a long time before starting his or her work

Daily Mail: They had been responsible for a year-long campaign of bombings in the city. . . . When police cleaned up the cell, the IRA activated a reserve unit of 'sleepers'. (1975)

Civilians
civvy (1915) Applied to a civilian, and also used adjectively to denote non-military items; from civilian + -y

Daily Express: Civvy cigarettes are dearer now. (1945)
P.E.C., pfe (1947) US; abbreviation of poor foolish (forlorn, fucking, etc.) civilian, modelled on earlier P.F.C., abbreviation of Private 1st Class

Thomas Pynchon: 'I would like to sing you a little song. 'To celebrate your becoming a PFC' said Ploy. . . . 'Pore Forlorn Civilian, We're goin to miss you so.' (1963)

Civilian life

outside (1903) W. Lang: You got to 'ave some bloody religion in the Navy. Now, wot church did you go to outside? (1919)

Civvy Street (1943) John Braine: Dick was in splendid shape, sampling every delight Civvy Street had to offer. (1959)

Civilian clothes
civvies (1889) From civilian + -ies

Daily Telegraph: Young men exchange their uniforms for 'civvies'. (1946)
dog-robbers (1898) Applied to civilian clothes worn by a naval officer on shore leave

Monica Dickens: Then he. . . . changed into dog robbers and went into the town to get drunk. (1958)

Pacifism

conchy, conchie, conshy (1917) Derogatory; applied to a conscientious objector; from conscientious + -y

Landfall: The deal that is going on here is worse than the one the Conchies got. (1951)

Cuthbert (1917) British, derogatory, dated; applied to a man who deliberately avoids military service, especially (in World War I) one who did so by getting a job in a government office or the civil service; from the male personal name Cuthbert, used in a cartoon by 'Poy' in the London Evening News

Joyce Cary: All you Cuthberts are fit for is to dodge responsibility at the cost of other people's lives. (1933)

undercover (1962) Applied to an undercover agent

James Mills: She was a very good detective. She was a narcotics undercover. (1972)
cut-out (1963) Applied to someone acting as a middle-man in espionage

Eric Ambler: Through our cut-out I have made an offer for the shares. (1969)

plumber (1972) Mainly US; applied to a member of a White House special unit during the administration of Richard Nixon which investigated leaks of government secrets, and which was found to have been guilty of illegal practices, including bugging with concealed microphones
swallow (1972) Applied to a woman employed in the Soviet intelligence service to seduce men for the purposes of espionage. M. Barak: I need a swallow in America. One... who is sexually skilled and expert in obtaining information. (1976)

mole (1974) Applied to a person who works undercover within an organization and passes information about it to others; there is some previous evidence of the use of mole to denote a traitor working secretly, dating back to the 19th century, but its specific modern application was popularized by John Le Carré. Times: Clearly, therefore, we suggest, this points to a "mole" within British Telecom Prestel headquarters. (1984)

Spies

the Circus (1963) Applied to the British secret service; from its address at Cambridge Circus, London. John Le Carré: In your day the Circus ran itself by regions... Control sat in heaven and held the strings. (1974)

the trade (1966) Applied to the secret service
J. Gardner: Heather had that smart plummy voice which spoke of a cut-glass background. The kind of girl the trade enjoyed: using the kind they called a lady. (1977)

the Company (1967) US; applied to the Central Intelligence Agency. Listener: The Americans working (presumably) for 'the Company', as the CIA is universally known, are privately scathing about the failure of positive vetters. (1982)

Communication

post office (1919) Applied to a secret place where documents, etc. can be left or passed on by a spy. D. Williams: It became evident in 1911 that the hairdresser's shop of Karl Gustav Ernst was being used as a post office or clearing-house for German espionage agents in this country. (1965)

drop (1959) Applied to a secret place where documents, etc. can be left or passed on by a spy; from earlier sense, hiding-place for stolen goods. Ian Fleming: They had arranged an emergency meeting place and a postal 'drop'. (1965)

treff (1963) Orig US; applied to a secret rendezvous, especially for the transfer of goods or information; from German Treffpunkt rendezvous.
W. Garner: Make a list... of all the drops, pick-ups and treffs. (1983)

To equip with a hidden microphone


spike (1974) Used especially to denote equipping with a spike microphone, one which can be driven into a wall to monitor an inner room.
D. Gethin: Quittenden's plumbers... were the crack team who could spike a high security building in under an hour. (1983)

Reconnaissance

sausage balloon (1916) Dated services' slang; applied to an observation balloon; from earlier sense, elongated air-balloon. Sapper: A row of sausage balloons like a barber's rash adorned the sky. (1917)

obbo, obo (1925) Dated services' slang; applied to an observation balloon; from observation + o

Assassination

wet (1972) Denoting an activity of intelligence organizations, especially the KGB, involving assassination. J. Gardner: He had seen men killed; and killed them himself: he had directed 'wet operations', as they were used to be called. (1980)

24. Religion

An (over)enthusiastically religious person

creeping Jesus (c1818) Applied to a hypocritically pious person

Bible-banger, -basher (1885) Mainly Australian & New Zealand; a synonym of Bible-pounder

Bible-pounder, -puncher, -thumper (1889) Applied to someone, especially a clergyman, who expounds or follows the Bible in a vigorous and aggressive way. A. L. Rowe: It's always the Bible-thumpers who are the greatest hypocrites. (1942). Hence Bible-pounding, -punching, -thumping (1951)

holy Joe (1889), holy Willie (1916)
holy Joe from earlier sense, clergyman. J. A. Lee: The Holy Willies would throw a party. 'Come to our Sunday School?' (1934)

J. D. Salinger: They all have these Holy Joe voices when they start giving their sermons. (1951)

Christer (1921) US; applied to an over-pious or sanctimonious person; from Christ + -er. Judson Philips: I'm a Christer and a do-gooder.... I wasn't welcome. (1966)

God-botherer (1897) British, orig services' slang; applied to a parson or chaplain, or more generally to anyone who vigorously promotes Christian ideals.
Kingsley Amis: 'What do you think of the padre, Max?'... 'Not a bad chap for a God-botherer.' (1966)

God squad (1965) Orig US colleges' slang; used as a disparaging collective term for (the members of) a religious organization, especially an evangelical Christian group.
Observer: BBC executives... said: 'Beware the unexpected—and keep tabs on the God squad.' (1983)
fundi, fundie, fundy (1982) Applied to a believer in the literal truth of Scripture; short for fundamentalist

Excessively religious

pi (1981) Dated; short for pius; recorded as a noun ("pius person") around 1870

A member of a particular religion

Prot (1725) Applied derogatorily to a Protestant; compare Prod

spike (1902) British; applied derogatorily to an Anglican who advocates or practises Anglo-Catholic ritual and observances; probably from the pointed decoration of Gothic churches

A. N. Wilson: There were several other effigies of famous spikes, including the legendary Father Tooth. (1980)

spiky (1893) and spike up to make more High Church (1923)

D. Whitington: Too many bloody tykes in the Labor Party. (1957)

Pape (1935) Scottish/Ulster; applied derogatorily to a Roman Catholic; from Pope, or a shortening of papist

John Braine: Adam's a good Catholic.... It's smart to be a Pape now. (1968)

Doolan, doolan (1940) New Zealand; applied to an (Irish) Roman Catholic; probably from the Irish surname Doolan

D. M. Davin: She'll have me a doolan yet, Father. (1947)

Metho (1940) Australian; applied to a Methodist

Patrick White: Arch and me are Methoes, except we don't go, life is too short. (1961)

Roman Candle (1941) Applied jocularly to a Roman Catholic

P. Haines: She said: 'I've noticed you lots—you're a Roman Candle, aren't you?' 'What?'... 'R.C., silly.' (1974)


Anglo-Irish; applied derogatorily to a Protestant; compare Prot

Philip Carter: Most of the kids were in tough Prod gangs, like the Tartans.... They always seemed to tell if you were as hard-line Prod as they were. (1977)

left-footer (1944) Applied derogatorily to a Roman Catholic

J. H. Fullarton: 'What about the R.C.s?' 'Oh, yes. Leave the left-footers behind as gun-picquets.' (1944)

Tim (1958) Scottish; used by Protestants as a nickname for a Roman Catholic; diminutive form of the male personal name Timothy

Taig, Teague (1971) Anglo-Irish; applied derogatorily to a Roman Catholic; Anglicized spelling of the Irish name Tadig, a nickname for an Irish person

Observer: This week a new slogan appeared along the Shankill Road, the backbone of Protestant West Belfast. It read: 'All Taigs are targets.' (1982)

A priest or clergyman

holy Joe (1874) Orig nautical

sky pilot (1883) Applied especially to a military or naval chaplain

B. Broadfoot: At the missions you would get a sermon, say 15 minutes of religion from a sky pilot. (1973)

joss-man (1913) From joss Chinese idol, perhaps from Portuguese deo god

Daily News: I was watch aboard and tried to get a sub, but no joy. I asked the Jossman if I could go ashore, and he told me to go. (1964)

sin bosun (1948) Naval; applied to a ship's chaplain

Daily News: Well, at least the Sin Bosun doesn't seem too old. (1964)

A church

God-box (1917) Used derogatorily

New Statesman: A ring-a-ding God-box that will go over big with the flat-bottomed latitudinarians. (1962)

The Salvation Army

Salvo (1881) Australian; also applied in the plural to members of the Salvation Army; from Sally + the Australian colloquial suffix -o

R. McKie: When workers everywhere got their notices and the slump showed every sign of lasting, the Salvos decided to open a doss house. (1978)

Sally (Army) (1915) Sally Ann(e) (1927) Also applied to a Salvation Army hostel and (Sally) in the plural to members of the Salvation Army; alteration of Salvation

D'Arcy Niland: The woman that runs it, she used to be some sort of high-up with the Sallyes down in Sydney. (1957)

W. A. Hagelund: Now you go see the Major at the Johnson Street Sally Anne about some meal tickets and beds. (1961)

Daily News: Sally + the Australian colloquial suffix -o • R. McKie: When workers everywhere got their notices and the slump showed every sign of lasting, the Salvos decided to open a doss house. (1978) • D'Arcy Niland: The woman that runs it, she used to be some sort of high-up with the Sallyes down in Sydney. (1957) • W. A. Hagelund: Now you go see the Major at the Johnson Street Sally Anne about some meal tickets and beds. (1961) • New Statesman: Julie Felix sang against the Salvation Army—and we were miles away from the sad Sally where the meth-drinkers are deloused. (1966)

God

Gawd, gawd, gaw (1877) British; representing a vulgar pronunciation of God; mainly used in exclamations (see at Imprecations (pp. 341–3))

The Devil

Old Nick (1643) Nick perhaps a shortening of iniquity, assimilated to the abbreviated form of the name Nicholas

Old Scratch (1740) Compare earlier scratch hermaphrodite, related to Old Norse skratt(ti) goblin, Old High German scrato sprite

See also God slot at Entertainment (p. 344).
Animals

Birds

**birdie** (1792) An affectionate or child’s term for any (small) bird; from *bird* + -ie

**chook, chookie, -y, chuckie, -y** (1855) Australian & New Zealand; applied to a chicken or other domestic fowl; compare British dialect chuck chicken ■ *Coast to Coast* 1967-68: His had been wild-eyed, scraggy long-legged chooks, few in number, sneaking into the kitchen after scraps. (1969)

**gump** (1899) US, vagrants’ slang; applied to a chicken; perhaps the same word as gump fool, from the notion of chickens being stupid ■ *American Ballads & Folk Songs*: Not even a shack to beg for a lump, Or a hen-house to frisk for a single gump. (1960)

**maggie, maggy** (1901) Australian; applied to a magpie; probably from earlier British dialect use ■ T. Winton: He could ... see the scabby trunk above bearing all the open-mouthed maggies that chased them to and from school. (1982)

**Jacko** (1907) Australian; applied to a kookaburra; from Jack kookaburra (short for laughing jackass kookaburra) + -o

**budgie** (1936) From budg(earig) + -ie ■ Anthony Gilbert: We’ve got a budgie... that Maureen’s teaching to talk. (1959)

**spag** (1951) Australian; applied to a sparrow; from British dialect spag house-sparrow ■ *Bulletin* (Sydney): I had found a spag’s nest in the letterbox. (1960)

Camels

**oont, unt** (1862) Indian & Australian; from Hindi & Urdu ınt camel ■ *Bulletin* (Sydney): He! what a lot of calculation had to go into piloting a couple of smelly oonts! (1933)

**hunchy** (1919) Australian ■ Lawson & Brereton: I went out west to the Camel Country... where turbaned Abdul Mahommed steers his ungainly lopsided ‘hunchies’ through the glittering sands. (1931)

**hump** (1935) Australian ■ D. Stuart: I see old Dotty Stanley once ... with a pair o’ camels; it was the first time he’d ever had humps, an’ he wasn’t too sure of ’em. (1978)

Cats

**puss** (a1530) Used especially as a calling name; probably from Middle Low German *püs* (also *pûskatte*) or Dutch *poes*; perhaps ultimately a call to attract a cat

**kitty** (1719) Used especially as a pet name or calling name; from *kit* shortened form of kitten + -y

**pussy** (1726) From *puss* + -y ■ Jerome K. Jerome: He strokes the cat quite gently, and calls it ‘poor pussy’. (1889)

**moggie, mogy** (1911) British; compare earlier dialect senses, cow, calf, undity woman; perhaps a variant of Maggie pet form of the female personal name Margaret ■ *People’s Journal*: Oh, and before I leave this topic of pussies, my neighbour across the lane also had a good laugh from the moggie next door to her. (1973)

**mog** (1927) British; shortened form of moggie ■ Philip Heseltine: Such lovely mogs you can’t imagine—including the best cat in the world, surely. (1934)

Cattle

**mickey, micky** (1876) Australian; applied to a young wild bull; from the male personal name Mick(ey) ■ H. G. Lamond: Mickeys roamed through the camping cattle. (1954)

**horny, horney** (1901) Australian; applied to a bullock; from Scottish dialect horny cow ■ C. D. Mills: Nugget gave me a spell after smoke—oh, and I went to the crush to deal with the ‘hornies’. (1976)

Chimpanzees

**chimp** (1877) Abbreviation ■ *Times*: Chimps, picture cards and many diverse forms of advertising bring our teas before... buyers. (1957)

Crocodilians

**’gator, gator, gater** (1844) Orig US; abbreviation of alligator

**croc** (1884) Abbreviation of crocodile ■ P. M. Clark: Leaving the corpses of many crocs lying about behind us. (1936)

**freshy, freshie** (1964) Australian; applied to a freshwater crocodile ■ *Age* (Melbourne): There are no recorded attacks by ‘freshies’ on humans. (1985)

Dogs

**tyke** (c1400) Dated; usually used contemptuously or dismissively; from Old Norse *tik* female dog ■ John Brown: Toby was the most utterly shabby, vulgar, mean-looking cur I ever beheld—in one word, a tyke. (1961)

**bow-wow** (1785) Used as an affectionate or child’s term; from earlier use as a representation of a dog’s bark ■ Roy Campbell: All the bow-wows, poodles, tykes and curs. (1931)

**doggy, doggie** (1825) Used as an affectionate or child’s term; from *dog* + -y ■ Bob Merrill: How much is that doggie in the window? (1953)

**ki-yi** (1895) US; from earlier sense, howl or yelp of a dog ■ *Buffalo* (New York) *Express*: A butcher in
Brussels made sausage of the carcass of a zoo elephant which had been killed. Doubtless the Brussels kiyis yelped for joy. (1904)

dawg (1898) Representing a colloquial or dialectal pronunciation. Osbert Lancaster: Beaten copper reminders that a man's best friend is his dawg (beloved of the golf-playing classes). (1939)

mong (1903) Australian; abbreviation of mongrel. J. Wright: Gor’on, ya bloody mong. Git ta buggery. Ya probably lousy with fleas. (1980)

mutt (1906) Orig US; usually applied, contemptuously, to a mongrel; from earlier sense, stupid person. Saturday Evening Post. That cat! That mutt! they fight it out. And back and forth they shuttle. (1949)

pooch (1924) Orig US; origin unknown. Guardian: It holds the world record for exclamation mark abuse: ‘Little Ernest Talbot killed his beloved pooch— with an ear-splitting high-C note on his violin!’ (1992)

goorie, goory, goori (1937) New Zealand; usually applied, contemptuously, to a mongrel; alteration of Maori kuri.

sausage dog (1938) Jocular; applied to a dachshund; from its cylindrical shape and German connections. Lawrence Durrell: The door...opened and a dispirited-looking sausage-dog waddled into the room. (1958)

Donkeys, mules, etc.:

moke (1848) British; applied to a donkey; origin unknown.

hard tail (1917) US; applied to a mule, especially an old one; from the impertinence of their rear ends to the driver's whip.
skin (1925) Applied to a mule; compare earlier sense, horse.

Fish

tiddler (1885) Applied to any small fish, often specifically the minnow or stickleback; probably related to tiddly little. Courier-Mail (Brisbane). Pastime anglers would not be allowed to keep 'tiddlers'. (1976)


Hippopotamuses

hippo (1872) Abbreviation.

Horses

nag (1336) Originally a standard usage, referring to a small riding horse; the slang usage, often with specific reference to an old, slow, or broken down horse, or jocularly to a racehorse, appears to be a 20th-century development; ultimate origin unknown. Thomas Wolfe: They...heard...the two back wheels...of an ancient buggy, the lifting hooves of an old boneyard nag, that slowly turned away from the road's centre. (1935)

countryside: A nag with a nifty habit of finishing 'out of the money' can prove the odds makers wrong. (1992)

prad (1798) Now Australian; by metathesis from Dutch paard. Courier-Mail (Brisbane): It would surely be more appropriate for the riding [for democracy] to be done on some business man rather than on a prad. (1977)

screw (1821) Dated; applied to an inferior or unsound horse; perhaps from the notion of a jockey screwing a horse, forcing it to the front of the field by hard riding. G. T. Chesney: Lionel was mounted on an obvious screw, but in good going condition. (1893)

plug (1860) Mainly US; applied to an inferior or worn-out horse.
moke (1863) Australian; applied especially to an inferior horse; from earlier British sense, donkey. C. D. Mills: How's my horse?... 'Your old moke's alright,' laughed the Boss. (1976)

neddy (1887) Applied especially to a racehorse; from the earlier sense, donkey. Bulletin (Sydney): Needing extra money for the neddies, he'd let it be known that guests were expected to cough up. (1981)

skinner (1891) Australian; applied to a horse that wins a race at very long odds; from earlier sense, swindler. A. Wright: Although he had gone up in the weights considerably, his owner decreed that he should win the Rosehill handicap, and give the 'shop' another 'skinner'. (1907)

brone (1893) Orig and mainly US; abbreviation of bronco.
skate (1894) Mainly US; applied to a worn-out decr ipt horse; origin unknown. Ernest Tidyman: The man was a gambler... A pony player. Used to bet thousands on the worst-looking skates you've ever seen. (1978)

mudder (1903) Orig and mainly US; applied to a racehorse which runs well on a wet or muddy course; from mud + er. New Yorker: In my book, Stardust Mel is the best mudder in California. Last month Mrs. Marjorie Lindheimer Everett's rangy gray gelding splattered through the rain and muck to win. (1975)

tomato sauce (1905) Australian; rhyming slang. J. Alard: 'Nice weak tomato sauce ta be puttin' money on,' said the Wrecker. (1968)


mudlark (1909) Applied to a racehorse which runs well on a wet or muddy course. Sunday Telegraph (Sydney): Born Star a Mudlark. Born Star, a two-year-old, yesterday outclassed the field at Sandown in his first start on a rain-affected track. (1975)

squib (1915) Australian; applied to a racehorse lacking stamina. Sun-Herald (Sydney): It has to be said... that the Golden Slipper is a race for speedy squibs. (1984)
hay burner (1920) US & Australian, jocular; from the notion of hay as the horse’s ‘fuel’

roisin-back (1923) Circus slang; applied to a horse used by a bareback rider or acrobat; from rosin, with which the horse’s back was rubbed for a firmer seat. C. B. Cochrane: A ‘roisin-back’ is a ring-horse used by bareback riders. ... Rosin is rubbed into the horse’s back to help the rider to get a firm footing as he jumps from the ring on to the horse. (1945)

skin (1923) Dated; from the notion of hay as the horse’s ‘fuel’

creepy-crawly (1858) Applied to any insect or creepy-crawly (1858)

greyback (1840) US; applied to a body louse; from French military slang greyback

skeeter (1839) US & Australian; applied to a horse that is slow, dog (1944)

stickout (1937) US; applied to a racehorse that accepts a command to a horse to go faster • Cleese & Booth: Had a little bit of luck on the gee-gees. (1979)

dog (1944) Applied to a horse that is slow, dog (1944)

Insects and the like

live stock (1785) Often jocular; applied to fleas, body lice, etc.

skeeter (1839) US & Australian; applied to a mosquito; abbreviation of regional pronunciation of mosquito • J. B. Hilton: If a slave broke loose, he would sometimes make a go of it in Florida—if he could survive the ‘gators and the skeeters. (1982)

greyback (1840) US; applied to a body louse

roach (1848) Mainly US; abbreviation of cockroach • Eliot Paul: Her failure to get results kept her hopping like a roach in a skillet. (1942)

creepy-crawly (1858) Applied to any insect or similar small creeping creature considered as disagreeable or frightening • Woman: Mice, spiders, moths and other creepy-crawlies. (1960)

mudlark (1785) Dated; from the notion of hay as the horse’s ‘fuel’

hay burner (1920) US & Australian, jocular; from the notion of hay as the horse’s ‘fuel’
unknown • Bulletin (Sydney): With a board of 16 shearsers a jumbuck-barbering firm this season cut out 105,000 sheep. (1926)

placer (1921) Australian & New Zealand; applied to a sheep which remains in one place • S. J. Baker: Placers are often lambs whose mothers have died and who have transferred their affection to some object, such as a bush or stone. (1941)

Snakes

rattler (1827) Orig US; applied to a rattlesnake • Paul Theroux: I was moving round the room, hunched like a cowboy that hears a rattler. (1978)

Joe Blake (1905) Australian; rhyming slang for snake • Sunday Mail Magazine: We’ve camped . . . with the Joe Blakes, the goannas, the flies, and 4000 skinny jumbucks. (1970)

wriggler (1927) Australian • W. Watkins: ‘Let’s go in here and get the wriggler.’ ‘The men will be home soon.’ ‘Bugger the men . . . The snake will have gone by then.’ (1972)

A large animal

lunker (1912) North American; applied to an animal, especially a fish, which is an exceptionally large example of its species; origin unknown • Sports Afield: A bronzed lunker came out of the shadowy depths and smashed the pigskin. (1947)

A scraggy animal

hat-rack (1935) From the resemblance of the protruding ribs and other bones to the pegs of a hat-rack • Roy Campbell: One trick is to deprive a hatrack of an old horse of water, and let him have a good lick of salt. (1957)
Sustenance and Intoxication

1. Foodstuffs

Food

grub (1659) Perhaps from the notion of grubs (larvae) as birds’ food. George II: On the table were grubs the like of which I’m sure have never been seen on this isle. (1855)

eats (1841) Plural of earlier obsolete eat food, from the verb eat. J. P. Donleavy: On the table were eats the like of which I’m sure have never been seen on this isle. (1955)

scoff (1846) Orig South African; from Afrikaans skaf, from Dutch schoft, a medley or assortment, from the verb tuck consume (as in to tuck away, to tuck in). J. P. Donleavy: On the table were eats the like of which I’m sure have never been seen on this isle. (1955)

tucker (1850) Australian & New Zealand; from the verb tuck consume (as in to tuck away, to tuck in). S. Locke Elliott: We’ve all been out our tucker with the worry. (1977)

chow (1856) Short for chow<how a medley or assortment, from Pidgin English (Indian and Chinese); popularly (but probably erroneously) associated with the use of the chow (the edible dog of China) as food by poor Chinese. Charles Barrett: Chameleons are insectivorous and get their own mungaree (food). (1942)

tuck (1857) Schools’ slang, dated; from earlier sense, a hearty meal, from the verb tuck consume (as tucker). Thomas Hughes: The Slogger looks rather sodden, as if he didn’t take much exercise and ate too much tuck. (1857)

pound and pint (1865) British naval slang, dated; applied to a sailor’s ration (according to Board of Trade regulations)

jock (1879) Orig dialect; origin unknown. Peter Wright: Food becomes . . . jock . . . and contrasts oddly with officialese. (1974)

mungaree, munjari (1889) Dated; from Italian mangiare to eat. Charles Barrett: Chameleons are insectivorous and get their own mungaree (food). (1942)

stodge (1890) Applied to heavy, usually fattening food; from earlier sense, semi-solid, usually farinaceous food; compare independent dated slang sense, food. Milton Keynes Express: Remember that no exercise programme will work if not backed by sensible eating patterns, and cut out stodge from today. (1976)

munchie (1959) From the verb munch + -ie

stodge (1963) Applied to heavy, usually fattening food; from earlier sense, semi-solid, usually farinaceous food; compare independent dated slang sense, food. Milton Keynes Express: Remember that no exercise programme will work if not backed by sensible eating patterns, and cut out stodge from today. (1976)

munchies (1971) US; applied to a snack taken to relieve the ‘munchies’, hunger caused by taking marijuana

Bread

toke (1843) Dated; applied to (a slice of) bread; origin unknown. M. Kendon: Dripping . . . spread on ‘tokes’ was eaten for eleven o’clock lunch by schoolgirls for well nigh forty years. (1963)

needle and thread (1859) Dated; rhyming slang

slinger (1882) Mainly services’ slang; applied to bread soaked in tea; usually used in the plural

rooty (1883) Military slang; from Urdu, Hindi roti

doors-step (1885) British; applied to a thick slice of bread. Listener: Won’t you slice me a doorstep please? (1969)
punt (1891) Dated; from earlier sense, tinder made from wood • Joseph Gores: 'Punk and plaster?' 'You bet.' The waiter picked up his tray... (1975)
dodger (1897) Australian and services' slang: from US dodger hard-baked corn-cake; compare Northern England dialect dodge jump • Nino Culotta: Smack us in the eye with another hunk o' dodger. (1957)

Sandwiches

butty, buttie (1855) Orig Northern England dialect; from butt(er) + -y • Oxford Mail: The biggest jam butty in the world. (1965)
wad (1919) British, orig services' slang; also applied to a bun, cake, etc. • Gerald Kersh: I'm in a caff, getting a tea 'n' a wad. (1942)
dodger (1925) Services', dated; from earlier sense, bread
sanger, sango (1943) Australian; from alteration of sandw(ich) + -er, -o • Sunday Mail (Brisbane): A colleague went to order a chicken 'sanger' and decided to ask the serving lady why they seemed 'a little thin of late'. (1980)
BLT (1952) Orig US; abbreviation of bacon, lettuce and tomato; applied to a sandwich with this filling • US Air: He eats at his desk every day, sometimes dining on such delicacies as a hot dog or a BLT. (1989)
sarnie (1961) From colloquial and northern pronunciation of sandwich • Times: Questions like the protein content of bacon butties... and the vitamin rating
sambie, sammie (1976) Australian & New Zealand; from sam-, representing the pronunciation of sandwich + -ie • Barry Humphries: Some exciting sambies... an increasingly popular diminutive for 'sandwiches'. (1976)

Meat

salt horse (1836) Naval slang; applied to salted beef
red horse (1864) Orig military slang, dated; applied to corned beef
Fanny Adams (1889) British, naval slang; applied to tinned meat, and subsequently (1962) to meat stew; from the name of a young woman murdered c1867
tinned dog (1895) Applied to tinned meat • R. Ellis: Another frugal meal of 'tinned dog', a couple of flats to mend, and straight into our swags. (1982)
Harriet Lane (1896) Mainly nautical, dated; applied to preserved meat, especially Australian tinned meat; from the name of a famous murder victim • W. E. Dexter: On Sunday we were allowed 1 lb. of preserved meat, known as 'Harriet Lane'. (1939)

Maconochie (1901) British, services' slang, dated; applied to meat stewed with vegetables and tinned, especially as supplied to soldiers on active service; from the name of the makers of the tinned stew, Maconochie Brothers, of London • Gun Buster: He manages to scrape together two tins of Maconochie (stew), a tin of cold potatoes... and some 'issue biscuits'. (1940)

baby's head (1905) Applied to a steak (and kidney) pudding; perhaps from the round shape and pallid appearance of the pudding in its basin • Kenneth Giles: He went to the counter and ordered kidney soup and a baby's head and chips. (1967)

Kate and Sidney (1914) British; rhyming slang (and partial spoonerism) for steak and kidney • Marguerite Steen: Beefsteak pudding? Phew! A pity Johnny's not here, Mal! Remember how he used to go for your Kate and Sidney? (1949)
schooner on the rocks (1916) Naval slang; applied to a joint of meat roasted on potatoes (or in batter)

underground mutton (1919) Australian; applied to rabbit meat

Sausages

bags of mystery (1864) From the uncertain nature of the ingredients • John o' London's: The bags of mystery or links of love are sausages. (1962)

winny (1867) US; variant of wienie • Thomas Wolfe: Fortune out of winnies. They're hot, they're hot. (1929)
red-hot (1892) US; applied to a frankfurter or hot dog • Bernard Malamud: I got this redhot with mustard on it. (1971)

weenie, weeney, weenie (1906) US; anglicized spelling of wienie • Paul Theroux: Father said, '... I've got other weenies to roast.' And he went back to his maps. (1981)

wienie (1911) North American; applied to a type of smoked pork or beef sausage; from wiener such a sausage (short for Wienerwurst, from German Wienerwurst Viennese sausage) + -ie

banger (1919) Probably from the explosive noises made by frying sausages • Monica Dickens: The chap had bought him tea and bangers and mash. (1949)

frank (1925) Orig US; short for frankfurter • Washington Post: Safeway Skinless All Meat Franks. 2 lb. pkg. 99c. (1968)
sav (1936) Short for saveloy • Charles Drummond: Some home-made savs—not the shop kind. (1969)
snag (1941) Australian; probably from British dialect snag morsel! • Bulletin (Sydney): I make my own snags, my own pies and pasties. (1980)

starver (1941) Australian, dated; applied to a saveloy; apparently from their use as cheap food by the hungry and destitute during the Depression • D'Arcy Niland: I know what the things I eat cost me. Starvers, crumpets, stale cakes, speckled fruit, pies. (1959)
tub steak (1963) US, euphemistic; applied to a hot dog or frankfurter. □ Boston Globe. The food isn’t bad which is mainly tube steaks (hot dogs). (1978)

Fish

whales (1890) School and university slang; dated; applied to anchovies on toast. □ M. Cox: They were held at 9.45–10p.m. on Saturdays at the rooms of the readers of the papers, who provided coffee, a cup, and whales. (1983)

Spitehead pheasant (1948) British nautical; dated; applied to a kipper or bloater; Spitehead from the name of a British naval anchorage off Portsmouth.

Sausages

gippo, gippy, gyp(p)o, gypoo (1914) Mainly services’ slang; dated; applied to any greasy gravy or sauce; variant of dialect jipper gravy, dripping, stew.

red lead (1918) Naval slang; dated; applied to tomato ketchup.

red-eye (1927) US; applied to tomato ketchup.

mayo (1960) US; abbreviation of mayonnaise. □ Lilian Hellman: Run down to the corner and get me a ham and cheese on rye and tell them to hold the mayo. (1969)

Soup

slum (1847) Equivalent to slumgullion, and apparently an abbreviation of it.

shackles (1886) Applied to any broth, soup or stew; probably from shackle-bone knuckle-bone. □ Telegraph (Brisbane): Mr. Coppard records how one night he stumbled on a field kitchen and enjoyed a wonderful meal of shackles, a soup made up from leftovers. (1969)

slumgullion (1902) Mainly US; applied to a watery stew or hash; probably a fanciful formation. □ T. Walker: For want of a better word we call it slumgullion. (1976)

hoosh (1905) Dated; applied to a kind of thick soup; origin unknown.

Eggs

hen-fruit (1854) Mainly US, dated.

googie, also googie egg, googy (egg) (1904) Australian; from Scottish dialect googie child’s word for an egg. □ B. Dickens: Two holy eggcups … that once supported my daddy’s googy egg when he was a tin-lid. (1981)

goog (1941) Australian; abbreviation of googie. □ P. Barton: We half filled the tub with water, chucked in a handful of soap powder, and gingerly tipped in about 120 googs. (1981)

Cheese

mousetrap (1947) Applied to inferior or unpalatable cheese; from the use of such cheese to bait mousetraps. □ Observer: Although often dismissed as ‘mousetrap’, Cheddar is much the most popular cheese in Britain. (1975)

Butter and margarine

spread (1812) Dated; applied to butter. □ John Hotten: Spread, butter, a term with workmen and schoolboys. (1865)

marge, marg (1922) Abbreviation of margarine. □ John Betjeman: In quieter tones we asked in Hall that night Neighbours to pass the marge. (1960)

Maggie Ann, Maggy Anne, also maggy (1933) From the female personal names Maggie (familiar form of Margaret) and Ann, from their phonetic similarity to margarine (older pronunciation /ma:gari:n/). □ Dan Lees: Sam never paid him enough to put maggy on his bread. (1971)

Vegetables

veg (1918) Abbreviation. □ Economist. Treasury officials paying for their meat and two veg are rightly suspicious. (1984)

Potatoes

tater, tatie, tato, tattie, tatur, taty (1759) Originally dialectal variants of potato. □ Flora Thompson: Mother spent hours boiling up the ‘little tatars’. (1939)

murphy (1811) From the Irish surname Murphy; from the former prominence of the potato in the Irish diet.

spud (1845) From earlier sense, small narrow spade. □ Keith Weatherly: Some sugar, tea and a few spuds and onions formed the rest of their supplies. (1968)

Beans and peas


Salad

rabbit food, rabbit’s food (1936) Applied disparagingly to lettuce or other green salad vegetables; from their prominence in the diet of pet rabbits. □ Anthony Price: You can both come back with me and eat pounds of rabbit food. (1972)

Tomatoes


Gooseberries

goosegog (1823) Alteration of gooseberry; -gog is an alteration of gob lump. □ Bernard Kops: Redcurrants and black-currants and golden goosegogs. (1959)

Cakes

pufterlooner (1853) Australian; applied to a type of scone made of dough and fried in fat; from the way it ‘pufts’ up during cooking.

sinker (1880) Orig US; dated; applied to a doughnut or dumpling; perhaps from their sinking into the fat or liquid when cooking.

Edna Ferber: The coffee was hot, strong, revivifying; the sinkers crisp and fresh. (1926)
tabnab (1933) Nautical; applied to a cake, bun, or pastry, or to a savoury snack; origin unknown
- Kyri Bonfiglioli: My favourite ‘tabnab’ was... a little fried potato-cake with a morsel of kani’d mutton inside. (1978)

Biscuits

squashed fly (biscuit) (1900) Applied to a garibaldi biscuit; from the appearance of the currants in the biscuits.
- C. Lithgow: In ‘the break’, they grated for their milk and bun, or ‘squashed-fly’ biscuit. (1931)

Puddings

pud (1914) Abbreviation; applied to savoury as well as sweet puddings

frog-spawn (1959) British; applied disparagingly by children to tapioca or sago pudding

Sweets

sucker (1823) Orig dialectal; applied to a sweet consumed by sucking, often specifically a lollipop
- Islander (Victoria, British Columbia): The small children eagerly hunted suckers that had been hidden in a large hay wagon. (1971)

choc (1874) Abbreviation of chocolate
- Andrew York: He comes up to me one day when I was getting after the chocs and says, ‘Rhoda, it’s me or them chocolates. Take your pick.’ (1966)

pogey bait (1918) US; applied to sweets or more broadly to any snack; perhaps from pogy a North American herring

chewy, chewie (1924) Australian; applied to chewing gum
- McDonald & Harding: The easiest to prepare, cheap as mud to buy, and the slowest to eat, is a couple of pieces of chewy. (1976)

gob-stopper (1928) British; applied to a very large, hard, usually spherical sweet; from gob mouth, from its speech-inhibiting size

chutty, chuddy (1941) Australian & New Zealand; applied to chewing gum; origin unknown
- Noel Hilliard: ‘Better have some chuddy,’ said Tom. (1960)

nutty (1947) Naval slang; applied to chocolates and other sweets
- John Hale: Their Christmas presents and their nutty and cigarette rations. (1964)

Miscellaneous

parson’s nose (1839) Applied to the fatty extremity of a fowl’s rump; formerly also known as the pope’s nose (1796)

slider (1915) Applied to a portion of ice-cream served between two wafers

train smash (1941) Nautical; applied to cooked tinned tomatoes, usually with bacon

spag (1948) Abbreviation of spaghetti
- Southey: I’ll shout you a plate of steak and spag. (1969)

spaggers, spadgers (1960) British; from spag (hatti + -ers)
- Iris Murdoch: ‘You said you were tired of spaghetti and potatoes—’ ‘Spuds and spadgers fill you up at least.’ (1980)

sac, sacch (1961) Abbreviation of saccharine
- Elleston Trevor: Sacch. You couldn’t get them down there. (1968)

za (1968) US; abbreviation of pizza
- Verbatim: One of the boys called up and asked the parlor to bag the za (meaning ‘cancel the pizza’). (1983)

spag bol (1970) Abbreviation of spaghetti Bolognese

Beverages

skilly (1927) Applied to an insipid beverage, especially coffee or tea; from earlier sense, thin porridge or soup; abbreviation of obsolete slang skilligate thin porridge or soup, probably a fanciful formation
- John Masefield: A cup of skilly completed the repast. (1953)

Tea

split pea (1857) Dated; rhyming slang
- Sheila Kaye-Smith: I’ll make you a nice cup of split pea. (1931)

gun-fire (1912) Army slang, dated; applied to an early-morning cup of tea served to troops before going on first parade; from the firing of the morning gun at the start of the day
- Gun Buster: ‘Dawn just breaking, sir,’ he affirmed, shoving into my hands a mug of hot ‘gunfire’. (1940)

char, cha (1919) British; from Chinese cha
- Howard Spring: I thought of the thousands of cups o’ char that batmen had produced at moments like this. (1955)

Rosy (Lee), Rosie (Lee), and with small r (and l) (1925) British; rhyming slang
- Allan Prior: This is the best cup of rosy I get all day. Janey. (1964)

sergeant-major, sergeant-major’s (1925) British; military slang; applied to strong sweet tea, or to tea with rum; usually used attributively, designating this; from the notion that such tea is the prerogative of sergeant-majors; compare the earlier obsolete US military slang sense, coffee with cream or milk and sugar
- John Wainwright: This tea... it damn near dissolved the spoon. A real ‘sergeant-major’ brew. The way tea should be made. (1981)

cuppa (1934) British; representing a colloquial pronunciation of cup of, used elliptically for cup of tea
- Germaine Greer: Barbara Castle dealt with [it] by the disgusting expedient of having a cuppa with the women and talking it over heart to heart. (1970)

splash (1960) British; presumably from the sound of tea being poured noisily
- Celia Dale: Look, I gotta get to work.... Give ‘er a cup of splash. (1964)

Coffee

mud (1925) Nino Culotta: Got another cuppa mud, Joe? (1957)
Sustenance and Intoxication

2. Eating & Drinking

To consume

eck (1514) Dated: applied especially to drinking; from the notion of pouring something down one's neck. 
John Masefield: I do wish . . . you'd chuck necking Scotch the way you do. (1929)
guzzle (1579) Used to suggest greedy eating or drinking; perhaps from Old French gosier, vomit, or Old French gosier, throat, from Late Latin gavestia cheeks. 
Benjamin Disraeli: Guzzling his venison pasties. (1826)
stuff oneself (1585) Used to suggest eating to repletion. 
G. H. Lorimer: [He] stuffed himself till his hide went stretched as tight as a sausage skin. (1903)
eat like a horse (1707) Used to suggest ravenous eating.

snack (1807) Used to denote the eating of small amounts between or instead of meals; from the noun snack. 
Radio Times: There are three meals a day, 'more or less regular, with no snacking in between'. (1978)
tuck in, tuck into (1810) Used to suggest heartily beginning to eat or drink. 
Edna Lyall: It takes me an hour to get outside the mixed grill and the ice-cream and coffee. (1967)
egut (1560) Used to suggest greedy eating or gormandizing. 
Kylie Tennant: 'Gusying again, Briscoe?' she reproved. (1943)
dig in (1912) Used to suggest heartily beginning to eat or drink; from earlier sense, set to work energetically. 
A. Baron: Sit down and dig in. Your grub's getting cold. (1952)
hoe in, hoe into (1935) Used to suggest heartily beginning to eat or drink; from earlier sense, set to work energetically. 
I. L. Idriess: The local cow... took a lick; fancied the salty taste and hoed in for breakfast. (1972)
feed (or stuff) one's face (1939) Used to suggest excessive or impolite eating. 
Louise Erdrich: I had a desperate hungry craving. I kept pouring it in and feeding my face fast as I could. (1984)

from the bottle

archie hill: We sat in the stern drinking the pop, trying to count the bubbles as they rose behind our noses. (1976)
polly (1852) Abbreviation of Apollinaris, an effervescent mineral water from Apollinarisburg in the Rhineland. 
D. Kyle: 'Soda? Apollinaris?' 'Whisky and Polly . . . I haven't had one in years.' It becomes increasingly difficult to cope by. (1973)
fizz (1889) Applied to an effervescent drink. 
Gillian Freeman: I'll 'ave a coke. . . No I won't, I 'ave a raspberry fizz. (1955)
spider (1941) Australian: applied to a soft drink with ice-cream floating on it; compare earlier sense, brandy mixed with lemonade

horse

P. G. Wodehouse: I must rush. I'm putting on the nosebag with a popsy. (1973)

put away (1878) 
Graham Greene: Between us we can probably put away half a bottle of vodka. (1969)
go (c1882) Used especially in the phrase I, you, etc. could go (a particular drink or food). 
David Ballantyne: I could go a good feed of eels just now. (1948)

get outside (of) (1886) 
D. Campbell: It takes me an hour to get outside the mixed grill and the ice-cream and coffee. (1967)

shift (1896) 
Willie Russell: Although his speech is not slurred, we should recognize the voice of a man who shifts a lot of booze. (1981)
mug up (1897) Mainly Canadian and nautical; denoting eating a large meal, or having a snack, a meal, or a hot drink. 
Lyn Hancock: We... mugged up on boiled eggs, toast, jam, and coffee. (1972)
guts (1903) Used to suggest greedy eating or gormandizing. 
I. L. Idriess: The local cow... took a lick; fancied the salty taste and hoed in for breakfast. (1972)

food

Mug up on boiled eggs, toast, jam, and coffee. (1972)

joe (1941) North American; origin unknown. 
Ed McBain: "Would you like some coffee?" Carella asked. "Is there some?" "Sure. . . Can we get two cups of joe?" (1963)

java (1945) From earlier sense, Javan coffee. 
Herbert Gold: Lots a guys come in for chatter and java; friend. (1956)

Cocoa, drinking chocolate

kye (1943) Nautical; origin unknown. 
Times: Kye, from the service names drinking chocolate, is to end. (1968)

Soft drinks

pop (1812) Applied to an effervescent drink; from the sound made when the stopper is removed

Sustenance and Intoxication
nosh (1957) Applied to eating, and often (US) specifically to eating between meals; from Yiddish; compare German naschen to nibble, eat on the sly. • Time: The politician, equipped with a towel and the fixed Smile, gobs mortar on a cornerstone, or noshes his way along the campaign trail. (1970) • Charles Drummond: The Sergeant... morosely noshed the veal-and-ham pie. (1972)

scarf (1960) US; used to denote eating greedily; variant of scoff. • Richard Condon: Let's... scarf up some of that osso bucco. (1976)

pig out (1978) Orig and mainly US; used to denote overindulgence by eating and drinking. • Jane Fonda: Troy and Vanessa... pig out for days on leftover Halloween candy. (1981)

To drink

slurp (1648) Used to denote drinking noisily; from Dutch slurpen. • Richmond Times-Dispatch: The stars just whirl in... slurp a cup of coffee and zoom out again. (1947)

swig (c1654) Used to denote drinking deeply; from the noun swig drink, draught, of unknown origin.

An eater

nosh (1957) From the verb nosh eat. • Sunday Times: Gourmet foods to salivate the palates of jaded British noshers. (1974)

An overeater

gannet (1929) Orig naval slang; from the name of the sea-bird, renowned as a great eater. • Paul Tempest: The bet may be on how many plates of porridge one 'gannet' can put away at a sitting. (1950)

pig (1942) Often in the phrase make a pig of oneself eat gluttonously. • Guardian: We had made pigs of ourselves on the bread. (1979)

dustbin (1959) Used to denote a greedy and indiscriminate eater. • Nina Bawden: It's all his own fault. He's been stuffing his face ever since he left London. Greedy pig. Dustbin. (1973)

guzzle-guts (1959) British

Dietary preferences

veggie, veggy (1975) Shortened form of vegetarian; sometimes derogatory. • City Limits: Built on a solid base of traditional veggie dishes like nut roasts... it doesn't seem to be living up to its reputation. (1986)

Meals

elevenses (1887) Applied to light refreshment taken at about 11 a.m.; from eleven - ses; compare earlier obsolete elevens and elever in the same sense. • Liliput: On the desk in front of him was a cup of coffee and some sandwiches. 'Elevenenses,' he said. (1951)

brekker (1889) British, orig university slang; from break (fast + -er). • John Paddy Carstairs: I complained of an undesirable brekker kipper. (1965)

bite (1899) Applied to a small meal or a snack; from earlier sense, food to eat. • C. Carnac: I... had a bite with my friend at the fish and chips stall. (1959)

soupy, soupie (1899) US, military slang; applied to a meal or to a summons to a meal; from soup + -y. • Stars & Stripes: I say 'Yum yum' when 'soupie' blows. (1918)

hash-up (1902) Applied to a hastily cooked meal; from previous sense, a reworking

brekkie, brekky (1904) British; orig children's slang; from break (fast + -y). • Private Eye: I don't reckon I feel like brekkie! (1969)

sit-down (1919) North American, tramps' slang; dined; applied to a free sit-down meal

mug-up (1933) Mainly Canadian and nautical; applied to a snack, a meal, or a drink; from the verb mug up have a meal, etc. • R. Price: Occasionally they stopped for mug-up. (1970)

fry-up (1967) Applied to a quickly made dish or meal prepared by frying, often of cold cooked food. • John Wainwright: Then lunch. More often than not a 'fry-up'—I became a dab hand with a frying pan. (1969)

Chinkey, Chinkie, Chinky (1985) Applied to a meal in or from a Chinese restaurant; probably from earlier sense, Chinese restaurant

A large or over-large meal

blow-out (1821) From the notion of being expanded or 'blown out' by a large amount of food. • Rosamund Lehmann: Have a nice blowout and a good sleep afterwards. (1930)

spread (1822) From the notion of food generously 'spread' out on a table. • Henry Vizetelly: He... was a constant attendant at these little spreads. (1883)

tuck-in (1886) From the verb tuck in eat heartily; compare earlier obsolete tuck-out in the same sense

beano (1888) Printers' abbreviation of beanfeast, which originally denoted an annual dinner given to employees by their employer (at which beans and bacon used to be regarded as an indispensable dish)

slap-up (1889) British; used to denote a large and splendid meal; from earlier more general sense, first-class. • Lancashire Life: There was a slap-up tea at the institute. (1977)

nosh-up (1979) British; from the verb nosh eat. • Alfred Draper: Like most birds she didn't want to lose out on a nosh-up. (1970)

pig-out (1979) Orig US; applied to a bout of excessive eating; from the verb pig out. • Chicago Tribune: Favorite pig out food: Turkey. In fact, I love the whole Thanksgiving dinner. (1989)

Food distribution, preparation, cooking, and serving

whip up (1849) Used to denote the speedy preparation of a dish or meal; from whip
thicken a liquid by beating

rabbit-o, rabbit-oh (1902) Australian; applied to a travelling seller of rabbit-meat

iron (1905) Mainly services' slang; applied to eating utensils

slung hash (1906) US; used to denote waiting at tables; back-formation from hash-slinger waiter

slum-gun (1917) Military slang; applied to a place-setting at a restaurant

soup gun (1918) US military slang; applied to a mobile army kitchen

me-and-you (1932) Jocular; applied to a menu; adaptation of colloquial pronunciation /miːnju:/ of menu

set-up (1934) US; applied to a place-setting at a restaurant

shackle-up (1935) Dated; applied to an act of making food in a pot; origin uncertain; compare shackles soup or stew

eighty-six (1936) US; used in restaurants and bars to indicate that the supply of an item has run out, or that a customer is not to be served; also applied to a customer to be refused service; probably rhyming slang for nix, used to denote refusal

spud-bashing (1940) British, orig services' slang; applied to (a lengthy spell of) peeling potatoes

barbie (1976) Orig Australian; abbreviation of barbecue

nuke (1987) Mainly US; used to denote the cooking or heating of food in a microwave oven

Dutching (1989) British; applied to the practice of sending food destined for the UK market for irradiation abroad (usually in the Netherlands), to mask any bacterial contamination before it is put on sale; from Dutch + -ing

to go (1946) US; used of cooked food sold in a restaurant or shop, to denote that it is to be taken away and eaten elsewhere

A second helping of food

seconds (1792) New Zealand; applied especially to a cook who is good at cooking but I'll try. 'Never you mind about that. Up north we've got the best poisoners in the country.'

Preparation and serving of drinks

brow up (1916) Used to denote the making of tea

doctor (1821) Applied to a ship's cook and also to a travelling seller of rabbit-meat

drum up (1923) Used to denote the making of tea in a billy-can, etc., and also the preparation of a makeshift meal; from drum can used for this

slum (1943) Australian; probably short for gash, the crew called it. (1972)
works on a sheep station, army camp, etc.; babbling brook rhyming slang for cook; babbler short for babbling brook ■ Weekly News (Auckland): We worked it out that the old babbler made 112,000 rock cakes during those four months. (1963) ■ Sunday Mail (Brisbane): Local good cooks asked for the recipe, but minds bogged at the quantities the army's babbling-brook recited for their benefit. (1981)

slum burner (1930) Military slang; applied to an army cook; from slum watery stew + burner ■ M. Hargrove: Oscar of the Waldorf, in the Army, would still be . . . a slum burner. (1943)

spud barber (1935) Jocular; applied to a potato peeler ■ G. Foulser: The galley-boy [was] just a spudbarber after all. (1961)

bab (1936) Australian & New Zealand; short for babbling brook cook ■ Bulletin (Sydney): The bab's present rate for cooking for more than seven is £14 4s. 11d. (1959)

Waiting and kitchen staff

hash-slinger (1868) US; applied to a waiter or waitress; from hash food ■ American Speech: The cooks and 'hash-slingers' of former years went off to war or to the shipyards. (1946)

biscuit-shooter (1893) US; applied to a waitress or sometimes to a waiter

pearl diver (1913) Orig US; applied to someone who works as a dishwasher in a café or restaurant

hasher (1916) US; applied to a waiter or waitress; from hash food + -er ■ Listener: When it came to making an impression on the 'hashers' in the railroad 'beaneries', the boomers really let themselves go. (1960)

Nippy (1925) British; dated; applied originally to a waitress in any of the restaurants of J. Lyons & Co. Ltd. in London, and hence to any waitress; from nippy quick ■ G. V. Galwey: His hands stuck out in front of him like a Nippy carrying a tray. (1948)

cookie-pusher (1936) US; applied to a waitress

Eating places and food shops

beanery (1887) US; applied to a cheap restaurant, originally one where beans were served ■ Ernest Hemingway: Inside the door of the beanery Scripps O'Neil looked around him. (1933)

hash-joint (1895) US; applied to a cheap eating place, boarding house, etc.; from hash dish of recooked meat ■ John Dos Passos: Passing the same Chink hashjoint for the third time. (1930)

eatery (1901) Orig US; from eat + -ery ■ Times: His inability to make contact with a really good hunk of beefsteak in the eateries of Germany, Italy and France. (1930)

one-arm joint (1915) US; applied to a cheap restaurant in which customers support their plates on a widened chair-arm; based on earlier one- arm lunch room

nosh, also nosh bar, nosh-house (1917) From Yiddish; compare German naschen to

nibble, eat on the sly ■ Colin Macinnnes: After a quick bite at a Nosh, and two strong black coffees, I felt up to the ordeal. (1959)

greasy spoon (1918) Orig US; applied to a cheap and inferior eating place ■ Time: They [sc. the Marx brothers] . . . ate in coffee pots and greasy spoons. (1951)

caff (1931) British; colloquial anglicization of café ■ Sunday Times Magazine: In 1979 . . . the Sunday Times Magazine ran a fearful article predicting the demise of the working man's caff. (1991)

pull-in (1938) Applied to a roadside café or refreshment stand at which vehicles can 'pull in' ■ John Wainwright: A blue and white sign warned five miles to the next service area. . . . 'They'll be at the next pull-in.' (1973)

deli (c1954) Orig & mainly US; abbreviation of delicatessen ■ Guardian: The deli on the corner may serve delicious tagliatelle, but is not trying to serve it to millions of people. (1991)

chippy, chippie (1961) British; applied to a fish-and-chip shop; from chip + -y ■ Listener: In the industrial towns the housewife . . . found that time, labour, and money were saved by the chippie. (1965)

noshery (1963) Applied to a restaurant or snackbar; from nosh eat + -ery ■ Kenneth O'Hara: The place I'm thinking of for lunch . . . has the reputation of a very superior noshery. (1972)

tratt, tratt (1969) Abbreviation of trattoria ■ Guardian: Mostly I mean the white-tiled trattas of SW1, 3 and 7. (1970)

Chinkey. Chinkie, Chinky (1985) Probably orig Scottish; applied to a Chinese restaurant; first recorded in 1985, but in use since at least the late 1960s; from earlier sense, Chinese person ■ Irvine Welsh: Three guys stagger oot ay a pub and into a Chinky. (1993)

Hungry

peckish (1785) From the notion of being disposed to 'peck' at food ■ Jerome K. Jerome: You're a bit peckish too, I expect. (1988)

starving (1882) ■ James Kelman: It was grub as well right enough he was starving, totally starving. Plus there was fuck all in the house bar a box of weetabix. (1994)

could eat a horse (1936) ■ C. George: 'Shall I put the pasta on now?' 'Please do!' He leaned against the doorjamb, his hair brushing the lintel. 'I could eat a horse, Madame Chef.' (1991)

Thirsty

dry (c1536) Originally in standard use, but considered colloquial since the late 19th century

spit chips (1901) Australian; denoting extreme thirst; from the notion of having dry wood in one's mouth and throat ■ Alan Marshall: I was spitting chips. God, I was dry! (1946)
3. Alcohol

Alcoholic drink

booz(e) (c1325) From the verb booz drink alcohol
T. S. Eliot: ‘We’re goin’ sit here and drink this booz. (1932)

tipple (1581) In modern usage mainly used to denote a particular person’s habitual alcoholic drink; from the verb tipple drink alcohol Daily Mail He presented her with a picture showing her with a gin and tonic, her favourite tipple. The Queen burst out laughing. (1991)

grog (1804) Often applied specifically to beer; from earlier sense, drink of rum (or other spirits) and water; ultimately perhaps from Old Grog, a nickname (from his habit of wearing a program (= type of coarse cloth) cloak) of Admiral Edward Vernon (1684–1757), who in 1740 ordered the introduction of such a drink in the Royal Navy in place of neat spirit Centralian Advocate (Alice Springs): Mr Forrester agreed that the main ‘grog problem’ on the town camps was caused by the licensed stores. (1986)

poison (1805) Jocular, orig US; mainly in the phrases name one’s poison and What’s your poison? used to ask someone what they would like to drink Mark Twain: In Washoe, when you are ... invited to take ‘your regular poison’, etiquette admonishes you to touch glasses. (1866)

juice (1828) Mainly US R. Russell: ‘Nuthin’ at all like juice, either,’ Hassan said. ‘No hangover.’ (1961)

alky, alchy, alki(e) (1844) Orig and mainly US; often applied specifically to illicit liquor or to whisky; from al(c)ohol + -y R. & J. Paterson: All they [sc: bootleggers] need is a shack and a can of alky. (1970)

tiddly, tiddley (1859) Dated; origin uncertain; compare obsolete rhyming slang tiddlywink drink E. V. Lucas: It wasn’t oysters that she really wanted, but ... tiddly. (1930)

neck-oil (1860) Jocular; often applied specifically to beer Private Eye: A chance encounter ... leads Barry to consume a lot of nice neck-oil. (1970)

turps (1865) Australian; applied especially to beer; used mainly in the phrase on the turps; from earlier sense, turpentine S. Thome: Dan was a good bloke, but a terror on the turps. Once he started on rum—look out! (1980)

nose paint (1880) Jocular; from the reddening effect on the nose American Speech: He [sc: the cowman] drinks ... nose paint instead of ‘whisky’. (1968)

rabbit (1895) Dated; Australian; mainly in the phrase run the rabbit take drink (illegally) from a public house, especially after hours

stagger juice (1896) Jocular, orig Australian Wynnnum: ‘These two bowls of punch look exciting’ ... ‘Well now, that one ... is our customary Stagger Juice.’ (1962)

shicker, shiker, shikker (1901) Australian & New Zealand; often in the phrase on the shicker; from the adjective shicker drunk Kings Cross

Whisper (Sydney): Surfers Paradise beer garden, where everyone got on the shicker. (1966)

shick (1907) Australian & New Zealand; shortening of shicker

skimish (1908) From Shelta xkimis to drink, xkimis drunk James Curtis: He had been drinking all that skimish without having had a bite to eat. (1936)

white line (1914) Dated US Flynn’s: All we could glow was a shot of white line. (1926)

jollop (1920) Probably from jollop medicine (not recorded until later) Colin Willock: ‘Tell ’em up at the house to bring out the jollop.’ The keeper uttered this in a tone that made it quite clear that he considered serving refreshment something completely outside his duties. (1961)

giggle-water (1926), giggle-juice (1939) Jocular, orig US; often applied specifically to champagne Gilbert Harkforth-Jones: Drop o’ gin’ll go down nicely on top of that giggle-water [sc: champagne cocktails]. (1946)

sting (1927) Australian J. de Hoog: You can share a bottle of sting (methylated spirits) down a lane. (1972)

panther juice, panther’s piss, panther sweat (1929) Mainly US; applied especially to spirits distilled illicitly or locally William Gaddis: Yeah? Well did you ever drink panther piss? the liquid fuel out of torpedoes? (1955)

River Ouse, River Ooze (1931) Rhyming slang for booz Robin Cook: The place still bulging with smoke and river ooz. (1962)

wallop (1933) Mainly applied to beer; perhaps from earlier sense, bubbling of boiling liquid Lynton Lamb: Mrs Tyler could do nothing to improve the wallop she served at the Hurdlemakers [Inn]. (1972)

sauce (1940) Orig US William Trevor: ‘You often get loonies in joints like that,’ he remarked on the street. ‘They drink the sauce and it softens their brains for them.’ (1976)

jungle juice (1942) Jocular, orig Australian G. Dutton: The Americans had two bottles of bourbon and one of jungle juice made from fermented coconut milk and surgical alcohol. (1968)

smash (1959) North American; applied especially to wine American Speech: Let’s get in the wind and belt some smash. (1975)

joy-juice (1960) US Black World: He could hear the others as in a dream, laughing, telling dirty jokes, playing cards and swizzling joy-juice. (1974)


A drink

wet (1719)

slug (1762) Now mainly US; applied to a drink of spirits Louis Heren: Their simple niceness was almost
as good as a slug of scotch and a cigarette which I... could not enjoy in their company. (1978)

nobbler (1842) Australian; applied to a drink or glass of spirits; from noble drug a racehorse or obsolete noble hit + -er ■ Walkabout: Whisky costs around 300 rupees, or some 75 cents, for a generous nobbler. (1971)

sniffet (1884) Orig US; applied usually to a small drink of spirits; from dialect sniff sniff + -er ■ P. G. Wodehouse: And now, old horse, you may lead me across the street to the Cool Hole for a short sniffet. (1924)

pony (1849) Applied to a small glass or measure of alcohol ■ G. Hamilton: Os pulled a beer each for me and Tommy, and a pony for himself. He always drank small beers. (1959)

peg (1864) Mainly Anglo-Indian; often applied specifically to a drink of brandy and soda; from the pegs or markers in a drinking-vessel ■ F. M. Crawford: Trial... who could absorb the most 'pegs'—those vile concoctions of spirits, ice, and sodawater. (1883)

stiffener (1864) Orig Australian; from its reviving effects ■ Gladys Mitchell: I'll buy you a stiffener in the bar. (1973)

nip (1869) Applied to a small drink of spirits; from earlier obsolete sense, half-pint of beer; ultimately probably short for obsolete nipperkin small measure for liquors, of unknown origin

spot (1885) Applied to a small alcoholic drink ■ P. G. Wodehouse: May I offer you a spot?... I can recommend the Scotch. (1936)

half (1888) Applied to a half-pint of beer

bevvy, bevie, bevy (1889) British; usually applied specifically to a drink of beer; from beverage + -y ■ Philip Allingham: 'I think this calls for a bevvy,' I said, and we walked off to the nearest pub together. (1934)

gargle (1889) ■ Guardian: 'Copy of the Boss's Wit and Wisdom, old boy,' he said, presenting a neatly typed replica of the non-election address. 'Come and have a gargle.' (1987)

snort (1889) Orig US; applied to a small drink of spirits; from the notion of the later drink

spot (1885) Applied to a small alcoholic drink ■ P. G. Wodehouse: May I offer you a spot?... I can recommend the Scotch. (1936)

half (1888) Applied to a half-pint of beer

speedball (1926) US; applied to a glass of wine, specifically one strengthened with additional alcohol

quick one (1928) Applied to a drink intended to be taken quickly ■ Gwen Moffat: Ken Maynard came into the cocktail lounge... 'Just in time for a quick one. Two lagers, please.' (1976)

refill (1929) Applied to a second or further drink ■ Rolling Stone: She lets go with a loud, decidedly unsentimental laugh that startles a room-service waiter trying to set down refills on a coffee table hopelessly cluttered with empty glasses and Heineken bottles. (1977)

shorty, shortie (1931) Orig US; applied to a small drink of spirits ■ Freedomways: Yarborough... yelled, 'Bartender. Give the professor another shorty of gin there.' (1963)

rosiner (1932) Irish & Australian; applied to a stirf drink of spirits; from resin type of resin + -er ■ H. D. Brockman: I've not had a solitary spot since four. I need a rosiner. (1947)

tank (1936) Applied to the amount held by a drinking glass, and hence loosely to a drink, especially of beer; probably an abbreviation of tankard, but compare tank up get drunk and tanked drunk ■ Spectator: Their carousals over a few friendly tanks at the neighbouring Whitehall milk bar. (1958)

for one in the road (1943) Applied to a drink taken before leaving ■ J. Blackburn: 'What about giving me one for the road, my dear?' He gulped down the remains of the sherry. (1972)

sippers (1944) British, naval slang; applied to a sip of rum, especially taken from another's tot, as a reward for some service or in celebration; from sip + -ers ■ H. Tunstall-Behrens: A bottle appeared sold over the bar cost four dollars. (1974)

middy (1945) Australian; applied to a medium-sized measure of beer, or a similar quantity of another drink; from mid middle + -y ■ K. Cook: 'Middy of rum, Mick,' said the youth. ... Ten ounces of rum sold over the bar cost four dollars. (1974)
the office copy (1946) Naval slang, jocular; applied to a second or return drink

shant (1960) From earlier sense, a (quart) pot of drink; ultimate origin uncertain; compare Australian & New Zealand shanty (unlicensed pub) ▪ News Chronicle: We did not want to roll anybody but we had a few shants and I always get a bit garritty then. (1960)

pen and ink (1963) Australian & New Zealand; rhyming slang ▪ J. Alard: Are ya gonna have a pen an' ink? (1968)

shooter (1971) US; applied to a measure or drink of spirits, especially whisky ▪ Wilson McCarthy: Let's have a shooter and a beer. (1973)

A drink taken to instil courage

Dutch courage (1826) From earlier sense, (false) courage produced by drinking alcohol; from the Dutch origins of gin as drunk to steady the nerves ▪ D. Clement & I. la Frenais: The bride gulped Dutch courage with a couple of lorry driving mates. (1978)

Poor-quality drink

rot-gut (1633) ▪ Eugene O'Neill: That isn't Phil'srotgut. That's real, honest-to-God bonded Bourbon. (1952)

firewater (1826) Applied to any strong spirit; originally attributed to North American Indians; latterly used jocularly ▪ Paul Ablema: I am not a teetotaller but I always use the firewater cautiously. (1991)

popskull (1867) North American ▪ American Speech: Distillers never refer to a still coil as a 'worm', as did the bootleggers who manufactured popskull and rotgut during Prohibition. (1946)

snake juice (1890) Mainly Australian; applied especially to inferior whisky ▪ Southernly: Ironbark . . . went into the poison shop. Old Nick handed him a glass of snake juice. (1962)

hooch, hootch (1897) Orig and mainly North American; applied mainly to illicitly distilled whisky or other spirits; abbreviation of Alaskan Hoochinoo name of a liquor-making tribe ▪ New Yorker: The people of the city were prepared to swallow any old hootch under the rule of some wild thirst. (1969)

shypoo, shipoo (1897) Australian; applied especially to inferior beer; origin unknown ▪ N. Bartlett: You could get drunk, at Cossack's other pub, on Colonial ale or 'shypoo' at sixpence the quart. (1954)

pink-eye (1900) Mainly Australian & Canadian; probably an alteration of pinky inferior wine, but also with some allusion to the drink's effect on the drinker ▪ Coast to Coast: Better put that bottle away. . . . If the trooper comes round somebody'll be getting into trouble for selling Charley pinkeye again. (1941)

screech (1902) North American

gut-rot (1916) ▪ Samuel Beckett: The customer . . . was paying for his gutrot ten times what it cost to produce. (1938)

lunatic soup (1933) Australian & New Zealand ▪ Transair: They went about destroying themselves with the lunatic soup chipping their larynx as surely as if they'd downed an economy size tin of paint stripper. (1986)

scrap iron (1942) US ▪ Washington Post: A trio of investigators warned the drinking public yesterday to beware of a new bootleg concoction, 'scrap iron', noted more for its voltage than vintage. (1958)

King Kong (1946) US dated; from the name of the ape-like monster featured in the film King Kong (1933)

Sneaky Pete (1949) Orig and mainly US; often applied specifically to illicit liquor ▪ J. H. Jones: He walked around an unconscious Sneaky Pete drinker. (1971)

gnat’s piss, gnats’ piss (1959) Often applied specifically to weak or insipid beer ▪ B. S. Johnson: Where’d you get this gnatspiss from, Maurie? . . . I can get you gnatspiss as good as this gnatspiss for sixteen bob a bottle. (1963)

Illicitly distilled or irregularly concocted liquor

sly grog (1825) Australian; applied to alcoholic drink sold by an unlicensed vendor ▪ W. Dick: We were on our way to the sly grog joint to buy a dozen bottles. (1969)

moon (1928) US; short for moonshine ▪ Saturday Evening Post: I would buy a couple of pints of moon. (1950)

smoke (1940) US; applied to a cheap drink based on raw alcohol, methylated spirit, solvent, etc.; from earlier sense, cheap whisky ▪ Washington Post: It was the smoke that made Heaton a loner and junk peddler in the demolition jungles of the Southwest area. (1959)

steam (1941) Australian & New Zealand; applied to cheap wine laced with methylated spirit ▪ T. A. G. Hungerford: I’ve got a bottle of steam in my room—I think I’ll have a snort and turn in. (1953)

torp (1945) Short for torpedo juice ▪ J. Bryan: Someone brought a pint of torp. (1945)

torpedo juice (1946) Applied to intoxicating drink extracted from torpedo fuel, and hence to any strong home-made alcoholic liquor

See also hooch (p. 144), panther juice (p. 142), Sneaky Pete (p. 144).

Types of alcoholic drink: Beer

swipes, swyipes (1796) Dated; originally applied to weak inferior beer, and hence to beer in general; perhaps from the verb swipe in the obsolete sense 'swig' ▪ George Meredith: You may get as royally intoxicated on swipes as on choice wine. (1895)

heavy wet (1821), heavy (1823) heavy now applied in Scotland to a particular type of bitter beer ▪ Independent: Bob Sutherland swigs his fifth pint of 'heavy', knocks it back with a rum chaser. (1991)

she-oak (1848) Australian, dated; applied to Australian-brewed beer; origin uncertain; presumably connected with she-oak type of casuarina, but the reason is unclear (a late 19th-century source claims that there was at one time a brewery on She Oak Hill in Hobart.
Tasmania) • T. C. Wollaston: Each would take a pull from the jug of 'sheoak' between them. (1914)

pig's ear (1880) Rhyming slang • James Curtis: But most of the fiver would go in the old pig's ear. (1938)

slop (1904) US & Australian; usually used in the plural with the same meaning • Australasian Post: Bung me and me mate over a droppa slops, will yer love? (1963)

each would take a pull from the jug of 'sheoak' between them. (1914)

slop (1904) Orig and mainly US • C. L. Sonnichsen: The bear . . . was still consuming his free bottle of slops. (1943)

suds (1904) • C. L. Sonnichsen: The bear . . . was still consuming his free bottle of slops. (1943)

hop (1929) Mainly Australian & New Zealand; usually used in the plural with the same meaning; from earlier sense, climbing plant used for flavouring beer • J. Hibberd: I was in a sad state . . . all psychological . . . the hops were having their desired effect. (1972)


coldie (1953) Australian; applied to a glass, bottle, or can of cold beer; from cold + -ie • Overland: Bet they're both downin' a few coldies. (1976)

See also wallap (p. 142).

Brandy

O.D.V. (1839) Dated; jocular alteration of eau de vie

jackass brandy (1920) US, dated; applied to home-made brandy

Champagne

the widow (1781) In later use associated with Veuve (= widow) Clicquot name of a brand of champagne • G. Boothby: A good luncheon and a pint of the Widow to wash it down. (1899)

fizz (1884) From its effervescence • V. M. Cottrell: A bottle of 'fizz' each. (1942)

(the) boy (1882) Dated; origin unknown • Melody Maker: Lord Delamere came up to them with a foaming magnum of champagne and said, 'Well, boys! you've given us a glorious time! What do you say to a beaker of "the boy"?' (1929)

bubbly (1920) Short for earlier obsolete slang bubbly water (1910) • Blackwood's Magazine: [He] had finished up at dinner with some capital oysters and a bottle of bubbly. (1927)

champers (1955) British; from champagne + -ers • Milo Ainsworth: Champers or something with gin in it? (1959)


Gin

lightning (1781) Mainly US; also applied more broadly to any strong, often low-quality alcoholic spirit • Laurens van der Post: The fiery Cape brandy known to us children as 'Blitz' or Lightning. (1958)

mother's ruin (1937) Jocular • P. Jones: I have been to a party, darling . . . What would you like? 'Mother's Ruin?' (1955)

needle and pin (1937) Rhyming slang

Methylated spirit

jake (1932) Orig US; from earlier sense, alcoholic drink made from Jamaica ginger; abbreviated form of Jamaica • John Steinbeck: He would drink jake or whisky until he was a shaken paralytic. (1939)

metho (1933) Australian & New Zealand; from methylated spirit + -o • B. Dixon: Old Jimmy Taylor had gone a little bit in the mind, from drinking too much beer and metho. (1984)

white lady (1935) Australian; compare earlier sense, cocktail made of gin, orange liqueur and lemon juice

goom (1967) Australian; origin uncertain; possibly from Aboriginal (Jagara and neighbouring languages) guj fresh water • Meanjin: Goom! What a name for methylated spirits. (1982)

Pink gin

pinkers (1961) British, mainly naval slang; from pink (gin) + -ers • D. Clark: 'It was well known that Middleton was the only one who drank pink gin.' . . . 'Rubbish. There were two newcomers . . . Who knew they didn't drink pinkers?' (1978)

Rum

Tom Thumb (1905) Orig Australian; rhyming slang; from the name of a legendary diminutive character

Whisky

red-eye (1819) US; applied to rough, strong whisky; from its effect on the drinker • A. Hynd: Barrow put down a slug of red eye and walked up to her. (1949)

pine-top (1858) US, dated; applied to cheap or illicit whisky

tarantula-juice (1861) US; applied to inferior whisky

forty-rod whisky, forty rod (1863) Orig US; applied to cheap fiery whisky; probably from obsolete forty-rod lightning in same sense, supposedly from a jocular reputation for being lethal at forty rods (about 200 metres) • Daily Oklahoman (Oklahoma City): The mere possession of a few gills of forty rod is not counted as an ample offset to planned assassination. (1948)

white mule (1889) US; applied to illicit or inferior whisky
snake poison (1890) US & Australian • Kylie Tennant: If Bee-Bonnet ever again wants me to sample his snake poison, I'll pour it on him and set it alight. (1947)

scrreech (1902) North American; applied to illicit or inferior whisky • W. H. Pugsley: [The rating] gets hold of some bootleg stock—“high life”, they call it on the West Coast, and ‘scrreech’ in Newfie—and then he’s away to . . . Cells or Detention. (1945)

smoke (1904) US; applied to illicit or inferior whisky • Daily Telegraph: Twelve additional deaths today are attributed to week-end ‘jags’, which have been traced to ‘speak-easies’ in the New York east-end, where the liquor is known as ‘smoke’. (1928)

scat (1914) US, dated; origin unknown • Publications of the American Dialect Society: Peter men don’t punch much guff as a rule, but sometimes the scat will loosen them up for some good yarns. (1955)

white lightning (1921) Orig US; applied to illicit or inferior whisky

skee (1959) Australian & New Zealand; shortened from whisky • G. Jenkin: And for this here quid and a bottle of see I’m betting at ten to one. (1967)

Wine

pinky, pinkie (1897) Mainly Australian; applied to cheap or inferior (fortified) wine

dago red (1906) US; applied to cheap red wine, especially of Italian origin • John Dos Passos: As we poured down the dago red he would become mischievous. (1966)

red ink (1919) Mainly US; applied to cheap red wine • Eugene O’Neill: You’d lie awake . . . with . . . the wine of passion poets blah about, a sour aftertaste in your mouth of Dago red ink! (1952)

vino, veeno (1919) Often applied to inferior wine; from Spanish and Italian vino wine

plonk (1930) Orig Australian; applied to cheap or inferior wine; probably from blanc in French vin blanc white wine, though plonk is perhaps more commonly applied now to red wine • Nevil Shute: He asked me if I would drink tea or beer or plonk. ‘Plonk?’ I asked. ‘Red wine,’ he said. (1950)

lizzie (1934) Dated; applied to wine from Lisbon • M. Ellison: She drinks ‘Lizzie’ and methylated spirit. (1934)

nelly, nellie, Nelly’s death (1935) Australian; applied to cheap wine • Kings Cross Whisper (Sydney): You’ve got to get up very early in the morning to catch them sober and then you can’t always be sure on account of their habit of keeping a flagon of nellie by the bed. (1973)

Red Ned (1941) Australian & New Zealand; applied to cheap wine or other similar drink

bombo (1942) Australian; applied to cheap wine, often fortified; probably from bomb something of explosive effect + -o, but compare obsolete humbo drink concocted from rum, sugar, water, and nutmeg • Stuart Gore: He done in the whole issue on sheilas and bombo. (1968)

plink (1943) Australian; applied to very low-quality wine; a jocular alteration of plonk cheap wine • Hepworth & Hindle: Plink is defined as being cheap plonk. (1980)

fourpenny dark (1955) Australian; applied to cheap wine (originally as served in a miniature mug with a handle); from its price and colour • Dorothy Hewett: You better watch your step with that fourpenny dark. It’ll get you before you know it. (1976)

A container for drink

long-sleever (1879) Australian; applied to a tall glass, and also to a drink contained in this • Xavier Herbert: The priest got out the whisky bottle. Sims had a long-sleever. (1975)

set-up (1930) US; applied to the glass, ice, soda, etc. required for mixing a drink, as served to customers, who supply their own spirits, in unlicensed premises • Wilson McCarthy: He looked over to the sideboard and saw a complete assortment of liquors, rums and set-ups. (1973)

stubby, stubbie (1957) Australian; applied to a dumpy beer bottle • G. Morley: Phil opened the freezer and pulled out four stubbies. (1972)

tinny, tinnie (1964) Australian; applied to a can of beer • Truck & Bus Transportation: We doubt if the driver would have enough room on board to stow his lunch box or a couple of tinnies. (1980)

An empty container

marine, dead marine (1831) Dated

doold soldier (1909) US, dated

dead soldier (1917) Orig US • Raymond Chandler: I held up the dead soldier and shook it. Then I . . . reached for the pint of bonded bourbon. (1940)

A place where alcohol is sold or drunk

crib (1823) Mainly US; applied to a disreputable drinking saloon; from earlier sense, house

drum (1859) Mainly US; applied to a disreputable drinking saloon; from earlier sense, place, house

dive (1871) Orig US; applied to a disreputable nightclub or drinking-den • Spectator: The degenerate dives of Berlin. (1958)

speakeasy (1889) Orig and mainly US; applied to an illicit liquor store or drinking club, especially during Prohibition; from the verb speak + easy easily; from the notion of speaking ‘easily’ or quietly when ordering illicit goods
Sustenance and Intoxication

### The serving of drink

- **Boozer (1895)** British, Australian & Irish; applied to a pub; from *booze* drink alcohol + *-er*  ■ Peter Moloney: The boozer on the corner. (1966)
- **Rubbity-dub, rubbity-dub, rubbedy-dub** etc. (1898) Australian & New Zealand; rhyming slang for *pub*
- **Rubbity, rubbetty, rubbedy, rupperty** (1898) Australian & New Zealand; shortening of *rubbity-dub*  ■ O’Arcy Niland: How about a gargle? Down to the rubberty, come on. (1957)
- **The nineteenth hole** (1901) Jocular, orig US; applied to the nineteenth hole (1901)  ■ Eugene O’Neill: There’ll be a speak open, and some drunk laughing. (1936)
- **Shypoo, shipoo, shipoo house, shipoo joint, shipoo shop** etc. (1903) Australian; applied to a pub that sells inferior drink; from *shipoo inferior drink*  ■ H. Drake-Brockman: How about managing that shipoo for me? (1936)
- **Peg-house** (1922) Applied to a pub; compare *peg*  ■ J. I. M. Stewart: I tried to teach him how to translate Tacitus, but had more success in topping him up with madeira. (1976)
- **Rub-a-dub (1926)** Australian & New Zealand; applied to a pub; alteration of *rubbity-dub*
- **Speak** (1930) US; short for *speakeasy*  ■ Eugene O’Neill: There’ll be a speak open, and some drunk laughing. (1952)
- **Speako** (1931) US; from *speak* + *-o*  ■ J. M. Cain: Making the grand tour of all the speako’s he knows. (1941)
- **Local** (1934) British; applied to a pub serving the immediate neighbourhood  ■ Germaine Greer: Women don’t nip down to the local. (1970)
- **Beer-off** (1939) British; applied to an off-licence  ■ Alan Sillitoe: Bill… had called at the beer-off by the street-end. (1958)
- **Watering hole** (1975) From earlier sense, place where animals drink  ■ Gainesville (Florida) Sun: In a calmer time, players and fans mingled at local watering holes, drinking beers together and becoming friends. (1984)

An employee in such a place

- **B-girl** (1936) US; applied to a woman employed to encourage customers to buy drinks in a bar; abbreviation of *bar-girl*  ■ F. Archer: If I stand here, I’m a waitress, see? If I sit down, I’m a B-girl, and this joint doesn’t pay for that kind of protection. (1964)
- **Sitter** (1938) US; dated; applied to someone employed to sit in a bar and encourage other patrons to buy drinks

The serving of drink

- **Happy hour** (1961) Orig US; applied to a period, usually in the early evening, during which drinks are sold at reduced prices  ■ Times: Most restaurants and bars have been forced to forget about ‘happy hour’ where drinks are cheaper. (1985)

To provide or serve with drink

- **Mug** (1830) British; used to denote buying a drink for someone; from *mug* drinking vessel  ■ Peter Moloney: If ye say to them ‘scouse, Mug us dem on de house,’ ‘Yerl make Birty and Girty all shirty. (1966)
- **Shout** (1850) Australian & New Zealand; used to denote buying a round of drinks; or buying a drink for (someone)  ■ National Times (Australia): The tightwad. . . wouldn’t shout if a shark bit him. (1981)
- **Caravan World** (Australia): On meeting an old friend a miner would shout him, not a drink as in other places, but a bath. (1977). Hence the noun *shout* (British, Australian & New Zealand) denoting (a turn to pay for) a round of drinks. (1854)  ■ Desmond Bagley: Hoonister addressed the landlord. ‘Hi, Monte: a large scotch and a pint of Director’s.’ ‘My shout,’ I said. (1977)
- **Top someone up** (1869) Used to denote replenishing someone’s glass with drink  ■ J. I. M. Stewart: I tried to teach him how to translate Tacitus, but had more success in topping him up with madeira. (1976)

A drinking spree

- **Drunk** (1779) ■ Miles Tripp: ‘I went on a seven-day drunk.’ ‘Like muck you did.’ (1952)
- **Bender** (1845) Orig US; mainly in the phrase on a *bender*; perhaps from obsolete Scottish *bend* have a bout of hard drinking  ■ Bulletin (Sydney): Being on a strenuous bender, he had forgotten to sign a cheque. (1933)
- **Bat** (1848) Orig US; origin uncertain; compare on the *batter* on a drinking spree  ■ Evelyn Waugh: Why don’t you switch to rum? It’s much better for you. . . When did you start on this bat? (1942)
- **Booze** (1850) Mainly in the phrase on the *booze*; from the verb *booz* drink alcohol  ■ Joyce Cary: If I didn’t you’d go on the booz and say it was all my fault. (1959)
- **Binge** (1854) From the British dialect verb *binge* soak (a wooden vessel)  ■ Guardian. Some of his colleagues . . . regarded japes such as giving Peter the Great a lunchtime booze-up. (1957)
- **Jag** (1891) From earlier sense, as much drink as one can take, from original sense, load for one horse; ultimate origin unknown  ■ Listener: Sid Chaplin’s Saturday Saga, the account of two miners on a memorable jag. (1986)
- **Booze-up** (1897) ■ John Braine: The traditional lunchtime booze-up. (1957)
- **Souse** (1903) US  ■ Eugene O’Neill: Bejees, we’ll go on a grand old souse together. (1946)
- **Pub crawl** (1915) Applied to a slow progress from one pub to another, drinking at each one  ■ Observer: Heads of the dress firms will take the 100 expected buyers on individual ‘pub-crawls.’ (1959). Hence the verb *pub-crawl* (1937) ■ Canadian Magazine
To drink alcohol (to excess)

**booze** (c1325) From Middle Dutch būsen drink to excess

**wet one's whistle** (c1386) From the jocular comparison of the mouth or throat with a whistle

**tipple** (1560) Back-formation from tippler drinker of alcohol • R. Davies: There was plenty of brandy, for . . . Lind loved to tipple. (1988)

**drink like a fish** (1640) • P. G. Wodehouse: He drank like a fish and was always chasing girls. (1964)

**soak** (1687) • 19th Century: The shambling and scrofulous shirk whom you may find any night soaking at the pouthouse. (1863)

**bend** (or lift) the (or one's) **elbow** (1823) • Coast to Coast 1965–&: He's not much cop. Too fond of bending the elbow. (1967)

**binge** (1854) Probably from the noun binge drinking spree • Hilaire Belloc: It is plainly evident that they know how to binge. (1910)

**hit the booze** (or bottle, **jug** or **pot**) (1889) Orig US • Landfall: Everyone knew he'd turn out a flop. . . . Hit the booze and got T.B. (1957)

**slop up** (1899) US, dated • Jack Black: No use takin' a bunch of thirsty bums along and stealin' money for them to slop up in some saloon the next day. (1926)

**tank up** (1902) • I. Hunter: Behan arrived for the interview 'somewhat full' and proceeded to tank up further in the BBC hospitality room. (1980)

**shicker, shiker, shikker** (1908) Australian & New Zealand; from the noun shicker alcoholic drink • Cusack & James: He'd gamble his shirt off on any damn thing that's got a leg to run on, but he doesn't shicker. (1951)

**drink (put, see, etc.) someone under the table** (1921) Used to denote remaining sober while one's drinking companions collapse into insensibility • V. W. Brooks: He was far from sober, or would have been if two tumblers of brandy had been enough to put him under the table. (1936)

**souse** (1921) • M. Watts: Just as they're middling honest and don't souse. (1923)

**down** (1922) Used especially to denote consuming an alcoholic drink rapidly • Wole Soyinka: [He] downs the rest of his beer and calls for more. (1967)

**stop** (1924) Australian; especially in the phrase stop one have an alcoholic drink • L. Mann: But if he should recognise any one, he could scarcely avoid asking: 'Could you stop a pint?' (1942)

**knock** something back (1931) Used especially to denote consuming an alcoholic drink rapidly • Mordecai Richler: Hod was knocking back large snifters of brandy. (1968)

**sink** (1932) Used especially to denote consuming an alcoholic drink rapidly • Airey Neave: Each man spoke of what he would do first on arrival in England. 'I shall sink three pints of mild and bitter,' said one. (1953)
bevvv, bevie, bevv (1934) British; from the noun bevvv alcoholic drink  ■ Frank Shaw et al.: Ard cases who could bevvv by the jug. (1966)

chugalug (c1936), chug (1958) Used to denote drinking a glass of beer, etc. at a single swallow; imitative; chug by shortening from chugalug

sozzle (1937) Back-formation from sozzled drunk  ■ N. Fitzgerald: We can sit here and sozzle gently and enjoy ourselves. (1953)

be on it (1938) Australian  ■ Patrick White: 'It is him,' she said finally. 'It is that bastard. He is on it again.' (1955)

get a spark up (1939) New Zealand; used to denote raising one's spirits by drinking alcohol

be on the bottle (1967)  ■ Daily Mirror: Watch that daily tipple, ladies. You could end up on the bottle. (1976)

Drunk

merry (1575) Euphemistic  ■ N. Hinton: They'd finished the champagne and started on the wine so they were all a bit merry. (1967)

tipsy (1577) Used to suggest mild drunkenness; from tip turn over ←-→, from the notion of liability to fall over  ■ Clare Harkness: Euphorically tipsy on ale, the vicar mistook his way to the . . . lavatories.

overshot (1605) From the notion of being carried to excess

disguised (1607) Dated, euphemistic  ■ Walter Besant: He was not 'disguised', his speech was clear. (1884)

mellow (1611) Euphemistic  ■ W. S. Maugham: Bartolomeo . . . was, if not drunk, at least mellow. (1946)

high (1627) Now especially in the phrase as high as a kite  ■ Margery Allingham: He . . . gave them a champagne lunch in a marquee . . . and held a sale. By then everyone was as high as a kite. (a1966)

blind (1630) Short for blind (= very) drunk  ■ W. S. Maugham: On the night he arrived in London he would get blind, he hadn't been drunk for twenty years. (1930)

top-heavy (1687) Dated, euphemistic

boozed (1737) Sometimes followed by up

cocked (1737) US

cock-eyed (1737) Orig US; from earlier sense, quaint-eyed  ■ Eric Linklater: You wouldn't have asked me to marry you if you hadn't been cock-eyed at the time. (1934)

jagged (1737) Dated, mainly US; from jag as much drink as one can take + -ed

moon-eyed (1737) US  ■ American Speech: Sid gits moon-eyed every Saturday night. (1940)

oiled (1737) Usually in the phrase well oiled  ■ Edgar Wallace: He'll come out in a minute, oiled to the world. (1926)

soaked (1737) Often as the second element of a compound  ■ Eugene O'Neill: Like a rum-soaked trooper, brawling before a brothel on a Saturday night. (a1953)

stewed (1737) Also in the phrases stewed to the ears, eyebrows, gills, etc.  ■ Peter de Vries: A casual observer not familiar with him would have thought he was stewed to the gills as he rose and wobbled over to join me. (1958)

stiff (1737) US  ■ G. V. Higgins: I always got stiff on the Fourth because it was the only way I could listen to all that crap. (1975)

happy (1770) Euphemistic; used to suggest mild drunkenness

corned (1785) Dated; from the use of grain in making beer and spirits

slewed (1801) From the past participle of slew turn round  ■ David Lodge: I was somewhat slewed by this time and kept calling him Sparrow. (1975)

lumpy (1810) Dated  ■ Punch: For 'boosey' we might substitute 'lumpy' to suit modern parlance. (1845)

swipey (1821) Dated; from swipe(s) beer + -y  ■ Charles Dickens: 'He ain't ill. He's only a little swipey you know.' Mr. Bailey reeled in his boots, to express intoxication. (1844)

ripe (1823) Dated

snuffy (1823) Dated; from earlier sense, affected by snuff  ■ Newcastle Evening Chronicle: He considered, if a member got 'snuffy', he should go home, and not come there to annoy the meeting. (1891)

mortal (1824) Scottish & Northern English; short for mortal (= extremely) drunk  ■ J. M. Barrie: He doesn't strike me except when he's mortal. (1891)

tight (1830) Also in the phrase as tight as a tick  ■ David Lodge: Among the other guests was Mrs Zapp, extremely tight; and in a highly aggressive mood. (1975)

muzzed (1836) Dated; from the past participle of muzz make muzzy, fuddle

half-shot (1838) Orig US; used to suggest moderate drunkenness  ■ J. M. Cain: Stuff for guys in college to gag about when they were half shot with beer. (1948)

pickled (1842)  ■ Dylan Thomas: On Sundays, and when pickled, he sang high tenor, and had won many cups. (a1953)

swizzled (1843) From swizzle any of various frothy alcoholic drinks; ultimate origin unknown  ■ American Spectator: The editors of The American Spectator got somewhat swizzled one night last week and didn't feel so good the next day. (1934)

squeezed (1845) US; origin unknown  ■ Saturday Review of Literature: A judge of good whiskey, who is, for the purpose of this narrative, slightly squeezed. (1941)

full (c1848) Australian & New Zealand; also in the phrases as full as a tick, boot, bull, egg, fort, goog, etc.  ■ C. Lee: We were all pretty well full when the van rolled into Mittagong. (1980)  ■ D. M. Davin: Wasn't he in here this afternoon and as full as a tick? (1949)

pixilated (1848) Orig US dialect; used to denote mild intoxication; from earlier sense, confused, slightly mad  ■ C. Nesbitt: We were both ever so slightly inebriated, no not even that, pixilated, to use the lovely movie euphemism. (1975)
squiffy (1855) Mainly British; origin unknown. Dennis Potter: 'There's another bottle,' said Helen. 'Good! I feel like getting a bit squiffy.' (1988)

buffy (1858) Dated; origin unknown. Aldous Huxley: She did like boasting about the amount of champagne she could put away without getting buffy. (1924)

elephant's trunk, elephants (1859) British, dated; rhyming slang for drunk. Evening Standard. He came home here and he found the artful dodger elephant trunk in the bread and butter. (1931)

scammered (1859) Dated; origin uncertain; perhaps related to dialect scammed injured or Somerset dialect scammish rough, awkward, untidy. Michael Sadleir: He's badly scammered, and out for women. (1940)

rotten (1864) Australian. J. Famechon: A reporter from one of the Sydney papers—he was the last to leave, rotten. (1971)

shot (1864) Mainly US, Australian, & New Zealand. D. R. Stuart: Ah well, I got shot, real staggery . . . but that arrack, hell, it's great stuff. (1979)

boiled (1884) Sometimes in the phrase as drunk as a boiled owl. Hugh Pentecost: He's boiled to the ears. (1940)

sozzled (1886) Past participle of sozzle mix sloppily, probably imitative. Ngaio Marsh: 'She's sozzled,' said Wally, and indeed, it was so. (1963)

loaded (1890) Orig and mainly US. Voice (New York): A Democrat who stood on the sidewalk made this uncharitable exclamation as S. stepped into a carriage: 'He's loaded.' (1929)


squired (1890) Variant of squiffy. Brian Garfield: I'm already a little squiffed. Ought to go on the wagon. (1977)

half-cut (1893) British; used to suggest moderate drunkenness. Radio Times: Intebriation . . . is the sport of all ranks. How many executives can work reasonably effectively unless they are half-cut? (1971)

tanked (1893) Mainly British; often followed by up. H. Simpson: Dawlish wrote poetry, and caused acute discomfort by reciting it aloud on starry nights when he was tanked up. (1932)

up the pole (1897) Dated. Daily Chronicle. Alec went to football smoker. Came home up the pole at one a.m. . . . 'Up the pole,' Mrs. Norman said, was one of her husband's slang terms for a person under the influence of drink. (1905)

inked (1898) Australian; apparently from an equation of ink with alcoholic liquor; compare red ink cheap red wine. P Adam Smith: Driver found well and truly inked and lying down to it. (1969)

shicker, shiker, shikker (1898), shickered, shikkered (1898) Australian & New Zealand; from Yiddish shiker drunk. New Zealand Listener. After midnight, Jerry got so shicker that he was quarrelling with everyone. (1970)

soused (1902) From earlier sense, thoroughly wetted. Martin Russell: Ralph's a pro. He's soused every night, and I don't recall an edition going astray yet. (1976)

pie-eyed (1904) Orig US: compare pied jumbled, confused, and hence unable to focus correctly. Daily Express. Personally I didn't care if the whole band was pie-eyed, I wanted them to be busy playing good dance music. (1937)

rosy (1905) Used to denote mild drunkenness; from the effect on the complexion. Desmond Bagley: Sure, there was drinking. Some of the boys . . . got pretty smashed . . . I was a bit rosy myself. (1975)

tiddly, tiddley (1905) Used to suggest mild drunkenness; probably from tiddly alcoholic drink. Beverley Nichols: No more wine, George, thank you. I shall be quite tiddly. (1958)

spiflicated, spifflicated (1906) US; past participle of splicicate overwhelm, crush, destroy, probably a fanciful formation. H. A. Smith: I do not believe . . . that I was spifflicated last night. (1971)

tin hats (1909) British nautical, dated. W. Lang: If you do come off tin 'ats (i.e. inebriated), go quietly below to the Mess Deck. (1919)

blithered (1911) Australian; from blither talk nonsense. Bulletin (Sydney): A Mildura settler was making home in the dusk one night slightly blithered. (1944)

pipped (1911) Dated: perhaps from pip defeat, forestall. Mazo de la Roche: Lilly, here, can't see the strings. He's pipped, aren't you, Lilly? (1929)

tonicked (1911) Australian; from tonic invigorating drink. F. Leechman: But the wicked old lout had been 'tonic'd' as they call it and had wandered about bushed for twenty-four hours. (1961)

piped (1912) US, dated

plastered (1912) Ngaio Marsh: He's overdone it to-night. Flat out in the old bar parlour . . . he was plastered. (1964)

polluted (1912) Orig US. P. G. Wodehouse: I was helping a pal to celebrate the happy conclusion of love's young dream, and it may be that I became a mite polluted. (1974)

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canned (1914) J. J. Connington: Being rather canned, he sticks the candle on the table, and forgets all about it. (1926)

lit (1914) Often followed by up. Edward Hyams: Some of the lads a bit lit, eh? Who's this in the hedge? (1949)

binged (1916) From the past participle of binge drink alcohol. Sunday at Home: One man was so binged in drink and so enchanted by the craving for it. (1925)

molo, mowlow (1916) Australian; origin unknown. D. R. Stuart: By the time he ran us down to the wharf to catch the boat back, we were nicely molo. (1979)
blotto (1917) Obscurely from blot  ■ P. G. Wodehouse: Did you ever see a blotto butler before? (1951)
crooked (1917) Orig US; perhaps from the past participle of crock collapse, disable  ■ Guardian:
The curtain fell and the audience retired to get crooked. (1970)
zig-zag (1918) Dated, mainly US; from the uncertain course typically taken by drunks  ■ E. Pau: He groped and floundered ... not completely 'zigzag'. (1923)
stunned (1919) Australian & New Zealand, dated  ■ P. Cadey: I'm afraid I got a bit stunned. ... I had one over the odd. (1933)
paralytic (1921) ■ Daily Express: Woman at the Thames Court. I was not drunk. I was suffering from paralysis. Mr. Cairns: I have heard being drunk called being paralytic. (1927)
shellacked (1922) US, dated  ■ J. T. Farrell: You know, when I first found out about how you'd get shellacked, I thought it was pretty terrible. (1935)
fried (1923) ■ Noel Coward: After a gay reunion party ... I retired to be slightly fried, blissfully happy. (1984)
potted (1924) North American ■ Sun (Baltimore): Awful calamity at the Park bird bath ... when somebody discovered the birds were potted due to some members of the Mint Julep Association having emptied their julep glasses in the fountain. (1943)
stonkered (1924) Mainly Australian & New Zealand; from earlier sense, exhausted  ■ Southerly: 'Tastes absolutely bonzer....' 'I'm out to get stonkered good and proper.' (1946)
gassed (1925) British ■ Daily Mail: When I'm with people I laugh so much ... they figure I'm 'gassed'. But I'm not. I don't drink. (1960)
pinko (1925) Dated; applied especially to someone drunk on methylated spirit
bottled (1927) ■ Aldous Huxley: Bottled as she was ... the Golden Goose, where ... all of us got faintly whistled. (1979)
lubricated (1927) Compare earlier lubricate (ply with) drink
paralysed (1927) Mainly US
stinko (1927), (jocular) stinko paralytico (1942) From stinking drunk + -o  ■ Diana Ramsay: Jessie's a lush. Stinko most of her waking time. (1974)
well away (1927) Euphemistic ■ Angela Carter: The Colonel ... overcomes his resistance to vodka to such an extent he is soon well away and sings songs of Old Kentucky. (1984)
whiffled (1927) Origin unknown  ■ J. D. Carr: Helen ... was much too clear-headed ... ever to let herself get whiffled. (1956)
blasted (1928) Mainly US ■ James Carroll: Den O'Coole forced his way to the bar. ... He was already blasted. (1978)
pissed (1929) Sometimes followed by up  ■ Kingsley Amis: An uncle of mine went there a year or two ago and was pissed all the time on about ten bob a day. (1958)
steamed (1929) Usually followed by up ■ Landfall: Little Spike is six foot two and has a reputation for being a hard case when he is steamed-up. (1950)
as drunk as a piss-ant (1930) Mainly US; piss-ant literally 'ant', but influenced by piss urine and pissed drunk
swacked (1932) US; from past participle of Scottish swagulp, swill, of imitative origin  ■ H. Kane: I'm slightly swacked on champagne. (1985)
looped (1934) Mainly US ■ Ross Macdonald: The message ... didn't come through too clear. She talked as if she was slightly looped. (1973)
*kaylied, kailed, kalied (1937) Origin unknown  ■ J. Gash: He offered to brew up but my stomach turned. That left him free to slosh out a gill of gin. Dandy was permanently kaylied. (1978)
stocious, stotious (1937) Mainly Anglo-Irish; origin unknown  ■ Julia O'Faolain: 'Coming home stocious five nights a week,' said Doris. (1980)
whistled (1938) Origin uncertain; compare 'He was indeed, according to the vulgar Phrase, whistled drunk,' Henry Fielding, Tom Jones (1749)
private eye: We all sidled off to a very nice little snug at the golden Goose, where ... all of us got faintly whistled. (1979)
liquefied (1939)
plonked (1943) From plonk cheap wine + -ed  ■ Life: A few badly plonked soldiers biarily unaware of just where they were. (1943)
juiced (1946) Often followed by up ■ Stephen Ransome: He was sitting at the bar brooding over a drink— not making any trouble, not getting juiced up. (1971)
sloshed (1946) British; from the past participle of slosh splash, pour liquid  ■ Robert Ludlum: They drank a great deal. ... They appeared quite sloshed. (1978)
stoned (1952) Orig US ■ Jack Karouac: I had finished the wine ... and I was proper stoned. (1957)
schnookered (1955) US; jocular alteration of schookered  ■ Brian Garfield: Bradleigh took the empty glass. 'That's probably enough. You don't want to get schnookered.' (1977)
bombed (1956) Orig US; often used with out
* tiddied (1958) Variant of tiddly  ■ Gerald Durrell: 'I've got the most splitting headache.' 'I'm not surprised; you were as tiddied as an owl last night.' (1956)
as pissed as a newt (1957) ■ Richard Mason: Christ, I'm pissed. I'm pissed as a newt. (1957)
honkers (1957) British; origin unknown  ■ Christopher Wood: Roll on Wednesday week and we'll all get honkers on champers. (1970)
zonked (1959) Often followed by out; from the past participle of zonk overwhelm, defeat  ■ Joseph Wambaugh: We sat ... drinking arak and wine, and then beer, and we all got pretty zonked. (1972)
bevried (1960) British; from the past participle of heavy drink alcohol. • Linacre Lane: The Sousers’ favourite excuse for an act of hooliganism is I was bevried. (1966)

snookered (1961) Perhaps an arbitrary alteration of snookered stymied. • Globe & Mail (Toronto): I’ll get a bottle of Jack Daniel’s for cocktails. Get them snookered on bourbon and they won’t know the difference. (1980)

plotzed (1962) Apparently from plotz sit down legless. • M. Allen: Mimi got drunk that night but something more than liquor knocked her off base. . . . She was so loaded I had to put her to bed, and I know from my own experience that when I am plotzed I go out for the night. (1974)

smashed (1962) Orig US • D. Laing: He would get smashed on two and a half pints of Worthington E from the wood, and fall about misquoting the poetry of the beat generation. (1973)

out of it (1963) US

molly the monk (1966) Australian; rhyming slang for drunk. • Kings Cross Whisper (Sydney): Ophelia was more than a little bit Molly the Monk after Parkinson had been loosening her up a bit with three bottles of Quelltaler hock. (1973)

wiped (1966) Mainly US; usually followed by out

wasted (1968) Orig US

wrecked (1968) US

legless (1976) From the notion of being too drunk to stand up. • Daily Telegraph: I must have had well over half a bottle. . . . In the end I was legless and couldn’t talk. (1986)

wired (1977) Mainly US; sometimes followed by up

Adrian Quist, Adrian (1978) Australian; rhyming slang for pissed; from the name of an Australian tennis player. (b. 1913) • Sydney Morning Herald: They didn’t look particularly decorous, collapsed, Adrian Quist, as the racing men say, under the hedge. (1982)

Brahms and Liszt, Brahms (1978) British; rhyming slang for pissed; arbitrary use of the name of two composers, Johannes Brahms (1833–97) and Franz Liszt (1811–86). • P.S.: Do you remember the first time you got. . . . a bit Brahms? . . . My five cousins took me out round the pubs and I got ill on Pernod and blackcurrant. (1988)

Mozart and Liszt (1979) British; rhyming slang for pissed; arbitrary use of the name of two composers, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91) and Franz Liszt (1811–86). • Ronnie Barker: Everybody thought I was Mozart and Liszt, falling flat on my Khyber Pass like that. (1979)

drunk as a skunk (1981) • T3. It’s also got lots of little pointers to work out tack angles and stuff like that—essential for when you’re walking home drunk as a skunk. (1997)

tired and emotional (1981) British; euphemistic. • Daily Telegraph: Sensing that Penrose’s efforts might have left him tired and emotional, the four Eye men called at the Mirror building. (1986)

trashed (1981)

ratted (1983) British; probably from rat-arsed. • Daily Telegraph: He zipped up his anorak and went out to get ratted with the rest of the ice hockey team. (1987)


bladdered (1992) British; from the notion of a full bladder. • Observer. Friends say she and ‘Hooky’ enjoy hitting the clubs together, getting ‘bladdered’, and generally acting like soppy teenagers in each other’s company. (1995)

A large amount of alcohol drunk

load (1958) Especially in the phrase get (or have) a load on. • V. Palmer: We’re not to blame if men get a load on and begin to fight. (1948)

skinfull (1788) Used to denote as much alcohol as one can drink. • Guardian. One night, after closing time, a man who’d had a skinful produced a wad from his pocket. (1992)

snootful (1918) From snoot nose + ful. • Kurt Vonnegut: Billy didn’t usually drink much. . . . but he certainly had a snootful now. (1969)

The state of being drunk

brannigan (1892) North American, dated; origin uncertain; perhaps from the surname Brannigan. • George Ade: Those who would enjoy the wolfish satisfaction of shoveling it in each morning must forego the simple Delights of acquiring a Brannigan the Night before. (1918)

edge (1897) US; often in the phrase have an edge on be rather drunk. • Ernest Hemingway: ‘How do you feel? . . . Swell. I’ve just got a good edge on.’ (1925)

bun (1901) Dated; especially in the phrase get (or have, tie) a bun on get drunk; origin unknown. • J. van Druten: We’ll celebrate tonight, if you do. And if you don’t, well, then we’ll tie a bun on anyway, just to forget it all. (1954)

heat (1912) US; especially in the phrase have a heat on be drunk

To drink to excess; become drunk

(have had) one over the eight (1925) From the (fanciful) notion that eight pints of beer represents the maximum intake consistent with sobriety. • Daily Express: Luton magistrate: What does he mean by ‘one over the eight’? (‘A glass too many?’) (1928)

(have had) one too many (1941) • Jimmy Sangster: Didn’t mean to be crude. Must have had one too many. (1968)

feel no pain (1947) Used to imply drunken insensibility. • Bickham Sweet-Escott: There were a great many Anglo-Russian parties, a vast quantity of vodka
was drunk, and twice I saw senior Russian officers being
carried out of the room evidently feeling no pain. (1965)

**tie one on (1951)** Mainly US  ■ A. Mather: He had
d to tie one on, if you know what I mean. (1982)

A drinker of alcohol; a drunkard

**tippler (1850)** Applied to a relatively restrained
drinker of alcohol; from earlier sense, tavernkeeper

**soaker (1959)** From soak drink alcohol + -er
■ G. M. Trevelyan: The upper class got drunk . . . on ale and . . . on wine. It is hard to say whether men of fashion or the rural gentry were the worst soakers. (1946)

**boozier (1906)** From booze drink alcohol + -er
■ Daily Mail: On its second day, which became known as Black Wednesday, presenter Michael Barratt announced: 'Now let's meet Britain's biggest boozier.' The cameras swung to the Chief Constable of Essex, lined up for a discussion of police procedure. (1991)

**drunk (1907)**

**soak (1820)** From the verb soak drink alcohol
■ James Fenton: Old soaks from farmers poets' pubs And after-hours drinking clubs. (1982)

**rummy (1851)** Mainly US; from rum used as a
derogatory term for intoxicating liquor in
general + -y ■ J. H. Chase: Johnnie was a rummy. . . . Drink had rotted him, and he was only two jumps ahead of the nut-factory. (1939)

**lush (1890)** Mainly US; from earlier sense, alcoholic drink; perhaps a jocular use of lush luxuriant ■ David Delman: He's a drunk, ain't he? . . . He's a lush. And a lush is a lousy security risk. (1972)

**Jimmy Woodser, Jimmy Wood(s) (1892)** Australian & New Zealand; applied to a solitary drinker; from jimmy wood, the name of a character in a poem of that name (1892) by B. H. Boake, and perhaps the name of an actual person. ■ N.Z.E.F. Times: You'll find me lonesome in a Naafl, a-drinkin' to me sins, A-sippin' like a Jimmy Woodser. (1942)

**shicker, shiker, shikker (1906)** Australian & New Zealand; from earlier sense, alcoholic drink ■ Xavier Herbert: He's the biggest shikker in Town. (1968)

**stiff (1907)** From the adjective stiff drunk
■ Newton Thornburg: It had taken a good part of the day just to locate the poor stiff. (1976)

**white line (1908)** US dated

**Jack ashore (1909)** From the notion of a Jack (= sailor) getting drunk on shore-leave ■ Edmund McGirr: Jack Ashore does not check bills. (1970)

**souse (1915)** Orig US; from earlier sense, drunken spree ■ Raymond Chandler: Sylvia is not a souce. When she does get over the edge it's pretty drastic. (1953)

**wino (1915)** Orig US; applied to a habitual excessive drinker of cheap wine or other alcohol, especially one who is destitute; from wine + -o ■ M. Leitch: He saw the winos watching him out of bleary eyes as they huddled on their benches passing their brown bottles to and fro. (1981)

**rum-hound (1918)** Dated; applied to any heavy
drinker ■ E. Paul: What he resented was the insinuation that he was a chronic rumhound. (1951)

**alky, alchy, alk(e) (1929)** Applied to a
drunkard or alcoholic; from alcoholic + -y ■ City Limits: Nazi sympathizers, alkies, junkies and the unemployed. (1986)

**rum-pot (1930)** North American; applied to any
heavy drinker ■ T. H. Raddall: I had him moved in there as soon as that rumpot of a doctor was off tae the toon. (1966)

**tanker (1932)** From tank (up) get drunk + -er
■ John O'Hara: But the rest of them! God, what a gang of tankers they were. (1935)

**metho (1933)** Australian & New Zealand; applied to a methylated spirit addict; from methylated spirit + -o ■ J. Alard: The old metho snored on. (1968)

**wine dot (1940)** Australian; applied to a habitual drinker of cheap wine; pun on Wyandotte name of a breed of chicken ■ T. A. G. Hungerford: 'Is he a wine-dot? 'Is he hell!! . . . He's never off it.' (1953)

**hophead (1942)** Australian & New Zealand; from hop(s) beer + -head addict ■ David Ballantyne: It's Betty that can't hold the liquor. . . . She's a real lily of a hophead. (1948)

**lushy, lushie (1944)** US; from obsolete lusty
drank, from lush drunkard + -y ■ Mezzrow & Wolfe: The lushies didn't even play good music. (1946)

**two-pot screamer (1959)** Australian; applied to
someone who easily becomes drunk ■ J. de Hungerford: 'Is he a wine-dot?' 'Is he hell!! . . . He's never off it.' (1953)

**piss-head (1961) ■ Landfall: My old man was a piss-head too. (1968)

**plonko (1963)** Australian; applied to someone with a taste for cheap or inferior wine; from plonk such wine + -o ■ W. Dick: We could go and see if there's any plonkos under Martin's Bridge and chuck rocks at 'em. (1965)

**juicer (1967)** US; applied to an alcoholic; from juice alcoholic drink + -er

**goomy, goomee (1973)** Australian; applied to a
drinker of methylated spirit; from goom methylated spirit + -y

**piss artist (1977)** Associated with pissed drunk; compare slightly earlier sense, loud-mouthed fool ■ Custom Car: I refer to the auto/driver self-destruct mechanism known as 'booz'. A piss artist behind the wheel of a 1935 Austin Seven was a killer. (1977)

**lager lout (1988)** British; applied to a youth (usually one of a group) who typically drinks large amounts of lager or beer, and behaves in an offensive boorish way ■ Private Eye: It's a clever wheeze dreamed up by a bunch of lager louts with a GCSE in Spanish. (1989)
A cell for an arrested drunk

drunk tank (1947) North American; applied to a large cell for accommodating several drunks

The effects of drinking (too much) alcohol

grog blossom (1796) Applied to redness of the nose caused by excessive drinking

D.T.'s, D.T. (1858) Abbreviation of delirium tremens • Kessel & Walton: Delirium tremens—DTs—
generally begins two to five days after stopping very heavy drinking. (1869)

nose paint (1880) Jocular; applied to redness of the nose caused by excessive drinking

the jimmies (1885) Jocular; applied to delirium tremens; a fanciful reduplication

the jimmies (1900) Jocular; applied to delirium tremens; a reduced form of jimmies • A. Mason: Riley, ... you drank too much Scotch last night; be careful that you don't get the Jimmies and jump overboard. (1921)

pink rat(s) (1914) Jocular, dated; = pink elephants

pink elephants (1940) Jocular; applied to an apparition supposedly seen by a drunken person • E. W. Hildick: It's like pink elephants. Folk 'ud think you'd been drinking if you went round saying you'd seen white mice running about wild! (1960)

beer belly (1942). beer gut (1976) Applied to a paunch developed by drinking too much beer • Rolling Stone: Woods pauses to tuck his shirt between a beer belly and a silver belt buckle. (1969) • Los Angeles Times: Fregosi took to wearing the jacket ... when he began to develop a beer gut while trying to play for the Mets. (1986)

strawberry (1949) Jocular; applied to a red nose caused by excessive drinking • C. Smith: His nose ... had turned ... to the characteristic boozer's strawberry. (1980)

brewer’s goitre (1953) Australian; applied to a paunch developed by drinking too much beer; transferred use of goitre swelling of the neck resulting from enlargement of the thyroid gland • M. Powell: The condition is known as 'brewers goitre', and it eventually leads to 'brewers droop'. Well, I knew Australia had a small population, but surely not for this reason. (1976)

brewer's droop (1970) Orig Australian; applied to temporary impotence as a result of drinking excessive amounts of alcohol, especially beer • M. Knopfler: I'm not surprised to see you here—you've got smoker's cough from smoking, brewer's droop from drinking beer. (1982)

Suffering from the effects of drinking alcohol

hung-over (1950) After hang-over • Irwin Shaw: He awoke late, feeling headache and hung-over from the liquor of the night before. (1960)

hung (1958) Probably short for hung-over
 • H. Slesar: I know you're hung, Mr. Drew. (1963)

overhung (1964) • Ian Fleming: He was considerably overhung. The hard blue eyes were veined with blood. (1964)

A hang-over cure

a hair of the dog (that bit you) (1954)
Applied to an alcoholic drink taken to allay the effects of drinking too much alcohol; in allusion to the former belief that one could be cured of a mad dog's bite by one of its hairs. • N. Fitzgerald: What you need, Frank, is a good stiff hair of the dog. (1967)

corpse reviver (1865) Jocular, orig US; applied to a strong (mixed) drink intended to cure a hang-over • Anne Blaisdell: Corpse Reviver Number Three. ... You take a jigger of Pernod and add some lemon juice and ice cubes and fill the glass with champagne. (1966)

To adulterate a drink

spike (1889) Orig US; used to denote lacing a drink with alcohol, a drug, etc. • G. Thompson: She made tea, which he spiked with bourbon. (1980). Hence the noun spike (US) denoting a quantity of alcohol, especially spirits, added to a drink (1906) • Times-Picayune (New Orleans): It's like chips without dips, or punch without the spike. (1974)

needle (1929) US, dated; used to denote the injection of alcohol or ether into a drink, especially beer, to make it more powerful; from the use of a needle to add the alcohol, etc. • American Mercury: This beer knocks you for a loop. It's needled with ether. (1930)

Adulterated drink

needle beer (1928) US, dated; used to denote beer with added alcohol or ether; compare the verb needle

Accompaniments to an alcoholic drink

splash (1922) Applied to a small quantity of liquid, especially soda water, to dilute spirits • Graham Greene: The atmosphere of ... the week-end jaunt, the whisky and splash. (1935)

rock (1946) Applied to ice or an ice-cube for use in a drink; especially in the phrase on the rocks (of spirits) served with ice • Nancy Spain: I ... went in and fixed myself a Scotch on rocks, neat. (1952)

Toasts

here's how (1896) • J. B. Priestley: 'Well,' said Mr. Hull, holding up his glass, ... 'here's howl' (1951)

chin chin (1909) From earlier use as a general salutation to Chinese people; from Chinese ts'ing ts'ing • Philip Jones: Two glasses appeared, with ice tinkling in the Scotch. Paul raised his, smiling. 'Chin chin.' (1967)

bottoms up (1917) From the notion of draining a glass, so that its bottom is raised • Lewis Nkosi: I say bottoms up both to women and to glasses! [He raises his glass.] (1964)

cheerio (1919) British; use of the farewell cheerio as a substitute for the standard English toast cheers • P. G. Wodehouse: Much as the wounded soldier would have felt if Sir Philip Sidney, instead of offering him the cup of water, had placed it to his own lips and drained it with a careless 'Cheerio!'. (1921)
bung-ho (1925) • Dorothy Sayers: 'Dry Martini,' said Wimsey. ’ ‘Bung-ho!’ (1929)

(here’s) mud in your eye (1927) • Julian Symons: Here’s mud in your eye, Eileen. (1956)

down the hatch (1931)

Absence of alcohol

dry (1888) Orig US; applied to someone who opposes the sale and consumption of alcohol; from the earlier adjectival sense, opposed to or free from the sale of alcohol • P. G. Wodehouse:

The woman who runs the school is a rabid Dry and won’t let her staff so much as look at a snifter. (1965)

on the wagon (1906) Applied to someone who is teetotal; from the earlier phrase on the water- wagon • Len Deighton: They dug him out of a bar..., stoned out of his mind. . . . He stayed on the wagon for years. (1976)

dry out (1908) Orig US; used to denote an alcoholic undergoing treatment to cure addiction • Ernest Tidyman: By eight, she had undergone . . . the drying-out procedure in private institutions. (1970)

4. Tobacco

weed (1606) • Daily News: She had been addicted to the use of the weed, in the specific shape of ‘black boy’, for over forty years. (1898)

bacco (1792) Dated; shortening of tobacco • Elizabeth Gaskell: But the ‘bacco, and the other things—’. (1853)

baccy, backy, backey, bakky (1821) Shortening of tobacco + -y • George Orwell: Dere’s sixpennorth o’ good baccy here! (1933)

bacca, baccah, baccer, backa, backer (1823) Dated; shortening of tobacco • D. H. Lawrence: They’ll give you plenty to eat . . . and a bit of bacca. (1920)

snout (1885) British, prisoners’ slang; origin unknown • Economist The ‘snout barons’—prisoners who make a profit from the shortage of tobacco within prisons. (1964)

old rope (1943) Services’ slang, dated; applied to strong, evil-smelling tobacco

Cigarettes

fag (1888) Mainly British; from earlier obsolete senses, cigarette end, cheap cigarette; abbreviation of fag-end • Charles Barrett: Cobbers of the men in detention had hit upon an ingenious method of smuggling fags to them. (1942)

coffin-nail (1888) Orig US; from the fatal effects of cigarette-smoking, perhaps reinforced by the vaguely nail-like shape of cigarettes • P. G. Wodehouse: Most of these birds [sc. invalids in a sanatorium] would give their soul for a coffin-nail. (1928)

cig (1889) Abbreviation; also applied to cigars • James Fraser: Greens on the slate, never beer. Never cigs, either. (1969)

stinker (1907) Applied especially to a cheap or foul-smelling cigarette or cigar • P. G. Wodehouse: Have you such a thing as a stinker? . . . And a match? (1935)

gasper (1914) British, dated; applied especially to a cheap or inferior cigarette; from the effect on the smoker • Listener ‘Gasper’ commercials are with us still at every peak viewing hour. (1965)
drag (1942) From earlier sense, an act of smoking, an inhalation

tube (1946) • High Times: Filter tipped tubes give a smoother smoke to the very end. (1975)

snout (1950) British, mainly prisoners’ slang: from earlier sense, tobacco • Peter Moloney: Goin down the city fer a booze an a snout. (1966)

roll-up (1950) Orig prisoners’ slang; applied to a hand-rolled cigarette

straight (1959) Applied especially to a cigarette containing tobacco as opposed to marijuana

cancer stick (1958)

square (1970) US, mainly Black English; applied to a cigarette containing tobacco (as opposed to marijuana) • Black World: Light me up a square, baby. (1974)

Cigars
twofer, too-, -fah, -for, -fur (1911) US; applied to a cigar sold at two for a quarter, and hence to any cheap cigar; from two + (representation of) for • P. G. Wodehouse: I found him ... lying on the bed with his feet on the rail, smoking a toofah. (1923)

rope (1934) US • Herman Wouk: Carter Aster was smoking a long brown Havana tonight. That meant his spirits were high; otherwise he consumed vile gray Philippine ropes. (1978)

la-di-da, la-di-dah (1977) British; rhyming slang • Sunday Times Magazine: Nerves take over, so a puff or two on a Lusitania cigar. Being too poor to bet or have women,... a la-di-dah is my one luxury. (1996)

Cigarette ends
old soldier (1834) US, dated; applied to the discarded butt of a cigar, and also to a quid of chewed tobacco

fag-end (1853) British; from earlier sense, final unused portion of something; fag perhaps ultimately from obsolete fag droop, hang loose, perhaps an alteration of the verb flag • Alan Hollinghurst: The flames showed up the hundreds of fag-ends that had unthinkingly been thrown in. (1988)

bumper (1899) Australian & New Zealand; apparently a blend of butt and stamp + er

5. Drugs

An (illegal) drug

dope (1889) Applied to a narcotic drug; perhaps related to earlier sense, stupid person, from the notion of being stupefied with drugs • Trucking International: Police drugs squad ... arrested the gang and seized 64 boxes of the ‘best’ Lebanese dope. (1987)

Peter (1899) US; applied to a knock-out drug; origin unknown

speedball (1909) Orig US: applied to a mixture of cocaine with heroin or morphine • William Burroughs: A shot of morphine would be nice later when I was ready to sleep, or, better, a speedball, half cocaine, half morphine. (1953)

junk (1925) Orig US; applied to a narcotic drug, often specifically heroin; origin uncertain, but probably connected with junk discarded or waste material • John Brown: You do anything for junk. ... Cheat. Lie. Steal. (1972)
stuff (1929) Orig US; especially in the phrase on the stuff on drugs • Lilian Hellman: Years before she had told me her son was on the stuff. (1973)

Mickey Finn, Mickey Flynn, Mickey (1931). Michael (1942) Orig US; applied to a narcotic used to adulterate an (alcoholic) drink in order to make someone unconscious; from earlier sense, the drink so adulterated • Desmond Bagley: Meyrick was probably knocked out by a Mickey Finn in his nightly Ovaltine. (1973) • B. Buckingham: He only pretended to trust me and just slipped me a Michael in my drink. I passed out in the car a few minutes after leaving the bar. (1957)

schmeck (1932) Mainly US; applied to a narcotic drug; from Yiddish schmeck sniff

mojo (1935) US; applied to a narcotic drug; origin uncertain; perhaps from Spanish mojar celebrate by drinking

sugar (1935) Orig US; applied to a narcotic drug

smack (1942) Orig US; probably an alteration of schmeck narcotic drug

sting (1949) Australian; often applied specifically to a drug injected into a racehorse • F. Hardy: The ‘smarties’ soon found stings that didn’t show on a swab. (1958)

narco (1955) US; abbreviation of narcotic(s) • Dell Shannon: The pedigrees varied from burglary to narco dealing to rape. (1971)

juice (1957) Applied to a drug or drugs; compare earlier sense, alcoholic liquor • H. C. Rae: I wasn’t interested in him. I mean, when you shoot juice, you lose the other thing. (1972)

tab (1961) Applied to a tablet or pill containing an illegal drug, often specifically LSD; probably short for tablet • M. Walker: An order for two tabs of acid. (1978)

French blue (1964) Applied to a mixture of amphetamine and a barbiturate • Dorothy Halliday: They’re all lying around in there wearing beads and stoned out of their skulls on French Blues. (1971)

mellow yellow (1967) US; applied to banana peel used as an intoxicant

minstrel (1967) Applied to a capsule containing an amphetamine and a sedative; from its black and white colour, with reference to the Black and White Minstrels, a troupe of British variety entertainers of the 1960s and ’70s

torpedo (1971) Applied to a capsule or tablet of a narcotic drug • Martin Russell: The phial... contained more tablets... He tried to estimate how long... it took a couple of the torpedoes to send him off. (1978)

To drugs or drug-users

hoppie (1942) US; from hop opium + -y • Mezzrow & Wolfe: Detroit is really a hoppy town—people must order their opium along with their groceries. (1948)

draggy (1959) Compare earlier sense, of medicinal drugs • Times: I was enmeshed in a very druggy crowd at the time. (1984)

A stimulant drug

pep-pill (1937) Orig US; from pep vigour • Eric Ambler: As for that movie star, how do you know he isn’t on pep pills? (1974)

uppie (1966) Applied especially to an amphetamine; from up raise + -ie • J. F. Burke: There’s nothing in the box but a few uppies. I haven’t got a regular prescription. (1975)

upper (1968) Applied especially to an amphetamine; from up raise + -er • Dell Shannon: I want all your pills, man, all the uppers and downers you got. (1981)

up (1969) Applied especially to an amphetamine • P. G. Winslow: ‘She did take pills, ups, if you get me.’ Capricorn understood her to mean amphetamines. (1978)

wake-up pill, wake-up (1969)

A tranquilizing drug

happy pill (1956) Applied to a tranquilizer • Isaac Asimov: You’ve got that tranquilizer gleam in your eye, doctor. I don’t need any happy pills. (1966)

downer (1965) Orig US; applied especially to a barbiturate • Daily Telegraph: Those that shoot dope are soon stoned and on the habit, junkies liable to write their own scripts and thieve your downers and perhaps your chinky. (1983)

downie (1966) Orig US; applied especially to a barbiturate

down (1967) Orig US; applied especially to a barbiturate; often used in the plural; shortened from downer • M. Kaye: Tom needed money for drugs... pot, acid, speed, ups, downs. (1972)

trank, tranq (1967) Abbreviation of tranquilizer • A. Skinner: We’ll have to go back to slipping tranks into his coffee. (1980). Hence tranked dragged by tranquilizers (1972) • Observer: Lulling drugs are prescribed; tots shamble eerily about, tranked. (1974)

Amphetamine

benny, bennie (1949) Orig US; mainly applied to a benzedrine tablet; abbreviation • Adam Diment: The benny was starting to wear out and I was hot, thirsty and exhausted. (1967)

dexie, dext (1961), dex (1961) Orig US; applied to (a tablet of) dexamphetamine sulphate; short for Dexedrine proprietary name of this • Lawrence Sanders: I think he’s on something. I’d guess Dexies. (1969) • Harper’s: Pops a dex or a bennie occasionally, especially during exam week. (1971)

gooft ball, goof pill (1952) Orig US; applied to a pill containing an amphetamine, or more broadly any stimulant drug; from earlier sense, barbiturate tablet

purple heart (1961), purple (1968) Applied to a tablet of the stimulating drug Drinamyl, an amphetamine; from its shape and colour; presumably inspired by the earlier Purple Heart name of a US decoration awarded to someone wounded in action • Nicholas Stacey: They became
more responsible, they took more interest in life, they stopped taking purple hearts and they settled down in their homes, their schools and their jobs. (1971) • Charles Drummond: I heard her on at the Doc... about some Puffles to key them up but he hit the ceiling. (1968)

**sweets** (1961) US; applied to amphetamine tablets

**black bomber** (1963) Applied to an amphetamine tablet

**pill** (1963) Applied to an amphetamine tablet

- **Guardian**: It's impossible to discover how many adolescents use the more common illicit soft drugs—cannabis, LSD, 'pills' (amphetamines, barbiturates or mixtures of both). (1972)

**meth** (1967) Orig US; applied to (a tablet of) methamphetamine; abbreviation of methamphetamine or of Methedrine proprietary name of methamphetamine • Joseph Wambaugh: She's a meth head and an ex-con. (1972)

**speed** (1967) Orig US; applied to an amphetamine drug, especially methamphetamine, often taken intravenously; from its stimulant effect • Julian Symons: 'What was he on?'... 'Speed mostly. Sometimes acid.' (1975)

**white** (1967) Applied to an amphetamine tablet

- **H. C. Rae**: He had anticipated a rash of arrests for possession of brown drugs and amphetamines—but not this, not a straight leap into the lethal whites. (1972)

**crank** (1969) US; applied to an amphetamine drug, especially methamphetamine

**splash** (1969) US; applied collectively to amphetamines

**ice** (1989) Applied to a crystalline form of methamphetamine, inhaled or smoked as a stimulant; from the drug's colourless, crystalline appearance (like crushed ice) during the manufacturing process • **Courier-Mail** (Brisbane): Once ice was something one simply dropped into drinks. Now it could be the latest and most dangerous designer drug being smoked in salons from Beverly Hills to Bronx ghettos. (1989)

**whizz** (1993) • **Daily Telegraph**: None of the kids a bit older than us ever seem to get a job. They just hang around taking drugs like ecstasy, draw and whizz. It's everywhere. (1996)

**Amyl nitrate**

**popper** (1967) Orig US; applied to a capsule of amyl nitrate (or of (iso)butyl nitrate) taken as a stimulant drug; from the fact that the capsule is typically crushed or 'popped', and the drug taken by inhalation • **R. Silverberg**: She closed the door behind him and looked about for something to offer him, a drink, a popper, anything to calm him. (1985)

**Barbiturates**

**goof ball, goof pill** (1939) Orig US; applied to a barbiturate tablet or drug • **Jack Kerouac**: She took tea, goofballs, benny. (1957)

**bomber** (1950) Applied to a capsule containing barbiturates • **Kate Nicholson**: I was planning to go back on bombers today. (1966)

**nembie, nebbie, nemish, nemmie, nimby** (1950) US; applied to a capsule of Nembutal; from Nembutal + a range of suffixes • **William Burroughs**: Next day I was worse and could not get out of bed. So I stayed in bed taking nembies at intervals. (1953)

**yellow jacket** (1953) US; applied to a pentobarbitone tablet

**pill** (1963) Applied to a barbiturate tablet

**red, red devil** (1967), **red bird** (1969) Applied to (a red-coloured tablet of) the barbiturate Seconal • **Joseph Wambaugh**: What've you got, boy? Bennies or reds? Or maybe you're an acid freak? (1972)

**pink lady** (1970) Applied to barbiturate or a barbiturate tablet; compare earlier sense, cocktail of gin, grenade, egg white, etc.

**rainbow** (1970) Orig US; applied to a capsule of the barbiturates Amytal and Seconal, of which one end is blue and the other red • **Margaret Millar**: Getting their kicks by mixing drinks and drugs, like... the high school kid carrying a flask of vodka to wash down the rainbows. (1976)

**Bromide**

**bromo** (1916) Applied to (a dose of) a sedative drug containing a bromide mixture; short for Bromo-seltzer proprietary name of such a drug • **Encounter**: For God's sake a Bromo! (1961)

**Cannabis**

**ganja, ganga** (1800) From Hindi gānjhā • **Guardian**: The telltale smell of ganja assails your nostrils as soon as you enter. (1992)

**Mary Ann** (1925) Fanciful alteration of marijuana

**muggles** (1926) Orig US; also used in the singular to denote a marijuana cigarette (1969); origin unknown • **Mezzrow & Wilson**: 'Ever smoke any muggles?' he asked. (1946) • **A. Arent**: Offer our guest a muggle. (1969)

**Mary Jane, Mary J, maryjane** (1928) Also applied to a marijuana cigarette; fanciful alteration of marijuana • **Dell Shannon**: 'What did they buy?' asked Mendoza. 'Oh, Mary Jane. Twenty reefers,' said Callaghan. (1970)

**weed** (1929) Applied to marijuana or a marijuana cigarette; compare earlier sense, tobacco • **Jack Kerouac**: You could smell tea, weed, I mean marijuana, floating in the air. (1955)

**reefer** (1931) Orig US; mainly applied to a marijuana cigarette, but also to marijuana itself; from earlier sense, something rolled (from naval use), or perhaps from Mexican Spanish grifo marijuana • **Chicago Defender**: The humble 'reefer', 'the weed', the marijuana, or what have you by way of a name for a doped cigarette has moved to Park Ave. from Harlem. (1933)
mooh, mooter, moote, mootie, mota, muta, etc. (1933) US; origin unknown ■ Ed McBain: One of the guys was on mooh. So he got a little high. (1956)

loco weed (1935) From earlier sense, type of plant that causes brain disease in cattle eating it, from Spanish loco mad ■ Sunday Sun (Brisbane): Detectives from the CIB Drug Squad in Brisbane are becoming quite familiar now with words like . . . rope and locoweed. (1972)

tea (1935) Orig US; often applied specifically to marijuana • San Francisco Chronicle: A couple of years ago she started blowing tea. (1950)

spliff, splif (1936) Orig West Indian; applied to a marijuana cigarette; origin unknown ■ High Times: Like Marley, he’s a spliff-taking Rastafarian. (1975)

grass (1938) Orig US ■ Adam Diment: Pure Grass cigarettes, at two dollars a pack and none of your watering down with tobacco. (1968)

jive (1938) Orig US; applied to a marijuana cigarette; from earlier sense, spiritous or intoxicating drink ■ New York Times: So Diane smoked jive, pod, and tea. (1952)

Mary Warner (1938) Fanciful alteration of marijuana

mezz (1938) From the name of Mezz Mezzrow (1890–1972), US jazz clarinetist and drug addict

pot (1938) Orig US; probably from Mexican Spanish potiguaya marijuana leaves ■ Thomas Pynchon: ‘But we don’t repeat what we hear,’ said another girl. ‘None of us smoke Beaconsfields anyway. We’re all on pot.’ (1966)

stick, stick of tea, stick of weed (1938) Applied to a marijuana cigarette; from earlier sense, cigarette, cigar ■ Colin MacInnes: ‘I’ll roll you a stick.’ . . . i lit up. . . . ‘Good stuff. And what do they make you pay for a stick here?’ (1957)

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Indian hay (1939) US

ju-ju (1940) Applied to a marijuana cigarette; reduplication of marijuana ■ Nicholas Freeing: ‘He had juju cigarettes too; like Russians, with a big mouth piece and pretty loose. . . . ‘The jujus are—you feel very clever.’ (1963)

charge (1941) US; from earlier sense, a dose of a narcotic drug ■ Melody Maker: Club promoters are worried that hippies could close them down by smoking charge on the premises. (1969)

goof (1941) US; from the effect on the user

rope (1944) Mainly US; compare earlier sense, cigar

shit (1950) Orig US ■ Daily Telegraph. Acid (LSD) and ‘shit’ (cannabis), were on open sale, and . . . a notice was pinned to a tent stating: ‘Anybody with some black shit for sale, ask for Irsh Mick.’ (1972)

bomb (1951) US; applied to a (large) marijuana cigarette ■ E. Wymark: First they simply smoke marijuana. . . . They refer to the smokes as sticks or bombs, depending on their size. (1967)

bomber (1952) US; applied to a (large) marijuana cigarette ■ Jack Kerouac: Victor proceeded to roll the biggest bomber anybody ever saw. (1957)

joint (1952) Applied to a marijuana cigarette ■ Daily Telegraph: The making of the joint seemed to be as much a part of the ritual as smoking it. (1972)

pod (1952) Compare pot marijuana ■ William Burroughs: A square wants to come on hip. . . . Talks about ‘pod’, and smokes it now and then. (1959)

roach (1953) Orig US; applied to (the butt of) a marijuana cigarette; from earlier more general sense, cigarette-end ■ M. J. Bosse: I . . . took out my pot pouch and cigarette paper . . . . . . rolled myself a joint. . . . I had finished the roach down to my fingernails. (1972)

green (1957) Orig US; applied to marijuana of poor quality; from the colour of uncurled marijuana

boo (1959) Orig US; origin unknown ■ Playboy: Where’s the fun in . . . inhaling carbon-monoxide fumes, when you could be taking refreshing essence of boo smoke. (1985)


Acapulco gold, Acapulco (1965) Applied to a high grade of marijuana, typically brownish- or greenish-gold in colour, originally grown around Acapulco, a seaside resort on the west coast of Mexico

doobie (1967) US; applied to marijuana or to a marijuana cigarette; origin unknown

puff (1989) Applied to marijuana for smoking ■ Guardian: In George’s book, a drink, a few lines, a bit of puff is okay but those E’s and stuff like acid turns people into wrong uns. (1992)

Cocaine

coke (c1903) Orig US; abbreviation ■ P. Capon: He started introducing her to drugs. . . . Reefers at first, and then, under the influence of reefers, coke. (1959)

white stuff (1908) Mainly US

snow (1914) Orig US; from its white powdery appearance ■ Adam Hall: Pang菩萨 was a narcotics contrabandist and would therefore know people . . . prepared to kill for a fix of snow. (1966)

happy dust (1922) From its powdery form and its supposed effect on the user ■ E. St. V. Millay: Your head’s So full of dope, so full of happy-dust . . . you’re just a drug Addict. (1937)

Charlie (1935) Orig US; from the male personal name, probably because of the shared initial letter ■ Guardian: The Loafer was rather surprised to be served champagne. Not a whiff of Charlie, though. (1996)

toe (1935) Applied to marijuana for smoking ■ Guardian: The making of the joint seemed to be as much a part of the ritual as smoking it. (1972)

nose candy (1935) Orig US; applied to cocaine taken by inhaling

blow (1971) Orig US; applied especially to cocaine for inhaling

toot (1978) US; from earlier sense, ‘snort’ of cocaine
freebase (1980) Orig US; applied to cocaine that has been purified by heating with ether, and is taken by inhaling the fumes or smoking the residue; short for the technical term freebase cocaine

crack (1985) Orig US; applied to a hard crystalline form of cocaine broken into small pieces and inhaled or smoked; probably from the cracking sound it makes when smoked or from the fact that it is cracked into small pieces

U.S. News & World Report: Crack... has rocketed from near obscurity to national villainy in the past six months. (1986)

Heroin

dynamite (1924) Orig US; from the drug’s effect

M. Culpan: ‘A little bit of horse? Some dynamite?’ Horse was heroin; so was dynamite. (1967)

H (1926) Abbreviation

Kenneth Orvis: Suppose I... ask you where to connect for H? (1962)

horse (1950) Orig US; perhaps from the shared initial and the horse’s power

Daily Telegraph: He had seen the effects of an overdose of ‘horse’ before. The skin becomes greenish and there was frothing at the mouth. (1969)


the white stuff (1953) Orig US

Norman Lucas: Luckier still not to have graduated from pep pills to... The White Stuff... heroin. (1967)

sugar (1956) Orig US; from earlier more general sense, a drug

Observer: Detectives call them the ‘sugar people’ and to the expensive white powder they inject or sniff. (1979)

duji, dujie (1959) US; origin unknown

smack (1960) Orig US; from earlier more general sense, a drug

Oz. In the paper today it said that Jimmy Hendrix got busted for smack. (1969)

schmeck (1966) Mainly US; from earlier more general sense, a drug

M. Culpan: ‘He was always... anything for kicks... In the end it was schmeck.’ (1979)

jack (1967) Applied to a tablet of heroin

Roger Busby: He’s been cracking up on horse. His last jack is wearing off, and he’s grovelling on the floor for another pill. (1971)

scag, skag (1967) Origin unknown; compare earlier sense, cigarette (stub)

N. Adam: I’m no junkie myself, never touched the scag, never even used the White Dragon Pearl. (1971)

scat (1970) From earlier sense, dung, (pl.) animal droppings, from Greek σκάντος, skanó dungs

D. E. Westlake: You’re dealing in machismo, man, just like I’m dealing in scat. (1972)

brown sugar (1974) Applied to a drug consisting of heroin diluted with caffeine and strychnine

Donald MacKenzie: No more Hong Kong brown sugar. We’ll be out of business. (1978)

black tar (1986) Applied to an exceptionally pure form of heroin originating in Mexico

See also junk at An (illegal) drug (p. 156).

LSD

acid (1965) Orig US; short for lysergic acid diethylamide

John Lennon: I was influenced by acid and got psychedelic, like the whole generation, but really, I like rock and roll and I express myself best in rock. (1970)

purple haze (1967), purple (1968) Also applied to LSD mixed with methedrine

Jimmi Hendrix: Purple haze is in my brain lately things don’t seem the same. (1967)

sugar (1967) Applied to LSD taken on a lump of sugar

white lightning (1972)

Village Voice: Ellen... unfolded some tinfoil which she said contained three tabs of Owsley’s original ‘white lightning’, the Mouton-Rothschild of LSD. (1972)

Methadone

phy (1971) British; abbreviation of Physeptone a proprietary name of methadone hydrochloride

Times: She said to him: ‘Do you want some phy (Physeptone)?’ and made it quite clear that she meant the drug. (1973)

Methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA)

Adam (1985) Probably a reversal and partial respelling of the chemical name MDMA, perhaps influenced by the first Adam’s connections with Paradise

Observer: ‘Ecstasy’—also known as ‘MDMA’ or ‘Adam’—has been reported on sale in Bath, Bristol and Cardiff. (1988)

eccstasy (1985) Orig US; from its euphoric effect on the user

Sunday Times: Acid House (the music) and Ecstasy (the drug) became inextricably bound together and the fans turned to it. (1988)

E (1989) Abbreviation of ecstasy

New Musical Express: ‘People will dance to anything now,’ muses Mal. ‘I blame the E meself!’ (1990)

Morphine

white stuff (1908), white (1914) Mainly US

N. Adam: By 1965 they were growing poppies for half the world’s white. (1977)

morph (1912) US; abbreviation

Herbert Gold: No morph, no! I had really kicked that one, and would do my own traveling from now on. (1956)

mojo (1955) US; from earlier more general sense, a narcotic drug

Opium

hop (1887) US. dated; from earlier sense, plant used for flavouring beer

US Senate Hearings: Opium in the underworld is referred to as... ‘hop’. (1955)

pill (1887) Dated; applied to a pellet of opium for smoking
**twang** (1898) Australian, dated; probably a back-formation from Twonkay variety of green tea  ■ T. Ronan: The honest Chinese limits himself to his one pipe of ‘Twang’ per night. (1945)

**mud** (1922) US ■ Flynn's: Some stiffs uses mud but coke don't need any jabbin', cookin', or flops. You can hit it an' go. (1926)

**yen** (1926) US; probably from Chinese (Cantonese) yín opium, or (Mandarin) yín opium

**phencyclidine**

**angel dust** (1970) Orig US ■ Joseph Wambaugh: My nephew was arrested because he was holding this angel dust for somebody else. (1978)

**rocket fuel** (1977) Orig US ■ Sunday Times: PCP or ‘angel dust’, a strong anaesthetic which came after LSD in 1960s drug fashions . . . has recently emerged anew. Now they call it ‘rocket fuel’ in Chicago and mix it with peanut butter. (1985)

**Sodium pentothal**

**soap** (1975) Applied in espionage slang to the drug sodium pentothal, or a mixture of this and amphetamines; from the initial letters of sodium pentothal, humorously respelled after soap cleaning agent ■ J. Gardner: Soap—as the Service called it—would sometimes produce spectacular results. (1980)

A quantity, portion, or dose of a drug  

**deck** (1916) US; applied to a package containing narcotic drugs; from earlier sense, pack of playing cards ■ Chester Himes: When it's analysed, they'll find five or six half-chewed decks of heroin. (1966)

**jolt** (1916) Mainly US; applied to a quantity of a drug in the form of a cigarette, tablet, etc.; from earlier sense, drink of liquor ■ Kim Platt: Her LSD cap would cost about two dollars and fifty cents for the jolt. (1970)

**bindle** (1921) Applied to a package containing narcotic drugs; from earlier more general sense, package ■ Dialect Notes: Bindle, a package containing either morphine or cocaine. ‘Give me a bindle of snow.’ (1923)

**bang** (1922) US; applied to an injection or inhalation of cocaine, morphine, or heroin ■ Kenneth Orvis: He . . . talked me into Sampling a bang. (1962)

**charge** (1925) US; applied to a dose or injection of a narcotic

**sniffer** (1930) Orig US; applied to a small quantity of cocaine inhaled through the nose ■ John Wainwright: A sniffer when the pain's bad . . . it ain't for kicks. You're no junkie. (1974)

**fix-up** (1934), **fix** (1936) Orig US; applied to a dose of a narcotic ■ Oxford Mail: A weird scene where the dope peddlers gather to beat up Johnny, who gets more into debt with each ‘fix’. (1958)

**piece** (1935) US; applied to an ounce of a drug, especially morphine or heroin


**twister** (1938) US; applied to an intravenous injection of a mixture of drugs

**hit** (1951) Orig US; applied to a dose of a narcotic, or to the act of obtaining or giving such a dose ■ Southeylike: Somebody hands me a joint and I take a hit and hand it to Marlene who takes a hit. (1972)

**spike** (1953) Orig US; applied to an injection, or the drug injected ■ John Wainwright: It was a mounting yearning. A craving. . . . He needed a spike—badly! (1974)

**snort** (1951) Orig US; applied to an inhaled dose of cocaine, heroin, etc. ■ Gore Vidal: ‘Want a snort?’ Bruce produced a cocaine sniffer. (1978)

O.D. (1980) Orig US; applied to a (fatal) overdose of drugs; abbreviation of overdose ■ Black World: A truly brilliant Black filmmaker goes into his grave at 24 . . . an O.D. takes him, he loses a battle of several years—the ‘stuff’ wins. (1971)

**lid** (1967) Applied to an ounce of marijuana ■ J. D. MacDonald: We had almost two lads of Acapulco Gold. (1968)

**nickel** (1967) US; applied to five dollars’ worth of marijuana; from nickel note five-dollar bill

**nickel bag** (1967) US; applied to a bag containing, or a measure of, five dollars’ worth of a drug, especially heroin or marijuana ■ Black World: If . . . he gets high and blurts it out to a stranger in some bar that he got his nickel bag from Joe, the pusher, then Joe’s livelihood is endangered. (1973)

**trey, tray** (1967) US; applied to a three-dollar bag of a narcotic drug; from earlier sense, set of three ■ James Mills: She wants to buy two treys, $3 bags of heroin. He says he has treys, but wants $3.50 for them. (1972)

**key** (1968) US; applied to a kilogram of a drug; respelling of ki- in kilo ■ Joseph Wambaugh: On her coffee table she had at least half a key and that’s a pound of pot and that’s trouble. (1972)

**toke** (1968) US; applied to a drag on a cigarette or pipe containing marijuana or other narcotic substance; from the verb toke smoke a marijuana cigarette

**mike** (1970) Applied to a microgram of LSD; abbreviation of microgram ■ James Wood: They wanted me to tell where I got the mikes . . . the acid, see? (1973)

**weight** (1971) Applied to a measure of an illegal drug ■ S. Wilson: Neil was taking colossal risks, there’d be up to thirty weights sitting in the flat at one time. (1978)
A drug-taker or addict

Junkie (1923) Orig US; applied to a drug-addict; from the verb toot inhale cocaine • Maclaren's Magazine. They sink into some of the finer furnished bathrooms of the city for a quick toot. (1977)

Junker (1922) C. R. US; applied to a drug-addict

Toot (1977) US; applied to a 'snort' of cocaine; from the verb toot inhale cocaine • John Brown: Lacerated hands, the hands of junkies, scarred where needles had searched for veins. (1972)

Fiend (1881) Applied especially to someone addicted to opium or an opiate drug • R. H. Davis: With the desperation of a dope fiend clutching his last pill of cocaine. (1914)

Dope (1899) US; suggested by earlier senses, idiot and stupefying drug

Hypo (1904) Orig US; applied to a drug-addict; abbreviation of hypodermic • Jack Black: Vag these two hypos', said the cop to the desk man. (1926)

Head (1911) Orig US; applied to someone addicted to a (usually specified) drug • Lee Duncan: I saw the more advanced narcotic addicts, laudanum fiends, and last but not least, the veronal heads. (1936)

Hophead (1911) US; applied to a drug-addict • Helen Nielsen: I'll mail the letter to that hophead lawyer. (1973)

Snow-bird (1914) US; applied to someone who sniffs cocaine, and more broadly to any drug-addict; from snow cocaine

Cokie, cokey (1916) Orig US; applied to a cocaine-addict; from coke cocaine + -ie • J. G. Brandon: His first glance at the shivering, stricken-looking creature ... told him that the man was a 'cokey'. (1934)

Sniffer (1920) Orig US; applied to someone who inhales drugs or toxic substances • Daily Telegraph: A glue sniffer is under the influence of a drug for the purposes of the 1972 Road Traffic Act, magistrates decided yesterday when a self-confessed 'sniffer' denied being unfit to drive through drink or drugs while in charge of a motorcycle. (1981)

Doper (1922), Dopester (1938) Applied to someone who uses or is addicted to drugs; compare earlier sense, one who collects and provides information • J. Rice: A doper seldom drinks and most drinkers have not yet taken to dope. (1938)

Hoppy (1922) US; applied to an opium addict; from hop opium + -y • Ben Hecht: A lush, a proste, a hoppy, and a pain in the neck, say the police. (1941)

Junker (1922) US; applied to a drug-addict • C. R. Shaw: Next to me in the hospital was Herbie, a junker, who was taking the cure. (1930)

Junkie (1923) Orig US; applied to a drug-addict • John Brown: Lacerated hands, the hands of junkies, scarred where needles had searched for veins. (1972)
acid head (1966) Orig US; applied to a habitual taker of LSD

druggy, druggie (1966) Orig US; applied to a drug-addict ■ Washington Post: Sherlock Holmes fans... remember his portrayal as an angstridden druggie a few years back. (1979)

freak (1967) Orig US; applied to someone addicted to a (usually specified) drug ■ Atavar (Boston): The life expectancy of the average speed-freak...is less than five years. (1967)

crackhead (1986) Orig US; applied to a habitual taker of crack cocaine ■ Observer: Charlie and two fellow 'crackheads' took me to a vast housing estate in south London where crack is on sale for between £20 and £25 a deal. (1988)

A non-addict

straight (1967) Orig US; from more general sense, conventional person ■ Kenneth Royce: I'm not having the stink of pot in this place...'...You straights are all the same.' (1974)

Addiction

yen-yen (1886) US, dated; applied to opium addiction or a craving for opium; probably from Chinese (Cantonese) yïnïn craving for opium, from yïn opium + yïn craving ■ Jack Black: He [an old Chinese person] was shaking with the 'yen yen', the hop habit. (1926)

monkey (1942) Orig US; especially in the phrase have a monkey on one's back be a drug-addict ■ E. R. Johnson: An addict's greatest worry would not be his, since Vito would feed his monkey. (1970)

the needle (1955) Orig US; applied to addiction to injected drugs; especially in the phrase on the needle addicted to injecting drugs ■ Listener: Middle Britain thinks...one puff on the joint leads to the needle. (1973)

jones, Jones (1968) US; applied to a drug-addict's habit; probably from the surname Jones ■ Black World: I don't have a long jones. I ain't been on it too long. (1971)

To take drugs

dope (1909) ■ M. Hong Kingston: I don't dope anymore. I've seen all there is to see on dope; the trips have been repeating themselves. (1989)

shoot (1914) Orig US; denoting injecting oneself with a drug; often followed by up ■ Oz: They were using those needles man, they were shooting up. (1971)

sleigh-ride (1915) US; denoting taking a narcotic drug; from the association with snow cocaine. Hence sleigh-ride (1915)

coke (1924) Orig US; denoting taking cocaine; often followed by up; from coke cocaine ■ Nicholas Blake: They let him coke himself up for the occasion. (1954)

peter (1925) Denoting taking a stupefying drug; from peter knock-out drug

sniff (1925) Denoting inhaling cocaine, the fumes of glue or solvents, etc. through the nose ■ Edgar Wallace: Red, you're... a hop-head... We got no room in this outfit for guys who sniff. (1931)

main-line (1934) Orig US; denoting injecting a drug; from main line large vein (into which drugs are injected) ■ Michael Perera: He made himself a fix... and he mainlined it. (1972) Hence mainliner (1934)

snort (1935) Orig US; denoting inhaling cocaine, heroin, etc. ■ Daily Telegraph: Mrs Pulitizer's lawyers claim that she started snorting cocaine after being sucked into the vortex of the 'Palm Beach lifestyle'. (1982)

spike (1935) Orig US; denoting injecting (with) a drug; from spike hypodermic needle ■ Guardian: The addicts...'ll sometime try and spike you, try and get you mainlining too. (1974)

fix (1938) Orig US; denoting injecting oneself with a narcotic drug ■ M. M. Glatt: At first I 'fixed' only once a week, then more often, and after about six months I was addicted. (1967)

blast (1943) Orig & mainly US; denoting smoking marijuana; compare earlier Scottish dialect blast smoke tobacco

goof (1944) From the notion of being made goofy ■ Guardian: Thousands of youths openly...'goofed' amphetamines. (1970)

toke (1952) US; denoting smoking a marijuana cigarette; origin unknown ■ Norman Mailer: He had been over at a friend of his selling drugs, a little crystal, some speed, toked a couple, got blasted. (1979)

skin, skin-pop (1953) Denoting injecting oneself with a drug; from the notion of subcutaneous injection (often as directly contrasted with intravenous injection) ■ Daily Telegraph: She had also 'skin-popped' (injected drugs just below the surface of the skin) and taken a vast assortment of pills. (1970) ■ John Brown: The bastard, he mainlined me. I said to skin it, but he mainlined it. First time. (1972). Hence skin-popper (1953) ■ Hilary Waugh: No marks. She must be a skin-popper. (1970)

use (1953) Used intransitively to denote taking drugs; compare user regular drug-taker ■ Kenneth Orvis: Almost twenty-four hours...since I've had a fix...Are you the only one?...You forget I use, too. (1962)

pop (1956) Denoting taking a narcotic drug, and also injecting a drug into (a blood vessel) ■ Martin Woodhouse: For him the day... started when he swallowed the first pill or popped the first vein. (1968)

chase the dragon (1961) Denoting taking heroin by inhalation; from the resemblance between the movements of the smoke from the burning heroin and the undulations of a dragon's tail ■ R. Lewis: There's this myth among the kids that if they inhale the burned skag it isn't going to hurt them. Chasing the dragon, they call it. (1985)

drop (1963) Orig US; often in the phrase drop acid ■ Saul Bellow: Some kids are dropping acid, stealing cars. (1984)
do (1967) Orig US • New Yorker: Their lives . . . involve . . . smoking (tobacco, marijuana, cloves), drinking (everything), and doing drugs—mainly cocaine. (1985)

main (1970) US; short for main-line • Time: All my friends were on heroin. I snorted a couple of times, skinned a lot, and after that I mained it. (1970)

crank (1971) Denoting injecting oneself with an illegal drug; compare crank amphetamine drug • Daily Telegraph: If . . . I continue to crank I will be dead within 18 months. (1972)

speed (1973) Orig US; denoting taking the drug 'speed' • S. George: 'You speeding?' He shrugged. 'Yes. Cancels the alcohol.' (1978)

toot (1975) US; denoting inhaling cocaine: from earlier sense, go on a drunken spree • High Times: You’ll feel better knowing that what you toot is cut with the original Italian Mannite Conoscenti. (1979)

freebase (1980) Orig US; denoting inhaling freebase cocaine • Time: The Los Angeles police say Pryor told them that the accident occurred while he was 'free-basing' cocaine. (1980)

Taking drugs

on (1938) US • William Gaddis: She's high right now, can’t you see it? She’s been on for three days. (1955)

Equipment for taking drugs

hop toy (1881) US, dated; applied to a container used for smoking opium

pipe (1886) Orig US; applied to an opium pipe

gun (1899) US; applied to a hypodermic syringe

hypo (1904) Orig US; applied to a hypodermic needle; abbreviation of hypodermic • John Wainwright: The night medic . . . held the loaded hypo. (1973)

gonger (1914) US; applied to an opium pipe; probably from gong opium

gongerine (1914) US, dated; applied to an opium pipe; from gong + diminutive suffix -ine

suey pow, sueypow, sui pow (1914) US, dated; applied to a sponge or rag used for cleaning or cooling an opium bowl; origin unknown

gong (1915) US; applied to an opium pipe; apparently short for gonger

stem (1925) US; applied to a pipe for smoking opium or crack • Village Voice: Now the johns drive up, they don’t even say hello. They just go, ‘Hey, you got a stem on you?’ (1990)

hype, hyp (1929) Orig US; applied to a hypodermic needle; abbreviation of hypodermic

needle (1929) Orig US; applied to a hypodermic needle

spike (1934) Orig US; applied to a hypodermic needle • Peter Driscoll: This punk kid, shooting amphetamines, can’t find enough spikes. (1979)

toy (1934) US; applied to a small tin or jar containing opium

works (1934) US; applied to the apparatus with which a drug-addict takes drugs • William Burroughs: I went into the bathroom to get my works. Needle, dropper, and a piece of cotton. (1953)

joint (1935) Dated; applied to hypodermic equipment used by drug-addicts

outfit (1951) Applied to the apparatus with which a drug-addict takes drugs • William Burroughs: She keeps outfits in glasses of alcohol so the junkies can fix in the joint and walk out clean. (1953)

skin (1969) Orig US; applied to a paper used for rolling marijuana cigarettes

To give a drug to

dope (1875) Denoting especially the drugging of a racing animal to affect its performance • Times: He had heard of greyhounds being doped, but not to make them run faster. (1955)

hypo (1925) Orig US; denoting administering a hypodermic injection (to); from hypo hypodermic needle • Time: Because of continuing hypo-ing, his arms and legs become abscessed. (1960)

snow (1927) US; from snow cocaine or other drug • Raymond Chandler: She looked snowed, weaved around funny. (1934)


A drugged state

heat (1912) US; applied to a drug-induced state of intoxication; especially in the phrase have a heat on

sleigh-ride (1925) US; applied to (the euphoria resulting from) the taking of a narcotic drug, especially cocaine; especially in the phrase take (or go on) a sleigh-ride • Dell Shannon: It was just some dope out on a sleigh-ride. (1963)

wingding (1927) US; applied to a drug-addict's real or feigned seizure; especially in the phrase throw a wingding • P. Tamony: It assigned . . . Winfred Sweet . . . to throw a wing-ding . . . in Market Street. (1965)

nod (1942) Applied to a state of drowsiness induced by narcotic drugs; especially in the phrase on the nod • Kenneth Orvis: While I was on the nod. (1962)

flash (1946) Orig US; applied to the brief pleasurable sensation obtained by injecting a narcotic drug • Oz: More & more people started shooting it to get the flash all the real hip suckers were talking about. (1971)

high (1953) Applied to a drug-induced euphoria • Times: The two cigarettes smoked by each subject were intended to produce a 'normal social cannabis high'. (1969)

trip (1959) Orig US; applied to a hallucinatory experience induced by a drug, especially LSD • Scientific American: One of the volunteers had a bad trip, entering a panicky and nearly psychotic state. (1971). Hence the adjective trippy (1969) • New Age: Trippy music...
for meditation, massage, free-form movement, tantric loving, and a relaxing environment. (1980)

**bummer (1966)** | Orig and mainly US; applied to an unpleasant experience induced by a hallucinogenic drug; from bum bad (as in bum trip) + -er. | Timothy Leary: The Western world has been on a bad trip, a 400-year bummer. (1968)

**acid trip (1967)** | Applied to a hallucinatory experience induced by taking LSD

**turn-on (1969)** | Applied to a drug-taker's state of teaed, tea-d (1928) US; applied to someone in a state of somewhere; from earlier sense, drunk. (1924)

**munchies (1971)** | US; applied to hunger caused by taking marijuana; from earlier sense, munchie food

**loaded (1923)** | US; from earlier sense, drunk. | 

**hopped-up, hopped (1924)** | US; from hop a narcotic drug. | Guardian: Chuck Berry don't drink either but he gets hopped. (1973)

**piped (1924)** | US; from earlier sense, drunk

**teed, tea-d (1928)** | US; applied to someone in a marijuana-induced euphoria; often followed by up; from tea marijuana

**high (1932)** | From earlier sense, drunk. | New Scientist: It is far safer to drive a car when high on marihuana than when drunk. (1969)

**geed-up (1938)** | From gee opium or other drug

**jagged (1938)** | Sometimes followed by up; compare earlier sense, drunk. | Boyd & Parkes: Solange is—was—God help her, a heroin addict. When we first met, she was all jagged up. She was a reject on the junk heap. (1973)

**polluted (1938)** | Orig US; from earlier sense, drunk

**straight (1946)** | US | Life: Once the addict has had his shot and is 'straight' he may become admirably, though briefly, industrious. (1965)

**stoned (1953)** | Orig US; from earlier sense, drunk| Dorothy Halliday: They're all lying around in there wearing beads and stoned out of their skulls on French Blues. (1971)


**zonked (1959)** | Often followed by out; from zonk hit, overwhelm. | Daily Telegraph: A... Caucasian woman obviously zonked out... and a tracery of leaves resembling cannabis. (1979)

**potted (1960)** | Orig US; applied to someone under the influence of ‘pot’ or marijuana | Busby & Holtham: The Jamaicans... didn't appear to be potted. (1968)

**out of it (1963)** | Orig US

**bombed (1965)** | Often followed by out; from earlier sense, drunk. | Olivia Manning: 'Poor little brat! They'll take her off on the heroin trail and she'll die between here and the Philippines.' (1974)

**wiped (1966)** | Orig & mainly US; usually followed by out; from earlier sense, tired

**smashed (1968)** | Orig US; from earlier sense, drunk | New Society: If you're smashed out of your skull all the time on peyote, then even the bizarre patronage of Marlon Brando must seem tolerable. (1977)

**spaced (1968)** | Orig US; denoting drug-induced euphoria, distraction, or disorientation; usually followed by out | J. Mandelkau: I remember being really spaced out and someone handing me a ladybird—telling me how nice they tasted. (1971)

**spacey, spacy (1968)** | Mainly US; denoting drug-induced euphoria, distraction, or disorientation. | J. A. Carver: His head felt large, and a little spacey, and he felt a heightened sense of geometry, of perspective. (1980)

**wasted (1968)** | Orig US

**wrecked (1968)** | US

**blasted (1969)** | Mainly US; from earlier sense, drunk | S. Booth: He seemed as fog-bound as I was, a sweet-tempered English boy staying blasted on grass and coke. (1985)

**ripped (1971)** | Orig US | Clive James: On he gabbled as if ripped on Speed. (1975)

**tripped-out (1973)** | Orig US; applied especially to someone under the influence of LSD | H. Ferguson: Everyone was gathered round talking about the arrangements they would make for their 'excursion' the following day. They cared so little for my tripped-out state that they turned out the light and left me in the darkened room. (1976)

**whacked out (1975)** | US; from earlier sense, crazy

**wired (1977)** | Mainly US; often followed by up; from earlier sense, tense, edgy | Fortune: From a cocaine-abusing denizen of Wall Street: 'I worked on both Chrysler refinancings, and by the second one, I was wired most of the time.' (1985)

To (cause to) experience the effect of a drug

**stone (1952)** | Orig US; usually followed by out; | G. Mandel: I'd rather stay with the tea. It's great pod. I don't want to stone out. (1952) | John Brown: You smoke Egyptian Black, that will stone you out of your head. (1972)

**turn on (1953)** | Orig US; from earlier sense, excited, stimulate | Roni Jaffe: She walked in while I was turning on so I offered her some [marijuana]. (1979)

**blow someone's mind (1965)** | Orig US; denoting the inducing of hallucinatory experiences in someone by means of drugs, especially LSD

**freak (1965)** | Orig US; denoting (causing someone to have hallucinatory experiences from the use of narcotic drugs; usually followed
by out. ■ Life: When my husband and I want to take a trip together... I just put a little acid in the kids’ orange juice... and let them spend the day freaking out in the woods. (1966)

trip (1966) Orig US; denoting experiencing drug-induced hallucinations; sometimes followed by out. ■ J. Scott: Some of the people here were tripping already. Seemed a pity not to bust ’em. (1980). Hence tripper one who experiences hallucinatory effects of a drug (1966) ■ Bernard Malamud: One of the swamis there, a secret acid tripper, got on my nerves. (1979)


space out (1968) US; denoting going into a drug-induced euphoria. ■ New York: Karenja... looks like he’s going crazy or spacing out on dope. (1970)

get off (1969) Orig US; usually followed by on. ■ A. Kukla: Did you get off on that acid you took last night? (1980)


mellow out (1974) US; denoting becoming relaxed under the influence of a drug. ■ Cyra McFadden: How about we all smoke a little dope and mellow out, okay? (1977)

Physical effects of drug-taking

tracks (1964) Applied to the lines on the skin made by repeated injections of an addictive drug. ■ James Mills: Whaddya mean, lemme see your tracks? I’m a pros, man, I shoot up in my thighs. (1972)

Detoxification

dry out (1908) Orig US; applied a drug-addict undergoing treatment to cure addiction. ■ Guardian: They are not only making firmer contact with the addicts... but also giving some of those they have ’dried out’ a purpose. (1987)

cold turkey (1921) Orig US; applied to the sudden complete giving up of an addictive drug, especially as a method of withdrawal; from the notion of the simple abruptness of the withdrawal, with reference to a simple dish of cold turkey, without garnish. ■ S. George: She took a cold turkey, no methedrine, no sedatives, nothing, just off. (1976)

kick (1936) Orig US; applied to giving up a drug-taking habit. ■ Billie Holiday: Along about the end of the war I went to Joe Glaser’s office and told him I wanted to kick and I’d need help. (1956)

twister (1936) US; applied to a spasm experienced by a drug-taker as a withdrawal symptom.

sick (1951) US; applied to someone suffering drug withdrawal symptoms. ■ William Burroughs: The usual routine is to grab someone with junk on him, and let him stew in jail until he is good and sick. (1953)

clean (1953) Applied to someone free from or cured of addiction to drugs. ■ Times: Only one-tenth of heroin addicts are ever completely ‘clean’ again. (1970)

To buy or sell drugs

hold (1935) US; denoting being in possession of drugs for sale. ■ R. Russell: He was holding, just as Red had said. Santa had the sweets. (1961)

score (1935) Orig US; denoting obtaining an illegal drug. ■ William Burroughs: Junk wins by default. I tried it as a matter of curiosity. I drifted along taking shots when I could score. (1953)

connect (1938) US; denoting meeting someone in order to obtain drugs. ■ Kenneth Orvis: If you’re connecting from Frankie, he should have told you. (1962)

push (1938) Denoting peddling illegal drugs

deal (1958) Used intransitively to denote peddling illegal drugs

A supplier of drugs

connection, connexion (1927) Orig US. ■ Jack Kerouac: A couple of Negro characters whispered in my ear about tea.... The connection came in and motioned me to the cellar toilet. (1957)

junker (1930) US; compare earlier sense, drug-addict. ■ J. Evans: No slim-waisted junker with a snapbrim hat and a deck of nose candy for sale to the right guy. (1949)

mule (1935) Orig US; applied to someone employed as a courier to smuggle illegal drugs into a country and often to pass them on to a buyer; from the role of the mule as a beast of burden. ■ Ed McBain: I bought from him a couple times. He was a mule, Dad. That means he pushed to other kids. (1955)

pusher (1935) Orig US; probably from push peddle illegal drugs (although not recorded until a few years later). - cr ■ Howard Journal: Western loathing for temptation is vented... upon the scapegoats of the junkie and the pusher. (1976)

teaman (1950) US; applied to a seller of marijuana; compare earlier sense, marijuana-addict.

swing man (1972) ■ John Wainwright: Tell us about the dope he pushed... He was taking from his swingman. (1973)

superfly (1973) US; from Super Fly name of a cocaine dealer in a 1972 US film of the same name

A supply of drugs or place where drugs are available

teapad (1938) US; applied to a place where one can buy and smoke marijuana

teaparty (1944) US; applied to a gathering at which marijuana is smoked. ■ Julian Symons: Used to give tea parties—marijuana. (1956)
script (1951) Orig US; applied to a prescription for narcotic drugs; short for prescription. John Brown: You're just like a bloody junkie I know. Gets his script at mid-day every day, then works his fixes out. (1972)

shooting gallery (1951) US; applied to a place where illegal drugs can be obtained and injected; compare shoot (up) inject oneself with a drug
Articles and Substances

1. Things

A thing of a particular type

animal (1922) Often in the phrase there is no such animal. □ Guardian: There never has been such an animal as the American symphony. (1932)

job (1928) Orig US. □ Brickhill & Norton: A rather imposing moustache. It was one of those bushy black jobs. (1946)

sucker (1978) Orig & mainly US; compare earlier sense, gullible person □ Sports Illustrated: One day David said, ‘Never fear, I’ll shut that sucker off.’ And he grabbed it and gave it a huge twist. (1982)

An unnamed or unspecified thing

thingummy (1796) From obsolete thingum in same sense (from thing + a fanciful suffix) + -y □ Economist: When the last gets used up, the card is returned to the thingummy supplier. (1987)

thingumajig, thingamajig, thingummyjig (1824) From obsolete thingum or thingummy + the fanciful element jig. □ Elizabeth Banks: I would drive through Hyde Park in a victoria and everybody would say. ‘There goes the editress of the Thingymygig Magazine!’ (1902)

dingbat (1923) US; compare earlier senses, money, tramp; this meaning perhaps influenced by dings. □ James Thurber: It is sitting on a strange and almost indescribable sort of iron dingbat. (1931)

doohickey, dohickey, doohicky (1914) Orig & mainly US; perhaps from doo(dad + hickey thing, gadget □ Alison Lurie: Just unhitch that doohickey there with a wrench. (1967)

oojah, oojar, and in various comical extensions such as oojah-ka-piv, oojah-ma-flip (1917) British, dated; origin unknown □ B. W. Aldiss: I’ve seen blokes in hot countries go clean round the oojar because of the perverted practices of native women. (1971)

oojiboo (1918) British services’ slang, dated; origin unknown

dingbat (1923) US; compare earlier senses, money, tramp; this meaning perhaps influenced by dings. □ James Thurber: It is sitting on a strange and almost indescribable sort of iron dingbat. (1931)

doodee, doodea, do-da (1924) Compare earlier use in the phrase all of a doodah in a state of confusion □ Honoria Croome: They make little plastic doodahs to use in electrical machinery. (1957)

whangdoodle, whangydoodle (1931) North American; compare earlier sense, imaginary creature □ Globe & Mail (Toronto): A new company sprang to the fore in Quebec.... PQ Productions claimed to have invented the whangdoodle. (1979)

whassit (1931) US: representing a casual pronunciation of whatist

thingy, thingie (1933) From thing + -y □ Spare Rib: Then there are those women who make men wear things on their thingies. (1977)

thingummytight, thingummytite (1937) British, dated; from thingummy + the fanciful element tight, tite □ Dirk Bogarde: Nothing in the taps of course because the terrorists had buggered up the hydroelectric thingummytites. (1980)

doover, doovah (1941) Australian; origin uncertain; possibly representing a Yiddish pronunciation of Hebrew davar word, thing □ S. Gore: They was humpin’ along all these other doovers as well as the Tucker. (1968)

hickey, hickie (1909) Now mainly US; usually applied specifically to a device or gadget; origin unknown □ Atlantic Monthly: We have little hickeys beside our seats to regulate the amount of air admitted through a slot in each window. (1932)
gubbins (1944) British; often applied specifically to a device or gadget; from earlier sense, unspecified things, paraphernalia • Ivor Brown: You can save more petrol by how you drive than with the gubbinses now floating around. (1958)
doofer, doofah (1945) British; compare earlier sense, half a cigarette (1937); probably ultimately the same word as doover (1941) • Peter Dickinson: This is a very fancy doofer indeed. . . . It transmits along one wavelength and receives along another. (1970)
whiff flow (1961) Fanciful formation • Anthony Burgess: The cabin was still a mess of smashed and battered whiff flows. (1971)
whatnot (1964) From earlier sense, anything whatever • M. Riley: She said . . . tapping the Cellophane-It's a strange combination: -man(s) m Daily Telegraph: of nignogs' whatnots.' (1977)
bizzo (1969) Australian; from business + -o • G. Morley: Sheilas sitting down against the wall, legs up in the air, showing their bizzos. (1972)
 frobnitz, frob (1983) US, computer slang; probably a fanciful coinage
doobry (1990) British; reportedly current since the 1950s. Probably modelled on similar words beginning do(o)-

Unspecified things, paraphernalia
and I don't know what all (1702) Denoting various other (unknown or unspecified) things • Alison Lurie: That old Mr Higginson. . . . Got his house full of bird dirt and what-all. (1982)
clobber (1890) British; from earlier sense, clothes • Lancet: Every celliar storoom . . . is packed tight with fantastic collections of clobber and junk. (1965)
doings (1913) Usually applied to things needed • Graham Greene: Her skirt drawn up above her knees she waited for him with luxurious docility. . . . You've got the doings, haven't you? (1938)
gubbins (1925) British; compare earlier sense, clothes • Observer: To pay for the kiddies' clobber. (1959)
civies. civies (1889) Services' slang; applied to civilian clothes; from civilian + -ies • Daily Telegraph: Young men exchange their uniforms for 'civies' . (1946)

tot (1873) British; origin unknown
2. Clothing & Accessories
Clothing

duds (1307) Origin uncertain • W. Kennedy: Put her in new duds, high heels and silk stockin's. (1979)
best bib and tucker (1747) Denoting someone's smartest clothes; from bib upper part of an apron and tucker lace frill worn round the neck
togs (1779) From the plural of former vagabonds' slang tog coat, apparently a shortening of togenman(s). togenman cloak or loose coat, from French toge or Latin toga + cant suffix -man(s) • Daily Telegraph: It's a strange combination: Redgrave, in glamorous togs; a studio audience; a chat-show set. (1992)
rig-out (1823) Applied to a set of clothes, especially an unusual one • Robertson Davies: The young Canada during the whole of the nineteenth century wore a strange rig-out that we might imagine as a pair of pants cut down from Uncle Sam's very long legs, and the Union Jack waistcoat of John Bull. (1977)
civilian clothes; from civilian + -ies • Chicago Tribune: They were in full dress uniform. Later they were joined by Maj. Judson of the engineers in 'civies'. (1907)
rig (1843) Applied to a set of clothes • Guardian: Brummell's rig was essentially riding gear. (1991)

Sunday best (1846) Denoting one's smartest clothes, originally as worn on a Sunday • Frank Sargeson: He was all dressed up in his Sunday best . . . but his hair was any old how. (1949)
get-up (1847) Applied to a set of clothes, especially an unusual one • Rachel Praed: Dressed in a well-made tweed suit, that contrasted with the careless get-up of the bushmen round. (1889)
drag (1870) Applied to women's clothes worn by men, and hence (1959) to clothing in general; from the (unaccustomed) length and weight of women's clothes • John Osborne: You would never have the fag Of dressing up in drag You'd be a woman at the weekend. (1959) • Listener: Laurence Olivier, doing his Othello voice and attired painstakingly in Arab drag. (1966)
clobber (1879) British; origin unknown • Observer: To pay for the kiddies' clobber. (1959)
civilian clothes • Daily Telegraph: Young men exchange their uniforms for 'civies'. (1946)
rug-up (1896) Applied to a set of clothes, especially an unusual one • Kathleen Caffyn: Either she's mad or in a peck of trouble, to come . . . in this rig-up. (1896)
dog-robbers (1898) British, naval slang; applied to civilian clothes worn by a naval officer on shore leave; compare earlier dog-rober scavenger, officer's orderly • Monica Dickens: Then he . . . changed into dog robbers and went into the town to get dunked. (1958)
glad rags (1899) Orig US; applied to one's smartest clothes, and often specifically to formal evening dress • H. B. Hermon-Hodge: We all turned out in our glad rags to join in the procession. (1922)
thr 121 s (1926) Orig & mainly US • John Gardner: Load it and get in on under that set of executive threads. (1978)
drape (1938) Orig US jazz slang; applied to a garment or, in the plural, to clothes, often specifically a zoot suit; from earlier sense, cloth, drapery n Michael Swan: He was a man of thirty-two, wearing gaberdine drapes and a bow-tie. (1957)


schmutter, shmutter, shmottah (1959) Mainly US; from Yiddish schmatte rag, from Polish szmata n Bookseller: Several dresses [at trade terms] were bought for Mrs. Wolfe... from small schmutter merchants. (1972)

vines (1959) US; from vine suit of clothes n American Speech: Without your vines you're nothing but FBI [sc. Fat, Black, and Ignorant]. (1975)

kit (1985) Mainly British; often used in the context of undressing; from earlier sense, set of matching garments worn for a sporting or military activity n Sunday Times: Fiona Pitt-Kethell has agreed to get her kit off to appear on Channel 4's forthcoming Naked Chat Show. (1993)

A garment

number (1894) n Marguerite Steen: Petula Wimbly's solution turned out to be an exquisite but throat-high 'little number' redeemed by lumps of jade. (1953)

woolly (1899) Applied to a garment (especially a sweater) knitted from wool n Guardian: The weather's been wonderful, but it changes. I hope you brought a woolly. (1992)

schmatte, shmatte, schmottah, etc. (1970) US; applied especially to a ragged garment; Yiddish, from Polish szmata n J. Marks: I ran away from home in San Bernardino when I was fifteen. . . . All I took was this schmottah I wore Halloween. (1973)

A pocket

pit (1811) n D. W. Maurer: The most important pocket in the coat from the pickpocket's point of view is the coat pit, or the inside breast pocket. . . . This is often shortened to pit. (1955)

kick (1851) n Sunday Truth (Brisbane): One of Luke's jobs was to see that the money was banked every week. Luke put it in his own kick. (1968)

sky-rocket (1879) Rhyming slang n Berkeley Mather: Ten trouble-free runs . . . and you're back in England with five thousand quid in your skyrocket. (1973)

sky (1890) Short for sky-rocket n P. Hill: Said 'ee found it [sc. a gun] on the rattler. Put it in 'is sky when 'ee got off at Leicester Square. (1979)

side-kicker (1903), sidekick (1916) US criminals' slang, dated; applied to a side-pocket; compare kick pocket

slide (1932) US; applied to a trouser pocket n I. Slim: How would you like a half a 'G' in your 'slide'? (1967)

A hole in a garment

potato (1885) Applied to a hole in a sock or stocking through which the skin shows n Country Gentlemen's Estate Magazine: Gumboots . . . will hole a 'potato' like a cannon-ball in the heels of a new pair of socks in an afternoon. (1973)

spud (1960) Applied to a hole in a sock or stocking through which the skin shows; from earlier sense, potato n M. de Larrabeiti: There were huge spuds in the heels of their socks. (1978)

A hat

tile (1813) Dated n P. Fitzgerald: Willis . . . had not been able to lay hands on his 'waterproof tile', but made do with a deep-crowned felt hat. (1979)

topper (1820) Applied to a top hat n H. A. Vachell: The 'topper' you wear on Sunday. (1905)

skimmer (1830) Mainly US; applied to a broad-brimmed boater n Peter de Vries: The thoroughly incompatible straw hat. . . . The brightly bandered boater, or 'skimmer' or 'katy'. (1974)

lid (1896) Often applied specifically to a soldier's steel helmet or a motorcyclist's crash-helmet n P. G. Wodehouse: It is almost as foul as Uncle Tom's Sherlock Holmes deerstalker, which has frightened more crows than any other lid in Worcestershire. (1960)

tin hat (1903) Applied to a military steel helmet

tully (1915) Mainly US; applied to a man's hat, especially a derby; perhaps suggested by derby belly n Lait & Mortimer: Some of the larger clubs reap up to $50,000 a year for the privilege of checking your kellys. (1948)

gorblimey, gaw-. -blime, -blimy (1919) British, dated; applied to a soft service cap; from the exclamation gorblimey

titfer, titfa, titfor (1930) British; short for tit for tat, rhyming slang n U. Holden: The old lady made a show. . . . Lil Pratt forgot to fill her mouth. . . . She'd not seen a titfer like that since the film of mountain people in the Dardanelles, made after World War One. (1976)

blocker (1934) British; applied to a bowler hat n Frank Shaw: Foremen traditionally wore bowler-hats, or 'blockers'. (1966)

God forbid. Gawd forbid (1936) British; rhyming slang for lid hat n James Curtis: Why don't you take off your gawd-forbid? We're passing the Cenotaph. (1936)

skid-lid (1958) Applied to a motorcyclist's crash-helmet n C. Watson: This bird in motor-cycle get-up . . . with that great skid-lid hiding half her face. (1977)

Smokey Bear, Smokey Bear (1969) US; applied to a type of wide-brimmed hat; from the name of an animal character used in US fire-prevention advertising n Ian Kemp: Sergeants Sullivan, McKane and Rothwell . . . wore the round, soft-brimmed hats known by Americans as 'Smokey Bear'—similar to those of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. (1969)

A garment for the upper body

dicky dirt (1925) British; applied to a shirt; rhyming slang, perhaps suggested by dicky false shirt-front (1811)
thousand-miler (1929) Nautical; applied to a dark shirt that does not show the dirt; from its only needing to be washed after a thousand miles of voyaging

Jacky Howe, Jackie Howe (1930) Australian & New Zealand; applied to a sleeveless vest worn especially by sheepleashers and other rural workers; from the name of John Robert Howe (1816–1920), a noted Queensland sheepleasher
cardy, cardie (1968) Abbreviation of cardigan
■ J. Milne: He wore his yellow cardy with the leather buttons. (1986)

boob-tube (1978) Applied to a woman’s close-fitting strapless top; from boob breast + tube, probably inspired by earlier boob-tube television
■ My Weekly: Now the rush around to find... a variety of tops from waterproofs to ‘boob-tubes’. (1986)

A coat
benny, ben (1812) US; applied to an overcoat; apparently a shortening of obsolete benjamin overcoat, perhaps from the name of a tailor
mack, mac (1901) Applied to a raincoat; short for mackintosh ■ Arthur Behrend: Richardson slipped on his mack and went round to India buildings. (1973)
pussy (1937) Criminals’ slang; applied to a fur coat; compare earlier sense, cat ■ John Wainwright: The coat... Ten to one, a fur coat, and there was always somebody ready to lift a pussy. (1972)
mog (1950) Applied to a fur coat; compare earlier sense, cat ■ Eric Partridge: Annuver ‘orse comes up, an’ it’s... a new mog fer the missus. (1950)

A jacket
bum-freezer, (dated) bum-perisher, -shaver, -starver (1889) Mainly British; applied to a short jacket (thought of as) not covering the buttocks ■ Howard Spring: A nice little Eton suit—what Greg inevitably called my bum-freezer. (1955)
tux (1922) US; applied to a dinner jacket; short for tuxedo ■ Kate Millett: Daddy doing his tux. First the black tie. Next the studs. (1974)


Trousers
bags (1853) British; dated: from the garment’s loose fit ■ Dorothy Sayers: Just brush my bags down, will you, old man? (1927)
round-the-houses (1857) Rhyming slang ■ Edward Dyson: No man that wore ‘ome-made round-th’-ouses ever done wonders in this world. (1905)
strides (1889) Now mainly Australian ■ Anthony Burgess: He handed a crumpled bundle to Edwin, saying: ‘You’ll ave to take my strides.’... The trousers, Edwin found, were too short. (1960)
rammies (1906) Australian & South African; shortened form of round-the-houses trousers ■ Bulletin (Sydney): Old Bill watched the youngest jackeroo disrobing,... ‘If I was you, young feller,’ he said, ‘I’d leave them rammies on.’ (1933)

loons, loon pants, loon trousers (1971) Dated; applied to casual trousers widely flared from the knees to the ankles; from loon pass the time pleasurably, probably reinforced by pantafoons
petrol bowser, petrols (1971) Australian; rhyming slang, from petrol bower petrol pump, petrol tanker
stubbies (1973) Australian; a proprietary name for a brand of shorts

A suit
soup and fish (1918) Applied to a formal dress suit for evening wear ■ Hugh McLeave: Get him to take off his soup-and-fish and show us his scar. (1970)
fiddle and flute (1919), fiddle (1943) US; rhyming slang for suit
monkey suit (1920) Orig US; applied to a formal dress suit for evening wear ■ Anthony Fowles: He could... hire one of those monkey-suits from Moss Bros. (1974)
whistle and flute (1931), whistle (1941) British; rhyming slang for suit ■ Observer: What you are and where you are: it mattered as much as your Beemer and the Armani whistle. (1996)
vine (1932) US; from the notion of clothes clinging to the body ■ L. Hairson: I... laid out my vine, a clean shirt and things on my bed. (1984)
zoot suit (1942), zoot (1965) Orig US; applied to a man’s suit with a long loose jacket and high-waisted tapering trousers, popular especially in the 1940s (originally worn by US blacks); reduplicated rhyming formation on suit ■ Thomas Pynchon: Where’d you get that zoot you’re wearing, there? (1973)
penguin suit (1967) Applied to a formal dress suit for evening wear; from the black-and-white appearance ■ Observer: Steak Diane was only served in red-plush restaurants, where the staff wore penguin suits and could barely speak a word of English. (1996)

A collar
dog collar (1861) Usually jocular; applied to a clerical collar ■ Joyce Porter: His dog collar gleamed whitely in the darkness of the hall. (1965)

A tie
Peckham rye (1925) British; rhyming slang, from the name of an open space in Peckham, SE London
dicky bow, dickie bow, dickey bow (1977) Applied to a bow tie ■ Observer: The odds, however, would be completely revised if, as rumoured, Robin Day takes off his dickey-bow and leaps into the fray. (1979)

A handkerchief
snot-rag (1886) From snot nasal mucus + rag ■ Norman Mailer: One of them said he was going to take my shirt and use it for a snotrag, and they all laughed. (1959)
hanky, hankie (1895) From hand(kerchief + -y  ■ Nicolas Freeling: Janine was snuffling in a silly little hanky. (1967)

penwiper (1902) Dated

Swimwear
cossie, cozzie (1926) Australian; applied to a swimsuit or pair of swimming trunks; diminutive of costume  ■ Times: A girl in a cozzie with a dead animal draped over her shoulders is a powerful image. (1981)

Nightwear
nightie, nighty (1871) Applied to a night-dress; from night(dress + -ie  ■ Gavin Black: The hospital nighty . . . felt slightly scratchy. (1972)

jim-jams (1994) Applied to pyjamas; reduplicated formation based on the second syllable of pyjamas  ■ Independent on Sunday: Dr Clements made as strong a case as I've heard for attempting a cross-legged Harrier take-off in your jim-jams. (1944)

Protective clothing
pinny (1851) Applied to a pinafore; from pina(fore) + -y  ■ John Braine: 'Get me a bloody pinny,' I said, 'and you can go out to work.' (1962)
teddy bear (1917) US; applied to a fur-lined high-altitude flying suit  ■ C. Codman: We issue forth from ushership . . . clad in fur-lined Teddy Bears and fleece-lined overshirts. (1937)
penguin suit (1971) Applied to a type of tight-fitting suit worn by astronauts
steamer (1982) Applied to a type of wetsuit worn by surfers and wind-surfers, with minimally permeable rubber; probably from its warming effect on the wearer

See also skid-lid and tin hat at A hat (p. 170).

Underwear
undies (1906) Applied to girls' or womens' underwear; from und(e)wear + -ies  ■ Nicolas Freeling: Arlette . . . knows I'm not just belting off for the afternoon because of the black undies. (1967)
underfug (1924) British public schools' slang; applied to an undervest, and also to underpants; from under - fug stuffy atmosphere  ■ Bruce Marshall: The matron kept everybody's spare shirts, underfugs giesel • Marshall: The matron kept everybody's spare shirts, underfugs • Marshall: The matron kept everybody's spare shirts, underfugs • Barbara Pym: I bought a peach coloured vest and trolleys to match. (1934)
gay deceivers (1942) Dated; applied to a padded bra or to breast-pads; compare earlier gay deceiver deceitful rake or dissolute person
falsies (1943) Orig US; applied to a padded bra or to breast-pads; from false + -ie  ■ Monica Dickens: The secretary slouched in . . . her falsies pushing out her sweater like cardboard cones. (1958)
long johns (1943) Applied to underpants with long legs  ■ J. Gardner: Boysie picked up the clothes . . . A suit of woollen long Johns, a pair of heavy calf-length stockings. (1969)

passion-killers (1943) Applied to sturdy, practical, and unromantic ladies' knickers, originally those issued to female service personnel

smalls (1943) British; applied to underwear; compare earlier sense, breeches  ■ Guardian. Not many Americans . . . can have a clear idea of what to use the bidet for, apart from soaking the smalls. (1973)
jock (1952) North American; abbreviation of jockstrap  ■ Wilson McCarthy: He found the Beretta . . . as well as the jock strap. He quickly took off his trousers, put on the jock. (1973)
pasties (1961) Applied to coverings worn over the nipples of a showgirl's or topless dancer's breasts, especially to comply with legal requirements for entertainers; from paste apply (with paste) + -ies  ■ Sunday Truth (Brisbane): Stripper Sharon was promoting a Valley nightclub, wearing nothing on top but a couple of pasties to keep her modest. (1969)

A loincloth
cockrag (1964) Australian; applied mainly to a loincloth worn by an aboriginal; from cock penis + rug  ■ Ngabidi & Shaw: Wallambil threw away his womera and cock rag and jumped in. (1981)

Gloves
turtle-dove (1857) British; rhyming slang
turtle (1893) British; short for turtle-dove  ■ James Curtis: Got any turtles? The Gilt Kid, having no gloves, answered: 'No, but I'll buy a pair.' (1936)

Shoes
clothhopper (1836) Applied to a large heavy shoe; compare earlier sense, boorish or clumsy person  ■ Times: These high-technology developments are far removed from the customised clothhoppers which are the ancestors of today's lightweight sports shoes. (1991)
daisy roots (1859) British; rhyming slang for boots  ■ Gen: Your toes is poking out of your daisy-roots. (1943)

beetle-crusher, beetle-squasher (1860) Jocular; applied to a boot, especially a large or heavy one  ■ Rhoda Broughton: What howible boots! Whoever could have had the atwocity to fwame such beetle-cwushers? (1870)
stomper (1899) Orig US; usually applied specifically to a large heavy shoe • Kate Millett: The Left wears its jeans and stompers. (1974)
creeper (1904) Mainly British; applied to a soft-soled shoe • Edward Blishen: He pointed to my shoes, which were new and grape-soled. 'They're creepers . . . Real up-to-the-minute yob's thick-soled creepers.' (1955)
kicks (1904) Orig US • Black World: My terrible blue-and-white kicks. (1973)
laughing-sides (1937) Australian; a jocular term (supposedly an Aboriginal malapropism) for elastic-sided boots
brothel-creepers (1954) British; applied to a suede or soft-soled shoe • Godfrey Smith: 'Pouncing about the place in those brothel-creepers of his! . . . He always wore plush suede shoes.' (1954)
welly, wellie, welly-boot (1961) British; applied to a wellington boot; from wellington + y • S. Radley: Perhaps it wasn't done for a parson to wear welly boots under his cassock. (1982)
bover boot (1969) British; applied to a heavy boot with toe-cap and laces, of a kind characteristically worn by skinheads; from bover disturbance, fighting, from the notion of the boot being used to kick opponents
waffle stomper (1974) US; applied to a boot or shoe with a heavy, ridged sole
DMs (1993) British; abbreviation of Doctor Martin's, name of a brand of boot • Irvine Welsh: Marten's, a name of Sarah Gamp, a nurse in Dickens's Martin Chuzzlewit (1844), who owned such an umbrella
Claire Rayners (1997) British rhyming slang for trainers. From the name of the British journalist and agony aunt Claire Rayner
An umbrella
gamp (1864) British, dated; applied especially to an umbrella tied in a loose untidy way; from the name of Sarah Gamp, a nurse in Dickens's Martin Chuzzlewit (1844), who owned such an umbrella
brolly (1874) British; abbreviation and alteration of umbrella
Jewellery and similar personal items
hoop (1507) Applied to a ring; originally standard English • Jack Black: I go in her joint and drop a hoop to one of her frowzy little brums for nine dollars. (1926)
sparkler (1822) Applied to a diamond or other precious stone • Listener: Two of her safes contained vast quantities of sparklers and folding stuff. (1984)
slag (1857) Criminals' slang, dated; applied to a watch-chain or other decorative chain; probably from obsolete slag slag watch-chain, perhaps from Dutch slang snack • Clues: Then we'll take the hot hoops and slags up to the block dealers. (1926)
spark-prop (1879) Criminals' slang, dated; applied to a diamond pin or tie-pin
shiner (1884) Applied to a diamond or other precious stone; usually used in the plural • Dorothy Sayers: I never had those shiners. (1934)
kettle (1889) Dated, mainly criminals' slang; applied to a watch • James Curtis: Next buckshee kettle that comes my way I'll just stick to it. (1936)
stone (1904) Criminals' slang; applied to a diamond
ice (1906) Orig US; usually applied specifically to diamonds • Hartley Howard: Prager caught sight of five hundred grand in cracked ice. (1972)
rock (1908) Orig US; applied to a diamond or other precious stone • Ivor Drummond: 'We will see some of the most beautiful jewellery in the world. . . . The emeralds.' . . . 'Personally,' said Jenny, 'I call it vulgar, having all those rocks on a yacht.' (1973)
prop (1914) Criminals' slang; applied to a diamond or valuable piece of jewellery; from earlier obsolete slang sense, scarf pin; compare Dutch prop skerwer • W. F. Brown: 'Did he get any sparkler?' George. 'Yes, a couple of kettles, . . . a lovely groin and a pro.' (1931)
slum (1914) North American; applied to cheap or imitation jewellery; compare earlier obsolete sense, nonsense, blarney • Kenneth Orvis: Jewellery. . . Top stuff. No slum. (1962)
Simple Simon (1928) US, dated; rhyming slang for diamond • Damon Runyon: I do not see any Simple Simon on your lean and linger (= finger).
groin (1931) Dated, mainly criminals' slang; applied to a ring; probably from the curve of an architectural groin • James Curtis: There was one [woman] with three groins on her fingers. (1936)
tomfoolery (1931) British; rhyming slang for jewellery
tom (1955) British; applied to jewellery; short for tomfoolery • G. F. Newman: What d'you do with the torn tom and money you had out of Manor Gardens this afternoon? (1970)
Bags, luggage
peter (1668) Orig criminals' slang, and latterly taxi-drivers' slang; applied to a portmanteau or trunk, or to any bundle or piece of luggage; from the male forename Peter, perhaps in allusion to the keys that are the symbols of Saint Peter • Anthony Armstrong: 'Peters' are pieces of luggage,—a threepenny extra for the driver. (1930)
pogue (1812) Criminals' slang; applied to a bag or purse, or to a wallet; perhaps related to obsolete pough bag; compare poke purse, wallet • Michael Crichton: It was the stickman's job to take the pogue once Teddy had snaffled it, thus leaving Teddy clean, should . . . a constable stop him. (1975)
poke (1859) North American; applied to a purse or wallet; from earlier sense, bag or small sack, as in buy a pig in a poke
keister, keester, keyster (1882) US; applied to a suitcase or satchel, a handbag, a burglar's
To dress (oneself)

tog out (1793), tog up (1894) Usually denoting dressing in smart clothes; usually in the phrase
togged out, togged up; from togs clothes. J. A. Riis: Mrs. Cleveland when he was Governor,
togged out his staff in the most gorgeous clothes. (1904)

get up (1858) Often denoting someone dressed in
unusual or particularly stylish clothing; usually in the phrase
got up; from earlier sense, produce. Guardian. Not everyone will fork out a small fortune to look as if they are got up
in someone else’s hand-me-downs. (1991)

do up (1882) Often denoting someone dressed
in unusual or particularly stylish clothing; usually in the phrase
done up; from earlier sense. wrap up, tie up: Lauchmonen: Brother Polo ... was done up
in flowing white cotton gown like the Jordanite sect wear. (1965)

dude up (1899) Orig US; denoting dressing
oneself in one’s smartest or most impressive
clothes; usually in the phrase dudied up; from
dude dandy. Guardian. The two men, shaved and resteted
and all dudied up. (1960)

doll up (1906) Denoting dressing oneself in one’s
smartest or most impressive clothes; usually in the phrase
dolled up; from doll small human figure as a toy. Nevil Shute: She could put on her
Number Ones and doll herself up smartly. (1955)

toff up (1914) British; denoting dressing oneself
like a toff; from toff upper-class person. East End Star: Notice the perfect stillness when the ‘lovely lidy all
toffed up’ sings. (1928)

poon up (1943) Australian; denoting dressing
oneself in stylish or flashy clothes; origin
unknown. Dal Stivens: Some of ‘em were young lairs, all pooned up to kill. (1951)

spiv up (1959) British; denoting dressing oneself
in stylish or flashy clothes; from spiv (flashily
dressed) racketeer. B. W. Aldiss: We spivved
ourselves up, put on clean shirts, and strolled out of camp. (1971)

Dressed

dressed up to the nines (1859) Applied to
someone dressed up in their smartest clothes;
specific use of obsolete to the nines to the highest
degree, of uncertain origin. Listener. So there they are, whenever a concert is given by their own orchestra,
dressed up to the nines and bursting with pride. (1965)

lairy, lary, leary, leery (1898) Australian;
applied to someone flashily or vulgarly dressed;
from earlier sense, knowing, conceited.
B. Martyn: He was a stout fleshy chap wearing a dazzling
tie and fancy waistcoat. He was popularly described as a ‘bit
lairy’. (1979)
dressed up (got up, etc.) like a dog’s
dinner (1934) Applied to someone dressed up
smartly or flashily. James Curtis: The geezer ... was
dolled up like a dog’s dinner with a white tie and all. (1936)
mocked up, mokkered up (1938) Australian & New Zealand; applied to someone
dressed up in their smartest clothes; from
mocker clothes. Caddie: I won’t be likely ter be gettin’
mokkered up before Saturday, so I’ll pop me clobber termor ter raise the wind. (1953)
dressed up (got up, etc.) like a pox
doctor’s clerk (1949) British; applied
derisively to someone smartly dressed
E. Lambert: They was all dressed like they was at
Buckingham Palace and Foran was done up like a pox doctor’s clerk. (1965)
sprauncy, sprauntsy, sproncy (1957) British; applied
to someone smartly or showily dressed;
origin uncertain; perhaps related to dialect
sprauncy cheerful. Guardian. The ‘sprauntsy’ (showy)
ante dealers. (1969)

To undress

peel (1785) Denoting taking one’s clothes off;
now usually followed by off. Variety. The gals are
peelin’ in 23 clubs through Los Angeles County. (1950)
debag (1914) British; denoting removing
someone’s trousers, especially as a joke; from de-
bag’s trousers. Beverley Nichols: A number of us
chased Sir Robert down the moonlit High Street in an
devour to debag him. (1958)

The clothing business

the rag trade (1890) Applied to the business of
manufacturing and selling ladies’ garments.
J. Coates: I know that line. It’s going to be fashionable... Forgive the digression but I’m in the rag trade. (1957)

Cosmetics

slap (1860) Applied originally to theatrical make-
up, such as rouge or grease-paint, and hence
more generally to any cosmetic make-up,
especially applied thickly or carelessly; from the
notion of make-up slapped on to the face. J. R.
Ackerley: She was all dolled up, her face thick with slap. (1960)

war paint (1869) Jocular. Landfall: ’In a moment,’
Sylvia said, clicking open her purse. ‘Just a daub of warpaint.’ (1957)

lippy, lippie (1940) Australian; applied to
lipstick; from lipstick + -y. D. Hewett: Just a wee
dab of lippy, dear. Look at that, a picture no artist could paint. (1976)
Coiffure

**hair-do (1932)** Orig US; applied to a style or process of arranging a woman’s hair

**suicide blonde (1942)** Jocular; applied to a woman with hair dyed blonde, especially rather inexperiently or garishly. Alan Sillitoe: The snow-white hair of a suicide-blonde flashed around. “Hey up, Margaret!” (1973)

D.A. (1951) Abbreviation of duck’s arse. Monica Dickens: His hair, which was swept back in the popular D.A. haircut into a little drake’s tail at the back. (1961)

**duck’s arse, duck-arse, duck’s ass, duck’s anatomy, duck’s behind (1951), duck-tail (1955)** Applied to a hair-style with the hair on the back of the head shaped like a duck’s tail, favoured by Teddy boys. Nik Cohn: He looked like another sub-Elvis, smooth flesh and duck-ass hair. (1969)

**flat-top (1956)** Applied to a man’s short flat haircut; compare earlier sense, aircraft-carrier


**natty (1974)** Denoting hair that is knotty or matted, as in Rastafarian dreadlocks; from the Jamaican pronunciation of knotty

**big hair (1988)** Orig US; applied to long hair teased and lacquered into a large bouffant

**divot (1934)** US, dated; from earlier sense, portion of turf removed

**rug (1940)** US. *Telegraph (Brisbane): ’Now, in fact, I do wear a hairpiece in the film I’m making.’... The film for which he has donned a ‘rug’ as they are called, is Meteor.* (1978)

**toup (1959)** Abbreviation of toupee. Peter Bull: ‘Say, Padre, is that a toup?’ he naively enquires. (1959)

**syrup of figs, syrup (1981)** Rhyming slang

**Irish jig, Irish (1983)** Rhyming slang

Uniform

See at Military, Maritime, & Airforce (p. 124).

3. Tools, Implements, & Containers

An axe

**Douglas (1905)** Australian; mainly in the phrase swing Douglas; formerly a proprietary name in the US for axes, hatchets, etc., produced by the Douglas Axe Manufacturing Co., East Douglas, Mass. James Hackston: Sometimes on a Sunday morning exhibitions of axmanship… were given; right and wrong way to swing Douglas. (1966)

**kelly (1909)** Australian; from a proprietary name for a type of axe. Stuart Gore: A man’d better be reckoning on a bit of shut-eye, if he’s going to be any good on the kelly in the morning. (1968)

A shovel

**idiot stick (1942)** US

A pickaxe

**mad mick (1919)** Orig Australian; rhyming slang for pick. Frank Huelin: Well, I won’t buy drinks f’r any bloody ganger, just f’r a chance to swing a mad mick. (1973)

A jemmy, crowbar

**stick (1879)** Criminals’ slang. P. Savage: It’s a fair cop. I’ll go quiet, and here’s my stick (jemmy). (1934)

**iron (1941)** Criminals’ slang. John o’ London’s: Tools for breaking into other people’s premises are irons. (1962)

A key

**twister (1940)** US

A waste-paper basket

**wagger, wagger-pagger, wagger-pagger-bagger (1903)** Orig Oxford University slang; addition of the arbitrary jocular suffix -agger to the initial letters of waste-paper basket

4. Weapons

See also under Armaments at Military, Maritime, & Airforce (pp. 124 – 5).

**equalizer (1899)** Orig US; applied to a range of weapons, especially revolvers and clubs; from the notion that a powerful weapon reduces all its actual or potential victims to the same level. Ian Jefferies: He just thought anybody running about with a nasty look and an equalizer was a foreigner. (1961)

**tool (1938)** Criminals’ slang. J. Mandelkau: We grabbed our tools and by then the Mods were at the bottom of the street. (1971)
**Guns**

**Betsy, Bessy, Betsey**, and with lower-case initial (1832) Orig US; often applied to one's favourite gun, especially in the phrase old Betsy; Betsy variant of Betty, diminutive of Bet, abbreviation of Elizabeth  ■ J. P. Carstairs: 'You've noticed I'm totting a Betsy?' 'Betsy?' "Equalizer, rod, gat, iron." (1965)

**iron** (1836) Applied to a pistol  ■ Rolf Boldrewood: Put down your iron . . . or . . . we'll drop ye where ye stand. (1889)

**shooter** (1840) Applied especially to a revolver  ■ G. F. Newman: Why did you pull the shooter on the two detectives? (1970)

**smoke-wagon** (1891), **smoke-stick** (1927), **smoke-pole** (1929) Orig & mainly US  ■ New Zealand Listener: A long time since he'd fired the old smoke-pole, anyway. (1970)

**gat, gatt** (1897) Dated, orig US; applied to a revolver or pistol; short for Gatling (gun), a type of automatic machine-gun invented by R. J. Gatling (1818–1903)  ■ P. G. Wodehouse: He produced the gat . . . and poised it in an unsteady but resolute grasp. "Hands up!" he said. (1931)

**ironmonger** (1902) Applied to firearms collectively  ■ John Wainwright: Shove it. You are only here for the ride. If you hadn't been so damned handy with the ironmongery—. (1973)

**rod** (1903) Mainly US  ■ James Carroll: I ain't getting my ass blown off because you're stupid. You won't get near Zorelli with a rod anyways. (1978)

**roscoe** (1914), **John Roscoe** (1938) US; roscoe from the surname Roscoe  ■ Edwin Newman: You'll shoot me if I don't sell? . . . His hand went to the bulge again. 'Is that what they call a "roscoe"?' (1979)  ■ A. S. Neill: The type used by petty criminals. (1979) • A. Melville-Ross: Trelawney crossed to the far wall, yanked the knife from it. . . . 'You'll hand over that pig-sticker and come home with uncle.' (1978)

**hipe** (1917) Army slang; applied to a rifle; representing a pronunciation of arms in military commands such as 'Slope arms!'  ■ Nevil Shute: It was full of muckin' Jerries. All loosing off their hips at Bert and me. (1942)

**heat, heater** (1929) Orig US  ■ Raymond Chandler: Then he leaned back . . . and held the Colt on his knee. 'Don't kid yourself I won't use this heat, if I have to.' (1939)  ■ P. G. Wodehouse: And Dolly, drop the heater and leave that jewel . . . 'You've never carried a piece on a job. (1972)

**Saturday night special, Saturday night pistol** (1929) Applied to a cheap handgun of the type used by petty criminals  ■ Ian Fleming: There was a mixture of single shots and bursts from the cheaper. (1962)

**snubby, snubbie** (1981) US; applied to a small short-barrelled pistol; from snub-nosed designating such a gun + -ie  ■ Elmore Leonard: You want a snubbie. This one, .38 Special, two-inch barrel. (1963)

**plinker** (1982) Applied to an airgun or other cheap low-calibre firearm; from plink make a high-pitched sound + -er  ■ Survival Weaponry: Lightweight back garden 'plinker'. (1985)

**spout** (1943) Mainly in the phrase up the spout (of a bullet or cartridge) loaded and ready for firing  ■ Michael Gilbert: I can count six here in the clip. . . . There's probably one up the spout. (1969)

**Knives and other cutting weapons**

**chiv, chive** (1673) Criminals' slang; from Romany chiv blade  ■ New Monthly Magazine: The dreadful clasp-knife called a chiv is exposed and used if necessary. (1834)

**toad-sticker** (1858), **toad-stabber** (1885) Mainly US; applied to a large knife  ■ J. S. Pennell: I must have picked up this old toadsticker. (1944)

**pig-sticker** (1890) Applied to a bayonet, knife, or other sharp weapon  ■ A. Melville-Ross: Trelawney crossed to the far wall, yanked the knife from it . . . 'You'll hand over that pig-sticker and come home with uncle.' (1978)

**wicklung-pin** (1924) Military slang: applied to a bayonet  ■ Philip Evans: AI type-writer'. (1973)

**Clubs**

**sap** (1899) US; applied to a club or short staff; from earlier sense, sapwood, soft wood between the heart and the bark  ■ Raymond Chandler: He had the sap out this time, a nice little tool about five inches long, covered with woven brown leather. (1940)

**nigger-stick** (1971) US, offensive; applied to a baton carried by policemen, prison warders, etc.  ■ Black Panther: They were attacked and brutally beaten by 50 to 60 guards armed with tear gas, plexiglass shields and four-foot-long 'nigger sticks'. (1973)

**Stones**

**Irish confetti** (1935) Applied to stones, bricks, etc. used as weapons  ■ Observer: An American friend in Amsterdam, describing last week's riots there, said; 'There's just a lot of Irish confetti around.' (1966)

**Other weapons**

**nigger shooter** (1876) US, dated, now offensive; applied to a catapult
moley (1950) British; applied to a gangland weapon consisting of a potato with razor-blades inserted into it; origin unknown. *Spectator*: I suppose if I go on criticising him I shall end up by having the boys with the moleys call on me one dark night. (1959)

To arm oneself

rod up (1929) US; used to denote arming oneself with a gun; from the noun rod gun. *Harper's Magazine*: They do not rod up, or arm themselves. (1950)

tool up (1959) From the noun tool weapon. *J. Mandelkau*: We tooled up with pieces of wood and iron bars and hiked over towards their main camp. (1971)

To be armed with (a weapon)

pack (1902) From earlier sense, carry with one. *Raymond Chandler*: Don’t you pack no rod? (1940)

Armed

heeled (1866) Orig US; from the obsolete US slang verb heel provide, arm. *Ed McBain*: Were you heeled when they pulled you in?... ‘We didn’t even have a water pistol between us.' (1956)

tooled up (1959) *J. Barnett*: Smith brandished the shotgun... to let the minder know he was tooled up. (1982)

5. Explosives

soup (1902) Orig US; applied to nitroglycerine or gelignite, especially as used for safe-breaking. *Dorothy Sayers*: Sam put the soup in at the ‘inges and blew the ‘ole front clean off. (1930)

puff (1904) Orig US, dated; applied to gunpowder or other explosives used for safe-breaking

pete (1931) Applied to nitroglycerine as used for safe-breaking; from earlier sense, a safe

nitro (1935) Abbreviation of nitroglycerine. *J. Godey*: They had an old-time safe I hit it with a fat charge of nitro. (1972)

jelly, gelly (1941) Used to denote gelignite; shortening of the pronunciation of gelignite, influenced by the substance’s jelly-like appearance. *Guardian*: Stolen ‘gelly’ found. (1971)

6. Dirt & Cleanliness

Dirt; dirty material; filth

toe-jam (1934) Applied to dirt that accumulates between the toes. *Black World*: If you miss nose Picking time Then you collect Three and one half milograms Of toejam And give it to barbara’s cat. (1973)

gunk (1938) Applied mainly to slimy or viscous material; apparently a back-formation from gungy sticky, messy. *Listener*: Adam and Eve emerge from a transportable saucer of murky gunge. (1985)

ook (1969) Applied mainly to slimy or viscous material: apparently a back-formation from ooky slimy. *Disch & Sladek*: She had been... glad... to be here, to be anywhere so long as it marked an end, so long as she could... take a shower to wash off all this brown ook. (1969)

grot (1971) British; back-formation from grotty unpleasant. *John Wain*: This place, the tawdriness, the awful mound of grot it all is, stands between me and feeling anything. (1982)

scunge (1975) Probably a blend of scum and grunge, but compare scrungy dirty. *John Wain*: God, the scunge of this place. (1982)

Dirtiness

raunch (1967) Orig US; back-formation from raunchy dirty. *Time*: Calvin Coolidge High is an actual Manhattan school building, its rust and raunch unretouched for the camera. (1967)

(Disgustingly) dirty, filthy

cruddy (1877) Variant of curdy curdlike, apparently of Irish English origin

shitty (1935) Denoting something dirty with excrement. *Colleen McCullough*: If I catch you flaming little twerps touching that doll again I’ll brand your shitty little arse! (1977)
**Scroungy (1949)** Orig & mainly US; from scrounge sponge, cadge + -y  ■ Ed McBain: I'll continue commuting to a scroungy squadroom in perhaps the world's worst neighborhood. (1959)

**Gungy, gungey (1962)** British; applied to something sticky or messy; origin uncertain  ■ Spectator: If you're in the mood for something gungy, there's certainly something here for you: chicken stuffed with lamb served with a port sauce. (1985)

**Oooky (1964)** Applied to something slimy or viscous; origin unknown  ■ Disch & Sladek: The milk was so warm and ooky it was like yogurt. (1969)

**Grungy (1965)** Orig & mainly US; apparently an alteration of disgusting  ■ Road & Track: Let's change the color from the current scuzzy metallic brown to white. (1990)

**Manky, mankey (1971)** British; from earlier sense, incompetent, sloppy  ■ Daily Colonist (Victoria, British Columbia): I'll bet the girls would boycott guys with dirty, tangled hair, filthy jeans, raunchy sweat shirts and bare feet. (1971)

**Scuzzi (1969)** Orig & mainly North American; perhaps an alteration of disgusting  ■ Road & Track: Let's change the color from the current scuzzy metallic brown to white. (1990)

**Raunchy (1965)** Orig US; from earlier sense, slimy; origin uncertain  ■ Daily Colonist (Victoria, British Columbia): I'll bet the girls would boycott guys with dirty, tangled hair, filthy jeans, raunchy sweat shirts and bare feet. (1971)

**Scroungy (1974)** Mainly US; applied to something or someone grimy or shabby; probably related to scroungy shabby, dirty; compare grungy dirty  ■ Rolling Stone: As the scruny taxi passenger, he has driver De Niro stop the cab and look at his wife's lurid silhouette up against a window. (1977)

**Yucky, yukky (1975)** Applied to something messy or gooey; from earlier sense, unpleasant  ■ J. Wilson: Let's get these yucky things off and get you washed. (1977)

Untidy; untidily

**Topsy-turvy (1528)** Denoting a disorder condition; from earlier sense, upside down; ultimately probably from top + obsolete tery overturn (probably from unattested Old English tierulf roll)  ■ Wall Street Journal: The topsy-turvy, ever-changing plot makes 'Nightshade' an interesting interplanetary romp. (1989)

**Higgledy-piggledy (1598)** Rhyming jingle probably based on pig, with reference to pigs herding together  ■ Economist: It was thrown together higgledy-piggledy with no overall unity or sense of identity. (1988)

**Ratty (1856)** US; applied to something untidy and in poor condition  ■ R. M. Pirsig: John always kept his BMW spic and span. It really did look nice, while mine's always a little ratty, it seems. (1974)

**Tacky (1862)** Orig US; applied to something dowdy or shabby; origin uncertain  ■ Hart & Kaufman: An extremely tacky-looking evening wrap. (1937)

**Any old how (1933)** ■ Frank Sargeson: He was all dressed up in his Sunday best . . . but his hair was any old how. (1949)

**Tatty (1933)** Applied to something untidy and in poor condition; from tat rag, junk + -y  ■ Times: Nineteenth-century-style songs, played by a jaunty orchestra before tatty red-plush curtains and even tattier scenery, accompany the high jinks. (1963)

**Slobby (1961)** From slob slovenly person + -y  ■ William Burroughs: Vicki told me that I looked like a slobby bum. (1970)

To make dirty...

**Gunge (1976)** British; denoting clogging with dirty viscous material; usually followed by up; from the noun gunge viscous material  ■ Sounds: A few academic 'experts' know something about the short-term effects of sniffing, but aren't too sure about exactly how it gunges up the body. (1977)

A dirty or untidy place...

**Pigsty (1820)** From earlier sense, enclosure for pigs  ■ Woman: The place is usually a pigsty,' confesses Nick. 'I definitely don't do my share of the jobs but then neither does Rachel—we wait until one of our mums come round.' (1992)

**Tip (1983)** Applied especially to a room; from earlier sense, place where waste is tipped for disposal  ■ P. Barker: She was anything but pleased: the living-room was a tip. (1984)

A dirty, slovenly, or untidy person...

**Slob (1981)** Often also implying fatness; from earlier sense, unclean  ■ Jeffrey Ashford: 'Do you reckon we'd waste good bees and honey on a stump like you for nothing?' (1980)

**Litter lout (1927)** British; applied to someone who scatters litter antisocially  ■ Guardian: The packaging industry had been made a scapegoat for the actions of the litter lout. (1972)

**Rag-bag (1888)** Applied to a sloppily-dressed person, especially a woman; from earlier sense, motley collection

**Slump (1906)** Applied to a fat slovenly person; from earlier sense, sudden decline  ■ Jeffrey Ashford: 'Do you reckon we'd waste good bees and honey on a stump like you for nothing?' (1980)

**Litter lout (1927)** British; applied to someone who scatters litter antisocially  ■ Guardian: The packaging industry had been made a scapegoat for the actions of the litter lout. (1972)

**Something the cat (has) brought in (1928)** Applied to someone bedraggled

**Warb, waub, worb (1933)** Australian; applied to a disreputable or slovenly person; probably from warble maggot of a warble-fly  ■ Kylie Tennant: But it's a no-hoper's jail—a lot of old warbs and kids mixed up with coves like Amos the Cannibal and chaps that razors bounce off. (1967)
**tat, tatt (1936)** Applied to a shabby person; from earlier sense, rag; ultimate origin uncertain

- Ngaio Marsh: Do they think it's any catch living in a mausoleum with a couple of old tats? (1947)

**litterbug (1947)** Orig and mainly US; applied to someone who scatters litter antisocially

- *Guardian*: He picks up any litter he can find ... and he is apt to give litter-bugs a severe dressing-down. (1971)

**scruffo (1959)** Applied to an untidy person; from *scruffy* + -o

- Colin MacInnes: One of the scruffos turned and looked at his choice companions. (1959)

**scruff (1960)** Applied to an untidy person; partly from earlier collective sense, untidy people, partly a new back-formation from *scruffy*

- *Daily Mail*: Dome-headed lollipop-lover Theo is promoted to inspector and so minus the scruffs he calls colleagues. (1993)

**Clean**

**squeaky clean (1976)** Applied to something washed and rinsed so clean as to squeak

- Len Deighton: His ... long dark hair was wavy and squeaky clean. (1981)

To clean

**do out (1728)** Applied to cleaning a room

- Joanna Cannan: 'E's not arriving till ... this afternoon but I did the room out yesterday. (1955)

**sand and canvas (1912)** Dated, orig naval slang; applied to cleaning something thoroughly

- P. A. Eaddy: The Mate was anxious to get on with the ‘sand and canvasing’ of the bright work. (1933)

**bogy, bogey (1960)** Australian; applied to taking a bath; from earlier sense, swim

- *Smoke Signal* (Palm Island): 'Bogey' with plenty of soap and water every day. (1974)

A neat person

**neatnik (1959)** Mainly US; originally used in contrasting neat people with beatniks; from *neat* + -nik as in beatnik

- *Sears Catalog*: A new look in Rally-back Jeans that can be worn by Neatniks of any age. (1969)
Money, Commerce, and Employment

1. Money

**Money**

**gelt** (1529) From German, Dutch geld: money; in early use often with reference to the pay of a (German) army; in more general use from the 19th century, reinforced by Yiddish gelt money

- Charles Drummond: 'The gelt?' said Reed. ... 'Four thousand dollars,' said Miss Pocket. (1968)

**brass** (1597) In early use, applied specifically to bronze or copper coins

- B. T. Bradford: She was obviously a relation of the Bells who were local gentry, posh folk with pots and pots of brass. (1986)

**dust** (1607) Now mainly US, Black English

**ready, reddy** (1688) Applied to cash; short for ready money

- Robin Cook: Not enough reddy in it in my case. (1962)

**rhino** (1688) Dated; origin unknown

- Henry Mayhew: You shall have it cheap, for me and my mate are both short of rhino. (1851)

**shiners** (1760) Dated; applied to money in coin, especially sovereigns or guineas; from the shininess of the coins

- Charles Dickens: Is it worth fifty shiners extra, if it's safely done from the outside? (1838)

**the stuff** (1775) Dated

- P. G. Wodehouse: I presumed Uncle Tom would brass up if given the green light, he having the stuff in heaping sackfuls. (1971)

**iron** (1785) C. Rougvie: He was earning a bit of iron. (1966)

**dibs** (1807) Dated; probably from dibs, dib-stones pebbles for a game

**rag** (1817) Applied to paper money, and also to an individual note or bill

- D. W. Maurer: That working stiff had over two C's in rag on him. (1955)

**hooptoo, hoot, hutu** (1820) New Zealand; applied especially to money paid in recompense; from Maori atu recompense

- Kenneth Giles: I got the idea of starting a chain of those places ... for blokes without much hoot and wanting a clean bed. (1967)

**tin** (1836) Vladimir Nabokov: He could always let me have as much cash as I might require—I think he used the word 'tin', though I am not sure. (1941)

**rivets** (1846) Dated; from the appearance of coins

- James Curtis: 'So you got a bit of rivets to speculate?' 'I ain't said so. All I said as I could put up a bit.' (1937)

**dough** (1851) Orig US; Times: I'm going back to business and make myself a little dough. (1955)

**dosh** (1854) Orig US; in recent British use a revival; origin unknown

- Michael Kenyon: 'America! The money's in America!' ... 'Tis true. The Yankees have the dosh all right.' (1970)

**dinero** (1856) Orig US; from Spanish dinero

- Colin MacInnes: You need a bit of dinero? Five pounds do? (1959)

**spondulicks, -ics, -ix, spondoolicks, -iks, -ix** (1857) Orig US; a fanciful coinage

- Private Eye: No one seemed very anxious to come up with the spondulicks. (1980)

**soap** (1860) US; latterly applied especially to money used in bribery

- Nation: This, combined with more or less 'soap', was undoubtedly instrumental in causing his defeat. (1892)

**dingbats** (1861) US, dated; also used in the singular to denote a coin; origin uncertain; perhaps from ding knock + bat club; compare dingus thingummy

**sugar** (1862) Dated

- Punch: Political Picnics mean sugar to them as is fly to wot's wot. (1884)

**scales, scale** (1872) US, dated

- American Speech: The waitress received much scale at the hotel. (1929)

**shekels** (1883) Often in the phrase rake in the shekels make money rapidly; from plural of shekel ancient Hebrew coin, from Hebrew sheqel

- Laurence Olivier: We extended for another four weeks—not so much to rake in the shekels as because I couldn't bear to say farewell to the part I loved doing so much. (1982)

**boodle** (1884) Orig US; often applied specifically to money illegally acquired; from earlier sense, booty, loot; ultimately from Dutch boedel estate, property

- James Joyce: Ready to decamp with whatever boodle they could. (1922)

**oof** (1885), **oofish** (1882) Dated; from Yiddish ooftisch, from German auf dem Tische on the table (of gambling debts)

- Rider Haggard: Living like a fighting-cock and rolling in 'oof'. (1888)

**bees and honey** (1892) British; rhyming slang

- Jeffrey Ashford: 'D'you reckon we'd waste good bees and honey on a slump like you for nothing?' (1960)

**bottle** (1893) British

- J. B. Priestley: Knocker brought out some money. ... 'Not much bottle. A nicker, half a bar.' (1939)
**splosh** (1893) From earlier sense, splashing sound. P. G. Wodehouse: The jolliness of having all that splosh in the old sock. (1950)

**long green** (1896) US; from the shape and colour of dollar bills. S. Newton: We'll be there tomorrow afternoon with Napoleon and the long green. (1946)

**stiff** (1897) Dated. Hilaire Belloc: He wrang his hands, exclaiming, 'If I only had a bit of Stiff! How different would be my life!' (1930)

**green** (1898) Orig US; from the colour of dollar bills. Robert Crawford: When finally we did lay our mitts on a nice pile of green, Arthur simply knuckled under to luxury. (1971)

**gonce, gons** (1899) Scottish. Usually applied to money used in small coins; from the notion of coins jingling in one's pockets. (1930)

**oil** (1903) US; applied especially to money used for bribery and corruption. Detective Fiction Weekly: She didn't take care of her protection directly, that is, she didn't slip the oil to the cops herself. (1935)

**greens** (1904) Orig US; compare green. Scottish Daily Mail: What had been 'dough' in the 20's and became 'readies' and 'greens' in the 50's turned up again as 'bread'. (1968)

**mazuma, mazume** (1904) US; Yiddish. Times Literary Supplement: Likewise piling up its mazuma by legerdemain. (1972)

**jingle** (1906) Australian, dated; applied to money in small coins; from the sound of coins jingling. Bulletin (Sydney): If he is a youngster man, his pockets are lined with coin, oof, dough, sugar or hay. If he is getting on in years his pockets will hold jingle. (1958)

**doubloons** (1898) Jocular: from doubloon. Spanish gold coin. Peter Bull: I... was anxious to lay my hands on anything that brought in the doubloons. (1959)

**kale** (1912) North American, dated; from the crinkly green leaves' resemblance to dollar bills. Flynn's: The kale is cut up an th' biggest corner goes to th' brains. (1959)

**scratch** (1914) Orig US; compare the verb scratch. Forge banknotes. Private Eye: This state-funded legal nonsense—which is... putting even more scratch into the bulging wallets of the lawyers. (1980)

**oscar, Oscar** (1917). Oscar Asche (1905) Australian & New Zealand; rhyming slang for cash, from the name of the Australian actor Oscar Asche (1871–1936). D'Arcy Niland: If you'd been fighting all those blokes in the ring you'd have more oscar in your kick now than the Prime Minister himself. (1959)

**snow** (1925) Applied especially to money in silver coins. James Curtis: Count up that snow while I go through the other drawers. (1936)

**poke** (1926) From earlier sense, purse, wallet. Evening News (Edinburgh): Colgan asked him: 'Have you got your poke?' obviously referring to the money. (1974)

**lettuce** (1929) Orig US; from the crinkliness and greenish-white colour of dollar bills. John Wainwright: 'They spend money, in Beirut... 'Phoenicia Street,' murmured Gantley. 'Anything... Any out-of-this-world luxury. Any service. Anything! You have the lettuce... Phoenicia Street can oblige.' (1974)

**dropsy** (1930) Often applied specifically to money paid as a tip or bribe; jocular extension of dropsy excess of fluids in body tissue, from the notion of 'dropping' money into someone's hand. Peter Wildeblood: A nice bit of dropsy to a copper usually does the trick. (1955)

**potatoes** (1931) US. National Observer (US): Usually he [sc. a horse] runs with a price tag of about $3,500. With those kind of potatoes, it can be hard to get respect. (1976)

**bread** (1935) Orig US; inspired by dough money. Down Beat: If I had bread (Dizzy's basic synonym for loot) I'd certainly start a big band again. (1952)

**readies, redodies** (1937) Usually applied to bank notes; from ready cash. Dick Francis: He sort of winks at me and gives me a thousand quid in redadies. (1974)

**funny money** (1938) Orig US; applied to money which is not what it seems to be, especially counterfeit currency or assets amassed unscrupulously. T. Barling: Sadler's got a name for asset stripping... It's been whispered Tommy Troy's pulled himself a funny-money man. (1976)

**ackers, akkas, akkers** (1939) British, services' slang; sometimes singular; from acker (Egyptian piastre); ultimately probably from Arabic piastre; among British and Allied troops in Egypt. H. R. F. Keating: I can't offer a great deal in the way of ackers. Though you'd get your ten per cent, old man. (1995)

**moola, moolah** (1939) Orig US; origin unknown. Julian Symons: Then the only thing to be settled is the lolly, the moolah. (1975)

**lolly** (1943) British; from earlier sense, lollipop, apparently with reference to the notion of the Government giving away money 'like lollipops'. Gwen Moffat: There's only one person bringing in the lolly in that house. (1973)

**loot** (1943) From earlier sense, booty; ultimately from Hindi lüt, loot. Apparently with reference to the notion of the Government giving away money 'like lollipops'. Gwen Moffat: There's only one person bringing in the lolly in that house. (1973)

**moo** (1945) Abbreviation of moola. Dennis Bloodworth: Most of my nurses... don't work for moo... But local stuff I pay. (1975)

**white** (1960) From earlier slang sense, silver coin. Observer: The white, crinkle, cabbage, poppy, lolly, in other words cash. (1960)
money, commerce, and employment

**Monetary resources**

**slush fund** (1874) Orig US; applied to a reserve fund used especially for political bribery; from earlier naval slang sense, money collected from the sale of slush (fat or grease obtained from boiling meat) and used to buy luxuries for the crew. **Guardian:** Eisenhower's running mate was accused of being the beneficiary of a 'slush fund' subscribed by wealthy backers. (1962)

**pork** (1879) US; applied to federal funds obtained through political influence. **Marshfield** (Wisconsin) **News-Herald:** That difference of more than $54,000,000 includes a lot of pork for individual senators. (1949)

**fall money** (1893) Dated; applied to money put aside by a criminal for use if he should be arrested; from fall be arrested. **New York Times:** We had often discussed the matter of 'fall money.' (1929)

**kitty** (1903) From earlier sense, sum contributed by players in a game and taken by the winner. **Listener:** In 1949, the authorities at the hall had enough money in the kitty to install a new aluminium roof. (1969)

**pork barrel** (1909) Orig and mainly US; applied to the state's funds available for regional expenditure, especially as disbursed subject to political influence; from earlier sense, barrel in which pork is preserved, viewed as a source of one's livelihood. **Economist:** It [sic. the Macmillan government] has treated some nationalised industries almost as if they were its positive enemies, while a quite considerable pork-barrel has been opened up for a growing number of private firms. (1960)

**mad money** (1922) Applied to money for use in an emergency, especially money taken by a woman on a date in case her escort abandons her and she has to make her own way home. **Melody Maker:** I haven't even a dime of mad money with me, hope I don't need it. (1970)

**copper** (1788) Applied to a coin (originally) made of copper, such as a penny or US cent. **Daily Telegraph:** J Sainsbury shares showed no sign of slackening and the price ended another 4 better at 375p, only a few coppers below the high. (1991)

**smash** (1821) Applied to loose change. **Kylie Tennant:** Giving her his smash on pay-night so's she can blow it. (1953)

**mick** (1918) Australian; applied to the reverse side or tail of a coin; origin unknown. **T. A. G. Hungerford:** 'Ten bob he tails 'em!' he intoned, 'I got ten bob to say he tails 'em—ten bob the micks!' (1953)

**clod** (1925) British; applied to a copper coin; usually used in the plural; from earlier sense, lump. **Anthony Burgess:** He began to search for coppers. 'Lend us a couple of clods,' he said to his twin. (1960)

**tiddler** (1966) British; applied to a small coin, such as a silver threepenny piece or a 1/2p coin; from earlier sense, something small. **Daily Mail:** They will scrap the 1/2p coin—the 'tiddler'—when they change to decimals. (1971)

An amount of money

**roll** (1846) US & Australian; applied to a collection of bills or notes rolled together, and hence more generally to one's money. **Jack Black:** No Missouri dip would take his roll, extract two fifty-dollar bills, and put the rest back in his pocket. (1926)

**wedge** (1977) British, orig criminals' slang; applied to a wad of banknotes, and hence more generally to (a significant amount of) money; from the notion of a thick pile of banknotes; compare wodge and obsolete slang wedge silver plate, silver money. **Melody Maker:** Don't part with your hard earned wedge until you've seen it. (1987)

**top (or full) whack** (1978) British; applied to a very high (especially the highest) price or rate. **Money Observer:** Payments then rise by 5.0 per cent a year, so you pay the full whack after eight or nine years. (1989)

A particular multiple of monetary units

**pony** (1797) Applied to £25; perhaps because (like a pony to a horse) it is small compared to £50, etc. **Jimmy O'Connor:** 'Bet you the next three guys that come by do that,' he said. 'Make it a pony (£25),' said Charlie. (1976)

**monkey** (1832) Applied to £500 or $500; origin unknown. **Times:** It looks like you are going to be roped into that theft from the pub but it will be all right. It will cost you a monkey (£500). (1973)

**rouf, roaf, rofe, roof** (1851) Applied to four shillings or four pounds; backslang for four. **Kenneth Royce:** From under a pottery sugar jar... protruded two jacks. . . I found a roof under them. (1972)

**century** (1859) US; applied to $100 or £100. **Raymond Chandler:** He... arranged five century notes like a tight poker hand. (1964)

**thou** (1869) Applied to £1000 or $1000; from earlier more general sense, thousand. **New Yorker:** The gesture cost me a cool ten thou, but I didn't begrudge it. (1985)

**grand** (1915) Orig US; applied to $1000 or £1000. **Sunday Telegraph:** One 26-year-old [criminal]... insisted that he picked up a regular £1,000 a week working with a professional gang. 'Honest, a grand or a couple of grand isn't really big stakes in my game.' (1967)

**yard** (1926) US; applied to $100 or $1000. **V. Patrick:** You throw a hundred to the guy who makes the loan. . . . He writes the loan for thirteen hundred, you take twelve, and a yard goes south to him. (1979)

**G** (1928) US; applied to $1000; abbreviation of grand. **A. Curry:** He'd probably drop me a few G's for the names of the guys in London. (1971)

**score** (1929) Applied to $20 or £20. **Kyril Bonfiglioli:** You'll have to give me a score to buy an old throwaway shooter. (1979)
half (1931) British, dated; applied to the sum of ten shillings (50p); from ten shillings being half of one pound sterling  ■ Graham Greene: She's just a buer [= (loose) woman]—he gave her a half. (1938)

goo (1936) US; applied to $1000; from the pronunciation of the initial letter of grand  ■ M. Taylor: There's a hundred gees at stake. (1946)

ton (1946) Applied to £100; from earlier more general sense, hundred  ■ P. Turnbull: The old man would charge three ton for this but me and the boys will do it for half-price. (1981)

K, k (1968) Applied to £1000 or $1000; used especially with reference to salaries offered in job advertisements; from its use in computing to represent 1000; originally from its use as an abbreviation of kilo— ■ Guardian: Who should become unit manager of Guy's itself, at 50K plus expenses? (1991)

A large amount of money

a mint (1655) From earlier sense, an amount of money coined  ■ C. H. Spurgeon: Our John Knox would be worth a mint at this hour, but where is he? (1874)

a pot (1856), pots (1871)  ■ Ouida: You'll make a pot by it, as Barnum did. (1897)  ■ Sports Quarterly: Some old women with pots of money are up to all the tricks and keep tabs on everything themselves. (1992)

a small fortune (1874)  ■ D. Mayo: It's one of the least known islands in the group, and Doreen pays a small fortune to keep it that way. (1962)

big money (1880) Orig US  ■ Ring Lardner: It'll be pretty soft for you, because they got the pennant cinched and they'll cut you in on the big money. (1924)  ■ Jack Dempsey: My five big-money bouts. (1950)

shirt (1892) In the phrases bet one's shirt, put one's shirt on bet one's money on (especially a horse in a race), lose one's shirt lose all one's possessions, especially by gambling or speculation  ■ E. B. Mann: He hit the market . . . about the time the bottom dropped out of it. He lost his shirt! (1935)

a bundle (1903) Orig US; from earlier sense, roll of banknotes  ■ Guardian: This is not the world's fastest dish, since it requires home-made stock. Nor is it the cheapest, since porcini cost a bundle. (1992)

a poulterce (1904) Australian; applied especially to money used as a bribe  ■ Nino Culotta: ‘Reckon e pulled im?’ That’s wot I reckon. . . . ‘Yer can’t prove ut.’ ‘Somebody slung in a poultice, I bet.’ ‘They’re all crooked.’ (1967)  ■ Sun-Herald: A bloke who made a poultice in recent weeks when he sold Rupert a quarter of a million Channel Ten shares. (1979)

a packet (1922)  ■ P. G. Wodehouse: ‘Get in on the short end,’ said Aurelia earnestly, ‘and you’ll make a packet.’ (1928)

heavy sugar (1926) US, dated  ■ Flynn’s: Johnns with heavy sugar. (1928)

a motser, a motsa, a motza, a motzer (1943) Australian; often applied specifically to a large amount won in gambling; probably from Yiddish matse bread  ■ Bulletin (Sydney): Canberra might have cost a motza but it’s worth every cent. (1985)

a roll Jack Rice couldn’t jump over (1945) Australian

megabucks (1946) Orig US; originally as megabuck a million dollars  ■ Cosmopolitan: Having earned megabucks as Ian Fleming in Goldeneye, Charles Dance can afford to help a debt-laden theatre company once in a while. (1988)

a bomb (1958) British  ■ A. E. Lindop: Can I have that instead of the five pounds? I might flog it for a bomb in me old age. (1969)


Large in amount

cool (1728) Used to emphasize the largeness of the amount; perhaps from an original sense, deliberately or calmly counted, reckoned, or told, and hence, all told, entire, whole  ■ Daily Mail: The deal he negotiated means that the trio are likely to pool a cool $100 million . . . between them. (1991)

A small amount of money

shoestring (1904) Orig US; mainly in the phrase on a shoestring at very small expense  ■ Colleen McCullough: Australians in England, youth-hosteling on a shoestring. (1977)

peanuts (1936) Orig US; applied especially to inadequate payment; from earlier sense, something small or trivial  ■ Scotsman: A salary of £3000 a year is peanuts for a man at the top of his profession. (1973)

chicken-feed (1937) Orig US; from earlier sense, poultry food  ■ New Review: In peacetime, officers in the British Army were men of independent means to whom their Army pay was chicken-feed. (1941)

British and other sterling-based currency

Unless another variety of English is specified, the terms in this section are British and refer to British currency.

quid (1688) Applied to a pound; probably from quid the nature of something, from Latin quid what  ■ W. P. Ridge: Milton received only ten quid for the first edition of ‘Paradise Lost’. (1929)

kick (c1700) Dated; applied to a sixpence; mainly used to denote sixpence as an element in a sum of money (e.g. two and a kick two shillings and sixpence); rhyming slang for six

mag, meg (1781) Dated; applied to a halfpenny; origin unknown  ■ Charles Dickens: It can’t be worth a mag to him. (1852)

bob (1789) Applied to a shilling, and latterly used in non-specific references to amounts of money; origin unknown; compare Old French bobe coin of low value  ■ Guardian: Shergar . . . is alive and well . . . according to the latest person trying to extract a few bob from Lloyds underwriters. (1991)

tizzy, tizzy, tissey (1804) Dated; applied to a sixpenny piece; origin unknown  ■ Longman's
**Money, Commerce, and Employment**

**tanner (1811)** Dated; applied to sixpence or a sixpenny piece; origin uncertain; suggested sources include Romany toawn young (hence, small) and Latin tener young. **Bowlers' World:** We'd gone round at nine for a tenner, and as it was Friday night and we were developing a thirst, we decided to play the 'penny end' then call it a do. (1992)

**brown (1812)** Applied to a penny; long obsolete in British English, but used in Australian until the mid 20th century; from its colour. **Sun (Sydney):** Everybody's jumping about like a double-headed brown had been found at a swy game. (1946)

**sov (1829)** Applied to a pound; abbreviation of sovereign pound. **T. Barling:** There's more to life than bashing pimps and publicans for a handful of sovs. (1968)

**dearer, deener, dener, diener (1839)** Dated; applied to a shilling; probably an alteration of derer former small French coin, hence small amount of money. **Frank Sargeson:** Could you give me the land of a bob? . . . I'm on the beach myself, I said, but I can make it a deener. (1946)

**finnip fin(n), finny, fin(n)if(f), finnup, finuf (1839)** Applied to a five-pound or a five-pound note; said to represent a Yiddish pronunciation of German fünf five. **Rex Stout:** I . . . got out my wallet and extracted a finuf. (1966)

**fiver (1843)** Applied to five pounds or a five-pound note; from five + -er. **Daily Telegraph:** In St Tropez they have ways of taking your money, if not your life: a coke may cost you a fiver and a gin and tonic twice that. (1991)

**tenner (1845)** Applied to ten pounds or a ten-pound note; from ten + -er. **Independent:** I once went to a tattooist. He said 'Yeah. I'll take em off, only a tenner.' I thought, oo-er, I'll have some of that. (1991)

**dollard (1848)** Dated, orig British; applied to five shillings; mainly in the phrase half a dollar two shillings and sixpence; probably from the former exchange rate of five shillings to one US dollar, but there may be some connection with the use in Britain of Spanish dollar notes, which had been found at a swy game. (1839)

**thick 'un, thick one (1848)** Dated; applied to a gold sovereign, and also to a crown or five-shilling piece. **Sapper:** Done with you, your Graces, a thick 'un it is. (1926)

**rogue and villain (1859)** Dated; rhyming slang for shilling.

**tosherono, tusheroon (1859)** Dated; applied to a half-crown; origin unknown. **Daily Mirror:** All sorts of things, places and creatures we believed were everlasting have vanished, like trams, tosheroons and Constantinople. (1978)

**caser (1860)** Dated; applied to a crown (a five-shilling coin); from Yiddish kaser name of various coins issued in German-speaking states, from earlier application to one of two ornamental crowns placed on a Scroll of the Law, from Hebrew keter-tora crown of the Pentateuch. **J. B. Priestley:** Knocker brought some money and examined it. . . . 'A nicker, half a bar, a caser an' a hole.' (1939)

**thrum (1865)** Dated; applied to a threepenny piece; back-formation from thurms threepence, representing a casual pronunciation of threepence. **Bulletin (Sydney):** I haven't encountered a crook thrum yet. (1933)

**filn (1870)** Dated; applied to a five-pound note; short for obsolete slang filmey banknote, from the thin paper formerly used for such notes. **Nicholas Blake:** They . . . offer Bert . . . a film for his boat. (1954)

**Jimmy O’Goblin, jimmy o’goblin, jimmy, Jimmy O’Goblin (1889)** Applied to a pound; rhyming slang for sovereign. **A. E. W. Mason:** I want one thousand jimmies per annum. (1899) **Times:** He . . . had made a profit of some six million jimmies-o-goblins. (1973)

**Jemmy O’Goblin (1889)** Australian, dated; applied to a pound; short for Jimmy O’Goblin. **A. E. Yarra:** The racehorse they have just bought in Bourke for fifty jims. (1930)

**oner (1889)** Applied to one pound, and also to one hundred pounds; compare earlier sense, something or someone unique or remarkable. **Parker & Allerton:** A one-er for the Guv’nor, and fifty each for me and George here, that’s cut price. Two hundred all told, how’s that? (1962) **H. R. F. Keating:** You’d pay me five sovereign? . . . Five golden oners? (1974)

**red 'un (1890)** Dated; applied to a sovereign. **A. Hewins:** I don’t think much o’ that stone you got. I’ll give you a nice red un for it. (1981)

**scrum (1891), scrummy (1894)** Australian, dated; applied to a threepenny piece; scrum apparently a rhyming form based on thrum threepenny piece. **Byron Bay Record (New South Wales):** Notify the public that they must bring along their scrumies (the fee for using the dressing sheds is reported 3d. for adults, 1d. children). (1915)

**spinnaker (1898)** Australian, dated; applied to five pounds or a five-pound note; from earlier sense, large sail. **N. Pulliam:** I’ll bet the first Aussie taker a couple of spinnakers the Snowy Mountains dream comes true. (1955)

**thrummer (1898)** Australian, dated; applied to a threepenny piece; from thrum threepenny piece + -er. **Bulletin (Sydney):** Mac stopped dead, the thrummer half out of his pocket. (1944)

**zak, Zack, zak (1898)** Australian, dated; applied to a sixpence; probably from Scottish dialect saxpence.

**frogskin (1907)** Australian, dated; applied to a pound (note); from US frogskin dollar. **Australian New Writing:** You come back here tomorrow night . . . and it’s two frogskins for you and drinks all round! (1944)
trey, tray, trey-bit (1907) Dated, latterly mainly Australian; applied to a threepenny piece; from trey (set of three) • National Time (Australia): Service of the kind just described is as rare these days as finding a trey in the Christmas pudding. (1977)

o'goblin (1909) Dated; applied to a pound; short for Jimmy O'Goblin • P. G. Wodehouse: Five hundred o'goblins a year. (1925)

nicker (1910) Applied to a pound; origin unknown • Julian Symons: Who said there'd be trouble? Anyway, it's a hundred nicker. (1975)

bar (1911) Dated; applied to a pound; usually in the phrase half a bar ten shillings; probably from earlier sense, ingot (of gold, etc.)

tosheroon • Julian Symons: Here's a tosh to buy yourself some beer. (1961)

Bradbury (1917) Dated; applied to a one-pound note; from the name of John Swanwick Bradbury, Permanent Secretary to the Treasury 1913–19 • Gilbert Frankau: Cynthia had decided to 'risk a couple of Bradbury's each way'. (1926)

Fisher (1922) Dated; applied to a one-pound note or other currency note; from the name of Sir Warren Fisher, Permanent Secretary to the Treasury 1919–39 • Motor Cycling: The Bench mulcted him of a couple of Fishers and warned him as to his future behaviour. (1923)

smacker (1924) Applied to a pound; from earlier sense, dollar • Lionel Black: 'Gone at twelve thousand sobs; when I failed I didn't want compensation. (1974)

oncer (1931) Applied to a one-pound note; compare earlier senses, something that happens only once, a person who only achieves something once • Michael Kenyon: They gave you an 'un'ed quid in oncers to see things their way. (1978)

sprazer, spraser, sprasy, sprazy, etc. (1931) Dated; applied to sixpence or a sixpenny piece; from SheIlta sprazi • J. B. Priestley: See if we can't take another spraser or two from the punters. (1939)

sprowsie, sprouse, sprowser (1931) Dated; applied to sixpence or a sixpenny piece; probably a variant of sprazer • Allan Prior: I walked across to the record player and took some silver out of my pocket.... 'Half-Nelson, do me a favour and put a sprouse in there for me.... I've got no change.' (1960)

berry (1934) Dated; applied to a pound; usually used in the plural; from earlier US sense, dollar

hole (1935) Dated; applied to a shilling

Joey, joey (1936) Applied to a former twelved-sided British coin of nickel-brass worth three old pence—a threepenny bit; from the male personal name Joey; compare earlier sense, fourpenny piece

ogg, og (1937) Australian & New Zealand, dated; applied to a shilling; from older slang hog

shilling, (US) dime • Penguin New Writing: Three quid and seven og. (1946)

Oxford scholar, Oxford (1937) Rhyming slang for dollar: applied to a dollar in Australian & New Zealand English and to the sum of five shillings or 25 pence in British English; reported in use in SW England in the 1870s • Anthony Burgess: 'We'll say a quid deposit, returnable on return of the hat, and a straight charge of an Oxford for the loan. Right?' 'Right.' The young man handed over his Oxford scholar. (1960)

potatoes (1939) Dated; applied to pounds: from earlier sense, dollars • P. G. Wodehouse: Was it conceivable.... that any man, even to oblige a future brother-in-law, would cough up the colossal sum of two hundred potatoes? (1939)

fiddley-did, fiddley (1941) Australian, dated; applied to a pound; rhyming slang for quid • R. Blieby: He would 'like to be home right now, putting a copper of fiddleydids on a little horse'. (1977)

spin (1941) Australian, dated; applied to a pound; abbreviation of spinner • S. Gore: Backed Sweet Friday for a spin.... But it never run a drum. (1962)

swy, swey, swi, zwei (1941) Australian, dated; applied to a two-shilling piece; compare earlier sense, game of two-up • J. Duffy: 'Here's a swy,' he said, ringing it down on the table. 'Buy yourself one on me.' (1963)

trizzie, trizzy (1941) Australian, dated; applied to a threepenny piece; probably an alteration of trey • Sunday Truth (Brisbane): When you peppered the Christmas pud. with trey-bits this year we hope you remembered they will be scarcer next Yuletide and unless you hoard some there will be no trizzies at all for.... the 1968 plum-duff.... A trey-bit or a trizzy is Aussie slang for a three-penny-bit. (1965)

saucepan lid (1951) Applied to a pound; rhyming slang for quid

jack, jacks, jax (1958) Applied to five pounds; short for Jack's alive obsolete rhyming slang for five • Guardian: 'That one,' says the dealer from Islington, 'that one we know she died in; so it'll cost you a jax.'.... Five quid for a shroud, cheap at the price. (1968)

sheet (1958) Applied to a one-pound note or a pound; from earlier sense, dollar bill • Hot Car. Maserati air horns [have]... a howling, double high-pitched, screaming note.... This cacophony can be yours, whatever car you drive, for less than ten sheets. (1978)

iron man (1959) Orig Australian; applied to a pound or a one-pound note; from earlier US sense, dollar • John Wainwright: Ten thousand iron men.... We're talking bank-notes. (1974)

smackeroo (1961) Applied to a pound; from earlier sense, dollar

sob (1970) Applied to a pound; probably an alteration of sov • Kenneth Royce: Norman could have back his fifty sobs; when I failed I didn't want compensation. (1973)
US currency

**rock** (1840) **Cavalier Daily** (University of Virginia): They got a campaign goin’ around here to try to stick us students six rocks just to go . . . and listen to some old bag yell her fool head off. (1949)

**fiver** (1843) **Applied to a five-dollar bill; from earlier sense, five-pound note**

**caser** (1849) **Dated; applied to a dollar; from earlier (but recorded later) British sense, five-shilling coin**

**double sawbuck, double saw** (1850) **Applied to twenty dollars or a twenty-dollar bill**

**sawbuck** (1850) **Applied to ten dollars or a ten-dollar bill; from the x-shaped end (Roman X = 10) of a Sawyer’s horse or ‘buck’**

**William, william** (1865) **Dated; applied to a dollar bill; from punning association of bill banknote and Bill familiar form of the male personal name William**

**finif, finnif** (1859), **fin** (1916) **Applied to five dollars or a five-dollar bill; from British slang finnie, finnie five pounds**

**nickel note** (1926) **Applied to a five-dollar bill; from earlier sense, (number) one nickel; origin unknown**

**berry** (1916) **Applied to a dollar; usually used in the plural**

**greenback** (1870) **Applied to a dollar bill; from a name originally applied to a non-convertible US currency note first issued in 1862, during the Civil War, which had a green design on its back**

**bit** (1873) **Applied to a unit of value equal to an eighth of a dollar; now used only in even multiples, especially two bits; from earlier application in the Americas to a small silver coin forming a fraction of the Spanish dollar**

**clam** (1886) **Applied to a dollar; origin uncertain**

**plunk** (1891) **Dated; applied to a dollar; origin unknown**

**tenner** (1893) **Applied to a ten-dollar bill; from earlier sense, ten-pound note**

**simoleon, samoleon** (1896) **Applied to a dollar; origin uncertain; perhaps modelled on napoleon French coin**

**ace** (1898) **Applied to a dollar or a dollar bill; from earlier sense, (number) one**

**frogskin** (1902) **Applied to a banknote, and usually specifically a dollar bill; from the colour**

**jitney** (1903) **Applied to a five-cent piece or nickel; origin unknown**

**iron man** (1908) **Applied to a dollar**

**toadskin** (1912) **Applied to a banknote, and usually specifically a dollar bill; compare earlier obsolete sense, postage stamp, and also earlier frogskin dollar**

**berry** (1916) **Applied to a dollar; from earlier sense, (number) one nickel; origin unknown**

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**New Yorker**. We observe him on his way to Mexico with a suit case full of green-backs. (1966)

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**John Steinbeck**: If you wanta pull in here an’ camp it’ll cost you four bits. (1939)

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**John Steinbeck**: If you wanta pull in here an’ camp it’ll cost you four bits. (1939)
smackeroo (1940) Applied to a dollar; blend of smack and -eroo • E. V. Cunningham: The price is eight thousand pounds, and the pound was five dollars then, so that makes it forty thousand smackeroos. (1977)

Rich

flush (1603) From earlier sense, plentifully supplied • Mortimer Collins: Tom ... is always very flush or very hard up. (1871)

rolling (in money, it, etc.) (1782) • Sun: Paul Hogan must be rolling in it—he's just turned down a £5 million movie deal to make Crocodile Dundee III for Paramount. (1992)

made of money (1849) Mainly used in negatives and questions • Clive Egerton: Book him into a hotel ... but nothing fancy, we're not made of money. (1975)

heeled (1880) Orig US; now usually preceded by well; from earlier sense, equipped • Daily Telegraph: Though the million and a quarter left by his grandfather has been spread among a large family he is still well-heeled enough. (1968)

oozy (1896) Dated; from oozy money + -y

financial (1899) Australian & New Zealand; applied to someone who is financially solvent or has money • Patrick White: 'Shall I tell you, Alf,' he called, 'how us girls got to be financial?' (1961)

in the money (1902) Originally used to denote being among the prize-winners in a competition, show, etc. • Tony Parker: She said we could stay there rent free until I was in the money again. (1969)

stakey, staky (1919) Mainly Canadian • B. Broadfoot: Why, we was making 15 cents a glass.... (1926)

A rich person

plutocrat m Daily Mait. 'The plûtes', as ... He's crawling with money. (1959)

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squillionaire (1979) Applied to a multi-millionaire, and hence to an extremely rich person; from squillion unmeasurably large number + -aire, after millionaire, etc. • Private Eye: Several of the squillionaires at the back start shouting abusive remarks about the morality of queue-barging. (1989)

nooie, noov (1984) British, derogatory; applied to a member of the nouveaux riches; shortened from nouveau riche • Times: The pupils: 45 per cent sons of Old Etonians.... Also largish element of noovs to keep up academic standards and/or provide useful business contacts. (1986)

To be rich

stink of (or with) money (1877) Derogatory • I. Brown: We must do our best. He stinks of money. Will you fix up about rooms and for God's sake let's have a decent dinner.

To become rich

make one's (or a) pile (1854) Orig US • Times: This is tough talk from a man who first made his pile as an investment banker. (1973)

marry money (1858) Used to denote marrying a rich spouse • Joan Fleming: You're the answer to a maiden's prayer dear heart. No need for you to do a stroke of work, you can marry money and live the life of a gentleman. (1957)

strike it rich (1884) Orig US; from earlier sense, discover a profitable seam when prospecting • Guardian: His father was a rolling stone who struck it rich in the oil business. (1991)

Having no money

broke (1716) From an obsolete form of broken, past participle of break • Jack Black: [The landlady] wanted the rent. I told her I was broke. (1926)

hard up (1821) • Jerome K. Jerome: You don't feel nearly so hard up with elevenpence in your pocket as you do with a shilling. (1886)

flat (1833) US: short for flat broke • Times Literary Supplement: Satisfying his desires freely when he can, starving when he is 'flat'. (1930)

strapped (1857) Orig US; used to denote a severe shortage of cash; usually followed by for • Maria Franklin: Also she was strapped for ready money. (1936)

Time: By the spring of 1974, the whipsaw effect of recession and rising costs—particularly for oil which fuels 80% of Con Ed's generating capacity—left the company strapped. (1977)

stony, stoney (1886) Short for stony-broke • Eric Gill: The Guild is very hard up, and Hilary is at the very bottom of his fortunes & Joseph ... is stoney as can be too. (1923)

stony-broke, stone-broke (1886) • O. Bernier: Naples wasn't exactly short of nobility.... Some were stone broke. (1981)

(down) on one's uppers (1895) From the notion of destitute people who have worn out
the soles of their shoes, leaving only the uppers.
■ David Williams: My guess is the swine's on his uppers. . .
He's going for the ten thousand a year. (1985)

**bust** (1913) From bust, a past participle of bust break  ■ **Observer:** Companies do go bust. (1964)

**motherless** (1916) Australian; short for motherless broke completely broke  ■ B. Bennett: He let half-a-dozen others out at the same time. The motherless hoover. (1976)

**skint** (1925) British; variant of skinned  ■ **Times:** Are the British really as skint as we tend to make out? (1981)

**skinned** (1935) Sometimes followed by out  ■ **Observer:** I'm skinned, I know I can always count on someone helpin' me. (1958)

**a skinner** (1943) New Zealand  ■ **New Writing:** So I paid for the pair of us, which left me practically a skinner. (1943)

**boracic** (1959) British; short for boracic lint, rhyming slang for skint  ■ D. Raymond: 'He's boracic,' said someone. 'He's out grafting.' (1984)

**uptight** (1967)  ■ **Esquire:** The expression 'uptight,' which meant being in financial straits, appeared on the soul scene in the general vicinity of 1953. (1968)

**wiped out** (1977)  ■ J. Blume: I am almost wiped out financially, but maybe I can pick up a babysitting job over the holidays. (1981)

No money

**nuppence** (1886) British, dated; blend of no and tuppence  ■ **Observer:** Living on nuppence. (1964)

Any money; a trivial amount of money

**brass farthing** (1642) British  ■ **Guardian:** Off course they do not contribute a brass farthing. The punter pays the levy and no amount of BOLA smokescreen can hide that. (1991)

**red cent** (1839) Orig US; from the copper of which cents were made  ■ Tom Sharpe: Til alimony was paid for the pair of us, which left me practically a skinner. (1932)

**bean** (1893) From earlier applications to a coin and various specific coins  ■ Dorothy Sayers: None of the Fentimans ever had a bean, as I believe one says nowadays. (1928)

**razoo, brass razoo** (1919) Australian & New Zealand; origin unknown  ■ Richard Clapperton: He isn't rolling in the stuff—he hasn't got two brass razoos to rub together. (1968)

**sponduluck, spondoolick** (1923) US; from spondulicks money  ■ E. P. Oppenheim: 'Do I understand that the young man . . . has dissipated the whole of his patrimony, in twelve months?' he inquired. 'Every bean,' Harold asssented. 'Not a spondulick left.' (1923)


**zac, Zack, zak** (1953) Australian; from earlier sense, sixpence  ■ **National Times** (Sydney): No wonder Paul Keating has angrily refused to give the ABC another zac. (1986)

A penniless person

**stumer, stumor, stoomer** (1898) Australian, dated; from earlier sense, dud cheque

**slepper, shlepper** (1949) Mainly US; applied especially to a poor person regarded as a parasite; from schleip drag, toil + -er  ■ Groucho Marx: The paupers, or schlepper crowd, still hang on to their portable radios, but unfortunately they're not the ones who buy Chryslers. (1950)

To deprive of money

**clean out** (1812)  ■ **Big Comic Fortnightly:** Oh no! There's been a bank raid! I've been cleaned out! (1989)

To lose one's money

**come a stumer** (or stoomer) (1900) Australian, dated

To have little money

**feel the pinch** (1886) Applied to someone feeling the effects of having insufficient money  ■ **World of Cricket Monthly:** Otago are really feeling the pinch. (1977)

To make payment

**shell out** (1801) From the notion of taking seeds out of their pod or shell  ■ **New Scientist:** The other nations may agree to place them at ESA's satellite operations centre just outside Frankfurt—if the Germans agree to shell out more cash. (1983)

**dub in, dub up** (1823) Origin unknown  ■ Edmund Blunden: Five or six boys 'dub in' for a pot of strawberry jam or treacle. (1923)

**fork out, fork up** (1831)  ■ Hart Crane: The family will just have to fork up a loan or something for me. (1932)

**stump up** (1833)  ■ Grant Allen: The governor... fishes out his purse—stumps up liberally. (1893)

**blow someone to something** (1889) US; denoting paying for someone to have something  ■ Arthur Miller: Tell Dad, we want to blow him to a good meal. (1949)

**cough up** (1894)  ■ George Moore: Now, then, old girl, cough up! I must have a few halfpence. (1920)

**stumper** (1898) From brass money  ■ P. G. Wodehouse: What did he soak him? Five quid?... And Gussie brassed up and was free? (1949)

**spring** (1906) Australian & US  ■ Milton Machlin: We'll spring for the booze. (1976)

**kick in** (1908) Used to denote paying one's share  ■ **Fortune:** Hillard Elkins, producer of Ooh! Calcutta!, asked him to help back his productions of two Ibsen plays; Lufkin kicked in $10,000. (1972)

**go Dutch** (1914) Orig US; denoting each person paying for their own food, drink, etc. in a joint undertaking; from Dutch treat outing in which expenses are shared equally among participants  ■ **Economist:** To suggest a free trade area to any of them in such circumstances looks rather like proposing to a teetotaller that you and he go dutch on daily rounds of drinks. (1957)
pick up the bill (or check, tab, etc.) (1945)    Orig US; used to denote bearing the cost of something. **Daily Telegraph:** Ratepayers would have to pick up the bill if important jobs were transferred from the county councils to some of the larger districts. (1978)

pop (1959)    L. J. Braun: Heil. I didn’t buy you anything, but I’ll pop for lunch. (1968)

To fail to pay

skunk (1851) US

(Of payments) in advance

up front (1972) Orig US. **S. Wilson:** ‘How much cash did you have in mind?’ ‘Five thousand, up front.’ ‘I beg your pardon?’ ‘In advance.’ (1982)

Expenses

exes, ex’s, exs (1864) Abbreviation of expenses

put the bite on (1933) **P. G. Wodehouse:** For years and years I have been trying to lend him of my plenty, but he has always steadfastly refused to put the bite on me. (1934)

To spend money recklessly; squander

lash out (1513) **Daily Telegraph:** The poor who lash out on slow horses and unsuitable food might sometimes be more colourful and more fun to be with than the millionnaire breakfasting on crispbread and orange juice. (1991)

knock down (1845) Australian & New Zealand; applied to spending all one’s money on a spree or drinking bout. **J. H. Travers:** After they made payment, they would book up another three months’ supply, and then knock the balance down at the local pub. (1976)

blue (1846) Perhaps a variant of blow. **Walter de la Mare:** She had taken a holiday and just blued some of her savings. (1930)

blow (1874) **Economist:** He will probably feel able to blow with a clear conscience the £2,000. (1957)

blow in (1886) Mainly US. **Frank Sargeson:** Then he’d go to town and blow his money in, usually at the races. (1946)

do (1889) Mainly Australian & New Zealand; usually followed by in **Bulletin** (Sydney): Now he’s done his money in. (1930)

splash (1934) Often followed by out **Samuel Beckett:** He thought for a second of splashing the fourpence. (1938) **Morecambe Guardian:** Splash out on something new to wear; the result will be worthwhile. (1978)

splurge (1934) Orig US; from earlier sense, behave ostentatiously. **High Times:** If you really get into omelettes, you should splurge and procure a good copper or stainless steel omelette pan. (1975)

push the boat out (1937) Orig naval slang; used to denote being more than usually open-handed, especially in buying drinks for others. **John Le Carré:** ‘Felding’s giving another dinner party tonight.’ ‘He’s pushing the boat out these days.’ (1962)

To borrow money, etc.

touch (1760) Often followed by for **Graham Greene:** ‘If you would lend me a pound.’ . . . Had she ‘touched’ Henry once too often? (1951)

tap (1840) **Essex Weekly News:** The first gentleman who was tapped for a subscription generously promised £30. (1901)

bite someone’s ear (1879) **P. G. Wodehouse:** His principal source of income . . . was derived from biting the ear of a rich uncle. (1925)

moosh (1899) Also applied more generally to cadging; from earlier senses, loiter, steal

pole (1906) Australian; also applied more generally to cadging or sponging; usually followed by on **Kylie Tennant:** Only his own obstinacy kept him working, but Launce was as independent as any other man in Lost Haven. He wasn’t going to pole on Alec. (1945)

hum (1913) Australian; also applied more generally to cadging or sponging; short for humbug. **Xavier Herbert:** Gertch—you old blowbag! You’re only humming for a drink. Nick off home. (1938)

put the bee on (1914) Dated, mainly US; compare earlier sense, put an end to **James Curtis:** If a bloke had come up and put the bee on him all the handout would have been . . . a lousy tanner. (1936)

put the nips in (or into) (1917) Australian & New Zealand **F. Huelin:** Parsons, priests, doctors, lawyers and professional people generally were legitimate prey, and we had no scruples about ‘putting the nips’ into them. (1973)

bite (1919) Australian **L. Glassop:** Can I bite you for a few quid, Lucky? (1949)

nip (1919) Mainly Australian; also applied more generally to cadging; **H. C. Baker:** No chance of nippin’ the bricky for a smoke—he don’t smoke. (1978)

put the sleeve on (1931) US; compare earlier sense, arrest **H. N. Rose:** Wait’ll I put the sleeve on Joe for some chewin’. (1934)

put the bite on (1933) Orig and mainly US **P. G. Wodehouse:** For years and years I have been trying to lend him of my plenty, but he has always steadfastly refused to put the bite on me. (1934)

bot (1934) Australian; also applied more generally to cadging or sponging; from the noun bot scrounger

ponce on (or off) (1937) Usually applied more generally to cadging or scrounging; from earlier sense, live off a prostitute’s earnings **Guardian:** Let’s face it, New Zealand has been poncing on us for years. (1971)

bludge (1944) Australian & New Zealand; also applied more generally to cadging or scrounging; from earlier sense. shirk. **Ian Hamilton:** He bludged three cigarettes off me. (1967)

Borrowing, cadging

on the tap (1932) From the verb tap borrow **P. Carter:** She was a real moaner and always on the tap, borrowing sugar and milk. (1977)
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A borrower or cadger

**moocher** (1857) From mooch borrow + -er
- Kenneth Orvis: You moocher, you—don’t you respect a lady’s natural curiosity? Be nice to me. After all, I’m paying for this party. (1962)

**ear-biter** (1899) Dated, orig Australian; from bite someone’s ear borrow • P. G. Wodehouse: Two things which rendered Oofy Prosser a difficult proposition for the ear-biter. (1940)

**bludger** (1900) Australian & New Zealand; applied to a parasitical person; from earlier sense, prostitute’s pimp • Courier-Mail (Brisbane): Surely if one is willing to give a good day’s work for a good day’s pay one should be given a chance to earn. I’m no bludger. (1969)

**mooch** (1914) From the verb mooch borrow • William Burroughs: Cash was a junk mooch on wheels. He made it difficult to refuse. (1953)

**hum** (1915) Australian; short for humbug • White & Halliwell: Two professional hums... took an oath at Bendigo no more work they would do. (1983)

**bot** (1916) Australian & New Zealand; from the parasitic habits of the bot-fly • J. H. Fingleton: One of... the officials was berating Pressmen... as a ‘lot of bots who wanted everything for nothing’. (1960)

**tapper** (1930) From tap borrow, cadge + -er

**poler** (1938) Australian; from pole cadge + -er

A loan

**rub** (1914) Naval slang • W. Lang: ‘Innyone as hasn’t had a letter can have a rub of mines,’ says Moriarty, the big Irishman, generously. (1919)

A mortgage

**poultice** (1932) Australian; from earlier sense, (large) sum of money • Coast to Coast 1957–1958: When the farm was free of its ‘poultice’, her father had promised to hand over to Sam. (1958)

A money-lender

**Shylock, shylock** (1786) Derogatory & offensive; applied to a hard-hearted money-lender; from the name of the Jewish money-lender in Shakespeare’s Merchant of Venice • Turkus & Feder: ‘Sometimes it’s as good as 3,000 per cent,’ one of the shylocks... explained. (1951)

**ikey, ike, iky** (1864) Derogatory & offensive; applied especially to a Jewish money-lender; from earlier sense, Jew

Borrowed money

**O.P.M.** (1901) US; abbreviation of other people’s money • Josiah Flynn: It cost me nothing to play the game, because I played it with O.P.M. (1901)

An advance

**sub** (1866) British; often applied specifically to an advance payment of wages or salary; short for subsist (payment), itself short for subsistence

(payment). Hence the verb **sub** pay someone a sub (1874)

To beg

See also at **Vagrancy** (pp. 115–16)

**schnorr, shnoor** (1892) US; see schnorrer beggar

**panhandle** (1903) Mainly US; back-formation from panhandler beggar

**spear** (1912) US

**pling** (1913) US, dated; origin unknown

**tap** (1935) From earlier sense, borrow money, cadge • George Orwell: They were begging... ‘tapping’ at every... likely-looking cottage. (1935)

A beggar

**schnorrer, shnorrer** (1892) US; from Yiddish, from German Schnurrer (from schnurren go begging)

**panhandler** (1897) Orig US; humorously alluding to the beggar’s bowl • Ed McBain: Don’t... start screaming if a panhandler taps you on the shoulder. He may only want a quarter for a drink. (1973)

**plinger** (1913) US, dated; from pling beg + -er

**dummy** (1918) Applied to a beggar who pretends to be deaf and dumb; from earlier sense, deaf-mute

**tapper** (1930) From tap beg + -er • J. Worby: I didn’t have time to light a cigarette before I was accosted by a tapper. (1939)

(An act of) begging

**stemming** (1924), **stem** (1929) US; from stem street frequented by beggars

Wages

**stake** (1853) From earlier sense, amount won at gambling

**screw** (1858) • T. S. Eliot: He’s offered me the job With a jolly good screw, and some pickings in commissions. (1959)

**Irishman’s rise** (1889) Applied to a reduction in pay • Times: For many low-paid workers with children, an extra £2 a week may be no more than an ‘Irishman’s rise’. (1972)

**greengages** (1931) Rhyming slang • Guardian: The money? Greengages we call it, greengages—wages. You’ll be surprised. In a lot of places it’s a fiver a night. (1964)

**rock of ages** (1937) Rhyming slang

**greengages** (1931) Rhyming slang • Guardian: The money? Greengages we call it, greengages—wages. You’ll be surprised. In a lot of places it’s a fiver a night. (1964)

**toke** (1971) North American; applied to a gratuity or tip; from earlier sense, unearned or unexpected money • Sun: When there is a mix-up at the table and two diners leave separate tips, it becomes double gray. (1987)

**gravey** (1967) Applied to a gratuity or tip; from earlier sense, unearned or unexpected money • Sun: When there is a mix-up at the table and two diners leave separate tips, it becomes double gray. (1987)
To earn as wages

**pull in** (1529)  ■ *Scotsman*: The Archbishop of York... pulls in £6000 a year. (1973)

**knock out** (1871)  ■ *Bulletin* (Sydney): What about the schoolteacher, the young computer programmer or plumber knocking out about $200 a week? (1975)

**Profit**

**bunce** (1719)  Origin uncertain; perhaps an alteration of *bonus*  ■ *Charles Drummond*: They take the place for a fee and pocket any bunce. (1968)

**clean-up** (1878)  Orig US; from *clean up* make a profit  ■ *Kylie Tennant*: He was now a hundred pounds in debt; but that, for Alec, was practically no debt at all; one good clean-up... and he would be clear. (1946)

**velvet** (1901)  ■ *Eliot Paul*: A good French mechanic... would have to work two and one half days to earn 2,430 francs, which on account of taxes... would not be all velvet. (1951)

**melon** (1908)  Applied to large profits to be shared between a number of people; especially in the phrase *cut the melon*  ■ *Aurora* (Illinois) *Beacon News*: This year, a record number of your friends and neighbors will split a record ‘melon’ in our 1948 savings clubs. (1948)

**gravy** (1910)  Applied to unearned or unexpected money; from the notion of gravy as a pleasing addition (to meat)  ■ *Globe & Mail* (Toronto): In the past 10 years, the Manitoba Government has reaped about $8-million from the Downs (more than $1-million last year). This revenue is almost pure gravy. (1968)

**vigorish, viggerish** (1912)  US; applied to the percentage deducted by the organizers of a game from the winnings of a gambler, and hence to the rate of interest on a usurious loan; hence to the notion of gravy as a pleasing food item; applied to a relishing of one’s profits; alteration of *vigor*; *vigger*; from Yiddish; from Russian *vigorish*; from *giverich*  ■ *Collier’s*: They take a vig... and when I had a little stake I hitched back to Istiqlaf. (1978)

**fast buck** (1949), **quick buck** (1960)  Orig US; applied to a quick profit; from *buck dollar*  ■ *Zigzag*: It will attract talentless dorks out for a taste of notoriety or a fast buck. (1977)  ■ *Robert Barnard*: Dreaming of luxury, of the quick buck dubiously acquired. (1980)

**Something profitable**

**gravy train** (1914), **gravy boat** (1943)  Orig US; applied to a source of easy and often undeserved profit; compare gravy unearned or unexpected money  ■ Mary McCarthy: There was a moment in the spring when the whole Jocelyn sideshow seemed to be boarding the gravy train, on to fatter triumphs of platitude and mediocrity. (1952)  ■ *Sunday Telegraph*: The family letting rooms on the quiet, or the person who has a ‘nice little earner’ on the side. (1987)

**To make a profit**

**rake in** (1583)  Especially in the phrases *rake it in* and *rake in the shekels*  ■ *Observer*: He’s raking it in already. Writes ‘think pieces’ for *Honey* magazine. (1969)

**clean up** (1831)  Orig and mainly US  ■ *Budd Schulberg*: I mean profit. That show must be cleaning up. (1941)  ■ *20th Century*: A concerted drive to ensure that this 25-year-old veteran cleans up another £16 million. (1960)

**coin money, coin it** (1863)  ■ *Economist*: Restaurantiers and hoteliers in Portsmouth were coining it this week as 2,000 honest Social Democrats and several hundred expense-account journalists ate, drank and slept their way through the SDP wake. (1987)

**laugh all the way to the bank** (1969)  Used to denote a relishing of one’s profits; alteration of an original (ironic) cry all the way to the bank deplore one’s undeserved profits, attributed to the pianist Liberace:  ■ *Daily Mirror*: On the occasion in New York at a concert in Madison Square Garden when he had the greatest reception of his life and the critics slayed him mercilessly, Liberace said: ‘The take was terrific but the critics killed me. My brother George cried all the way to the bank.’ (1956)  ■ *National Trust*: The taxpayer may be called in to ‘save’ it (from a great house) for the nation. Then the owner laughs all the way to the bank, and the devil can take his conscience. (1985)

**To save money**

**salt away, salt down** (1849)  Often denoting storing money secretly in order to conceal profits; from the notion of preserving food in salt  ■ *Kansas City* (Missouri) *Star*: It is a well known fact that all gamblers salt away their ill-gotten gains and die inordinately rich. (1931)

**Money saved**

**stake** (1853)  North American; from earlier sense, amount won at gambling  ■ *John Updike*: I worked in that oil town in the Rift... and when I had a little stake I hitched back to Istiqlaf. (1978)

**In debt; in financial difficulty**

**up King Street** (1864)  Australian, dated; from the name of a street in Sydney, site of the Supreme Court where bankruptcy cases were heard  ■ C. Stead: They don’t sweat their guts out for a chump who buys... himself a new car when he’s up King Street. (1934)

**in hock** (1926)  Compare earlier senses, in prison, in pawn  ■ *Collier’s*: My cash was gone, and I was in hock for the next three years. (1929)

**in the red** (1926)  From the use of red ink to show debit items and balances in accounts  ■ *Times*: The British Transport Commission is already in the red to the tune of at least £30m. (1980)

**in Queer Street** (1952)  British; from *Queer Street* name of an imaginary street inhabited by those in trouble  ■ Angus Wilson: He enjoys a little flutter... and if he finds himself in Queer Street now and again, I’m sure no one would grudge him his bit of fun. (1952)
An IOU

**marker** (1887)  US  ■ Damon Runyon: He is willing to take Charley's marker for a million if necessary to get Charley out.  (1931)

Cheap

**for a song** (1601)  ■ Charles Dickens: I assure you, the things were going for a song.  (1865)

**dirt cheap** (1821)  Applied to something very cheap  ■ Economist: Development costs for the S-Cargo were roughly £200m—dirt cheap for a new car.  (1988)

**on the cheap** (1859)  ■ George Orwell: Anything from theosophy to cat's-cradle, provided you can do it on the cheap.  (1939)

**cheapie** (1898), **cheapo** (1967)  Applied especially to something cheap and of low quality; **dirt cheap** applied to something very cheap  ■ Economist: Development costs for the S-Cargo were roughly £200m—dirt cheap for a new car.  (1988)

**el cheapo** (1967)  Orig US; applied especially to something cheap and of low quality; jocular pseudo-Spanish  ■ 80 Microcomputing: You could get away with an el cheapo cassette recorder for storage.  (1983)

Something free

**freebie, freebee, freeby** (1942)  US; from **freebie** something free  ■ Mezzrow & Wolfe: It’s the brakeman who throws freebie passengers off.  (1946)

**freebie, freebee, freeby** (1928)  Orig US; arbitrarily from **free**  ■ Ed Lacy: She’ll write ‘free’ on the slip.  . . . They come in for the freebie and end up buying 10 or more copies.  (1962)

Expensive

**stiff** (1824)  Applied mainly to a price  ■ A. C. P. Haggard: He naturally thought 3s. an hour pretty stiff boat hire.  (1903)

**steep** (1856)  Applied mainly to a price  ■ Munsey's Magazine: Forty thousand marks. . . . is a pretty steep price even for a royal motor carriage.  (1901)

**pricey, pricy** (1932)  From **price + y**  ■ SLR Camera: It can . . . be fitted with a motor drive unit, but not with the wide variety of viewing heads and viewing screens available for the more pricey sisters in the catalogue.  (1978)

To be expensive

**break the bank** (1612)  From the notion of ruining a bank financially; in earliest use used to denote becoming bankrupt  ■ Guardian: Yes, by £3bn to £4bn; in a £600bn economy that won’t break the bank.  (1992)

**cost** (1895)  ■ F. Scott Fitzgerald: I like them but my God they cost.  (1938)

**set back** (1900)  ■ Dan Lees: He was carrying an over-and-under that must have set him back the thick end of a thousand quid, and, behind that much gun, even plus-fours . . . couldn’t make him look silly.  (1973)

**knock back** (1946)  ■ Guardian: The complete CD edition occupies eight feet of shelf space, runs 200 hours, and will knock you back £1,400.  (1991)

The (high) cost of something

**the damage** (1755)  Now especially in the phrase what's the damage? how much is there to pay?  ■ Barbara Pym: You must let me know the damage and I'll settle with you.  (1977)

**nut** (1912)  US; applied to the cost of a venture  ■ Publishers Weekly: He submitted a strong script that led Fox to substitute color film and wide screen for black-and-white and the conventional small-screen ratio, and to raise the nut to $400,000.  (1972)

**the earth** (1924)  ■ Agatha Christie: Would it be terribly expensive? . . . She'd heard they charged the earth.  (1961)

**an arm and a leg** (1956)  ■ Daily Mirror: She needed half a million dollars to help pay palimony to Judy Nelson. Her lesbian affair has cost an arm and a leg.  (1992)

To pay a high price

**pay through the nose** (1672)  ■ Guardian: You pay through the nose for the 'show', often menus give no choice, and you are taken to the cleaners for wine and 'extras'.  (1992)
A bank

jug (1845) □ Observer: If a villain had seriously suggested screwing a jug (breaking into a bank). (1960)

A cheque

stumer, stumor (1890) Applied to a dud cheque; from earlier sense, something worthless □ F. M. Ford: Two [were] awaiting court-martial for giving stumer cheques. (1926)

kite (1927) Applied especially to a blank, dud, or forged cheque; from earlier sense, fraudulent bill of exchange, from the phrase fly a kite issue such a bill, from the notion of a toy kite as something insubstantial that floats in the air temporarily □ Tony Parker: He’s in for what they call ‘kites’, dud cheques, you know. (1969)

A safe

peter (1859) Also applied to a cash-box or cash register; from earlier sense, case, trunk □ G. F. Newman: There was s’posed to be some dough in the Peter. (1970)

box (1904) Orig US

pete, pete-box (1911) Abbreviation of peter safe □ Damon Runyon: This is a very soft pete. It is old-fashioned, and you can open it with a toothpick. (1938)

keister, keester, keyster (1913) US; from earlier sense, suitcase, bag □ H. E. Goldin: Easy on the soup (crude nitro-glycerine) with that keister or she’ll jam. (1938)

A container for money

skin (a1790) Criminals’ slang, dated; applied to a purse or wallet □ James Curtis: Proper jobs I mean. Not nicking skins from blokes what are lit up. (1936)

2. Bribery

A bribe

hush-money (1709) Applied to money paid to prevent disclosure or exposure, or to hush up a crime or discreditable transaction □ Henry Miller: The cops will be sitting on our necks... The natural thing, under the circumstances, would be to put something aside for hush money. (1953)

sweetener (1847) □ G. Hammond: Everybody gives ‘sweeteners’ of some kind or another, even if it’s only a bottle at Christmas. (1979)

boodle (1884) Orig US; applied to money acquired or spent in connection with the obtaining or holding of public offices, the material means or gains of bribery and corruption; from earlier senses, counterfeit money, money in general

graft (1901) Orig US; applied to money acquired or spent in connection with the obtaining or

holding of public offices, the material means or gains of bribery and corruption; also applied to the practice of bribery and corruption; from earlier sense, (illegal) profit □ Daily Telegraph: Victims in a wave of graft, corruption and fear were making regular payments for protection. (1970)

oil (1903) US; applied to money used for bribery and corruption □ Detective Fiction Weekly. She didn’t take care of her protection directly, that is, she didn’t slip the oil to the cops herself. (1935)

dropsy (1930) Jocular extension of dropsy excess of fluids in body tissue, from the notion of ‘dropping’ money into someone’s hand □ Peter Wildeblood: A nice bit of dropsy to a copper usually does the trick. (1955)

pay-off (1930) Orig and mainly US □ National Observer (US): Tanaka is one of several Japanese officials accused of receiving $12 million in pay-offs from Lockheed for promotion of the company’s sales in Japan. (1976)

pogue (1812) Applied to a bag, purse, or wallet; perhaps related to obsolete pough bag, and compare poke purse □ Michael Crichton: It was the stickman’s job to take the pogue once Teddy had snaffled it, thus leaving Teddy clean, should... a constable stop him. (1975)

poke (1859) North American; applied to a purse or wallet; from earlier sense, bag or small sack (as in buy a pig in a poke)

grouch-bag (1908) US; applied to a hidden pocket or a (draw-string) purse carried in a concealed place, for keeping one’s money safe; from grouch grumbling □ Telegraph (Brisbane): Grouch... he earned his nickname in poker games because he always carried his money in a ‘grouch bag’. (1969)

Credit cards


Welfare

susso (1941) Australian, dated; applied to unemployment benefit (often in the phrase on (the) susso) and also to someone paid such benefit; from sustenance + -o □ F. Hardy: The very thought... of the contempt the respectable held for the sussoos changed his mood to defiance. (1983)

baby bonus (1945) Canadian; applied to the family allowance □ Globe & Mail (Toronto): Extra tax on rich to be eliminated; baby bonus to rise. (1976)

pogey, pogy (1960) North American; applied to welfare payment for the needy; from earlier senses, hostel for the poor, welfare office □ H. T. Barker: During the winter we lived on turnips, potatoes, canned clams and the pogy, and Mother and I would hook rugs for the tourist trade. (1964)

2. Bribery

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To bribe

**drop** (1931) ■ George Orwell: A half-penny’s the usual drop (gift) (1933)

**payola** (1938) Orig US; applied to a bribe or other secret payment to induce someone to use their influence to promote a commercial product, especially one made to a disc-jockey for plugging a record; -ola commercial suffix, after *pianola*, etc., used in *Victrola* and other products ■ Thomas Pynchon: They got the contracts. All drawn up in most kosher fashion, Manfred. If there was payola in there, I doubt it got written down. (1966)


**sling, sling back** (1948) Australian: from the verb slang pay a bribe ■ *Canberra Times*: To have a house... given to you is, to put it colloquially, a sling of major proportions. (1982)

**bung** (1958) British; from the verb bung bribe ■ Jeffrey Ashford: What’s the matter? Not being offered enough bung? (1966)

**kickback** (1958) Orig US; applied to money paid (illegally) to someone who has made it possible for you to do something; from earlier sense, refund, rebate ■ *Daily Telegraph*: The promoter claims that another member of the committee approached him demanding a kick-back on the profits and, after he had refused this proposal, the permit was somehow no longer forthcoming. (1972)

**backhander** (1960) Applied to a secret payment; from the notion of concealing payment by making it with the hand reversed; compare earlier sense, blow with the back of the hand, and back-handed indirect, ambiguous, devious (as in ‘a back-handed compliment’) ■ *Listener*: A bit of a backhander and, boy, you’re in. (1968)

**schmeer, schmear, shmere, shmear, shmeer, shmear** (1961) North American; from the verb schmeer bribe ■ Ed Lacy: Our lad didn’t want the shmeer to start with, so he ain’t greedy. (1962)

See also soap under *Money* at *Money* (p. 180).

To bribe

**palm** (1747) Dated; from the notion of putting money into the palm of someone’s hand ■ C. G. Harper: Votes which would in other days have been acquired by palming the men and kissing all the babies. (1899)

**grease** someone’s palm (1807) Compare earlier obsolete grease someone’s hand (1526) ■ *Economist*: The property and construction interests, which lavishly grease the palm of the biggest faction in the ruling party. (1987)

**square** (1859) Denoting conciliation by bribery ■ Elizabeth Bowen: ‘What’s poor Willy going to think of us?’ ‘I’ll square Willy.’ (1969)

**oil the knob** (1870) British, dated; applied to bribing a doorman

**boodle** (1890) Orig US; from the noun boodle money for or from bribery ■ W. H. Smith: If you're going to boodle you've got to do it on a party basis. If I wanted to boodle an Illinois legislature, [etc.] (1904)

**reach** (1906) US ■ L. Katcher: It is impossible... to open a big, notorious gambling operation without buying off public officials... This does not necessarily mean a sheriff or a District Attorney or a chief of police is being reached. (1967)

**sling** (c1907) Australian; denoting the paying of a bribe ■ F. Hardy: On first name terms with every shire President so long as they didn’t forget to sling when backhanders came in. (1971)

**get to** (1927) US ■ E. D. Sullivan: Gangsters can’t operate on a satisfactory scale anywhere until they have ‘got to someone’. (1930)

**lubricate** (1928) ■ *Daily Express*: He made specific charges. One was that taxicab proprietors have to ‘lubricate’ Scotland-yard before their taxicabs are passed for licensing. (1928)

**schmeer, schmear, shmere, shmear, shmeer, shmier** (1945) North American; from earlier sense, flatter ■ Leo Rosten: Do the officials expect to be shmeered there? (1968)

**bung** (1950) British; origin unknown ■ John Burke: Don’t forget the solicitors.... They’ll want bunging. (1967)

Acceptance of bribes; corruption

**mumping** (1970) British; applied to the acceptance by the police of small gifts or bribes from tradespeople; from obsolete mump beg

Taking bribes

**on the take** (1930) Orig US ■ *Boston Sunday Globe*: In an unguarded public moment [he]... said, ‘Half the people in Philadelphia are on the take.’ (1967)

See also on the pad at pad (below).

An establishment that pays bribes

**pad** (1970) US; applied to a gambling saloon or similar place which provides police with regular pay-offs; also in the phrase on the pad receiving such bribes ■ *Guardian*: [He] was thrilled with becoming a plainclothesman because... ‘he was now on the pad’. The pad is the regular sum paid to officers for ignoring illegal activities. (1971)
3. Work

Work

** graft (1853) ** Applied especially to hard work; perhaps a transferred use of obsolete graft depth of earth lifted by a spade, in its original sense ‘digging’ ■ Times: This view is that salvation ... is to be won by long, hard graft by industrial management. (1968)

** yakka, yacca, yacka, yacker, yakker (1888) ** Australian; mainly to hard work; often in the phrase hard yakka; from the dated Australian verb yakker work, from Aboriginal (Jagara) yaga ■ National Times (Sydney): Child care remains women’s responsibility. . . . There’s no evidence that men are taking part in the hard yakka. (1986)

** leg work (1891) ** Applied to work characterized by running of errands, going from place to place in search of information, etc. ■ Daily Telegraph: 1,700 men . . . do the surveying leg-work needed for keeping local maps up to date. (1972)

** bashing (1940) ** British, services’ slang; applied to the work or other activity that a person prefers to do; from earlier sense, dodge ■ T. Stow: ‘What’s your luck, mate?’ ‘Me? Stockman on a mission.’ (1958)

** schlep, schlepp, shlep (1964) ** Mainly US; applied to hard work; from the verb schlep work hard ■ National Times: The Hollywood Park chef . . . did much of the grunt work in construction of the cake base. (1989)

** grunt work (1970) ** US; applied to unskilled or manual work; from grunt unskilled worker ■ Los Angeles Times: The Hollywood Park chef . . . did much of the grunt work in construction of the cake base. (1989)

To work

** graft (1859) ** Applied especially to working hard; from graft hard work ■ Allan Prior: The great mass of mugs were law-abiding . . . doing as they were told, working, grafting. (1966)

** schlep, schlepp, shlep (1963) ** Mainly US; applied to working hard; from earlier sense, drag ■ Saul Bellow: Why should I schlepp out my guts? (1964)

A worker

** wallah, walla, wala (1785) ** Orig Anglo-Indian; applied to someone concerned with or in charge of a usually specified thing, business, etc.; from the Hindi suffix -walā -er ■ J. M. Stewart: It’s marvellous what these ambulance wallas can do at a pinch. (1977)

** grafter (1900) ** Applied especially to a hard worker; from graft work (nard) + -er ■ Times: He is a grafter rather than a fluent striker, with little back-lift, plenty of concentration, and a willingness to use his feet. (1959)

** basher (1940) ** British, orig services’ slang; applied to someone with the stated duties, occupation, etc.; from the notion of using, repairing, etc. a particular implement in a robust or careless way ■ Gen: One of the cookhouse bashers that came off at five. (1945)

** workaholic (1968) ** Orig US; applied to someone who works excessively hard; from work, after alcoholic ■ Guardian: They’re concerned about the pressures of their jobs, which demand that they become workaholics. (1984)

Working hard

** nose to the grindstone (1828) ** From earlier use denoting oppression or repression ■ Guardian: He liked the idea of working with mature students who would not call him a swot if he kept his nose to the grindstone. (1982)

A product of work

** foreigner (1943) ** British, orig military slang; applied to something done or made at work by an employee for personal benefit, or to a piece of work not declared to the relevant authorities; mainly in the phrase do a foreigner ■ Alan Bleasdale: We’re both gettin’ followed, for all we know, we’re both goin’ t’get prosecuted f’doin’ a foreigner while we’re on the dole. (1983)

A job or occupation

** berth (1778) ** Applied to (an appointment to) a job; from earlier more specific sense, a situation or job on board a ship ■ South China Morning Post: Lord Wilson expressed surprise at the appointment but it is seen as an acceptable berth for the former governor. (1992)

** hat (1869) ** Used to denote an office or occupation symbolized (as if) by the wearing of a hat ■ Evening Standard: Wearing his new ‘economic overlord’ hat the Prime Minister summoned three key figures to Downing Street today. (1987)

** lurk (1916) ** Australian & New Zealand; from earlier sense, scheme, dodge ■ R. Stow: ‘What’s your lurk, mate?’ ‘Me? Stockman on a mission.’ (1958)

** site (1930) ** US, nautical ■ New Yorker: Joe, who generally keeps his own counsel, tells me that he is hoping to get a site—a job—on the Sniktaw. (1977)

** number (1948) ** ■ Listener: Transferred to what was described as a ‘cushy number’ with the Commandos. (1968)

** bag (1964) ** Orig US; applied to the work or other activity that a person prefers to do; from earlier sense, category (of jazz) ■ Sunday Times: His bag is paper sculpture. (1966)

To have more than one job

** moonlight (1957) ** Orig US; from the notion of having an evening job in addition to one’s usual day job ■ Times Literary Supplement: He . . .—naturally for one who moonlights as the Financial Times’s . . .
correspondent when not otherwise engaged as a Fellow of Magdalen—never misses a turn on botanical or horticultural matters. (1974). Hence moonlighter (1957) • Clive Egleton: I employ a lot of moonlighters, blokes who take a second job at nights. (1973)

Bar staff

See at Alcohol (p. 147).

A bookmaker

bookie, booky (1885) From book(maker + -ie • Times: One of his thirties-style bookie check suits. (1969)

A building-trade worker

Chips (1785) Mainly naval slang; applied to a carpenter, often as a nickname

brickie, bricky (1880) Applied to a bricklayer; from brick + -y • Sunday Times (headline): Minimum wage hits Germany's British brickies. (1997)

chippy, chippie (1916) Orig naval slang; from chip + -y • Arnold Wesker: I'll work as a chippy on the Colonel's farm. (1960)

putty (1946) Naval slang, dated; applied to a ship's painter

A butcher

pig-sticker (1886) Dated; applied to a pork butcher

A cook

See at Eating & Drinking (pp. 140–1).

A delivery worker

postie, posty (1871) Applied to a postman; from post(man + -ie • South Wales Guardian: He was missed by the upper valley residents on his transfer down to Ammanford, where he has been a 'postie' for the past 13 years. (1977)

milky, milkie (1886) Applied to a milkman; from milk + -y • Evening News: He appeared his normal easy-going self and all he said to me was, 'Hullo milkie.' (1975)

milko, milk-oh (1907) Orig Australian; applied to a milkman; from the call milk O! used by milkmen • Canberra Chronicle: He has spent quite a fair bit of time in banking and an oil company business, but also doubled as a pretty good milko. (1985)

An electrician

sparks (1914) • Listener: Lord Sneaker tells his sparks to wrap up the lights. (1975)

juicer (1928) From juice electricity + -er • V. J. Kehoe: He directs the . . . juicers to place the lights in the most effective positions. (1957)

A farmer

cockatoo (1845) Australian & New Zealand; applied to a small farmer; probably from earlier sense, a convict serving a sentence on Cockatoo Island in Sydney Harbour • O. Duff: The most they [sc. sheepfarmers] can hope for is an uneasy truce with dairymen . . . or an alliance with Labour to control the 'cockatoos'. (1941)

tiger (1865) Australian; applied to a sheep shearer • F. B. Vickers: Those tigers (he meant the shearers) will make you dance. (1956)

cocky (1872) Australian & New Zealand; applied to a small farmer; from cockatoo + -y • Barry Crump: The cocky had a sheep-run in the foothills of the Coromandel Ranges. (1960)

pen-mate (1895) Australian & New Zealand; applied to a shearer who catches sheep out of the same pen as another shearer

drummer (1897) Australian & New Zealand, dated; applied to the worst or slowest sheep-shearer in a team; perhaps a jocular use of obsolete drummer commercial traveller • H. P. Tritton: It's not every man that is drummer in four sheds running. (1959)

waddy, waddie (1897) US; applied to a cattle rustler, and also to a cowboy, especially a temporary cowhand; origin unknown • J. Lomax: He rides a fancy horse, he's a favorite man, Can get more credit than a common waddie can. (1927)

leather-neck (1898) Australian, dated; applied to an unskilled farm-labourer, especially on a sheep station

cow-spanker (1906) Australian & New Zealand; applied to a dairy farmer or stockman • Weekly News (Auckland): The good old New Zealand cowspanker. (1963)

backyder (1922) British, dated; applied to someone who keeps chickens in their backyard • Gen: Backyders keep fifteen million hens according to Agriculture Ministry census. (1942)

jingling Johnny (1934) Australian & New Zealand; applied to someone who shears sheep by hand

swede-basher (1943) Jocular, derogatory; applied to a farm worker, and hence to any rustic • Joyce Grenfell: I tried to sing a song appropriate for the swede-bashers from Lincolnshire, the Cockneys, Scots . . ., and so on. (1976)

stubble-jumper (1961) Mainly Canadian; applied to a prairie farmer • Islander (Victoria, British Columbia): An authentic stubble-jumper from the prairies was looked upon as being at the very bottom rung of the social and employment ladder. (1973)

A general worker

tiger (1865) Australian; applied to a menial labourer

lobby-gow (1906) US; applied to an errand-boy, messenger, or hanger-on; origin unknown • T. Betts: He flung away fortunes in grubstakes to bums, heels, and lobby-gows. (1956)

dogsbody (1922) Orig nautical; applied to a junior person, especially one to whom a variety of menial tasks is given; compare earlier
nautical slang sense, dried peas boiled in a cloth

*Listener:* I was a sort of general dogsbody to begin with—an assistant stage-manager, and what have you. (1967)

**ground-hog (1926)** US; applied to a worker who operates at ground level; from earlier sense, American marmot

** grunt (1926)** Orig and mainly US; applied originally to a ground worker in the construction of power lines, and hence to any unskilled worker or labourer. *Daily Telegraph.* Better by far not to attempt to be over-smart... by using new words like... 'grunt' for a guy who does the dirty work. (1986)

**wood-and-water joey (1926)** Australian; applied to an odd-job man; from wood-and-water, in allusion to 'hewers of wood and drawers of water' (Joshua vi.21) + obsolete Australian Joey recent arrival on a goldfield, inexperienced miner. *D. Stuart:* You might consider taking a job here with me, wood-and-water joey, general roustabout. (1978)

**working stiff (1930)** US; applied to an ordinary working man. *Guardian Weekly.* The idea of two young working stiffs [sc. Woodward and Bernstein] carrying off the prize is irresistible to youngsters with their careers before them. (1977)

**temp (1932)** Orig US; applied to a temporary employee, especially a temporary secretary; abbreviation of temporary. *Economist.* Overstaffing is not solely the result of the unwillingness to use temps. (1967). Hence the verb *temp* work as a temp. (1973) *Times.* Most of the students had given as their explanation for deciding to temp: 'To gain office experience before taking up a permanent job.' (1978)

**yardbird (1963)** US; applied to a worker in a yard. *Thomas Pynchon:* 'Yardbirds are the same all over,' Pappy said. . . . The dock workers fled by, jostling them. (1963)

**gofer, gopher (1967)** Orig and mainly US; applied to someone who runs errands, especially on a film set or in an office; from the verbal phrase go for, because the person goes and fetches things; influenced by gopher small mammal. *Listener.* But Lancaster plays Lou, an ex-bodyguard and gofer for the mob, still running the bedraggled tail of the numbers racket. (1981)

A groom

**swipe (1929)** US; applied to a groom or stableboy; perhaps originally a variant of sweep. *William Faulkner:* He hasn’t got any money... What little there might have been, that cockney swipe threw away long ago on whores and whisky. (1959)

A hairdresser

**crimper (1968)** British; from crimper + er

*Elleston Trevor:* He’d opened up as a crimper... decorating the salon and supervising the work himself. (1968)

A mechanic

**grease monkey (1928)** *Times Literary Supplement.* In Australia he was impressed by the ‘grease-monkey’ at Broken Hill who could afford to run a racing stable. (1959)

**mech (1951)** Abbreviation. *Alan Hunter:* Hanson called over a mech. The mech started it for us and drove it out. (1973)

An office worker

**steno (1906)** Orig and mainly US; applied to a (female) shorthand-typist; abbreviation of stenographer. *Motion Picture.* Frances Dee . . . skyskets to new importance with an amazingly fine performance as a small town steno who wins a five-thousand-dollar lottery. (1935)

**pen-pusher (1911)** Usually derogatory; applied to someone engaged in writing or desk work

*John Braine:* I saw myself, compared with him, as the Town Hall Clerk, the subordinate pen-pusher, halfway to being a zombie, and I tasted the sounness of envy. (1957)

**cookie-pusher (1943)** US, derogatory; applied to a diplomat devoting more attention to protocol or social engagements than to work; from earlier sense, man leading a futile social life. *Economist.* The popular image of the cookie-pusher in Foggy Bottom [i.e. the US State Department]. (1962)

**wallah, walla (1965)** Derogatory; applied to a bureaucrat or someone doing a routine administrative job; from earlier sense, person with a particular task. *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane): Some wallahs in Canberra are sitting in air-conditioned offices telling us what has been flooded and what hasn’t. (1974)

**pink button (1973)** British, Stock Exchange slang; applied to a jobber’s clerk

**suit (1979)** Derogatory, orig US; applied to a business executive, or to anyone who wears a business suit at work. *TV Week* (Melbourne): A kid . . . eager to propel himself out of the mail-room, where he has a menial job, into the executive ranks... of those who are called ‘suits’. (1987)

**sysop (1983)** Orig US; someone responsible for assisting in the day-to-day running of a computer system; abbreviation of system operator. *Telelink.* Operational initially for 20 hours a day... the board will eventually feature up to 16 sub-boards, each run by separate sysops. (1986)

Office work

**admin (1942)** Applied to administrative functions or duties, and also to the department of an organization that deals with these; short for administration. *W. Buchan:* A mass of practical details—sheer ‘admin’. (1961)

An oil-rig worker

**rough neck (1917)** Orig US; applied especially to a labourer on the rig-floor; compare earlier sense, rough or quarrelsome person. *Time.* The centre of the rig’s activities is the mud-sticked drill floor, where half a dozen roughnecks struggle day and night with heavy chains and power-driven winches to shove 90-ft.-long pieces of drill pipe into the narrow hole. (1977)

**roustabout (1948)** Orig US; from earlier sense, general labourer. *Offshore Engineer.* The clothing was tested on the rig Sedco 700, operating close to the B2nd
parallel, by supervisors and roustabouts on the nightshift.
(1975)

A photographer

See at Entertainment (p. 345)

A police officer

See at The Police (p. 107).

A publicist

adman (1909) Orig US; applied to an advertising copywriter or executive • Observer: That side of modern life . . . which bears the finger-smears of the ad. man.
(1957)

flack (1939) Mainly US; applied to a publicity agent: origin uncertain; said to be derived from the name of Gene Flack, a publicity agent in the US film industry • Charles Drummond: They were booked to do ten matches in Mexico City; Bull, their flack, had lined up the opposition.
(1968). Hence the verb flack as acting as a publicity agent (for)
(1963)

A refuse collector

totter (1891) British; applied to a rag-and-bone man; from the verb tot + -er

bottle-o, bottle-oh (1898) Australian & New Zealand; applied to a collector of empty bottles • Dick Whittington: ‘What do you do for a living?’ . . . ‘I’m the local bottle-O’.
(1967)

garbo (1953) Australian; from garbage + the Australian colloquial suffix -o • Guardian: Australian garbos probably could not compete with English bottles.
(1967)

sanno (man), sano (man) (1959) Australian; applied to someone who collects excrement from unsewered areas; from sanitary + the Australian colloquial suffix -o • L. Fox: Mother sympathised with the Sanno man’s job; she always greeted him.
(1973)

binman (c1966) • Daily Telegraph: Another common request was for . . . a waste-disposal system that would eliminate the need for bin men.
(1986)

To collect refuse

tot (1884) British; applied to collecting saleable items from refuse as an occupation; from the noun lot such an item • Martin Russell: I could earn as much, totting for the corporation.
(1976)

A sales representative

rep (1938) From earlier more general use of rep as an abbreviation of representative • Eric Ambler: No travellers seen except on Tuesdays and Thursdays . . . Reps . . . , Tuesdays and Thursdays.
(1938)

A scientist

backroom boy (1943) Applied to someone engaged on (secret) research; from the notion of a secluded room at the rear of premises where secret work is carried out; compare Lord Beaverbrook in Listener: Now who is responsible for this work of development on which so much depends? To whom must the praise be given? To the boys in the back rooms. They do not sit in the limelight. But they are the men who do the work.
(1941) • Times: The man most responsible for the development of the rocket projectile . . . is Group Captain John D’Arcy Bakercarr, . . . whose ‘backroom boys’ at the Ministry of Aircraft Production have worked unremittingly with him.
(1944)

boffin (1945) Applied to someone engaged on (secret) research; apparently originally Royal Air Force slang for a scientist working on radar; compare earlier obsolete application to an elderly naval officer; ultimate origin unknown • Economist: The unexpected success of the boffins’ conference at Geneva . . . ending in agreement on the feasibility of controlling a nuclear test suspension.
(1958)

A servant

tweeny, tweeney, tweenie (1888) Dated; applied to a maid-servant assisting both the cook and the housemaid; from ‘tween, a reduced form of between (from the notion of being ‘between’ the two posts) + -y • Daily News: A certain useful section of the servant class, who . . . were known as ‘tweenies’.
(1904)

skivvy, skivey, scivey (1902) Mainly derogatory; applied to a female domestic servant, especially a maid-of-all-work; origin unknown • Times: This represents a change in the nurses’ attitude. No longer will you be the skivvies of the health service.
(1974)

tiger (1929) Nautical; applied to a captain’s personal steward • Richard Gordon: In the old days, you could have swapped the Captain’s tiger for the butler in any stately home in the kingdom, and no one would have been the wiser.
(1961)

daily (1933) Applied to a domestic cleaner or other servant who does not live on the premises; from the notion of coming to a house every day • Laurence Meynell: Most ‘dailies’ I have known have been disastrous. They come late; charge exorbitantly; drop ash all over the place.
(1967)

To do the work of a servant

do for (1844) • Bram Stoker: He . . . got . . . the name of an old woman who would probably undertake to ‘do’ for him.
(1914)

skivvy, skivey, scivey (1931) From the noun skivvy • June Thomson: It wasn’t no skivving job . . . Mrs King treated me like a friend.
(1973)

A shop worker

counter-jumper (1829) Dated, derogatory; applied to a shop assistant or shopkeeper; from the notion of jumping over a counter to go from one part of a shop to another • John Braine: You’ll not waste your time with bloody consumptive counter-jumpers!
(1959)

shoppy, shoppie (1909) Dated; applied to a shop assistant; from shop + -y • H. A. Vachell: Her
sparkling eyes, her fine figure, were gifts rarely bestowed upon urban ‘shoppiess’. (1934)

A tailor

Jew (1916), Jewing-bloke (1945) Nautical; applied to a ship’s tailor • Tackline: The ‘Jewing-bloke’ had a rather ancient Singer sewing machine, bought when ashore at Alexandria with ... pay in his pocket. (1945)

A teacher

See at Education (p. 315).

A transport worker
cabby, cabbie (1859) Applied to a taxi-driver; from cab taxi + -y • Sunday Times: November 5 ‘bombfire night’, as a cockney cabby has it. (1930)

swamper (1870) Orig US; applied to the driver of horses, mules, or bullocks, and hence (1929) to the assistant to the driver of a lorry • E. Iglauer: We don’t have swampers, a second man on the truck, the way the oil-field men have. (1975)

shack, shacks (1899) North American; applied to a shanty • Dean Stiff: A great many hobo writers ... are unknown • G. Mitchell: Ended up as a sea-gull on the Wellington wharves downstream. (1959)

jumper (1900) British, dated; applied to a ticket-inspector; from the notion of ‘jumping’ on to or boarding a bus, tram, etc. to inspect tickets • Daily Express: If you use a second [class carriage] with a ‘third’ ticket, watch for the ‘jumpers’, ready to pounce and demand excess. (1937)

river hog (1902), river pip (1921) North American; applied to someone who guides logs downstream

rounder (1908) US; applied to a transient railway worker • Listener: His was a six pipe job whose moans ... Listener. (1961)

wharfie (1911) Australian & New Zealand; applied to a stevedore, docker or other wharf-worker; from wharf + -ie • National Times (Australia): A lazy wharfie would be known as ‘the Judge’ because he was always sitting on a case, and another ‘the London Fog’ because he would never lift. (1981)

tallow pot (1914) US & Australian, dated; applied to a fireman on a locomotive

gandy dancer (1923) Orig US; applied to a railway maintenance worker or section-hand; origin uncertain; perhaps from a tool called a gandy used for tamping down gravel round the rail, and operated by pushing with the foot • F. McKenna: Footplatemen have a great regard for gandy dancers, the men who keep the rail safe for the train to run over. (1970)

sea-gull (1926) New Zealand; applied to a casual, non-union dock labourer • Gordon Slatter: Ended up as a sea-gull on the Wellington wharves loading up the Home boats. (1959)

snake (1929) US & Australian; applied to any of various categories of railway worker

winger (1929) British, nautical; applied to a steward; compare earlier sense, cash stored in the wing of a ship’s hold • Harper’s Bazaar: Stewards will help you. ... Behind your back they will call you a ‘blood’— ... they themselves being ‘wingers’— and wonder how much ‘rent’ you will pay them at the end of the voyage. (1962)

hackie, hacky (1937) US; applied to a taxi-driver: from hack hackney carriage + -ie • Margot Neville: And now ... unearth some other blasted hacky that drove me there. (1959)

snake charmer (1937) Australian; applied to a railway maintenance worker

snapper (1938) British; applied to a ticket-inspector; from the clipping of tickets • Nino Culotta: ‘E doesn’t want yer ticket. The snapper’s got yer ticket. (1957)

clippie, clippy (1941) British; applied to a bus-conductress; from clip referring to the clipping of tickets + -ie • G. Usher: An ex-clippie on a local bus. (1959)

hostie (1960) Australian; applied to a female flight attendant; from air host(ess) + -ie • Sydney Morning Herald: The hosties ... are not concerned about Qantas picking up passengers here and there. (1981)

stew (1970) US; applied to a female flight attendant; abbreviation of stewardess • S. Barlay: I’m Mara. I used to be a stew myself. (1979)

A waiter

See at Eating & Drinking (p. 141).

A window-cleaner

shiner (1958) British • Centuryan (Office Cleaning Services): There we were, shiners and cleaning ladies, surrounding Fred and Dora on the float by the London Wall. (1977)

A work period

hitch (1835) Mainly US; applied to a period of service (e.g. in the armed forces) • Washington Post: In his work in intelligence, Pounder had many assignments, including a hitch as part of the White House security detail during President John F. Kennedy’s Ireland trip. (1973)

lick (1868) US, dated • Putnam’s Magazine: The father ... did an occasional ‘lick of work’ for some well-to-do neighbor. (1868)

shop (1885) Theatrical slang: applied to a period of employment or an engagement • G. Mitchell: He was an out-of-work actor and was very anxious to get a shop, as he called it. (1978)

dogwatch (1901) Mainly US; applied to a night shift, especially in a newspaper office, or to any late or early period of duty, or the staff employed on this; from the earlier nautical sense, either of two short watches (4–6 or 6–8
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p.m.) • Truckin’ Life: Alan and Sue are the hosts and Neville looks after the shop on the dogwatch shift. (1983)

stag (1931) Applied to a spell of duty • R. Storey: There’s seven stags in the hours o’ darkness and only five of you to do ‘em. Somebody has to do two. (1958)

trick (1942) US: applied to a term of service on a ship or in the forces; from earlier sense, period of duty at the helm of a ship • Sun (Baltimore): He reenlisted as a corporal, a rank he held at the end of his former trick. (1942)

Lack or absence of work

See also Laziness (pp. 293–5).

A break from work

vac (1709) Mainly applied to a university vacation; abbreviation of vacation • Catholic Weekly: Others lectured to working men in the vacs. (1906)

smoke-ho, smoke-oh, smoke-o, smoko (1865) Australian & New Zealand; applied to a stoppage of work for a rest and a smoke, or to a tea break; from smoke period of smoking tobacco + the Australian colloquial suffix -o • Sydney Morning Herald: Restrictive work practices—from heavily subsidised housing to the provision of pink salmon and oysters for workers' 'smoko' breaks. (1986)

rope-yarn (1886) Mainly naval slang; applied to a day given as a (half-)holiday; from the notion that at such times there are no drills, inspections, etc. and the crew are free to get on with ship's work, such as splicing ropes • E. N. Rogers: Rope-yarn Sunday is the seaman's Monday. Actually, it is a half day off and comes on a Wednesday afternoon. (1956)

hols (1905) Abbreviation of holidays • Sunday Times: July and August tends to be the party season (our university hols and the Aussie winter). (1993)

swing (1917) US: applied to a worker's rest period or to a shift system which incorporates such breaks, and also more broadly to time off work • James Mills: I went on my swing after that. (1972)

To have no work

sign on (1885) British: denoting registering at the Department of Employment (formerly Labour or Employment Exchange) in order to obtain unemployment benefit, and hence applied to being out of work • Independent: 3,500 people were prosecuted, along with 15 employers who paid their staff low wages but encouraged them to sign on. (1991)

Unemployment benefit

buroo, brew, broo, b’roo (1934) Dated, mainly Scottish; applied originally to the Employment Exchange, and hence to unemployment benefit; mainly in the phrase on the buroo receiving such benefit; representing a regional (mainly Scottish) pronunciation of bureau, in ‘Labour Bureau’

the pineapple (1937) • Observer: There were just too many people on the pineapple. 'The pineapple' is slang for the dole. (1971)

compo (1941) Australian & New Zealand: applied to compensation, especially as paid for an injury received while working; from compensation + the Australian colloquial suffix -o • Patrick White: You got a bad hand. You see the doc... You'll get compo of course. (1961)

To go on strike

hit the bricks (1946) US • Time: The United Auto Workers hit the bricks against giant General Motors. (1964)

A strike-breaker, blackleg

scab (1777) From earlier more general use as a term of contempt for a person • Socialist Worker: 180 women walked out. But 70 stayed in... The scabs soon found out what it was like to be hated. (1974). Hence the verb scab act as a scab (1806) • Times: Frantic calls... summoned... a driver who was prepared to scab as a special favour. (1969)

A retrained person

retread (1941) Mainly US, Australian & New Zealand; originally applied to a retired soldier recalled to service, and hence to a worker undergoing retraining; from earlier sense, renovated tyre • David Beatty: A diplomat with thirty years experience... not the re-tread given a job with other unwanted Civil Servants. (1977). Hence the verb retread to retrain, especially after a period of unemployment (1963) • Wall Street Journal: To ‘retread’ many retired nurses and other skilled professionals through refresher courses. (1966)

Equal opportunities

twofer, too-, -fah, -for, -fur (1977) US: applied to a black woman appointed to a post, the appointment being seen as evidence of both racial and sexual equality of opportunity; compare various earlier applications based on the general notion of 'two for one' • Daily Telegraph: Personnel departments [in the United States] are told always to try and hire a 'toofer'. (1979)
4. Business & Commerce

Salesmanship, selling: A seller

**scalper (1869)** Orig US; applied to someone who sells tickets, etc., especially below or (now) above the official rates. 

**shillaber (1913)** Mainly North American, dated; applied to someone posing as an enthusiastic or successful customer to encourage other buyers, gamblers, etc.; origin unknown

**shill (1916)** Mainly North American; applied to someone posing as an enthusiastic or successful customer to encourage other buyers, gamblers, etc.; probably short for *shillaber* • Mario Puzo: As a shillaber she played with casino money. . . She was subject not to fate but to the fixed weekly salary she received from the casino. (1978)

**stick (1926)** US; applied to someone posing as an enthusiastic or successful customer to encourage other buyers, gamblers, etc.; origin unknown

**shoddy dropper (1937)** Australian & New Zealand; applied to a pedlar of cheap or falsely described clothing; from shoddy woolen yarn + dropper one who sells goods

**rep (1938)** Applied to a sales representative; abbreviation of representative. • T. Lloyd: I am the only member of this club who isn’t a farmer’s son . . . or a rep. (1969)

**ampster, amster (1941)** Australian; applied to the accomplice of a showman or trickster, ‘planted’ in the audience to start the buying of tickets, goods, etc.; perhaps short for Amsterdam, rhyming slang for run criminal’s accomplice or decoy • H. Porter: A shady Soho club patronised by dips, amsters, off-duty prostitutes. (1975)

To sell

**knock down (1760)** Denoting selling something to a bidder at an auction; from the notion of the auctioneer’s hammer banging at the conclusion of bidding • *Daily Mail*. Although I was the underbidder at £1,100, the wily auctioneer . . . suddenly produced another one and knocked it down to me. (1991)

**knock out (1876)** British: originally applied to the reselling of items acquired by an auction ring; latterly applied to the selling of stolen items to a fence and to the selling of items by a market stall-holder or similar trader • *Observer*. Last week, our local market was knocking out Kiwis at 10 for a quid. (1996)

**scalp (1886)** Orig US; denoting selling stock, tickets, etc. at below or (now) above the official rates • *Sun* (Baltimore): The Stadium attendants told me they are the same men . . . who scalp at other games, . . . selling 60-cent tickets for $1. (1948)

**hustle (1887)** North American; denoting selling or serving goods, especially in an aggressive, pushing manner • *Black World*: He hustled the watch to a barber for 35 bills. (1973)

**shill (1914)** Mainly North American; denoting posing as an enthusiastic or successful customer to encourage other buyers, gamblers, etc.; probably short for *shillaber* • Herbert Gold: It’s how to get the audience. . . I shilled for my wife. (1965)

**flog (1919)** British, orig services’ slang • Margaret Drabble: Let’s go . . . and look at the ghastly thing that Martin flogged us. (1967)

**gazump (1971)** British; denoting raising the price of a property after having accepted an offer by an intending buyer; from earlier, more general sense, swindle

**shift (1976)** Usually denoting selling something in large quantities • *Church Times*: He was also hopeful that some £40,000-worth of unsold books would eventually be shifted. (1990)

**sug (1980)** British; denoting selling or attempting to sell someone a product under the guise of market research; acronym from sell under guise • Which?: If someone tries to ‘sug’ you, write to the Market Research Society. (1988)

To buy

**jew down (1848)** Derogatory & offensive; denoting beating someone down in price; from the stereotype of the Jew as a hard bargainer • *Harper’s Magazine*: Jew the fruitman down for his last Christmas tree. (1972)

**wheel and deal (1961)** Orig US; denoting shrewd bargaining; from wheel person of high rank or importance + deal do business • *Publishers Weekly*: Lads who . . . wheeled and dealt with megacorporations. (1974)

A bargainer

**wheeler-dealer (1960)** Orig US; from wheel and deal + -er • Louis Horen: He [sc. Lyndon Johnson] was a shop-soiled old politico, a wheeler dealer, and past master of consensus politics. (1978)

**gazunder (1988)** British; denoting lowering the offer made to the seller of a property, especially just before the exchange of contracts, so putting pressure on the seller to lower the price or risk losing the deal; a blend of gazump and under

**gazumping, gazundering and all manner of noxious debilitations are blamed on slothful solicitors. (1990)**

Mail-order

**wish book (1933)** North American; applied to a mail-order catalogue
Mortgages

**Fannie Mae (1948)** US; a nickname for the Federal National Mortgage Association, established by the US Government in 1938, and since 1970 a private corporation, which assists banks, trust companies, etc. in the distribution of funds for home mortgages and guarantees mortgage-backed securities; an acronym elaborated from the name of the association, after the female personal names Fannie and Mae.

Deferred payment, credit

**tick (1642)** Usually in the phrase on tick; probably an abbreviation of ticket, in the phrase on the ticket. **John Wainwright:** Three of the others are already inside, anyway . . . and they were damn near living on tick. (1976)

**jaw-bone (1862)** North American (origin Canadian). **New Yorker:** A young Canadian . . . started this film on a small grant . . . and apparently finished it on jawbone and by deferring processing costs. (1970)

**the never-never (1926)** British; applied to hire purchase; from the notion of the indefinite postponement of full payment; compare earlier Australian on the never at no cost to oneself. **Jacqueline Wilson:** They've still not paid off their mortgage, you know, and I wouldn't mind betting that Rover of theirs is on the never-never. (1973)

**cred (1979)** Abbreviation. **2000AD:** Special talent for turning any object (cred card, drink cup) into lethal weapon in his hands. (1990)

Prompt payment

**on the nail (1600)** From earlier, more general meaning, straightaway; origin uncertain, although other languages have parallel phrases meaning 'precisely, exactly' (e.g. French sur l'ongle, German auf dem Nagel). **Observer:** He always paid cash, on the nail. In the terms of the Belgrade mob, he was an honest guy. (1991)

Pawnning: In pawn

**up the spout (1812)** Dated

**in pop (1866)** British; from the verb pop pawn

**in hock (1883)** Compare earlier sense, in prison. **Guardian:** If the goods are still in hock at the end of this time the pawnbroker has to remind the client that the contract has expired. (1991)

A pawnshop

**pop-shop (1772)** British; from the verb pop pawn. **P. G. Wodehouse:** This makes me feel like a pawnbroker. . . . As if you had brought it in to the old pop shop and were asking me what I could spring on it. (1942)

**hock-shop (1871)** From in hock in pawn (not recorded until later). **C. Irving:** He had previously pawned one of the Matisse oils . . . to the Mont de Piété, the French national hockshop. (1969)

**moscow (1910)** Australian; latterly mainly in the phrases in Moscow, gone to Moscow in pawn; from the verb moscow pawn. **'Caddie':** Me clobber's already in Moscow, an' so is me tan shoes. . . . There don't seem nuthin' a man can raise a deaner on. (1953)

A pawnbroker

**uncle (1756)** In early usage, usually preceded by a possessive adjective. **Times:** 'Uncle' is changing his image. His clients may still be in dire financial straits, but they are no longer the traditional working class. (1988)

To pawn

**pop (1731)** British. **J. M. Barrie:** It was plain for what she had popped her watch. (1902)

**hock (1878)** Orig US; from in hock in pawn (not recorded until later). **C. F. Burke:** Then he went and he took everything he had—his automobile—and he hocked them. (1969)

**soak (1882)** British, dated

**moscow (1910)** Australian; alteration (presumably influenced by Moscow capital city of Russia) of obsolete British slang moskeneer pawn an article for more than it is worth, of Yiddish origin, from modern Hebrew mashkôn a pledge. **C. Drew:** Do you know where a man can 'moscow' a couple of snakes? (1917)

Price

**steal (1942)** Orig US; applied to a bargain. **News Chronicle:** At £30,000 it was a steal. I think it's worth £75,000. (1960)

**daylight robbery (1949)** Applied to the charging of an exorbitant price. **Guardian:** UB's £335 million payment was certainly seen at the time as what grocers like to call a 'premium price'. But now it seems more like daylight robbery. (1991)

To increase a price

**slap something on (1922)**. **Economist:** He slapped on an income-tax surcharge of 7.5%. (1987)

Profit

**clean-up (1867)** Orig US. **P. G. Wodehouse:** It was the man's intention to make what I might term a quick clean-up immediately after dinner and escape on the nine-fifty-seven. (1929)

**push money (1939)** US, dated; applied to commission on items sold

A dividend

**divvy, divi (1872)** Abbreviation. **Graham Chapman et al.:** If you'll wait till Saturday I'm expecting a divvy from the Harpenden Building Society. (1970)

Something profitable

**skinner (1891)** Australian; applied to a betting coup; from earlier sense, swindler, from skin to fleece, swindle. **Sydney Morning Herald:** Skinner for bookmakers. (1974)
money-spinner (1952) From earlier sense, person who makes large profits; the original meaning (1756) was 'a spider which supposedly brings prosperity to the person it alights on'.

earner (1970) Applied to a lucrative job or enterprise, especially in the phrase a nice little earner a means of making easy and often illicit profits.  

In profit

quids in (1919) From quid one pound.  

To make (as) a profit

clean up (1831) Mainly US; used transitively and intransitively.  

Loss

downer (1976) Applied to a downward trend in business or the economy.  

A customer

regular (1852) Applied to a regular customer, especially in a pub.  

up (1942) US; applied to a prospective customer; perhaps from the sales assistant having to stand 'up' to go and serve a customer.  

punter (1965) Often used dismissively; from earlier sense, person who bets.  

Investment

spec (1794) Orig US; applied to a commercial speculation or venture, or more broadly to a prospect of future success or gain; abbreviation of speculation.  

piece (1929) Applied to a financial interest in a business, etc.; often in the phrase a piece of the action.

An investor

angel (1891) Orig US; applied to a financial backer of an enterprise, especially one who supports a theatrical production; from earlier sense, someone imposed on for favours.  

arb (1977) Orig US; short for arbitrageur person who trades in securities, commodities, etc., hoping to profit from price differentials in various markets.  

white knight (1981) Stock Exchange slang; applied to a company that comes to the aid of another facing an unwelcome take-over bid; from earlier sense, a hero or champion.  

stocks and shares

churning (1953) Orig US; applied to the practice or result of buying and selling a client's investment, etc. simply to generate additional profit for the broker.  

warehousing (1971) Applied to the buying of shares as a nominee of another trader, with a view to a take-over.  

the Big Bang (1983) Applied to the deregulation of the London Stock Exchange on 27 October 1986, when a number of complex changes in trading practices were put into effect simultaneously; from earlier senses, creation of the universe in one cataclysmic explosion, hence any sudden forceful beginning.  

Advertisement

ad (1841) Abbreviation.  

Organization

admin (1942) Abbreviation of administration.  

A type of business

racket (1891) From earlier sense, a swindle.  

An agreement, a deal

a go (1878) Dated; mainly in the phrase it's a go.  

An investor
5. Dismissal

Dismissal

**the sack** (1825) Often in the phrases give/get the sack dismiss/be dismissed; usually applied to dismissal from employment; equivalent phrases recorded in French, Dutch, etc., although the precise derivation is not clear: perhaps the bag of tools returned to an apprentice on dismissal

**walking papers** (1825) US; usually in such phrases as get one’s walking papers/give someone their walking papers be dismissed/dismiss someone

**the bullet** (1841) crescendo: It was only the boss’s inherent good nature that saved me from the bullet. (1987)

**the boot** (1881) In the phrases give/get the boot dismiss/be dismissed; usually applied to dismissal from employment; from the notion of kicking someone out

**the push** (1899) Usually in the phrases give/get the push dismiss/be dismissed; applied especially to dismissal from employment

**the chuck** (1892) Usually in the phrase give the chuck dismiss argent: When they gave me the chuck, you married me out of hand. (1930)

**the spear** (1897) Australian; in the phrase get the spear be dismissed from employment

**the shove** (1899) Usually in the phrases give/get the shove dismiss/be dismissed

**the air** (1900) US; in the phrases give/get the air dismiss/be dismissed

**the gate** (1901) Mainly US; usually in the phrases give/get the gate dismiss/be dismissed

**the bum’s rush** (1910) Orig US; first applied to forcibly ejecting someone from a place, and hence more generally to dismissing someone; usually in the phrase give the bum’s rush from the notion of hurling a bum (= vagrant) out of a bar or similar place

**the raspberry** (1920) Dated; usually in the phrases give/get the raspberry dismiss/be dismissed; from earlier sense, derisive sound

**the bird** (1924) Usually in the phrases give/get the bird dismiss/be dismissed; from earlier sense, hissing and booing as a sign of audience disapproval

**cards** (1929) Usually in the phrases get one’s cards/give someone their cards be dismissed/dismiss someone; from the notion of the documents (e.g. national-insurance card) returned to an employee when employment ceases

**marching orders** (1937) British; usually in such phrases as get one’s marching orders/give someone their marching orders be dismissed/dismiss someone; from earlier literal military sense, order to march (i.e. to leave by marching)

**the heave-ho** (1944) Orig US; usually in the phrases give/get the heave-ho dismiss/be dismissed; from earlier sense, sailors’ cry when raising the anchor

**the shaft** (1959) Mainly US; usually in the phrases give/get the shaft dismiss/be dismissed

**the elbow** (1971) British; usually in the phrases give/get the elbow dismiss/be dismissed; from the notion of elbowing someone aside

**the big E** (1982) British; usually in the phrases give/get the big E dismiss/be dismissed; E from the first letter of elbow dismissal

**be** or get **shut of** (1575)

**send** someone packing (1594) Denoting summary dismissal

To dismiss, get rid of
show someone the door (1778) ■ George Bernard Shaw: ‘Does Christine ever lecture them?’ . . . ‘Catch her at it!’ said Krogstad. . . . ‘They would soon show her the door.’ (1890)

be (or get) shot of (1802) ■ Daily Telegraph: Advising its members to make haste to get shot of unsuitable employees. (1976)

kick upstairs (1821) Denoting removing someone from a post by promoting them
■ William Cooper: The plot was devastatingly simple—Dibdin was to be kicked upstairs and Albert was to take his place. (1952)

sack (1841) Usually denoting dismissing someone from employment; from the sack dismissal ■ Daily Mail: Jealous boss Terence Hancock blew his top when he discovered that the woman who had spurned his advances was seeing someone else. He sacked her on the spot. (1991)

chuck out (1869) ■ Engineering: Chuck out the conventional concepts. (1958)

boot out (1880) ■ Rebecca West: Were not the Turks booted out of here in 1878? (1941)

turf out, turf off (1888) ■ J. I. M. Stewart: These people have become my colleagues. If you use that sort of language about them I’ll have to turf you out myself. (1976)
■ O. Jacks: The plane’s loaded. . . . I can’t turf off passengers. (1977)

spear (1911) Australian; usually denoting dismissing someone from employment; from the spear dismissal ■ A. B. Paterson: Didn’t he spear (dismiss) you for cutting a plateful of meat off one of them stud rams? (1936)

bust (1918) Often applied specifically to demotion in the armed services ■ Wall Street Journal: A former branch office manager recalls a friend, also a branch manager, who was busted down to a simple loan-officer status for failing to achieve quotas. (1989)

tie a can to (or on) (1926) ■ P. G. Wodehouse: I’m warning you to kiss her goodbye and tie a can to her. Never marry anyone who makes conditions. (1972)


tramp (1941) Australian; denoting dismissing someone from employment; from earlier sense, stamp on ■ M. Wattone: I went to the surface and immediately was tramped (sacked). (1982)

wipe (1941) Australian & New Zealand ■ Patrick White: Suspended once—but they didn’t wipe me. (1983)

bowl er-hat (1953) British; denoting retiring someone compulsorily, especially demobilizing an officer; from the earlier phrase be given one’s bowler hat, from the bowler hat formerly worn by many British male civilians

eighty-six (1958) US; denoting ejection or debarment from a premises, or more generally rejection or abandonment; from the expression eighty-six used in bars and restaurants, indicating that a particular customer is not to be served ■ New York Times: On the evening of July 22, Mr. Mailer was filming a dream sequence at the house of Alfonso Ossorio in East Hampton, when Mr. Smith came into the house. ‘He told me, “You’re 86’d”,’ Mr. Smith recalled yesterday. (1968)

to dispose of

bin (1991) British; from the notion of putting something in a rubbish bin ■ Guardian: When first screened, it was judged so bad by the domestic audience in Mexico that the series was ‘binned’. (1992)

flunk out (1920) Orig and mainly US; denoting being dismissed from college, etc. after failing an examination; from flunk fail an examination ■ Reader’s Digest: He flunked out of various high schools, not because he was too stupid. (1951)
1. Behaviour

To behave well or satisfactorily

keep one's nose clean (1887) Often implying avoidance of involvement in criminal activity
■ Angus Ross: Denis Fitzgerald . . . a known associate of villains, but managed to keep his own nose clean. (1974)

shape up (1938) ■ National Observer (US): After that [sc. adolescence] one is expected to shape up, get a job, get married. (1976)

To behave in an unacceptable way

carry on (1828) Denoting someone who behaves, and especially speaks, strangely or over-excitedly
■ R. L. Stevenson: There was Adams in the middle, gone luny again, and carrying on about copra like a born fool. (1892)
muck about (or around) (1856) Denoting foolish, aimless, or time-wasting behaviour; from muck dirt
■ Kylie Tennant: We been mucking about and mucking about, and got nowhere. (1946)
monkey about (or around) (1889) Denoting mischievous or aimless behaviour; from monkeys' reputation for mischievousness
■ Kipling & Balestier: I don't see how you fellows have the time to monkey around here. (1891)
fart about (or around) (1900) Denoting foolish, aimless, or time-wasting behaviour; from fart break wind
■ John Wainwright: Look! It's important. Stop farting around. (1969)
act up (1903) Denoting abnormal behaviour, often affected in order to impress
■ John Hearne: 'I'm sorry,' he said, 'I'm acting up a bit. I feel pretty tight inside.' (1956)
crap around (1935) US; denoting foolish, aimless, or time-wasting behaviour; from crap defecate
■ Stanley Kauffmann: Let's not crap around. Let's get to the business in hand. (1952)
piss about (1961) Denoting foolish, aimless, or time-wasting behaviour; from piss urinate
■ T. Lewis: Are you coming in? Or do we piss about all day? (1970)
play silly buggers (or bleeders, b-s) (1961) Denoting foolish, aimless, or time-wasting behaviour
■ Guardian: We don't want people jeopardising our position by playing silly bs. (1979)

Unacceptable in behaviour

out of order (1979) British; from earlier sense, contravening the rules of procedure
■ Cambridge International Dictionary of English: His behaviour in the meeting was well out of order. (1995)

to behave like

come (1837) ■ Colin Watson: I never thought he'd come the old green-eyed monster. (1962)
go . . . on someone (1963) Denoting adopting a particular mode of behaviour towards someone
■ New Society (headline): Amis goes serious on us. (1966)

A period of indulgence in a particular type of behaviour

jag (1913) Orig US; from earlier sense, drinking spree
■ New Yorker. A neurotic habit . . . may be overt, like a temper tantrum or a crying jag. (1972)

One's preferred mode of behaviour

thing (1841) Especially in the phrase do one's own thing follow one's own inclinations
■ Ed Bullins: Anything that anybody wants to do is groovy with me. . . . Go ahead and do your thing, champ. (1970)

Affected behaviour or speech

gyver, givo, givor, guiver, guyver (1864) Mainly Australian & New Zealand; especially in the phrase put on the gyver; origin unknown
■ D. M. Davin: I wouldn't want you to get stuck-up and start putting on the gyver and forgetting your own. (1970)

A person noted for their behaviour

a one (1880) Applied to someone who behaves outrageously or impudently
■ Edward Dyson: 'Oh, Mr. Ellis, you are a one!' she said. (1906)
operator (1951) Applied to someone who behaves in a particular way (often with an implication of underhandedness or unscrupulousness); from earlier sense, one who carries on financial operations
■ Times: One almost expects him to say, with J. K. Galbraith, that modesty is a much over-rated virtue, but he is far too smooth an operator to be trapped into such an admission. (1974)
2. Favour & Disfavour

In favour

in someone's good books (1839) ■ John Masefield: You'd ought to be careful with the judy. It's best to keep in her good books. (1938)

Out of favour

on the shelf (1839) Applied to a woman (or occasionally a man) with no prospect of marrying; from earlier sense, put to one side ■ Daily Mail: It is the spare men who will be left on the shelf. (1991)

in Dutch (1851) Orig US. ■ John Dos Passos: While I plodded around . . . trying to explain my position and getting myself deeper in Dutch every time I opened my face, I saw marvellous scenes. (1968)

in someone's bad books (1861) ■ Economist: Mr Bresser is already in the bad books of some of his colleagues for his plan to trim Brazil's budget deficit . . . to 2% in 1988. (1967)

in bad (1907) Orig US. ■ Kingsley Amis: This ought to put me nicely in bad with the Neddies. (1953)

in the dog-house (1926) Orig US. ■ P. H. Johnson: He'd been getting bad grades, he was in the dog-house as it was. (1983)

on the outer (1928) Australian; from outer part of a racetrack outside the enclosure ■ T. A. G. Hungerford: And you're on the outer for sticking up for him? (1953)

(A) favourite

dive (1938) Orig US; used especially in show business; abbreviation ■ Washington Post. Art Laffer, the Reagans' dive moneyman, threw his curve at the American Meat Institute just recently (1982). ■ Face: These new recruits may have allied themselves to Smithdom's cause because their former faves, Echo & The Bunnymen for instance, haven't delivered. (1987)

dive rave (1967) Orig US; applied to a special favourite piece of music, film, musician, etc. ■ Melody Maker. Smith's quartet version with Stan Getz was one of the dive rave records of the period. (1967) ■ Times: The American fan magazine market, always at the ready to replace a current dive rave. (1973)

That which one favours or prefers

cup of tea (1932) ■ Muriel Spark: Freddy had stood in the doorway of the dark Orthodox chapel and, regarding the heavy-laden altar and the exotic clusters of coloured lamps 'hung round it, said, 'It's not really my cup of tea, you know.' (1965)

bag (1964) Orig US, Black English; from earlier sense, category or style of jazz ■ Sunday Times: His bag is paper sculpture. (1966)

scene (1966) ■ David Lodge: Washing up was more his scene than body language. (1975)

Someone regarded favourably

fair-haired boy (1909) US, derogatory ■ Wall Street Journal. Mr. Hessler, an engaging man, was the fair-haired boy at Unisys. (1983)

blue-eyed boy (1924) British, derogatory ■ Times. During this period, farmers were 'blue-eyed boys'. (1963)

Favourable opinion or comment

dive (1928) Orig US; applied to an enthusiastically favourable review ■ Listener. I yield to none in my admiration for this pianist, whose first London notice I had the honour to write long before the war (a 'dive' in case you think I am always wrong). (1958)

Brownie point (1944) Orig US; applied to favour in the eyes of another, especially as gained by sycophantic or servile behaviour; in allusion to the points system used for advancement by the Brownies (= junior members) of the Girl Scouts of America, reinforced by brown-nose curry favour, flatter ■ Times Educational Supplement. The clause would not be used to 'punish' teachers. Those who took part in extra activities would get a Brownie point, he said, but classroom effectiveness would be the prime test of a teacher's success. (1985)

To regard favourably, like, enjoy, approve of

swear by (c1815) Denoting full confidence in something ■ Washington Post. My wife swears by the Palmer House . . . , a restaurant down next to the old Lexington Market. (1993)

go on (1824) Orig US; usually negative, in the phrase not go much on ■ Nevil Shute: Jo says she wants to live in Tahiti, but I don't go much on that, myself. (1960)

lap something up (1890) Denoting receiving something with obvious liking or approval ■ Times. Americans have lapped the book up, already getting through Dell's first order of 100,000. (1972)

have a soft spot for (1902) Often denoting sexual fondness ■ New Scientist. He won a scholarship advertised in New Scientist and has had a soft spot for the magazine ever since. (1971)

have tickets on (1908) Australian; denoting having a high opinion of someone or something ■ Robin Hyde: You must have tickets on her, Starkie. (1938)

have time for (1911) Often used in negative contexts ■ Bulletin (Sydney): The bulk of the Nahos—how the Army loathes that term—have little time for the 'protestos'. (1966) ■ M. Allen: 'Yes, I've got a lot of time for Lester,' the Vicar continued . . . 'He'll always lend a hand at a fête or whatever.' (1979)

have a thing about (1936) Often implying an irrational or obsessive interest or attraction ■ Guardian. What is your favourite piece of clothing? Well, it's not one specific thing. I love jackets short, long, colourful, plain. I have a thing about handbags, too. (1991)
dig (1839) Orig US; compare earlier sense, understand, appreciate. ‘Guardian: He doesn’t plan ahead. He doesn’t analyse himself or his music. He ‘doesn’t really dig the music business overall.’ (1992)

go a (or dated) the bundle on (1942) Often used in negative contexts; from earlier sense, bet much money on. ‘Adam Diment: I don’t go a bundle on being told I’m a pro.’ (1968)

go off on (1973) From earlier sense, achieve sexual satisfaction from. ‘Time: I really get off on dancing. It’s a high.’ (1977)

To express enthusiastic approval (of)

rave (1704) Usually followed by about. ‘John Updike: So you’re the young man my daughter has been raving about.’ (1978)

be all over someone (1912) Denoting an (excessively) great show of favour or affection. ‘Agatha Christie: ‘Were they friendly?’ ‘The lady was . . . All over him, as you might say.’ (1931)

drool (1924) Denoting excessive or sycophantic approval; often followed by over; from earlier sense, run with saliva, dribble. ‘Observer: It wasn’t so much the spectacle of a distinguished ex-Prime Minister reduced to the role of a Princess Michael of Kent having to drool over some Happy Eater that she was opening. (‘Oh, how very very very good,’ she trolled as she was being shown around the ship’s bar.)’ (1991)

go overboard (1931) Orig US. ‘New Zealand Listener: I cannot admire ‘abstract’ interpretations any more than I can go overboard about sculpture rigged up out of bicycle parts.’ (1960)

Showing enthusiastic approval or liking

wow (1921) Orig US; from the interjection wow expressing surprise, admiration, etc. ‘John o’ London’s: A chorus of wow reviews from international critics.’ (1962)

rave (1951) From the noun rave enthusiastically favourable review. ‘Tucson Magazine: These three-day bus tours . . . have received rave notices from all who have gone along.’ (1979)

Someone who favours or enjoys something; an enthusiast

bug (1841) Orig US; probably from bug insect. ‘Daily Colonist (Victoria, British Columbia): There are no more critical people than what are generally classified as baseball ‘bugs’.’ (1911)

fiend (1884) Orig US; from earlier sense, addict. ‘Ngaio Marsh: I’m a bit of a camera-fiend myself.’ (1962)

freak (1895) Orig US; in early use derogatory; from earlier sense, odd or eccentric person. ‘P. Booth: Boy, are you exercise freaks into punishment.’ (1986)

buff (1931) Orig US; from earlier sense, someone who is enthusiastic about going to see fires, associating with firemen, etc., from the buff-coloured uniforms of New York City firemen. ‘Globe & Mail (Toronto): Sports buffs will enjoy many diversions, with bicycling and camping . . . heading the list.’ (1968)

nut (1934) Orig US; from earlier sense, mad person. ‘L. Gould: If you’re such a health nut, how come you take all those pills?’ (1974)

sucker (1957) Orig North American; applied to someone particularly susceptible to the stated thing; followed by for; from earlier sense, gullible person. ‘Sunday Times: I’m a bit of a sucker for celebrity-owned restaurants.’ (1993)

Liking; fond of; enthusiastic about

mad about (1744) Often implying sexual infatuation. ‘Sunday Mirror: Gender Bender boys are mad about make-up and adorning up. . . Gender Benders are anything but gay. They make up and dress up out of a sense of fashion.’ (1984)

nuts about, nuts on (1785) Often implying sexual infatuation. ‘New Yorker: You’re nuts about me, right?’ (1975)

hot on (1885) T. E. Lawrence: The Squadron Leader is hot on punishment. (1925)

big on (1867) Orig & mainly US. ‘Cyra McFadden: He said he’d had amazing results just acting out his anger with his patients. He was also big on video feedback . . . role-playing . . . and Japanese hot tubs.’ (1977)

wild about (1868) ‘Mrs. L. B. Johnson: I was wild about the sack races!’ (1967)

keen on (1889) Often implying sexual infatuation. ‘Clifford Bax: Maxine urged Guinivere to take Buster Graham more seriously. ‘He’s frightfully keen,’ she said, ‘on you.’’ (1943)

crazy about (1904) Often implying sexual infatuation. ‘P. G. Wodehouse: And the unfortunate part of it all is, Bertie, that I’m crazier about him than ever.’ (1949)

hipped on (1920) Orig US; from hip inform. ‘Spectator: Betjeman is absolutely hipped on his subject.’ (1962)

potty about (1923) Often implying sexual infatuation. ‘Reville: Women are potty about pans—they can’t resist buying them.’ (1975)

sold on (1928) Orig US. ‘Anthony Price: I’ve never been absolutely sold on the classics.’ (1978)

high on (1942) US; from high under the influence of drugs. ‘Guardian: ‘I am not high on the Thieu brand of Government,’ he [sc. McGovern] said, noting that 40,000 people had been executed . . . by it.’ (1972)

mad keen on (1949) ‘Lyonet Lamb: Derek Boots was not exactly the type to join us here . . . I was not so mad keen on him.’ (1974)

stoked on (1963) Orig & mainly surfing slang; from stoke thrill, elate. ‘Sunday Mail (Brisbane): I’m stoked on Chinese food.’ (1969)

into (1969) ‘Listener: Margaret is ‘into’ astrology, and consults the I-Ching each morning.’ (1973)

In love with

soft on (1840) ‘Theodore Dreiser: He’s kinda soft on me, you know.’ (1925)
3. Wanting & Getting

Wanting

itch (a1225) Usually followed by for or to and an infinitive
■ Charles Kingsley: The men’s fingers are itching for a fight. (1853)
■ George Eliot: He had an itch for authorship. (1863)

gasp (c1586) Usually followed by for
■ John McVicar: He is gasping for money and I’m his lifesaver for the weekend. (1992)

fancy (1598) ■ Midwest Living: Whether you fancy a big flower garden or favor container gardening, you’re sure to find a just-right variety or two to enjoy from spring well into fall. (1995)

die (1709) Usually followed by for or to and an infinitive
■ Grant Allen: The pretty American’s dying to see you. (1893)

after (1775) Used to denote something which someone wants to obtain
■ Daily Mail: In his McTaggart Lecture tonight, Elstein will categorically deny that he is after the job, modestly assuring delegates that the only job he covets is the one he holds at present. (1991)

vote (1814) Used for suggesting what one wants
■ Janice Galloway: Culture fatigue, she says. I vote we go back to the room and look at each other. (1994)

want (1844) Orig & mainly US and Scottish; used with an adverb to denote where one wants to go; originally used with a range of adverbs, now mainly out (denoting withdrawal) and in (denoting inclusion)
■ Arthur Hailey: Well, I’m not afraid, or proud, or anything any more. I just want out. (1979)

To dislike strongly

not stick (1899) ■ George Orwell: I can’t stick my bloody office... signing one chit after another. (1934)

hate someone’s guts (1918) ■ Noel Coward: You know perfectly well I hate Freda’s guts. (1936)

To begin to dislike

go off (1934) ■ Muriel Spark: I simply don’t feel anything for him any more. In fact, I’ve gone off him. (1965)

Antipathetic

allergic (1937) Usually jocular
■ Punch: Colonels have a curious effect on me. Quite frankly, I am allergic to them. (1942)

Exclamations of dislike or distaste

ick (1948) Orig US; back-formation from icky nasty, disgusting
■ John Irving: Blood, people leaking stuff out of their bodies—ick. (1985)

yuck, yuk (1966) Imitative
■ D. Simpson: It was the way he talked about her... ‘You know what older women are, wink, wink...’ Yuk! (1983)

yech, yecch, yeck (1969) US; jocular
■ Arthur Hailey: As for the food there—yech! (1979)
cannot afford, the movies, sharp clothes, and up to Cadillacs. (1960)

That which is wanted or needed

dissatisfaction (1867) • G. N. Wright: Their material wants were so
suspended, that they had no dissatisfaction. (1870)

would do (1877) • There's no reason why he wouldn't do what
we asked. (1923)

the ticket (1838) Perhaps from earlier sense, list of
election candidates, or from the notion of the
winning ticket in a lottery ■ Graham Swift: But
sweetness and innocence were never really the ticket, were
they? (1988)

the job (1943) In the phrase just the job ■ Harold Pinter: Just the job. We should have used it before. (1960)

the shot (1953) Australian ■ C. Wallace-Crabbe: 'Beer, Bob?' Sandstone asked. . . . 'Just the shot, thanks.' Bob
was thirsty now. (1979)

Acquisitiveness

gimm emotion (1918), gimme (1927) Orig US; contraction of
give me ■ C. Morris: One could only
write him off as a victim of our acquisitive, thrusting
philosophy of get and 'gimme'. (1963)

Acquisitive

on the make (1869) Orig US; applied to
someone intent on profit ■ W. M. Duncan: Riordan
was on the make. He'd found out something he could use. (1973)

To seize for oneself; to grab; to obtain

bag (1818) From the notion of adding something
to one's 'bag' (= orig, amount of game killed and
put in a bag) ■ Wall Street Journal: In his absence,
Easy Goer bagged the winner's check. (1989)

snaffle (1902) From earlier sense, arrest
■ Economist: Its genetically engineered Rhizobium
meliloti—a microbe that lives on the roots of alfalfa
plants—snaffles up to 17% more nitrogen from the air
than ordinary Rhizobia. (1988)

glom (1911) US; usually followed by on to in
intransitive use; from earlier sense, steal
■ Charlotte Armstrong: Trust Lily Eden, though, to glom on to
a customer. (1969)

4. Ambition

An ambitious person

climber (1833) ■ George Bernard Shaw: Do ambitious
politicians love the climbers who take the front seats from
them? (1924)

go-getter (1910) Orig US ■ Marten Cumberland: He
was a go-getter, an arriviste, . . . a bull charging at competitive
life. (1959)

wannabe, wannabee (1988) Orig US; applied
to someone who wants to emulate someone
else; a respelling of want to be ■ Australasian Post.
Scores of Samantha Fox and Linda Lusardi wannabees raided
British lingerie shops for skimpy lace and satin undies recently. (1988)

A person on whom, or thing on which, hopes are
based

white hope (1911) Orig US; from earlier sense, a
white boxer who might beat Jack Johnson, the
first black boxer to be world heavyweight
champion (1908–15) ■ Lord Berners: He was a
composer: the white hope (thus a critic had described him) of
English music. (1941)

Ambitious

go-getting (1921) Orig US; from go-getter
■ Punch: My future as a go-getting reporter was bleak
indeed. (1959)

pushy (1936) Orig US; applied to someone who is
unpleasantly self-assertive in getting their way;
from push + -y ■ Thomas Griffith: The more talented . . .
can be counted on to disqualify themselves further by seeming
too pushy. (1959)

To be too ambitious

bite off more than one can chew (1878) Orig US

5. Indifference

To be indifferent to something; not care

do (or care) twopence (or tuppence)
(at1744) ■ G. W. Appleton: He asked me if you really cared
twopence for Kate. (1894)

don't give (or care) a damn (1760) ■ Joyce Cary:
It was obvious, as one angry young woman remarked, that he
didn't give a damn—and so they were enraged. (1959)

don't give (or care) a tinker's cuss (or curse,
damn), don't give a tinker's (1824) tinker's
cuss from the former reputation of tinkers for
profanity ■ Julian Symons: I don't give a tinker's, if you'll
forgive the old fashioned way of putting it, who killed Ira
Wolfdale. (1983)

don't give (or care) a rap (1834) rap from earlier
rap small coin; ultimately a contraction of Irish
ropaire robber, counterfeit coin ■ Andrew Dobson:
Sartre asserts its importance—in contrast to Genet who 'cares

don't give (or care) a hang (1861) hang a
euphemistic substitution for damn ■ Ouida: She
don't care a hang what anybody says of her. (1876)

don't give (or care) a toss (1876) ■ Time Out I
don't give a toss whether he's black, white or purple. (1973)
not give (or care) a twopenny (or
tuppenny) damn (or hang) (1887) British
  ■ D. K. Cameron: It was rich in its lairds, men who . . . gave
  not a twopenny damn . . . for anybody. (1980)

not give (or care) a bugger (1922) British
  ■ Frederick Raphael: It'd be a wonderful thing to have a
  magazine that just didn't give a bugger what it said about
  anyone. (1960)

not give a shit (or shite) (1922) ■ B. W. Aldiss:
  Do you think Churchill gives a shit for the Fourteenth Army?
  (1971) ■ Kingsley Amis: An interviewer . . . being very
  rude to a politician . . . and the politician not giving a shit.
  (1978)

not give (or care) a hoot (or two hoots)
  (1925) hoot probably from hoot loud cry,
  although compare earlier US slang hooter
  anything at all ■ Kylie Tennant: I don't see that it
  matters two hoots in hell if you don't function. (1943)
  ■ Listener: Winston Churchill was idiosyncratic in that he did
  not care a hoot about being thought a gentleman. (1966)

not give (or care) a fuck (1929) ■ Ink: We don't
  give a fuck if we have to stand around all day doing nothing.
  (1971)

couldn't care less (1946) ■ Daily Mail: They live in
  a world of their own and couldn't care less who knows they are
  having a whale of a time. (1991)

not give (or care) a frig (1955) frig from hoot loud cry
  and as it's long. (1848) . .

not give (or care) a monkey’s (fuck, etc.)
  (1960) British ■ John Wainwright: ‘Not,’ snarled
  Sugden, ‘that I give a solitary monkey’s toss what you wear.’
  (1975)

not give (or care) a sod (1961) British ■ David
  Storey: I don’t give a sod for any of them, Phil. (1973)

  sneaking past your servants in the morning.’ They know,
  anyway. They could care less. Thornton mistreats them
  horribly.’ (1978)

not give (or care) a stuff (1974) Mainly
  Australian & New Zealand; from stuff have sex
  with ■ Bulletin (Sydney): The list goes on and on and on
  and as it grows so does the feeling amongst the blokes in the
  bush that no one gives a stuff. (1977)

not be fussed (1988) British ■ Independent: In a
  recession men don’t mind about the holes in their underpants.
  Their womenfolk, who make almost as many menswear
  purchases as men, aren’t much fussed either and prefer to
  spend on their children or themselves. (1991)

Indifferent, insouciant

flip (1847) Orig dialect; denoting a non-serious
  attitude; from flip move lightly or nimbly
  ■ Times: The word ‘schizophrenia’ is flung about today with
  flip facility. (1970)

couldn’t-care-less (1947) ■ Times Literary
  Supplement: The couldn’t-care-less attitude of people with
  little to lose. (1965)

what-the-hell (1968) ■ Time: The only real stumbling
  block is fear of failure. In cooking you’ve got to have a what-
  the-hell attitude. (1977)

It doesn’t matter; It makes no difference

tit’s as broad as it’s long (1867) ■ Charles
  Kingsley: The sharper the famine, the higher are prices, and
  the higher I sell, the more I can spend . . . and so it’s as broad
  as it’s long. (1848)

what the hell? (1872) ■ Rosamond Lehmann: As if
  she’d decided to say at last, ‘Oh, what the hell! Let them rip.’
  (1936)

san fairy anne(é) (1919) Humorous alteration of
  French ça ne fait rien it doesn’t matter ■ L. Brain:
  ‘I wish you’d thought of my ulcer before you—’ he began, and
  then broke off. ‘Oh, san fairy anne!’ (1965)

what the fuck? (1951)

6. Excellence, Remarkableness

Excellent

tip-top (1755) From earlier senses, topmost, pre-
  eminent ■ Mc: Both actors are back on tip-top form, while
  Jack Nicholson . . . looks a dead cert for an Oscar nomination.
  (1993)

dandy (1794) Orig & mainly US; often in the
  phrase fine and dandy; from the noun sense, something very fine ■ Ogden Nash: Candy is dandy
  But liquor is quicker. (1940)

topping (1822) Dated; from earlier sense, superior, pre-eminent ■ Kurt Vonnegut: That was a
  really fine performance . . . really topping, really first rate. (1987)

 cracking (1833) ■ Independent: A pitch that had both
  pace and bounce, a cracking cricket wicket. (1991)

A1 (1837) From the designation applied in
  Lloyd’s Register to ships in first-class condition

splendiferous (1843) Jocular, orig US; fanciful
  formation from splendid; compare earlier obsolete use (c1460–1546) in the sense ‘full of
  splendour’, from medieval Latin *splendifer

ripping (1856) Dated ■ Rosamond Lehmann: This is a
  ripping place, and they’re being jolly decent to us. (1944)

hunky (1861), hunky-dory, hunky-dorey
  (1866) Orig & mainly US; hunky from US hunk
  safe, all right +; hunky-dory with unknown
  second element ■ Bulletin: I’ll be all hunky. Nurse
  Dainton tends me like I was made of glass. (1926)
  (1969)
spiffing (1872) Dated; from earlier sense, smart  ■ Cleese & Booth: Oh, spiffing! Absolutely spiffing. Well done! Two dead, twenty-five to go. (1979)
daisy (1879) US, dated; compare earlier daisy  ■ Edgar Wallace: I'll introduce you to the daisiest night club in town. (1927)
tipping (1887) British, dated; from tip form the tip of something, probably after topping and ripping  ■ W. S. Ramsom: The Australian Pocket Oxford ... is a real beaut, a ryebuck dictionary. (1977)
outasight (1893) Orig US; modification of out-of-sight (not recorded until later)  ■ Black World: This Srisuth here sho give some out-a-sight sets. (1973)
corking (1895) Dated; compare corker excellent person or thing  ■ Anthony Hope: It turns out to be a perfectly corking house—a jewel of a house, Stephen! (1911)
super (1895) From earlier cloth-trade slang sense, of the highest quality; ultimately an abbreviation of superfine  ■ Evening Post (Nottingham): His wife Lee, said: 'Isn't it super? We can't get over it.' (1976)
out-of-sight (1896) Orig US  ■ J. D. Corrothers: 'Out o' sight!' yelled a dozen voices as the poem was concluded. (1902)
bad (1897) Orig US, Black English; from earlier Black English sense, pugnacious, formidable, formidable skilled  ■ Time: Adds longtime Fan Carolyn Collins: 'Oh man, I don't think he's changed. He got quiet for a while but he's still cool-blooded. He's still bad.' Bad as the best and as cool as they come, Smokey is remarkably low key for a soul master. (1980)
swell (1897) Orig & mainly US; often used as exclamation of approval or satisfaction; from earlier sense, stylish, of high social position  ■ Dashiell Hammett: 'She's full of gas and ready to go.' 'Swell.' (1930)  ■ Judith Krantz: All in all, a swell bookshelf. (1977)
crackerjack (1899) Orig US; from the noun crackerjack excellent person or thing  ■ Punch: These seventy-odd pieces of crackerjack journalism begin with Walter Lippmann's putting Mr. Rockefeller in the witness stand sometime in 1915. (1966)
aces (1901) US; used predicatively; from the plural of ace card valued one  ■ American Speech: That broad (female) is aces with me. (1943)
doozy (1903) Orig & mainly North American; perhaps an alteration of daisy excellent, possibly influenced by the name of the celebrated Italian actress Eleonora Duse (1859–1924)  ■ Courier-Mail (Brisbane): Swingers Saturday Night was doozy. (1975)
bonzer, bonze, bonser, etc. (1904) Australian, dated; perhaps formed in word play on French bon good, influenced by bonanza  ■ Vance Palmer: 'A bonzer night!' she said with drowsy enthusiasm. (1934)
bosker (1905) Australian & New Zealand, dated; origin unknown  ■ Frank Sargeson: It turned out a bosker day. (1943)
smashing (1911) Mainly British  ■ Chemistry in Britain: This is a smashing book for anyone interested in surface chemistry and physics to have available on his bookshelf. (1977)
keen (1914) Orig US  ■ New Yorker: 'My mother's going to buy me four new dresses.'... 'That's keen.' (1940)
snodger (1917) Australian & New Zealand; origin uncertain; compare British dialect smod sleek, neat  ■ C. J. Dennis: It was a snodger day! ... The apple trees was white with bloom. All things seemed good to me. (1924)
bottling (1919) Australian & New Zealand; compare earlier bottler excellent person or thing  ■ Ray Lawler: They made Dowdie ganger in his place, and what a bottling job he done. (1957)
mean (1920) Orig US  ■ Observer: Does a mean goulash, taught him by his grandmother and perfected in Hungary. (1973)
wicked (1920) Orig US  ■ Western Mail: He could, as I say, sidestep off either foot, but what sped him on was a wicked acceleration over 20 yards. (1977)
wizard (1922) Mainly British  ■ Times: 'How wizard!' they said. ... 'How absolutely super!' (1974)
peachy (1929) Compare earlier sense, sexually attractive  ■ David Westheimer: How about it, fellows? ... Isn't it a peachy idea? (1973)
ace (1930) Orig US; from ace card valued one, which outscores others, from the notion of being pre-eminent above all others; originally only in attributive use  ■ Guardian: It used to be an ace cafe with a museum attached, but that was in the old days when it was trying to lose its stuffy image. (1991)
cool (1933) Orig US, Black English  ■ Time: The latest Tin Pan Alley argot, where 'cool' means good, 'crazy' means wonderful. (1953)
plenty (1933) Mainly US  ■ R. P. Smith: When they want to say a man's good, they say he plays plenty sax or plenty drums. (1941)
solid (1935) US jazz slang  ■ New York Times: There has been some solid trumpet players who can really send. (1943)
corker (1937) New Zealand; attributional use of the noun corker excellent person or thing  ■ D. W. Ballantyne: The kids told Syd what a corker sixer it had been. (1948)
too much (1937) Orig US  ■ G. Lea: I want to make it to the City. ... Man, like the City is too much—and that's where I want to be. (1958)
ready (1938) US; originally and usually applied to music or musicians  ■ Cab Calloway: That fried chicken was ready. (1944)
socko (1939) Orig & mainly US; compare earlier noun sense, a success, a hit  ■ Underground Grammarian: Their latest brochure starts right off with this
absolutely socko bit of dialog: 'What is cooperative education? It's in simplistic [sic] definition, it is learning by doing.' (1981)

curl- (or curl-) the-mo, curl-a-mo, etc. (1941) Australian; from curl the mo succeed brilliantly Coast to Coast 1967-68: He... fits one of the trimming pilcher glasses: 'Come an' get it! It's curl-a-mo chico. Lead in the old pencil.' (1969)
dodger (1941) Australian; perhaps from dodger bread, but compare snodger excellent Dal Stevens: Instead of having to risk a knock on the Pearly Gates everything was dodger. (1953)
groovy (1941) Orig US; from earlier sense, playing jazz with fluent inspiration Observer. To-morrow I'll tell him to go to hell, and what's so groovy is, he will. (1959)
grouse (1941) Australian & New Zealand; origin unknown D. R. Stuart: She's a grousie sort of a joint, this bloody Ceylon, do me. (1979)
rumpty (1941) Australian & New Zealand, dated; origin unknown in there (1944) US; applied especially to a jazz musician's performance righteous (1944) US, mainly Black English gone (1946) Orig US jazz slang; often in the phrase real gone L. J. Brown: This is a real gone pad... it's what the clients expect. (1967)
crazy (1948) Orig US jazz slang James Baldwin: She laughed. 'Black Label [Scotch]?' 'Crazy.' (1962)
whizzo, wizzo (1948) Compare earlier whizzo an exclamation of delight Margery Allingham: I wanted to look at some wizzo lettering on... the Tomb. (1955)
gear (1951) Orig & mainly British, dated; from the phrase that's the gear, an expression of approval John Burke: Once we even all sat down and wrote those letters saying how gear she was and all that rubbish. (1964)
beaut (1952) Mainly Australian & New Zealand; compare earlier noun beau excellent person or thing Nevil Shute: It's been a beaut evening. (1957)
tremendous (1952) From earlier sense, very great Guardian: If Norma hadn't been so supportive none of this would ever have happened. She has been absolutely tremendous. (1991)
end (1953) US jazz slang; used attributively; from the end the best Nugget I was blowing some jazz in the student lounge on this end Steinway. (1963)
far-out (1954) Orig US jazz slang. applied to playing that is daringly creative; often used interjectionally to denote enthusiastic commendation New Scientist: 'How does it feel to be alive again after all this time?' 'Far out!' she replied with gusto. (1983)
magic (1956) Guardian: Finally we ate in a pizza parlour. 'What's this pisser?' asked Jimmy. 'It's magic,' Gordon told him. (1975)

fab (1957) Abbreviation of fabulous Meet the Beatles: Most of the Merseyside groups produce sounds which are pretty fab. (1963)
fantabulous (1958) Blend of fantastic and fabulous Sunday Express (Johannesburg): Since the bust up of the fantabulous group, it's been George who's been doing most of the slogging. (1971)
fabulous (1959) From earlier sense, astonishing, incredible; first recorded in 1959, but the evidence of fab and fantabulous indicates earlier use Radio Times: I think it's [sc. Salford] a fabulous place. (1962)
ridiculous (1959) Orig jazz slang Scottish Daily Mail Superlatives... gradually increased with the years into 'out-of-sight', 'ridiculous' and 'unbelievable'. (1968)
peachy-keen (1960) US Nik Cohn: We dig America. We think it's really peachy-keen. (1969)

boss (1961) Orig & mainly US; from earlier attributive use of boss master, chief Martin Amis: I have to tell you right off that Martina Twain is a real boss chick by anyone's standards. (1984)
storming (1961) Daily Mail: Everybody People... is the mainstream pop disco hit, and... certainly deserves to be: it's a storming groove, glitteringly produced. (1991)
upright (1962) Orig US Courier-Mail (Brisbane): Disc jockeys... talk in a kind of sub-English... as in 'All right baby suck-it-to-me it's all right upright yeah'. (1969)
knock-out (1966) Listener: The wit and repartee of the DJ... 'Hi there—it's great to be with you and welcome to another knock-out show.' (1968)

together (1968) From earlier sense, fashionable, up-to-date Jamaican Weekly Gleaner: I read in the Miami Herald that conditions in the women's jails [are] not so together. (1971)
stud (1969) Mainly US; apparently from earlier sense, displaying a masculine sexual character brilliant (1971) Sue Townsend: I allowed Pandora to visit me in my darkened bedroom. We had a brilliant kissing session. (1984)

awesome (1975) Orig & mainly North American; trivialization of earlier sense, staggering, remarkable, prodigious Making Music: I just know it'd be an awesome band. (1986)
primo (1975) Orig & mainly US; from Italian primo first American Film: The Taylor murder had all the elements of a primo Hollywood thriller. (1986)
def (1979) Orig US, rap musicians' slang; often said to be an abbreviation of definite or definitive, but perhaps better explained as an alteration of death, used in Jamaican English as a general intensifier Smash Hits: Like all good 'def' and 'baaad' rappers do, Sandra and 'Tim' really love their mum. (1988)
killer (1979) Orig US; attributive use of killer someone or something excellent City Limits: Sometimes James Brown's albums stank, but there was always one killer track. (1986)
brill (1981) British; abbreviation of brilliant
  ■ Guardian: It may have been an awful night... but the meat and potato pies were brill. (1983)

rad (1982) Orig US surfers' slang; abbreviation of radical in same sense ■ BMX Plus: This was just the start of the raddest one-week vacation a freestyler has ever had. (1987)

tubular (1982) Orig & mainly US; often in the phrase totally tubular; from earlier surfing slang sense, (of a wave) hollow and well-curved, and so excellent for riding ■ Herbeck & Ross: Donatello was at a loss. His brothers continued to top each other: 'Tubular!' 'Radical!' 'Dynamite!' (1990)

radical (1983) Orig US surfers' slang; from earlier sense, at the limits of control and safety ■ Independent: 'Radical'... no longer has rebellious or left-wing connotations but means... wonderful or remarkable. (1988)


mondo (1986) Orig & mainly US; from earlier use as an intensifier, suggesting great extent or size

crucial (1987) British; from earlier sense, essential ■ Looks: Yazz's crucial new video Yazz—The Only Way Is Up is a must for your Chrissie list, with all her best tracks. (1989)

Excellently

a treat (1898) ■ New Yorker: I knew this floor had life left in it. ... It's come up a treat. (1984)

An excellent person or thing

dinger (1809) Orig & mainly US; from dialect ding hit + -er ■ John Steinbeck: See how good the corn come along until the dust got up. Been a dinger of a crop. (1939)

clinker (1836) British, orig sporting slang, dated ■ Winifred Holtby: By God she could ride. A clinker across country. (1936)

ripper (1838) Now mainly Australian; compare rippling excellent ■ Courier-Mail (Brisbane): Nagle has a fine ear for Australian dialect. The book's a 'ripper', as his characters might say. (1976)

bottler (1855) Australian & New Zealand; origin unknown ■ Gordon Slater: Congratulations boy, a glorious try, a real bottler, you won the game. (1959)

peacherino, peacherine, peacheroo (1900) Mainly US; playful extension of peach excellent person or thing ■ S. E. White: Plant has a drag with Chairman Gay, don't know what it is, but it's a good one, a peacherino. (1910) ■ Martin Woodhouse: 'She [sc. an aeroplane]'s a peach,' he said. 'A real peacherino.' (1966)

humdinger (1905) Orig US; probably from hum sing with closed lips + dinger excellent person or thing ■ Times: The last set was a humdinger, to use a transatlantic expression. (1958)

hummer (1907) Mainly US; from hum(dinger) + -er ■ N. Scanlan: When the new car was swung out on to the wharf, Mike walked round it and touched it lovingly. 'She's a hummer, Dad.' (1934)

whizz (1908) Perhaps from whiz buzzing sound; compare whizzer excellent person or thing ■ Times: Here are some of the gifts I have given to children in recent years: a massive iron key that could surely unlock the deepest dungeon in Nottingham Castle and makes a whizz of a paper-weight. (1959)

cracker (1914) British; perhaps short for crackerjack ■ Shoot!: I've played in a few crackers in my time but it's hard to think of a more exciting tussle than the one we had at Anfield in 1985. (1986)

the berriess (1917) US, dated ■ H. L. Foster: You think you're the berries, don't you? Well, you might have been once, but you're a flat-tire these days! (1925)

the cat's (1919) US; probably elliptical for the cat's meow, etc., though these phrases are not recorded until later

the cat's meow (1921), the cat's pyjamas (1922), the cat's whiskers (1923), the cat's nuts (1928), the cat's balls (1962), the cat's ass (1967) Orig US ■ Sinclair Lewis: This kid used to think Pa Gottlieb was the cat's pyjamas. (1925)
the bee's knees (1923) Orig US; dated; a bee's knee was formerly the type of anything small or insignificant, though this sense appears to be a separate development. ■ Dennis Potter: As you'd all know, we get a lot of blokes from round here nowadays as do reach Universities. And they think they be the bee's knees. (1967)

pipp (1928) Orig & mainly US; from pip seed of an apple, etc. ■ New Yorker: He has written a pip of a meeting between Jerry and the therapist in the empty house. (1987)

the nuts (1932) US; from nuts testicles (compare the cat's nuts excellent person or thing). ■ William Gaddis: Get a little cross with mirrors in it, that would be the nuts if you want to suffer your way. (1955)

to kill or pill (1937) Orig US; from kill amuse, delight, etc. greatly + -er. ■ Melody Maker: George Khan has a solo on the up-tempo passage of the same track which is an absolute killer. (1970)

killer-diller (1938) Orig US; rhyming reduplication of killer, probably influenced by dilly remarkable person or thing. ■ W. C. Handy: My old friend Wilbur Sweatman—a killer-diller and jazz pioneer. (1957)

murder (1940) US, dated. ■ Max Shulman: We got on the dance floor just as a Benny Goodman record started to play. ‘Oh, B.G.’ I cried Noblesse. . . . ‘Man, he’s murder, Jack.’ (1943)
	ruby-dazzler (1941) Australian & New Zealand; apparently from ruby red gem + (bobby)-dazzler. ■ W. S. Ramson: The Australian Pocket Oxford. . . . is . . . a gem amongst dictionaries if not a rubydazzler. (1977)

rumpty (1941) Australian & New Zealand, dated; from the adjective rumpty excellent. ■ E. G. Webber: What a rumpty. (1946)

snozzler (1941) New Zealand; origin unknown


a hard (or tough) act to follow (1975) Orig US; applied to someone or something difficult to rival; from the notion of a performer coming next on a variety bill. ■ P. F. Boiler: It was not easy being the second President of the United States; George Washington was a hard act to follow. (1981)

the dog's bollocks (1989) British; perhaps from the notion of being outstanding, from the prominence of the testicles in the male of certain breeds of dog, but compare earlier the cat's nuts; the cat's balls. ■ Times: Before Tony Blair's speech, a chap near me growled: ‘E thinks 'e's the dog's bollocks.’ Well, he's entitled to. It was a commanding speech: a real dog's bollocks of an oration. (1995)

An excellent or admirable person

goody (1873) Orig US; now mainly used, usually in the plural, to denote one of those on the side of right in a film, book, etc. ■ Times Literary

Supplement: The Communists are goodies and John L. Lewis is a baddy. (1958)

sport (1881) Applied to someone who reacts generously or pleasantly even in untoward situations. ■ H. R. Davis: All that was asked of the stranded Americans was to keep cool and, like true sports, suffer inconvenience. (1915)

goody-goody (1889) Applied to an excessively or ostentatiously good person; reduplication of goofy

toff (1898) British; from earlier sense, upper-class person. ■ Daily Chronicle: One of the witnesses . . . spoke of a generous employer as ‘a regular toff’. ‘Toff’ is perhaps the highest compliment, or the bitterest sneer, according to the tone, that a man who does not make any pretence to magnificence can aim at a man who does. (1908)

white hat (1975) Orig US; from the white hats traditionally worn by the ‘goodies’ in Hollywood westerns. ■ Guardian Weekly: His judgments of the men he dealt with. . . . The white hats are Truman [etc.]. A prime villain is Britain’s postwar foreign secretary. (1978)

gent (1987) Applied to an admirable man; not recorded in print before 1987, but almost certainly in use well before then; from earlier, neutral sense, gentleman. ■ K. Dunn: McGurk was such a gent that nobody who went tap-tapping at his windshield in the dark after the midway was closed ever went screeching in fear or pain or shame through the camp before dawn. (1989)

diamond (1990) British, mainly London slang; applied especially to a stalwart or reliable person

An excellent thing

daisy (1757) Mainly US. ■ Boston Journal: In a new book upon ‘Americanisms,’ some of the less familiar are . . . daisy, for anything first-rate. (1889)

dandy (1784) Mainly US; from dandy for anything first-rate. ■ D. Helwig: We . . . sat . . . waiting for Barrow Man to light his fire. At nine-fifteen he did it. It was a dandy. (1968)

splitter (1843) Hunting slang; applied to an excellent hunt. ■ Shooting Times & Country Magazine: There was more than a holding scent and . . . we were in for a splitter. (1976)

lollapalooza, lala-, lolla-, -paloozer, -paloozer (1904) US; fanciful formation. ■ S. J. Perelman: All agreed that Luba Pneumatic was a lollapalooza, the Eighth Wonder of the World. (1970)

purler, pearler (1935) Mainly Australian; from purler knock-down blow; pearler is now the commoner spelling. ■ Weekend Australian: Flo’s 35-minute speech was a pearler. (1980)

blinder (1950) British; applied especially to an excellent performance in a sport; from the notion of being ‘dazzlingly’ good. ■ David Storey: You played a blinder. . . . It was the best game I ever saw. (1960)

tinger (1955) US; from zing make a sharp ringing sound + -er. ■ Richard Adams: My private collection was...
becoming what an American friend . . . described as a ‘zinger’. (1990)

To do (something) excellently

**max** (1837) US; used transitively and intransitively, denoting doing something to the maximum degree of excellence; from the noun max, a colloquial shortening of maximum

*Washington Post* Scott has just finished maxing the push-up test at 88, where he was ordered to stop. (1982)

**wail** (1955) US, orig & mainly jazz slang; denoting performing excellently

*Shapiro & Hentoff* I revered the amazing Fats Waller, who had lately made a splash wailing on organ at the Lincoln. (1955)

Surpassing (all others)

**a cut above** (1818) Often denoting (slightly) superior status

*Economist* France is now streets ahead of anyone, with 50% of its local exchanges . . . now running digitally. (1987)

**top-notch** (1900) *American Speech* Some successful criminals escape getting a monicker, for they, especially top-notch con men and syndicate members, think it adds ‘class’ to be without one. (1928)

**stickout** (1948) US; from the noun stickout outstanding sportsman or -woman

*Washington Post* Kramer’s only hope for a stickout newcomer would be Australia’s Mai Anderson against Gonzales. (1958)

Best

**bestest** (1868) Used as an emphatic or nursery form of best; from best + the superlative suffix -est; orig dialectal

*Times* The Duchess of York will remain ‘the bestest of friends’ with the Duke, she announced yesterday. (1996)

Someone or something outstanding or surpassing all others

**the daddy** (1865) Orig US; from earlier sense, father

*William Garner* You graduate from taking little chances to taking big ones. This one was the daddy of ‘em all. (1989)

**the father and mother** (1892) *Punch* The stage is set for the father and mother of a row. (1960)

**the grand-daddy** (or granddaddy) (1907) Orig US; usually followed by of; from earlier sense, grandfather

*Muriel Beadle* The granddaddy of all electrical storms dumped a cloudburst. (1961)

**great** (1912) Applied to someone particularly distinguished in their field; usually used in the plural; in use in this sense from the 15th to the 17th centuries, but the current usage appears to be a new formation on the adjective great

*J. Walsh* Statues and paintings of the greats of French science and literature. (1963)

**the father** (1930) Mainly Australian & New Zealand

*D. W. Ballantyne* The local side got the father of a hiding. (1948)

**stickout** (1942) US; applied to an outstanding sportsman or -woman; from earlier sense, horse considered certain to win a race

*Washington Post* As for third base, ball players and fans alike have no range of choice. Frank Malzone of the Red Sox is a stickout. (1958)

The best

**the** **tops** (1935) Orig US

*Punch* Cooney’s Cassocks stand the test, Choosy Churchmen say they’re best. Sure-fire sermons, never flops: Cooney’s Cassocks are the tops. (1958)

**the end** (1948) US, mainly jazz slang; from earlier, negative sense, the limit of endurance

*Neurotica* Senior this shit [sc. narcotic] is the end! (1950)

**the most** (1953) Orig US

*Listener* I would infinitely prefer to listen to the Kenny Everett programme—the show that’s the most with your tea and toast’, as that masterly dj himself puts it. (1968)

**endsville, endville** (1957) US jazz slang, dated: from the end the best + -ville

*Esquire* Endsville, the greatest. (1969)

To surpass all others

**beat the Dutch** (1775) Dated; often used in expressions of surprise

*M. E. W. Freeman* Well, you women do beat the Dutch. (1906)

**beat the bugs** (c1833) US; often used in expressions of surprise

**beat the Jews** (1845) US, offensive; often used in expressions of surprise

**beat the band** (1897) Often used in expressions of surprise

*Agatha Christie* Well, if that doesn’t beat the band! (1923)

To be better than, surpass

**knock spots off** (1856) Orig US

*A. L. Rowe* They [sc. the Nazis] . . . have at any rate been intelligent, and knocked spots off those public-school gentlemen. (1943)

To be surpassed by

**have nothing on** (1906) Orig US

*Listener* For a picture of sheer bloodcurdling hatred and human degradation, our playwrights have nothing on this 60-year-old music-drama inspired by Sophocles’ play. (1967)

Delightful, pleasing

**darling** (1805) Applied affectedly to something sweetly pretty or charming; from earlier use as a term of endearment

*New Yorker* Isn’t it going to be darling! (1970)

**ducky** (1897) British; from earlier use as a term of endearment

*Punch* You can wear one of those ducky little lace caps. (1927)

**deevy, deevie** (1900) Dated, mainly British; affected alteration of divyy, from the first syllable of divine + -y

*Vita Sackville-West* Tommy, you’re going, aren’t you? How too deevy! (1930)
loverly (1907) Representing a Cockney pronunciation of lovely. ■ John Wainwright: He `ad the ackers—believe me—wiv a car like that. . . . A loverly job, it was. (1968)
dreamy (1926) Orig US; applied to something wonderful or delightful. ■ Stanley Kauffman: “Let us find a cool and lovely garden restaurant and have a slow, exquisite dinner. . . . ‘O.K., Rus. . . . Sounds dreamy.” (1952)
out of this world (1928) Orig US jazz slang
■ John Rossiter: She gave me the skinned fruit. . . . With Cointreau poured on, mine tasted out of this world. (1972)
neat (1934) Mainly US. ■ David Westheimer: “I could drive you on into Idyllwild if you want. . . . ‘That would be neat.” (1972)
mellow (1942) US. ■ Dan Burley: The whole town’s copping the mellow jive. (1944)
neato (1968) Mainly US; from neat delightful + -o
■ More (New Zealand): Those were the days when Beaver used to . . . have what she calls ‘a neato free time’. (1986)

Delicious
scrumptious (1881) From earlier, more general sense, stylish, handsome, delightful; ultimate origin unknown. ■ A. L. Rowe: The scrumptious meal she cooked, Cornish duck and Californian avocado stuffed with shrimp, our own cream from the farm with the delicious sweet. (1976)
yummy (1899) Often used interjectionally; from yum an exclamation of pleasurable anticipation, and a blend of delightful + -y.

A remarkable or exceptional person or thing
rip-snorter (1842) Orig US
■ Last Whole Earth Catalog: This is Gurney Norman the author speaking, bringing you the end of this folk tale, and it’s a rip-snorter. (1972)
stunner (1855) Mainly British. ■ E. A. Collard: Next comes a stunner—a skeleton sleigh, red as fire, drawn by a trotter black as coal. (1955)
lulu (1886) Orig US; often used ironically; perhaps from Lulu, pet form of the female personal name Louise. ■ Evening News (Edinburgh): There are some parts of a new book on spying that aren’t fit to be printed. . . . This one is a lulu. As long as two years ago, legal proceedings were initiated. (1974)
hot stuff (1900) Orig US; compare earlier, more specific sense, extremely sexually attractive person. ■ Warwick Deeping: I’m getting my new M.-B. next week. Hot stuff. She’ll do eighty. (1931)
dynamite (1904) Orig US ■ Washington Post: Even detractors will concede that Chung is just dynamite on the air. She’s magnetic and compelling. (1993)
dilly (1908) Orig US; from obsolete dilly, wonderful, from the first syllable of delightful or delicious. ■ Raymond Chandler: You’re the most impossible man I ever met. And I’ve met some dillies. (1958)
phenomenon (1950) US; applied especially to an unusually gifted person; shortened from phenomenon. ■ New Yorker: He has a series of run-ins with a militant black rookie phenom. (1966)

A remarkable or exceptional thing
snoiter (1959) Applied especially to something remarkable for its size, power, severity, etc.; compare earlier sense, one that snorts.
■ J. H. Fingleton: May . . . now hit another ‘snoiter’ through the covers. (1954)
scorcher (1900) Applied in sport to an extremely hard shot or hit. ■ Belfast Telegraph: He . . . diverted a scorcher from Pat Spence later in the game. (1977)
something else (1909) Orig North American
■ O.D.: Oh, wow, these guides are . . . something else man! (1977)
doozy, doozie (1916) Orig & mainly North American; often used ironically; from the adjective doozy excellent. ■ Times: Mr Bentsen was . . . sharply questioned about his short-lived proposal. . . . He admitted the scheme was ‘a real doozy’. (1998)
doozer (1930) North American: origin uncertain; probably related to doozy, but perhaps a variant of obsolete douser. heavy blow
■ New Yorker: You know about our crosswinds, I’ve seen some doozers here too. (1985)
sockeroo (1942) Orig US; applied to something with an exceptional impact; from sock strong impact + the fanciful suffix -eroo. This latest box-office sockeroo also provides a modest example of the industry's throat-cutting activities. (1964)

something (1958) Usually in such phrases as quite something, really something. 

stoker (1978) British; applied to something of exceptional size, vigour, or excellence.

Satisfactory

all is gas and gaiters (1839) Dated. Agatha Christie: 'I've only got to get hold of dear old Stylpitch's Reminiscences... and all will be gas and gaiters.' (1925)

O.K., OK, ok, okay, okey (1839) Orig US; abbreviation of all right.

not (or none) so dusty (1856) British. J. B. Priestley: 'You're a swell tonight all right!... 'Not so dusty, Mar,' said Leonard. (1929)

more like (it) (1888) Denoting improvement to a satisfactory standard.

(right as rain) (1894) G. B. Shaw: Proteus. How did you get on with the King? Boanerges. Right as rain, Joe. You leave the king to me. (1930)

sweet (1898) Australian; often in the phrase she's sweet everything is satisfactory. Kylie Tennant: 'Everything O.K.? 'Yep,' said the scrawny man beneath us. 'She's sweet.' (1964)

up to par (1899) From par average standard.

jake (1914) Orig US, now Australian & New Zealand; often in the phrase she's jake everything is satisfactory; origin unknown.

copacetic, copasetic (1919) US; origin unknown. Down Beat: We hear two city cops chatting. 'Well, everything seems copasetic,' says one. 'Yeah, we might as well move on,' the other agrees. (1969)

jakealoo, jakealoo, jakerloo (1919) Australian & New Zealand; from jake satisfactory + fanciful suffix -aloo. S. Gore: The least you could do now is give some sorta guarantee that me and me Mum and Dad'll be jakealoo, when the invasion starts. (1968)

kayo (1923) Reversal of the pronunciation of O.K. under the influence of K.O. knock out. P. G. Wodehouse: If you think it’s kayo, then it’s all right by me. (1928)

hotsy-totsy (1926) Orig US; apparently coined by Billie De Beck, US cartoonist. Jessica Mann: What the law allows me, is mine… So that’s all hotsy totsy. (1973)

oke (1929) Orig US; from O.K.

patsy (1930) US; dated; origin unknown

up to snuff (1931) Compare earlier sense not easily deceived.

enko, uke, dokey (1932) Orig US; reduplicated form based on ok.

apples (1943) Australian & New Zealand; often in the phrase she's apples everything is satisfactory; short for apples and rice (or spice), rhyming slang for nice.

all-right (1953) Used attributively; from the phrase all right satisfactory.

useful (1955) Often somewhat euphemistic.

jakealoo, when the invasion starts. (1968)

adequate

not to be sneezed (or sniffed) at (1813) Nat Gould: A thousand pounds… was not a thing to be sneezed at. (1881)

better than a poke in the eye (with a burnt stick, etc.) (1852) George Eliot: 'Then,' he said… 'Here are those "Letters from Ireland" which I hope will be something better than a poke in the eye.' (1852)
7. Beauty & Ugliness

Beautiful

easy on the eye (1938) Orig US; applied to something or someone delightful to look at
■ D. E. Stevenson: Miss Walters was certainly easy on the eye. (1943)

A beautiful person or thing

a picture (1815) ■ Guardian: The bride was, as they say, 'a picture'. (1961)

beaut, bute (1866) Mainly US, Australian, & New Zealand; abbreviation of beauty in the same sense ■ T. H. Thompson: Well, I guess she ain't a bute. (1909)

See also A sexually attractive person at Sex (pp. 68-9).

To beautify

glam (1937) Originally intransitive, but now mainly used transitively with up; abbreviation of glamorize ■ John Osborne: Get yourself glammed up, and we'll hit the town. (1957)

Ugly, unattractive

not much to look at (1861) ■ M. Deane: 'She is just a little fool,' said Roger—'a skittery little fool, with no sense, and not much to look at'. (1905)

drack, drac (1953) Australian; applied especially to a woman; origin uncertain; sometimes said to derive from the name of the US film Dracula's Daughter (1936); compare earlier sense, dull, dismal ■ Sydney Morning Herald: Mr Hardy said he would put aside his memories... of meeting Raquel Welch ('A drac sort—not nearly as good looking in the flesh as you would expect') (1972)

like the back (end) of a bus (1959) ■ Options: Self-confidence has a lot to do with it too—until three years ago, I thought I looked like the back of a bus. (1993)

stop a clock (1994) In such phrases as a face that would stop a clock and ugly enough to stop a clock; not recorded in print until 1994, but in use before then ■ J. F. Garner: They were differently visaged enough to stop a clock. (1994)

An ugly person or thing

heap (1806) Applied to a slovenly or unattractive woman ■ James Joyce: The fat heap he married is a nice old phenomenon with a back on her like a ball-eye. (1922)

fright (1832) From earlier sense, something scaring ■ Sylvia Plath: Betsy looked a fright. (1963)

Mother Bunch (1847) Applied to an unattractive or untidy fat woman; from the name of a noted fat woman of Elizabethan times ■ Guardian: She no more looks like a Mother Bunch than sounds like one... a fairly plump but elegant, well-dressed woman. (1964)

dogface (1849) US

haybag (1851) Applied to an unattractive woman ■ Spectator: The weary certainty that one more stranger has paused to inspect her casually and to depart calling her a haybag. (1967)

crow (1866) Orig US; applied to an unattractive (old) woman; often in the phrase old crow ■ Damon Runyon: She is by no means a crow. In fact, she is rather nice-looking. (1938)

rag-bag (1888) Applied to a sloppily-dressed person, especially a woman; from earlier sense, motley collection ■ P. Cave: She was neither attractive nor plain; not a raver or a ragbag. (1978)

trouth (1897) Applied to an unattractive (old) woman; usually in the phrase old trout; probably from the name of the fish, but compare trot old woman ■ David Beatty: There were some funny old trouts and some spritely young ones, but no raving beauties. (1914)

plain Jane (1912) Applied to an unattractive woman; from the female personal name Jane ■ Newsweek: Takarazuka girl players, living like priestesses, are virtually adored by their plain-Jane sisters throughout Japan. (1953)

bag (1922) Orig US; applied to an unattractive (old) woman; often in the phrase old bag; probably from earlier obsolete slang sense, vagina ■ Monica Dickens: I've never really known a pretty girl like you. At the training college they were all bags. (1961)

no oil painting (1930) Euphemistic ■ Listener: Mr Tillett was no oil painting, but he was a gentlemanly sort of man. (1973)

roach (1930) US; applied to an unattractive woman; compare earlier sense, cockroach

old boot (1958) Applied to an unattractive and typically intransient (old) woman ■ Guardian: Can this really be the same Julia Smith, the producer known as the toughest of tough old boots currently working in British television? (1992)

drack, drac (1960) Australian; applied especially to an unattractive woman; from earlier adjetival sense, unattractive ■ B. Beaver: I thought she was going to kiss it [sc. my hand] or bite it like another silly drack I knew once did. (1966)

boiler (1965) Orig Australian; applied to an unattractive (old) woman; often in the phrase old boiler; from the notion of a boiling fowl being older and tougher than a young chicken ■ i-D: You get a lot of dodgy boilers fronting acts, but here was a woman who didn't need to wear mini-skirts to attract attention. (1993)
8. Bad Quality

Of low quality; bad; inferior; unsatisfactory

tenuous (1596) From earlier senses, dirty, contemptible • Keith Weatherly: You’re not a bad bastard, Hunter, . . . in spite of your lousy cooking. (1968)

not able to hold a candle to (1640) Applied to one who is of lower quality than another; from the notion of not even being worthy to hold a candle for someone else to work by (i.e. take a subordinate role) • Guardian: As border guards, these men were supposed to be the elite of the Warsaw Pact’s elite, but most of them couldn’t hold a candle to us. (1991)

bloody (1802) • Guardian: The awful truth may be that, like Mr. Gummer, we love rubbishy sausages. (1991)

not (what it is) cracked up to be (1836) Applied to something of lower quality than it is said to be; from dated crick up praise; compare earlier not (. . .) cracked up for (1829) • Enid Bagnold: The emotions have been found by then to be not all they are cracked up to be. (1951)

not much chop (1847) Australian & New Zealand; from Anglo-Indian first (second) chop first (or other) rank or quality, from Hindi cháháí impression, print, stamp, brand, etc. • Coast to Coast 1967-68. The street is not much chop, but not seedy, rather claustrophobic from the eight-feet walls of grey concrete on each side. (1969)

bum (1859) Orig US; compare bum lazy person, tramp • Anthony Powell: This is a bum party (1931)

crummy, crumby (1859) From obsolete slang crumb body-louse + -y • L. & P. Opie: The game has been taken up by the physical training instructors under such crummy names as ‘Poison Circle Tag’. (1969)

not a patch on (1860) Applied to one who is of lower quality than another • Guardian: There’s Coppola’s Godfather III which, though not a patch on I and II, is at least a much better than average movie. (1991)

cheesy, cheesey (1863) Orig US; Rose Macaulay: Here and rabbit fur are just utterly revolting and cheesy. (1930)

rotten (1880) Often in such phrases as rotten luck, rotten shame, etc. • Westminster Gazette: Outside the competition they were, comparatively speaking, a rotten team. (1895)

snide (1887), snidey, sniddy, snidy (1890) Dated; from earlier sense, counterfeit • Edward Dyson: ‘Tain’t her liquor wot’s snide, it’s th’ dear hookey hides what it gets chuted into. (1906)

mouldy (1896) • F. M. Hueffer: I slogged like that for Nancy . . . We could have got along on a major’s pay, out there. Just got along! And then the blasted girl goes and gets rotten titles and mouldy houses to her back on the day the bottom drops out of me. (1912)

crook (1900) Australian & New Zealand; from earlier sense, dishonest • J. O’Grady: When the mulga starts to die things are crook all right. (1968)

not much (or no) cop (1902) British • Kenneth Giles: The house . . . has never been much cop. People don’t like living opposite a church or a graveyard. (1970)

N.B.G., n.b.g. (1903) Abbreviation of no bloody good • Gladys Mitchell: Bang goes our reason for coming here . . . She said it was N.B.G. and that seems to be just about right. (1973)

chronic (1904) From earlier senses, continuous, persistent • Scotsman: ‘The weather is chronic,’ says a Seaforth Highlander. (1915)

schlock, shlock (1915), schlocky, shlocky (1968) Mainly North American; applied especially to inferior art or entertainment; Yiddish, apparently from sogn strike • Publishers Weekly: Shlock fiction with all the necessary ingredients, the result is mindlessly entertaining, if rather tasteless. (1972) • Spectator: The concentration on Sinatra arises out of the suspicion that the Reagan entourage of friends and hangers-on is loaded with shabby, shady, schlocky, smarmy, shyster millionaires. (1975)

crappy (1928) Orig US; from earlier sense, made dirty with excrement • Weekly Guardian: Rents as high as £52 a month ‘for crappy quarters’. (1970)

half-arsed, half-ass, half-assed (1932) Orig US • William Gaddis: A half-assed critic . . . thinks he has to make you unhappy before you’ll take him seriously. (1555)

kaffir, Kaffir (1934) South African, offensive; from the noun Kaffir used disparagingly of a black South African • Spectator: ‘That was a real Kaffir shot.’ (1961)

ribby (1936) Applied especially to something shabby • P. Alexander: She lived at the ribby end of Maida Vale. (1976)

under the arm (1937) British • Frank Norman: I read no matter how bad the book and some are right under the arm, stand on me. (1958)

nowhere (1940) Applied to something insignificant or dreary • Melody Maker: We all thought it was the most nowhere record we’d made. (1966)

ropy, ropey (1942) Perhaps from earlier sense, sticky and stringy • Daily Mail: It is, of course, very difficult to get waiters on New Year’s Eve. If you hire them outside, you may get a few ropey types. (1957)

(except for the birds) (1944) Orig and mainly US; applied to something worthless or no good, especially appealing only to gullible people • Listener: Our answer, at that age, would have been that Stanley Matthews was for the birds. Football was just not mobile enough. (1963)

bogger (1945) Australian; from badge patch or mend clumsily

piss-poor (1946) • Nation Review (Melbourne): I think privately that they look in pisspoor condition; but the spirited bidding rockets the price up to $2.50 in no time. (1973)

poxy (1950) From earlier sense, infected with pox • Jimmy O’Connor: The first tray . . . was full of poxy rings worth two or three quid. (1976)

duff (1956) From earlier sense, spurious • Crescendo: A duff piano player will still sound duff on a Bosendorfer Grand. (1967)
diabolical (1958)  ■  Sue Townsend: Asked our postman about communications between Tunisia and England. He said they were 'diabolical'. (1982)

manky, mankey (1958)  ■  British; from obsolete mank defective (from Old French manc, manque, from Latin manus maimed) + -y; perhaps influenced by French manque  ■  B. W. Aldiss: Have you checked out that dirty manky beer you poisoned me with last time I came? (1971)

crap (1916)  ■  From earlier sense, refuse, filth garbage (1592)

wanky (1972)  ■  From wank + -y  ■  Zigzag: We loved that, 'cos it's such a wanky plastic paper and they thought by slagging us early they'd be in first. (1977)

Something of inferior quality

garbage (1592)  ■  From earlier sense, refuse, filth Washington Post: The kiwano tasted as if a passion fruit had met a cucumber and gone wrong; the mushy pepino tasted like a cucumber that had lost an argument with a honeydew. They were the most expensive garbage I've ever put out on the street. (1993)
rubbish (1601)  ■  From earlier sense, unwanted material, refuse  ■  Jonathon Gash: Don't misunderstand—I've sold some rubbish in my time. (1974)

hash-up (1895)  ■  Applied to something of low quality concocted afresh from existing material: from the verb hash up make a dish of recooked meat, rework  ■  Times: A style perilously close to certain Colour Supplement hash-ups and clearly aligned for Over-ground consumption. (1970)

tripe (1902)  ■  W. H. Canaway: The group of girls who were watching some tripe on television. (1973)

slum (1914)  ■  US; applied to cheap or imitation jewellery, and also (1929) to cheap prizes at a jewellery market as a whole. (1992)

crap (1916)  ■  Orig US; from earlier sense, excrement  ■  Guardian: 'Crap' was the word used by Gerald Ratner to describe his very own jewellery and it's a word that pretty much sums up the state of the high street jewellery market as a whole. (1992)

stinker (1917), stinkeroo (1934)  ■  Listener: Stylistically the Royal Victoria Hospital is indeed a stinker. (1967)  ■  J. B. Priestley: They've sunk two-and-a-half million dollars in this new stinkeroo that opens tonight. (1951)

turkey (1927)  ■  US; applied to an inferior or unsuccessful film or theatrical production, and hence to anything disappointing or of inferior value  ■  Howard Fast: 'Have you ever thought of selling the place?' Jake asked. 'Oh? And who the hell would buy this turkey?' (1977)

shit, shite (1930)  ■  From earlier sense, excrement Rolling Stone: I enjoyed Simmons' logic that Shakespeare is 'shit' simply because he can't understand it. (1977)

dog (1938)  ■  US; from earlier jazz slang sense, an inferior piece of music  ■  New Yorker: Audiences are in a mess. . . . They don't know what they want. . . . So many movies are dogs. (1970)

toe-cover (1948)  ■  Applied to a cheap and useless present  ■  Listener: Gifts are given, not only the completely useless trivia or 'toe-covers' which litter the surgery, but more substantial gifts, such as briefcases. (1983)

tat, tatt (1951)  ■  Compare earlier sense, shabby person  ■  Times Literary Supplement: New ways of getting the johns to spend their money on previously unsellable old tat. (1981)

shocker (1958)  ■  From earlier sense, something which shocks  ■  Horse & Hound: Lucky Sovereign ran a shocker, presumably either unable or unwilling to give his true running on this firm ground and/or the Epsom course. (1977)

scrubber (1974)  ■  Australian & New Zealand; applied in sport to a second-rate player or competitor; compare earlier sense, inferior horse  ■  New Zealand Herald: The three winners . . . have rather enjoyed their reputation as 'scrubbers' since they unexpectedly won their club title. (1977)

Bad advice

bum steer (1924)  ■  W. H. Whyte: The muddy-headed way so many of us do (ac. talk) gives young men a bum steer. (1957)

Indifferent

so so (1530)  ■  Compare German so so, Dutch zoo so so, in similar use  ■  New York Times Magazine: Even though I'm pushing 30, moisturizer plus cream foundation equals the sweats. Not a pretty sight. Possibility of replication: So-so. (1990)

no great shakes (1819)  ■  Perhaps in allusion to the shaking of dice  ■  Daily Mirror: Sir Richard may not have been particularly great shakes. But he was never given much chance to show his paces. (1976)

nothing to write (or worth writing) home about (1914)  ■  Victor Canning: He has a small place in the country. . . . Don't run away with the idea of anything worth writing home about when I say 'place'. It's a crumby little cottage. (1967)

half-pie (c1926)  ■  New Zealand; perhaps from Maori pai good  ■  Roderick Finlayson: A few straggling competitor; compare earlier sense, inferior runner  ■  Listener: Gifts are given, not only the completely substantial gifts, such as briefcases. (1983)
9. Unpleasantness

Unpleasant; deplorable

many (1538) From earlier sense, affected with mange. Roy Campbell: The poet wags his many stump of rhyme. (1930)
hellish (1569) From earlier sense, of hell. Guardian: The new 1916 album was, as ever, a hellish din. (1991)
snotty (1681) From earlier sense, dirty with nasal mucus. J. C. Harold: Albertine had slapped the Crown Prince and called him a snotty brat. (1958)
shocking (1842)
filthy (1875) Often applied specifically to bad weather. Guardian: On a filthy Thursday night at the National Sports Centre at Crystal Palace when the rain is not falling, a soaking mist hovers. (1991)
Godawful (1878) Orig US. Philip McCutchan: I heard the most God-awful racket above my head. (1959)
like thirty cents (1886) US, dated. T. Tobin: Feeling ‘like thirty cents’ and ‘the cold gray dawn of the morning after’ became part of the American idiom. (1973)
septic (1914) From earlier sense, putrefying. G. Mitchell: Mummy and Daddy have had a row. Isn’t it septic of them? (1974)
onkus (1918) Australian; origin unknown. D. McLean: All this yabber about Danny is onkus. (1962)
over the fence (1918) Australian & New Zealand; used to stress the unacceptability of something found objectionable. Sydney Morning Herald: Some publications which unduly emphasise sex were ‘entirely over the fence’, the Chief Secretary, Mr C. A. Kelly, said yesterday. (1964)
upter, upta (1918) Australian; from the phrase up to putty in a mess. Caddie: Dadda made some derogatory remark about the tucker. ‘If it’s upter why don’t you ‘ave a go?’ (1953)
white-arsed (1922) Daily Colonist (Victoria, British Columbia): Delegates . . . sat in shocked silence when an Indian leader accused them of being ‘white-arsed Liberals’. (1975)
shitty (1924) From shit + -y. Spare Rib: All the shitty jobs that most women . . . do every day of their lives. (1977)
bloody (1934) From earlier use as a derogatory intensifier. R. W. Chambers: ‘It’s bloody, ’ I said. ‘To call it bloody,’ Ker replied, slowly and sadly, ‘is fulsome flattery.’ (1939)
umpty (1948) Apparently from obsolete military slang umpty iddy unwell, from umpty and iddy, fanciful verbal representations of respectively the dash and the dot in Morse code. Celia Fremlin: This rather umpty friend of his. (1980)
scroungy (1949) Orig and mainly US; from the verb scrounge + -y; compare scunge and scruny at Dirt & Cleanliness (pp. 177–8)
poxy (1950) From earlier sense, infected with pox. Guardian: No well-meaning bearded weirdos trying to set up a community garden in a poxy suburban backwater. (1992)
horrrendous (1952) From earlier sense, terrifying. Guardian: Not that Scotland’s rampaging back-row forwards really need any encouragement to give Wales, England or anyone else a horrendous afternoon. (1991)
uncool (1953) From the jazz sense, not ‘cool’. It: The whole place [sc. Turkey] . . . is very very uncool. The Turks seem to be ready to turn with a malicious vengeance on young Europeans for the least (often no provocation. (1986)
grotty (1964) Shortened form of grotesque + -y. Guardian: The capacity has increased to 830 now, with 40 staff seats in boxes like grotty cubbyholes under the roof. (1992)
unreal (1966) US; compare earlier sense, remarkable. New Yorker: In the summer the dust and the flies are unreal. (1986)
shitting (1967) L. Cooper: That shitting girl looks at me as if I was dirt. (1980)
grungy (1972) Mainly US; from earlier senses, dirty, disgusting. New York Times Magazine: Boyle . . . taught high-school English at his alma mater to avoid the Vietnam draft, drifting into a weekend smack habit and a grungy life outing to the police searches. (1990)
punk-ass (1972) US; applied to a person. Zigzag: This period of court harassment . . . went on until July 25th, when I was locked up for good by punk-ass Colombo in Detroit. (1977)
shithouse (1972) From earlier noun sense, lavatory. Zigzag: If you’re banned in town A and then banned in town B, well then town C has just got to ban you or it’s, ‘well what kind of shithouse place are you running there, councillor?’ (1977)
hellacious (1976) US; from earlier sense, terrific, tremendous. Daily Telegraph: During the heaviest ground fighting of the war so far, described by one American commander as ‘hellacious’, at least 12 American Marines were killed and two injured when two light armoured vehicles were hit. (1991)
wack (1986) US; used especially with reference to (use of) the drug ‘crack’; probably shortened from wacky or wacko, the implication being that it is crazy to get involved in drug-taking. Atlantic: Crack is wack. You use crack today, tomorrow you be bumming. (1989)

Unpleasantly early

unearthly (1865) Compare earlier senses, sublime, supernatural
ungodly (1889) From earlier sense, unpleasant, deplorable. • Guardian: You know that the Lib-Dems are keen to get their retaliation in first during the campaign, calling a daily news conference at an ungodly 7.15am. (1992)

disgusting

icky, ikky (1939) From earlier sense, sickly sentimental. • Herbert Hunter: She wears the most frightful cardigans. Always some sort of ikky colour—to go with everything, I suppose. (1967)
gross (1959) Orig and mainly US; from earlier sense, (of behaviour, etc.) coarse, unrefined. • Joseph Hyams: 'She really thinks he's gross, huh?' 'The pits,' said Freda. (1978)

scroungy (1959) Orig and mainly US; from earlier senses, unpleasant, dirty, shabby. • G. Winokur: I was fascinated with the scroungy, low life diseases . . . in that clinic. (1981)
grotty (1964) Shortened form of grotesque + -y. • Times: 'I don't like the grotty old pub,' says Miss McCormick. (1970)
grody, groady, groddy, groaty, etc. (1965) US; often in the phrase grody to the max; from grod-, groat- (altered forms of grotesque) + -y; compare grotty. • Los Angeles Times: Moon Zappa calls her toenails 'Grodty to the max', which means disgusting beyond belief. (1982)
grungy (1965) Mainly US; perhaps inspired by scroungy. • Sunday Times: In 1973, 47th Street Photo moved one block east to its current location, a grungy walk-up at 67 West 47th Street. (1983)

scuzzi (1968) Orig and mainly North American; from the noun scuzz + -y. • New Musical Express: Zeppelin were really dumb: visibly hanging out . . . with the scuzziest groups in town. (1987)
yechy, yecchy (1969) US; from the interjection yech + -y

yucky, yukky (1970) From the interjection yuck + -y. • Mildred Gordon: It's only bats, I say.... They're weird,' says Linda. 'Yucky.' (1981)

Someone or something unpleasant or unendurable

the end (1938) • Gillian Freeman: Donald, you really are the absolute end. (1959)

the pits (1953) Orig US. • Observer: I've never been fined for saying something obscene. It's always been for saying 'You're the pits,' or something.—John McEnroe. (1981)

• J. Fuller: Hey, give me a little comfort here. This weather is nasty. (1966)

endsville (1962) US

An unpleasant or despicable person

pig (1546) • P. G. Wodehouse: I had some beautiful birds in London, but I had to stay on the good side of that pig, or she might have noticed more than was good for her. (1977)

beast (1772) From earlier stronger sense, bestial person

blister (1806) Dated British; from earlier sense, swelling on the skin. • P. G. Wodehouse: Women are a wash-out. I see no future for the sex, Bertie. Blisters, all of them. (1930)

nark (1846) Mainly Australian & New Zealand • Vance Palmer: 'Oh, don't be a nark, Miss Byrne,' he coaxes her. (1928)

cunt (1860) From earlier sense, female genitals

• Samuel Beckett: They think they can confuse me. . . Proper cunts whoever they are. (1956)

pill (1871) • Brian Garfield: 'Do you love your wife?' . . . 'You're a pill. Yes, I love her.' (1977)

rotter (1894) British; from the verb rot + -er

• G. Swift: He liked his mother and sisters . . . all other women he classed as 'rotters'. (1900)

so-and-so (1897) Euphemistic. • Keith Weatherly: It's not much good you staying out if some other so-and-so is going to work it, is there? (1968)

Noah's Ark (1898) Orig Australian; rhyming slang for nark • J. Alard: Ya knows Bill, yer gettin' to be a real Noah's Ark. (1968)

wowser (1899) Australian & New Zealand, dated; origin uncertain; perhaps from British dialect wow howl, grumble; claimed by John Norton (c1858-1916), editor of the Sydney Truth, as his coinage

scroucher, scrounger, scrowcher (1901) Australian; origin uncertain; perhaps connected with dialect scrouch, crouch, bend

• D'Arcy Niland: Ah, I could puke. That scrousher, that rough-house annie, what's she got to get uppety about? (1966)

whore (1906) From earlier senses, female prostitute, promiscuous woman • E. Gaines: 'You hear me whore?' 'I might be a whore, but I'm not a merciless killer,' he said. (1968)

scunge (1912) Orig Scottish; from earlier sense, sly fellow; ultimate origin unknown • Comment (New Zealand): He obviously thought I must be a bit of a scunge asking political questions. (1967)

crumb (1918) Orig US; probably a back-formation from crumbly, crummy lousy, dirty, distasteful, of low quality, itself from crumb in the obsolete slang sense, body-louse • Women Speaking: If a man doesn't like a girl's looks or personality, she's a . . . crumb. (1970)

roach (1930) US; from earlier sense, cockroach

face-ache (1937) British; often applied specifically to a mournful-looking person; compare earlier sense, neuralgia • Galton & Simpson: On a train . . . a carriageful of the most miserable-looking bunch of face-aches. (1961)

bad news (1946) Applied especially to someone best avoided; from earlier sense, something unpleasant • Dulcie Gray: Milly these days was plain sly fellow; ultimate origin unknown • Comment (New Zealand): He obviously thought I must be a bit of a scunge asking political questions. (1967)

An unpleasant or despicable male person

Many of the words in this section do not positively denote a male person, but are in practice almost exclusively applied to males rather than females.
shit, shite (1508) From earlier sense, excrement
> John Irving: Oh, I never knew what shits men were until I became a woman. (1978)
scab (1590) From earlier sense, incrustation formed over a wound
rat (1594) Guardian: Hope told his star-studded audience: ‘In my life a lot of people have called me a rat, so it’s good to be one officially.’ (1991)

louse (1633) T. Morrison: What a louse Valerian was. (1981)
son of a bitch, son-of-a-bitch, sonofabitch, sonuvabitch, etc., pl. sons of bitches (1707) Now mainly US J. D. Salinger: Boy, I can’t stand that sonuvabitch. (1951)
bugger (1719) From earlier sense, one who practises anal intercourse Listener: Come and sit on my other side. Otherwise they will put me beside that bugger Oparin. (1969)
booger (1770) US; from a dialectal pronunciation of bugger Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English: You wouldn’t want to meet him in a dark alley—he’s a mean-looking booger. (1995)
sod (1818) Abbreviation of sodomite John Braine: It’s time he was dead.... If you want to destroy the sod, Frank, I’ll give you absolutely all the dirt. (1968)
bastard (1830) From earlier sense, one born out of wedlock H. G. Wells: Serve the cocky little bastard right. (1940)

skunk (1841) From earlier sense, smelly animal of the weasel family Pierre Berton: It called Edwards a ‘ruffian’, a ‘moral leper’, and a ‘skunk’ whose literary fulminations cannot but create the impression that he was born in a brothel and bred on a dungpile.’ (1973)

swine (1842) From earlier more specific sense, sensual, degraded or coarse person Guardian: Mr Skinner suddenly found his output being jammed from the Tory benches. ‘You swine!’ Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman began. (1966)
shiner, schicer, shiser (1846) From German Schiesser shitter

sh, B (1851) Euphemistic: abbreviation of bugger or bastard Noel Streetfield: Can’t ‘elp bein’ sorry for the poor old B. (1952)

stink-pot (1854) David Ballantyne: They can call me miserable old stinkpot. (1948)
stiff (1882) Orig US New York Times: And if a black man did buy a house, hey, we knocked on his door and said hello. If he was a nice guy, great. If he was a stiff, well, I know lots of white sweets, too. (1975)

bleeder (1887) James Curtis: Give me the damn groin, you robbing bleeder. (1936)
fucker (1890) Orig Australian & New Zealand Angus Wilson: ‘We’ll get you, you fucker!’ Barley was shouting. (1961)
ratbag (1890) Orig Australian & New Zealand Barry Crump: This’d be the best scraper among you bunch of ratbags, wouldn’t it? (1961)

fink (1894) US; applied especially to a disloyal person; perhaps from German Fink person not belonging to the students’ association, or from German Schmierfink despicable person
> Raymond Chandler: Now he’s looking for the fink that turned him up eight years ago. (1940) Charles Williams: Except for being a rat, a fink, a scab, a thug, and a goon, he’s one of the sweetest guys you’ll ever meet. (1959)

blighter (1896) British; from blight + -cr J. I. M. Stewart: ‘What we have to contrive,’ he said, ‘is fair shares—or something near it—for each of the little blighters.’ (1957)

cheap skate (1896) Dated US skate (1896) Mainly US; compare earlier sense, worn-out horse
> Harold Pinter: Astor. I saw him have a go at you. Davies. ... The filthy skate, an old man like me. (1960)

stinker (1898) Daily Mail A gang of ‘real stinkers’ have raised a top wartime air ace and stolen his most prized souvenir—a 6ft. German propellor. (1975)
toe-rag (1912) British; from earlier sense, rag, vagrant, from the rag wound round a tramp’s foot in place of a sock
> Henry Calvin: Move, ya useless big toe-rag! (1971)

cocksucker (1918) Former sense, one who performs fellatio
> James Baldwin: If it wasn’t for the spooks wouldn’t a damn one of you white cock suckers ever get laid. (1982)

S.O.B., s.o.b. (1918) Mainly US; abbreviation of son of a bitch, also of silly old bastard, etc.
> C. Stead: That s.o.b. Montagu got me the job ‘ere, you know. (1934)
jelly bean (1919) Orig US; from earlier sense, jelly-like bean-shaped sweet
> William Faulkner: Are you hiding out in the woods with one of those damn slick-headed jellybeans? (1929)

four-letter man (1923) British, euphemistic; probably from the four letters of the word shit
crut (1925) US; a variant of crud
> Ernest Hemingway: You miserable little crut. (1937)

oik, oick (1925) British; originally applied descriptively by schoolboys to members of another school or to unpopular school-fellows, and hence used generally to denote any obnoxious or uncultured male; origin uncertain, though possibly from the verb (h)oick spit
> Nicholas Blake: Smithers is such an oick. (1935)
creep (1926) Orig US Punch: ‘Maurice Thew School of Body-building?’ That’ll be that phoney creep upstairs. (1966)
swipe (1929) Probably a variant of obsolete slang ‘swipe’ said Mr Mate Solivich. (1951)
twat, twott (1929) From earlier sense, female genitals
> Guardian: Miss Currie (who called her teacher a twat) can in part be excused. Her mother has 10 entries in Honourable Insults, a compilation of political invective. (1992)
crud (1930) Orig US; from earlier sense, dirty disgusting material ■ K. A. Saddler: Can’t stand the man. A real crud. (1966)

lug (1931) Mainly North American ■ Berkeley Mather: Any other names you can come up with? . . . You don’t owe these lugsw anything. (1973)

heel (1932) Orig US; from earlier sense, double-crosser ■ Times Literary Supplement. John Augustus Grimshawe was a heel about money and women. (1959)

arsehole, (US) asshole (1933) Orig US; from earlier sense, piece of turd (1936)

jerkwater (1935) Orig US; perhaps influenced by the US adjective jerkwater insignificant, inferior, from jerkwater train on a branch line, from the notion of taking on water by bucket from streams along the track ■ Listener. If . . . the sponsors get eight letters saying that their comedian is an idiot, or a foul-mouthed jerk, they’re terrified. (1958)

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jerk (1935) Orig US; perhaps influenced by the US adjective jerkwater insignificant, inferior, from jerkwater train on a branch line, from the notion of taking on water by bucket from streams along the track ■ Listener. If . . . the sponsors get eight letters saying that their comedian is an idiot, or a foul-mouthed jerk, they’re terrified. (1958)

bucket (1936) Euphemistic alteration of bastard ■ J. Gillespie: He’s a nice old bucket really. (1959)

bastard (1938) Origin and mainly North American ■ Berkeley Mather: Any other names you can come up with? . . . You don’t owe these lugsw anything. (1973)

get (1940) British; from earlier Scottish and Northern English sense, (illegitimate) offspring; compare git ■ Henry Calvin: Put something on him, the git. (1967)

henchman, henchman, henchman, henchmen, etc. (1941) German, from Schwein pig and Hund dog ■ J. Gillespie: He’s a nice old bucket really. (1959)

egan (1943) Applied especially to someone considered ignorant, stupid or awkward ■ Gavin Lyall: Of course I’m not alone, you—you peasant. D’ you think I drive myself? (1964)

suckhole (1966) Canadian & Australian; from the verb suck-hole curry favour ■ Globe Magazine (Toronto): No matter how strong I could become there was still someone in this city of 470,000 who thought I was a suckhole. (1970)

suck-hole (1966) Canadian & Australian; from the verb suck-hole curry favour ■ Globe Magazine (Toronto): No matter how strong I could become there was still someone in this city of 470,000 who thought I was a suckhole. (1970)

jerk-off (1968) From jerk off masturbate, influenced by the noun jerk ■ W. Sheed: You know perfectly well that the jerk-offs do all the talking at meetings. (1973)

suck, scuz (1968) Orig and mainly North American; probably an abbreviation of disgusting, but compare scum and fuzz ■ Joseph Wambaugh: One white, bearded scuz in a dirty buckskin vest and yellow headband. (1972)


wank (1970) British; from the verb wank masturbate ■ Peter Laurie: Fred’s counsel is a fat wank. (1970)

shag (1971) From the notion of one who shags (= copulates with) another. ■ Kingsley Amis: The moustached shag and the flat-chested bint . . . had moved away from the bar with their drinks. (1978)

wanker (1972) British; from earlier sense, masturbator. ■ U. Holden: Her kiddies . . . rarely spoke except to mutter ‘Wanker’ or something crude. (1976)

suck (1974) Canadian; from the verb suck be contemptible, or abbreviation of suck-hole. ■ Citizen (Ottawa): A neighbor described Rob as ‘a quiet guy who was always getting put down a lot. Lots of people used to call him a suck . . . He didn’t do much socially or in the way of sports.’ (1975)

piss-artist (1975) British; from the probable earlier sense, drunkard. ■ Sounds: I am appealing to anybody who knows John and Murdoch of Erkshire Scotland. You know, those piss-artists, protozoans who wrote that letter about a rock band classification. (1977)


scrote (1977) British; probably shortened from scrotum sac enclosing the testicles. ■ Clive Dawson: Who’d be crooked enough to employ an evil little scrote like you, Thomas? (1997)

tosser (1977) Probably from toss (off masturbate + er). ■ Guardian: Genrem forrad over’t half-way line, Machin, yer chuffin’ tosset, bawled one sage, clearly disturbed by Barnsley’s initial caution. (1991)


An unpleasant or despicable female person

The majority of opprobrious epithets applied to women contain, or can contain, some suggestion of immorality, particularly sexual promiscuity. For them, see under A promiscuous woman at Sex (pp. 67–8).

mare (1303) From earlier sense, female horse. ■ C. W. Ogle: Forgot her keys! Bah! These mares give me the creeps. (1953)

bitch (1400) In early use often applied specifically to a prostitute, and latterly often applied specifically to a malicious or spiteful woman; from earlier sense, female dog. ■ Evelyn Waugh: Mrs Cecil Chesterton was a bitch and a liar. I think you officiously make that clear. (1962)

cow (1696) ■ Doris Lessing: It’s just that stupid cow her mother. (1960)

madam (1802) Mainly applied specifically to a disrespectful young woman or girl. ■ John Wainwright: ‘She was a little madam. I couldn’t handle her.’ And, always, the fault wasn’t hers. (1983)

bat (1906) Often in the phrase old bat. ■ Sunday Times: If Riva is to be believed . . . the old bat was even more fearsome than the rest of us ever suspected. When Yul Brynner developed cancer, some years after breaking off a passionate affair with Dietrich, her sole comment was ‘goody, goody’. (1993)

moo (1967) British; often in the phrase silly moo; from earlier sense, cow, in allusion to cow unpleasant woman. ■ Funny Fortnightly: It was rustling you heard all right—I’m a rustler! And I’ve rustled you, silly moo! Hey! Gerroff! (1989)

Something unpleasant or undesirable

bitch (1814) ■ T. E. Lawrence: ‘She’ says the incarnate sailor, striking the gangway of the Iron Duke, ‘can be a perfect bitch in a cross-sea.’ (1931)

beast (1862) From earlier sense, unpleasant person. ■ H. C. Bunner: I’ve got to stay and finish my grind. It’s a beast. (1891)

cow (1864) Australian & New Zealand. ■ F. D. Davison: Looking for work’s a cow of a game! (1940)

bugger (1915) From earlier sense, unpleasant man. ■ Penguin New Writing: Drilling before breakfast’s a bugger, believe me. (1942)

bad news (1917) ■ Hugh Miller: Any kind of witness would be bad news on a job with such a tight specification. (1973)

bastard (1938) From earlier sense, unpleasant person. ■ Julian Maclaren-Ross: This bastard of a bump on the back of my head. (1961)

bummer (1966) Orig and mainly US; from earlier sense, bad experience caused by drugs. ■ Norman Mailer: It was a bummer. Hitchhiking over to the nuthouse, the whole day got lost. (1979)

An unpleasant experience

purgatory (1807) From earlier sense, place in which souls are purified. ■ Independent: ‘It’s purgatory for me,’ Higgins ranted on, ‘just being involved in the qualifying rounds at Stoke for two months, then this kind of thing happens.’ (1991)

nightmare (1827) From earlier sense, frightening or oppressive dream. ■ Ritchie Perry: The daily nightmare that many Paulistas called travelling home from work. (1976)

something nasty in the woodshed (1959) Applied to a traumatic experience or concealed unpleasantness in a person’s background; from the passage ‘When you were very small . . . you had seen something nasty in the woodshed’ in Stella Gibbons’s Cold Comfort Farm. (1932)

Something disgusting

turn-off (1975) From turn off repel. **New York Times**: Patrons dined on cervele Grenobloise. ‘Sounds better in French,’ said the chef. . . . ‘Brains is a turn-off.’ (1975)

Disgusting material

crud (a1508) Recorded once in the early 16th century, but not in regular use until the mid 20th century; variant of curd. **Guardian**: Dust off the habichi, scrape the crud off your tongs and fork, buy some charcoal to replace the bag you left out in the rain last summer. (1992)
go (1900) Orig US; applied mainly to viscous material; origin uncertain; perhaps a shortening of burgoo type of stew. **Stella Gibbons**: He . . . began to measure and mince vegetable scraps and scoop out grey, gritty, oily goo from a large tin. (1949)
dreck, drek (1922) From Yiddish.filth, dung • O. Hesky: Meat better than the usual drek we get. (1967)
gunge (1965) Mainly British; origin uncertain. **Listener**: Adam and Eve emerge from a transportable saucer of murky gunge. (1985)
grunge (1968) Probably back-formation from grungy. **American Speech**: There’s grunge in the bottom of my Dr. Pepper bottle! (1977)
grot (1971) Back-formation from grotty. **John Wain**: This place, the tawdriness, the awful mound of grot it all is, stands between me and feeling anything. (1982)
squizz, scuzz (1988) Orig and mainly North American; from earlier sense, unpleasant or disgusting person. **Margaret Atwood**: In the larger picture, we’re just a little green scuzz on the surface. (1988)

An unpleasant place

hell-hole (1886) From earlier sense, the pit of hell. **J. B. Priestley**: Go and drudge in some hell-hole of an office. (1945)

hole (1876) From earlier sense, cramp and unpleasant lodging. **Guardian**: Yesterday they were fighting again, but it’s quiet today. I’m ready to go back, bombs and all. It’s better than this hole. (1981)
dump (1915) Orig US; from earlier sense, cheap lodging-house. **Daily Express**: A uniformed cop patrolled the bar . . . I didn’t think that mattered much at a dump like this. (1942)
flea-bag (1941) From earlier sense, verminous lodging-house. **Elaine Dundy**: God, how I hated Paris! Paris was one big flea-bag. (1958)
arsehole of the universe (1950) **Dylan Thomas**: This arsehole of the universe . . . this . . . fond sad Wales. (1950)

the armpit of . . . (1968) Orig US. **Washington Post**: Your alma mater is still the armpit of the universe. (1986)

shit-hole (1969) From earlier sense, anus. **Zigzag**: John went to a Catholic school in Caledonian Road—’a right shit-hole’. (1977)
piss-hole (1973) **R. Gadney**: Let’s get out of this pissethole. (1974)

To be unpleasant

stink (1934) **C. D. Simak**: ‘How did you know that?’ ‘Just a guess,’ I said. ‘This whole thing stinks to heaven.’ (1963)

suck (1971) Probably from earlier sense, practise fellatio or cunnilingus. **M. Gordon**: All the hotels have the same pictures. The last one, the food sucked. (1978)

to repel

gross out (1965) Orig and mainly US; from gross disgusting. **Cyra McFadden**: I can dig it. They’re grossing me out too, you know? (1977)
turn off (1965) **Daily Telegraph**: [He] is kinkly for short-back-and-sides and turned off by long-haired television performers. (1972)

10. Contemptibleness

A contemptible person

trash (1604) Originally applied to a worthless or contemptible person, but in modern use usually applied collectively to such people; from earlier sense, refuse, rubbish. **Independent**: $10 was pocket money to jeans-wearing, Biro-owning Western trash. (1991)
tick (1631) From earlier sense, parasitic insect-like creature. **Roger Fulford**: How often in those early days did I hear those ominous words ‘that awful little tick Waugh’. (1973)

snout (1809) From earlier sense, nasal mucus. **Jennie Melville**: We’ve let the boy go home on bail . . . Miserable little snout, but no real harm in him. (1981)
squirt (a1825) British; applied to a small or insignificant person; perhaps related to the obsolete dialectal verb squat: **E. E. Coxhead**: It’s impossible, darling. That—that little squirt—and Peggy Jacobs! (1947)
soor (1848) Anglo-Indian, dated; from Hindi suär pig. **Frank Richards**: You black soor, when I order you to do a thing I expect it to be done at once. (1936)
11. Ineptness

**squirt (1848)** Orig US; applied to someone insignificant but presumptuous. Nicholas Blake: It's about time that squirt Wemys was suppressed. (1935)

**scut, scutt, skut (1873)** Perhaps ultimately from *sout* mock, deride, of Scandinavian origin. J. B. Cooper: The likes of them skuts to find fault with my cookin'—'deed it's more than O'Callaghan himself would dare do. (1916)


**piss-ant (1903)** Now mainly US; from earlier sense, ant, influenced by *piss* urinate. F. van W. Mason: You stole my skelp, you no-count piss-ant. (1972)

**tinhorn sport (1906)** US. Robertson Davies: Swifty Dealer, the village tin-horn sport. (1975)

**pipsqueak (1910)** From *pip* high-pitched sound + squeak. Hartley Howard: For a little pipsqueak you make a big squeak. (1973)

**zob (1911)** US, dated; origin unknown. Sinclair Lewis: I don't know how you fellows feel about prohibition, but the way it strikes me is that it's a mighty beneficial thing for the poor zob that hasn't got any will-power but for fellows like us, it's an infringement of personal liberty. (1922)

**trip-hound (1923)** Ngaio Marsh: You damned little trip-hound. (1937)

**kye (1928)** Nautical, dated; origin unknown, but compare British dialect kyish dirty

**slug (1931)** From earlier sense, shell-less mollusc. G. & S. Lorimer: 'He didn't love me and I felt pretty bad about it!' The complete and utter slug! (1940)

**snurge (1933)** Origin unknown. Michael Gilbert: He's such a little snurge... He's so bogus. (1955)

**zombie (1936)** Applied to a dull or apathetic person; from earlier sense, re-animated corpse. *Guardian*: Mr. Dawson describes the committee as a parliament of zombies. (1984)

**douche-bag (1942)** US; from earlier sense, apparatus used for douching. *Punch*: 'Send them away!' she hissed. 'If they are found here, those douche-bags will incriminate us all.' (1958)

**sad sack (1943)** Mainly US; originally applied to a blundering serviceman; from a cartoon character created by the US cartoonist G. Baker. Marshall McLuhan: Model mother saddled with a sad sack and a dope. (1951)

**yuck (1943)** Orig US; origin unknown. John Wainwright: Three no-good yucks had felt like playing footsie with the law. (1979)

**snotnose (1949)** Compare earlier sense, inexperienced person. Ed McBain: He was not enjoying this little snotnose . . . and the college girl talk. (1963)

**kvetch, kvetch (1964)** US; from Yiddish *Quetsche* crusher, presser

**schmegeggy, schmegegge, etc. (1964)** US; origin uncertain; perhaps influenced by *piss* urinate. *Chicago Tribune*: Any community that can knowingly elect a kvetch like Edwin Eisenraeth as alderman obviously has a precious sense of fun. (1990)


**Contemptible**


**D. Sears**: A few general comments on sad-assed, puritanical sons-of-bitches individually and collectively. (1974)
Ineffectually, incompetently

not for toffee (1914) Used to denote incompetence, especially after can. ■ Margaret Kennedy: Those dreamy girls you get in every Drama School who can't act for toffee. (1951)

An ineffectual or incompetent person

duffer (c1730) Perhaps from Scots doofart stupid person, from doup' spiritless. ■ G. Smith: While the truly great... go unkindled there is no shortage of such acadollies for the second-rate: duffers like Henry Newbolt and John Squire. (1984)

plug (1848) Mainly US: perhaps from earlier sense, poor or worn-out horse (although this is not recorded until later). ■ Redbook Magazine: You—you broke reed! You doormat! Old steady, unimaginative, dumb plug! (1948)

scissor-bill, scissors-bill (1871) Mainly US: from earlier sense, type of bird (the skimmer or shearwater). ■ R. P. Hobson: The hell you did, you big scissorsbill, you stepped on my bum leg and my hand both. (1961)

greek (1876) Orig British, dialect; variant of earlier geck in same sense, apparently from Low German geck. ■ Barr & Popp: When I looked in the mirror, I saw a fuzzy-haired geek with a silly smile. (1987)

ham (1882) Applied to an incompetent performer, especially an actor who overacts; probably short for obsolete US slang hamfatter ineffective performer. ■ Times: 'He thought I was an old ham,' says Miss Seyler indulgently. (1958)

stiff (1882) Orig US; compare earlier sense, corpse. ■ Sun: A bad customer... a stiff who orders the table d'hote and nothing to drink. (1967)

nebbish, nebbishy, nebbishe, nebbisher, nebish (1960) From nebbish ineffectual or incompetent person. ■ Atlantic Monthly: Paranoid psychopaths who, after nebbish lives, suddenly feel themselves invulnerable in the certain wooing of sweet death. (1959)

wimpy (1967) Orig US; from wimp ineffectual person. ■ New York Times: I was this little wimpy kid in elementary school and high school. (1984)

untoverall (1969) Applied to someone who is poorly co-ordinated or not in control of their faculties. ■ Jilly Cooper: She felt staggeringly unoverall. . . She had a blinding headache. (1976)

drooby (1972) Australian; from droob ineffectual person. ■ Sydney Mail (Brisbane): The party was rotten—drooby creeps, spooks, twits, bores etc. (1981)

nerdy (1978) Orig US; from nerd ineffectual person. ■ Guardian: She goes for a really tubular type of dude, the kind of hot babe with a cute butt who isn't all hairy and gross but isn't any nerdy zod either. (1982)

spastic (1981) From earlier sense, affected by spastic paralysis. ■ Sunday Telegraph: They never hear folk music, and it takes an exceptional child not to dismiss the classics as 'boring' and 'spastic'. (1985)
incompetence, especially as P.O. Prune; from earlier sense, dried plum. ■ Nevil Shute: He wished . . . that he knew what it was that worried her, whether it was some prune that she had left at her last station. (1944)

gazook (1901) Dated, orig US; origin unknown, but compare gazabo fellow, guy and gazob fool ■ B. Penton: Look at that poor gazook, Sambo. He’d call your old man God Almighty even if he starved him to death. (1936)
rabbit (1904) Applied to an unskilful player of a game ■ Agatha Christie: He could get no fun out of playing [golf] with a rabbit like me. (1976)

these were lapsed Jews, Australian; probably from American Speech: ■ Don’t be a droop. (1932)

wimp (1920) From the notion of being ‘wet’ drip (1932) poop-stick (1930) Dated; probably from poop excrement + stick, but compare poop ineffectual person. ■ Philip MacDonald: ‘You make me sick!’ he said. (1968)


poop (1915) Perhaps short for nimnocompo ■ Robert Dentry: Those stupid bloody Yankee poops blew the panic whistle and the whole shebang went sky-high. (1971)
punk (1917) Mainly US; compare earlier sense, passive male homosexual, tramp’s young companion ■ Ernest Hemingway: This fellow was just a punk . . . a nobody. (1933)

wimp (1920) Orig US; often applied specifically to a weak ineffectual man; origin uncertain; perhaps from whimper make weak cries ■ She: Masseur! Huh! He sounds a right little wimp. (1985)

palooka (1925) Mainly US; origin unknown ■ New Yorker: A romantic fable about a Philadelphia palooka who gains his manhood. (1977)

prick (1929) Applied to an ineffectual or incompetent man; from earlier sense, penis ■ Elleston Trevor: We don’t like being pushed around by an incompetent prick of a commanding officer. (1967)

poop-stick (1930) Dated; probably from poop excrement + stick, but compare poop ineffectual person. ■ Philip Mac Donald: ‘You make me sick!’ he said. (1932)

drip (1932) From the notion of being ‘wet’ (= ineffectual) ■ Joanna Cannan: Of all the wet drips! (1951)

droop (1932) US ■ American Speech: Don’t be a droop. (1940)

stumblebum (1932) Orig & mainly US; from the verb stumble + bum lazy person, loafer ■ Arthur La Bern: These stumble-bums may have stumbled across the real culprit. (1966)

droob, drube (1933) Australian; probably from droop ineffectual person ■ J. Jost: You’re not normal boy. . . . You’re a mug, a droob, a weak mess of shit! (1974)

mess (1936) ■ Muriel Spark: These were lapsed Jews, lapsed Arabs, lapsed citizens, runaway Englishmen, dancing prostitutes, international messes. (1965)

droopy-drawers (1939) Jocular; from earlier sense, someone whose drawers (= underpants) are too large or long, giving an impression of slovenliness or incompetence. ■ Anthony Gilbert: The neighbours round about thought what bad luck on that charming Mr. Duncan having a droopy-drawers for a wife. (1966)

pisher (1942) US; from earlier sense, bed-wetter; ultimately from Yiddish pisher one who urinates, from Middle High German pissen urinante ■ Ernest Tidyman: Then the marriage. Now that was really smart! Who could call him pisher now, with the Jewish princess on his arm? (1978)

shower (1942) British; applied collectively to a group of ineffectual or incompetent people, and hence (1949) to a single such person. ■ Observer. Some of the people who go out with the hounds these days are a shower. . . . We can’t have people turning up as if they have been wearing the same pyjamas for a month. (1973)

no-hoper (1944) Orig Australian; from earlier sense, racehorse with no chance of winning ■ R. Hall: That no-hoper! . . . If you turn out like him I shan’t go on lettin you buy me a beer. (1982)

wet fish (1944) ■ Agatha Christie: Audrey marry that wet fish? She’s a lot too good for that. (1944)

turkey (1951) US; from earlier sense, something inferior or unsuccessful ■ Time: ‘Come on, you turkeys! Let’s speed this show up!’ cries an irreverent observer. (1978)

nerd, nurd (1957) Mainly US; often applied specifically to someone studious but socially inept; origin uncertain; sometimes taken as a euphemistic alteration of turd, though perhaps simply derived from the name of a character in the children’s book If I Run the Zoo (1950) by ‘Dr. Seuss’ ■ M. Howard: He feels . . . like a total nerd in his gentleman’s coat with the velvet collar. (1986)

lame (1959) US, mainly Black English; applied to a socially unsophisticated person, one who does not fit in with a particular social group; from lame socially inept ■ Joseph Wambaugh: They’re a couple of lames trying to groove with the Kids. They’re nothing. (1972)

nebbich, nebbish, nebbishe, nebbisher, nebish (1960) From Yiddish nebech poor thing ■ Jewish Chronicle. The kings [in this Jewish chess-set] are dead, long live the nebbishes (the deprived, signifying the decline of royal power). (1973)

spaz, spas (1965) Abbreviation of spastic (not recorded in this sense until later) ■ Guardian: Come onnnnn—bag your face, you geek, you grody totally spacer. (1982)

pogo (1972) Australian; applied to an ineffectual or incompetent man; short for pogo stick, rhyming slang for prick ■ J. J. Coe: ‘We’re on road clearing again. . . . ’What about bloody 7 section doing it . . . ?’ ‘Yeah, bloody pogo’s.’ (1982)

spastic (1981) From earlier sense, person affected by spastic paralysis
big girl's blouse, great girl's blouse (1983)  
British; applied to an ineffectual male, often with a suggestion of effeminacy  
- Outdoor Walking: I was, I explained, a bit of a big girl's blouse when it came to climbing ledges, sheer drops, being underwater for unreasonable lengths of time and squeezing into jam jar sized spaces. (1992)

wuss (1990)  
Orig & mainly US; origin unknown  
- Sunday Times: Last seen here as George Wallace's presidential running-mate, he manages to make the far-right Wallace seem a pinko wuss. (1996)

anorak (1991)  
British; applied to someone obsessively involved with something (e.g. a hobby) that is generally regarded as boring or unfashionable; from the stereotypical wearing of anoraks by certain types of hobbyist (e.g. train-spotters)  
- Empire: Any schoolboy or classics anorak will tell you that the old sheet-wearer was around a good 400 years before boring old monotheism. (1993)

Physically ineffectual; clumsy, awkward  

butter-fingered (1615)  
Denoting a propensity for dropping things; from the notion of having greasy fingers from which things easily slip  
- Harpers & Queen: Quarry-tiled kitchen floors [are] lethal if one is butter-fingered with china. (1992)

flat-footed (1912)  
Denoting an inability to move quickly or adroitly; from earlier sense, having flat feet  
- Sunday Times: With the Rovers' defence flat-footed, Cox shot home from six yards. (1993)

ham-handed (1918), ham-fisted (1928)  
From the notion of having large clumsy hands, like hams  
- C. Dixon: The pilot with sensitive hands is a better pilot than one with non-sensitive hands. The latter are bluntly called 'ham-handed'. (1930)  
- C. S. Forester: God damn and blast all you hamfisted yokels. (1938)

mutton-fisted (1918)  
Dick Francis; I worked in a slovenly fashion and rode... like a mutton-fisted clod. (1965)

12. Sentimentality  
Excessively sentimental  

mushy (1870)  
From earlier sense, soft  
- G. S. Porter: They formed a circle around Sally and Peter and as mushy as ever they could they sang, 'As sure as the grass grows around the stump, You are my darling sugar lump,' while they danced. (1913)

slippery (1883)  
Orig US; from earlier sense, wet  
- Rosamond Lehmann: Kate said with a funny look, as if she were saying something a tiny bit embarrassing, on the slippery side. (1936)

slushy (1889)  
Orig US; from earlier sense, soft and wet  
- Sunday Times: At the album's other extreme, slushy ballads, such as Heal The World, were plainly aimed at white suburban mums and children. (1993)

soppy (1918)  
From earlier sense, wet  
- Daily Telegraph: Lord Parker, Lord Chief Justice, said yesterday he deplored the tendency towards 'soppy and sentimental' treatment of children in juvenile courts. (1961)

A clumsy or awkward person  

clod-hopper (1824)  
Applied to someone who moves clumsily or without skill; from earlier sense, ploughman  
- Washington Post: I hear it said all the time... that B. J. Armstrong is average, that John Paxson can't play defense or get his own shot, and that the rest of the bench is a bunch of clodhoppers. (1993)

butter-fingered (1837)  
Applied to someone liable to drop things, often specifically catches at cricket; from earlier butter-fingered liable to drop things  
- Guardian: The stubblers and butterfingers among us will acquire the grace and elegance of the most accomplished actors, gymnasts and dancers. (1952)

To be clumsy or awkward in movement  

have two left feet (1915)  
- Diana Ramsay: Clumsy... you've got two left feet. (1975)

Something ineffectual  

kludge, kluge (1962)  
Orig US; applied to an ill-assorted collection of poorly matching parts, and hence more specifically (1972) to a computer system or program that has been improvised or badly put together; coined by J. W. Granholm with ironic reference to German klug clever  
- Which Micro?: The QL is at last available and without 'kludges' tacked on to make it work. (1984). Hence the verb kludge, kluge to improvise with a kludge (1962)  
- QL User: Its history was most unfortunate to start with: production delays, 'kludged' machines, extra ROMs hanging off the back. (1984)

To expend effort ineffectually or futilely  

flog a dead horse (1872)  
Compare earlier mount on a dead horse in same sense  
- Cabinet Maker & Retail Furnisher: If this is the case, we are flogging a dead horse in still trying to promote the scheme. (1971)

goopy (1935)  
From earlier sense, sticky  
- Ronald Knox: What you mean by a dance is the wireless in the hall playing revolting stuff and you lounging round in pairs and feeling all gooey. (1948)

schmaltzy (1935)  
Orig US; from schmutz excessive sentiment + -y  
- T. P. Whitney: Yuri painted for nothing schmaltzy pictures such as Nero's Feast and the Chorus of Elves and the like for the German officers on the commandant's staff. (1974)

icky, ikky (1939)  
Origin uncertain; perhaps a baby-talk alteration of sticky or sickly  
- Charlie Chaplin: He must hide his blindness... His stumblings and butterfingers among the bench is a bunch of clodhoppers. (1993)

twee (1956)  
From earlier, appreciative sense, sweet, charming; ultimately from tweet, representing a child's pronunciation of sweet  
- Listener: Mike Nichols's thriller-fantasy about dolphins...
should be as nauseatingly twee as the worst Disney—but it isn’t. (1983)

yechy, yecchy (1969) US; from the exclamation yech expressing disgust + -y

yucky, yukky (1970) From the exclamation yuck expressing disgust + -y. Oxford Times: The sweetness is fused with enough real feeling to avoid being sugary, except for the rather yucky spoken introduction to ‘Meadows of Springtime’. (1977)

Excessive sentiment

gush (1866) From earlier sense, an effusion • Independent: Most of the interviews elicit embarrassing gush or non-committal plaudits (Spielberg on Jones: ‘Quincy is just, like, a spraygun of love’). (1991)
schmaltz, shmaltz (1935) Orig US; from German and Yiddish schmalz fat, dripping, also used in English (1931-) in the sense ‘melted chicken fat’ • Spare Rib: She... is saying with appalling schmaltz that ‘Josh’s warm, funny smile was where I lived now’. (1977)

slush (1937) From earlier sense, rubbishy writing, nonsense, influenced by the notion of ‘wetness’ • Observer: The ending is purest slush, and there are some cheap dramatics in the camera work. (1961)

goo (1951) From earlier sense, sticky substance • Times Literary Supplement: He writes about subjects which, in less skilled hands, have so often and so embarrassingly degenerated into a mess of gush and goo. (1959)

13. Fairness & Unfairness

See also Equally or fairly shared at Sharing, Distribution (p. 431).

A fair chance, fair treatment

a fair (or even, good) shake (1830) US • Studs Terkel: I’d like to see an America where so much power was not in the hands of the few. Where everybody’d get a fair shake. (1980)

fair do’s (1859) Orig dialect; plural of do action, nominalized form of the verb do • Andrew Garve: There’s no ‘nobs’ there; it’s fair do’s for everybody. (1951)

fair dinkum (1890) Australian, dated; from British dialect dinkum work, due share of work; compare later sense, genuine • J. Harpur: Then Gallant Captain Albert With a love for what is right, Jumped in to see fair dinkum And to try and stop the fight. (1924)

a (fair) go (1904) Australian & New Zealand • Advertiser (Adelaide): Stop whingeing and give a bloke a go, mates. (1969)

a fair crack of the whip (1924) Orig Australian • Lawson Glassop: I am sorry to have to tell you that the Lord’s had a fair crack of the whip and He’s missed the bus. (1944)

To sentimentalize

schmaltz, shmaltz (1936) Orig US; often followed by up; from schmaltz excessive sentiment • Audrey Laski: He... tried to lighten his touch; no use giving this visitor the notion that they schmaltzed it up. (1969)

An excessively sentimental person

softy, softie (1886) Compare earlier sense, weak-minded person • Dorothy Halliday: You didn’t know Daddy like I did. He was an awful old softie inside. (1970)
sob sister (1912) Orig US; originally applied specifically to a female journalist writing sentimental articles • Sun (Baltimore): Forecasting opposition to his plan by ‘sob-sisters’ Goodwin said ‘it wouldn’t do any harm to give these sob-sisters a couple of wallops too’. (1939)

A self-pitying person

wet leg (1922) • Times Literary Supplement: We know how much Auden hated wet-legs, how constantly he repeated his many litanies of his own good fortune. (1981)

(A) sentimental narrative

sob story (1913) Applied to an account intended to evoke a sympathetic response • Guardian: Any Russian will fall for a sob story if treated right. (1992)
sob stuff (1918) • Ngaio Marsh: He puts on a bit of an act like a guide doing his sob-stuff over Mary Queen of Scots in Edinburgh Castle. (1978)

Unfair, unreasonable

not cricket (1851) From the notion that cricket is always played fairly • Van Dine: It didn’t seem cricket to leave the poor devil there. (1930)

below the belt (1890) From the notion of punching an opponent below the waist (and particularly in the area of the testicles), which is against the rules in boxing • Guardian: Labour published figures last week showing that the Tory government have closed more grammar schools in the last 20 years than Labour has. Now that was below the belt. (1992)

red-hot (1896) Australian • Arthur Wright: ‘It’s red ‘ot,’ put in Dave, ‘th’way these ’ere owners makes er pore man give ‘em a lump in th’ sweep.’ (1907)

tough (1929) Often followed by on • P. G. Wodehouse: ‘I suppose it’s because I’m rather an out-size and modelled on the lines of Cleopatra. ’Tough!’ ’You bet it’s tough. A girl can’t help her appearance.’ (1929)

Something disappointingly unfair

swizzle (1913) British, mainly schoolchildren’s slang; probably an alteration of swindle • Anthony Buckeridge: It was a rotten swizzle, sir, because we flew through low cloud and we couldn’t see a thing. (1950)
swizz, swiz (1915) British, mainly schoolchildren's slang; shortened from swizzle
■ Roy Fuller: He's given him not out. What a sodding swiz. (1959)

Unfair treatment

tickled, tickled pink, tickled to death (1956), on cloud seven (1959)
Orig US, jazz slang; applied to gone (1946)
Dated; applied to someone sent (1940)
British, orig services' slang; up (1942)
Denoting a feeling of elation or over the moon (1936)
Compare earlier jump
bucked (1907) British, dated; from buck (up cheer up + -ed) ■ Punch: I am so bucked that you have asked me what to wear when you are accompanying at the concert next month. (1928)
tickled, tickled pink, tickled to death (1907) ■ P. G. Wodehouse: Your view, then, is that he is tickled pink to be freed from his obligations? (1950) ■ Elmore Leonard: 'I'm tickled to death I'm talking to you,' Mr. Perez said . . . smiling into the telephone. (1977)
over the moon (1936) Compare earlier jump over the moon be delighted ■ John Brown: He goes back there. She's over the moon, of course, and off they go to parties. (1972)
up (1942) Denoting a feeling of elation or euphoria ■ Gossip: He was very up about his job (in the CBS studio mailroom) and people in general. (1981)
on cloud seven (1956), on cloud nine (1959)
on cloud seven US; denoting extreme or complete happiness; compare non-slang seventh heaven state of utter happiness ■ Sunday Times: 'The prime minister was on cloud nine,' said a member of the British team. 'Everything went according to plan and better.' (1993)
chuffed (1957) British, orig services' slang; probably from British dialect chuff pleased ■ Crescendo: I cannot express too much just how 'chuffed' I am with the drums. (1967)

Euphorically happy, elated, ecstatic

sent (1940) Dated; applied to someone completely enthralled or entranced, especially by rhythmic music, drugs, etc.; from the past participle of send delight ■ Spectator: The girls wore thick eye-makeup and 'sent' expressions. (1958)
gone (1946) Orig US, jazz slang; applied to someone completely enthralled or entranced, especially by rhythmic music, drugs, etc. ■ News Chronicle: The jazz-loving 'hep-cat' who claims that the music 'sends' him until he is 'gone'. (1959)

To treat unfairly
do the dirty on (1914) ■ J. B. Priestley: Anyhow they did the dirty on yer. (1929)
shaft (1959) Orig & mainly North American; from the notion of inserting a pointed object into someone ■ Official Report of Debates, Canadian Senate: As I have told my constituents in Hamilton, Ontario, which seems to have been continually shafted by this government. (1970)

14. Pleasure, Enjoyment

Happy, pleased
chirpy (1837) Applied to someone who is cheerful or merry; from chirp make the sound of a bird + -y ■ Punch: 'I'm tickled to death I'm talking to you,' Mr. Perez said . . . smiling into the telephone. (1977)
as happy as Larry (1905) Orig Australian; applied especially to someone whose happiness cheers others; often in the phrase little ray of sunshine ■ Celia Framlinc: Milly rather fancied herself in the rôle of little ray of sunshine to brighten his declining years. (1972)
ray of sunshine (1915) Often applied to one whose happiness cheers others; often in the phrase little ray of sunshine ■ Daily Mail: He's given him not out. What a sodding swiz. (1959)

A happy person
yum-yum (1885) Often applied specifically to love-making; reduplication of the interjection yum expressing pleasurable anticipation ■ Aldous Huxley: Enjoying what she called 'a bit of yum-yum'. (1939)
whooppee (1930) From make whooppee have fun ■ Mary Soames: The evening broke up about midnight, in a general atmosphere of whooppee and goodwill. (1945)
jollies (1957) Mainly in the phrase get one's jollies ■ Surfer Magazine: The announcer acted like this is where all of the surfers go after dark to get their jollies. (1968)

A life of pleasure

the life of Riley (or Reilly) (1919) Applied to an enjoyable carefree existence; from the common Irish surname: the phrase is said to come from one of a number of late 19th-century songs, but was popularized by H. Pease's My Name is Kelly (1919) ■ J. B. Priestley: The life of Reilly, which some people imagine me to lead, has been further away than a fading dream. (1949)

A euphoric state

high (1953) Applied especially to such a state induced by drugs ■ Mail on Sunday: Another driver on a high was Britain's Martin Brundle. His Brabham Yamaha was a splendid 10th—his best of the season. (1991)

A good time; a spree; a party
do (a1824) British; applied to a party or similar social occasion; from earlier sense, something done ■ M. Kerr: Her family has a 'do' every year on the anniversary of the day her mother's father died. (1958)
flying (1827) Applied to a brief period of self-indulgence or pleasure, often with the implication of a sexual liaison. "Guardian: ‘You should see his girlfriend. She’s a cracker.’ ‘Well, if you feel the slightest desire for a little fling, don’t hold back on my account.’ (1991)

tea-fight (1849) Jocular, dated; applied to a tea-party. "Scotsman: The good people . . . organise a splendid weekly tea-fight and concert for our behoof. (1901)

a high old time (1858) Applied to a very enjoyable time. "Jean Potts: You probably had a high old time chasing blondes. (1955)

tear (1869) Applied to a spree, especially a drinking spree; mainly in the phrase *on a tear.* "Harper’s Magazine: Got me off on a tear somehow, and by the time I was sober again the money was ‘most all gone. (1996)

shindig (1871) Orig US; applied to a lively or noisy party; apparently from earlier sense, blow on the shins, from the notion of clumsy dancing at a party. "New Statesman: The competition among the ‘old nobility’ to attend what they termed ‘Aspers’ little shindig’ was so fierce that five private detectives were hired to keep out the unwelcome. (1959)

junket (1886) Orig US; applied to a trip, ostensibly undertaken for business or other serious purposes and paid for by an employer, government, etc., which is characterized by the self-indulgent pursuit of pleasure; from earlier non-slang sense, pleasure outing marked by eating and drinking. "Telegraph (Brisbane): United States delegates to the Inter-Parliamentary Union conference in Canberra are upset that their trip has been described as a junket. (1966)

beanfeast (1897) British; applied to a festive meal or other entertainment (in modern use usually with the implication of indulgence at others’ expense); from earlier sense, annual dinner given to employees by their employer, at which beans and bacon used to be regarded as an indispensable dish. "Guardian: To follow revelations about a curious friendship with a rich Texan playboy and a sponsored beanfeast in Florida was to ignore the basic tenets of PR. (1992)

jolly (1905), jolly-up (1927) jolly short for *jollification.* "Evelyn Waugh: Why can’t the silly mutt go off home and leave us to have a jolly up. (1932) "William Haggard: It would be a splendid wedding, the sort of big jolly Charles Russell enjoyed. (1971)

jollo (1907) Australian; often applied specifically to a party at which liquor is drunk; from *jollity* or *jollification + the Australian suffix -o.* "N. Pulliam: My mother used to ask some of the chappies in for a little week-end jollo—like a touch of home, you know. (1955)

a whale of a time (1913) Orig US; applied to a very enjoyable time. "Barbara Castle: They regaled us with drinks and a superb buffet and we had a whale of a time. (1980)

whoop-up (1913) Mainly North American; applied to a noisy celebration or party; from whoop it up have a noisy good time. "Dorris Heffron: I thought it quite . . . sensible of Big Point to have one great annual public whoop-up in which to give a little exercise to the witch and devil of one’s soul. (1976)

beanfeast (1914) British; applied to a festive entertainment often ending in rowdyism; abbreviation (originally among printers) of *beanfeast* festive occasion. "Listener: Dear-heart, I fear we will have to make a token appearance at the beanfeast those thrusting young String-Along’s are giving tonight. (1967)

bun-fight (1928) Jocular; applied to a tea-party; compare earlier obsolete bun-struggle and *bun-worry* in same sense.

whoopie (1929) Dated; applied to a lively or rowdy party; from *make whoopee* have fun. "Evelyn Waugh: Noel and Audrey are having a little whoopie on Saturday evening. (1930)

ding-dong (1936) Applied to a wild party or gathering; compare earlier sense, heated quarrel. "Ashley Smith: The sons and daughters . . . coming up for a ding-dong which went on till far into the night. (1961)

rort (1941) Australian; applied to a wild party; ultimately from *rotty fine, jolly, boisterous, noisy.* "George Johnston: I am not, strictly, a true devotee of the wild Australian ‘rort’ and always remorseful in my hangovers. (1963)

percolator (1946) US; often applied specifically to a rent party. "Stephen Longstreet: You could always . . . get together . . . and charge a few coins and have . . . a percolator. (1956)

shake (1946) US; often applied specifically to a rent party. "American Speech: There’s a shake at Jim’s house. (1977)

skiffle (1946) US, Black English; applied to a rent party; perhaps the original sense, from which ‘popular music based on jazz and folk music’ developed (although this is recorded earlier); ultimate origin unknown.

bash (1948) Orig US. "Sunday Times: He and Lloyd Webber go for the truly mega-bash, with 1,000-1,500 guests, sometimes a sit-down dinner, vast decorated venues and an upmarket guest list. (1991)

wingding (1949) Orig & mainly US; applied to a party or celebration, especially a wild one; compare earlier sense, drug addict’s seizure. "Arthur Hailey: How are you, Nim? Don’t see you often at these Jewish wingdings. (1979)

ding (1956) Australian; applied to a party or celebration, especially a wild one; perhaps from *ding-dong* wild party or wonging wild party. "Frank Hardy: It appears that he had drunk fifteen of them there drinking horns of beer at a Commemoration Day ding. (1967)

thrash (1957) Applied to a party, especially a lavish one. "Kinglsey Amis: No quiet family party at all, it had turned out, but a twenty-cover thrash. (1968)

blast (1959) Applied to a party, especially one that is very noisy or wild. "William Murray: Man, they’re throwing a monster blast over on the East Latego later . . . Everybody’s going. (1967)
rave (1960), rave-up (1967) Applied to a lively party or rowdy gathering. George Melly: We . . . organized all-night raves. (1965) Hugh Miller: Phyllis McBain is invited to an old-style rave-up, knickers and husbands optional. (1973)

knees-up (1963) British; applied to a wild party or similar gathering, typically featuring energetic dancing; from the title of the Weston & Lee song Knees up, Mother Brown! (1939) Len Deighton: As indigenous to London as a Saturday-night knees-up in the boozers. (1967)

smash (1963) North American; applied especially to a wild party. New Yorker: Every spring the Thrales gave a party. . . . They called this decorous event 'our smash'. (1977)

rage (1980) Australian & New Zealand; from rage have a good time. Skyline (Australia): Have a rage at our Castaway BBQ where the order of dress is strictly Castaway style! (1985)

A drinking spree
See under Alcohol (pp. 147–8).

An invitation to a party or similar event

stiffy (1980) British; applied to a formal invitation card; from the thick cardboard of which it is made. Daily Telegraph: Nigel Lawson had in hand a gilt-edged stiffy for a banquet at the Stock Exchange. (1987)

On a spree

on the tiles (1887) From the nocturnal activities of cats. Colleen McCullough: They all went out on the tiles. . . . It was some night. (1977)

on the razzle (1908) razzle short for razzle-dazzle excitement, bustle. John Le Carré: Your wife was in England, and you went on the razzle with Leo. (1968)

Someone on a spree

heller (1895) US; from hell (around + -er). Listener: Jack Harrick, the old hillbilly satyr or 'heller'. (1959)

raver (1959) Applied to someone who has a wild time, especially sexually. Sunday Mail (Brisbane): I have never analysed why, but many pop musicians are ravers—people who like to live it up—with a strong self-destructive streak. (1978)

rager (1972) Australian & New Zealand; from rage have a good time + -er. Sunday Mail (Brisbane): Downstairs on the boom-boom floor, the pretty ragers purred and boogied their youth into another dawn. (1988)

To please, delight

turn someone on (1903) Orig US; implying the arousing of someone's approving (often sexual) interest. News of the World: Dinner jacket, wing collar, and bow tie may not sound the sort of gear to turn on a teeny bopper. (1976)

make someone's day (1909) P. G. Wodehouse: That. . . will be great. That will just make my day. (1935)

grab (a1915) Orig US. Post (Cape edition): Elton John is big but if his music doesn't grab you then it just doesn't grab you. (1971)

panic (1927) US. Fred Astaire: After a while they were saying 'Dompah-Dompah-Dompah' with the music. . . . Adele absolutely panicked 'em. (1960)

slay (1927) Denoting overwhelming someone with delight, and often specifically convulsing them with laughter. Dick Francis: 'Oh God, Dolly, you slay me,' said Chico, laughing warmly. (1965)

send (1932) Orig US. dated; applied especially to pop music. Naomi Mitchison: So much modern poetry is ironic or deliberately held on a low note; that may be artistically admirable, but it doesn't send the reader. (1975)

kill (1938) Orig US; denoting overwhelming someone with delight, and often specifically convulsing them with laughter. J. D. Salinger: She killed Allie, too. I mean he liked her, too. (1951)

gas (1941) Orig US, jazz slang; probably from gas fun. Crescenda: A. . . . cadenza at the end of 'Watermelon man' which really gassed me. (1967)

knock someone out (1942) Orig US. Melody Maker: I only heard half an hour of Ornette but I wasn't knocked out at all. (1966)

groove (1952) Orig US, jazz slang; compare earlier sense, enjoy oneself. Esquire: Her singing grooved me. (1959)

flip (1956) US, jazz slang; compare earlier sense, become suddenly very excited, angry, etc.

Billie Holiday: Meade Lux Lewis knocked them out; Ammons and Johnson flipped them; Joe Turner killed them; Newton's band sent them. (1956)

One that pleases or delights; something enjoyable

sender (1935) Orig & mainly US, dated; applied especially to a pop musician; from send delight, enthrall + -er. Spectator: Fabian, the teenagers' sender, indistinguishable from Cliff Richards [sic]. (1960)

gasser (1944) Orig US, jazz slang; from gas please, delight, thrill + -er. Sunday Truth (Brisbane): Ron's Friday night show was a gasser. (1970)

groove (1946) Orig US, jazz slang; probably from in the groove performing well. Melody Maker: This is what makes the Indian one such a groove for me. (1967)

gas (c1953) Orig US, jazz slang; from gas please, delight, thrill. Frenz: The Stones. . . . were a screaming, speeding, sexy gas. (1971)

Turn-on (1969) From turn on excite someone's approving interest. David Hockney: A medieval city is unstimulating to me, whereas to others it might be a great turn-on. (1982)

Enjoyable

jolly (1949) Orig in standard use, but now colloquial. Independent: For her, Swan is going to be more than just a jolly night out. (1991)

fun (1950) Orig US. Adam Diment: I was remembering Marianne and the fun times we have had. (1968)
To enjoy oneself, have a good time, have fun; to go on a spree

**lark about; lark around** (1857) Denoting enjoying oneself doing silly or mischievous things; from earlier *lark* play tricks, frolic; ultimate origin uncertain; perhaps a modification of dialect *lark* play. Harry O'Reilly: 'I was always larking about and playing pranks on my schoolfellows.' (1889)

**paint the town red** (1884) Orig US; denoting going on a boisterous spree. J. Stern: 'This settlement...is descended on by four lumberjacks from Alaska, looking for somewhere to paint the town red with their savings.' (1994)

**hell around** (1897) Denoting living a life of disreputable pleasure. Emma Latham: 'If he did any helling around, it wasn't here,' the janitor continued. (1969)

**party** (1922) Orig and mainly US; from the noun *party*. Time: 'Outgoing Democratic National Committee Chairman Robert Strauss partied along with singer Helen Reddy and actor Alan Alda.' (1977)

**horse about; horse around** (1928) Orig US. Joseph Heller: 'They were having a whale of a good time as they helped each other set up their cots. They were horsing around.' (1961)

**make whoopee** (1928) Orig US; from *whoop* exclamation of delight. Quentin Crisp: 'It often happens that when we think we're making whoopee we're only making a whoop! instead,' I replied. (1984)

**beat it up** (1933) Denoting having rowdy fun, typically resulting in breakages. Daily Telegraph: 'What sort of noise did the neighbours complain about? Did the Purdums and their friends beat it up a little in the evenings?' (1958)

**whoop it up** (1935) Orig US; compare earlier, obsolete sense, create a disturbance. Listener. The broadcasting moguls and their groupies whooped it up in Edinburgh and other select watering holes. (1983)

**have a ball** (1938) Orig US; from the noun *ball* dance. Colin MacInnes: 'My poor old battered parent was really having a tremendous ball.' (1959)

**ball** (1942), **ball it up** (c1953) North American, ball (1942), ball it up (c1953) Denoting experiencing delight (as if) at something delicious. Henry Miller: 'I see Halvah and Baklava too. Goody goody!' (1953)

**get one’s rocks off** (1948) Orig US; often applied specifically to achieving sexual satisfaction; from rocks testicles. John Irving: 'I don’t get my rocks off by humiliating myself, you know.' (1978)

**groove** (1950) Orig US, jazz slang; sometimes in the phrase *groove it*; from earlier sense, play jazz with a swing. Guardian. I had the white Courreges boots, the minis, a huge beehive. I had more hair pieces than Elizabeth Taylor and I was really grooving. (1992)

**live it up** (1951) Orig US. Neil Armstrong: 'Those who lived it up in the cocktail lounges that night were also emotionally moved.' (1970)

**swing** (1957) Orig US. Wall Street Journal. He has to really swing: Motor-cycle racing, free-fall parachuting, etc. (1967)

**rave** (1961) Compare earlier rave lively party. Sunday Times: He started out by raving at weekends to Bridlington. (1965)

**loon** (1966) Denoting passing time in pleasurable activities; origin unknown. It Children and the younger adults alike looning about in wonderful costumes. (1971)

**bliss out** (1973) US; denoting reaching a state of ecstasy. New Yorker. Long-haired Westerners...bliss out or freaking out in the streets. (1986)

**let one’s hair down** (1974) Denoting uninhibited activity after a period of restraint; from earlier let one’s (back) hair down speak frankly. Guardian. We are concerned with antiquarianism and gender politics and like to let our hair down with a little shamanic (native American) chanting and drumming. (1992)

**rage** (1979) Australian & New Zealand. Sun. (Sydney): 'Over Christmas, I’ll probably be drinking too much and raging too much,' said the...breakfast Bimbo. (1986)

**To cheer up**

**perk up** (a1656) Used both intransitively and transitively. Sunday Times: As 1992 fades from view we are invited to perk up. Ignore last year's calamities...origin unknown; perhaps a modification of dialect *lark* play. B. von Huttten: Don't spoil it all by being weepy...Come, buck up, like a dear, and wish me joy. (1906) James Hackston: As if to buck us up after our recent loss, he promised us poultry on the table. (1966)

**To relax, take it easy**

**cool it** (1953) Orig US. Crescendo: Cool it will you? (1968)

**let it all hang out** (1970) Orig US

**mellow out** (1974) US; usually applied to relaxing under the influence of a drug. Cyra McFadden: How about we all smoke a little dope and mellow out, okay? (1977)

**chill out** (1980) Mainly US. Ski. The fat one whistles, waves madly and rudely ignores my fatherly admonitions to chill out. (1989)

Exclamations of delight or exultation

**goodie, goodee, goody goody** (1796) Henry Miller: 'I see Halvah and Baklava too. Goody goody!' (1953)

**whooppee** (1862) From whoop, an exclamation of excitement + -pee. Listener. You take your second MB...and once you’ve passed this—whooppee! You’re virtually guaranteed to qualify. (1974)

**yum, yum yumm** (1878), yummy (1899) Expressing delight (as if) at something delicious
to eat: imitative of the sound of contented eating  ■ Sara Paretsky: ‘Lotty talked her into ... making homemade enchiladas, yum-yum.’ ‘Yum-yum,’ the two little girls choused. (1982)

quaiss kitir (1898) British services' slang, dated; from Egyptian Arabic, literally ‘very nice’  ■ W. H. Canaway: ‘They’ll take us off to Germany and make us have rowt but sausages and beef.’ Sergeant Entwistle said, ‘Sausages and beer, kwais kitir, I wish I had some now instead of this muck.’ (1967)

good egg (1903) British, dated; expressing pleasure, satisfaction, or enthusiastic approval  ■ H. E. Bates: ‘It seems there’s a bar.’ ‘Good egg,’ Pop said. ‘That’s something.’ (1959)

whizzo, wizzo (1905) From whizz whizzing sound + -o  ■ Delano Ames: ‘It’s really a little surprise for the kiddies.’ ‘Whizzo!’ cried Anna, grabbing it. (1954)

hot dog (1906) US  ■ Terence Rattigan: Hot dog! There’s some Scotch. (1944)

yippee, yip-ee (1920) Orig US; perhaps from yay (1963)  ■ Nicolas Freeling: Buttered toast, and cherry cake, as well as Marmite. Goody, goody gumdrops. (1967)

right on (1925) Orig US

good-o, good-oh (1926) Orig Australian & New Zealand  ■ Frank Sargeson: Yes, good-oh, I said, and thanks very much. (1946)

15. Laughter & Amusement

To laugh

split one’s sides (1704) Implying hearty laughter

yock, yok (1938) Theatre slang, mainly US; compare English dialect yocha laugh  ■ New Yorker: There’d be Don, yocking it up like crazy, ... he’s so hysterical with joy laughter. (1951)

crack up (1942) Orig US; implying uncontrollable laughter  ■ Guardian: When the Rev Flasher (Sid James again) says ‘I would like to get my organ in use again’ we’re unlikely to crack up without Kenneth Williams’s eyebrows shooting up his forehead and his mouth forming a perfect ‘O’ in shocked disbelief. (1992)

laugh like a drain (1948) Implying loud, guffawing and often scornful laughter  ■ Kate Nicholson: Old Hester would laugh like a drain if she could see us singing hymns over her. (1986)

piss oneself (1951) From the notion of laughing so much that one urinates involuntarily  ■ Crisis: He’s yellin’ for help, but we were ‘legless an’ pissin’ ourselves laughin’’. (1989)

kill oneself (1956)  ■ Impact: I don’t know if I’d want to do it on my own. Ed and I are sympatico. We kill ourselves laughing. (1994)

fall about (1967) Implying uncontrollable laughter  ■ Times: The thought of producing a book in that time is enough to make us fall about. (1973)

wet oneself (1970) From the notion of laughing so much that one urinates involuntarily  ■ Guardian: It’s entirely possible that laughter is very good for you, but the language we use to describe its effects has more to do with death and damage than health and vitality: ‘I split my sides’... ‘this will kill you’... ‘I wet myself’. (1992)

yuck, yuk (1974) Mainly North American; perhaps related to yok laugh  ■ Time Out: Pryor has them yukking at whitey one moment and at themselves the next. (1975)

crease up (1977) Implying uncontrollable laughter; from the notion of laughing so much
that one bends over. • Guardian. The 12 contestants ... are all but crying with laughter. So are the producer, the researchers and the cameramen. ... Bowen plays it the same every day for two weeks and every day they crease up. (1992)

To cause to laugh

kill (1856) Implying convulsive laughter • Celia Dale: He kills me sometimes, the things he says. (1960)

break someone up (1895) Orig and mainly US, orig theatrical slang: compare earlier sense, upset • M. Wolff: It ... breaks me up. I can't help but laugh. (1956)

slay (1927) Implying convulsive laughter • D. O'Sullivan: They're fun. ... They'll slay you! (1975)

fracture (1946) US, orig theatrical slang; implying convulsive laughter, or more generally, great amusement. • Max Shulman: We're a riot, hey. We play all kinds of funny stuff. We fracture the people. (1951)

crack someone up (1966) Orig and mainly US • Guardian: Positively the last things They Never Said. ... 'The Sun and the Mirror please' (Bobby Robson); ... 'It cracked me up' (Graham Kelly). (1991)

crease (1977) Implying uncontrollable laughter; often followed by up; from the notion of laughing so much that one bends over. • Today: On the set of Family Business he had the cast and crew crease up with laughter with his impersonations. (1990)

Laughing

in fits (1856) • P. G. Winslow: There's one that likes a joke. Times I've had her in fits. (1980)

in stitches (1935) Implying uproarious laughter; often in the phrase have someone in stitches make them laugh in this way; from stitch sudden sharp pain in the side • D. M. Thomas: She had them in stitches with her absurd—but true—anecdotes. (1981)

rolling in the aisles (1940) Applied originally to an audience's uncontrollable laughter; usually in the phrase have people rolling in the aisles. • New Scientist: 'Chi-Lung'? 'A Chinese philosopher who apparently had the mandarins rolling in the aisles with his quips a couple of thousand years ago.' (1991)

A laugh

belly-laugh (1921) Applied to a deep reverberant laugh • Guardian. I think Chris Patten is a bit of a spoilsport. ... He has denied the British electorate and his erstwhile chums one last really good belly laugh. To see Chris Patten making a complete prat of himself with feathers and sword—it's quite something to miss. (1992)

yock, yok (1938) Theatrical slang, mainly US; probably from the verb yock laugh • New Yorker: A chuckle or even a short, muted yok is acceptable from time to time. (1965)

boff (1945), boffo (1992) US; origin unknown

yuck, yuk (1971) Mainly North American; probably from yuck it up fool around • National Observer: The biggest yuck of the night was when Mr. T. called Mrs. Llewelyn 'Mrs. Reweryn.' (1976)

Very funny or amusing

rich (1780) Now usually used ironically, to suggest unreasonableness • John Anderson: 'You have experienced a spontaneous demonstration of disapproval ... at your last recital.' 'Spontaneous! That's rich.' (1977)

killing (1844) From the notion of 'dying' with laughter • Muriel Spark: 'That's exactly what I expected you to say,' Marlene said. 'I think you're killing.' (1960)

priceless (1907) From earlier sense, invaluable • Shiva Naipaul: The European ... burst out laughing. ... 'Can you imagine how they must have ... rolled their eyes? Absolutely priceless.' (1978)

ripe (1923) Usually used ironically, to suggest unreasonableness • James Fraser: 'What the bloody hell are you playing at?' 'That's ripe considering you just near broke my arm!' (1969)

hysterical (1969) From earlier application to convulsive laughter • G. B. Trudeau: 'I'm afraid that's no joke, Miss.' 'It's not? But I was told it was hysterical.' (1980)

Fun, amusement

gas (1914) Anglo-Irish • Edna O'Brien: 'Let's do it for gas,' Baba said. (1962)

Something or someone very funny or amusing

screamer (1831) Dated; applied to a tale, etc. that raises screams of laughter

a scream (1888) From the notion of screaming with laughter • Guardian. Like the bearded lady, Lorna has curiosity value. ... 'Yes, isn't it a scream?' she says. (1974)

a riot (1909) Orig theatrical slang; applied to a very amusing performance, situation or person • John Snow: His rendering of 'Barnacle Bill the Sailor' was a riot and became his party piece. (1976)

a yell (1926) From the notion of yelling with laughter • E. E. Coxhead: All these doctors and their ecologists—what a yell. (1949)

a laugh (1930) Often used ironically • John Wain: 'Your friends paid for it.' That was a laugh. My friends ... were a one-way valve for drinks, cigarettes and loans. (1969)

a hoot (1942) Orig US; from the notion of hooting with laughter • Punch: All the chaps chuck their clubs in a heap, and the wives have to pick a club and go off with the owner; it's going to be an absolute hoot! (1969)

Laughter (1973) US • Washington Post: The voice belongs to ... the engineer-producer for this laugher of a recording session. (1977)

An amusing person

card (1905) British. dated: from earlier sense, person of the stated sort • W. B. Johnson: That old Witch-Hammer was really quite a card. (1942)
16. Gratitude

Thank you

ta (1772) British; baby-talk alteration of thank you
  D. Clark: ‘You know your way, don’t you?’ ‘Ta, love.’ (1981)
thanks awfully (1890) British     P. G. Wodehouse:
  The ‘Oh, thanks awfully’ which betrayed the other’s English
  origin. (1965)
thanks ever so, ta ever so (1914) British
  Joyce Porter: ‘Well, ta ever so! Be seeing you!’ (1970)
  Jessica Mann: ‘Thanks ever so,’ he said, his voice an
  octave higher than usual. (1972)
uts (1837) British

17. Depression

Depressed

down (1610)     Daily Mail: My favourite song is the
  Liverpool anthem: You’ll Never Walk Alone by Gerry and The
  Pacemakers. If you’re feeling really down, it can be very
  uplifting. (1991)
blue (1821)     From earlier senses, anxious,
  perturbed, disappointed     Wall Street Journal:
  David, dear boy, . . . I haven’t felt this blue since the fall of
  France. (1989)
weepy (1863) Denoting tearfulness     Washington Post:
  If I were the weepy type, she would have brought tears
  to my eyes. (1993)
mouldy (1876) Dated     Aldous Huxley: One feels a bit
  low and mouldy after those bouts of flu. (1956)
fee up (1914) From earlier sense, satiated, bored
  Daily Mail: I have been pretty low and fed-up at times and I
  am, frankly, still in the position of wondering whether I’m ever
  going to make it. (1991)
gutted (1981) British; from earlier sense, having
  the guts removed     Sun: I’ve heard nothing for four
  months. I’m gutted because I still love him. (1991)

Depression

the dumps (1714) Often in the phrase (down) in
  the dumps; from obsolete dump fit of melancholy
  or depression; probably ultimately of Low
  German or Dutch origin and a figurative use of
  Middle Dutch dump exhalation, mist, related to
  English damp     Wall Street Journal: Discouragement
  feeds on itself. The problem is, if people get down in
  the dumps, they stop selling. (1989)
the blues (1741) From earlier blue devils in same
  sense     New Statesman: The post-election blues are
  particularly prevalent this year. (1982)
the uglies (1846) N. Last: A gloom seems over us all.
  I’ve shaken off my fit of the uglies, but I felt I’d just like to
  crawl into a hole. (1939)
the hump (1873) British     T. S. Eliot: You seem to be
  wanting to give us all the hump. I must say, this isn’t cheerful
  for Amy’s birthday. (1939)
ta muchly (1970)
cheers (1976) British; from earlier use,
  expressing good wishes before drinking
  alcohol     R. Buckle: Do any small favour for a young
  Englishman these days and he will thank you by saying
  ‘cheers’. (1978)
thanks a bunch, thanks a bundle (1981)

Depressing, gloomy

down-beat (1952) Orig US     New York Herald-
  Tribune: That pictorially memorable march up the twilit hill of
  a dusty Southern town has an inexplicably plodding and down-
  beat air about it. (1955)

Something depressing

damper (1748) Mainly in the phrase put a damper
  on have a depressing effect on     Guardian: Ted will
  get number and number until he is . . . utterly numb and void.
  This put a bit of a damper on the wedding. (1992)
bummer (1966) Orig US; often applied
  specifically to a depressing experience induced
  by a hallucinogenic drug; from bum of low
  quality + -er     D. A. Dye: I ain’t no sooner off the chopper
  than I get a letter from my wife sayin’ she wants a fucking
  divorce. What a bummer, man! (1986)
downer (1967) Compare earlier sense,
  depressant drug     Oz: When I was in gaol they cut my
  hair very short. (1967)
hair, and that really was a downer. For four or five days I couldn’t eat or sleep. I couldn’t do nothing. (1971)

Someone depressing

See party pooper, wet blanket, and wet smack under Spoilsport at Spoiling, Ruination (p. 417).

A dreary(-looking) person

drear (1925) From the adjective dreary. H. G. Wells: The parade of donnish and scholastic drearies. (1936)

A dreary(-looking) person

Weeping

waterworks (1647) Often in the phrase turn on the waterworks start to cry. D. W. Smith: Course I was tactful. Didn’t stop the waterworks being turned on, though. (1986)

18. Hopelessness

not a leg to stand on (1594) Muriel Spark: She hasn’t a leg to stand on in the case. He’s divorcing her, she’s not divorcing him. (1960)

not a cat (in hell)’s chance (1796) Guardian: One seaman said the union had not ‘a cat in hell’s chance’ of beating the Government as well as the shipowners. (1965)

no chance, not a chance (1888)

Buckley’s (1895) Australian & New Zealand; in full Buckley’s chance, hope, etc.; used to denote a forlorn hope; origin obscure; perhaps from the name of William Buckley, a celebrated 19th-century Australian convict known as the ‘wild white man’ D’Arcy Niland: You reckon I haven’t got Buckley’s. (1955)

no earthly, not an earthly (1899) Hockey: The poor goal-keeper had not an ‘earthly’. (1907)

what a hope (1899) Cecil Day Lewis: ‘Well, you’d better start giving back the money . . . ’ jeered Tuppy. ‘What a hope!’ (1948)

on a hiding to nothing (1905) Orig horse-racing slang, denoting that a horse is expected to win easily, so that it gains no credit from victory, and is disgraced by defeat; from hiding punishment by beating; based on a commonly used formula (ten to one, etc.) for giving racing odds. Times: Derby know they are on a hiding to nothing

at Fourth Division Colchester, who have a reputation as giant-killers. (1977)

you can’t win (1926)

not a snowball’s chance (in hell) (1931) Arthur Hailey: ‘Told ‘em there wasn’t a snowball’s chance,’ a woman assistant dispatcher called over. (1979)

no hope, not a hope (in hell) (1933) Stella Gibbons: Not a hope . . . not a single bloody ghost of a hope in hell. (1959)

some hope(s) (1940) Fred Hoyle: I’d given them the idea I might come up with some explanation. Some hopes. (1966)

not have a prayer (1941) Alan Ross: He went for me. . . . He was a big lad, but he didn’t have a prayer. An amateur up against a professional almost never does. (1973)

One who is beyond hope

dead duck (1829) Orig US Guardian: It is not difficult to see Ron Dixon forsaking the Tories as a ‘dead duck’ in Liverpool and plumping for the Liberal Democrats. (1992)

gone goose, gone gosling (1830) Orig US J. & W. Hawkins: If my luck won’t hold . . . I’m a gone goose anyway. (1958)

goner (1847) From the adjective gone + -er. Ernest Bramah: If it failed it was—if one may be permitted the word in the excitement of the moment—a ‘goner’. (1930)

19. Confusion

Confused, bewildered

at sixes and sevens (1670) Also denoting disorganization or disorder; from the earlier phrase set on six and seven leave to chance, possibly a fanciful alteration of set on cinqe and sice (= five and six), a gambling term denoting hazarding everything on throwing a five and a six at dice. Sunday Times: So what if the government’s legal experts are at sixes and sevens about the Maastricht bill? (1993)
hung up (1945) Perhaps from hung up delay, detain. ■ Bernard Malamud: He was more than a little hung up, stupid from lack of sleep, worried about his work. (1971)

To confuse, bewilder

bamboozle (1712) From earlier sense, deceive, trick; ultimately probably of cant origin; compare obsolete ham hoax. ■ Elizabeth Gaskell: He fairly bamboozles me. He is two chaps. (1854)

flummox (1837) Origin unknown. ■ Economist. In Australia such information is made available by law without flummoxing everybody between Brisbane and Fremantle. (1987)

discombobberate (1838) US, dated; probably a jocular alteration of discompose or discomfit

throw (1844) Orig US; compare earlier throw someone out disturb someone's self-possession. ■ L. Kaufman: I knew my way around in a restaurant and a bill of fare. Sometimes, even those French dishes didn't throw me. (1950)

discombobulate (1916) Orig and mainly US; variant of discombobberate. ■ Ellery Queen: I don't want you people to be in any way discombobulated. (1970)

A scene of confusion

madhouse (1919) From earlier sense, mental hospital. ■ Radio Times: They [sc. chefs] roast and stew and bake in a kind of madhouse of shouted commands, cancelled orders and frayed tempers. (1973)

A moment of confusion

brainstorm (1907) British; applied to a brief mental aberration which causes one to do a foolish or untypical thing; from earlier sense, sudden violent mental disturbance. ■ Independent on Sunday: When he was at last introduced, Tufnell's very first ball induced a brainstorm in Lambert, who holeed out to cover. (1991)

20. Trouble

Trouble, harm, misfortune

merry hell (1911) Applied to great trouble, upheaval, or disturbance; often in the phrase raise (play, give, etc.) merry hell. ■ Bernard Ferguson: The Special Boat Squadron . . . was to play merry hell in the Eastern Mediterranean during the next two years. (1961)

a packet (1925) Usually in the phrase cop (catch, etc.) a packet suffer trouble or misfortune; from earlier sense, (a wound from) a bullet. ■ Anthony Price: We've been disbanded. . . . The same thing's happening to the 2nd Northants, they've caught a packet too. (1978)

grief (1929) Often in the phrase give (make, have, etc.) grief; from earlier sense, deep sorrow. ■ Face: Marm has had grief from snobby film critics and from the censorship lobby. (1989)

unshirted hell (1932) US. ■ Henry Kissinger: I've been catching unshirted hell every half-hour from the President who says we're not tough enough. (1979)

shtook, schtook, shtuck, schtuck, etc. (1936) Usually in the phrase in (dead) shtook in (serious) trouble; origin unknown (apparently not a Yiddish word). ■ John Gardner: You know I'm in schtuck with my bosses. (1978)

A setback

knock (1649) Often in the phrase take a knock suffer a setback. ■ Encounter: Like other institutions of the Establishment, it has taken a knock or two in recent years. (1959)

Temporary trouble

hiccup (1965) Orig US; applied to a temporary small problem or delay; from earlier sense, brief breathing spasm. ■ Business: We look at anomalies in past financial performance—to see whether, for example, there has been a hiccup in gross margins. (1990)
In trouble

in a pickle (a1620) • Jersey Evening Post: Don't leave jobs unfinished in order to start on something new, or you'll end up in a right old pickle. (1977)

in a hole (1762) • P. G. Wodehouse: 'Mr Bickersteth is in a hole, Jeeves, . . . and wants you to rally round.' 'Very good, sir.' (1925)

in hot water (1765) • Daily Mail: Another luxury hotel in Moscow has landed itself in hot water. (1991)

in Queer Street (1811) • John Wainwright: If Patstold talks, Webb's in queer street. (1980)

up a stump (1829) Orig & mainly US, dated • John Galsworthy: Look here, Uncle Soames, I'm up a stump. (1924)

up the spout (1829) From earlier sense, in pawn

in a fix (1834) Orig US; from obsolete fix condition, state • Kansas City Times: What a fix this old world might have been in if our boys had not made it safe for democracy. (1931)

in for (1835) Denoting that one is about to experience something unpleasant; sometimes in the phrase in for it about to experience something unpleasant • Guardian: If he goes outside something unpleasant • Ian Kemp: 'But what . . . if someone . . . gave him the money and support he needed?' 'We might be right in the poo.' (1976)

in Dutch (1851) Orig US • John Dos Passos: While I plodded around . . . trying to explain my position and getting myself deeper in Dutch every time I opened my face, I saw marvellous scenes. (1968)

in the cart (1889) British • J. B. Hobbs: We made 238, which was enough practically to put South Africa hopelessly in the cart. (1924)

in the soup (1889) Orig US • Listener: You find you may want to move a group of pictures . . . to a different part of the building, and if the rooms over there are designed for quite a different kind of picture, you're rather in the soup. (1968)

up against it (1896) Orig North American • Chambers's Journal: In Canadian phraseology, we were 'up against it' with a vengeance! (1910)

up the (or a) pole (1896) • Richard Beilby: We'd 'a' been up the pole without him, that's why we didn't send him on his way. (1970)

for it (1909) Orig services' slang: applied to someone in danger of getting into trouble, and often specifically of being punished • War Illustrated: Then it is that he realises so acutely that if anything happens to his pilot he is 'for it', as the current flying phrase has it. (1915)

in a jam (1914) Orig US • New Statesman: He knew instinctively that in a jam it was not done to let down one's own side. (1958)

up the creek (without a paddle) (1918) • Ian Kemp: 'You okay?' asked Donovan. . . . 'I thought you were properly up the creek.' (1969)

for the high jump (1919) British; applied to someone in danger of being severely punished; in early use often applied to someone likely to be hanged • Eric Ambler: If we fall down on this job . . . it's me for the high jump. (1936)

on the ropes (1924) Implying that someone or something is in serious trouble and near defeat; from the notion of a boxer so weakened that he has to lean on the rope surrounding the ring • Tablet: There is talk that the Kennedy campaign is not just 'on the ropes', but that it is plain dead. (1960)

up a gum-tree (1926) Compare earlier Australian up a gum-tree in another place and US up a tree trapped, in difficulties • Encounter: Until someone solves the problem of an English idiom we're going to be up a gum-tree. (1959)

in a spot (1929) • Erle Stanley Gardner: He was afraid his father would find out. He was in a spot. So he turned to the troubleshooter. (1967)

in the shit (1937) Also in the phrase in deep shit in serious trouble • B. W. Aldiss: We were all in the shit together and it was madness to try and escape it. (1971)

up shit creek (1937) • Private Eye: If they'd followed her this far up shit creek it's a long way to walk back. (1980)

in the pooh, in the poo (1961) A euphemistic substitute for in the shit; from pooh excrement • James McClure: 'But what . . . if someone . . . gave him the money and support he needed?' 'We might be right in the poo.' (1976)

in lumber (1965) British; compare earlier sense, in prison • L. Henderson: I've got to keep at it. Break my bloody leg or something stupid like that and I'm in lumber. (1972)


In financial trouble

in Queer Street (1886) From earlier, more general sense, in trouble • Angus Wilson: He enjoys a little flutter . . . and if he finds himself in Queer Street now and again, I'm sure no one would grudge him his bit of fun. (1952)

on the rocks (1889) • Economist: When ICL was on the rocks, its partner, Fujitsu, suggested that ICL's customers might have more confidence if, say, the 200 most important ones flew to Japan to see how stable ICL's Japanese partner was. (1998)

Lost

slewed (1879) Australian & New Zealand; applied to someone who is lost in the bush • Teece & Pike: That is where I must have got 'slewed' for . . . the sun came out and I could see we were heading into the sun instead of having sundown at our backs. (1978)
To be in trouble

catch it, catch it in the neck (1835)
Denoting getting into trouble, usually with the implication of punishment ■ John Welcome: I'll catch it if Firmian finds me coffee-housing here. (1961)

get it, get it hot, get it in the neck (1872)
Denoting getting into trouble, usually with the implication of punishment ■ H. G. Wells: They'll get it in the neck in real earnest one of these days, if they ain't precious careful. (1908)

cop it (1909)
British; denoting getting into trouble, usually with the implication of punishment ■ Daily Chronicle: When arrested he remarked, 'I suppose I shall "cop" it for this.' (1909)

have one's ass in a sling (1960)

To cause trouble or harm to someone or something

do someone a mischief (c1385) ■ Kyril Bonfiglioli: 'Lost my temper... Bloody roadhog.' 'He might easily have done us a mischief,' I agreed. (1972)

play (merry) hell with (1803) ■ Listener: Wingate and his Chindits would play hell with the Japanese communications. (1959)

soup (1895)
Usually used in the passive: from in the soup in trouble ■ Daily Telegraph: Admitting that he earned £3,000 a year, Lord Taylor said that if he accepted a junior Ministry he would be 'souped.' (1964)

give someone the (or a) run-around (1924)
Orig US ■ Erle Stanley Gardner: A small-town dentist... and you think that fits you to give me a run-around in a murder case. (1934)

bugger someone about (or around) (1957)
British; denoting causing difficulties for someone ■ Colin Watson: In this trade you get used to being buggered about a bit by head office. (1972)

hassle (1959)
From the noun hassle something troublesome ■ Guardian: Police intervention is common. 'They hassle us unnecessarily,' mutters Miranda. 'They move us on for the sake of it.' (1991)

fuck someone about (or around) (1960)
■ Independent on Sunday: 'We did it because we just got fucked around all the time,' Slash explains. 'Everyone's taken pot-shots at us and made up stories.' (1991)

drop someone in it (1991) ■ Just Seventeen: Your mate reveals she's really dropped you in it with your folks today, but she's just winding you up. Had you going for a minute though. (1996)

To upset, distress

turn someone over (1865) ■ New Society: Escalope I had, though what they do to those calves turns me over. (1972)

To have been harmed

have been in the wars (1850) ■ Guardian: Sigh at this criminal omission and hastily endow him with painfully bilious attack. 'Dear me,' says Aunt E, 'you have all been in the wars!' (1991)

To make trouble

rock the boat (1931) ■ Punch: The trouble with these people who nail their colours to the mast—they always rock the boat. (1958)

make waves (1962)
Orig US ■ Publishers' Weekly: Dr. Wilkins... had just been fired from Willowbrook for allegedly making waves about conditions. (1972)

stir (1969)
Perhaps a back-formation from stirrer trouble-maker ■ B. Bennett: More interested in stirring than they are in abo poets. (1976)

set (put, etc.) the cat among the pigeons (1976) ■ J. M. Brownjohn: You're putting a petit bourgeois cat among the pigeons. (1976)

A trouble-maker

mixer (1938)
Perhaps from mix it quarrel ■ A. E. Lindop: I knew what a mixer she was, and I knew she was not capable of keeping a secret. (1968)

bolshie, bolshy (1940)
British; applied to an uncooporative person; from earlier sense, Bolshevik

stirrer (1963)
From the notion of 'stirring' up trouble ■ Observer. Jessica Mitford is what Australians call a stirrer, meaning a person with a talent for causing trouble. (1982)

Something or someone very troublesome or annoying

peest (1609)
In modern use usually applied to a person ■ Daily Telegraph: The lad went on to be a 12-year-old pest at shareholder meetings and next month becomes Taube's personal assistant. (1991)

pebble (1829)
Australian, dated; applied to a troublesome person or animal

hell on wheels (1843) ■ Sinclair Lewis: Looks just like a sweet little ivory statue, but is she hell on wheels! (1943)

terror (1883)
Applied especially to a troublesome child; often in the phrase holy terror ■ A. McCowan: At school I was known as a terror and went looking for fights. (1979)

handful (1887)
Applied to someone or something difficult to cope with; from earlier sense, as much as one can hold in one hand ■ Daily Mail: I found her a bit of a handful, I suppose, but I never thought we wouldn’t end up friends. (1991)

peb (1903)
Australian; applied to a troublesome person or animal; short for pebble in same sense ■ C. J. Dennis: They wus pebs, they wus norks, they wus reel naughty boys. (1916)

murder (1924)
Applied to a very irksome experience ■ Malcolm Bradbury: Private life was simple enough, but the communal centres were murder. (1965)

a bind (1930)
Mainly British ■ Nevil Shute: But it's an awful bind for you, at such a time as this. (1953)
21. Excitement

Excited

**all of a doodah** (or do-da, dooda) (1915)
Applied to someone in a state of agitated or dithering excitement; from the refrain doo-dah (h) of the plantation song 'Camptown Races' • P. G. Wodehouse: Poor old Clarence was patently all of a doodah. (1952)

A state or feeling of) excitement; a thrill

**a drive** (1921) US; applied especially to exhilaration resulting from the use of narcotics; often in the phrase get a drive out of • Nelson Algren: Sure I like to see it hit. Heroin got the drive awright— but there's not a tingle to a ton. (1949)

**a kick** (1928) Often in the phrase get a kick out of, and also in for kicks for the sake of excitement or pleasure; from earlier sense, strong stimulant effect • R.A.F. Journal: We get a great kick out of wearing it. (1942) • Listener: Antisocial, sexually ruthless, stealing cars for kicks. (1963)

**a bang** (1929) US; often in the phrase get a bang out of; from earlier sense, dose of a drug • J. D. Salinger: I hate the movies like poison, but I get a bang imitating them. (1951)

**a buzz** (1937) Orig US; often in the phrase get a buzz out of • Times: Some players get a 'buzz' from the game of Space Invaders and that might explain why they become addicted. (1983)

tussle • Anthony Blond: To write a book without having the hassle of having to sell it too. (1985)

**schlep, schlepp** (1964) Mainly US; applied to a troublesome business or a piece of hard work; probably from the verb schlep drag, toil • National Observer (US): Anybody who has ever tried to make even a small amount of a classic brown sauce from scratch would probably agree with Liederman's assessment that 'it's the ultimate schlep'. (1976)

**a pain in the neck** (1941) • Ed McBain: Homicide cops ... were pains in the ass to detectives actually ... trying to solve murder cases. (1973)

A place of trouble

**hot spot** (1941) • G. Beare: You're putting yourself on the hot-spot, Sammy. (1973)

Exciting

**wow** (1921) North American; from wow exclamation of delight • Daily Colonist (Victoria, British Columbia): Two-foot-high letters inviting you to buy Vitamin E capsules, often at wow potencies, plaster the fronts of drug stores. (1972)

**wild** (1955) Orig & mainly US • Hot Car: Naugahyde ... has long been the favourite amongst Stateside rodders because of its stretchy qualities, amazing range of colours (including some wild marble-like effects). (1978)

(A state or feeling of) excitement; a thrill

**a charge** (1950) Orig US; often in the phrase get a charge out of; from earlier sense, dose of a drug • New York Times Magazine: It seems to me that people get a bigger charge out of their grandchildren than they did from their own offspring. (1963)

**thrills and spills** (1983) Widely used well before its first recorded date; spills probably from spill a fall, especially from a horse or vehicle, but compare the rhyming conceit in Merry Drollery: The sword doth ... nimbly come to the point ... . Thrilling, and drilling. And killing, and spilling (1661) • Air Gunner: Brocock's fabulous revolvers offer all the thrills and spills of full-bore hand gunning—without the smoke! (1993)

To excite; cause to lose composure; overwhelm emotionally

**wow** (1924) Orig US; from wow exclamation of delight • Daily Telegraph: Mr Macdonald, who supplied the off-screen commentary for this year's Channel 4 coverage of the SDP conference, had the bright notion of training up a novice speaker who would wow them at Buxton. (1984)

**psych** (1957) Mainly US; denoting psychological stimulation, especially in order to get into a state of mental preparedness; often followed by up; from psych, short for psychology, psychiatry, etc. • New Yorker: He's never tried to psych us, or insult us with a pep talk. (1985)

**stoke** (1963) Mainly surfing slang • South African Surfer: Your magazine stoked me out of my mind. (1965)

**freak out, freak** (1964) Orig US; from freak (out) undergo drug-induced hallucinations • Gandalf's Garden: He was the first guy I had ever met who used his music to influence people, to turn them on, or freak them out. (1969)

**zap** (1967) Orig US; compare earlier sense, kill • Theology: A well-known evangelist invited the undergraduates of Oxford to allow themselves to be 'zapped by the Holy Spirit'. (1983)
To give way to heightened emotion; lose one’s composure

**tear it (or things) up** (1932) US, mainly jazz slang; denoting performing, behaving, etc. with unrestrained excitement. The trumpeter Wild Bill Davison, who ‘tore it up’ with admirable primitivity and sensuality. (1963)

**flip one’s wig** (1934), **flip one’s lid** (1941), **flip** (1950) Orig US. Barry Crump: As he spoke one of the dogs sank his teeth into a tender part and the bull flipped his lid completely. (1960) Ross Macdonald: She’s a phoney blonde. . . . I can’t understand why he would flip over her. (1969)

**freak out** (1966), **freak** (1967) Orig US; from earlier sense, undergo drug-induced hallucinations. Nature: One question asked the respondents how often they had seen other people ‘freak out’, that is, have intense, transient emotional upsets. (1970)

**plotz** (1967) US; from Yiddish platsen, from Middle High German platsen burst. Judith Krantz: She came back to pick them up today and plotzed for joy all over the studio. (1978)

**wet oneself, wet one’s pants** (1970) From the notion of urinating involuntarily when over-energized

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**22. Eagerness, Enthusiasm**

Eager, enthusiastic

**gung ho** (1955) Orig US; from earlier services’ slang sense, dedicated to teamwork and effort; originally adopted as a slogan during World War II by the United States Marines under Lt. Col. Evans F. Carlson, from Chinese kung-ho Industrial Co-operatives, mistakenly taken in its literal meaning ‘work together’, from kung work and ho peace, harmony. Ian Kemp: He . . . was one of the most ‘gung-ho’ (exceptionally keen to be personally involved in combat) characters I ever met. (1969)

Enthusiastic support

**sky-rocket** (1867) US, dated; applied to an enthusiastic cheer, raised especially by college students

**rah rah** (1911) Orig US; used as a shout of support or encouragement for a college sports team

To be eager or enthusiastic

**champ at the bit** (c1645) Denoting eagerness or impatience to start; from the notion of a horse chewing its bit in impatience. Washington Post: If Bill Clinton thought like a chess player, Republican Kay Bailey Hutchison would not today be a United States senator-elect for Texas, champing at the bit to cast a vote against his economic program. (1993)

**fall over oneself** (1904) Orig US. Maclean’s Magazine: And last year mink breeders from Scandinavia to California were falling over themselves to buy a piece of the action. (1966)

straining at the leash (1910) Denoting eagerness or impatience to start; from the notion of a dog pulling at its lead in impatience. Independent on Sunday: We are told that . . . General Schwarzkopf’s . . . soldiers were straining at the leash. (1991)

An eager or enthusiastic person

**eager beaver** (1943) Orig US. Observer. The British pack were like a set of eager beavers. (1959)

An enthusiast

See Someone who favours or enjoys something under Favour & Disfavour (p. 208).

An enthusiast for the stated thing

**culture vulture** (1947) Derogatory, orig US; applied to someone eager to acquire culture; compare Ogden Nash, ‘There is a woman— / There is a vulture / Who circles above / The carcass of culture’ (1931). Dylan Thomas: See the garrulous others, also, gabbing and garlanded from one nest of culture-vultures to another. (a1953)

sun-worshipper (1966) Jocular; applied to a devotee of sun-bathing; from earlier sense, one who worships the sun as a god. B. H. Deahl: Her red bathing suit [was] brilliant against her white skin. Evidently she wasn’t the sun worshiper the others were. (1966)

An enthusiasm

**bee in one’s bonnet** (1845) Applied to an obsession with something. Independent: Fiona
Weir, air pollution campaigner, said: ‘Max has strong views and has got a bee in his bonnet over this issue’. (1991)

**fever (1885)** Applied to enthusiastic or excited interest. *Daily Telegraph.* A disparate group of characters, from the local machine knitting society to Admiral’s Cup sponsors, whose sole aim is to cash in on Cowes Week fever. (1991)

**bug (1902)** Orig US; applied to an obsessive enthusiasm or craze; often in the phrases be bitten by the bug, have got the bug; compare earlier bug person with an obsessive interest in or enthusiasm for something. *Which?* A boy bitten by the railway bug. (1959)

-itis (1903) Jocular; denoting an excessive or obsessive interest in something; from the use of -itis as a suffix in words denoting a disease. *Winston Churchill:* It was impossible to go on in a state of ‘electionitis’ all through the summer and autumn. (1945)

**kick (1946)** Often in the phrase on the—kick doing, or enthusiastic about, the stated thing. *Times Literary Supplement.* Somewhere behind the cumulative high, the peace-kick, the good vibes, efficient entrepreneurs… were smiling their mean smiles all the way to the bank. (1971)

**Obsessed**

**hung up (1957)** Followed by on. *New Scientist.* Roszak is very hung up on the power that science grants. (1971)

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### 23. Effort

To make one’s maximum effort

**put oneself out (1961)** Used to denote an effort that involves some inconvenience to oneself

**knuckle down (1864)** From previous sense, to admit defeat

**sweat one’s guts out (1890)** *Roderic Jeffries:* You sweated your guts out for months and finished your book, then the public looked the other way. (1961)

**go some (1911)** US. *H. Lieberman:* He’d known the girl for two months; for Daughtry that was going some. (1982)

**sweat blood (1911)** *Josephine Tey:* I expect he sweats blood over his writing. He has no imagination. (1950)

**lean (or bend) over backwards (1925)** Orig US; orig with the implication of doing something disadvantageous or distasteful to oneself. *Joyce Cary:* I had provoked in him that conscience, those scruples of justice and right, which might cause him actually to favour my enemy—to, as our transatlantic friends say, lean over backwards in obliging him. (1953)

**go to town (1933)** Used to denote an effort made with great energy or without restraint. *Times Literary Supplement:* Professor MacAndrew goes to town on this novel, deciphering the code which she believes Henry James has to set up. (1980)

**pull (or take, get) one’s finger out (1941)** Used mainly to demand effort of a lazy person; from the notion of idleness characterized by having one’s finger inserted in a bodily orifice. *Times* (Duke of Edinburgh): I think it is about time we pulled our fingers out. (1961)

**beaver away (1946)** From the notion of the beaver as an industrious animal; compare work like a beaver to work hard. (1741) *Spectator.* The Germans beaver away at their scheme for ‘entry by stages’. (1967)

**go for the doctor (1949)** Australian; from the notion of seeking medical help in an emergency

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*Dal Stivens:* There were three of the bastards and they went for the doctor. But I had time to get on my guard. (1951)

**go for broke (1951)** Orig US; from the notion of staking all one’s money in a gambling game, so that if one loses one will be broke. *Guardian.* The enemy is ‘going all out—.. he is going for broke’. (1968)

**pull out all the stops (1974)** From the notion of deploying all the stops on an organ. *Philip McCutchan:* We’ll be doing our best, all stops out. (1978)

To make the slightest effort

**lift (or stir, move) a finger (1833)** Used in the negative to denote unwillingness to make an effort. *David Garnett:* Could anyone honestly say that we should have allowed Paris to be occupied and France defeated without lifting a finger? (1955)

To require a great effort

**take some (or a bit of, a lot of) doing (1936)** *Time:* His long-suffering wife… and their six kids put up with him, which takes some doing. (1969)

A sudden great effort made

**blitz (1960)** From earlier sense, sudden concerted attack. *Guardian.* The women did only the bare essentials of housework during the week, with a ‘blitz’ at weekends. (1960)

Something requiring great effort

**sweat (1923)** Compare earlier sense, hard work. (a1300) *Prince Charles* (quoted in *Observer*): Actually sitting down and thinking is a sweat. (1980)

Something requiring little effort

**money for jam (1919), money for old rope (1936)** Orig services’ slang. *Evelyn Waugh:* At the moment there were no mortars and he was given instead a light and easily manageable counterfeit of wood which was slung on the back of his haversack, relieving him of a rifle. At present it was money for old rope. (1942)
An attempt

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### 24. Surprise

To surprise

**flabbergast** (1772) Usually used in the passive, quasi-adjectivally; origin uncertain; perhaps from flabby + aghast. Denoting something that has an overwhelming effect on someone's mind; compare earlier Scottish sense, spin, swirl.

**flabbergasted** (1884) From Old English feeze dialect. Quasi-adjectivally; origin uncertain; perhaps quasi-adjectivally; origin uncertain; from Old English feeze dialect. Applied to something that has an overwhelming effect on someone's mind; make drunk or high.

**make a stab at** (1895) Australian & New Zealand; especially in the phrases have (or make) a stab at. Denoting something that has an overwhelming effect on someone, with either pleasure or shock; from (or someone's) head (or someone) mind.

**knock** someone sideways (1925) Denoting astounding someone, with either pleasure or shock. Mainly British; especially in the phrase have a bash (at) or give it a whirl. To appear suddenly and surprisingly.

**spring** on someone (1876) From spring from (1853) Used in phrases such as where did you spring from? when someone appears unexpectedly.
you could have knocked me down with a feather (1741) First recorded in the form you might have beat me down with a feather; the modern form is first recorded in 1853 • Somerset Maugham: When I... saw Rosie standing there, you could ‘ave knocked me down with a feather. (1930)

Christ (1748) • Eugene O’Neill: Christ, what a dump! (1933)
gosh (1757) Orig in by gosh, as a euphemistic alteration of by God • John Dos Passos: ‘Gosh,’ he was saying at the back of his head, ‘maybe I could lay Elsie Finnegarn.’ (1936)
lawk, lawks, lawk-a-mercy, -mussy (1768) Dated; alteration of Lord (have mercy) • B. L. K. Henderson: Lawkamery, lad, what’s that? (1927)
golly (1775) Euphemistic alteration of God • Strand Magazine: Golly! He took a toss and a half! (1917)
you don’t say so (1779) Dated • Richard Whitening: You don’t say so; why, I’m going to a meeting at his mother’s house. (1899)

by gum, my gum (c1815) gum a euphemistic alteration of god • Private Eye: By gum, it must be visiting day up at hall. (1970)
blow me tight (1819) • Philip MacDonald: ‘Blow me tight!’ said Sergeant Guilfoil. For things were certainly happening in Farnley (1933)
say (1830) Orig & mainly US • William Faulkner: Well, say. Can you tie that. (1932)
lor, lor’ (1835) British; alteration of lord
crikey (1838) British; alteration of Christ • John Rae: Crikey, I thought, he’s tough. (1960)
begorra, begarra, begorrah (1839) Anglo-Irish; alteration of by God

sacristi (1839) Mainly used to suggest Frenchness or a French context; from French, alteration of sacristi • Agatha Christie: And the card—my card! Ah! Sacristi—she has a nerve! (1932)
did you ever? (1840) Dated; contracted form of such phrases as did you ever see such a thing? • John Masefield: Fifty pou-und. Fifty pou-und. Did you ever. (1909)

well I never, well I never did (1848) Contracted form of such phrases as well I never saw (or did see) such a thing • David Storey: They tell me... Well, I never. Didn’t see that, did he? (1970)

gewhillikins, ge-, je-, -whill(iken)s, -whit(t)aker(s) (1851) Orig & mainly US; perhaps a fanciful substitute for Jerusalem • C. S. Forester: ‘Gewhillikins, sir,’ said Hubbard, the dark mobile face lengthened in surprise. (1941)


my sainted aunt, my (holy, sacred, etc.) aunt (1869) Dated; compare earlier obsolete my sainted mother • Boy’s Own Paper: ‘My aunt!’ exclaimed Guy, with a start. (1888)

sacré bleu (1869) Mainly used to suggest Frenchness or a French context; from French, literally ‘sacred blue’, dated euphemistic substitute for sacré Dieu sacred God • Kenneth Benton: But sacre bleu! you can’t depend on that. (1974)

gee whiz(2), gee whizz, gee wiz (1876) Orig US; probably an alteration of gee-willikins or a euphemistic substitute for Jesus | Richmal Crompton: ‘Gee whiz!’ breathed William in ecstasy. (1940).


blimey, bli’ me, blime (1889) British; alteration of bikers; biklimes; biklimes (1886) | I’m damned, I’ll be damned (1925) • Henry Miller: Those things never happen to me. So you peddled candies in the Café Royal? I’ll be damned. (1953).

starve the crows (1918) Australian & New Zealand | Eric Lambert: ‘Starve the bloody lizards!’ breathed Clancy. ‘Now I’ve seen the lot!’ (1965).

holy smoke (1892) • Ian Cross: ‘Holy smoke,’ he gasped, ‘That’s a funny face.’ (1960).


wow (1892) From earlier Scottish use as a general exclamation | R. B. Dominic: ‘Wow!’ Mike Isham whistled reverently. ‘No wonder she was willing to murder.’ (1980).

boy (1894) Orig US | M. Hodge: Boy! They don’t wear a damned thing! (1934).

goo (1895) Mainly US; probably short for Jesus | Saturday Evening Post. Gee, that’s a long shot. Boloney! That’s not the ball—it’s the divot. (1928).

gorblimey, gaw-, -blime, -blimy (1896) British; alteration of bikers; biklimes; biklimes (1886) | Jeez(e), Geez(e), Jese, Jez (1923) Orig US; shortening of Jesus | Private Eye. Jeez, that’s nice of you to say so. (1970).

holy cow (1924) cow perhaps a euphemistic substitute for Christ | Guardian: There’s a huge red rose explosion lighting up the sky. Holy cow, that was a huge outburst. (1991).

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blow me down (1928) • R. Byrom: ‘Well, blow me down!’ I chose a phrase that seemed suitably Old Boy. (1959).

jeepers, jeepers-creepers (1929) Orig US; jeepers alteration of Jesus | Colin MacInnes: I put my head around the door, and jeepers-creepers, nearly had a fit. (1959).

cor (1931) British; often in the phrase cor blimey; alteration of god | Independent on Sunday: One youth near me, climbing on to a mate’s shoulders, yelled, ‘Cor, innee fat!’ which seemed to come as a surprise. (1991).

hush my mouth (1931) Southern US

stiffen the crows (1932) Australian & New Zealand


starve the bardies (1941) Mainly Western Australian; apparently never widely current, but often quoted as a colourful Australianism; based on starve the crows (lizards, etc.); bardie type of edible wood grub, from Aboriginal (Nyungar) bardi

you don’t say (1912) Orig US; often used ironically or sarcastically; compare earlier you don’t say so | Ngaio Marsh: ‘The Scorpion’s not here, George.’ ‘You don’t say,’ Mr. Copper bitterly rejoined. (1962).

zowie (c1913) Perhaps a blend of zap and pow + -ie | P. G. Wodehouse: He gets out and zowie a gang of thugs come jumping out of the bushes, and next thing you know they’re off with your jewel case. (1972).


wowiee (1921) From wow + arbitrary suffix -ie; orig spel wowey | Mad Magazine: Boy! Wow-wee! That’s quite an exciting evening line-up! (1963).

crumps (1922) British; from earlier by crum(s), a euphemistic substitute for by Christ | Stella Gibbons: Nothing like that. Crumbs! I should say not. (1956).

Jesus, Jesus (H.) Christ (1922) | Independent.


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25. Boredom & Disenchantment

Something or someone boring or tiresome


Gordon Bennett (1984) British; alteration of gorblimey, presumably after the name of James Gordon Bennett (1841–1918), after whom several motor and aeronautical events were named, or his father James (1795–1872), a celebrated newspaper editor and publisher

I’ll go to the foot of our stairs (1992) British, Northern dialect; first recorded in 1992, but in use earlier • Guardian: When we watch Coronation Street at home, we greet each twist of the plot with a chorus of... ‘Well, I’ll go to the foot of our stairs!’ This is to show that we are sophisticated. (1992)

See also beat the band. Dutch, etc. under To surpass all others at Excellence, Remarkableness (p. 216).

be binding everyone now... Binds you rigid, binds you stiff, bores you completely. (1943)

feed (1933) British, dated; perhaps a back-formation from fed-up • Georgette Heyer: Anyone can have the super motor boat as far as I’m concerned. Joan, too. She bars it completely, which feeds Brother Basil stiff. (1933)

bore the pants off (1934) • P. G. Wodehouse: They were... creeps of the first water and would bore the pants off me. (1954)

Boring, dull, tedious

draggy (1860) Orig US; from drag something boring + -y • Listener: I know it’s draggy having the au pair feeding with us, but one has to be madly democratic if one wants to keep them. (1967)

blah (1922) Orig US • H. Roth: You must... have come to realize how blank and blah he made himself. (1955)

feeding (1940) British, dated; from the verb feed bore • Morris Marples: ‘It’s feeding, isn’t it?’ (i.e. calculated to make one fed-up. (1940)

drack, drac (1945) Australian; origin uncertain; sometimes said to derive from the name of the US film Dracula’s Daughter (1936) • G. Dutton: You blokes get on to some bloody drack subjects. (1968)


Bored, fed-up

sick (1597) Followed by of; also in the phrases sick and tired of (1783) and sick to death of (1890)
251 | Milton Keynes Express: I believe people are sick and tired of half-truths and evasions. (1976)

Jack (1889) Australian; usually followed by of, probably from jack up give up. *Australian Geographic:* The missus might get jack of it and clear out for the city,’ observed one miner, ‘but most of them come back.’ (1986)

Browned off (1938) British. *Observer:* Medical boards were always being begged by browned-off invalids to pass them fit for active service. (1958)

Brassed off (1941) British. *Observer:* Brennan, Hesselyn, & Bateson: Nothing happened, & we came back very brassed off, not having seen a sausage. (1943)

26. Composure

Cool (1953) Orig US, Black English; usually used with a possessive. *Listener:* Professor Marcus consistently keeps his cool when sex is being discussed; all the four-letter words are used without blanching. (1967)

Loose (1968) Orig US; especially in the phrase hang (or stay) loose. *Cyra McFadden:* ‘And remember,’ he told him, waving, ‘stay loose’. (1977)


Together (1969) Orig US. *Alison Lurie:* I forgot you, and me, and where I was—I felt very calm, very together. (1974)

To keep one’s composure, remain relaxed

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27. A Fuss

to-do (1570) From the verb phrase to do, used to denote that which it is necessary to do.

brouhaha (1890) From French brouhaha
  ■ Brahms & Simon: I shall never forget the brou-ha-ha... when Cousin Geraldine married into Trade. (1946)

carry-on (1890) From the verb carry on behave excitedly (see at Behaviour. (p. 206)) ■ Peter Bull: We were all engaged for a radio version of Hamlet... I had never realized the incredible carry-on connected with these productions. (1959)
palaver (1892) Applied to annoying or troublesome complexities; often in the phrase fuss and palaver; from earlier sense, unnecessary, profuse, or idle talk ■ Radio Times: As if saying goodbye to all that money isn't enough, you'd have the palaver of writing out the cheques, trudging down to the post office to get the stamps, before finally sending the bloomin' things off. (1992)
song and dance (1895) Orig US ■ Elaine Dundy: If only he hadn't felt obliged to make such a song and dance about it. (1958)
ballyhoo (1928) Orig US; applied to excessive noise, fuss, publicity, etc.; from earlier application to a fairground showman's touting speech; ultimate origin unknown ■ Economist: The event was surrounded by the sort of ballyhoo you might expect if Toyota had taken over GM itself. (1988)

whoop-de-do, whoop-de-doo (1929) US; a fanciful extension of the verb whoop or the interjection whoops ■ Verbatim: There was many an angry powwow and much whoop-de-do, but in the end, of course, the bigwigs won. (1981)

28. Anger

(A fit of) anger

mad (1834) US; from mad angry ■ M. & G. Gordon: Well, thanks a lot! I go through hell for you and you take your mad out on me. (1973)
wax (1854) Dated; origin uncertain; perhaps from wax wroth, angry, etc., become angry ■ B. Duffy: Giggling and swallowing his hiccups, acting the part of Caliban, that professional guest and sporadic author Lytton Strachey called back, Oh, O. Don't be in such a wax now. (1987)
bate, bate (1857) Dated; from bate harass, persecute ■ Observer: 'Lenny Henry will be back at half time,' the voice on the Tannoy assures us, as the 'funny' man stalks off the pitch in something of a bate. (1996)
the hump (1873) British; mainly in the phrases get (or give) the hump become (or make) angry; compare obsolete hump the back show annoyance or sulkiness ■ Guardian: One of them... flashed a camera right in the face of Paco the other day. And Paco, the star camel, understandably got the hump and gave Ernest a bump and three cracked ribs. (1991)
the needle (1874) Mainly in the phrases have (got) the needle be angry and get the needle become angry; compare the verb needle annoy ■ G. F. Newman: He's got the needle with you. You've got to go very careful. (1970)
the spike (1890) Mainly in the phrases have (got) the spike be angry and get the spike become angry; variation on the needle ■ Noel Hilliard: But you don't have to get the spike with me just for that. (1960)
the allocvrs (1893) US, dated; from earlier sense, disquiet

snit (1939) Orig and mainly US; origin unknown ■ C. Boothe: 'I declare, Mrs. Rand, I cried myself into a snit.' 'A snit?' 'I do deplor it, but when I'm in a snit I'm prone to bull the object of my wrath plumb in the tummy.' (1939)

the pricker (1945) Australian & New Zealand; mainly in the phrase have (got) the pricker be angry; variation on the needle ■ D'Arcy Niland: You've got the pricker properly, eh? You'll knock him into next week, will ya? (1955)

wobbler (1942) Orig US; mainly in the phrase throw a wobbler fly into a fit of anger ■ Sunday Times: Vikki said the camera shots were all wrong, her
manager objected to ‘the thin sound’, and the backing group . . . threw a complete wobbler. (1985)

**wobbly (1877)** From the adjective wobbly unstable; mainly in the phrase *throw a wobbly* fly into a fit of anger. *Radio Times*: The debriefing . . . seemed to take an inordinately long time. . . . ‘By lunch,’ he [sc. Simeon Harris] says, ‘I was getting a bit fed up, so I threw a wobbly.’ (1981)

**Angry**

mad (a1300) Standard in early use, but now colloquial and mainly US. ■ M. Duggan: Are you mad at me? Simpson asked. (1956)

**hopping mad (1675)** Orig dialect & US; from the notion of being so angry that one is jumping about. ■ *Guardian*: Would-be [telephone] subscribers get hopping mad. (1960)

shirty (1846) Compare *get someone’s shirt out* annoy someone, and keep one’s shirt on remain calm. ■ John Rae: All right; all right; there’s no need to get shirty about it. (1980)

**waxy (1853)** Compare *get someone’s shirt out* annoyance, and *keep one’s shirt on* remain calm. ■ John Rae: All right; all right; there’s no need to get shirty about it. (1980)

ratty (1909) From earlier sense, characteristic of rats. ■ Tim Heald: I’d simply have asked her what the hell she was so ratty about. (1976)

**crook (1910)** Australian & New Zealand; mainly in the phrases *go crook* (at, on), *be crook on*; compare earlier senses, dishonest, inferior, ill

**Listener**: I cut off his boot to stop the foot swelling. I remember he went crook on me: he said they were new, and I’d darn well have to buy him a new pair. (1959)

**livid (1912)** From earlier sense, ashen, pallid, from the notion of being pale with rage. ■ Dell Shannon: Mr. MacFarlane would be livid to have it [sc. whisky] impounded as evidence. (1973)

**batey, baity (1921)** British, dated; from *bate* fit of anger + -y ■ P. H. Johnson: I’d better roll the damned thing in or Mater will be batey. (1954)

**steamed up (1923)** Used to suggest angry agitation. ■ Dirk Bogarde: The General insists it is sent to all the Brigades. He’s getting very steamed up about the bloody little thing. (1980)

**off one’s block (1925)** From block head; compare lose one’s block become angry

**ringly (1932)** North American. ■ M. C. Beatright: He’s a good-natured bird and don’t git ringly about it. (1934)

**ravers (1938)** Dated; from *raving* (mad anger + -ers

**butcher’s (1941)** Australian & New Zealand; often in the phrase *go butcher’s* become angry; short for *butcher’s hook*, rhyming slang for *crook angry*

**lemony (1941)** Australian & New Zealand; mainly in the phrase *go lemony at* (or on); perhaps from the sourness of lemons. ■ S. Gore: Oh, blimey, they went real lemony on ’im. (1968)

**crooked (1942)** Australian; in the phrase *crooked on* (or about); from *crook angry* ■ A. Seymour: Now, if Alf was you he’d have a reason to be crooked on the world. (1962)

**salty (1944)** US; compare earlier naval sense, aggressive; see also *jump* salty become angry ■ P. G. Winslow: He was furious when I said I didn’t have any [money] and got very salty. (1975)

**up the wall** (1951) Often in the phrases *go* (or *climb, run* up) the wall become angry and drive (or send) up the wall infuriate ■ *Observer*: When they found out he was a Catholic, they were up the wall. (1959) ■ *New Yorker*: Success or failure hardly entered into the picture. It was this kind of argument that drove some . . . executives up the wall. (1970)

**torqued (1967)** US; often followed by up

**miffed (1811)** From past participle of *miff* annoy ■ *Economist*: Howls of fury greeted the Argentine rescheduling. (1962)

**Annoyed and disappointed**

**up in the air (1906)** Orig US. ■ Edgar Wallace: Abiboo, who is a strict Mussulman, got up in the air because Bones suggested he might have been once a guinea-pig. (1928)

**sick (1853)** ■ Kazuo Ishiguro: It’s just the way you do things. . . . It makes me sick. (1982)
hacked (1892) Orig US; now usually in the phrase hacked off; from the past participle of hack cut roughly. \[ \text{Rolling Stone:} \] The big word down there is commercial. . . . I wouldn’t be so hacked off about it if I didn’t love country music. (1969)

pipped (1914) Dated; from the pip annoyance \[ A. M. N. Lyons: \] ‘How’s Levertin?’ ‘Rather pipped, thank you,’ replied Miss Disney. ‘Poor old Ma was raw-beefing him when I left.’ (1914)

pissed off (1946), pissed (1971) \[ Barbara Wright: \] I’m beginning to get pissed off with your rotten little questions. (1967) \[ \text{Rolling Stone:} \] Hamilton. . . says half the Cabinet is pissed at him because things are moving so slow. (1977)

choked (1950) \[ Oz: \] My governor is going to be choked when I take the day off. He’s going to be double choked if I enjoy myself. (1969)

teed off (1955) Orig and mainly North American; probably a euphemistic substitute for peed off (= pissed off) \[ G. V. Higgins: G. V. Higgins: He is kind of teed off (= pissed off) and said we would form an action group to drive ambulances. (1991)

chuffed (1960) British, orig services’ slang; perhaps from British dialect chuff surly \[ Celia Dale: \] Don’t let on they’re after you, see, or she’ll be dead chuffed, see? She don’t like the law. (1964)

sick as a parrot (1979) British \[ Private Eye: \] The Moggotollah admitted frankly that he was ‘sick as a parrot’ at the way events had been unfolding. (1979)

To be or get angry

raise Cain (1840) Used to denote making an angry scene; perhaps from the equation of Cain (who killed his brother Abel) with the Devil \[ J. B. Priestley: \] If we stand here talking another minute the mistress’ll be raising Cain the way she’ll say she’s destroyed (or who killed his brother Abel) with the Devil (1965)

fly off the handle (1843) Orig US; origin in the Times: \[ The village was incensed when the Minister of Defence... that he must find out whether the draught. (1930)

hit the roof (1925) \[ Victor Canning: \] The P.M. and his cabinet... would hit the roof if they knew half of the things that went on. (1971)

blow one’s top (1928) \[ Economist: \] This was not just a newly retired officer blowing his top after years of enforced silence. (1958)

have (or get) a cob on (1937) British; origin unknown \[ Richard Gordon: \] ‘Don’t you blokes go without me,’ he added threateningly, ‘I’ll get a cob on if you don’t wait.’ (1953)

blow a fuse (1938) \[ \text{Rolling Stone:} \] It was Mercury who would blow a fuse if the lights were out of sync or the PA system malfunctioned. (1977)

jump salty (1938) US; compare salty angry \[ Partisan Review: \] That man jumped salty on me. (1958)

go off one’s bike (1939) Australian & New Zealand; usually in negative contexts

blow one’s stack (1941) Orig US \[ W. H. Canaway: \] I ain’t whingeing, honest. . . . I’m sorry I blew me stack. (1979)

do one’s scone (1942) New Zealand; from scone head

do one’s bun (1944) New Zealand

blow a gasket (1946) From the notion of a gasket (= a joint seal in an engine) bursting \[ \text{Guardian:} \] The planning department would have blown a gasket if they were slipped back into the schedule the moment a cosefire was reached. (1981)

spit chips (1947) Australian \[ J. N. Smith: \] The train had gone away. (1965)

wig out (1955) Compare wiggly mad, crazy \[ Joseph Gores: \] Kearney was going to wig out when the expense voucher for $100 worth of cocaine came in. (1978)

go spare (1958) British \[ J. N. Smith: \] The train had just gone. His lordship nearly went spare. (1969)

lose (or do in) one’s block (1907) Mainly Australian & New Zealand; compare off one’s block angry

get one’s rag out (1914) \[ Leonard Cooper: \] Roger was definitely shirty about that. . . . He really got his rag out. (1960)

hit the ceiling (1914) Orig US \[ Elaine Dundy: \] Larry hit the ceiling and said he had to come along, that he’d spoil everything if he didn’t. (1958)

create (1919) British; used to denote making an angry scene \[ Macdonald Hastings: \] What does he do but come aboard and start creating about the loss of time! (1959)

do one’s nut (1919) From nut head \[ John Brown: \] I thought what Grace would say, that she’d do her nut maybe. But she didn’t blink an eyelid. (1972)

go (in) off the deep end (1921) Used to denote giving way to anger; from the notion of diving into the deepest part of a swimming pool

hit the roof (1925) \[ Victor Canning: \] The P.M. and his cabinet... would hit the roof if they knew half of the things that went on. (1971)

blow one’s top (1928) \[ Economist: \] This was not just a newly retired officer blowing his top after years of enforced silence. (1958)

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go spare (1958) British \[ J. N. Smith: \] The train had just gone. His lordship nearly went spare. (1969)
To become angrily agitated or upset

To annoy or infuriate

wet oneself, wet one’s pants (1970)

Someone

give

From earlier

Linacre Lane: When I think of it I spit blood (1963) •

get one’s knickers in a twist (1971)

British,

rub

up the wrong way (1862)

someone

get

shirt out (1859)

someone's

get

piss oneself (1969)

lose one’s rag (1959) ■ Hill & Thomas: Allison lost his rag with me over two goals by Leicester's Mike Stringfellow, both of which he considered were offside. (1975)

spit blood (1963) ■ Linacre Lane: When I think of it I could spit blood. (1966)

do (or lose) one’s nana (1966) Mainly Australian; nana perhaps from banana ■ Telegraph (Brisbane): The baby started crying again. I did my nana and I hit him. (1974)

To become angrily agitated or upset

piss oneself (1969) From earlier sense, urinate involuntarily

wet oneself, wet one’s pants (1970) From earlier sense, urinate involuntarily ■ Michael Underwood: There are quite a few people who’ll wet their pants if I get sent down. (1979)

get one’s knickers in a twist (1971) British, jocular ■ Brand New York: There is no reason to get one’s knickers in a twist and believe the revolution is nigh. (1982)

To annoy or infuriate

miff (1811) From earlier sense, take offence ■ Economist: It is Mr Burnley's manner more than his policies that miffs several senators. (1987)

e (1836) From earlier sense, stir up; variant of rile (1836) ■ New Scientist: So much did his lecturing rile Khrushchev, that the Russian leader bade farewell to the company with the immortal remark, 'Comrades, and Party Leader Gaitskell, if I lived in Britain I would vote Conservative!' (1983)

make someone’s blood boil (1948) ■ Daily Mirror: Sometimes it can make your blood boil to watch it. But why does it keep on happening? (1982)

get someone’s shirt out (1959)

rub someone up the wrong way (1862)

get (1867) Orig US ■ W. H. Smith: I wish to the Lord he hadn’t been so quick about it. That’s what gets me. (1904)

needle (1881) Used to denote deliberately and persistently annoying someone ■ Dougal Haston: Once again we’d needled each other into a state of open warfare. (1972)

nark (1888) Usually passive ■ Daily Telegraph: If you feel especially narked about something, you can turn it into a theory of human behaviour. (1973)

peeve (1908) Orig US; back-formation from pervish ■ Rose Macaulay: I suppose he’d peeved me in some way. (1934)

get someone’s goat (1910) ■ Buster Keaton: What got my goat was that when I finally did get knocked off ... it was due to an accident outside the theatre. (1960)

give someone the pip (1913) From earlier sense, make someone ill or depressed ■ J. B. Priestley: A proper old Jonah you’re turning into! You give me the pip, Dad, honestly you do. (1930)

get someone’s nanny-goat, get someone’s nanny (1914) ■ J. Minifie: Take it easy, old boy. . . Don’t let them get your nanny. (1972)

get across someone (1926) ■ Mary Stewart: He’s got across that damned Greek. (1960)

burn someone up (1931) US ■ Sinclair Lewis: What burns me up is the fact that . . . 7 per cent of all the families in the country earned $500 a year or less. (1935)

get on someone’s quince (1941) Australian ■ A. E. Farrell: These bloody trees are getting on me quince! (1963)

rip (1941) Australian; mainly in the phrase wouldn’t it rip you, used to express exasperation ■ Lawson Glassop: I had the idea that if you joined the A.I.F. you had to fight in the front line. I know now how many men it takes to keep one in those trenches. Do you know our divisions have even got a mobile laundry, decontamination unit and mobile bath unit? Wouldn’t it rip you? (1944)

get on someone’s tits (1945) ■ J. Wilson: This Sherlock Holmes act of yours gets right on my tits. (1977)

get on someone’s wick (1945) British; said to be from (Hampton) Wick (name of a locality in SW London), rhyming slang for prick penis ■ Kenneth Benton: The way you talk about Pat gets on my wick. (1977)

piss someone off (1946) ■ Rolling Stone: She may not want to be called ‘Queen’, but only because she considers herself too young, because she is not out to piss off Aretha Franklin any more than she already has. (1977)


get up someone’s nose (1951) ■ Daily Mail: The implication that granny was a little winning knockout with a system that couldn’t be bettered . . . does, I’m afraid, get rather up my nose. (1975)

tick someone off (1959) US; compare earlier sense, reprimand ■ R. L. Simon: Shit, it ticks me off I spent all the money on this tour and look what happens. (1979)

get to someone (1961) Orig US ■ New Yorker: You can’t excuse yourself that way, any more than you can let drunks and such get to you. (1968)

tee someone off (1961) Orig and mainly North American; compare earlier teed off annoyed ■ New Yorker: Frankly, it just tees me off. I consider them to be a god-damned curse. (1977)

Annoyed, upset

sore (a1694) Formerly standard usage; now mainly North American ■ American Notes & Queries: Jonson is likely to have been sore about Shakespeare . . . styling himself gentle. (1980)

miffed (1824) From past participle of miff annoy ■ Daily Telegraph: He told us a slightly improper story. The girls were not shocked but were rather miffed at his thinking they would not be. (1973)

cut up (1844) ■ Guardian: But if Portsmouth were cut up about the penalty, it was nothing compared with the state of the pitch. (1991)
peevd (1908) From past participle of peev
annoy ■ Daily Mail: The agency won't talk about the work; its executives are rather peeved that the news has got out. (1975)

Annoying

pesky (1775) Orig and mainly US; origin uncertain; perhaps an alteration of an unrecorded pesty, from pest plague + -y ■ David Karp: Just stay away from reporters. And if you can't—you have no comment. If they get real pesky, tell them to talk to me. (1956)

Something annoying

nark (1923) Applied to an annoying thing: from earlier sense, unpleasant person ■ Book (Christchurch, New Zealand): 'It's a nark, isn't it,' she said. 'I thought you'd get by without the op.' (1947)
chizz, chiz (1953) British; applied to an annoying circumstance; from the verb chisel cheat ■ Eric Partridge: 'What a chizz!' What a nuisance. (1961)
aggro, agro (1969) Applied to a source of annoyance or inconvenience; abbreviation of aggravation + -o

A bad temper or fit of sulking

the sulks (1818) From the verb sulk ■ W. E. Norris: When you are tired of being in the sulks, let me know. (1894)
the grumps (1844) From obsolete grump a slight, snub ■ Louisa May Alcott: Hannah had the grumps, for being up late didn't suit her. (1869)
paddy (1894), paddywhack, paddywack (1899) Apparently the same word as Paddywhack Irish person ■ Osmington Mills: It was my awful temper. I used to get into the biggest paddies when I was a kiddie. (1959) ■ Rudyard Kipling: He's a libellous old rip, an' he'll be in a ravin' paddy-wack. (1899)
moody (1969) British; also in the phrase pull the moody to sulk ■ T. Barling: I love you Ollie, so lay off the moosies. (1986)
snit (1971) US; from earlier sense, fit of rage ■ Daily Progress (Charlottesville, Virginia): If New York solves its problems through gambling, every state in the union is going to follow suit except Nevada, which will probably secede from the nation in a snit. (1971)

Bad-tempered

crabbv (1778) From crab small sour apple + -y ■ Ageing and Society: The 'change of life' makes women crabby. (1993)
grumpy (1778) From obsolete grump a slight, snub + -y ■ Daily Mail: Like a grumpy Father Christmas determined to withhold any presents, James Randi last night continued his sceptical scrutiny of all things occult. (1991)
crotchety (1825) From obsolete crotchet whimsical fancy + -y ■ Washington Post: Joe went to the Banking chairman and his political patron, Henry Gonzalez, a crotchety 77-year-old populist. (1993)
ornery (1887) Now mainly US; applied to a person or animal that is moody and uncooperative; from earlier sense, commonplace; ultimately a dialectal variant of ordinary ■ J. Faulkner: Mules are the ornieres critters. (1941)
prickly (1894) Applied to a person who is touchy; from earlier sense, armed with prickers ■ T. Morgan: Janet Vale of the Morning Telegraph found him prickly. (1980)
grouchy (1895) Orig US; from grouch (to) grumble + -y ■ Irish Times: My husband is narky in the house. If I was to bring heaven down it would not satisfy him. (1973)
spiky (1930) From earlier sense, armed with spikes ■ N. J. Crisp: He seemed more relaxed . . . not as spiky and difficult as he had been. (1981)
stroppy (1951) British; perhaps an alteration of obstreperous with altered stem-vowel ■ Adam Diment: Should the shit hit the fan and the Swedes come over stroppy, he could say . . . 'weren't nothing to do with us, son!' (1968)
snitty (1978) Orig and mainly US; from snit bad temper + -y ■ People: A sixteen-year-old orphan, the child of an affair, who lives with her half-brother . . . and his snooty, snitty wife. (1987)

A bad-tempered or discontented person

sore-head (1848) Mainly North American ■ Thomas Wolfe: We thought he was a man, but he turns out to be just a little sore-head. (1939)
grouch (1900) From the verb grouch grumble ■ Listener: I am probably a humourless old grouch. (1957)
grump (1900) Probably a back-formation from grumpy ■ Thomas Griffith: I called on an affectionate grump known throughout the journalism department as 'Pa' Kennedy. (1958)

An angry scene

fireworks (1889) ■ Economist. The Labour party has threatened fireworks when the government tries to unload Rolls-Royce. (1967)
ructions (1890) From earlier singular ruction disturbance, riot; ultimate origin unknown ■ Economist: Such a proposal would cause great ructions within the Labour party. (1987)

Exclamations of annoyance

darn, damn it (1589) ■ Nigel Balchin: I shall have to let go of the other wrench. Damn and blast. (1943)
hell (1678) Often in such phrases as bloody hell, fucking hell ■ R. P. Bissell: 'Time to get up, Mister Duke.' 'Oh, hell,' I thought. 'Here we go again.' (1954) ■ James
Grant: 'Christ, mate, she's on the game.' 'Bloody hell, Lew, what has that got to do with it?' (1980)

**Hang it** (1703). **Hang it all** (1889) From hang execute by suspension, used in various imprecations. D. H. Lawrence: Hang it all, one did one's bit! Was one to be let down absolutely? (1928)

**Christ** (1748) • Eugene O’Neill: Christ, what a dump! (1933)

**Darn, darn it** (1781) • Sinclair Lewis: 'Darn it, I thought you'd quit this damn smoking!' (1922)

**Tarnation** (1790) Mainly US; alteration of damnation, apparently influenced by obsolete US slang tarnal damned, an alteration of eternal. C. MacLeod: Tarnation! Here comes another o’ them mobile camera units. (1983)

**Drat** (1815) Expressing (mild) annoyance; from archaic ‘od rot, euphemistic alteration of God rot.

**Bother** (1840). **Bother it** (1877) Expressing mild annoyance. Virginia Woolf: 'I move,' said Helen, 'that no one be allowed to talk of chastity and unchastity save those who are in love.' ‘Oh bother,’ said Judith . . . , ‘I'm not in love and I'm longing to explain my measures for dispensing with prostitutes and fertilising virgins by Act of Parliament.’ (1935)

**Blow, blow it** (1871) From the verb blow curse, used in various imprecations. Frederic Hamilton: Oh, blow! And I go back to school in ten days. (1922)

**Rats** (1886) Orig US • National Observer (US): About a day later another letter from the company turned up in my mailbox. Rats, I thought, they have discovered their mistake and are going to take all the fun out of my life. (1971)

**Heck** (1887) Expressing mild annoyance; euphemistic alteration of hell. • Passing Show: Oh Heck, tell some photographer I can’t be photographed. The very sight of a camera nowadays gives me the jitters. (1933)

**Sugar** (1905) A euphemistic substitute for shit. • English Today: We find that the over-50s (especially women) tend to favour ‘ersatz’ swear-words like . . . oh sugar! (1995)

**Hell’s bells** (1912) • Dorothy Sayers: Hell’s bells. Here’s somebody at the door. (1927)

**Blast, blast it** (1916) From the verb blast curse, used in various imprecations. • Ngaio Marsh: ‘Damnation, blast and bloody hell!’ Alleyne said. (1955)

**Shit, shite, shee-y-it, she-it** (1920) From earlier sense, excrement. • Time: Aw, she-it, as the street kids say. (1977)

**Jesus, Jesus wept** (1922), Jesus Christ (1923), Jesus H. Christ (1924) Presumably in use before the 20th century, but not recorded in print until then. • Iris Murdoch: He’s so spineless. . . . He just wants to let off and I let him off. Jesus wept! (1974)

**Bugger** (1923), **bugger it** (1943) From earlier sense, condemn. • Guardian: I collected this useful glossary of racing terms. ‘That’s racing!’ (I lost.) ‘You win some, you lose some.’ (You lost.) ‘Can’t grumble.’ (Oh, bugger.) (1992)

**Fuck** (1929), **fuck it** (1933) From earlier sense, condole. • Sara Paretsky: I heard him whisper ‘Oh, fuck’ under his breath, but he didn’t say anything else. (1992)

**Shoot** (1934) US; partially a euphemistic substitute for shit • Ruth Moore: ‘Oh shoot,’ she told Jen, when Jen suggested they’d better write the next batch of boarders not to come. (1950)

**Wouldn’t it** (1940) Australian & New Zealand; short for such catchphrases as wouldn’t it rock you?, wouldn’t it root you?, etc. • Cusack & James: ‘Wound up!’ it! she muttered furiously. ‘Wound up!’ (1951)

**Sod it** (1953) • Paul Scott: At seven-fifteen they had to go out to dinner. Sod it. (1953)

**Son of a bitch, sonofabitch, sonuvabitch, etc.** (1953) US; from earlier sense, despicable • Margaret Millar: Sonuvabitch, I don’t get it. What’s the matter? What did I do? (1957)

**Fucking ada** (1962) British; ada perhaps arbitrarily from the female personal name Ada.

**Hell’s teeth** (1968) • A. MacLeod: ‘Hell’s teeth!’ he swore furiously. (1968)

**Knickers** (1971) British • TV Times: When things go wrong then I’ll say: ‘Knickers. I’ll have another go.’ (1971)

**Sod (fuck, etc.) this for a game of soldiers** (1979) Expressing irritation or exasperation at a situation or (especially time-wasting) activity. • R. M. Wilson: Fuck this for a game of soldiers, you conclude. You’ve got to move before you die. (1989)

**Flip** (1989) British; expressing mild annoyance; first recorded in 1989, but certainly in use before then; probably a back-formation from the intensifier flipping, and used partially as a euphemistic substitute for fuck. • Viz: Blinking flip! He didn’t buy me my action man space suit. The miserable old twister! Damn him to hell! (1991)

29. Argument, Quarrelling

(An) argument, row

**Tiff** (1754) Applied to a minor quarrel between friends or lovers; from earlier obsolete sense, fit of temper; perhaps ultimately onomatopoeic.

**Breeze** (1785) Dated • Saturday Review: 'Don't be angry, we've had our breeze. Shake hands.' (1985)

**Spat** (1804) Orig US; applied to a small or unimportant quarrel; probably imitative • Daily Mail: The £1.3 billion British snack industry has its origins in a 19th century spat between a Red Indian chef and a fastidious customer. (1981)

**Set-to** (1829) From earlier sense, fight • Nichols & Armstrong: I like nothing better than a good set-to with a good shop steward. (1976)

**Donnybrook** (1852) Dated; applied to a heated argument involving many
participants; from the name of Donnybrook, a suburb of Dublin, Ireland, once famous for its annual fair. Economist: Imagine the Donnybrook there would be in France or Italy. (1966)

barney (1858) British, Australian, & New Zealand; origin unknown. Encounter: There was a right barney at the other end of the shop. (1958)

bull and cow (1859) British; rhyming slang for barney (1858). British, Australian, & New Zealand, particularly in New Zealand. Possibly from British dialect bull and cow, meaning rough house or brawl. (1958)

dust-up (1897) Probably from obsolete slang dust-up with one of his girl friends. (1944)

bust-up (1899) Compare earlier sense, explosion. Bully and cow (1859) British; rhyming slang for barney (1858). British, Australian, & New Zealand; origin unknown. (1944)

dust-up (1897) Probably from obsolete slang dust row, disturbance + up. Nevil Shute: He had a bit of a dust-up with one of his girl friends. (1944)

bust-up (1899) Compare earlier sense, explosion. A. L. Rowe: They were having a tremendous bust-up with the railway porters about their belongings. (1945)

run-in (1905) Orig US; usually in the phrase have a run-in (with). Arthur Hailey: I hear you had a run-in (with) a ganister, and he was very tough. (1976)

argy-bargy (1887) Orig Scottish; alteration of argle-bargle (1888). Mainly US; applied to a ruckus, rukus. (1890)

bullock and cow (1859) British; rhyming slang for barney (1858). British, Australian, & New Zealand; origin unknown. (1944)

ram-sammy (1891) Orig dialect; applied to a ruckus violent commotion or disturbance. P. B. Yuill: ‘I heard him and her having a ruck about Nicholas, that’s all.’ ‘What kind of a row?’ (1976)

See also Fighting at Violence (pp. 258–9).

To argue

barney (1876) British, Australian, & New Zealand; from barney argument. Vance Palmer: No more barneying with pannikin bosses about the length of a smoko or whether the sheep’s wet or dry. (1947)

argy-bargy (1888) From argy-bargy argument. Blackwood’s Magazine: Do not argue bargo with such scoundrels. (1922)

part brass-rags (1898) Orig nautical; supposedly from the notion of close comrades sharing each other’s polishing rags, and ceasing to do so when they fall out. Economist: He seems to have finally parted brass rags with the Arab nationalists and President Nasser. (1959)

cag, kagg (1919) Nautical; from cag argument. (1958)

tangle (1953) Orig US; from earlier sense, fight. Times: The mood of the House was sombre, and he had no desire to tangle with the Secretary of State. (1982)

Argumentative, touchy

feisty (1896) Orig & mainly US; from feist fist, small dog + -y. Dell Shannon: Luther gets a little feisty against forty or fifty men. (1950)

30. Violence

Fighting; a fight, brawl

set-to (1816) From earlier sense, boxing match.

scrap (1846) Perhaps a variant of scrape scuffle. Jon Cleary: My chaps . . . [are] itching for a scrap, y’know. (1977)

rough house (1887) Bruce Graeme: He’s smaller and lighter than me; not nearly so useful in a rough house. (1973)

ruckus, rukus (1890) Mainly US; applied to a violent commotion or disturbance; probably from ruction and rumpus. Times Literary Supplement: World Team Tennis . . . now actively encourages ‘audience participation’, a polite phrase that covers barracking, beer-cans, and the kind of ruckus that England normally only sees after a Cup Final. (1977)

ram-sammy (1891) Orig dialect; applied to a fight or to a family quarrel; origin unknown.

stoush, stouch (1893) Australian & New Zealand; applied to fighting or a brawl; probably from British dialect stashie uproar, quarrel. Bulletin (Sydney): Hayden . . . is prepared to take risks, even a stoush with the left if necessary. (1986)

rough-up (1896) K. S. Prichard: There’d ‘ve been a rough-up in no time, and only half a dozen of us with Paddy against forty or fifty men. (1950)
shemozzle, schema, schmozzle, schmimozzle, etc. (1916) Applied to a brawl or commotion; from earlier sense, muddle
  ▪ Peter: In the ensuing shemozzle Samuel got laid out with the butt-end of a rifle. (1916)

rux (1918) Naval slang, dated; applied to a disturbance or uproar; compare ruckus commotion and ruck row, quarrel. ▪ Rudyard Kipling: The nastiest rux I ever saw, when a boy, began with ‘All hands to Skylark.’ I don’t hold with it. (1931)

up-and-downer, up-and-a-downer, upper and downer (1927) From obsolete up-and-down applied to violent brawling fights + -er

hey Rube (1935) Orig North American; applied to a fight, originally between circus workers and the general public; from a cry used by circus people; Rube short for the male personal name Rubin, often applied in North America to a country bumpkin

rammy (1935) Scottish; applied especially to a fight between gangs; perhaps from Scottish dialect rammie row, uproar ▪ Evening Standard (Glasgow): Gallaher had the body, he was Irish, he laid out two slops in the last rammy. (1938)

sort-out (1937) From sort out deal forcefully with
  ▪ Telegraph (Brisbane): He was the most cantankerous character I have met. I had only been here two days when we had our first sort-out. (1972)

brannigan (1940) North American; applied to a brawl or violent argument; from earlier sense, drunken spree ▪ Toronto Star: It hadn’t exactly been a drunken spree • rough house fight ▪ E. L. Rice: Rough-housing with your kid brother. (1929)

rumble (1946) Mainly US; usually applied specifically to a gang-fight
  ▪ Daily Mirror: He was fired after an alleged punch-up with another worker. (1976)

tear-up (1964) Orig US; applied to a period of violent destructive behaviour; compare earlier jazz sense, period of wild playing ▪ New Society: We’ve had a tear-up with the police. (1982)

thump-up (1967) British; modelled on punch-up
  ▪ Maladicta: Teacher: ‘What would you have if you had 10 apples, and the boy next to you took 6 apples from you?’ Boy: ‘A thump-up (fight), Miss.’ (1978)

aggro, agro (1969) British; applied to aggressive or violent behaviour (especially formerly by skinhead gangs); abbreviation of aggression and aggression + -er
  ▪ Maggie Gee: He had to stop the titters with a bit of aggro, over the next few weeks, a bit of knuckles and a bit of razors. (1981)

bover (1969) British; applied to disturbance or fighting (especially as caused formerly by skinhead gangs); representing a Cockney pronunciation of bother
  ▪ Daniel & McGuire: Around the Collinwood there was about twenty on average but with bower there was sometimes more than that. (1972)

See also Argument, Quarrelling (pp. 257–8).

To fight

square up to someone (1827) Denoting preparing to fight with someone
  ▪ F. C. Selous: He squared up to his adversary and . . . struck him a heavy blow. (1983)

scrap (1874) From the noun scrap fight
  ▪ Economist: The new health secretary, Mr Kenneth Clarke, has shown in the past that he enjoys scarring with doctors. (1988)

mix it (1900) ▪ Dan Lees: These lads don’t want to fight for nothing. If they can get away without mixing it they will. (1973)

rough house (1900) Orig US; from the noun rough house fight
  ▪ E. L. Rice: Rough-housing with your kid brother. (1929)

stoush, stouch (1909) Australian & New Zealand; from earlier sense, hit
  ▪ J. E. MacDonnell: He was in a position to stoush with the local larrikins. (1954)

mix in (1912) Applied to starting or joining in a fight
  ▪ P. G. Wodehouse: If you see any more goats headed in her direction, hold their coats and wish them luck, but restrain the impulse to mix in. (1971)

tangle (1928) Orig US
  ▪ Brendan Behan: I don’t like tangling with anyone, but Ickey Summers was the sort of little bastard that would pick a fight with you until he lost and the best thing to do with him was to make sure that he lost the first time. (1956)

dish it out (1930) Orig US; denoting very forceful hitting

slug it out (1943) Denoting fighting relentlessly
  ▪ Black World: I saw the two shadows boxing on the side of the brick building. . . . It was Bernie and Bennie Speakes, twins about 10, slugging it out in the alley. (1973)

go the knuckle (1944) Australian
  ▪ Northern Territory News (Darwin): Katherine went the knuckle against Banks in the NT Football Association—and paid the price. (1984)

rumble (1959) Mainly US; denoting especially taking part in a gang-fight; from the noun rumble fight
  ▪ Sam Greenlee: The teenage gangs . . . haven’t been rumbling and so they have a lot of latent hostility to get rid of. (1969)

steam in (1961) British; applied to starting or joining in a fight
  ▪ New Statesman: As the underworld put it, ‘he steamed in like a slag and roughed them up as he topped them.’ (1961)

To hit

clout (1314) Originally standard English
  ▪ Martin Braune: She goes around with a mop and clouts people with it. (1985)

sock (1700) Origin unknown
  ▪ Bruce Chatwin: The porter had socked him on the jaw, and he now lay, face down on the paving. (1982)

mill (1700) Dated; from the notion of pulverizing something in a mill
whack (1721) Probably imitative; sometimes applied to corporal punishment. ■ Joseph Conrad: He whacked the old nigger mercilessly, while a big crowd of his people watched him, thunderstruck. (1902)

crown (1746) Denoting hitting someone on the head. ■ Osmington Mills: 'Someone crowned me, I take it?' The sergeant nodded. 'With the poker from our own hearth.' (1956)

fan (1785) ■ Lincoln Steffens: You wonder why we fan these damned bums, crooks, and stickers with the stick. (1931)

nail (1785) Used mainly in boxing to denote success in hitting someone. ■ Jack Dempsey: He ... is in a position to be nailed on the chin. (1950)

bash (1790) Ultimately imitative; perhaps a blend of bang and the ending of dash, smash, etc. ■ Independent: I landed him, scrambled up the bank and bashed him on the head five times. (1991)

pop (1817) Probably imitative; recorded in the 14th and 15th centuries, but there is no evidence of continuity of use between then and the 19th century. ■ Ryan & Jenkins: When our oldest son, Reid, was pitching in high school, one night the guys on the other bench were razzing him pretty good. 'Jose Consesco's gonna hit a grand slam off your old man!' they said, and other stuff like that. Ruth was ready to come out of the stands and pop every one of them. (1982)

conk (1821) Now mainly US; originally denoting hitting someone on the nose (from conk noun), latterly applied to hitting someone on the head (from conk head)

slog (1824) Dated, except with reference to hitting the ball hard and wildly in cricket; origin unknown; compare slug

wallop (1825) Sometimes applied to corporal punishment; compare earlier sense, move clumsily. ■ R. L. Stevenson: I have a rope's end of my own to wallop 'em. (1886)

chunk (1835) US; denoting hitting someone or something with something thrown; from the noun chunk piece. ■ J. D. Mac Donald: He chunked the four that were turned on to the biggest high, chunked them cold, and he chunked the record player, busted it all to hell. (1968)

belt (1838) Sometimes used with reference to corporal punishment; from earlier sense, hit with a belt. ■ Sports Quarterly: Being hit by the bandleader was the final straw for the man with the bloody nose and he belted Curtis squarely in the mouth. (1992)

swipe (1851) From earlier sense, make a circular movement with the arms. ■ Mail on Sunday: In the beginning Massimo patrolled the nightclubs on a souped-up scooter. He was kicked, sworn at and swiped but never sued. (1991)

clip (1855) From the notion of a sharp cutting movement. ■ New Statesman: After hearing of the incidents in which his boy had been concerned he had 'clipped him round the earhole.' (1961)

slug (1862) Now mainly US; origin unknown; compare slog. ■ John Steinbeck: Cop slugged me from behind, right in the back of the neck. . . . I was rumdum for a long time. (1936)

fetch (1865) Denoting striking a blow against someone, with the person struck as the indirect object. ■ Punch: Fetch 'im [a donkey] a good whack 'ith your rumbereller! (1865)


sock it to someone (1877) Orig & mainly US

biff (1888) Imitative. ■ Alexander Baron: Where'd you get that bruise on your forehead? Girl friend been biffing you with the old rolling pin? (1950)

slosh (1890) British; from earlier senses, splash, pour liquid. ■ J. Gash: I've sloshed her . . . sometimes when she'd got me mad. (1977)

stouch, stoush (1893) Australian & New Zealand; from the noun stoush fighting, punch. ■ E. Lambert: Get out of that bloody car while I stoush yer! (1965)

dot (1895) British; especially in the phrase dot a person one. ■ J. B. Priestley: Any monkey tricks an' I'll dot yer one. (1951)

soak (1896) US; dated; perhaps influenced by sock hit. ■ H. L. Wilson: If he gets fancy with you, soak him again. You done it once. (1915)

knock someone's block off (1902) Denoting hitting someone (especially punching them on the jaw) very hard; often used as a threat; from block head. ■ H. G. Wells: Many suggestions were made, from 'Knock his little block off,' to 'Give him more love.' (1939)

hang one on someone (1908) ■ Punch: There are moments when most of us have felt the keenest desire to hang one on the boss's chin and walk out. (1966)

bean (1910) Mainly US; denoting hitting someone on the head; from bean head. ■ P. G. Wodehouse: Why did you not bean him with a shoe before he could make his getaway? (1924)


sap (1926) US; denoting hitting someone with a club; sometimes followed by up, and also used intransitively with up on; from the noun sap club. ■ Jack Black: The posse fell upon the convention and 'sapped up' on those therein assembled and ran them . . . out of town. (1926)

bop (1928) Orig US; compare pop hit and dialect bop throw down with a resounding noise. ■ Cecil Day Lewis: I can use it [sc. a football] to bop them on the head. (1948)

clock (1932) Originally denoting punching someone in the face (from clock face), hence more generally hitting someone. ■ P. H. Johnson: I should have clocked Dorothy, as the saying goes, more times than I care to count. (1959)

nut (1937) Applied to head-buttting someone or hitting someone on the head; from nut head. ■ J. Mandelkau: He took it off and as I was getting out of mine he nutted me in the head. (1971)

bonk (1938) Probably imitative of the sound of a blow. ■ New York Times: This snake came out. My
grandfather pulled this wrench out of the flower and he bonked it on the head. (1984)

tag (1940) US; used in boxing; from earlier sense, touch or hit, as in the game of tag. • Ring: If I tag him the way I tagged Shufford, he’ll go down. (1986)

cream (1942) Orig & mainly US; from earlier sense, defeat heavily, thrash

pan (1942) Perhaps from pan face, from the notion of hitting someone in the face. • New Society: ’To pan’ is to punch just once. (1983)

clonk (1943) From earlier sense, make the sound of a hard blow. • Spectator: I have never been able to pick up a hammer without clonking myself one. (1980)

skull (1945) Denoting hitting someone on the head. • Andrew Berman: My waking came in dragged stages. . . I had been skullied. (1975)

zonk (1950) Imitative. • Ian Cross: She zonked me again on the head with this hairbrush. (1960)

king-hit (1959) Australian; denoting punching someone suddenly and hard, and often unfairly; from king-hit knock-out punch. • Northern Territory News (Darwin): Nikoletos was reported by goal umpire Peter Hardy after ‘king-hitting’ McPhee in the first term of the grand final. (1985)

stick one (or it) on someone (1960) • Making Music: I could have fallen through the floor— I thought he was there to stick one on me. (1986)

To hit repeatedly; assault by hitting

baste (1533) Dated; sometimes used with reference to corporal punishment; perhaps from baste moisten cooking meat with melted fat. • Richard Barham: Would now and then seize . . . A stick . . . And baste her lord and master most confoundedly. (1847)

leather (a1625) Originally denoting hitting someone with a leather strap, and hence more generally beating or thrashing someone; often used with reference to corporal punishment. • Alfred Tennyson: I’d like to leather ‘im black and blue. (1882)

towel (1705) Dated; compare obsolete slang (oaken) towel. club. cudgel. • M. G. Gerard: He caught him by the collar and towelled him down with a cutting whip. (1903)

lather (1797) Dated; usually denoting beating someone with a whip, cane, etc., sometimes as a form of corporal punishment

dust (1803) Sometimes used with reference to corporal punishment; sometimes followed by off; perhaps from the notion of knocking someone to the ground (the ‘dust’). • Time: [Miners] dusted one of [the district leader’s] lieutenants with an old shoe for trying to talk them back to work. (1950)

larrup (1823) Applied to thrashing or flogging someone; often used with reference to corporal punishment; origin unknown. • P. Dickinson: Mr. Fasting . . . had larruped Jamie. . . . Mother had wanted to send for the Cruelty Man. (1970)

scrag (1835) From earlier sense, hang (on a gallows) or garotte, from the noun scrag lean animal, hence (by 1829) the neck. • l. & P Opie: The first one to get off, gets scragged by the other lads. (1969)

lay into someone (1838) • G. R. Sims: She would lay into Master John with her stick. (1887)

paste (1846) • Arthur Morrison: ‘Isibs is goin’ black where father pasted ’em. (1896)

tan (1862) Dated; usually denoting beating someone with a whip, cane, etc. as a form of corporal punishment; from the earlier phrase tan someone’s hide beat someone (1670).

set about someone (1879) • John Horsley: This got to my father’s ears; when I went home he set about me with a strap until he was tired. (1879)

beat (knock, etc.) the tar out of someone (1884) US

do (1888) • Encounter: I . . . told him . . . I’d do him if I ever saw his face again. (1959)

wade into someone (1893) Orig US

roust (1904) North American; earlier senses (stir, etc.) suggest derivation from rouse. • Newton Thornburg: He ran into Sergeant Verdugo, one of the detectives who had rousted him the night of the murder. (1976)

beat (the) bejesus (or bejazzus) out of (1908) bejesus originally an Anglo-Irish expletive, an alteration of by Jesus. • Josephine Tey: I know men who’d beat bejazzus out of you for that. (1949)

take to someone (1911) New Zealand; applied especially to attacking someone with the fists. • Noel Hilliard: When we got home he really took to me. That was when I lost a lot of my teeth. (1950)

knock someone about (1926) • Guardian: Why does it matter whether Jeanne Triplehorn enjoys being knocked about by Michael Douglas unless you assume that her behaviour will be seen as typical of women in general? (1992)

work someone over (1927) • R. Perry: Alan held me and Bernard worked me over. (1978)

tan someone’s arse (or backside, behind, bottom) (1938) Usually denoting beating someone with a whip, cane, etc. as a form of corporal punishment; from the earlier phrase tan someone’s hide beat someone (1670). • Roddy Doyle: I’m warnin’ yis, he said—If one o’ yis laughs I’ll tan your arses for yis. (1991)

rough someone up (1942) • M. Braithwaite: They began to rough us up and we kicked and pulled and yelled about what our dads would do if they didn’t leave us alone. (1970)

clobber (1946) From earlier sense, attack with severity. • Oslington Mills: He must have seen me clobber Leeming when he dived for the brief-case. (1959)
fill someone in (1948) British ■ *Times*: A naval rating accused of murdering... an antique dealer... was alleged to have... said: 'I filled in a chap and took his money.' (1959)

break someone's ass (1949) US ■ Harold Robbins: 'Come on, kid,' he said. 'Let's break their asses!' And then he was running zig-zag across the field. (1949)

bash someone up (1954) British ■ *Daily Telegraph*: Discussing intimidation, the lawyer says: 'How would you advise a wretched statutory tenant who is threatened he will be "bashed up" by a rough-looking individual on the staircase one night?' (1963)

duff Someone up (1961) British ■ R. Lait: They had been duffed up at the police station. (1968)

beat (knock, etc.) the shit out of someone (1966) ■ B. W. Aldiss: The Japs... were meek and respectful... The shit had been knocked out of them. (1971)

bust Someone's ass (1980) US

To knock down

duck (1945) Orig US; from the deck the ground ■ *Sunday Times*: I shouldn't have sworn at Arianna. I should have decked her, and if she had been a man, maybe I would have. (1996)

To knock out

out (1896) Orig boxing slang ■ Eugene Corri: Lewis... promptly hit him a terrific punch on the point. 'Outed' by bluff! (1915)

wooden (1904) Australian & New Zealand; from the adjective wooden, perhaps after stiffen kill ■ Arthur Upfield: Got woodened with something wont wasn't a bike chain. (1959)

kayo (1923). K.O., k.o. (1927) (Representation of an abbreviation of knock out ■ *Cleveland (Ohio) Plain Dealer*: Rademacher, who was kayoed by Patterson in the sixth round in 1957, won a gold medal in the 1956 Olympic Games for boxing. (1975)

A blow

clout (18400) Originally standard English; from the verb clout hit ■ Walter Besant: The gunner... found time to fetch me a clout on the head. (1887)

sock (1700) Origin unknown

whack (1737) Probably imitative ■ *Guardian*: Give them a whack with a cleaver. (1992)

bash (1805) From the verb bash hit ■ *Listener*: A weak, wan lad... escaped with no worse than a bash and a hang-over. (1959)

swipe (1807) Applied to a heavy swinging blow; from the verb swipe ■ Michael Crichton: They can break a tyrannosaur's neck with a swipe of their tail. (1991)

wallop (1823) From earlier sense, clumsy or violent movement of the body

pop (1825) Used especially in the phrase take a pop at; from the verb pop hit; recorded in the 15th century, but there is no evidence of continuity of use between then and the 19th century ■ Jayne Miller: I wouldn’t go out and start on anybody, but you do get people who think, 'Look, he's a skinhead, he thinks he's hard, I'll go and have a pop at him.' (1995)

clip (1830) Often used in the phrase clip (a)round the ear; from the verb clip hit ■ *Guardian*: Scotland is a very macho society; a clip round the ear is considered good for your wife. (1992)

slug (1830) Now mainly US; from the verb slug hit

biff (1889) Orig US; compare Scottish dialect biff blow ■ W. H. Smith: What an idiot a man can be when he gets a biff that takes his wind. (1904)

paddywhack (1898) Probably a fanciful alteration of whack blow, based on earlier paddywhack Irish person ■ Frank Sargeson: Of course Michael is not going to be unsociable,' she announced. 'I'll have to give him a paddy-whack if he is.' (1965)

woodener (1899) Australian & New Zealand; applied to a staggering or knock-out blow; from the verb wooden hit

dinnyhayser, dinnyhazer (1907) Australian; applied to a knock-out blow; reputedly from the name of a boxer, Dinny Hayes ■ W. W. Ammon: Sometimes he let his dinnyhazer go with such viciousness that Stevie shook his head. (1984)

wham (1924) Imitative ■ Chris Bonnington: Have another try... This time the peg held, another half-dozen whams of the hammer, and it was in to the hilt. (1973)

dong (1932) Australian & New Zealand; from the verb dong hit

bop (1932) Orig US; from the verb bop hit ■ *Guardian*: His tenderly worded advances being repaid with a haymaker bop in the chops from ungrateful, unpuntable women. (1982)

fourpenny one (1936) British ■ Nicolas Freeing: I think he got mad because he gave her a real four-penny one. I bet she has a real black eye. (1964)

slosh (1936) British; from the verb slosh hit ■ *Daily Mirror*: I'll give you such a slosh when I get up from here. (1977)

bonk (1970) From the verb bonk hit; compare earlier noun use, denoting the sound of a blow

Punch

poke (1796) Often in the phrase take a poke at ■ *Billie Holiday*: She tried to get at me. I took a poke at her, and down the stairs she went. (1956)

bunch of fives (1891) From earlier sense, fist ■ B. W. Aldiss: My regret was that I had not given Wally a bunch of fives in the mush while I had the chance. (1971)

swing (1910) Applied to a punch delivered with a sweep of the arm; especially in the phrase take a swing at attempt to punch in such a way ■ W. Winward: If I stand here much longer I'm going to be tempted to take a swing at you. (1983)

haymaker (1912) Applied to a swinging punch; from the resemblance to the swinging action of someone wielding a haymaking fork ■ Emma Lathen: Rising from a collision, he had thrown off his glove and landed a haymaker. (1972)

king-hit (1912) Australian; applied to a knock-out punch, especially an unfair one
stoush, stanch (1919) Australian & New Zealand; from earlier sense, fighting, brawl

roundhouse (1920) Orig US; applied to a heavy blow delivered with a wide sweep of the arm  ■ Jack Kerouac: Damion's girl suddenly socked the jaw with a roundhouse right. (1958)

Sunday punch (1929) US; applied to a knock-out punch; probably from the notion that the victim does not come round until Sunday (or 'the middle of next week')

clock (1959) Often applied specifically to a punch in the face; from the verb clock hit  ■ Julian Macaren-Ross: It was my turn to administer the anaesthetic — by a final clock in the jaw. (1961)

knuckle sandwich (1973) Applied to a punch in the mouth  ■ A. Buzo: He tried to hang one on me at Leichhardt Oval once, so I administered a knuckle sandwich to him. (1973)

An act of hitting; a beating-up

Jesse, jesse, Jessie, jessy (1839) US, dated; in the phrases give (someone), catch, or get Jesse: perhaps from a jocular interpretation of 'There shall come a rod out of the stem of Jesse' (Isaiah xi.1)

pasting (1851) ■ J. D. MacDonald: Fictional heroes . . . can bounce back from a pasting that should have put them in hospital beds. (1950)

doing (1880) ■ Bill Turner: 'For God's sake, man! You'd get three years if you give him a doing,' she exclaimed. (1968)

going-over (1942) Orig US; compare earlier sense, scolding  ■ Angus Ross: 'Got a going over, did you?' 'Not much, I got a going over. Want to see the bruises?' (1970)

To kick

boot (1877) ■ Stevenson & Osbourne: I saw a big hulking beast of a Dutchman booting the ship's boy. (1892)

root (1890) Mainly schools' slang; denoting especially kicking someone in the buttocks

put the boot in (1916) Denoting a brutal kicking  ■ Guardian: When he's lying there some cow in the front row puts the boot in. (1964)

welly, wellie (1966) British; from welly wellington boot

A kick

root (1900) Mainly schools' slang; from the verb root kick  ■ N. Scanlan: Matt gave him 'a root in the gear' and told him not to talk like a stable boy. (1934)

boot (1942) From the verb boot kick  ■ Guardian: The Jockey Club may be seen by some as in need . . . of a boot up the backside. (1991)

welly, wellie (1977) British; from the verb welly kick  ■ Guardian: The first goal began as a misplaced pass by Hirst straight to Fensome, whose long welly into the right corner panicked King into a straight back-pass. (1991)

To attack with a sharp instrument; to stab

chiv, chive (1725) From the noun chiv(e) knife  ■ Times: Three of Heaton's pals threatened to 'chiv' him. (1955)

carve (1897) Orig US; usually followed by up  ■ Graham Greene: They just meant to carve him up, but a razor slipped. (1938)

chivvy, chivie (1959) British; from chiv(e) to knife + -y  ■ K. Hopkins: He got chivied at Brighton races. (1960)

To shoot

plug (1870) ■ Graham Greene: Don't say a word or I'll plug you. . . . I don't care a damn if I plug one of you. (1936)

ventilate (1875) From the hole made by the bullet  ■ Clive Egleton: You'd just better pray he doesn't kill somebody . . . because he's talking about ventilating people. (1979)

plunk (1888) Orig US; compare earlier senses, pluck (a stringed instrument), propel suddenly  ■ D. & H. Teilhet: I wish you'd killed Jeff instead of plunking him in the leg. (1937)

smoke (1926) US ■ Detective Fiction: You chiseling rat. You didn't figure Tommy and those heels could hold me, did you? I smoked them just like I'm gonna smoke you. Bugs. (1942)

To attack or worry an animal

sool (1849) Australian & New Zealand; applied to a dog; variant of British dialect soul seize roughly  ■ A. Marshall: Urged the dog: 'Sool 'im, Bluey! Get hold of him!' (1946)

A violent person; a thug; a ruffian

rough neck (1836) Orig US; applied to a quarrelsome or uncultivated person  ■ Dougal Haston: Jimmy was twenty-eight, and already a qualified architect; we were seventeen-year-old roughnecks. Basically I think . . . he was at heart a roughneck himself. (1972)

rough (1837) From the adjective rough  ■ Thomas Hardy: Gents with terriers and facetious pipes, rouges with sticks and stones. (1891)

plug-ugly (1856) Orig US; perhaps from plug hit + ugly  ■ Punch: Readers who have led sheltered lives will think of plug-uglies, and I hope the cleaner kinds of plug-ugly will think of baths. (1935)

tough (1866) Orig US; from the adjective tough  ■ I. Hamilton: He graduated to the status of school tough via a series of spectacular playground victories. (1982)

mug (1890) US

roughie (1905) ■ Peter Driscoll: I know a roughie when I see one. . . . He's just one of those blokes who can't stay away from trouble. (1971)

bruiser (1907) From earlier sense, (rough or violent) boxer  ■ J. T. Farrell: Two of the bruisers were drawing close to him. He started to run. (1934)

caveman (1926) From earlier sense, prehistoric cave-dweller  ■ Aldous Huxley: 'That passionateness of his, that violence—' Philip laughed. 'Quite the irresistible cave-man.' (1928)
31. Caution

Cautious, wary

cagey, cagy (1893) Orig US; often also implying uncommunicativeness; origin unknown
■ James Barbican: We hoped they would come out and pick us off, but they were too cagey for that. (1927)

deary (1896) Orig US; from earlier sense, knowing, sly
■ New Yorker: Many tennis authorities have been a little leery about placing her on a level with Lenglen. (1970)

trogl (1956) British; abbreviation of troglodyte
cave

trog (1956) British; applied to a lout or hooligan; from earlier sense, boy; ultimately back-slang for boy
■ Times: I would not want anybody looking at me to think this man is a thick, stupid, illiterate yob. (1984). Hence the adjectives yobbish (1972), yobbish (1972)
■ Sunday Telegraph: The loony Left should not be confused with that other Left which has been described as the Left of the yobbish tendency. (1984)

enforcer (1929) Orig US; applied to a strong-arm man, especially in an underworld gang
■ Times: An east London wholesaler was cleared at the Central Criminal Court yesterday of the gangland execution of an underworld ‘enforcer’. (1983)

muscle man (1929) Orig US; applied to a muscular man employed to intimidate others with (threats of) violence
■ Paul Oliver: With the considerable returns accruing from operating policy wheels the racket came under the control of syndicates with muscle-men and hired gunmen ensuring that their ‘rights’ were protected. (1968)

trigger man (1930) Mainly US; applied to a gunman or a hired thug or bodyguard

heavy (1936) Applied to a strongly built man employed to intimidate others with (threats of) violence; from the adjective heavy
■ Times: Prostitutes were threatened with ‘heavies’ working for a man named Kenny Lynch. (1973)

goon (1938) Orig US; applied to someone hired by racketeers, etc. to terrorize political or industrial opponents; from earlier sense, stupid person
■ It: Heath orders Habershon of Barnett CID to ‘turn London over’. And he does exactly that... with 500 goons and a score of specially trained dogs. (1971)

hooligan (1927) Applied to a young ruffian or to an accomplice or henchman of a gang-leader; an adaptation of Russian drug friend, introduced by Anthony Burgess in A Clockwork Orange

clog (1970) British; applied to a soccer player who tackles heavily, usually fouling opponents; probably from the notion of kicking with clogs

To intimidate

gotten at (1871) Usually used in the passive
■ Times Literary Supplement: We resent, as the Victorians did not, being ‘got at’ by the social or religious moralist. (1958)

put the frighteners on (1958) ■ Allan Prior: His job had been to put the frighteners on various shopkeepers. (1966)

mau-mau (1970) US; from Mau Mau, the name of a secret society fighting for Kenyan independence, from Kikuyu; the verbal usage
■ The local Teddies and yobbos swing their m Times Chronicle: The local Teddies and yobbos swing their dubious weight behind the strike. (1960)

shiner (1904) ■ G. F. Fienens: Out shot a telescopic left, and I had the shiner of all time for weeks. (1967)

A black eye

To be careful (of)

watch (1837) ■ William Haggard: Rex said deliberately: ‘I have to watch champagne.’ ‘Really? But this one won’t damage you.’ (1963)

mind out (1886) British; often used as an exclamation
■ American Speech: English children whizzing around on bicycles... will warn each other to keep out of the way by shouting ‘Mind out!’ (1948)
pussyfoot (1903) Denoting acting (too) warily; from earlier pussyfoot person who moves stealthily, like a cat ■ Observer: While most papers are still 'pussy-footing' on the Presidency they called their editors together and afterwards announced a unanimous decision. (1928)

watch it (1916) Often used as an exclamation ■ Dennis Bloodworth: We really do have to watch it a bit. Thank God we’re officially engaged. (1978)

32. Nervousness, Agitation

A state of nervousness or unease

the shakes (1837) ■ Benjamin Bova: The sliding glass doors . . . were locked. . . So I sat around and waited, trying not to get the shakes. (1976)

the all-overs (1870) Mainly US; from the notion of a feeling affecting the whole body ■ L. Craig: It gives me the all-overs to have a gun pointed in my ribs. (1951)

the jim-jams (1896) From earlier sense, delirium tremens ■ D. Johnson: We’re both . . . drained by constant fear; the unrelieved jimmies. (1986)

the willies (1896) Orig US; especially in the phrase give someone (or get) the willies; origin unknown ■ Gerald Kersh: It can give you the willies when, in broad daylight, you hear a rifle go off. (1942)

the jimmies (1900) Alteration of jim-jams ■ Patrick White: She was not accustomed to see the grey light sprawling on an empty bed; it gave her the jimmies. (1961)

the wind (1916) In the phrases get the wind up become nervous and put the wind up make nervous ■ C. Alington: I tell you you’ve absolutely put the wind up Uncle Bob and Peter! They’re scared to death of your finding them out. (1922)

the wind-up (1917) From the phrase get the wind up ■ Anthony Price: Bit of nerves . . . the old wind-up. (1980)

the heeby-jeebies, the heeby-jeebies, butterflies (1940) Applied to a feeling of internal queasiness at the prospect of a difficult or frightening undertaking; from earlier sense, stomach cramps

Nervous, ill at ease

funky (1837) From funk fear + -y

cranky (1891) Compare earlier senses, vigorous, courageous ■ Julie Burrows: Greta was grey as paper and peevish and cranky. (1973)

windy (1916) From wind (compare get the wind up become nervous) + -y ■ Douglas Clark: ‘Are you feeling windy? ’Do I look as if I am?’ (1985)

To make nervous or anxious

rattle (1869) Orig US ■ Peter Fleming: But I had the empty satisfaction of seeing that I had (slightly) rattled Pai. (1939)


To be nervous or anxious

sweat on the top line (1919) Orig services’ slang; from the notion of waiting for a number to be called at bingo that will complete the top line of one’s card

sweat (1973) ■ D. Devine: No point in being early. Let him sweat. (1978)

To await nervously

sweat on (1917) ■ Guardian: What did he do? ’I sweated on it. I waited a day at least.’ (1992)

A state of agitation or restlessness

twitter (1678) Now mainly in the phrase all of a twitter; from the verb twitter make the sound of a bird ■ Guardian: Jacqueline Bouvier, a journalist of sorts, is off to London all of a twitter. ’I am going to cover the coronation of Queen Elizabeth the Second.’ (1952)

stew (1806) Often in the phrase in a stew ■ Economist: These two schools have recently got into a situation where they are stewing away.
stew over the amount of practical money-making experience provided in class. (1987)

state (1837) Often in the phrase in a state ■ Violet Jacob: Don't you remember when she went away, what a state you were in and how you raged? (1902)

lather (1839) Often in the phrase in a lather ■ Erin Stanley Gardner: You're standing there in a lather of indecision. (1945)

flap (1916) Often in the phrase in a flap ■ Cambridge Review: It is quite untrue to say that emotionally vulnerable patients who 'get into a flap' over exams will subsequently panic when a real situation threatens them in later life. (1960)

Harry Tate (1932) British; dated; from the stage-name of R. M. Hutchison (1872–1940). British musical-hall comedian, used as rhyming slang for state

stuma, stumer (1932) Usually in the phrase in a stuma; origin unknown ■ W. H. Auden: Poor old Ma in a perfect stuma. (1932)

tizzy, tiz (1935) Orig US; origin unknown ■ Daily Telegraph: He hopes this mass production of original art may 'throw into a state of total tizzy' an art world where 'more and more money is being made by less and less people'. (1983)

two and eight (1938) British; rhyming slang for state ■ M. Cecil: Poor old Clinker! Bet she's in a proper two-and-eight! (1960)

tizz, tiz (1954) Shortening of tizzy ■ Illustrated London News: The people of Morecambe were thrown into a tizz by this idea of a barrage [across Morecambe Bay]. (1978)

tiswas, tizz-wozz (1960) Perhaps a fanciful enlargement of tizz(2) ■ Observer: A young man rang up in quite a 'tis-was. (1974)

Agitated, restless

antsy (1838) Orig & mainly US; recorded once in 1838, but the modern usage (first recorded in 1950) appears to be a recoinage, presumably based on the phrase have ants in one's pants ■ W. A. Nolen: Her husband got antsy and asked me to have Tom Lewis see her in consultation. (1972)

twitchy (1874) From earlier sense, tending to twitch ■ Daily Telegraph: On Tuesday night there had been fighting with neighbouring Croats. People were twitchy. No one smiled. (1991)

jumpy (1879) ■ G. Markstein: She was jumpy about the blackout too. . . . She is on edge, he decided. (1974)

toey (1930) Mainly Australian; perhaps from the notion of a restless animal pawing the ground with its toes ■ National Times (Australia): Dallas Jongs . . . had a hotel bouncer friend who could get as toey as a Roman sandal. (1981)

jittery (1931) From jitters + -y ■ Alan Ross: Barrington made 33, in his more jittery manner, before flicking at an outswinger and being caught at slip. (1963)


To be or become agitated

flap (1912) ■ John Verney: Mummy . . . burst into tears. I put my arm round her waist. 'Please don't flap.' (1959)

have ants in one's pants (1931) Orig US ■ Washington Post: Uncle Milton has ants in his pants. (1986)

Tense

edgy (1837) ■ Times Literary Supplement: An American family of harassed father, edgy mother and irritated crop-headed boys. (1958)

on edge (1870) ■ J. B. Priestley: Laura had in fact worked much too hard, and now she was altogether too fine-drawn and too much on edge. (1951)

up-tight (1934) Orig US ■ C. Young: He looked worried. Really worried. As the kids say, he was up-tight. (1969)

wired (1982) Orig & mainly US; often followed by up ■ Erin Pizzey: He's really wired up. It's fun to see him do the jumping for a change. (1983)

Trembling

the yips (1963) Applied to nervous trembling which causes a golfer to miss an easy putt; origin unknown ■ Telegraph (Brisbane): Nevertheless, Jones got a dose of what golfers call 'the yips'. (1972)

the pearlies (1974) Applied to an uncontrollable nervous shaking of the bowing arm sometimes experienced by violinists, etc. before a performance; perhaps shortened from an unrecorded pearly whites rhyming slang for frights

Frenzy

panic stations (1961) ■ J. Prescott: Someone has been into Greenwood's again . . . . and got away with another three hundred . . . . The police seem to be at panic stations about it. (1963)

To behave frenziedly

tear one's hair (out) (1606) ■ Guardian: The chef may have been tearing his hair, but I was slopping down his handiwork with some gusto. (1992)

have a fit (or forty fits) (1877) ■ Daily Telegraph: Elgar would have had a fit at the thought of 'designer stubble'. (1991)

have kittens (1900) Orig US ■ Anthony Gilbert: Gertrude was going to have kittens when she discovered that extravagance. (1959)

go ape (1955) Orig US: from the frenzied, panic-stricken behaviour (including defecation) of monkeys and apes when captured and caged ■ Tobias Wells: I'm just keeping busy. I've been going ape with nothing to do. (1966)

get one's knickers in a twist (1971) British, jocular ■ Brand New York: There is no reason to get one's knickers in a twist and believe the revolution is nigh. (1982)

See also To give way to heightened emotion; lose one's composure at Excitement (p. 245).
Frenzied, having lost one's composure

**hot up** (1902) From earlier literal sense, heated

- **Listener:** One thing that I think endears him to the normal young intellectual, is that he can get tremendously hot-up about a cause. (1967)

**hot and bothered** (1921) ■ James Barlow: Most of the teachers... urged silence in hot-and-bothered threats. (1961)

A nervous or agitated person

**jitterbug** (1934) Dated; from jitter move agitatedly + bug person with an obsession ■ E. H.

### 33. Fear

#### Fear

**funk** (1743) Orig apparently Oxford University slang; perhaps from obsolete funk tobacco smoke ■ J. I. M. Stewart: One oughtn't to let funk be catching. Tony was admitting funk—but perhaps not as much as he had actually been feeling. (1974)

**blue funk** (1861)

**the creeps** (1879) Applied especially to a feeling of horror caused by something uncanny; from earlier sense, physical sensation of something crawling over the skin ■ **Guardian:** Hitler's signature never fails to give me the creeps, like the trench signs... from the Great War. (1992)

**cold feet** (1896) Orig US; used to denote fear of doing something risky or dangerous ■ Ian Hay: It seems that the enemy have evacuated Fosse Alley again. Nobody quite knows why: a sudden attack of cold feet, probably. (1915)

**wind-up** (1917) From get the wind up be afraid ■ Anthony Price: Bit of nerves... the old wind-up. (1980)

**the Jimmy Britts, the jimmys, the Britts** (1945) Australian; in such phrases as **have the Jimmies,** **have the Britts up** be afraid; (Jimmy) Britts rhyming slang for shits, from the name of Jimmy Britt (1879-1940), American boxer; jimmys influenced by earlier **jimmies delirium tremens**

**the shits** (1967) From earlier sense, diarrhoea

#### Alarm

**panic stations** (1961) Applied to alarm leading to confused action; modelled jocularly on the military term action stations ■ J. Prescott: Someone has been into Greenwood's again... and got away with another three hundred... The police seem to be at panic stations about it. (1963)

**Afraid**

**scary** (1827) Orig and mainly North American; from scare + y ■ L. Craig: He'd been right smart proudified of your not being scary. (1951)

Jones: Sir Samuel Hoare denounced the ‘Jitters’ who feared war... Five days after... German troops moved unresisted into Czechoslovakia. (1966)

See also Someone who has lost composure at **Excitement** (p. 245).

A person who worries

**worry-guts** (1932) ■ Olive Norton: He laughed. ‘Worryguts!’ ‘I wasn’t worried. I was just trying to be efficient.’ (1966)


#### Funky

**funky** (1837) From funk fear + y ■ George Meredith: If he did not give up to you like a funky traveller to a highwayman. (1871)

**windy** (1916) From wind + y; compare get the wind up be afraid ■ D. Clark: ‘Are you feeling windy?’ ‘Do I look as if I am?’ (1985)

**shitless** (1936) Used especially in the phrase scared shitless; from the supposed laxative effects of fear ■ **New Musical Express:** The self-appointed guardians of public morality who campaign against pornography because they’re simply scared shitless by it. (1976)

**spooked** (1937) US; past participle of the verb spook frightened ■ Elmore Leonard: He was running for town, spooked good now, in a panic. (1977)

**Charlie** (1954) ■ Frank Norman: I was dead charlie and little fairies were having a right game in my guts. (1958)

**shit-scared** (1958) Compare **shitless** ■ **Rolling Stone:** Stewart was ‘shit scared’ about opening night. (1977)

**poopy** (1963) From poop excrement + y; compare shit-scared ■ Athol Fugard: Come on. Confess. You were scared, hey! A little bit poopy. (1963)

To be afraid of (of)

**funk** (1813) From earlier sense, flinch ■ Albert Smith: ‘I rather funk the governor’ replied, in turn, Mr. Spooner. (1949)

**shake in one’s shoes** (1818) From the notion of trembling with fear ■ **Punch:** It had set the whole Liberal party ‘shaking in its shoes’. (1873)

**shit oneself** (1914) From earlier sense, make oneself dirty by defecating; from the supposed laxative effects of fear ■ **Spare Rib:** I was shitting myself before I came, looking for all kinds of excuses. (1977)

**get the wind up** (1916) From the notion of flatulence as a symptom of fear

**sweat blood** (1924) ■ W. M. Duncan: I was sitting there sweating blood when those damned cops arrived. (1977)

**get the breeze up** (1925) Compare get the wind up ■ David Ballantyne: She was only making out she hadn’t seen you so’s you wouldn’t get the breeze up. (1948)
run a mile (from) (1949)  •  Alastair Heron: Were a woman to whom he exposed himself to respond sexually, the average exhibitionist would run a mile. (1963)

spook (1957)  From earlier sense, (of an animal) to take fright  •  R. M. Pirsig: I spook very easily these days. . . . He never spooked at anything. (1974)

shit a brick or bricks (1961)  •  H. Ferguson: By the time I got back to the hospital they were all shitting bricks. (1976)

spit blood (1963)  Used to refer to a spy facing exposure  •  Len Deighton: A man tailed or suspected is said to be ‘spitting blood’. (1966)

Frightening

scary (1582)  From scare + -y  •  Listener. The threat . . . is pretty scary. (1981)

spooky (1854)  Applied especially to something eerie and supernatural; from spook ghost + -y  •  Thomas Wolfe: Don’t start that . . . spooky stuff! It makes my flesh crawl. (1929)

creepy (1883)  Applied to something that produces an uncanny feeling of horror or repugnance; from earlier sense, having a creeping feeling on the skin  •  Spectator. A really effective romance of the creepy order. (1892)

windy (1919)  Services’ slang, dated; compare earlier sense, afraid  •  T. E. Lawrence: Such performances require a manner to carry them off.... A windy business. (1928)

hairy (1966)  Perhaps from hair-raising  •  Times. Lord Snowden said during a break for an orange juice: ‘I was a bit frightened. Some bends are a bit hairy.’ (1972)

spooky (1966)  Surfers’ slang; applied to a dangerous or frightening wave; from earlier sense, eerie

white-knuckle (1988)  From the branching of the knuckles caused by gripping tightly when tensely anxious  •  Wall Street Journal. The collapse of the EUA issue shows just how quickly white-knuckle time can arrive in the junk-bond market. (1988)

To frighten

funk (1819)  From earlier sense, flinch  •  Saturday Review: The jury, ‘funked’ by the Anarchists, returned extenuating circumstances in the miscreant’s case. (1992)

Buffalo (1891)  US; denoting frightening or intimidating someone, especially by bluff; from the noun buffalo  •  New York Evening Post. All the rest [of the newspapers] were what we used to term in the Southwest ‘buffaleted’ by the McKinley myth—that is, silenced by the fear of incurring the resentment of a people taught to regard McKinley as a saint. (1904)

put the fear of God into (1905)  Used to denote terrifying someone  •  Arnold Bennett: When she’s my wife I’ll put the fear of God into her. (1930)

put the wind up (1916)  From the notion of flatulence as a symptom of fear  •  C. Alington: I can tell you you’ve absolutely put the wind up Uncle Bob and Peter! They’re scared to death of your finding them out! (1922)

put the breeze up (1925)  Compare put the wind up

scare, frighten, etc. the (living) daylights out of (1951)  •  Illustrated London News: I might have chuckled throughout ‘The Sitor’ if its chief actor did not happen to scare the living daylights out of me, as the current saying goes. (1964)

spook (1959)  From earlier sense, alarm a wild animal  •  M. Gordon: You always act like you’re waiting for something. . . . It spooks me. (1980)

scare the shit out of (1961)  •  Guardian. They’re fierce. It scares the shit out of me. (1991)

A timorous person

fraid cat, freidy cat (c1910)  Used mainly by children; from afraid (reduced form of afraid) + -y + cat  •  Michael Crichton: ‘You okay with the fence, Tim?’ ‘Sure.’ ‘Want some help?’ ‘Tim’s a freidy-cat,’ Lex called. (1991)

scaredy-cat, scaredy (1933)  Used mainly by children; from scared + -y + cat  •  David Ballantine: Sydney called them scaredy-cats because they wouldn’t run like he had. (1948)

Exclamations of fear or alarm

oo-er, ooo-er (1912)  •  Compton Mackenzie: ‘Oo-er!’ cried Jenny. ‘We aren’t going to sleep in the dark?’ (1912)


34. Courage & Cowardice

Courage

spunk (1773)  Compare earlier sense, spark, fire  •  D. H. Lawrence: Oh, I like it! Shows the girl’s got spunk. (1928)

pluck (1785)  Apparently originally boxing slang; from earlier sense, heart, liver, and lungs of an animal, as removed for use as food  •  Independent. Now Russians have proved that they may not be genetically incapable of enjoying freedom—indeed they have shown some pluck in defending it. (1991)

stiff upper lip (1815)  Orig US; applied to courage or resolution in the face of fear or danger; from the notion of a trembling upper lip as a sign of perturbation

Dutch courage (1815)  Applied to false courage induced by drinking alcohol; probably from the drinking of gin, regarded as a Dutch drink
balls (1890) Orig US; from earlier sense, testicles (in allusion to "virile" courage) ■ Martin Amis: Just keeping a handhold and staying where you are, . . . even that takes tons of balls. (1984)
guts (1891) From earlier sense, intestines ■ John Cooper Powys: I think, if you haven’t the guts to act like a man in the matter, you ought to leave this girl alone. (1933)
gimp (1893) Origin unknown ■ Jean Potts: She didn’t even have the gimp to make the break herself. (1962)
moxie (1930) US; from the name of an American soft drink ■ DailyColonist (Victoria, British Columbia): I was very impressed with his all-round moxie. He could snap back at any of them, news reporters, police, and me. (1975)
cojones (1932) Orig US; from Spanish, plural of cojón testicle (in allusion to "virile" courage) ■ Guardian: You have the cojones to ask me if I still got confidence in Britain? (1966)
ticker (1935) US & Australian; from earlier sense, heart ■ Sunday Sun (Brisbane): The lady has ticker. . . She didn’t opt for the soft life. (1979)
bottle (1958) British; probably from obsolete Orig US: From funk stick (1889) A coward ■ S. Dyer: The government is losing its bottle and is using 'concern for the environment' as something of an excuse to renege on promises and punish the motorist. (1991)

Brave

spunky (1786) From spunk courage + -y ■ Roberta Krueger: These steadfast or spunky heroines invite the audience’s admiration. (1986)
plucky (1842) From pluck courage + -y ■ J. S. Winter: You are the pluckiest little woman I ever knew. (1889)
gutsy (1893) Orig US; from guts courage + -y ■ Sean O’Faolain: Kit Brandon is the life-story of a woman gangster, a regular tornado, a passionate, lawless ‘gutsy’ young girl from the mountains. (1937)
tight (1928) US; applied to someone who is tough and unyielding ■ L. Buckley: He was a hard, tight, tough Cat. (1960)
ballsy (1935) Orig and mainly US; from balls courage + -y ■ Elmore Leonard: The old man was showing off . . . he knew his way around. Ballsy little eighty-year-old guy (1983)
geame as a piss-ant (1945) Applied to the emboldening effects of alcohol ■ R. Tuffian: The old white lady makes you as game as a pissant. (1962)

To retain one’s courage

keep one’s pecker up (1853) British; pecker probably = beak ■ A. Merritt: I was talkin’ loud to keep my pecker up. (1928)
keep one’s chin up (1938) ■ Irene Baird: Keep your chin up honey. (1939)

A coward

funk (1860) Dated; from earlier sense, fear
dingo (1869) Australian; from the dingo’s reputation as a cowardly animal
funkstick (1889) Dated, originally hunting slang; from earlier sense, huntsman who baulks at difficult fences, from funk be afraid of + sticks fence ■ A. E. W. Mason: She thought of William Mardyke and his timidities. ‘He’ll never do that. What did you call him? ’A funkstick.’ (1930)
yellow-belly (1930) Orig US; from yellow cowardly + -y ■ John Steinbeck: I’m a cowardly yellow-belly (1952)
sook (1933) Australian & New Zealand; perhaps from British dialect suck duffer ■ Courier-Mail (Brisbane): The tough specimen might appear as somewhat of a myth by fearing to be different from his mates in case they might think him a bit of a sook. (1975)
chicken (1936) In literary use in the 17th and 18th centuries, but moribund until revived in US slang in the early 20th century ■ E. W. Hildick: ‘Speak for yourself—chicken!’ he jeered. (1960)
pleep (1942) Military slang, dated; applied to an enemy pilot who refuses aerial combat; perhaps onomatopoeic—‘echoic of a timorous young bird’, Eric Partridge, Dictionary of Forces’ Slang 1948
squad (1945) Australian; from earlier sense, small or insignificant person ■ J. Alard: ‘I’m no squid,’ he thought, ‘I’ll show them.’ (1968)
chicken-shit (1947) Orig US; from earlier sense, contemptible person

Cowardly

funky (1837) From funk fear + -y
yellow (1856) Orig US ■ O. Jacks: You’re yellow scum. You’ll fight when the odds are with you. (1977)
gutless (1900) Orig US; from guts courage + -less ■ L. A. G. Strong: Now you see what a gutless poor worm I am. (1941)
yellow-bellied (1924) Orig US; compare yellow-belly coward ■ M. Heeden: I’m a yellow-bellied, lily-livered coward. (1979)
chicken (1933) Orig US; adjectival use of chicken coward ■ Stanley Ellin: ‘You’d just holler for the cops? Why, man, you’re chicken. ’ (1952)
milky (1936) From milk + -y; from the association of milk with mildness or weakness ■ Heron Carvic: ‘Getting milky?’ scoffed Doris. (1969)
chicken-shit (1945) US; adjectival use of chicken-shit coward ■ It American groups are not so chickenshit about getting into underground work. (1970)

To lose one’s nerve, withdraw pusillanimously

funk (1857) Used transitorily; from earlier sense, be afraid of ■ Times: Mrs Margaret Thatcher is said to be as firmly committed as ever . . . despite accusations . . . yesterday that she would ‘funk it’. (1985)
squib (1918) Australian; also used transitively; compare squib coward. D’Arcy Niland: The rough-and-tumble doesn’t worry me. I’m not squibbing the issue. (1955) Sydney Morning Herald: The Treasury-types’ eternal search for ‘a politician with some guts’ is futile. Mr Fraser looked tough enough at the time, but he squibbed. (1984)
punk out (1920) US H. E. Salisbury: The Chimp, unfortunately, has a tendency to ‘punk out’ when the fighting gets tough. (1959)
chicken (1934) Orig US; usually followed by out; from chicken coward. Economist: Nobody can trust the others not to chicken out if they take the first plunge. (1965)
dingo (1935) Australian; also used transitively; from dingo coward. E. Lambert: ‘Where is Allison?’ ‘He dingoed at the last minute.’ (1952) Jon Cleary: You ain’t dingoing it, are you? You can’t toss in the towel now. (1952)
bottle out (1979) British; from bottle courage. Times: Why did Ken Livingstone ‘bottle out’ and vote to set a legal GLC rate? (1985)
wimp out (1981) Orig US; from wimp feeble or ineffectual person. New England Monthly. One of the women suggested the night had already been very full and rewarding and she wasn’t sure she needed to continue it. ‘Hey, are you wimping out?’ Patti asked. (1990)

A place to which one withdraws out of fear
funk-hole (1900) From funk fear. J. D. Clark: Deep, dark caves were never occupied except very occasionally as refuges or ‘funk holes’. (1959)

35. Perseverance

Perseverance

stick-to-it-iveness (1887) Orig & mainly US. New York Review of Books: This man who made his million apparently more by stick-to-itiveness than brilliance. (1979)

stickability (1888) Orig US. Daily Telegraph: All too many lack any degree of ‘stickability’ and flit from job to job like butterflies. (1962)

To persevere (with)

peg away (1818) Mainly British; denoting persistent laborious work. Len Deighton: How I envied you doing Greats, while I pegged away at my Civil Law. (1978)
tough it out (1852) Orig US; denoting enduring something unpleasant. Thomas Raddall: She was a great ol’ lady. Just kep’ her chin up and ... toughed it out to the end. (1956)
sweat it out (1876) Orig US; denoting enduring something unpleasant. L. Lewis: I haven’t much time ... but I’ll sweat it out awhile. (1945)

To remain in a place

stay put (1843) Orig US; from the notion of remaining where placed. Globe & Mail (Toronto): Fire Chief Dawson told him to stay put until the car could be pulled away safely. (1978)
sit tight (1890) V. Hunt: ‘Sit tight!’ she exclaimed, pinching my arm violently. She always talks slang when she is excited. (1897)

stick around (1912) Orig North American. A. Fox: You’ll be asked to come over here next week ... and you’ll have to stick around for a day or two. (1979)

To recover from a setback

bounce back (1950) J. D. MacDonald: Fictional heroes ... can bounce back from a pasting that should have put them in hospital beds. (1950)

Some one who perseveres; a resolute person

sticker (1824) From stick remain + -er. Celia Fremlin: Daphne did not believe in dropping things; she was, as she would have told you, a Sticker. (1967)

pebble (1829) Australian, dated; often in the phrase as game as a pebble
36. Conceit, Boastfulness, Ostentation

Conceit

**high horse** (1782) Orig in such phrases as on the high horse and mount or ride the high horse, now mainly in on one’s high horse behaving as if one thinks oneself superior to others and get on (or off) one’s high horse start (or stop) behaving in this way, and in variations on this theme • Dick Clement & Ian la Frenais: ‘Now, don’t get on your high horse, dad,’ suggested Ingrid with a touch of asperity. (1978)

**Cosmopolitan**: A good co-worker leaves her high horse parked at the kerb. Be aware of your rights as an employee by all means, but show willing sometimes... to do a little more than you have been told to do. (1990)

**big head** (1850) Orig US • *Economist*: The brutal big head (1850) • *The Economist*: But they soon warmed to what average Australians now think. (1988)

**side** (1878) British; often in the phrase put on side give oneself airs • B. Mason: But they soon warmed to what average Australians now think. (1988)

**jam** (1882) Australian; especially in the phrase lay (or put) on jam give oneself airs; from the notion of jam being a luxury foodstuff • Dal Stive ns: give oneself airs; from the notion (or put) on jam (1980)

**swelled head** (1891), **swollen head** (1899)

Conceited

**hoity-toity** (1713) Denoting haughtiness; compare earlier obsolete sense, frolicsome; ultimately a reduplication of obsolete hoit behave boisterously (of unknown origin); under the influence of high and height the now obsolete variant highly-tighty evolved (1844) • *Sunday Times* She [sc. Anne Diamond] wasn’t the least bit hoity-toity. She was always having me back to her place for a bit of cheese on toast. (1993)

**cooky** (1768) From cock male chicken + -y, probably influenced by cocksure • *Observer*: She’s confident without being cocky, and comes across as a genuinely lovely person. (1991)

**stuck-up** (1829) Applied to someone who has a superior attitude towards others • Monica Dickens: I hate these Housemen—stuck-up little boys, they think they know everything. (1942)

**jumped-up** (1835) British; applied to a self-important person • L. A. G. Strong: The better class despise me as a jumped-up chap with too good a conceit of himself. (1942)

**too big for one’s breeches** (1835), **too big for one’s boots** (1879) • Marghanita Laski: A young man who was getting too big for his boots. (1952)

**highfalutin** (1839) Applied to someone or something absurdly pompous or pretentious; from the earlier noun sense, pompous speech, writing, etc.; perhaps ultimately from high + fluting, present participle of flute • *New Statesman*: This is... a pleasing unsententious compilation, not really a lecture at all. Sir Compton is never highfalutin. (1962)

**lairy, lary** (1846) Cockney slang; applied to a knowing person, aware of their own cleverness; alteration of leery • B. Naughton: We’ll have to keep an eye on him. Spivs are lary perishers. Anything goes wrong they’ll never risk their own skin. (1945)

**snotty** (1870) Compare earlier sense, contemptible • *Globe & Mail Magazine* (Toronto): Francois is not always snotty, thank heaven. (1968)

**ikey, iky** (1887) Dated; apparently from the noun ikey Jew • T. Prentis: Sez as I’m as ikey as the Dook of Boocle-oo. (1927)

**snifty** (1899) Orig & mainly US; from dialect snift sniff (perhaps of Scandinavian origin) + -y • H. G. Wells: ‘Snifty beast’... That goveness made things impossible. (1909)

**sidy, sidey** (1898) British; from side conceit, swagger + -y • Bruce Marshall: He couldn’t very well put himself in first because people might think it rather sidy. (1946)

**cheasty** (1899) US; applied to an arrogant person; from the notion of sticking out one’s chest with pride • Alan Lomax: George was a little bit chesty, because all the girls around were making eyes at him. (1950)

**dicty** (1923) US, Black English; origin unknown

**hincty, hinkty** (1924) US; origin uncertain; perhaps from a clipped form of handkerchief-head an Uncle Tom black • *Chester Himes*: All those hincty bitches fell on those whitey-babies like they was sugar candy. (1969)

**toffee-nosed** (1925) Mainly British; applied to someone who is snobbish or pretentious; toffee perhaps puzzlingly after toffy resembling a toff (1901) • T. E. Lawrence: A premature ‘life’ will do more to disgust the select and superior people (the RAF. call them the ‘toffee-nosed’) than anything. (1926)

**swollen-headed** (1928) From swollen head conceit • *Historical Journal* Walter Hope was out of work because he was ‘too swollen-headed to go back to his old job’. (1993)

**pound-noteish** (1936) Dated • W. H. Auden: When we get pound-noteish... send us some deflating Image. (1966)

**stiff-arsed** (1937) Applied to someone supercilious or stand-offish

**big-headed** (1942) From big head conceit • John Braine: The selfish big-headed, hard-hearted young lover. (1959)

**smart-arse, smart-arsed**. (US) • *smart-ass, smart-assed* (1960) Applied to someone smugly clever • *Globe & Mail* (Toronto): It is tempting to be smart-assed when reviewing a Richard Rohmer novel. (1979)
ditsy, ditzy (1979) US; origin uncertain; perhaps an alteration of dicty • New York Times: She also has a big repertory of comic voices, ranging from . . . a maternal croon to a ditsy English matron's stiff-upper-register. (1985)

A conceited person

stuffed shirt (1913) Orig US; applied to a pompous person • Islander (Victoria, British Columbia): He had no time at all for the 'stuffed-shirt' types which were beginning to show in the north [of Canada]. (1969)

big-head (1932) From big head conceit • Edward Blishen: Saying . . . 'This man was a bighead,' in baffled parody of Shakespeare's funeral speeches. (1955)

toffee-nose (1943) Mainly British; applied to someone who is snobbish or pretentious; back-formation from toffee-nosed • Woman: People thought I was a bit of a toffee-nose for the first few months because I didn't speak to them. (1958)

smart-arse, (US) smart-ass (1965) Applied to someone smugly clever • J. Barnett: He had indulged in reckless speculation. . . . He was just as much a smart-arse as the Farnham D.I. (1981)

A self-important person

his (or her) nibs (1821) Used as a mock title for a self-important person; origin unknown; compare earlier nabs with same meaning • Alan Hunter: Since when were you on first-name terms with His Nibs? (1973)

high-muck-a-muck, high-you-muck-a-muck (1856) North American; apparently from Chinook Jargon hiu plenty + muck-a-muck food • Time: Not all the liberal high muckamucks were as warmly defended as Favreau. (1965)

I am (1926) From earlier sense, the Lord Jehovah, from Exodus iii. 14: And God said unto Moses, I am that I am: And he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. • Nubar Gulbenkian: Cyril Radcliffe... did not take the short-cut favoured by so many of his colleagues who say . . . 'I am the great I am, Queen's Counsel'. (1965)

Lord Muck (1937), Lady Muck (1957) Applied to a pompous self-opinionated condescending man or woman • Jack Thomas: Hey, Lord Muck! May we have the honour of introducing ourselves! (1955) • Ian Cross: She sat there, sipping away at her tea like Lady Muck. (1957)

Jack Strop (1945) Nautical; applied to a bumpous or opinionated man

mucky-muck (1968) North American; alteration of muck-a-muck, short for high-muck-a-muck • Globe & Mail (Toronto): Orpen was always let out at the members' enclosure, but he never sat with the mucky-mucks. (1958)

A swaggering, showy, or boastful person

swanker (1846), swank (1913) From swank swagger, behave boastfully (+ -er) • Richmal Crompton: He was a pariah, outside the pale, one of the 'swankies' who lived in big houses and talked soft. (1923)
showboat (1953) Orig & mainly US; applied to an attention-seeker or show-off; from showboat show off

teddy bear (1953) Australian; rhyming slang for

signifier (1962) US, mainly Black English; from signify boast, brag. + -er *Herbert Gold:* When he bragged like any carnie signifier, then I wondered where and why I was going. (1965)

Wheneene, Whennie (1982) Applied to someone, especially a visitor or foreigner, who exasperates listeners by continually recounting tales of his or her former exploits; respelling of the phrase ‘When I (was . . . )’ *Daily Mirror:* The islanders now call members of HM Forces ‘Whennies’. The reason for this? ‘When I stormed Goose Green’, ‘When I took Tumbledown’, ‘When I entered Stanley’. . . . And so on. (1983)

A suave person

smoothie (1929) Orig US; from smooth + -ie *Hugh Jenkins:* I have nothing but contempt for the international art market. It is a racket none the better for being operated by cultivated smoothies. (1979)

To be conceited

have tickets on oneself (1918) Australian *Jack Hibberd:* You’re the bastard that’s always been smug and had tickets on himself. (1970)

fancy oneself British *New York Daily News:* He was a bit of a Jack-the-lad if you know what I mean. ‘Tell me.’ ‘Well, he was bright enough, fancied himself, not settled or ostentatiously for all his mouth and supposed cleverness was easily tricked.’ (1970)

To boast, behave boastfully, self-importantly, or ostentatiously

swank (1809) Origin unknown *Sport Lest:* I may appear to be swanking, let me hasten to add that all of the credit went to someone else. (1950)

skite (1857) Australian & New Zealand; perhaps from earlier skite shoot, dart, leave quickly, perhaps from Old Norse skýt-, umlauted stem of skata shoot. *Rodney Hall:* That’s skiting, if you want to hear me skite. We’d beat the lot of youse, him and me. (1982)

put on the dog (1865) Orig US; denoting putting on airs *J. T. Farrell:* They were all trying to put on the dog, show that they were lace-curtain Irish, and lived in steam-heat. (1934)

put (or pile) on lugs (1889) US, dated; denoting putting on airs *Sinclair Lewis:* Oh, the lugs he puts on—belted coat, and pique collar. (1920)

shoot one’s mouth off, shoot off one’s mouth (1896) Orig US; compare earlier sense, talk indiscreetly

lair, lare (1928) Australian; denoting behaving or dressing like a lair; often followed by up; from lair flashily dressed or vulgar man *A. F. Howells:* Earning something in the vicinity of three pounds ten shillings a week . . . I could still afford to lair up a bit, get on the scoot occasionally with my mates. (1983)

signify (1935) US, mainly Black English *Z. N. Hurston:* ‘Aw, woman, quit tryin’ to signify.’ ‘Ah kin signify all Ah please, Mr. Nappy-chin.’ (1935)

shoot a line (1941), line-shoot (1942) British *Guy Gibson:* These things were happening every night, so there was nothing to shoot a line about. (1946) *Val Gielgud:* He believed Tom to have been line-shooting as far as his swimming prowess was concerned. (1960)

kvell (1967) US; from Yiddish kveln, from German quellen gush, well up *L. M. Feinsilver:* You’ve got reason to kvell. (1970)

See also To talk (of) exaggeratedly at Communication (p. 320).

Boastful talk; behaviour intended to impress

swank (1854) From the verb swank behave boastfully *Daily Chronicle:* What he said is quite true, barring the whisky—that is all swank. (1905)

skite (1860) Australian & New Zealand; from the verb skite boast *S. T. Ollivier:* ‘Alister Bridgeman says it’s mostly skite,’ Sarah said breezily. (1965)

buck, bukh (1895) Dated; often in the phrase old buck; from Hindustani bałk, Hindi buk buk *Penguin New Writing:* Nah then, none o’ yer ol’ buck, Ernie. (1941)

piss and wind (1922) Applied to boastful but empty talk; often in the phrase be all piss and wind be full of empty bravado *Guardian:* Mr Eric Lubbock, the Liberal MP for Orpington . . . said: ‘. . . I have heard nothing but piss and wind.’ (1969)

(all) gas and gaiters (1923) Applied to pompous but empty talk *G. B. Shaw:* Its [sc. the Bible’s] one great love poem is the only one that can satisfy a man who is really in love. Shelley’s Epipsychidion is, in comparison, literary gas and gaiters. (1932)

mouth (1935) Orig US; applied to boastful but empty talk; often in the phrase be all mouth be full of empty bravado *G. F. Newman:* The youth . . . for all his mouth and supposed cleverness was easily tricked. (1970)

line-shoot (1943) British, dated; from shoot a line talk boastfully *Terence Rattigan:* Funny thing about gongs . . . They don’t mean a damn thing in war—except as a line-shoot, but in peace time they’re quite useful. (1952)

A boastful talker

bullshitter (1933) Applied to someone who talks exaggeratedly in order to impress; from bullshit talk nonsense + -er *John Lennon:* He is a bullshitter. But he made us credible with intellectuals. (1970)

line-shooter (1942) British; from shoot a line talk boastfully *Listener:* [He] was an awful line-shooter. He claimed to have been at Oxford, but . . . he hadn’t been at Oxford. (1973)
Boastful

See *mouthy* under *Loquacious* at *Communication* (p. 318).

To show off

**strut one's stuff** (1926) Orig US; denoting displaying one's ability • *Sun* (Baltimore): Rain today made the prospect for off-going for the first card, thus giving the 'mudders' an opportunity to strut their stuff. (1941)

**showboat** (1951) US • Roger Busby: The Europeans are enough of a handful without DEA prima donnas showboating all over the place. (1987)

Given to showing off

**split-arse, split-ass** (1917) Dated; services' slang, orig air force • Arthur La Bern: The Royal Air Force and the Fleet Air Arm used to describe certain flyers as 'split-arse types'. This coarse expression was reserved for outstandingly reckless airmen. (1986)

37. Audacity & Rudeness

Audacity, effrontery

**face** (1537) Now mainly in the phrase have the face to do something • H. Rosovsky: When seeking an interview or a hearing it is most important to arrive with or be preceded by such a document, whenever possible composed by someone possessing a lot of 'face'. (1990)

**brass** (1682) Orig standard English, but latterly colloquial; from the notion of brass being hard and insensible (i.e. to shame) (compare *brazen*) • *Washington Post*: He wants to keep high the capital gains tax rate. . . . And yet he has the brass to say H.R. 820 is 'wise', presumably because venture capital formation is inadequate. (1993)

**cheek** (1852) From earlier sense, insolence in speaking to someone • *Guardian*: Some journalists have had the cheek to say to me, 'Do you work?' (1991)

**chutzpah, chutzpa, chutzbah** (1853) Yiddish; common among non-Jews only since the 1960s • O. Hesky: The sheer chutzpa—the impudence—of defecting . . . right in front of his own eyes. (1967)

**nerve** (1887) Mainly in the phrases have a nerve and have the nerve to do something • S. Brett: Joanne Menzies looked at him coolly. 'You've got a nerve.' (1975)

**neck** (1893) • L. A. G. Strong: And then you have the sheer neck, the bloody effrontery to say you think there's more in life than I do. (1942)

**crust** (1900) From the notion of an insensitive outer covering • P. G. Wodehouse: Actually having the crust to come barging in here! (1954)

**rind** (1903) From the notion of an insensitive outer covering • Times Literary Supplement: The Bjorn Borg Story (I'm glad they didn't have the rind to use the word 'Life'). (1977)

**brass neck** (1984) • *Guardian*: You can only marvel at the brass neck of Rupert Murdoch's *Sun*. Yesterday it launched its Politicians' Complaints Commission, a watchdog—well the *Sun* is nothing if not barking—to scrutinise the performance of MPs and others. (1992)

Impudent talk

**lip** (1821) • Clement & La Frenais: Cheeky this one, Nulty. Lot of lip. (1878)

**sass, sas** (1835) US; alteration of *sauce* • P. Welles: Is this what we get? Sass? No gratitude. (1967)

**sauce** (1835) Probably from the piquancy of sauce; compare obsolete have eaten sauce be abusive • C. Morley: My husban' wouldn't take none of his sauce. (1897)

**jaw** (1846) Dated; from earlier more general sense, talk

**back-chat** (1901) Apparently orig military slang; applied to impertinent replies, especially to a superior • New Scientist: They used to have loudspeakers on the back of their machines that bawled out backchat and delivery instructions to everyone within a radius of a hundred yards. (1983)

Audacious

**as bold as brass** (1789) Used adjectivally or adverbially; from the notion of brass being hard and insensible (i.e. to shame) (compare *brazen*) • Stanley Weyman: Seeing as he hung back I up to him bold as brass. (1922)

Impudent

**sassy** (1833) Orig & mainly US; alteration of saucy impudent • Arizona Daily Star: She plays a leading character, Persona Non Grata, a hip, wise, slightly sassy new friend of Alic. (1979)

**fresh** (1845) Orig US; perhaps influenced by German *frech* saucy, impudent • Harold Nicholson: 'Those Britishers,' mumbled the President eventually, having taken a large gulp of iced water, 'are getting fresh.' (1932)

**lippy** (1875) From *lip* impudent talk + -y • Ross Thomas: It might learn them not to be so goddamned lippy. (1971)

See also *mouthy* under *Communication* (p. 318).

Embarrassingly frank

**near the knuckle** (1909), **near the bone** (1941) • A. L. Rowe: Charging him . . . with having ‘two harlots begotten with child in his own house’. . . . This was getting pretty near the bone. (1941)
Truculent temperament or demeanour

attitude (1862) Orig US; from the use of the earlier sense, (demeanour arising from) a set of opinions, with negative connotations (as in 'I don’t like your attitude') ■ Washington Post: Customers with an attitude, and who needs them? (1993)

To speak rudely (to)

cheek (1840) Used transitively; from cheek insolent talk ■ Sunday Telegraph: She has met the most legendary quiz champion of all, the Australian Barry Jones, who cheeked his questioners and was never once defeated. (1991)
sass (1856) US; alteration of sauce ■ William Faulkner: Don’t you sass me, nigger boy. (1929)

38. Contempt

schm-, shm- (1929) Added to or replacing the beginning of a word, which then follows the original word, to form a doublet indicating contempt, derision, etc. (e.g. ‘Oedipus, Schmoedipus’); in imitation of the many Yiddish words beginning with this letter-sequence ■ I. Goller: ‘I know he made Davy go to the Palace to-day with the idea of hastening on the crisis in his illness.’... ‘Crisis-schmisis!’ mocked Barnett disparagingly (1929)

turn up one’s nose (1818) ■ Bayard Taylor: What To regard or treat with contempt

to speak rudely (to)
cheek (1840) Used transitively; from cheek insolent talk ■ Sunday Telegraph: She has met the most legendary quiz champion of all, the Australian Barry Jones, who cheeked his questioners and was never once defeated. (1991)

To regard or treat with contempt

turn up one’s nose (1818) ■ Bayard Taylor: What learning there was in those days... turned up its nose at the strains of the native minstrels (1879)
give someone the finger (1890) Orig US; denoting making an obscene gesture with the middle finger raised as a sign of contempt, and hence showing contempt for someone ■ J. Mills: Wayne drove past us slowly, grinning and giving us the finger. We waved back and gave him the finger but it was all very cheerful. (1978)
thumb one’s nose (1903) Orig US ■ John Wainwright: They are already thumbing their snotty, aristocratic noses at us. (1973)
look down one’s nose (1921) ■ Angus Wilson: When you were all little babies, I used to sing and dance all day. The English neighbours would say ‘That young Mrs Middleton’s quite mad’, and look down their noses—so! (1956)

raspberry, (US) razzberry (1890) Applied to a sound or gesture expressing contempt, specifically the continuous noise made by forcing air out of the mouth with the tongue held limply behind the lower lip; abbreviation of earlier raspberry tart, rhyming slang for fart ■ South Wales Echo: The only answer to that kind of nonsense is a long-drawn-out vintage raspberry. (1975)

snoak, snoaks (1791) Usually in the phrase cock a snoak treat someone or something contumaciously or derisively; origin unknown ■ Times: East German craft last spring embarked upon a new ploy... to net a Danish torpedo,... cocking a snoak at Nato’s Baltic muscle. (1980)
raspberry, (US) razzberry (1890) Applied to a sound or gesture expressing contempt, specifically the continuous noise made by forcing air out of the mouth with the tongue held limply behind the lower lip; abbreviation of earlier raspberry tart, rhyming slang for fart ■ South Wales Echo: The only answer to that kind of nonsense is a long-drawn-out vintage raspberry. (1975)

snob, silence ■ David Delman: So why did you put him down that way, in front of me? (1972)

rank (1958) US, Black English; denoting insulting or putting down someone, especially within one’s social group ■ C. Mitchell-Kernan: ‘Barbara was trying to rank Mary,’ to put her down by typing her. (1971)
blank (1977) British; denoting deliberately ignoring someone; probably from the notion of giving someone a blank stare ■ Select As Alex wanders inside to bid the local support band a polite hello he is blanked outrageously. (1991)
diss, dis (1986) Orig US, Black English; denoting putting someone down, usually verbally; shortened from disrespect ■ Sky Magazine: What is a Gas Face? That’s the kind of face you pull if you’re trying to kick it with some girl and she disses you! (1990)

A sign of contempt

snook, snooks (1791) Usually in the phrase cock a snook treat someone or something contumaciously or derisively; origin unknown ■ Times: East German craft last spring embarked upon a new ploy... to net a Danish torpedo,... cocking a snook at Nato’s Baltic muscle. (1980)

razzoo (1890) North American, dated; from razberry + arbitrary suffix -oo ■ Raymond Chandler: My information is Apartment 301, but all I get there is the big razzoo. (1939)

razz (1919) Orig US; abbreviation of razzberry ■ Spectator: He selects one of them for punishment... delivers a sonorous ‘razz’ and pretends to cane him. (1961)

Harvey Smith (1973) British; applied to a V-sign or other gesture of contempt; from the name of
Robert Harvey Smith (b. 1938), British show-jumper, with reference to a gesture he made during a televised event in 1971 (explained by Harvey Smith as a Victory sign). *Telegraph & Argus* (Bradford): Centuries from now, people may still refer to a two-fingered gesture as a 'Harvey Smith'. (1985)

See also *give the finger* at To regard or treat with contempt (p. 275).

Contemptuous, scornful

**sniffy** (1871) From the verb sniff + -y. *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*: Sniffy comments of a patronizing nature about Victorian buildings so regrettably sprinkled throughout earlier books in *The Buildings of England* are carefully avoided. (1979)

Exclamations of contempt or derision

**kiss my arse** (or *ass*) (1705). *Fairbanks* (Alaska) *Daily News-Miner*: McGovern had told an airport antagonist to 'kiss my arse'. (1972)

**garn** (1886) Representing a Cockney pronunciation of *go on!* *Anne Holden*: 'Garn,' called out someone, 'tell us something we don't know!' (1968)

**pigs** (1906) Australian; often in the phrase pigs to you. *Les Ryan*: 'A pig to you!' 'In your dinger, too!' (1975)

**sucks** (1913) Used especially by children; usually in the phrases sucks to you and you bo.sucks

**Listener**: The council treated the urbane Mr Cook to the politician's equivalent of 'Yah, boo, sucks'. (1983)

**yah boo, ya(a) boo** (1921) Used especially by children. *Agatha Christie*: Two small boys arrived... preparing as usual to say, 'Yah. Boo. Shan't go.' (1976)

**nuts** (1931) From nuts testicles. *Dick Francis*: 'I'll give you a hundred.' 'Nuts.' 'A hundred and fifty.' (1974)

39. Meanness

Mean, ungenerous

**tight** (1805) J. Gaskell: When I was on the cabs... who'd give you a grand-hearted tip, never tight, but all the brass? (1869)

**cheap** (1904) US. *Charles Grant*: She took some time off. She went West someplace, to see friends, I think. She's too cheap to send me a postcard. (1994)

**mingy** (1911) Perhaps from *mean* + *stingy*, or a blend of *mangy* and *stingy*. *E. V. Lucas*: It's dear, but we are not going to be mingy. (1930)

A mean person


**skinflint** (1700) From the phrase *skin a flint* go to extreme lengths to save money. *Cecil Roberts*: Which sum the captain, who was a regular skinflint, said was far too much. (1881)

**cheapskate** (1903) Mainly US; from *cheap* mean + *skate* mean or contemptible person; compare earlier *cheap skate* contemptible person. *Car*: The neighbours would suss it instantly, label you a cheapskate. (1990)

**skate** (1904) Mainly US; from earlier sense, contemptible person

**tightwad** (1906) Orig and mainly US; from *tight* + *wad* bundle of banknotes. *Sunday Telegraph*: Bleeding tightwad! You'd think with all that cash he'd take a taxi. (1977)

**nickel nurser** (1926) US, dated; from nickel five-cent coin

**meany, meanie** (1927) From *mean* + *-y*. *J. B. Priestley*: He was at heart, she felt, a cunning old meanie. (1951)

**cheap Charlie** (1965) US, mainly military slang

Meanness

**one-way pockets** (1926) Jocular. *P. G. Wodehouse*: His one-way pockets are a by word all over England. (1961)
40. Honesty

(See also Genuineness & Spuriousness pp. 424–5)

Honest

**straight** (1864) ▪ John Wainwright: Inky was straight... Ten years ago, Inky had walked away from prison... and, since that day, he hadn’t put a foot wrong. (1977)

**on the level** (1872) Orig US ▪ Robert Graves: He also prefers pools to premium-bond gambling—in which a bloke can’t choose his own combination of numbers, so how does one know that it’s on the level? (1968)

**on the straight** (1900)

**legit** (1908) Abbreviation of legitimate ▪ Hartley Howard: This dough isn’t strictly legit. (1973)

**kosher** (1924) From earlier sense, genuine ▪ L. Gribble: ‘No financial irregularities?’ ‘Strictly kosher... It’s so good it stinks.’ (1961)

**clean** (1926) Often applied specifically to someone not carrying incriminating material, such as drugs or weapons ▪ Mario Puzo: They’ll frisk me when I meet them so I’ll have to be clean then, but figure out a way you can get a weapon to me. (1969)

**on the legit** (1931)

**straight-up** (1936) Often used adverbially to denote that one is speaking truthfully ▪ R. Hill: You looked honest to me... and you sounded like a straight-up guy. (1982) ▪ W. J. Burley: I don’t know where he is, Mr Gill, straight up. (1973)

**upfront** (1967)

An honest person

**straight goods** (1903) US, dated; from earlier sense, the truth

**clean-skin** (1907) Australian; applied to a person with a clean police record; from earlier sense, unbranded animal ▪ Sun-Herald (Sydney): Cameron’s death was... ordered because the drug gang had no further use for the former ‘clean skin’ they had recruited and it was feared he would give evidence against them. (1984)

**straight shooter** (1928) Mainly US

**straight arrow** (1892) North American ▪ Cyra McFadden: I keep trying to tell you, I’m really a straight arrow. (1977)

**Mr. Clean** (1974) Applied to an honourable or incorruptible politician ▪ Guardian: Mr Shultz himself has never been touched by Watergate... His reputation as a ‘Mr Clean’... has led him... to voice a growing sense of unease. (1974)

A reliable person

**brick** (1840) From the strength and solidity of a brick ▪ Guardian: I must say she has been an absolute brick and... both my parents will really miss her. (1992)

**pistol** (1984) US ▪ J. Phillips: What a pistol she was—still working at the dress shop then, hard as nails and took no truck from anyone. (1984)

To be, remain, or become honest

**keep one’s nose clean** (1887) Orig US ▪ Angus Ross: Denis Fitzgerald... a known associate of villains, but managed to keep his own nose clean. (1974)

**straighten up** (1907)

**go straight** (1940) ▪ Roger Simons: I’m goin’ straight. Last time I was done was two years ago, and I ain’t been tapped on the shoulder since. (1968)

An honest way of life

**the straight and narrow** (1930) Short for the straight and narrow path a course of conventionally moral and law-abiding behaviour; inspired by Matthew vii.14: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it ▪ Fay Weldon: It’s only the fear of pregnancy which keeps girls on the straight and narrow. (1978)

The truth

**gospel** (a.1250) From earlier sense, holy scriptures ▪ G. R. Sims: It’s gospel every word. (1887)

**the straight** (1866) US; especially in the phrases get (at) or hear the straight ▪ Lesley Egan: Tell you something. I never heard the straight of that anyway. (1977)

**straight goods** (1892) US, dated ▪ Eugene O’Neill: Is all dat straight goods? (1922)

**dinkum oil, dinkum** (1915) Australian & New Zealand ▪ J. H. Fullarton: Anyway there’s no dinkum oil. Only latrinograms... it may all be hooey. (1944)

**the strong of** (1915) Australian; used to refer to the truth about something or the point or meaning of something ▪ B. Dawe: H-hey fellers... What’s the strong of this—empty glasses? C’mom, it’s my shout. (1983)

**where it’s at** (1965) Orig US; used to refer to the true state of affairs

To tell the truth

**cross my heart (and hope to die)** (1908) Used as an assertion that one is telling the truth; from the action of making the sign of the cross over one’s heart as a pledge of sincerity ▪ Rose Macaulay: let’s both swear.’ ‘Cross my heart and hope to die. Now what about bed?’ (1926)

**come clean** (1919) Orig US; usually suggesting confession of wrongdoing ▪ Joyce Cary: I was wasting my time, because you kept dodging. You never come clean. (1959)

**level with** (1920) Orig US ▪ Len Deighton: I’d better level with you, son... From now on, control is through me. (1974)

**swear blind** (1937) Used to make a strong assertion that one is telling the truth (but often with the implication that one is not) ▪ Byte: You can swear blind it’s solving a partial differential equation and they would be hard put to prove it is not. (1985)
behaviour, attitudes, and emotions

shoot the works (1946) Orig US; denoting candid speaking
tell it like it is (1964) Orig US, Black English
L. Loko: The crowd responded fervently with 'Amen, amen,' and 'Tell it like it is.' (1969)

let it all hang out (1970) Orig US; denoting candid speaking
Village Voice: No names, of course, will be used; he doesn't expect everyone will be as willing as he is to let it all hang out. (1972)

41. Sincerity & Insincerity

Obsequious behaviour; toadying
arse-licking (1912) Paul Scott: I can't go up and ask Were you my brother's C.O.?... it'd look like arse-licking. (1958)

bum-sucking (1949) British Compton Mackenzie: Being accused of sucking up, or even of bum-sucking. (1963)

To behave obsequiously (towards)
kiss someone's arse (or ass) (1749) Henry Miller: If it weren't that I had learned to kiss the boss's ass, I would have been fired. (1934)
suck up (1860) Usually followed by to Margaret Mitchell: We hear how you suck up to the Yankees . . . to get money out of them. (1936)
crawl (1881) Orig Australian William Dick: I didn't crawl to him I wouldn't crawl to no bastard for nothing. (1969)
bum-suck (1930) British; back-formation from bum-sucker sycophant Leonard Cooper: He bum-sucked to all the rich men. (1960)
suck around (1931) Orig and mainly US; applied to someone who goes about behaving obsequiously George Ade: As for the Landsy party on July 10th I have had no invitation but maybe I could suck around and get one. (1934)

brown-nose (1938) Orig US military slang; from the noun brown-nose sycophant Julian Symons: If you don't . . . get cracking on a few little jobs for this paper instead of spending your time brown-nosing Mr. Fairfield, you [etc.]. (1960)
lick (someone's) arse (or ass) (1959) Select: Even the most outrageous band licks arse to get radio play and press. (1995)

ass-kiss (1961) Mainly US; back-formation from ass-kissing Saul Bellow: If it could have been done by ass-kissing his patrons and patronesses, B. B. would have dried away a good many tears. (1984)
suck-hole (1961) Orig and mainly Canadian
J. Metcalf: Can't even fix yourself a sandwich without suckholing round that man. (1972)

See also To speak revealingly under Communication (pp. 319–20).

Without concealment of the (unattractive) truth warts and all (1930) Applied originally to candid portraiture; said to be from Oliver Cromwell's request to Peter Lely to paint him without concealing the warts on his face Kenneth Giles: In fact you want a run down on Stanisgate, warts and all. Huh? (1966)

piss in someone's pocket (1967) Australian; denoting ingratiating
arse-lick (1968) Back-formation from arse-licking An obsequious person; a toady, sycophant
ass-kisser (1766) Mainly US
creeping Jesus (c1818) Applied to a sycophantic or servile person or one who is hypocritically pious Roy Campbell: The Zulus naturally despise the creeping Jesus type who sucks up to them. (1934)
bum-sucker (1877) British; from bum buttocks
creeping Jesus (c1818) Applied to a sycophantic or servile person or one who is hypocritically pious Roy Campbell: The Zulus naturally despise the creeping Jesus type who sucks up to them. (1934)

brown-nose (1938), brown-noser (1950) Orig US military slang; from the equation of servility with licking, etc. someone's anus Marshall Pugh: It was part of the tradition to hate a Highland laird or be a brown-nose.

apple-polisher (1927) Orig and mainly US; from the practice of American schoolchildren presenting their teacher with a shiny apple, in order to gain favour E. A. McCourt: The apple-polishers in the front row laughed with forced heartiness. (1947)

arse-licker (1938) Friend: Maybe we should have been talking with Henry Ford rather than this professional arse-licker. (1971)

brown-nose (1938), brown-noser (1950) Orig US military slang; from the equation of servility with licking, etc. someone's anus Marshall Pugh: It was part of the tradition to hate a Highland laird or be a brown-nose.

To flatter; to deceive with insincere or flattering talk
blasé (1803) From the noun blaser flattery
gammon (1812) British, dated; from gammon insincere or flattering talk
Georgette Heyer: He
added, as a clincher, that Mr. Christopher need not try to gammon him into believing that he wasn’t in the habit of wearing full evening-dress. (1963)

**butter up** (1819) From earlier butter in the same sense • E. M. Forster: ‘This is a great relief to us, it is very good of you to call, Doctor Sahib,’ said Hamidullah, buttering him up a bit. (1924)

**sawder** (1834), **soft-sawder** (1843) Dated; from the noun (soft) sawder flattery • Manchester Examiner: When the Irish electors were to be soft-sawdered. (1883)

**soft-soap** (1840) From the noun soft soap flattery • A. K. Green: I am not a clumsy fellow at softsoaping a girl. (1883)

**soap** (1853) Dated • Charles Dickens: These Dear Jacks soap the people shamefully, but we Cheap Jacks don’t. (1865)

**bull** (1907) US; from earlier sense, talk emptily

**crap** (1930) US; from crap nonsense • Stanley Ellin: I don’t want you to crap me. . . . I want your honest opinion. (1958)

**schmeer, schmere, shmeeer** (1930) North American; from Yiddish schmirn smear, grease, flatter

**sweet-talk** (1936) Orig and mainly US; from sweet talk flattery • Tennessee Williams: I’d say a sweet and I’d say it, and I’d keep up that hand in the cashbox. (1955)

**bullshit** (1937) Orig US; from the noun bullshit exaggeration, flattery • Philip Roth: Please, let us not bullshit one another about ‘love’ and its duration. (1969)

**flannel** (1941) British; from the noun flannel exaggerated or flattering talk • John Braine: I managed to flannel him into the belief that I approved of his particular brand of efficiency. (1957)

**snow** (1945), **snow-job** (1962) Orig and mainly US; snow-job from the noun snow job flattery, deception • J. Jones: He went on sweetmouthing me, with his slippery mean eyes. (1973)

In sincere or exaggerated talk intended to flatter or deceive; humbug or flattery

See also **Nonsense** (pp. 334–5).

**blarney** (1796) From Blarney name of a village near Cork, Ireland. In the castle there is an inscribed stone in a position difficult of access. The popular saying is that any one who kisses this ‘Blarney stone’ will ever after have ‘a cajoling tongue and the art of flattery or of telling lies with unblushing effrontery’ (Lewis, Topographical Dictionary of Ireland) • Times: You do not want to come here every day to listen to a lot of blarney. (1955)

**gammon** (1805) British, dated; probably from the 18th- and 19th-century thieves’ slang expressions give someone gammon, keep someone in gammon distract someone’s attention while an accomplice robs him, which may be an application of the backgammon term gammon complete victory achieved before one’s opponent has removed any of his pieces

**soft soap** (1830) Orig US • Sun (Baltimore): Assailing Governor Lehman for his ‘soft soap’ manner of campaign, the park commissioner . . . renewed his assault on the Lehman banking family. (1934)

**soft sawder** (1836), **sawder** (1843) Dated; apparently a use of sawder solder • D. G. Rossetti: MacCrac . . . offers £50 for the water-colour, with all manner of soap and sawder into the bargain. (1854)

**borak, borac, borack, borax** (1845) Australian & New Zealand; from Aboriginal blarney, flattery • A. Kimmins: This isn’t kid-stakes This is as in kidstakes, kidsteaks (1912) Australian & New Zealand; probably from kid nonsense, kidding, as in no kid • J. R. Macdonald: If you’re a detective, what was all that bushwa about Hollywood and Sunset Boulevard? (1959)

**bull con** (1896) US; applied to a concerted attempt at flattery, deception, or persuasion

**B.S.** (1900) Mainly North American; abbreviation of bullshit • J. Goulet: Shit you can’t be around a project like this for two years without picking up some of that B.S. (1975)

**bull** (1902) Orig US; from earlier sense, ludicrously contradictory statement • Guy Gibson: I have never heard such a line of bull in all my life. (1946)

**bushwa, booshwa(h), bushwha, bushwhah** (1906) North American; apparently a euphemistic alteration of bullshit • J. R. MacCrac... offers £50 for the water-colour, with all manner of expressions give someone gammon, keep someone in gammon distract someone’s attention while an accomplice robs him, which may be an application of the backgammon term gammon complete victory achieved before one’s opponent has removed any of his pieces

**oil** (1917) • P. G. Wodehouse: Coo to him, and give him the old oil. (1940)
blah, bla, blaa, blah-blah, etc. (1918) Orig US; imitative. • *Observer.* England isn’t fooling anyone with so much ‘blah’ about the world’s greatest tournament. (1927)

jazz (1918) Orig US; probably from earlier musical sense • Bernard Malamud: I read all about that formalism jazz in the library and it’s bullshit. (1971)

applesauce (1919) US; often used as an interjection to deflate or reject flattery; compare earlier theatrical slang sense, silly comedy.

drip (1919) Orig US

flannel (1927) British • *Penguin New Writing.* The ship’s company know what is coming. Jimmy the One is going to give us a pep talk. Tons of flannel. (1945)

madam (1927) • John Wainwright: It was not the sort of place conducive to putting over a spot of old madam. The normally glib flannel tended to stick in his throat and the guff and eye-wash hadn’t enough elbow-room to . . . sound feasible. (1973)

jive (1928) Orig US; origin unknown • *Black World.* Everything that we do must be aimed toward the total liberation, unification and empowerment of Africa . . . Anything short of that is jive. (1973)

malarkey, malaky, malarky, mullarkey (1929) Orig US; origin unknown • *Observer.* Tall stories . . . of rattlesnakes bringing up a nestful of baby robins, . . . or some such malarkey. (1973)

spinach (1929) US, dated; perhaps from the phrase **gammon and spinach,** part of the refrain of the song ‘A frog he would a-wooing go’, in allusion to **gammon** specious talk, humbug; popularized by a cartoon caption in the *New Yorker* (1928): ‘It’s broccoli dear’. ‘I say it’s spinach, and I say the hell with it.’ • Alexander Woollcott: This . . . reticence . . . will . . . be described by certain temperaments as . . . good taste. . . . I say it’s spinach. (1934)

ackamarackus, ackamaracka (1933) Orig US; mainly in the phrase the old ackamarackus; a fanciful pseudo-Latin coinage.

bull’s wool, bullswool (1933) Australian & New Zealand; euphemistic alteration of bullshit • Ian Cross: That last bit was bulls-wool of course, but I had to be careful. (1957)

moody (1934) British; probably from the adjective moody, but some connection has been suggested with *Moody* and *Sankey* rhyming slang for hanky-panky (from the names of two US hymn writers, Dwight L. Moody (1837–99) and Ira D. Sankey (1840–1908)). • Roger Busby: The same old moody he’d heard a thousand times before. (1970)

bull dust (1943) Orig US; now Australian; euphemistic alteration of bullshit, based on earlier bull dust fine powdery dirt or dust • J. Hamilton: I’m not in the mood for any of your bull dust. Where have you been all night? (1967)

snow job (1943) Orig US; applied to a concerted attempt at flattery, deception, or persuasion • Kylie Tennant: He . . . made a bee-line for the red-head. ‘Now for the snow job,’ Geechi murmured. (1953)

crock of shit (1945) US. • Susan Faludi: A male editor assigned reporter Marilyn Goldstein a story on the women’s movement with these instructions: ‘Get out there and find an authority who’ll say this is all a crock of shit’. (1992)

sweet talk (1945) Orig US

schmeer, schmereg, shmeer (1961) US; from the verb schmeer flatten

A flatterer; an exaggerated talker.

flannel-mouth (1881) US

bull artist (1918), bullshtitter (1933), bullshit artist (1942) Orig US

snow-man (1967) US; applied to someone who flatters or deceives with plausible words; from snow deceive or charm with flattery.

Outward show, empty display.

razzmatazz, razzamatazz (1958) Applied to noisy, showy publicity or display; from earlier sense, old-fashioned or sentimental jazz • John Wain: The enormous selling bonanza that was going on about him, in its astonishing flood of genuine goodwill, even a grain here and there of genuine piety, with unscrupulous salesman’s razzmatazz, heightened his sense of living in a dream. (1959)

glitz (1977) Orig US; applied to extravagant but superficial display or show-business glamour; back-formation from glitzy • *Toronto Life.* There was too much Third-World esoterica and not enough Hollywood glitz. (1985)

Characterized by outward show; flashy.

flash (1785) From obsolete flash superficial brilliancy • *Guardian.* He fetches me from my Miami hotel in a distinctly flash red convertible (‘a regular cocaine-dealer type car’ he says). (1991)

zazzy (1961) Mainly US; origin uncertain; perhaps from piz(zazz + -y), but compare also jazzy, sassy and snazzy

glitzy (1966) Orig US; applied to something glamorous but tawdry; perhaps a blend of glitter and ritzy, but compare German glitzerig glittering • *Listener.* The Oscars are the high point of the Western film industry’s year—a glitzy, vulgar affirmation that they’re getting things right. (1985)

Insincere in manner, ingratiating

slimy (1602) • *Guardian.* Coogan creates a student-bashing drunkard and a slimy sports commentator. (1992)

greasy (1848) • *Guardian.* Similar lily-white hero, greasy villain, leggy villainess. (1992)

soapy (1854) From soap flattery + -y • Robert Bolt: Steward (to audience, soaply. Lady Margaret, my master’s daughter, lovely; really lovely. (1960)

smarmy, smalmy (1924) From earlier sense, smooth and sleek • Simon Raven: He’s a smarmy, ingratiating swine. (1962)

An ingratiating person.

smoothie, smoothy (1939) Orig US; usually applied to a man; from earlier (positive) sense,
suave or stylish person H. Jenkins: I have nothing but contempt for the international art market. It is a racket none the better for being operated by cultivated smoothies. (1979)

To ingratiate oneself make (or keep) one’s marble (or alley) good (1909) Australian & New Zealand Don Crick: Take my tip, if you wanter make your marble good: say nothing. (1963)

An instance of insincere behaviour act (1934) Mainly in the phrase put on an act act insincerely Monica Dickens: This girl’s not naturally like that. She’s putting on an act. (1946)

Pretentious hokey, hokie, hoky (1945) Orig US; applied to something sentimentally or melodramatically artificial; from hokum sentimental or melodramatic material in a play or film + -ey Rolling Stone: A closing piece [on a record], ‘Sometimes’, is embarrassingly hokey. (1971)

pseudo (1945) Adjectival use of the prefix pseudo- Times: The whole conception was ‘pseudo’. (1958)

pseud (1962) From the Greek stem pseudo- false, or pseud- From the adjective pseudo. (1967)

arty-farty, artsy-fartsy (1967) Applied to someone or something pretentiously artistic; modelled on arty-crafty Miles Kington: The North is . . . trying to impose their bluff . . . values on our arty-farty-Dartington, southern way of life. (1982)

pseudy (1989) From pseud pretentious person + -y Sunday Times: Your work has been puffed by Rushdie and A S Byatt. McKay has included you in a list of ‘pseudy little twerps’. (1993)

A pretentious person pseudo (1959) From the adjective pseudo Observer: The undiscriminating,arty chat of a campus pseudo. (1967)

deceased

42. Lying A lie fib (1611) Applied to a small or trivial lie; perhaps short for obsolete fible-fable, a reduplicated form of fable Listener: An extraordinarily powerful old bureaucratic nanny . . . goes stalking up and down the United States, pouncing on people who are telling commercial fibs. (1959)

thumper (1677) Dated; from earlier sense, something large

story (a1697) Used especially in the phrase tell stories Mrs. Lynn Linton: Now, Eva, . . . I know all about you, so do not begin to deny and tell stories. (1880)

a likely tale (1749), a likely story (1865) Applied to a statement greeted with incredulity

pseud (1964) From the adjective pseud, popularized by the Private Eye column ‘Pseud’s Corner’ Jazz Monthly: As well as being the creator of an avant-garde film on human buttocks, Miss Ono has a long list of other achievements which must put her in the running for the title of Pseud of the Century. (1968)

To render something insincere or artificial hoke (1935) Orig US; denoting playing a part in a sentimentally or melodramatically artificial manner; usually followed by up; back-formation from hokum sentimental or melodramatic material in a play or film Marian Babson: Just try it straight . . . it’s a mistake to hoke it up. (1971)

A person of integrity mensch, monsh (1953) Orig and mainly US; Yiddish, from German Mensch person New Statesman: Mr Nixon is seen as an essentially decent man, . . . but not as a mensch on the scale of Roosevelt, Eisenhower, Kennedy. (1970)

To be in earnest mean business (1857) Jerome Weidman: We’ve decided to show these guys that we mean business. No crapping around. (1937)

Sincerely honest Injun (1876) Orig US; used as an assertion that what one has said, one believes to be true; perhaps from an assurance of good faith extracted from Native Americans; Injun representing a casual pronunciation of Indian L. A. G. Strong: ‘You’ve invented him.’ ‘Which I never, sir, . . . ’ ‘Honst Injun?’ (1950)

no kidding, I kid you not (1914) Josephine Tey: ‘I’m a policeman.’ ‘No kidding!’ (1952) Daily Mail: I kid you not: if seven million schoolchildren had to learn their faith extracted from Native Americans; Injun representing a casual pronunciation of Indian (1950)

no stuff (1946) US, dated

Miles Kington: Or so he told Mother, ‘A likely story!’ she would snort. (1982)

whopper (1791) From earlier sense, something large A. R. Hope: He thinks it’s . . . better to get a licking than to tell a whopper. (1870)

good one, good ‘un (1813) A. R. Hope: He thinks it’s . . . better to get a licking than to tell a whopper. (1870)

no kidding, I kid you not (1914) Josephine Tey: ‘I’m a policeman.’ ‘No kidding!’ (1952) Daily Mail: I kid you not: if seven million schoolchildren had to learn their national curriculum in my bathroom, heads would roll. (1991)

no stuff (1946) US, dated

Miles Kington: Or so he told Mother, ‘A likely story!’ she would snort. (1982)

whopper (1791) From earlier sense, something large Thomas Hughes: Oh, there’s a whacker! . . . We haven’t been within a hundred yards of his barn. (1857)

yarn (1835) Usually in the phrase spin a yarn tell lies; from earlier sense, story

tall story, tall tale (1846) From tall exaggerated
weasel word (1900) Orig US; applied to a word that is used in a deliberately misleading way
pork pie, porkie, porky (1984) British; rhyming slang • Alexander Smith: To lie weasel word (1900) Orig US; applied to a word
put-up job (1838) British; applied especially to something
slanter, schleinter, schlenter, shlanter, slang; applied especially to a deception that
dodge (1638) Applied to a deceitful trick or clever stratagem, especially one designed to evade something; from earlier sense, act of giving someone the slip • New Scientist: That would have shown the object to be far older than it really was, if the dodge had not been detected. (1983)
ramp (1812) Applied especially to a swindle or racket involving charging exorbitant prices; from the verb ramp swindle • W. G. Kerr: On their arrival in Dallas, Wellesley and Renshaw discovered that some serious ‘ramps’, or swindles, had been going on there. (1977)
put-up job (1838) British; applied to something pre-arranged in an underhanded way • Nicolas Freeling: There’s going to be a lot saying it’s a put-up job. (1974)
sell (1838) Applied especially to a deception that leaves the victim feeling disappointed
slanter, schleinter, schleter, schlantert, shlenter, shlinter, slang; applied especially to a type of confidence trick m
skin game (1868) US; from skin to swindle + game • Edmund McGirr: As a very small [antiques] dealer, I was no opposition His business is rather a skin game. (1973)
try-on (1874) British; applied to an attempt to deceive; from try it on • P. Townend: It was only a try-on, to see if I would react. (1959)
fiddle (1874) Orig US, now mainly British; often in the phrase on the fiddle engaged in swindling or deception; from the verb fiddle swindle • Spectator: I know you’ll think this is one of my fiddles. At my last parish we raffled a horse and trap, ... a clothes horse and a mousetrap. (1959) • New Statesman: As it was day-time, everyone in the coffee bar was a sciver, on the dole or on the fiddle or just plain hopeful. (1961)
con game (1899) Orig US; con short for confidence • Observer: Various petty fiddles and con games to which Christmas trading lent itself. (1960)
con (1901) Orig US; short for con trick, an abbreviated form of confidence trick • Listener: The intellectual theoreticians of visual pop culture have succeeded ... in pulling a con. (1987)
spiel (1901) Applied to a swindle or a dishonest line of business: from German Spiel game • T. A. G. Hungerford: This isn’t a spiel, Colonel. ... I know this bloke, and he’s on the level. (1954)
bunco, bunko (1904) US; from earlier sense, dishonest gambling game played with dice • Spectator: The bunco-artists from the lunatic fringe of the Democratic party. (1963)
lemon-game, lemon (1908) US; applied to a type of confidence trick which involves defrauding a gullible player in a game of pool; from lemon gullible person
gyp (1914) Orig US; applied to a trick or swindle; from the verb gyp swindle • Boston Sunday Globe: Some are good, but gyps abound. Authorities report ... phony practices. (1967)
pay-off (1915) Applied to a type of confidence trick in which the victim loses a large sum of money trying to follow the apparent good luck of the trickster. • P. J. Smith: It is to his genius that the successful swindle known as the ‘Pay Off’ was attributed. (1938)
wangle (1915) Applied to an act of obtaining deceitfully; from the verb wangle • Peter Dickinson: I worked a wangle. I got a line on the Minister of Tourism. (1977)
fast one (1923) Orig US; applied to a deceptive trick; usually in the phrase pull a fast one play such a trick • Anthony Gilbert: Mad to think they can pull a fast one ... over the whole community. (1958)
flanker (1923) British, orig services’ slang; applied to a trick or swindle; probably from the
notion of slipping past the side or 'flank' of someone • Bill Knox: This bloke wasn't content wi' just fiddling the h.p. He'd been workin' another flanker. (1962)

**swindle sheet** (1923) Mainly US, jocular; applied to a document making fraudulent claims, especially on an expense account • H. L. Lawrence: The fare's ten bob. ... Put it on the swindle sheet. (1960)

**ready-up** (1924) Australian; applied to a swindle or fraud • H. R. F Keating: I don't accept all the pretences and ready-ups you people put out. (1924)

**tweedle** (1925) Applied to a swindle or US, Black English; applied to trickery (1940) • Lawrence Sanders: He's been on the con or hustling his ass or pulling paper hypes. (1970)

**hype** (1926) Orig US; originally applied specifically to the deliberate giving of short change, and hence to any cheating or trickery; from the verb hype short-change, deceive • Lawrence Sanders: He's been on the con or hustling his ass or pulling paper hypes. (1970)

**rort** (1926) Australian; applied to a fraudulent practice; from rort engage in corrupt practices • Jean Devanny: The cookies are supposed to pay this retention money into the bank ... but normally they don't pay it in ... It's the greatest rort ever. (1936)

**have-on** (1931) Applied to a (playful) deception; from have on deceive • Listener: Puns, tropes, polyglot have-ons, batty new coinings. (1967)

**gazump, gasumph, gazoomph, gazumph, gezumph** (1932) British; from the verb gazump swindle • Youngman Carter: I've never known an offer from you that wasn't a gezumph. (1969)

**short con** (1932) US; applied to a small-scale confidence racket

**carve-up** (1935) British: often implying an unfair distribution; from carve up swindle, cheat • Times: Is the selection of justices of the peace in Britain ... a 'political carve-up', as alleged by some of the more vociferous of the system's opponents? (1963)

**pigeon-drop** (1937) US; applied to a confidence trick, especially one which starts with a wallet dropped in front of the victim or 'pigeon' • Harney & Cross: Sometimes it was the 'pigeon-drop'. A purse or billfold containing a considerable amount of money was dropped. The 'sucker' was allowed to find it right along with a member of the mob. (1961)

**trickeration** (1940) US, Black English; applied to a trick or stratagem; from trickery + -ation • L. Hughes: I believe my old lady's pregnant again! Fate must have some kind of trickeration to populate the cullud nation! (1951)

**con job** (1942) Orig US; con short for confidence • Wall Street Journal: Meredith, ... who in 1962 became the first black to enroll at the University of Mississippi, recently called integration a 'con job'. (1989)

**swiftie, swifty** (1945) Australian; applied to a deceptive trick; usually in the phrase pull a swiftie play such a trick; from swift fast + -ie • Northern Territory News (Darwin): Not many opportunities for pulling a swifty you'd think. (1962)

**Murphy game, Murphy** (1959) US; applied to a type of confidence trick in which the victim is duped by unfilled promises of money, sex, etc.; from the surname Murphy • New York Times: Everybody should have a car. ... How are you going to get it? ... You know, you can get it playing the Murphy. (1966)

**hustle** (1963) Orig US; applied to a swindle or racket • Malcolm X: Each of the military services had their civilian-dress eyes and ears picking up anything of interest to them, such as hustles being used to draft ... or hustles that were being worked on servicemen. (1965)

**scam** (1963) Orig US; applied to a swindle or racket, often specifically a fraudulent bankruptcy; origin unknown • Mario Puzo: The bribe-taking scam had been going on for nearly two years without any kind of hitch. (1978)

**prop game** (1966) British; applied to a fraud racket by which householders are coaxed into paying heavily for unnecessary repairs; prop abbreviation of property • Norman Lucas: The 'prop game' ... was a method by which men obtained money from old people by posing as officials. (1967)

**shucking and jiving** (1966) US, Black English; denoting not speaking or behaving seriously, in an attempt to mislead; from shuck deceive and jive deceive • H. L. Foster: For many blacks, shuckin' and jivin' is a survival technique to avoid and stay out of trouble. (1974)

**rip-off** (1970) From rip off swindle • Times: Britain's 41 motorway service areas ... have attracted such accolades as 'poor', 'appalling' and 'a rip-off'. (1980)

**stroke** (1970) British; applied to an underhanded trick; especially in the phrase pull a stroke play such a trick • John McCvicar: It would be wrong to let Charles go. ... He's pulled too many strokes. (1974)

See also **leg-pull** and **wind-up** under An instance of mocking at Ridicule (p. 331) and sting under Stealing, theft at Crime (p. 92).

To deceive, dupe

**have** (1805) • New Yorker: You've just been had, dummy. (1987)

**try it on** (1811) Denoting trying to outwit or deceive someone • Mandy: Huh! Thought you'd try it on, eh? Beat it, the pair of you—I've seen that trick before. (1989)

**string** (1812) • H. Engel: I guess I don't have any reason to believe they'd string me. (1982)

**pull the wool over someone's eyes** (1842) Orig US; denoting especially deceiving someone by hiding one's intentions • Guardian: You can't pull the wool over my eyes. My days of listening to your baloney are over. (1992)

**sell** (1849) Dated • Charles Leland: Nor was I 'selling' him, for I certainly had read the works. (1893)
have someone on (1867) Denoting deceiving someone playfully  L. P. Hartley: 'Of course,' said Dickie, when the boy had gone off with his mancia, whistling, 'he's having us on.' (1951)

shanghai (1871) Orig US; denoting putting someone into an awkward situation by trickery; from earlier sense, force into service on a ship  J. Gibson: Most of my guests got shanghaied into giving a general knowledge talk to the boys. (1976)

con (1882) Orig US; from con trick, con man, etc.  Listener: This mild tale of a shy boy conned into giving a girl a fortune. (1962)

make a monkey (out) of someone (1900) Orig US  Michael Innes: The plain fact was that Bulkingdon had made a monkey of her. It was all very mortifying. (1973)

put something over on someone (1912) Often in the phrase put one over on someone  Church Times: She may have been fleeced in Florence, robbed in Ravenna, grossly overcharged in Ostia . . . but Baedeker at least has not tried to put one over on her. (1976)

slip something over (on) someone (1912) B. McCrorquodale: It was something he really wanted to know and was trying to slip it over on her unexpectedly. (1960)

spruce (1919) Compare earlier sense, lie; ultimate origin unknown  Daily Telegraph: A kipper . . . by inference, should cost more than the untreated fish. Who is whopping whom? (1978)

two-time (1924) Orig US; denoting deceiving or being unfaithful to someone, especially a partner or lover  Sunday Times. Judith Exner . . . two-timed the late President John Kennedy with a leader of organised crime. (1981)

take someone for a ride (1925) Orig US  Angus Wilson: But for Vin, there were winks and the tongue stuck in the cheek, the wide boy who wasn’t to be taken for a ride by anyone. (1956)

hype (1926) Orig US; denoting originally short-changing or overcharging, and in more recent use deceiving or conning; origin unknown  James Baldwin: He doesn’t seem to be trying to hype me, not even when he talked about his wife and kids. (1962)

jive (1928) Orig US; from jive pretentious or misleading talk  W. Thurman: But I jived her along, so she ditched him, and gave me her address. (1929)

take someone for a sleigh-ride (1931) US  Sun (Baltimore): House Republicans, charging that the taxpayers are being taken for a 'bureaucratic sleighride.' (1950)

shit (1934) Denoting teasing or attempting to deceive  C. Kilian: Didja see the wave comin' across the Shelf? . . . There was a wave. I'm not shittin' you. (1979)

sucker (1939) Orig & mainly US; from sucker gullible person  Joseph Goehr: Delaney suckered us into making a payment which he now claims is an admission of guilt because we made it. (1978)

come the raw prawn (over, with, etc.) (1942) Australian; denoting trying to deceive someone; supposedly from the notion of a raw prawn as something difficult to swallow (i.e. believe)  Rodney Milgate: Don't come the raw prawn . . . you know there's no such thing. Things don't happen just like that. (1968)

shuck (1959) US; from shuck something spurious, sham  Carolyn Weston: You shucking me, man, I didn't get rid of nobody! (1978)

Murphy (1965) US; denoting deceiving or duping someone by means of the Murphy game  James Mills: I thought he was a complainant . . . some school kid who'd been Murphayed. (1972)

See also pull someone's leg, pull someone's pisser, and wind someone up under To make fun of someone or something at Ridicule (pp. 330-1).

To swindle, cheat

rook (1590) Applied especially to overcharging; from obsolete rook swindler, from earlier sense, crow-like bird  Capital Times (Madison, Wisconsin): The Federal Trade Commission thinks that a lot of people have been rooked by these buying clubs. (1977)

fiddle (1604) Probably from the quick finger movement involved in playing a fiddle (= violin)  Sunday Times: The unemployed . . . respond in kind, with . . . a frequent willingness to best or fiddle the system. (1993)

do (1641) Times: The disgruntled 'unchurched' . . . seem to think they are being 'done' by rigourists. (1990)

fleece (1772) Applied especially to overcharging; from earlier, more general sense, deprive of (all) money; ultimately from the notion of depriving a sheep of its fleece  Independent on Sunday. It goes without saying that all three hospitals were intending to fleece me equally. (1991)

diddle (1806) Mainly British; usually denoting petty cheating; origin unknown  News of the World: The cheeky madame claimed she was dilled out of her fee when . . . our reporter made an excuse and left after she offered sex. (1992)

burn (1808) Sunday Truth (Brisbane): I figured I'd burn the guy for a thousand. (1969)

chisel (1808) Dated; presumably related to chisel cutting tool, but the reason for the application is not clear  Ouida: I never can stand quiet and see people trying to chisel me. (1883)

clean (1812) Denoting fraudulently depriving someone of all or most of their money; usually followed by out

put someone in the hole (1812) Dated; denoting defrauding someone  Jack Black: I thought you put me in the hole for some coin, but I found out that the people lost just what you both said. (1926)

ramp (1812) Dated; probably from earlier sense, snatch, pluck  Chambers's Journal: The neighbour who's ramped the man that trusted him. (1892)

skin (1819) Often implying depriving someone of all their money by unfair methods; from the notion of removing the skin  P. G. Wodehouse: The only thing to do seems to be to get back to the course and skin a boodie or two. (1930)
do someone out of something (1825) Denoting depriving someone of something by fraud or unfair means. M. K. Joseph: The chiefy who done him out of his stripes. (1957)

come it over (or with) someone (1827) Denoting trying to get the better of someone by trickery. Auldus Huxley: When he saw... that no attempt was being made to come it over him, he had begun to take an interest. (1939)
hornswoggle (1829) Orig US; origin unknown. Sunday Times: The Americans look for value; you can’t... hornswoggle them. (1970)

sew someone up (1838)
bet (1849) US; often in the phrase beat someone out of something. Columbus Evening Dispatch: The people who try to beat the street car conductors out of their fare. (1904)

whip-saw (1873) US; denoting cheating or being cheated. Desmond Bagley: ‘Okay, so you’ve whipsawed me,’ said Follet sourly. (1969)

bunco, bunko (1875) US, dated; originally denoting cheating someone at bunco; from bunco dishonest gambling game played with dice.

gyp (1880) Orig US; perhaps from gyp college servant at Cambridge or Durham, itself perhaps from obsolete gippe scullion, originally a man’s short tunic, from obsolete French jupaeau; or perhaps shortened from gippy Punch: If he... thinks the conductor is trying to gyp him... he... need only look at the fares table. (1962)
rush (1887) British; applied to overcharging. N. W. Schur: ‘How much did they rush you for that sherry?’ To rush is to charge, with the distinct implication that the price was too high. (1973)
wangle (1888) Orig printers’ slang; denoting obtaining something by deceitful or devious means. Percy Wyndham Lewis: In the last war like yourself I joined the army, instead of wangling myself into some safe job in London. (1942)

skunk (1890) From earlier sense, fail to pay a bill. Elizabeth Fenwick: I’m beginning to think we skunked you over the price. (1971)

screw (1900) Mainly North American; compare earlier sense, copulate with. Harry Kemelman: In the business dealings between Hirsh and Goralsky, it wasn’t Goralsky that got screwed. It was the other way around. (1966)

sell someone a pup (1901) British; denoting especially selling someone something worthless. Scottish Daily Mail: The Basset is the aircraft the RAF did not want in the first place. They were sold a pup, in more ways than one. (1968)

gold-brick (1902) Orig & mainly US; from gold brick something spurious (see under Someone or something spurious at Genuineness & Spuriousness p. 425). Munsey’s Magazine: Well, look out they don’t gold-brick you, sonny. (1914)

gaff (1903) Mainly gamblers’ slang; from earlier sense, gamble, toss up. Herbert Gold: I want to play you straight fifty-fifty, not gaff you for fifty-fifty. (1965)

scale (1904) Australian & New Zealand; often denoting failure to pay what is owed; origin unknown. S. J. Baker: When we are taken down financially we are scaled. (1941)

sting (1905) Denoting swindling, especially by overcharging. London Magazine: I’ve no idea how much her son pays her... I like to think she’s really stinging her son. (1981)

take (or send) someone to the cleaners (1907) Denoting fraudulently depriving someone of all or most of their money. Guardian: Many a gilded youth... has been ‘taken to the cleaners’ once too often at midnight parties. (1961)

ream (1914) US, dated; compare earlier sense, enlarge a hole with an implement. Stanley Kauffmann: Yeah, I smell the rat. Joe Bass’s new relatives. Well, palsy, they’re liable to ream you yet. (1952)

paper (1925) Denoting defrauding someone by passing a forged cheque.

tweedle (1925) Denoting swindling people or playing confidence tricks; from tweeble confidence trick. P. B. Winslow: ‘Tweedling’—small con jobs, mostly against the old and weak. (1975)

clip (1927) Orig US; applied especially to swindling by overcharging; from earlier sense, rob. Observer: A commination against London taxi drivers, delivered with the fervour of a guy who’d really been clipped. (1958)

finagle (1927) US; denoting manipulating, altering, or obtaining by fraudulent or underhanded means; from earlier intransitive sense, scheme, intrigue; ultimately from an alteration of British dialect fain’aghe (of unknown origin) + -le. Wall Street Journal: The young president... already has finagled a $2 billion loan from the Japanese government. (1989)

gazump, gasumph, gazoomph, gazumph, gezumph (1928) British; origin unknown. Daily Mail: M.P.s had admitted that they had been ‘gazoomphed’ by fast-talking racketeers. (1961)

yentz (1930) US; Yiddish, from copulate. Judith Krantz: ‘I don’t yentz them,’ Maggie explained, Coca-Cola-colored eyes all innocence, ‘they just yentz themselves and I try not to run out of tape.’ (1978)

ikey, iky, ike (1932) US, offensive; from obsolete Jew, ikey, iky, ike. Harold Pinter: Then after that, you know what they did? They carved me up. It was all arranged, it was all worked out. (1959)

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ikey, iky, ike (1932) US, offensive; from obsolete Jew, Jewish moneymender. American Speech: He liked me out of my turn. (1932)

carve someone up (1933) British; auto: Harold Pinter: Then after that, you know what they did? They carved me up. Carved me up. It was all arranged, it was all worked out. (1959)

pin (1934) Australian, dated


stiff (1950) Orig & mainly US; denoting cheating or defrauding someone, especially by failing to
pay them • Washington Post: What is McCarthy doing when he refuses to tip a waiter who has given good service? . . . He may be cursed by the waiter he stiffs. (1982)

two-time (1959) From earlier sense, be unfaithful to • M. M. Kaye: You can’t go two-timing the police and skipping out of the country on a stolen passport. (1959)

scam (1963) Orig US; from the noun scam swindle • New Yorker: Local citizens . . . try to avoid being scammed by the familiar tergiversations of city politicians. (1977)

rip someone off (1971) Applied especially to overcharging; compare earlier sense, steal • Observer: Many women think all garages consider they can ‘rip off’ women drivers. (1976)

stitch someone up (1977) British; denoting swindling, especially by overcharging; from earlier sense, incriminate • Woman: After shelling out £1.50 for a fold-up version [of an umbrella] she found that she’d been stitched up. . . . Two spokes were broken. (1977)

sug (1980) British; denoting selling someone a product under the pretence of conducting market research; acronym from sell under guise • Which? If someone tries to ‘sug’ you, write to the Market Research Society. (1988)

A swindler

shark (1599) Originally perhaps from German Schurke worthless rogue, influenced by shark rapacious fish

sharper (1681) In modern use often applied specifically to a fraudulent card player or other gambler • John Maskelyne: [He] falls an easy prey to the sharper. (1894)

sharp (1797) In modern use often applied specifically to a fraudulent card player or other gambler; from sharper, probably influenced by shark • John Maskelyne: The successful sharp . . . must have unbounded self-confidence if his wiles are to be of any avail. (1894)

magsman (1838) Orig British, now Australian; applied to a confidence trickster; from mag chatter + man • Bulletin (Sydney): My mate was a top-notch magsman on the phone and could mimic the tone of gruff chatter + man Bulletin. (1976)

tug (1896) Australian, dated; often applied specifically to a fraudulent card player or other gambler; origin uncertain; perhaps related to tug pull or remove by pulling • A. Reid: So that chaps could know why a top-notch tug Can work ‘his’ ramps in a card-room snug. (1933)

con (1887) Orig US; short for con man

twister (1897) British; applied to a swindler or deceitful person • Milton Keynes Express: He was said to have called two women teachers ‘cheats and twisters’ and had refused to apologise for his remarks. (1976)

gee, gee-man (1898) Applied to a swindler’s accomplice planted in a crowd (e.g. to start bidding); origin unknown; compare gee guy, bloke • News Chronicle: Strategically placed in the crowd, the ‘gee men’ started the bidding going. (1959)

slicker (1900) Orig & mainly US; applied to a plausible person who deceives others • Morecambe Guardian: He becomes a sort of Midnight Cowboy, lost and confused by the slickers around him. (1978)

four-flusher (1904) US; applied to someone who imposes on others by bluffing; from four flush flush in poker containing only four (instead of five) cards and so almost worthless, hence something not genuine • L. A. G. Strong: You shouldn’t let these four-flushers come it over you. (1944)

take-down (1905) Australian; applied to a deceiver or cheat

heel (1914) Orig US, dated; applied to a double-crosser; probably from heel back part of the foot

sprucer (1917) Applied to someone who deceives others, usually playfully; from spruce deceive + -er • Listener: I suspect Peter Eckersley was pulling Cutforth’s leg. He was a good ‘sprucer’, as they used to say in Swadlincote. (1968)

chiseller (1918) From chisel defraud, cheat + -er • Edward Hyams: Harry was easy with all men because they were all equal as chisellers. (1949)

snide, snyde (1919) Applied to a cheat or swindler; from earlier, more general sense, contemptible person • Auden & Isherwood: Young Waters is playing too. He’s no snide at the game. (1935)

scaler (1924) Australian & New Zealand; from scale defraud, cheat + -er

twicer (1924) Applied to a cheat or a deceitful or cunning person; from earlier sense, one who does something twice; perhaps from the notion of duplicity • E. Wingfield-Stratford: The recent dismissal . . . of that elderly twicer, Sir Harry Vane. (1949)

tweedler (1925) Applied to a swindler or confidence trickster; from twedle swindle + -er
44. Betrayal

To betray

rat (1812) Applied to deserting one’s own side, especially in politics; usually followed by on; from the rat’s reputation for treacherousness

ray (1812) A fish

Two-timer (1927) Orig US; applied to someone who double-crosses or is unfaithful; from two-time deceive + -er

Geoffrey Jenkins: I’d written him off as a two-timer who’d run away to save his own skin. (1974)

rick (1928) Applied to a swindler’s accomplice planted in a crowd (e.g. to start bidding; origin unknown

Sunday Telegraph: If you are standing near a bookie’s joint, undecided, and a merchant dashes in and places a bet, such as ‘Seventy pounds to forty. On top’, don’t take a blind bit of notice. It’s a rick bet... It doesn’t even go in the book. Its sole object is to push or goad you into making your bet. (1967)

T.B., t.b. (1930) US; applied to a confidence trickster; from the notion of the common element con—in consumption (= tuberculosis or T.B.) and confidence

Chester Himes: Men... of all stages of deterioration—drifters and hopheads and tb’s and beggars and bums and bundle-stiffs and big sisters. (1942)

Con artist (1937) Orig US; con short for confidence

Sunday Telegraph: Among the hundreds of thousands passing by each day are customers for prostitutes and drug dealers, mugs for con artists—an old, old New York tradition—and victims for street robbers. (1991)

sharpie (1942) Orig US • Saul Bellow: He had chosen to be dreamy... and the sharpies cleaned him out. (1964)

take (1945) Australian & New Zealand; applied to someone who deceives others • Noel Hilliard: Among the hundreds of thousands passing by each day are customers for prostitutes and drug dealers, mugs for con artists—an old, old New York tradition—and victims for street robbers. (1991)

slick (1959) US; applied to a plausible person

jive-ass (1964) US; from jive pretentious or misleading talk + ass (= arse)

C. Brown: ‘You jiveass nigger,’ Reb said, laughing. ‘No, I’m telling the truth.’ (1969)

slickster (1965) US; applied to a swindler

C. Brown: All the Muslims now felt as though 125th Street was theirs. It used to belong to the hustlers and the slicksters. (1965)

Prop man (1966) British; applied to a fraudster operating the prop game

Guardian: Gangs operating from Leeds are known as ‘the prop men’ because the racket began in Leeds when so-called property repairers made exorbitant charges after the gales of February, 1961. (1966)


shonky (1979), shonk (1981) British; applied to a fraudster

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shonky (1979), shonk (1981) British; applied to a fraudster

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slickster (1965) US; applied to a swindler

sneaky (1833) Applied to something underhanded or secretive; from sneak go or act furtively + -y • Guardian: This is a Treasury-driven move which has not been thought through and it has been handled in a sneaky way. (1991)

An establishment where one is swindled

clip-joint (1932) Orig US; applied to a bar, club, etc. charging exorbitant prices • Daily Telegraph: The ‘clip joints’ specialise in luring customers inside, by means of attractive showcards and insistent ‘hostesses’, and then fleecing them. (1964)

44. Betrayal

To betray

rat (1812) Applied to deserting one’s own side, especially in politics; usually followed by on; from the rat’s reputation for treacherousness

Listener: One’s feeling for the Chamberlain government was one of such utter contempt that one felt they might very well rat once again. (1969)

D. W. S. Hunt: As I heard him say over the lunch table once, ‘to rat is difficult; to re-rat...’ and he broke off as though to show that to find a description of a second change of party was beyond even his eloquence. (1975)

pool (1907) Australian; often implying incrimination; apparently from earlier sense, share • Kylie Tennant: A man thought he’d do the decent thing and tide a girl over a patch of trouble, and she pools him every time. You can’t prove it isn’t your kid. (1967)

do the dirty on (1914) British • D. O. Barnett: I hope our friends the 133rd will... do the dirty on their Prussian friends. (1915)

stab in the back (1916) Imposing harming someone in a treacherous way • F. Olibrich: All these years with me he’s been completely honest and now he stabs me in the back. (1979).

Hence the noun stab in the back such a betrayal (1922) • Economist: Trade unionists... denounced the Lafontaine proposal as a stab in the back. (1988)

two-time (1924) Orig US; denoting deceiving especially a partner or lover • Sunday Times:
tell (1539) Usually followed by

sell down the river (1927) Orig US; from
earlier sense, deliver over to slavery, from
the notion of selling a troublesome slave to the
owner of a sugar-cane plantation on the lower
Mississippi, where conditions were harsher than
in the northern slave states. — Hayward & Harari:
It's my considered opinion, Yurochka, we've been sold down
the river. (1958)

blow the whistle on (1934) Implying a
revelation of what others had wanted kept
secret. — S. Wilson: So Arnie and Alfie blew the whistle on
you all. What are you going to do about it? (1978)

dob in (1955) Australian; often implying
incrimination; figurative use of British dialect
dob put down, throw down. — Punch: Those Canberra
wowers have really dobbed us in this time. (1964)

To betray an associate to the police or other
authority; to inform on; to incriminate

See also dob in, fink, pool above.

tell (1539) Usually followed by on. — Age
(Melbourne): Ooh Aah! I'm going to tell on you: I will inform
the authorities. (1974)

squeak (1690) Denoting turning informer
E. Amadi: All I want you to do is swear to secrecy. I have
assured them that you will not squeak when once you promise.
(1986)

split (1795) Often followed by on. — L. Cody: If I tell
you, and you ever split on me, I'll make you very sorry. (1982)

snitch (1801) Often followed by on; from snitch
informer. — Budd Schulberg: I felt a little guilty about
snitching on my neighbor. (1941)

nose (1811) From nose police informant. — Edgar Wallace: You come down 'ere and expect us to 'nose' for you,
and everybody in the court knows we're 'nosing'. (1930)

point the finger at (1833) Denoting
identifying someone or something as being
responsible for wrongdoing. — Isabel Lambot: No
one is going to point the finger at us. Neither of us has ever
stepped out of line. (1987)

stag (1839) Dated; usually followed by against;
from stag informer.

squeal (1846) Denoting turning informer; often
followed by on. — T. Tryon: Initiation into the club required
a scared oath, sworn in blood... never to squeal on a fellow
member, and never to break the code of silence. (1889)

nark (1889) British; dated; from nark police
informer. — Arthur Morrison: It was the sole
commandment that ran there: 'Thou shalt not nark'. (1986)

squawk (1872) US; denoting turning informer.
T. Tryon: Initiation into the club required a scared oath, sworn in blood... never to squeal on a fellow
member, and never to break the code of silence. (1889)

British; ord school slang, applied to
a child who tells a teacher about the
wrongdoings of another pupil; often followed
by on; from earlier sense, go or behave furitively
Guardian: Mr Morton was a member of the ratpack, his life
devoted to persuading Royal employees and policemen
to sneak on their bosses for money. (1992)

shop (1899) Mainly British; from earlier sense,
imprison, from obsolete slang shop prison
Guardian: One of the men who is thinking very seriously of
'shopping' Tearle, Dates and the rest of the crew told me, ‘One
word from me and they go down for a long, long while.’ (1984)

scream (1903) Denoting turning informer
John Morgan: He never got paid... and my information is
he's ready to scream. (1967)

peep (1911) From earlier sense, speak in a small
voice. — H. E. Goldin: Peep, to betray associates; to give
information to the police. (1950)

pot (1911) Australian; probably from put the pot on
spoil someone's prospects, perhaps influenced
by pot outdo, outwit. — Caddie: What dirty swine has
potted me? (1953)

snout (1923) Often followed by on; from snout
police informant. — Edgar Wallace: Dr. Marford
knows, but he's not the feller that goes snooting on his
patients. (1930)

put the finger on (1924) Orig US; from the
notion of pointing out with the finger. — Daily
Telegraph: I have not heard of anyone who wants to put the
finger on me. (1971)

talk (1924) William Golding: 'I won't talk. I know
nothing.' 'Talk. Yes, that is the word. At some point, Mr.
Mountjoy, you will talk.' (1959)

sing like a canary (1929) Denoting giving
someone up to the police. — M. Sokolinsky: If she'd
gone to bed with you, she would have enjoyed it—and then
she'd have turned you in. (1977)

have the pencil put on one (1929) US, dated;
denoting being reported to the police

sing (1929) Now mainly US; denoting turning
informer; often in the phrase sing like a canary
Peter Niesewand: You don't think they'd sing like
canaries?... They'll sing, Claud.... If they thought it would
help them, they'd tell on their mothers. (1981)

finger (1930) Orig US; compare earlier put the
finger on. — Raymond Chandler: She's on her way back... and my information is
"Turned state's evidence" — 'ratted' in gangland parlance. (1934)

rat (1932) Usually followed by on; from rat
informer, and compare earlier verb sense, desert
one's own side. — Sun (Baltimore): Misunas... has
'turned State's evidence' — 'ratted' in gangland parlance. (1934)

grass (1936) Orig British; used both transitiively,
often followed by up in recent use, and
intransitively, often followed by on; from grass
police informer. — Joyce Porter: It won't come out! Not
unless you start grassing. (1965)

Guardian: On one level is
expelled as professionally infamous; his occupation's gone. (1937)
the prison cell where his sister's boyfriend is banged up, having presumably been grassed up. (1992)

**shelf (1936)** Australian; apparently from shelf informer  ■ Vince Kelly: 'Is he all right? . . . Of course he's all right. Pat never shelved a man in his life. The court records show that.' (1975)

See also To speak revealingly at **Communication** (pp. 319–20).

An instance of informing on someone

**rumble (1911)** Dated  ■ Life: The boys slip into town. You wouldn't think they would be noticed. But some bodycatches on and puts in a rumble. (1957)

To fail to keep an appointment with

**stand up (1902)** Orig US  ■ Leslie Thomas: 'What about the other agent, the lady? . . . 'Stood you up, I shouldn't wonder,' laughed Charles. (1978)

A traitor; one who is disloyal to associates

**dog (1846)** A traitor; one who is disloyal to associates

**stand up (1902)** Orig US  ■ Leslie Thomas: 'What about the other agent, the lady? . . . 'Stood you up, I shouldn't wonder,' laughed Charles. (1978)

A traitor; one who betrays associates to the police or other authorities; an informer

**rat fink (1964)** Mainly US  ■ Carl Burke: His name was Judas and he was a rat fink. So this dirty rat fink he says was Judas and he was a rat fink. (1941)

One who betrays associates to the police or other authorities; an informer

See also **dog** above.

**stag (1725)** Dated; often in the phrase turn stag; probably from stag male deer, but the reason for the use is not known  ■ Harrison Ainsworth: As to clapping him in quod, he might prattle—might turn stag. (1834)

**snitch (1785)** From earlier sense, nose  ■ S. Rifkin: Lopez was an informant . . . a paragon among snitches. (1979)

**nose (1789)** Originally applied mainly to one who informs against fellow criminals, but in more recent usage denoting any police informant; probably from the notion of the nose as a symbol of inquisitiveness; compare the similar semantic development of snitch and snout  ■ R. Edwards: He knew that CID men are allowed to drink on duty because much of their time is spent with 'noses' or informants. (1974)

**split (1812)** Dated; from split inform on someone

**stool-pigeon (1845)** Orig US; from earlier senses, pigeon fastened to a stool as a decoy, person employed as a decoy  ■ June Thomson: A stool pigeon planted in a local Gestapo prison to eavesdrop on the detainees. (1974)

**pigeon (1849)** Short for stool-pigeon  ■ Dell Shannon: A lot of our pigeons offer the info to the other side too. (1971)

**nark (1860)** British; from Romany nák nose  ■ Times: If it was thought we were cops' narks it could endanger the lives of our film crews. (1975)

**squealer (1865)** From squeal turn informer + -er  ■ John Wainwright: The vengeance of the Clan against squealers . . . would be both hard and painful. (1976)

**pimp (1885)** Australian & New Zealand; compare earlier sense, manager of prostitutes

**fizgig, phizgig (1895)** Australian; compare earlier sense, silly or flirtatious young woman

**rumbler (1911)** Dated; from split inform on someone

**fizgig, phizgig (1895)** Australian; compare earlier sense, silly or flirtatious young woman

**squeaker (1865)** Dated; from squeal turn informer + -er

**singer (1914)** From the notion of pointing out with the finger

**shelf, shelve (1916)** Australian; probably from the phrase on the shelf out of the way

**stooge (1924)** US; from stew informing + -ie  ■ Ed McBain: The policeman trusted the stooge's information. . . . The stooge trusted the policeman. . . . Cops were averse to working with pigeons they did not know and trust. (1956)

**sneak (1861)** US; applied especially to a criminal who turns State's evidence  ■ George Ingraham: 'You think you got the low-down on me: well, see me put it on you!' 'You talk like a "lemon"!' (1935)

**grass (1932)** Orig British; perhaps short for grasshopper, rhyming slang for shopper (compare shop betray to the police) or for copper (= police officer)  ■ James Curtis: Tell you the details and then you'll do the gaff on your jack . . . or else turn grass. (1936)

**narker (1932)** British; from nark act as an informer + -er

**singer (1935)** Dated; from sing turn informer + -er

**top-off, top-off man, top-off merchant (1941)** Australian; probably an alteration of tip-
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off  H. C. Baker: ‘Don’t have much to say to that bloke,’ he advised, ‘he’s a top-off.’ (1978)

fizzer, fizz (1943), phizzer (1974) Australian; from fitzg + -er  Australian Short Stories: ‘See any drugs over there? . . . We catch twenty a week over there,’ he lied. ‘Mostly through fizzers.’ (1985)
grasser (1950) British; from grass inform on someone + -er  Roderic Jeffries: ‘How reliable was the original information?’ ‘As reliable as any information is from a grasser.’ (1968)

Moreton Bay (1953) Australian; short for Moreton Bay fig, rhyming slang for fitzgig informer  Bulletin (Sydney): Fifty percent of the Drug Squad’s arrests are based on information received and woebetide a user, supplier or anyone else who becomes a dog, a gig or, as the police term it, a Moreton Bay. (1984)

supergrass (1978) British; applied to an informer who tells the police about the activities of a large number of criminals  Listener: Following information from a supergrass, dozens of people alleged to be members of it had been arrested. (1983)
gig (1984) Australian; short for fitzgig informer; compare earlier gig busybody

(Something) that gives one away
tell-tale (a1577)  Wall Street Journal: Hoses sometimes snake across streets—tell-tale signs that neighbors are borrowing water from each other again. (1989)
give-away (1882) Orig US; also applied to an (inadvertent) revelation of the facts: often in the phrase dead give-away  Patrick Quentin: Her expression was a dead give-away. (1959)

45. Exploitation

To behave or obtain exploitatively

sponge (1673) Denoting obtaining something from someone exploitatively or living parasitically on another; often followed by on or off; from the notion of a sponge sucking things up  Guardian: The Government goes on about people sponging off the state. (1992)
tap (1901) Denoting obtaining something from someone exploitatively; often followed by for  Tucson (Arizona) Magazine: Many of the big plush resorts that tap you for $80 to $100 a day. (1979)
gold-dig (1923) Orig US; applied to a woman who marries or forms a sexual relationship with a man solely for the sake of financial gain; back-formation from gold-digger  John Steinbeck: I’ll bet she just gold-dug Eddie. (1947)

promote (1930) Dated, orig US; denoting obtaining exploitatively  Z. N. Hurston: You skillets is trying to promote a meal on me. (1942)
lig (1981) British; denoting freeloading, especially by gatecrashing; compare earlier sense, loaf about  Radio Times: I suddenly twigged what ligging was all about when I got my first job as a researcher on Aquarius. I found . . . I could get free tickets for everything, everywhere. (1985)

An exploiter

shark (1598) Applied to someone who unscrupulously exploits or swindles others; originally perhaps from German Schurke, worthless rogue, influenced by shark rapacious fish

sponger (1677) Applied to someone who lives at another’s expense; from sponge obtain things exploitatively + -er  North Lindsey Star: Those spongers on the nation’s earnings are quite happy without work. (1980)
gold-digger (1915) Orig US; applied to a woman who marries or forms a sexual relationship with a man solely for the sake of financial gain; from earlier sense, one who digs for gold  John Braine: It was expensive; that appealed to Lois. Not that she was a gold-digger; but once he started going around with her there were more withdrawals than deposits in his Post Office savings book. (1959)
ligger (1977) British; applied to someone who gatecrashes parties, a freeloader; from lig freeload + -er  Observer: The UK [Snooker] Championship is that sporting anachronism, a ligger-free zone. (1996)

Something that exploits people
tourist trap (1939) Applied to a thing or now usually place that attracts tourists to buy but is overpriced  Observer: The village . . . [was] now a tourist trap almost entirely given over to eating houses and souvenir shops. (1967)

One that is exploited
doormat (1861) Applied contemptuously to someone who accepts bad treatment without complaint; from the notion of ‘wiping one’s shoes on’ someone  Observer: She is not such a nullity and ‘doormat’ as Miss Byron. (1930)

meal ticket (1899) Orig US; applied to someone or something regarded solely as a source of income or livelihood; from earlier sense, ticket entitling a person to a meal  Hartley Howard: He was her meal-ticket. Why should she want him sent to the pen? (1972)
46. Slynness, Artfulness

Sly, artful

**no flies on** someone (1848) Orig Australian or US; probably from the notion of cattle so active that flies do not settle on them. *Observer.* There are no flies on Benaud. If England start bowling their overs slowly, no one will have to draw his attention to it. (1961)

carney, carny (1881) From the obsolete dialect verb *carn*(e)y wheedle. Edward Blishen: Macbeth was pretty carney in the way he handled Banquo. (1955)

**ikey** (1889) Derogatory & offensive, dated; compare earlier sense, conceited; ultimately from *ikey* Jew. Farmer & Henley: Only the shrewd-heads go for that hard stuff: the shysters the takes. (1960)

**crazy like a fox** (1908) Orig US; popularized by its use as a title by the US humorist S. J. Perelman (1944). Maurice Procter: 'Crazy,' Martineau mused. 'Crazy like a fox. And as hard to catch.' (1967)

A sly person

**fox** (1800) • Mayne Reid: I could not help reflecting on the strange stratagem by which the old fox had saved himself. (1851)

**sly-boots** (a1700) Mainly jocular. Stanley Elkin: 'Cunning,' Hartshine said, 'absolutely cunning! Wasn't he the old slyboots?' (1992)


47. Secrecy, Confidentiality, Concealment

See also Communication (p. 316)

Done or kept in secret

**q.t.** (1884) Usually in the phrase (strictly) on the q.t. secretly; abbreviation of quiet. Arnold Bennett: Mind you this is strictly q.t. Nobody knows a word about it, nobody! (1910). *New Yorker.* This is strictly on the q.t., Senator. (1972)

**on the side** (1893) Orig US; often used with reference to extramarital sexual affairs. R. L. Hudson: What would some of you say if I told you that I, as a married man, have had three women on the side? (1968)


**under wraps** (1939) Orig UK; visitors will see numerous others which are still under wraps until nearer the Show. (1978)

Told in confidence

**mum's the word** (a1704) Used as an injunction not to reveal a secret; from the obsolete interjection *mum hush be quiet.*

**between you (and) me and the gate-post** (1871) Variant of earlier between you (and) me and the bed-post (1830–82), between you (and) me and the post (1838–73). P. H. Johnson: Strictly between you and me and the gate-post, Colonel, I don’t care for them. (1959)

To conceal or be concealed

**stash** (1797) Orig criminals’ slang; origin unknown. Damon Runyon: She must have some scratch of her own stash away somewhere. (1937)

**hole up** (1875) From earlier sense, go into a hole or hibernation or shelter. Nicholas Blake: I bet you Elmer’s holed up in Harwich, or somewhere near it. (1954)

crazy like a fox (1908) Orig US; popularized by its use as a title by the US humorist S. J. Perelman (1944). Maurice Procter: ‘Crazy,’ Martineau mused. ‘Crazy like a fox. And as hard to catch.’ (1967)

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**lie low** (1880) Denoting going into hiding or behaving so as not to attract attention. *Wall Street Journal.* How much easier it is to lie low and not engage the enemy if nobody can see you. (1989)

**lie (stay, etc.) doggo** (1893) Denoting remaining hidden or motionless so as not to be noticed; doggo probably from *dog.* Fitzroy Maclean: Lying doggo with an expression of angelic innocence when he came to see if she was in bed and asleep. (1955)


A hiding place

**lurk** (1906) Applied to a place where one can meet others in secrecy; from the verb *lurk* stay hidden. J. Gardner: I met her in a servant’s lurk. (1974)

**stash** (1927) From stash conceal. R. Chapman: If we were on a bank job in a strange city the stash would be in a room we had rented several weeks in advance. In a small town, though, you don’t have any stash, because an hour after you moved in everybody in the burg would be checking in. (1930)

**trap** (1930) US, mainly criminals’ slang. *Time.* Other mobsters keep their escape money in bank safe-deposit boxes or hiding places called ‘traps’. (1977)

Something hidden

**stash** (1914) From stash conceal. *Daily Telegraph.* Chief Insp. Newark said he was satisfied Barnes had no stashes of money hidden away. (1979)

In or into hiding

**into smoke** (1898) Mainly Australian. K. S. Prichard: Meanwhile Tony’s got to be kept in smoke? (1967)
48. Energy, Vigour

Energy, vigour, vitality

get-up (1841), get-up-and-get (1870), get-up-and-go (1907) Orig US. P.G. Wodehouse: He’ll make a name for himself one of these days. He’s got get-up in him. (1915) Punch: Tortoises are not easy to race because they are devoid of get-up-and-go. (1962) Lady Bird Johnson: Lyndon went to church. . . . I am sorry I did not have the get-up-and-go to get with him. (1964)

jism, chism, gism, jizz (1842) Origin unknown. Samuel Beckett: A week will be ample, a week in spring, that puts the jizz in you. (1967)

vim (1843) Orig US; probably from Latin vim, accusative singular of vis strength, vigour. Independent: His neo-pop collages are bursting with mental vim and vigour. (1991)

go (1864) From earlier application, with regard to horses, to power of going, mettle. George Leslie: Physically, he is a wonderful man . . . very wiry, and full of energy and go. (1892)

razzle-dazzle (1889) Rhyming formation on dazzle. New York: It [sc. a musical] has pizzazz and razzle-dazzle, bursts of energy and invention, music and laughter. (1978)

zip (1900) From earlier use representing the sound of rapid movement. Independent: The new blood has put some zip in the team. (1991)

punch (1911) Orig US; from earlier sense, blow with the fist. Gaddy & Wigston Advertiser: Chances were created but there was just no punch up front. (1976)

pep (1912) Abbreviation of pepper. P.G. Wodehouse: That seems to be all the poor fish is able to do, dash it. He can chafe all right, but there he stops. He’s lost his pep. He’s got no dash. (1923)

zing (1918) Orig US; from earlier sense, high-pitched sound. Spectator: While death has not lost its sting, sex has undoubtedly lost its zing. (1985)

stingo (1927) Dated; from earlier sense, strong beer. Observer: Some shanties, sung by Raymond Newell and a chorus, are full of stingo. (1928)

sock (1936) US; from the verb sock hit. Arizona Daily Star: I figure we have enough speed and sock in our lineup to score runs. (1979)

oomph (1937) Orig US; imitative. Church Times: This prayer may take the form of thanks—for the fact that I am alive with enough energy and oomph to my personality to hate and lust. (1977)

pizzazz (1937) Orig US; origin unknown. G.V. Higgins: Maybe some guy that could recruit more troops and out-fund us gets himself involved in a bloodletting with another guy who has some pizzazz, and . . . they knock each other off. (1975)

piss and vinegar (1942) Roger Busby: Jacko’s not such a bad bloke. Full of piss and vinegar and ready to jump for any bugger with braid on his hat. (1978)

zizz (1942) Compare earlier sense, buzzing sound. Times: The Queensgate centre lacks, perhaps, finesse and a touch of zizz. (1983)

moxie (1943) US; compare earlier sense, courage. Vanity Fair: She was enrapturing, she was just captivating, she had the same moxie she has today. (1992)


To instil with vigour, liven up

pep up (1925) From pep energy. Winifred Holby: Keep it vivid. Pep it up with a bit o’ farce. (1931)

juice up (1964) James Mills: The departmental surgeon asked Jackson if he wanted him to give Lockley a shot of something, he meant juice him up a little, keep him from passing out. (1972)

zap (1979) Orig US; often followed by up; from zap liveliness, energy. Family Circle: How to find shoes, hats, accessories that zap last year’s clothes to look like new. (1986)

To be lively

hum (1887) Orig US; from earlier sense, be filled with the sound of many voices. Washington Post: But back at the Insect Club, England’s most profitable venture, business is humming. (1993)

hot up (1936) British; denoting increasing in vigour, liveliness, or excitement

jump (c1938) Orig US; denoting being full of liveliness and excitement; often in the phrase the joint is jumping. Jimmy Sangster: The place was really jumping. It took me three minutes to locate the bar through the smoke haze. (1968)

swing (1957) David Lodge: Jane Austen and the Theory of Fiction. Professor Morris J. Zapp . . . ‘He makes Austen swing,’ was one comment. (1975)

Energetic, vigorous, lively

rambunctious, rambunctious (1830) Orig & mainly US; denoting boisterousness; origin unknown; compare earlier rumbustious. Time: Brezhnev inherited many problems from his rambunctious, buccaneering predecessor, Nikita Khrushchev. (1976)

ripoarious, riporious (1830) Orig US; denoting vigour or boisterousness; from rip tear, after upriarious. R.W. Chapman: The Dictionary of American English . . . stopped at 1900, before the trickle of that rip-riarious idiom became a flood. (1948)

rip-roaring, rip-snorting (1846) Orig US; denoting vigour or boisterousness. Daily Mail: It’s a rip-roaring, red-blooded yarn that no man or woman will be able to read unmoved. (1923) Topeka (Kansas) Capital: It is now stated that Bryan will make a rip-snorting speech at the St. Louis convention. (1904)
full of beans (1854) Originally from the notion of a horse fed on beans. 

[jivey, jivy (1944)] jive 
Mainly US; probably from the notion full of beans (1854)

[rorty (1982)] rorty 
Applied to someone or something boisterous or noisy, coarse or earthy, or crudely comic, and also used as a more general adjective of approval; origin unknown

[spunky (1983)] spunky 
From earlier sense, emitting sparks

[hopped up (1923)] hopped up 
US; denoting someone full of vigour and enthusiasm; from hop narcotic drug

[punchy (1926)] punchy 
From punch vigour + -y

[bubbly (1939)] bubbly 
Denoting vivaciousness; from earlier sense, full of bubbles

[hyper (1942)] hyper 
Orig & mainly US; applied to someone who is extraordinarily active, energetic, or highly strung; short for hyperactive

[jivey, jivy (1944)] jivey, jivy 
Mainly US; probably from jive lively dancing + -y

[hyped up (1946)] hyped up 
Orig US; applied to someone who is over-excited or highly strung; from the notion of the effects of an injection with a hypodermic needle

[zingy (1948)] zingy 
From zing vigour, liveliness + -y

[springy (1944)] springy 
Applied to every with-it girl is pink under her jellies; short for zingy

[swinging (1958)] swinging 
Dated

[zappy (1969)] zappy 
Orig US; from zap energy + -y

[zingy (1948)] zingy 
From zing vigour, liveliness + -y

[stem-winder (1892)] stem-winder 
US; applied especially to someone who makes vigorous rabble-rousing speeches; compare earlier sense, keyless watch

[go-getter (1921)] go-getter 
Orig US; applied to an enterprising person

[tear-arse, (US) tear-ass (1923)] tear-arse, tear-ass 
Applied to a very active, busy person

[dynamo (1938)] dynamo 
Often in the phrase human dynamo; from earlier sense, machine producing electricity

[ball of fire (1953)] ball of fire 
A lively person; most characteristic of the enterprising and energetic

[To lose energy] run out of steam (1961) 
Dick Francis: When I’d run out of steam, they would begin to nod while they listened.

49. Laziness

A lazy person; a shirker

[lazy-bones (1592)] lazy-bones 
J. & M. Stern: Most pop-culture beatniks were silly sorts of characters played for laughs, foremost among them the amiable bongo-patting lazybones

[loafer (1830)] loafer 
Applied to someone who spends their time idly; perhaps from German Laudläufer tramp, from Land land + laufen (dialect løfen) run

[soldier (1840)] soldier 
Nautical, orig and mainly US; mainly in the phrase old soldier

[running] running 
He’s a bit of an old soldier, but a first-rate seaman, and a hundred per cent reliable at sea.

[mooner (1848)] mooner 
Dated; applied to someone who goes about listlessly; from moon move listlessly + -er

[passenger (1852)] passenger 
Orig British university slang, applied to a member of a rowing crew who does not pull his weight, and hence to a member of a group who does not contribute any effort and so has to be supported by the others

Energetic activity

[go (1965)] go 
Especially in the phrase it’s all go

[mooner (1848)] mooner 
Dated; applied to someone who goes about listlessly; from moon move listlessly + -er

[passenger (1852)] passenger 
Orig British university slang, applied to a member of a rowing crew who does not pull his weight, and hence to a member of a group who does not contribute any effort and so has to be supported by the others

[old soldier] soldier 
Bruce Hamilton:
research work, then the sooner you get out. . . . the better. We're carrying enough passengers already. (1961)

bummer (1855) US; applied to an idler or loafer; perhaps after German Bummier one who wanders around idly. ■ William Black: A system of local government controlled by 30,000 bummiers, loafers, and dead-boats. (1876)

bum (1864) Applied to a lazy shiftless person or a habitual loafer; probably short for bummer idler, loafer. ■ New Scientist: Then my neighbours start screaming, 'Galileo, you lazy bum, get into bed. You got to go look for work tomorrow.' (1983)

piker (1889) Orig US; compare earlier senses, cautious gambler, sponger. ■ H. W. Tilman: He is definitely no piker and although only 22 is one of the old school and believes in discipline. (1971)

scrimshank, scrimshank (1890) Orig and mainly services' slang; applied to a malingerer or one who avoids duty; from the verb scrimshank malinger (+ -er). ■ Evelyn Waugh: Brigade scrimshank (1945) expects us to clean up the house for them. I should have thought some of those half-shaven scrim-shankers I see lounging round Headquarters might have saved us the trouble. (1946)

bench-warmer (1892) US; applied originally to someone who sits idly on a bench, especially a substitute in a sports team, and hence more broadly to any lazy or ineffectual person. ■ Los Angeles Times: He thought about leaving after the 1984 season, his third straight year as a bench-warmer. (1986)

sooner (1892) Australian; applied to an idler or shirker; said to be from sooner rather, from the notion that such a person would sooner be idle than work. ■ Vance Palmer: 'The dirty soonerl' he burst out. 'They don't know a man when they find one, those heads down south.' (1948)

slacker (1898) Applied to someone who avoids work or exertion; from slack be lazy + -er. ■ Robin Maughan: 'You're a slacker and you're a shirker,' he said. 'You're a little runt in many ways. But you're the best of the lot of them.' (1969)

bludger (1900) Australian; applied to a loafer or someone who avoids his duties; from earlier sense, prostitute's pimp. ■ Sydney Morning Herald: The only people who would benefit from full pay on workers' compensation would be 'genuine loafers, shirkers or bludgers,' the Chief Secretary, Mr. Willis, said in the Legislative Assembly yesterday. (1971)

clock-watcher (1911) Applied to someone who does no more work than is strictly necessary; from the notion of repeatedly looking at a work-place clock to see if it is time to stop. ■ Dorothy Sayers: Mr. Talboy had left promptly at 5.30. Mr. Copley had seen him go. Clock-watchers, the whole lot of them. (1933)

gold-brick (1914), gold-bricker (1919) US; applied to a lazy person or a shirker; from earlier sense, worthless thing, sham. ■ John Steinbeck: In the ranks, billeted with the stinking, cheating, foul-mouthed goldbricks, there were true heroes. (1958)

lead-swinger (1918) British; applied to a malingerer or shirker; from the phrase swing the lead maling'er. ■ Daily Telegraph: 'It would soon put a stop to lead-swingers who take a few days off to paint the house or watch cricket,' the doctor added. (1973)

layabout (1932), lie-about (1937) ■ New Scientist: Those of us gifted by nature with inertia but maligned by society as layabouts. (1962) ■ Guardian: This former lie-about has got himself married. (1961)

poler (1938) Australian; applied to a shirker; from pole impose or sponge on someone + -er

skiver, skyver (1941) Orig services' slang; from skive shirk + -er. ■ Daily Telegraph: A Labour-controlled council is to crack down on 'skivers' following a report which alleges large scale absenteeism and sick leave among its manual workers. (1977)

spine-basher (1945) Australian; applied to a loafer; from spine-bash rest, loaf about + -er

beach bum (1962) Applied to someone, especially a youth, who hangs about on beaches. ■ Observer: He is the reverse of the popular image of a 'surfie' as a beach bum. (1963)

couch potato (1979) Orig US; applied to someone who spends leisure time as passively as possible (especially watching TV or videos), eats junk food, and takes little or no exercise; from the notion of reclining like a vegetable on a couch; the use of potato apparently derives from the original Couch Potato club, founded by cartoonist Robert Armstrong, who represented the typical boob-tuber (see at Entertainment p. 347) as a vegetable 'tuber', the potato; the expression is said to have been coined by Tom Iacino. ■ New Musical Express: [She] gave up opportunities in the world of modelling and in Tinseltown LA in order to stop her kids becoming couch potato video generation trash brains. (1987)

To be lazy, avoid work

leaf (1838) Denoting spending one's time idly; probably a back-formation from loafer idle person. ■ Economist: At worst he spends Sunday loafing around the cinemas or public houses. (1987)

moon (1848) Denoting behaving or moving about listlessly and unproductively; usually followed by about or around; from the notion of being moonstruck, distracted or dazed as if by the influence of the moon. ■ Jerome K. Jerome: I . . . did nothing whatever, except moon about the house and gardens. (1886)

mike (1859) British; applied to hanging around idly or shirking work; origin unknown; compare British dialect mixt skull, play truant, apparently from Old French muchier, mucier hide, lurk. ■ P. Eevet: [He would] spy on us as we worked, and then . . . thunder at any one he thought was mixing. (1974)

lallygag, lollygag (1862) US; applied to dawdling or idling around; origin unknown. ■ Springfield (Mass.) Union: The Dow Jones average of 30 industrials, which lollygagged most of the day, gained strongly in afternoon trading. (1973)
scrimshank (1890) Orig and mainly services' slang; applied to malingering or shirking one's duty; origin unknown • Iris Murdoch: I was just telling Hilary we saw him scrimshanking yesterday. (1975)

slack (1904) Probably from slack lacking rigour, lax, lazy, although previously recorded as a verb in standard use with the meaning 'be idle' in the 16th century • Guardian: Bond's own attacking partners, Morley and McAvennie, were not exactly slacking but failed to make use of some neat and imaginative approach work. (1991)

dog it (1905) Orig US; applied to acting lazily or halfheartedly, or to shirking or avoiding responsibility, risk, etc.; from the notion of the dog as an idle creature • Al Alvarez: Most guys playing for that kind of money will dog it, but Doyle's got no fear. (1983)

spruce (1917) British, orig services' slang; applied to malingering or shirking one's duty; origin unknown • G. M. Wilson: Dr. Meunier's no fool, he'd have known if she was sprucing. . . . Malingering. Faking tummy trouble. (1987)

swing the lead (1917) British, orig army slang; applied to malingering or shirking one's duty; apparently from the notion of someone taking depth soundings from a ship with a plumb line (with a lead weight on the end) who sits idly rather than engaging in duties involving exertion • Daily Express: He said he . . . had been 'swinging the lead' for the purpose of getting a permanent pension. (1927)

bludge (1919) Australian; applied to avoiding effort, especially by relying on others' exertions; from earlier sense (not recorded until later), live on the earnings of a prostitute • J. H. Fullarton: You were one of the 95 per cent who bludged at base in Enzed or England or Yankee-land. (1944)

dodge the column (1919) Orig services' slang; applied to someone shirking their duty or avoiding work • Howard Spring: My father, so great an expert in dodging any column he didn't see the point of joining. (1955)

skive, skyve (1919) Orig services' slang; applied to someone shirking their duty or avoiding work; often followed by off; perhaps from French esquiver dodge, slink away, but compare earlier English dialect skive move quickly, dart • Jessica Mann: The girls who dig are always glad of an excuse to skive off and have a rest. (1973)

gold-brick (1926) Orig and mainly US; denoting having an easy time or shirking; from gold-brick shirker • Mary McCarthy: Students with applied art or science majors tended to gold-brick on their reading courses. (1952)

goof (1932) Mainly US; applied to idling or wasting time, and also to shirking one's duties; often followed by off; from earlier sense, fool about • New Yorker: If you ever feel like goofing off sometime, I'll be glad to keep the old ball game going and fill in for you here. (1968)

plotz (1941) US; denoting originally sitting down weakly, and hence slouching or lounging around lazily; from Yiddish platsen, from Middle High German platen burst, influenced by German Platz seat • J. Kirkwood: He just kind of plotzed around waiting to fall into some sort of a cushy job. (1960)

spine-bash (1941) Australian; denoting resting or loafing about; from the notion of lying on one's back • Roland Robinson: They would rather have stayed in the camp to spine-bash or go down to the swy game. (1956)

skate (1945) US; denoting avoiding obligations or shirking; compare earlier sense, leave quickly • Observer: I'm not a woman's libber but I don't want to skate (shirk). (1979)

do a never (1946) Nautical, dated; applied to shirking or loafing

lig (1960) Denoting loafing about; from a dialectal variant of lie repose • It's a time for ligging in the streets and doing your thing, man. (1969)

piss about (1961) Applied to spending one's time unproductively or futilely • T. Lewis: Are you coming in? Or do we piss about all day? (1970)

veg, vedge (1980) Orig and mainly US; denoting passing the time in mindless or vacuous inactivity, especially by watching TV; usually followed by out; from veg abbreviation of vegetable, from the notion of vegetating • Independent: Cold rubbery pizzas for paralytic lager louts vegging out in front of the late-night movie. (1988)

Laziness; avoidance of work

Maori P.T. (1961) New Zealand; from the Maoris' alleged relaxed attitude to life

A period of lazy inactivity

mike (1825) British; applied to a period of idleness or shirking; compare mike hang around idly • Times: The day of the cheerful veteran forward, gratefully relying upon opportunities for a mild 'mike', may be coming to an end. (1958)

lie-in (1916), lie (1930) Mainly British; applied to staying in bed longer than usual in the morning • Gillian Freeman: I'm going to 'ave a bit of a lie in . . . seeing I'm on 'oliday. (1959) • Daphne du Maurier: Have a good long lie tomorrow morning. Don't attempt to get up. (1938)

bludge (1943) Australian; also applied to a job needing no effort; from the verb bludge avoid effort • Jon Cleary: He was happy in his job, it was a good bludge. (1949) • West Australian: Prime Minister Gorton . . . quoted . . . as saying . . . he was coming to . . . the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' conference 'on a bit of a bludge'. (1969)

Bone lazy (1925), bone idle (1836) From the notion of being lazy 'to the bone', through and through • W. D. Pereira: You should see 'is eldest kid. . . . Bone idle. Goes to one of them nitzy schools, but it won't 'elp 'im none. (1959)
1. Belief & Disbelief

To believe


buy (1926) Orig US ■ Mary McCarthy: It doesn’t seem likely to me that they cooked it up between them. More likely she half guessed and he told her. I’m willing to buy that for what it’s worth. (1952)

To be believable

wash (1849) ■ Spectator: He was not to be taken in by plausibilities that wouldn’t wash’. (1911)

Believe me!

stand on me (1933) British ■ G. F. Newman: You’ll be all right, stand on me. (1970)

I don’t believe it!

stuff and nonsense (1749) ■ George Eliot: Stuff and nonsense! I don’t believe a word of it. It’s all a got-up story. (1871)

tell it (or that) to the marines (1806)
Apparantly from marines’ reputation among sailors for being credulous ■ Dick Francis: ‘When this is over you can sleep for a fortnight.’ ‘Yeah?’ he said sarcastically. ‘Tell it to the marines.’ (1967)

my eye (1842) ■ William Faulkner: ‘How about Bigelow’s Mill . . . that’s a factory.’ ‘Factory my eye.’ (1929)


my arse (1933) ■ Wilcox & Rantzen: ‘I think we should both be pleased that she’s made this friendly gesture—even if it is a little eccentric.’ ‘Eccentric my arse,’ he said, shaking me into silence. (1981)

gertcha, gercha, gertcher (1937) British; alteration of get away (or along) with you ■ G. Carr: ‘Gertcha!’ The orator . . . elbowed him away. (1963)

my Aunt Fanny (1945) Especially in the phrase my Aunt Fanny ■ G. Carr: ‘Agree my Aunt Fanny,’ retorted the other loudly. (1954)

get off (1958)

stroll on (1959) British ■ Peter Tinniswood: ‘Excuse me, but do you by any chance suffer from hay fever?’ ‘No,’ said Brenda Woodhead. ‘Why?’ ‘Well, your eyes are all puffy and you’ve got a red nose.’ —Bloody rotate, Carter. Bloody stroll on. (1985)

do me (or us) a favour (1963) ■ Guardian: Was she hoping to get engaged during the year of the tour? ‘Good God, no, do us a favour’ (1969)

pull the other one, (it’s got bells on) (1968) Orig as a response to the notion that someone is trying to pull one’s leg (= make one believe an untruth) ■ Desmond Bagley: ‘She doesn’t hold the mineral rights.’ ‘Pull the other one,’ scoffed Eric. (1975)

bollocks (1969) British; from earlier sense, nonsense ■ Guardian: ‘But are we out to get a pound note or are we pulling tarts?’ ‘The one with high heels fancies you.’ ‘Bollocks.’ ‘I’m telling you.’ (1992)
2. Understanding

To understand or realize the meaning of something

be (or get) jerry (on, on to, to) (1908) US, dated; origin unknown. ■ Flynn’s: I know that th’ fly was jerry because he gave me th’ once over as I was comin’ out. (1926)

have something or someone taped (1914) Used to denote complete understanding of something or someone; probably either from the notion of tying something up with tape so as to have complete control over it or from the notion of measuring something with a tape. ■ Athenaeum: ‘I got you taped,’ an N.C.O. may say to a man, meaning ‘I know what you are up to.’ (1919)

take a jerry (to) (1919) Australian & New Zealand; compare jerry to in same sense

wise up (to) (1919) Orig & mainly US. ■ Wall Street Journal: Antique dealers are wisely rising to the growing demand for old radios. (1971)

cotton on (to) (1929) From earlier sense, develop a fondness for. ■ New Yorker: I just don’t dig any of these guys. I don’t understand their scenes. (1969)

get the picture (1938) Used to denote the grasping of a situation. ■ New Yorker: I explained all this. . . . He seems to get the picture. (1975)

know the score (1938) Used to denote grasping the essentials of the present situation. ■ J. D. Salinger: You’ve been around schools long enough to know the score. (1982)

click (1939) Used to denote that something suddenly becomes clear or understood. ■ Anthony Burgess: Then the name clicked, because somebody in the town had talked about Everett. (1960)

get it in one (1942) Used to denote immediate comprehension or grasping of a situation. ■ Catherine Ard: ‘What we are checking on is whether someone tried to kill him.’ . . . ‘Got it in one, Sloan.’ (1975)

the penny drops (1951) Used to denote sudden realization or recognition; from the notion of a penny dropped into a slot machine and activating the mechanism. ■ Times: The penny had begun to drop even before the present fuel crisis. (1973)

latch on (to) (1962) From earlier sense, grasp or grab something. ■ John Wain: It was a long time before I could latch on to what was happening. Then I got it. (1962)

get the message (1964) Used to denote the grasping of the import of something said. ■ Dan Lees: They don’t seem able to make up their minds whether to warn me off or knock me off but I do get the message loud and clear and . . . I’m going. (1972)

gotcha, gotcher (1966) Used to say that one has understood; representing a casual or
Thought and Communication

3. Knowledge & Ignorance

Intelligence

**brains** (1763) *Daily Mail:* Her 23-year-old co-presenter, who is a trained ballet dancer, has also proved she has brains as well as beauty. (1981)

**the upper storey** (1885) Used in referring to someone's level of intelligence. *I. & P. Opie:* A person who is 'wanting in the upper storey' is... daffy. (1959)

**up top** (1961) Used in referring to someone's level of intelligence. *Francis Warner:* Mousey little creature, bless her, not much up top if you know what I mean. (1972)

**grey matter** (1965) From earlier technical sense, darker tissues of the brain. *P. G. Wodehouse:* I've never been a brainy sort of guy, and what I want is a wife with about the same amount of grey matter I have, and that's how Vee stacks up. (1965)

**smarts, smart** (1970) US; from smart clever. *Guardian Weekly:* They complain that the level of intelligence is low and that the soldiers have neither the smarts nor the education to work the complicated weapons of modern warfare. (1981)

Good sense

**gumption** (1719) Orig Scottish; applied to practical good sense or initiative; origin unknown

**savvy, savee, savey** (1785) From savvy know (see at Understanding p. 297) *W. R. Titterton:* Which idea... Armstrong actively disliked because, having more savvy than I had, he saw it meant death to his doctrine. (1936)

**horse sense** (1832) Orig US; applied to practical good sense and shrewdness. *I. Wallach:* Summoning up his best horse sense (and trying to forget that the horse is an uncommonly stupid animal), Andrew said, 'I agree with Mr. Clifton.' (1960)

**common** (1906) British; short for common sense. *Harold Pinter:* You must... have a bit of common. They got departments for everything. (1960)

Something unintelligible

**all Greek to** (1600) From the notion of ancient Greek as an unintelligible language. *Nation* (New York): Schubert clothed his melodies in wondrous harmonies, which were 'Greek' to his contemporaries. (1892)

To defeat someone's understanding

**beat** (1882) Mainly in the phrase beats me. *Walter de la Mare:* Why you should have taken so much trouble about it simply beats me. (1930)

**lose** (1862) Mainly in the phrase you('ve) lost me. I don't understand what you've said. *H. Van Siller:* Frazer... looked up, frowning. 'You've lost me. What do you mean, exactly?' (1967)

Knowledgeable, clever

**cute** (1731) Now mainly US, often derogatory; alteration of acute. *Wall Street Journal:* Shorting big stocks to play little stocks sounds like a cute strategy. But it may be too clever by half. (1989)

**fly** (1811) British, dated; applied to someone who is very knowing or wide-awake; origin uncertain; perhaps from the verb fly. *Charles Dickens:* 'I am fly,' says Jo. (1852)

**up to snuff** (1811) British, dated; applied to someone who is knowing or not easily deceived; apparently from the notion of being old or experienced enough to take snuff

**brainy** (1845) From brain + -y. *Monica Dickens:* Betty's fiancé was an undersized but brainy boy. (1956)

**savvy** (1905) From savvy good sense, probably with the ending re-interpreted as the adjectival suffix -y. *Economist:* A savvy tenant putting a deposit on his house gains a 12-month option to buy at the price ruling when he made the deposit. (1980)

**smart-arsed, smart-arse, (US) smart-assed, smart-ass** (1960) Derogatory; applied to someone or something ostentatiously or smugly clever. *Globe & Mail* (Toronto): It is tempting to be smart-assed when reviewing a Richard Rohmer novel. (1979)

**wise-assed** (1967), **wise-ass** (1972) US, derogatory; applied to someone or something ostentatiously or smugly clever. *J. Poyer:* Listen to what I have to say, then you can make all the wise-ass remarks you want. (1972)

**pointy-headed** (1972) US, derogatory. *New York Times:* Let the dust gather on the pointy-headed bureaucrats and all the other props from yesteryear. (1975)

A knowledgeable or clever person

**clever Dick, clever-boots** (1847), **clever-clogs** (1866) Applied to a smart or knowing person; mainly used ironically or sarcastically;
Dick from the male personal name  ■ I. & P. Opie: There is bound to be some clever-dick who has hidden in a coal-hole and refuses to show himself. (1969)  ■ Listener: On each double-spread billing page it is three columns to the populars and eight for the clever-clogs. (1983)

**smart alec, smart aleck, smart alick (1965)**
Derogatory, orig US; applied to a know-all; often with capital initial(s); alec from the male personal name, a diminutive of Alexander  ■ Charles Barrett: One smart Alick came to . . . offer his services in return for a large tin of pineapple slices. (1942)

**wise guy (1896)**
Derogatory, orig US; applied to know-all  ■ J. Ross: 'I guess it's something to do with knowing your onions, didn't he? (1958)

**wise-ass (1971)**
US, derogatory; applied to a know-all; perhaps a combination of wise guy and smart-ass  ■ John Irving: Benny Potter from New York—a born wise-ass. (1978)

**pointy-head (1972)**
US; applied disparagingly to an intellectual or expert; probably a back-formation from pointy-headed  ■ Times: Mr Wallace . . . dismissed it quickly at the end of his address as 'the most callous, asinine, stupid thing that was ever conceived by some pointy-head in Washington DC'. (1972)

**bright spark (1974)**
Usually used ironically or sarcastically  ■ New Scientist: Some bright spark thought Windsor Castle was on fire and called the fire brigade! (1983)

**know what’s what (a1553)**
Denoting a general competence or worldly-wisdom

**know a thing or two (1792)**
Denoting either general competence or a thorough knowledge of one’s subject  ■ P. B. Wodehouse: The serfs and vassals now know a thing or two and prefer to make their living elsewhere. (1973)

**know how many beans make five (1830)**
Often implying that someone is not easily fooled  ■ Anthony Gilbert: Mr. Cook knew how many beans make five. (1958)

**know beans (1833)**
US; mainly used in the negative, denoting ignorance  ■ Independent: We have this very amusing scene in which George Cole as Froot will call you a fool and suggest that you don’t know beans about your business. (1991)

**know the time of day (1897)**
Denoting a general competence or worldly-wisdom  ■ Ouida: 'She knows the time o’ day’, said the other. (1897)

**know what one is talking about (1921)**
Often used in the negative, denoting speaking in ignorance  ■ Sun (Baltimore): The dealer ‘popped off without knowing what he was talking about’. (1943)

**know one’s onions (1922)**
Denoting either general competence or a thorough knowledge of one’s subject  ■ Joanna Cannan: Shakespeare knew his onions, didn’t he? (1958)

**know one’s stuff (1927)**
Orig US; denoting a thorough knowledge of one’s subject  ■ Agatha Christie: ‘He gave me a lot of knowledge about planting things.’ ‘Yes, he knew his stuff, as you might say.’ (1973)

**know all the answers (1933)**
Often used disparagingly, implying smug knowledgeability  ■ A. L. Rowe: The positive old lady in the garden, who knew all the answers and could not be told anything, had not ceased to be a marvellous politician. (1955)

To behave in a smugly clever way (towards)


To be very familiar with something

**know something backwards (1904)**  ■ Financial Times: An eclectic collector . . . he knows the showrooms backwards. (1983)

**know something inside out (1921)**  ■ Nicolas Freeling: A restaurant—that’s a simpler affair, and Margaret knows it inside out. (1967)

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**Thought and Communication**

*Wynter, 'the brains' of the victory. (1958)*

*smart-ass*

* • John Irving: Benny Potter from New York—a know-all; perhaps a combination of smart-ass and something.

* • Charles Barrett: One smart Alick came to . . . offer his services in return for a large tin of pineapple slices. (1942)

*常人, 異常人, 連常人 (1971)*

**egghead (1907)**
Orig US, usually derogatory; applied to an intellectual  ■ Scientific American: I fear that, while publicly unspoken, anti-intellectualism and suspicion of ‘eggheads’ may have been a factor. (1955)

**brain (1914)**
■ Edgar Wallace: I felt like a fourth form boy listening to a 'brain', and found myself being respectful! (1923)

**long-hair (1920)**
Orig US, usually derogatory; applied to an intellectual; from the stereotypical view of intellectuals as having long hair

**brains (1925)**
Used in the phrase the brains of (or behind) to denote the cleverest person in a group or the master-mind of a scheme  ■ American Speech: Big man, the brains behind a dope ring; the one who seldom takes the rap. (1936)  ■ Times: Admiral Sir William Wynter, 'the brains of the victory. (1958)

**smart-pants (1941)**
Orig US; applied to a know-all  ■ Monica Dickens: He jumped right in with his slick talk. . . . That smarty pants. (1953)

**sharpie (1949)**
Orig US; compare earlier sense, swindler, cheat

**clever-sticks, clever stick (1959)**
Applied to a clever, smart, or knowing person; often used ironically or sarcastically  ■ Compton Mackenzie: Some cleversticks had climbed up a plane-tree to get a better view. (1921)

**smartie-boots, smartie-boots (1962)**
Applied to a know-all  ■ Joyce Porter: He was grateful that he had indulged in something know-all • Budd Schulberg: Listen, wise guy if you wanted to be a marvellous politician. (1955)

**pointy-head**
US; applied disparagingly to an intellectual or expert; probably a back-formation from pointy-headed  ■ Times: Mr Wallace . . . dismissed it quickly at the end of his address as 'the most callous, asinine, stupid thing that was ever conceived by some pointy-head in Washington DC'. (1972)

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To behave in a smugly clever way (towards)

**smart-ass**
 ■ J. Ross: ‘I guess it’s something to do with the generation gap, sir.’ ‘Don’t smart-ass me!’ (1978)

To be very familiar with something

**know something backwards**
 ■ Financial Times: An eclectic collector . . . he knows the showrooms backwards. (1983)

**know something inside out**
 ■ Nicolas Freeling: A restaurant—that’s a simpler affair, and Margaret knows it inside out. (1967)
know something like the back of one's hand (1943) - Mary Stewart: I know the district like the back of my hand. (1956)

To lack knowledge

not know someone from Adam (1784) - Denoting ignorance of someone's identity

- Washington Post: They didn't know me from Adam. They just liked the fact that I was professional and that I had a strong art background. (1993)

dunno, dunna(w), etc. (1842) - Representing a casual pronunciation of (I) don't know

- Peter Moloney: A sed 'Wharar thee wack?' 'A dunno,' she said back. (1966)

search me (1901) - Origin North American; used, mainly in response to a question, to indicate that the speaker does not know the answer or has no idea what to do

- Dick Francis: 'Where did he go for the summer?' I asked. ... 'Search me.' (1965)

ask me another (1910) - Used to indicate that one does not know the answer to a question

- Ivy Compton-Burnett: 'Devoted?' said Josephine, raising her brows. 'Ask me another. I am not in a position to give you an account of their feelings.' (1933)

not (have) the foggiest (1917) - Used, mainly in response to a question, to indicate that the speaker does not know the answer or has no idea what to do; shortened from not have the foggiest idea, notion, etc.

- J. B. Priestley: 'Is that a good idea?' asked Laura. 'My dear, I haven't the foggiest.' (1951)

- P. McGerr: 'Then you've no idea what his play's about?' 'Not the foggiest,' she said cheerfully. (1967)

not have a clue (1948) - Edward Hyams: 'Sorry, old boy,' he said. 'I haven't a clue.' (1951)

To be ignorant

not know one's arse from one's elbow (1930) - Linacre Lane: Don't know 'is arse from 'is elbow. (1966)

not know shit from Shinola (c1930) - US; Shinola from the proprietary name of a brand of shoe polish

- Fortune: We'll package them together for people who don't know s- from Shinola. (1987)

not know from nothing (1936) - US

- F. Feikema: Them San dietitians, they don't know from nuthin'. (1945)

Ignorant

pig-ignorant (1972) - Denoting crass ignorance

- Tim Heald: Those press johnnies ... would never twig. Too gullible and too pig ignorant. (1976)

4. Skill

A skilled person

wizard (1620) - From earlier sense, man with magic powers

- Times: Judge Kenet ... noted that Mr Tzour had been noted as a financial wizard. (1975)

dab (1691), dab hand (1828) - Origin unknown

- Economist: Mrs Holladay has provided a beautiful room and, being a dab hand at fund-raising, lots of money. (1987)

ringer (1848) - Australian & New Zealand; often applied specifically to the fastest shearer in a shed (1871); from British dialect ringer something supremely good

- Thomas Wood: He was making his pile.... He's certainly no slouch in the business world. (1978)

no slouch (1879) - Orig US; used to suggest that someone is skilled at a particular activity; from the earlier phrase no slouch of a ... quite a good ... , from slouch lazy or incompetent person

- R. Holies: He was making his pile. ... He's certainly no slouch in the business world. (1978)

mivvy (1906) - Compare the earlier obsolete senses (perhaps not the same word) a marble, (derogatory) a woman; ultimate origin unknown

- Osmington Mills: He's a mivvy with anything like that. (1959)

whizz, whiz, wiz (1914) - Orig US; perhaps from whizz buzzing sound, via the intermediate sense, something remarkable, but in this sense regarded as short for wizard skilled person (whence the spelling wiz)

- Financial Times: He has since become a whiz at ping pong. (1982)

hot-shot (1933) - Orig US; often used attributively

- Guardian: He was one tenth of a second quicker in practice than the current grand prix hotshot, John Kocinski. (1991)

- John Wainwright: These hot-shot scientists. They love the limelight. (1973)

whizzo (1977) - From whizz + -o

- Sydney Mirror: Electronics whizzo Dick Smith ... aims to become the taxman's friend in another way. (1981)

Highly skilled or capable

great (1784) - Now followed by at

- Guardian: Scotland have shown that they are great at counter-attacking and forcing mistakes. (1981)

nifty (1907) - Orig US; from earlier sense, smart, splendid

- Observer: Duncan was nifty on occasions, and forcing mistakes. (1991)

hot (1914) - Surf '70 (New Zealand); Walsh is not the only hot surfer in New Plymouth. (1970)

mustard (1925) - Daily Express: Britain is particularly hot on calculi. The Russians and the East Germans are mustard on the theory of numbers and on solid geometry. (1972)
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pie (1941) New Zealand; usually used with on; from Maori pai good

shit-hot (1961) • Martin Amis: They've elected a new guy... I don't know anything about him. Except that he's shit-hot. (1973)

bionic (1976) From earlier sense, having electromechanical body parts • Washington Post: No one in the emergency room seemed to speak English... After two hours, the woman who is frequently described as 'unflappable' and 'bionic' did the appropriate thing. She sat down and cried. (1984)

Skill

green fingers (1934) Applied to exceptional skill at growing plants. Hence green-fingered (1946) • Lancet: Trees like this... would soon be produced by hybridisation and plant-hormones under the green-fingered genius of him and his helpers. (1966)

green thumb (1943) Mainly US; = green fingers • Listener: Every kind of briar, of bush rose, of rare bulb, and flowering tree flourished under her green thumb. (1962)

To be skilled at something

have something down to a fine art (1919) • Guardian: I spoke to some stylish regular travellers who had got living out of a suitcase down to a fine, and lightweight, art. (1992)

A skill-less person

rabit (1904) Applied to an inferior or novice player • Agatha Christie: He could get no fun out of playing [golf] with a rabbit like me. (1976)

5. Sanity

Sanity

buttons (1860) Dated • N. H. Kennard: They said... he had not 'got all his buttons', meaning that he was not 'all there'. (1893)

marbles (1927) Orig North American • Ottawa Journal: 'I still have most of my marbles,' he said cheerfully. (1973)

The head as the repository of sanity

upstairs (1932) • G. W. Brace: He just ain't right upstairs. (1952)

the upper storey (1959) • I. & P. Opie: A person who is 'wanting in the upper storey' is... daffy. (1959)

Failing sanity

white ants (1908) Australian; especially in the phrase have white ants be eccentric or dotty; from the destructiveness of termites or white ants • I. L. Idriess: A hardened old nor'-wester can develop a few white 'ants', as well as the veriest new-chum. (1937)

Sane

The terms in this category are often used in negative contexts, implying 'insane'.

compos mentis (1616), compos (1809) Latin, in control of the mind; originally standard English, but latterly (especially in the abbreviated form compos) colloquial or jocular; see also non compos under Mad (p. 301) • Bruce Hamilton: Honestly, is he quite compos? (1958)

right (1662) Euphemistic; often in such phrases as right in the (or one's) head • J. Hocking: We've got an old aunt of mine in the carriage who isn't exactly right. (1896) • M. L. Roby: He ain't right in the head. Got a few marbles missing. (1967)

all there (1864) • Edward Hyams: I've never known a really good cow-hand quite all there. (1949)

with it (1961) • W. J. Burley: There's an old man, living in a home... He's quite with it—I mean he's mentally alert. (1985)

To be sane

have one's head screwed on (the right way) (1821) Applied to a sensible or level-headed person • Daily News: Elizabeth has, to use a slang phrase, 'her head very well screwed on'. (1900)

Mad

There is a continuum of usage between 'mad' in the clinical sense, at one extreme, and 'eccentrically foolish or strange' at the other. For convenience, the continuum is divided into two here, 'Mad' and 'Crazy, eccentric', and words are assigned to the one to which they most typically belong. But many are capable of being used in both senses, and with several gradations of connotation in between.

non compos (1628) Originally standard English, but latterly colloquial or jocular; short for non compos mentis, Latin, not in control of the mind; compare compos mentis at Sane (p. 301)

out of one's head (1825), off one's head (a1845) • Laurence Meynell: That old woman's a Tartar. No wonder the Duke's gone off his head. (1981)

nuts (1846) Probably from earlier sense, wildly enthusiastic about (1785), but compare nut head, off one's nut mad, and nut mad person • Nevil Shute: 'Gee,' said Wing Commander Dewar, 'this thing'll drive me nuts.' (1953)

off one's nut (1860) From nut head • W. R. Burnett: If you think you can muscle into this joint you're off your nut. (1929)

off one's chump (1864) From chump head • Angus Wilson: This chap Beard seems to be off his chump. He's evacuated all the wallabies. (1961)
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locо (1887) Orig US; from Spanish loco mad
- Dick Francis: He'd been quietly going loco and making hopeless decisions. (1965)

off one's onion (1890) From onion head - H. G. Wells: He come home one day saying Tono-Bungay till I thought he was clean off his onion. (1909)

off one's pannikin (1895) Mainly Australian: from pannikin head (from earlier sense, metal drinking vessel) - C. J. Dennis: Per'aps I'm off me pannikin wiv' sitit' in the sun. (1916)

off one's trolley (1896) - N. R. Nash: If you suspect Patty, you're off your trolley! (1949)

off one's rocker (1897) From rocker curved bar on which something rocks - Evelyn Waugh: It's going to be awkward for us if the Emperor goes off his rocker. (1932)

stir-crazy, stir-nuts, stir-simple (1908) Mainly US; applied to someone mentally deranged (as if) from long imprisonment; from stir prison - Washington Post: A Democratic President would go 'stir crazy' without a depression or war to occupy his time. (1960)

magnoon, macnoon, magnune, mangoon (1917) Australian, orig services' slang: from Arabic - Richard Beilby: She could be a bit magnoon in the head. Women are funny like that. (1970)

poggle, puggle, poggled, puggled (1923) British, mainly services' slang; from earlier obsolete slang puggle, puggle mad person, idiot, from Hindustani pâgal, paglâ mad person - B. W. Aldiss: A woman in this bloody dump? You're going puggle, Page, that's your trouble! Too much tropical sun. (1971)

blah (1924) Dated - Telegraph & Telephone Journal: The third class is hopeless. . . . It consists of the people who, in New York slang, have gone 'blah'. (1924)

doolla1y, doolla1y tap (1925) British, orig services' slang; representing a spoken form of Doolali (Marashtra, India), site of a British army camp + obsolete tap fever, heat - James Curtis: What's the matter with that bloke? Doolally? (1936)

off one's rocket (1925) Dated; rocket probably replacing rocker

off one's conk (1926) From conk head - Harold Pinter: Why are you getting on everybody's wick? Why are you driving that old lady off her conk? (1959)

mental (1927) - James Patrick: They must be mental. . . . Shit-bags the lot o' them. (1973)

round (or around) the bend (1929) - J. I. M. Stewart: Right round the bend. . . I mean ... as mad as a hatter. (1955)

lakes (1934) Shortened from Lakes of Killarney, rhyming slang for harrny - Margery Allingham: Which is not like a bloke who's done a killing unless he's lakes. (1955)

ravers (1938) British, dated; from raving (mad) + -ers - Edward Hyams: 'You said you wanted to meet Sylvester Green. Well, here I am.' . . . Stark ravers. I served for two years with Green. This man isn't even much like him.' (1951)

certifiable (1939) From earlier technical sense, so deranged as to be officially certified insane - Observer: That I should bet money on the hated adversaries caused even close friends and colleagues to ask which side Wales had been on in the war, and forced a Chilean journalist called Niden Iconomow to consider me certifiable. (1991)

troppo (1941) Australian; applied to someone mentally unhinged (as if) from exposure to a tropical climate; often in the phrase go troppo; from trop(ic or tropical) + -o - Barry Humphries: Am I going troppo? Mum's gettin' hitched again? (1979)

yarra (1943) Australian; from the name of a mental hospital at Yarra Bend, Victoria - Sydney Morning Herald: Kingston Town is a good horse . . . but in my opinion he would not have lived with Phar Lap. I know a lot of people will say I'm 'Yarra'; but that's my belief. (1980)

rock-happy (1946) US services' slang, dated; applied to someone mentally unhinged from serving too long on a (Pacific) island

bananas (1957) Orig US; perhaps from banana oil nonsense - Judith Krantz: Jesus, thought Lester, his first movie star and she turns out to be a bit bananas. (1978)

bonkers (1957) Orig British; origin uncertain; recorded earlier (1948) in the sense 'slightly drunk' - Simpson & Galton: By half-past three he'll be raving bonkers. (1961)

round the twist (1960) British; based on round the bend - Desmond Bagley: I swear Ogilvie thought I was going round the twist. (1977)

off one's gourd (1961), out of one's gourd (1963) US; from gourd head

starkers (1962) British; from stark (raving mad) + -ers - L. P. Davies: You belted out of that room. . . . They thought you were starkers. (1972)

out of one's tree (1966) US - Newton Thornburg: 'We is duh [= the] loanees.' 'You're out of your tree.' (1976)

barking mad, barking (1968) British; from the notion of barking like a mad or uncontrollable dog - Richard Ingrams: It was considered perfectly in order for a man who was clearly barking mad to sit for many years dispensing justice to his fellow citizens. (1984)

Sunday Telegraph: The fact that she comes across as slightly batty is a cause of great annoyance to the Member for Billerica. ('Barking' is now a journalist who interviewed her for the Spectator put it.) (1991)

out of one's skull (1968) - Gore Vidal: I thought that Kalki was out of his skull. (1978)

whacked out (1969) US; compare wacky crazy, eccentric

off one's nana (1975) Compare earlier do one's nana lose one's temper - Australian: 'We all learned to laugh at ourselves and our predicament,' Trevor England said. 'If we hadn't we'd all be off our nanas.' (1975)

A mad person

crazy (1867) Orig US; rare before the late 1960s; noun use of the adjective crazy - Guardian: There's
To be or become mad quer (1508) Abbreviation of pyromaniac

ment (1913) Often applied specifically to a mental patient F. De Felitta: 'What's to prevent him from going?' 'He is a mental.' (1973)

psycho (1942) Abbreviation of psychopath Colin MacInnes: Wiz has for all oldies . . . the same kind of hatred psychos have for Jews or foreigners or colourheads. (1959)

nutter (1958) British; often applied to a violently deranged person; from nut crazy person +or- Andrew Garve: I reckon Chris was right, Rosie—King's a nutter. I reckon he'll go on killin' till there ain't no one left. (1963)

retard (1970) Orig US; applied to a mentally retarded person New Yorker. The younger son, self-described as 'a hard-core retard', dreams of escaping to the wilds of Oregon to gamble with the bears and squirrels. (1971)

head case (1971) Mainly British; applied to someone who is mentally deranged, and hence to someone whose behaviour is violent and unpredictable — James Kelman: Wee Danny could pot a ball with a headache at his back all ready to set about his skull with a hatchet if he missed. (1980)

sickie, sicky (1973), sicko (1977) Australian & New Zealand, dated — Dated; from sick+ -y • J. I. M. Stewart: He might have been a schizo . . . for all the tie-up there seemed to be between the Phil of this rational conversation and the Phil who wanted Jean Canaway. (1961)

schizo, schiz (1945), schizmainly North American; applied to someone who is mentally ill or perverted; from sick + -y • Peter De Vries: 'Shall I . . . make it clear . . . I'm a sickie?' 'No! . . . this—aimment of yours . . . it's an expression of some deep-seated conflict.' (1974)

klepto (1958) Abbreviation of kleptomaniac — E. V. Cunningham: You got it . . . right out of Helen Sarbine's purse. . . . What are you—some kind of nut or klepto? (1964)


touched (1893) From the notion of having been marked out as abnormal by the hand of God — Sunday Telegraph: Gordon was known locally to be a bit touched. That was why he was called 'Psyches'. (1991)

nyt (1898) Often in the phrase nyt as a fruitcake; from nut mad person + -y • Author: Yeats was a great poet and a fascinating critic, but if he had been hired to give a year's course of lectures on the development of English poetry his performance would have been extremely nytty. (1974)

bats in the belfry (1899) Also in the phrase have bats in the belfry be crazy — The Sahib had bats in his belfry, and must be humoured. (1928)

dippy (1899) Origin unknown — Times Review of Industry: In past days the senile and the slightly dippy were clapped into institutions. (1967)
Mainly US; from Orig US; from earlier wacky, whacky (1935) fruity (1929) US; probably suggested by the Thought and Communication (1941) From the notion short of a ... (1941) Orig US; from the notion off the beam (1941) Orig & mainly US; from crackpot (1934) Orig British; compare crackers (1928)

Compare earlier senses, trivial, simple Daily Mirror: He played the joyously potty day-dreamer. (1977)

loopy (1925) Ian Cross: Honestly, the pair of them were loopy (1925) •

in the belfry m British Weekly. Ian Cross: Honestly, the pair of them were loopy (1925) •

in the belfry m Elizabeth Bowen: You’re completely bats. (1938)

potty (1920) Crackpot idea, fraught with all kinds of difficulties and dangers. (1959)

crackpot (1934) Often applied to something crazily impractical; from crackpot crazy person Geoffrey Jenkins: The High Command still thought it a crackpot idea, fraught with all kinds of difficulties and dangers. (1959)


screwball (1936) Mainly US; from screwball eccentric person

nutsy, nutsey (1941) Orig & mainly US; from nuts mad + -y Guardian: Gee, it was nutsy. (1962)

off the beam (1941) Orig US; from the notion of deviating from the course indicated by a radio beam ( . . . ) short of a . . . (1941) From the notion of not having the full complement (of mental faculties) (compare next); the earliest recorded formulation is short of a sheet (US & Australian), but more recent examples (since the mid 1980s) usually identify individual elements which go to make up the whole—the commonest are two (etc.) bricks short of a load and a few (etc.) sandwiches short of a picnic, but the variations are almost infinite Jack Hodgins: You try to do the right thing by hiring local girls and you discover they can be as thick as fencposts. There’s one in there that’s two bricks short of a load, I swear it. (1987) • Susan Johnson: I’m afraid he’s a few sandwiches short of a picnic. Still, he’s harmless. (1990) • Post (Denver): This guy was weird.... He was a few pickles short of a barrel. (1994)

not the full quid (1944) Australian & New Zealand: from a comparison between an amount of money falling short of a pound and someone’s mental faculties falling short of those of a normal person

out to lunch (1955) Orig US; applied to someone or something out of touch with reality Toronto Daily Star: A girl who would be attracted to Bud’s mean streak and bad temper must be a little out to lunch. (1966)

oddball (1957) Orig US; from oddball eccentric person Peace News: It’s always been very much an odd ball way of doing it. (1974)

flaky, flakey (1959) Orig US; perhaps from the notion of ‘flaking out’ through exhaustion, the influence of drugs, etc. • New Yorker: People can choose their own words to describe Qaddafi’s mental state—President Reagan called him ‘flaky’, and later denied that he considered Qaddafi mentally unbalanced. (1986)

kooky, kookie (1959) From kook crazy person + -y • Nation Review (Melbourne): ‘No Sex Please, We’re British!’ The funniest, kookiest night of your life. (1973)

weirdo (1962) From earlier weirdo bizarrely eccentric person • M. Moore: The lady I’m looking after is a dear old duck, completely weirdo, but she’s got a terrible sense of humour, and I like her. (1974)

wiggly (1963) US; from wig out freak out + -y Last Whole Earth Catalog: Traditionally considerations such as his—economics, organizations, the future—turn a prophet’s soul terrible and dark or at least partially wiggly. (1972)

off the wall (1968) Orig US • National Review (US): Brian knows how to startle the over-interviewed with off-the-wall questions that get surprising answers: Ever see a ghost? (1974)

nutso (1975) Mainly US; from nuts mad + -o • Time: He swore off meat about this time and took up vegetarianism ‘in my typically nutso way’. (1983)

wacko, whacko (1977) Orig & mainly US; from wack’y + -o • D. Uhnak: She’s gone slightly wacko politically. (1981)

tonto (1982) Orig US; from Spanish tonto silly, foolish Times Literary Supplement: You compile a dossier on the habits and rituals of those around you. This is all much more interesting than going tonto at home. (1988)

A crazy or eccentric person

dag (1875) Australian & New Zealand; from British dialect dag dare, challenge • D. M. Davin: Gerald seemed to have become a bit of a dag since the old days. (1970)

dingbat (1879) US & Australian; compare earlier US dingbat coin, projectile; perhaps from ding beat + bat hitting implement, or from ding sound of a bell + bat flying animal, with jocular reference to bats in the belfry • New York Times: Miss Sternhagen’s mother increases in giddiness, even to wearing what appears to be a feather in her hair. She is, in fact, a certifiable dingbat. (1985)
crackpot (1883) ■ Joyce Cary: The public is used to
grievance-mongers and despises ‘em—they’ll put him down
for a crack-pot. (1959)
loon (1885) Dated; often applied to a simpleton;
from earlier sense, type of water bird,
influenced by lunatic and loony ■ Coast to Coast
1944. There we were, bottled up in camp because the loon in
charge couldn’t get the order signed for the trucks to leave.
(1945)
weirdie, weirdy (1894) From weird + -ie ■ Daily
Telegraph. There was not an unwashed bearded weirdie in
sight! (1966)
nut (1903) Orig US; often applied to a crank;
probably back-formation from nutty crazy ■ Nation Review (Melbourne): The Worker Student
Alliance, a bunch of nuts in Melbourne. (1973)
screwball (1933) Mainly US; from earlier sense,
baseball pitched with reverse spin against the
natural curve ■ P. G. Wodehouse: You are going to
Blandings Castle now, no doubt, to inspect some well-
connected screwball? (1939)
ding-a-ling (1935) North American; from the
notion of crazy people hearing imaginary bells ■ James Carroll: Hell, Pius—that dingaling—would never of
given me my hat. Thank God for Pope John. (1978)
wack, whack (1938) Orig US; probably a back-
formation from wacky crazy, eccentric ■ G. F. Newman: The cop shrugged. ‘Some wack with a grudge.’
(1982)

fruitcake (1945) Orig US; from the phrase nutty
as a fruitcake ■ Observer. To be considered as a candidate
you must first get onto the Panel, which is a sort of index
designed mainly to exclude fruitcakes. (1982)
oddball (1948) Orig US ■ Margaret Truman: Earlier in
1946 an oddball broke into the National Gallery and cut a hole
in Dad’s portrait. (1973)
flip (1952) Probably from flip or flip one’s lid lose
one’s composure ■ I. Ross: She’s a flip. . . . Nuts,’ he
weirdo (1955) From weird + -o ■ Melody Maker. This
record is for the real weirdos. (1984)
flake (1959) Mainly US; back-formation from flaky
crazy, eccentric ■ Easyriders: Gotta git rid of that flake
Bobby Joe. He’s just too gutless for the big time. (1983)
fruit (1959) US; shortened from fruitcake
nut-case (1959) ■ Boyd & Parkes: They were all shams. . . . She was a nutcase really. (1973)
kook (1960) US; probably from cuckoo ■ Publishers Weekly: A bona fide kook who is never quite
able to get in gear till he finally dies paddling his canoe across
the Atlantic. (1973)
tonto (1973) Orig US; from Spanish tonto foolish person
nutso (1975) Mainly US; often as a derisive form
of address; from nuts crazy + -o ■ New York Times: Hey, nutso, you’re not gonna do that, are you? Bug off! (1986)
wacko, whacko (1977) Orig & mainly US; from
wacky crazy, eccentric + -o ■ Robert Ludlum: They
catch a whack-o now and then. “Whack-o?” “Someone who’s
crossed over the mental line, thinks he’s someone he’s not.”
(1982)
head-banger (1983) From the notion of shaking
or banging the head, as associated with mental
disorder ■ Observer. In the European Parliament, they sit
alone with a few Spanish and Danish head-bangers, while the
main conservative grouping excludes them. (1989)

A mental hospital

crazy house (1887) US

booby-hatch (1896) Orig & mainly US; compare
erlier sense, police station, gaol ■ P. G. Wodehouse: What, tell people you’re me and I’m you. Sure
we could, if you don’t mind being put in the booby-hatch.
(1936)
bughouse (1899) US; compare earlier sense,
verminous lodging house, and bug person
obsessed with an idea ■ Ngaio Marsh: You’re bigger bloody fools than anybody outside a bughouse. (1940)
rat house (1900) Australian & New Zealand
■ Vance Palmer: Hadn’t it been plain all along that there was
a streak of madness in the old boy? . . . He had done a spell in
the rat-house and was only out on sufferance. (1948)

funny house (1906) US

nut factory (1915) US ■ J. H. Chase: Johnnie was a
rummy . . . Drink had rotted him, and he was only two jumps
ahead of the nut-factory. (1939)
giggle-house (1919) Australian & New Zealand
■ Weekend Australian Magazine: The classic story of that
beautiful poet, John Clare, who had himself locked up in
the giggle-house for nearly a quarter of a century. (1982)
loony bin (1919) ■ J. Symonds: Yes, Aunt Marion. She’s
locked up, you know, in the looney bin. (1962)
nut-house (1929) ■ Radio Times: Clothing for the
Government, prisons and nut-ouses—what is it they call ‘em
now? (1974)
cuckoo house (1930) US

nut college (1931) US

nuttery (1931) From nut mad person + -ery
■ Dean Stiff: Should the sociotechnic social worker be
convinced that you are not normal she will have you bound for
a nuttery before sunset. (1931)

the bin (1938) Short for loony bin ■ L. A. G. Strong:
The chaps who certified you and popped you in the bin. (1942)
snake-pit (1947) From the title of a novel by M. J.
Ward ■ Audrey Laski: They had visited him in the snake-
pit. (1968)

funny farm (1959) Orig US ■ Eric Ambler: Intercom
was described as ‘the Batman of the funny-farm set’ and its
editor as ‘the Lone Ranger of the lunatic fringe.’ (1969)
cuckoo’s nest (1962) US; from cuckoo crazy
(person); popularized by the title of the novel
One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest (1962) by Ken Kesey

cracker factory (1981) US; compare crackers


A psychiatrist

**loon-y-doctor** (1925) P. G. Wodehouse: She's browsing with Sir Roderick Glossop, the loony-doctor. (1960)

**trick cyclist** (1930) Jocular alteration of psychiatrist. 

**New Scientist** Dr. Louis West . . . may eventually be taking the caviare out of head-shrinkers' mouths with his development of the robot psychiatrist. (1968)

**head-shrinker** (1950) Orig US. 

**Times Literary Supplement** It does not take a shrink to see that a man so humanely flawed and artistically inept has got to be a loser. (1980) J. B. Hilton: It had to be the clinic for her. Maybe they'd left it too late, or maybe she was too clever for the shrinkers. (1980)

**witch-doctor** (1956) Services' slang D. Anthony: That sounds like one of your witch doctors at the Retreat. (1979)

To psychoanalyse

**psych** (1917) Abbreviation. 

**Daily Express**: While for some patients being 'psyched' may be a step towards being cured, to others it may amount to being infected. (1928)

To have (or need) psychiatric treatment

**have one's head examined, need one's head examining** (1949) Used jocularly to suggest that someone is crazy. 

**New York Times**: Anyone who votes for Nixon ought to have his head examined. (1972)

6. Foolishness

Foolish: Slow-witted, unintelligent, stupid

**half-witted** (1712) Compare earlier sense, lacking sense, irrational. 

**Guardian**: Anything you get out of an egg is either half-witted or liable to take your leg off at the knee. I draw the line at an alligator. (1992)

**gormless** (1746) British; orig gaumless, gawmless, from gaum, dialectal variant of goam, understanding (from Old Norse gaumr care, heed) + -ess. Louis Golding: She just went on pulling the [beer] handle and in a moment . . . the floor was swilling. 'Mother!' cried little Nellie sharply. 'You are gormless!' (1932)

**mutton-headed** (1768) P. G. Wodehouse: She had caused all the trouble by her mutton-headed behaviour in saying 'Yes' instead of 'No'. (1934)

**thick** (1800) Often in the phrase as thick as two (short) planks (or as a plank). Gordon Honeycombe: 'He must be as thick as two planks,' said Nick. (1974)

**J. I. M. Stewart**: You might expect to become P.M. if you hadn't been so thick as to accept your idiotic life peerage. (1976)

**dumb** (1823) From earlier sense, unable to speak, probably reinforced by German *dumm* and Dutch dom stupid. Elizabeth Bowen: One has got to see just how dumb Mr. Quayne was. He had not got a mind that joins one thing and another up. (1938)

**mullet-headed** (1857) US; from mullet-head slow-witted person. 

**Mark Twain**: 'Them's my sentiments, old socks.' (1905)

**bone-headed** (1903) Orig US. B. M. Bower: 'I'm willing to be just a boneheaded cow-puncher.' 'Accent on the bone,' Pink murmured. 'Tham's my sentiments, old socks.' (1940)

**dopey, dopy** (1903) Orig US; from earlier sense, affected with a drug, sluggish, drowsy. 

Garner: Step began to laugh. 'That dopey foreman. He didn't bother to check with me.' (1963)

**bird-brained** (1922) Orig US. Kenneth Orvis: Not like the usual lamer-brained addict. (1962)

**dim-witted** (1940) Edmund Crispin: They say he's got 'a madman's cunning', which is their excuse for being too dim-witted to catch him. (1948)

**clueless** (1943) From not have a clue not know. John Braine: Their two sons, . . . noisy and clumsy and clueless. (1957)


**dumb-assed** (1957) US

Out of touch with reality, empty-headed, daft, silly, irresponsible

**dizzy** (1878) From earlier sense, light-headed, giddy. 

**Penguin New Writing**: A dizzy blonde all dressed up like a dog's dinner. (1945)

**dilly** (1905) Mainly Australian; perhaps a blend of daft and silly; compare obsolete British dialect silly cranky, queer. J. K. Ewers: Cripes, it'd drive a bloke dilly! (1949)

**goofy** (1919) Orig US; from goof fool + -y

**Observer**: Commercial television has brought a boom in animation, with comic men and goofy animals bouncing out from everywhere. (1958)
Thought and Communication

foopy (1926) Orig US; from goop fool + -y
cockamamie, -mamy, -manie, many (1950) US; from earlier sense, foolish or ridiculous person ■ Ed McBain: You marched into the precinct with a tight dress and a cockamamie bunch of alibis. (1962)

ditsy, ditzy (1973) Orig US; applied mainly to women; perhaps an alteration of dizzy ■ Washington Post: Willie Scott... is a ditsy blond who sings at a Shanghai nightclub. (1984)
divy, divy (1975) British (Midland & Northern dialect); origin unknown

devile, devile (1945) British; applied mainly to a slow-witted person; from the notion of having a wooden block for a head ■ Samuel Johnson: No mutton-heads. Idiots. (1972)
nit (1588) British; from earlier sense, egg of a body-louse, and latterly probably influenced by nitwit fool ■ Philip Cleife: If you think... I would be willing to allow you... to board my aircraft... then you must be a nit. (1972)
ninny (1593) Origin uncertain; perhaps from innocent with prefixed n (as in an innocent) ■ Cosmopolitan: If women are made to look like ninnies by agencies, why do magazines like Cosmo run the ads? (1992)
booby (1599) Dated; probably from Spanish bobo fool, from Latin balbus stammering, stuttering ■ Evelyn Waugh: ‘Poor simple monk,’ I thought, ‘poor booby.’ (1945)
clopdoll, clodpole (1601) British; from clod lump + poll head ■ Times Literary Supplement: The former editor of the Far Eastern Economic Review is worried... that his book will fall into the hands of clodpoles. (1996)
clod (1605) Applied to a slow-witted person; from earlier sense, lump ■ Wall Street Journal: Clod though he may otherwise be, Edwin Meese is a man of honor. (1989)
nincompoop (1676) Origin uncertain; perhaps from the male forename Nicholas or Nicodemus (compare French nicodème simpleton) with -n due to association with ninny fool + obsolete poop deceive, cheat,befool ■ Virginia Woolf: Never could she understand how he cared. But those Indian women did presumably—silly, pretty, flimsy nincompoops. (1925)
sawney (1700) Perhaps a variant of the male forename Sandy, as in the earlier sawney Scotsman

gump, gumph (1722) Now US; origin unknown ■ Anthony Gilbert: She might do her best to attract attention—any girl who wasn’t a complete gumph would. (1945)
buffer (1749) British; applied to a foolish old person; often in the phrase old buffer; probably from the obsolete verb buff, imitative of the sound of a soft body being struck, or from the obsolete verb buff stutter ■ Peter Dickinson: You can make the correct noises while all the old buffers are waffling on. (1982)
noodle (1753) Dated; origin unknown ■ Arthur Helps: I say he is a noodle if he has not previously determined how and when to leave off. (1875)
half-wit (1755) ■ F. Scott Fitzgerald: We are setting it aside till we think of a way of half-witting halfwit Hayes and his Legion of Décency. (1938)
stupe (1762) Shortened from stupid ■ Tobias Wells: His assistant, a big stupe called Jersey Eng. (1967)
dummy (1796) Probably from dumb foolish (not recorded until later) + -y; compare earlier sense, dumb person ■ Sunday Express Magazine: The emphasis at the school was on rugby and the classics. Art was for dummies. (1986)
dummkopf, dumkopf, dambkopf (1809) Orig US; from German Dummkopf idiot, from dumm foolish + Kopf head ■ Listener: They may turn out, after all, to have been fall guys, dummkops, dupes of their own chicanery. (1968)
sap (1815) Short for earlier sapskull simpleton ■ Globe & Mail (Toronto): Bobby Mull... is a sap if he accepts less than $100,000 from the tight-fisted... management. (1968)
jackass (1823) From earlier sense, male ass ■ Economist: He cares little for the sensitivities of his fellow politicians (‘jackasses’ is a common epithet). (1988)
silly billy (1834) British; from Billy, familiar form of the male forename William; originally used specifically as a nickname of William Frederick, Duke of Gloucester (1776–1834), and of William IV (1765–1837) ■ Wordpower: Mr Healey is a Silly Billy to have waited so long before doing so little of what everyone knew was necessary. (1977)
fat-head (1842) ■ Guardian: When they [sc. MPs] behave like fatheads, people are apt to notice. (1991)
dope (1851) Origin uncertain; perhaps the same word as earlier dope sauce, gravy (from Dutch dop sauce), or perhaps an alteration of dupe ■ P. Capon: Silly dope, he can’t go on dodging the Court for ever. (1959)
muggins (1855) Perhaps from the personal name Muggins, with allusion to mug gullible person ■ Daily Telegraph: The letter bomb was not meant for me personally. I was just the muggins who opened it. (1973)
mullet-head (1857) US; applied to a slow-witted person; compare earlier use as the name of a
type of freshwater fish, and compare also British dialect null-head fool. Z. N. Hurston: Hey, you mullet heads! Get out de way. (1935)

thick (1857) Orig schoolchildren’s slang; from thick foolish, slow-witted - G. Lord: Some of those thickies in Earls Court would do it just for the kicks. (1970)

flat-head (1862) - New Statesman: Gobbledygook is the defense of the American intellectual aware of the hostile mockery of the surrounding flatheads. (1966)

galoot (1886) Orig US; compare earlier sense, inept or stupid soldier or marine; ultimate origin unknown - D. McClean: I've just thought of something that will interest lan. What a galoot I am not to think of it sooner. (1960)

lunk (1887), lumphead (1884) Orig US; applied to a slow-witted person; lump perhaps an alteration of lump; lumphead was probably the original form, and lump shortened from it - Punch: The poor lumphead’s concerns soon got lost under all the modelling and backlighting. (1966) - New Yorker: He looks incredulous, as if he couldn’t figure out how he got turned into such a lunk. (1975)

gooney (1872) Now US; a variant of obsolete dialect goney, gony fool, of unknown origin

twerp, twirp (1874) Origin unknown; the suggestion that it is from the name of T. W. Earp, an early 20th-century Oxford undergraduate, is refuted by evidence of its late 19th-century use - Stan Barstow: If she turns me down I'll look more of a twerp than ever. (1960)

juggins (1882) British, dated; perhaps from the surname Juggins, or alternatively a fanciful derivative of mug fool (compare muggins) - Iris Murdoch: You are a juggins, you shouldn’t walk in those high-heeled shoes. (1985)

chump (1883) From earlier sense, lump of wood - Sunday Times: Phil Tufnell is a chump. Here in Vishakhapatnam, he was in trouble again, his aberrant ways forcing [the] England management team . . . to impose a £500 fine for ungentlemanly conduct. (1993)

josser (1886) British, dated; origin uncertain; compare Australian jisser priest

dumbhead (1887) Mainly US; from dumb foolish + head, after German Dummkopf, Dutch domkop - C. E. Muford: Have I got to do all the thinking for this crowd of dumbheads? (1921)

schmuck, shmuck (1892) Mainly US; from Yiddish shmok penis - Groucho Marx: He doesn’t know I can write, in fact, he thinks I’m a complete schmuck. (1945)

prawn (1893) Mainly Australian - A. O'Toole: The prawn has talked this little sheila into wanting to sell our horse. (1969)

goop (1900) Orig US; coined by Gelett Burgess to denote a mischievous childlike creature - David Jacobs: I am very jealous of my position as chairman of Juke Box Jury, . . . and I don’t believe one can be a placid smiling goop all the time. (1965)

mutt (1901) Orig US; applied to a slow-witted person; abbreviation of mutton-head - Derwent May: The poor mutt must have driven it along the bank. (1973)

oaf (1902) Applied to a large, slow-witted, clumsy person; from earlier senses, child stolen by the fairies, idiot child; variant of obsolete auf, from Old Norse alftr elf - William Golding: Running in panic lest I should be grabbed by some enormous oaf from the scrum. (1984)

simp (1903) US; abbreviation of obsolete simple fool, or of simplicity - Publishers Weekly: The book's assumption is that single men are simps who don't know the difference between a pepper mill and a can opener. (1976)

cluck (1906) US; especially in the phrase dumb cluck; from earlier sense, sound made by a hen - Stephen Ransome: Showing ourselves up as a fine pair of clucks. (1950) - Olivia Manning: For the last half-hour I've been telling these dumb clucks to find me a bloke who can speak English. (1960)

gazob (1906) Australian, dated; perhaps from gazabo fellow - C. J. Dennis: Ar! but 'e makes me sick! A fair gazob! (1915)

boob (1907) Shortened from booby - George Bernard Shaw: You gave it away, like the boobs you are, to the Pentland Forth Syndicate. (1930)

bone-head (1908) Orig US; applied to a slow-witted person - Arthur Conan Doyle: James was a bonehead—I give you that. (1917)

lemon (1908) - Adam Hall: They’d sent me down to show me something and they knew I couldn’t see it and I felt a bit of a lemon. (1973)

gorm, gawm (1912) Perhaps a back-formation from gormless - Heron Carvic: ‘It’s all finished and it’s all wunners.’ She smiled with pride. ‘Isn’t it, you great gorm?’ (1969)

rummy (1912) US, dated; compare earlier sense, drunkard

date (1914) British, mainly jocular; mainly in the phrase soppy date; from date fruit - George Ingram: A kid like that ought not to talk about love at her age, the soppy little date. (1935)

poop (1915) Perhaps shortened from niccomepoop - Robert Dentry: Those stupid bloody Yankee poops blew the panic whistle and the whole shebang went sky-high. (1971)

blob (1916) Mainly Australian - Bernard Cronin: Maybe they’re all right, but I don’t do to run risks. Tell some of them blobs they’ll need to walk to Green Valley next time they get a thirst up, if they don’t act reasonable. (1920)

bozo (1916) Orig & mainly US; perhaps from Spanish bozal simple, stupid or from Italian bozzo cuckold, bastard, or perhaps a reduplicated form of US bo fellow - Encounter: Frank, the grey bozo behind the counter. (1961)

goat (1916) - Kylie Tennant: ‘Don’t be a goat.’ Silly young fools, all three of them. (1947)

goof (1916) Perhaps from obsolete dialect goff, guff fool, from French goffo awkward, stupid, from Italian goffo, from Medieval Latin guffus
coarse  ■ Hay & King-Hall: Have you stopped to think what is happening to that poor old goof in the day-cabin, right now? (1930)

gubbins (1916) British; probably the same word as gubbins equipment, gadget  ■ John Osborne: Have you been on the batter, you old gubbins! (1957)
goofus (1917) US; from goof fool + arbitrary suffix -us (perhaps after dingus thingummy)

Mutt and Jeff (1917) Applied to a pair of slow-witted men, especially one tall and one short; from the names of two characters called Mutt (compare fool mutt) and Jeff, one tall and the other short, in a popular cartoon series by H. C. Fisher (1884–1954), American cartoonist
dumb-bell (1918) Orig US; after stupid; dumb

Orig US; perhaps from fool, goon (1921)
dimwit (1922) Applied to a foolish woman • Graham Mclnnes: They [sc. female forename • John Wyndham: He had an uncomfortable awareness of how many ways there were for even a dimwit to contrive a fatal accident. (1956)

dumb bunny (1921) Orig US
goon (1921) Orig US; perhaps from gooney fool, reputedly as a coinage of F. L. Allen; subsequently influenced by the subhuman cartoon character called Alice the Goon created by E. C. Segar in 1933, and in general use from the late 1930s ■ S. Clark: There, you goon. You'll bump into them if you don't watch out. (1959)
dimwit (1922) Orig US; applied to a slow-witted person ■ John Wyndham: He had an uncomfortable awareness of how many ways there were for even a dimwit to contrive a fatal accident. (1956)

Dumb Dora (1922) Applied to a foolish woman or girl; from dumb foolish + Dora female forename ■ Graham Mclnnes: They [sc. hers] would then wait expectantly, heads cocked on one side with a sort of dumb-Dora inquisitive chuckle. (1965)
nitwit (1922) Perhaps from nit egg of a body-louse (compare nit fool) + wit ■ June Drummond: For God's sake, Beryl, don't be such a nitwit. (1975)
pie-face (1922) US; back-formation from pie-faced: from the notion of someone with a round expressionless face, like a pie

dingleberry (1924) Orig US; probably from earlier sense (not recorded until later), piece of dried faecal matter attached to the hair round the anus ■ Righting Words: Tell that dingleberry I'm not here. (1990)

BF, B.F. bee eff (1925) Orig British services' slang; abbreviation of bloody fool ■ Cecil Day Lewis: You really are a B. F., Arthur. (1939) ■ M. Ceci: 'Your mother's relations,' he muttered, 'bee effs, every one of 'em.' (1960)
ding-dong (1929) US; probably from earlier use, representing the sound of a bell

lame-brain (1929) Mainly US; applied to a slow-witted person ■ Times Literary Supplement: We have finished feeling indulgent towards the disaffected lamebrains who turn this kind of stuff out. (1972)

loogan (1929) US, dated; origin unknown ■ P. Cain: There's Rose, with his syndicate behind him, and all the loogans he's imported from back East. (1933)
sparrow-brain (1930) Applied to a slow-witted person ■ Vita Sackville-West: I don't suppose it satisfies anyone, except perhaps a sparrow-brain like mother. (1930)
dumbo (1932) Orig US; from dumb foolish -o ■ Sue Townsend: I am sharing a book with three dumbos who take half an hour to read one page. (1984)
bird-brain (1933) Applied to a slow-witted person ■ Gen: There are more birdbrains and dim-wits outside the boxing ring . . . as ever stepped around in it. (1943)
twit (1934) Mainly British; perhaps from the verb twit reproach, taunt ■ N. Fleming: No one but a prize twit or Captain Oates would have ventured out in this weather. (1970)

berk, birk, burk(e) (1936) Mainly British; abbreviation of Berkeley Hunt or Berkshire Hunt ■ John Osborne: The Tories were burglars, berks and bloodclutters. (1959) ■ Sunday Express: All my mates thought I was a berk to try to break away: now they know they were the burks. (1963)
cockamamie, -mamy, -manie, many (1936) US; applied to a foolish or ridiculous person; origin unknown

Berkeley Hunt, Berkeley (1937) British; rhyming slang for cunt; from the name of a celebrated hunt in Gloucestershire; now largely replaced by berk ■ A. Bracey: Lane's face cleared. Tell us, chum. 'And spoilt the nice surprise! Not bloody likely! 'You always was a berk,' said Lane cheerfully. 'Well, I can wait.' (1940)
oonchook, oonshik, etc. (1937) Irish & Newfoundlander; from Irish ainseach foolish woman, clown; earlier, in Newfoundland, a man masquerading as a woman in a mummers' parade ■ Flann O'Brien: The divil himself is in the hearts of that Corporation ownshucks. (1961)
galah (1938) Australian; from earlier sense, rose-breasted cockatoo; from Aboriginal (Yuwaalaraay and related languages) gilaa ■ H. L. Hendry: These bloody galahs going round now are bowling feet wide of the stumps and being hailed as good bowlers. (1891)
schlep, schlepp, shlep (1939) Mainly US; probably short for schlepper fool, although not recorded in this sense till later ■ New Yorker: My teacher can just zero in on one phrase, and it's immediately obvious that what I've done is so immature it makes me feel like an absolute schlep. (1977)

poon (1940) Mainly Australian; origin unknown ■ D. Williamson: What possessed Keren to shack up with a poon like you? (1974)
dill (1941) Australian & New Zealand; probably a back-formation from dilly foolish ■ Telegraph
(Brisbane): At the start he felt a bit of a dill in a wig and robes. (1969)

drongo (1941) Australian & New Zealand; compare earlier sense, bird of the family Dicuridae found in India, Africa and Australia, from Malagasy drongo; perhaps suggested by the use of the word as the name of an Australian racehorse of the 1920s that often finished last

nana (1941) Orig Australian; perhaps from banana; compare bananas crazy Times: A frank admission that he had made a nana of himself. (1974)
tonk (1941) Mainly Australian; origin unknown • Richard Beilby: You’re a good bloke, Turk, but sometimes you talk like a tonk. (1970)
clot (1942) British; from earlier sense, lump • Penelope Mortimer: Jolly bad luck, what a clot she is. (1956)
klunk, clunk (1942) US; origin unknown • New York Herald-Tribune: Mr. Wagner has been a remarkably good mayor, and the klunks who don’t realize this, they add, understand neither the Mayor himself nor the nature of his responsibilities. (1964)
alec, aleck (1944) Australian; short for smart alec know-all • Alan Seymour: He looked such a big alec, marching along as though he’d won both wars single-handed. (1962)
goof ball (1944) From earlier sense, pill containing a drug, influenced by goof foot • Washington Post: You want to know why Michael Jordan may finish his career as the greatest player of all time? Because he’s won two championships with this soft goofball as his sidekick. (1993)
kucklehead (1944) Orig & mainly US; applied to a slow-witted person • Roger Parkes: What I’m trying to get across to you knuckleheads is that it was not murder! (1971)
nong, nong-nong (1944) Australian; compare nong-nong fool • Bulletin (Sydney): Rod Cavalier has . . . turned himself into a ridiculous nong. (1956)
schmendrik, shmendrik (1944) US; from the name of a character in an operetta by Abraham Goldfaden (1840–1908)
boofhead (1945) Australian; perhaps from obsolete bufflehead fool; popularized by a comic-stripe character of that name created by R. B. Clark in 1939 and running in the Sydney Daily Mirror 1941–70 • Australian: Mr Hayden . . . described the former ALP secretary as a boofhead. (1983)
meat-head (1945) Mainly US; applied to a slow-witted person • Newsweek: Archie Bunker, the middle American hero of ‘All in the Family’ . . . sees himself menaced by a rising tide of spades, . . . meatheads, . . . fags and four-eyes. (1971)

Charlie, Charley (1946) Mainly British; especially in the phrase a proper (or right) Charlie; from the male forename, a familiar form of Charles • Alan Simpson & Ray Galton: I felt a right Charlie coming through the customs in this lot. (1961)
tit (1947) Origin uncertain; perhaps from tit breast • S. Wilson: We always took a gun, and it kept me quite alert, not wishing to make a tit of myself in front of the laird. (1970)
schlump, schloomp, shlump (1948) Orig & mainly US; probably from Yiddish; compare Yiddish shlumperdick dowdy, German Schlump slattern • Joseph Heller: Kissinger would not be recalled in history as a Bismarck . . . but as an odious shlump who made war gladly. (1979)
schmo, shmo (1948) Mainly US; shortened from schmuck • Dick Francis: ‘Who,’ he said crossly, ‘is going to give that schmoo a thousand quid for breaking his ankle?’ (1970)
dumbfuck (1949) US; from dumb foolish + fuck

tarmpot (1951) British, orig & mainly northern dialect; from earlier sense, pot for storing barn or yeast, probably influenced by barmy slightly mad, foolish • T. & P. Morris: Thus a harmless schizophrenic will be classified by the staff as a ‘barmpot’ and by the prisoners as a ‘nutter’. (1963)
bubblehead (1952) Orig US; applied to an empty-headed person (in early use apparently often specifically to Henry A. Wallace, US Vice-President 1941–45); compare airhead • Time: But Jack is not a Hollywood bubblehead. . . . He sometimes thinks before he says his lines. Or anyway, he thinks he thinks, which for an actor amounts to the same thing. (1988)
nig-nog (1953) British; compare ning-nong fool and obsolete nigmenog fool • Arnold Wesker: A straight line, you heaving nig-nogs, a straight line. (1962)
sawn (1953) Australian; abbreviation of sawney fool • Kylie Tennant: I’m always getting into trouble through sawns. (1953)
schlepper, shlepper (1954) Mainly US; from earlier sense, poor person • Rolling Stone: I’ve got a message for the Penelopes of this world. It’s high time they say to their Ulysseses, ‘Okay Schlepper, you’ve been around the world, your turn to keep the home fires burning, I’m splitting on my own trip for a while.’ (1977)
ning-nong (1957) Australian; from obsolete British dialect ning-nang fool; compare ning-nog fool and nong(-nong) fool • Telegraph (Brisbane): Even ning-nongs can win prizes on Channel O’s daily quiz show. (1973)
dumb-ass (1958) US

oafo (1959) Applied to a large, slow-witted, clumsy person, or to a lout; from oaf + -o • Robin Cook: The middle classes . . . the working classes . . . not to mention the oafos. (1962)
pea-brain (1959) Applied to an empty-headed person; apparently a back-formation from pea-brained • Howard Jacobson: The intellectual pogromists and pea-brains, with their scream-squads of love-mongering mystics who have taken over our educational institutions. (1986)
pronk (1959) Origin uncertain; compare Dutch pronker fop • L. Henderson: Whoever this pronk Durant was he had a lot to learn. (1972)
herbert, Herbert (1960) British; applied to a foolish or ridiculous man; arbitrary use of the male forename. | T. Baring: A dozen baby-brained herberts looking to face me off just to say they squared up to Kosher Kramer before the cobbles came up a bit smartish. (1986)

dumbshit (1961) US | William Gibson: ‘Sorry, gentlemen, but this is official warlord biz,’ this dumbshit says. (1986)

dipshit (1962) US; compare dippy foolish | William Gibson: He got up from his chair, walked to the door, and gently edged one of the curtains aside. ‘What the fuck are those dipshits doing out there?’ (1986)

Dipstick (1963) Orig US; perhaps a euphemistic partial substitution for dipshit; compare dippy foolish | R. Blount: If I’d told the truth to that dipstick who played me, I would have just said, ‘Sugar’. (1990)

dizz, diz (1963) US; back-formation from dizzy foolish

dick-head (1964) From dick penis + head | Alan Bleasdale: But I lost that job, it was alright, I deserved to lose it, I was a dickhead—but haven’t we all been at one time or another—haven’t we all woken up the next mornin’ an’ gone ‘oh Jesus, did I do that?’ (1983)

Putz (1964) Mainly US; from earlier sense, penis | E. V. Cunningham: ‘What are you telling me? That you fell for her—love at first sight?’ ‘Don’t be a putz. I run a gambling house. I don’t fall in love.’ (1966)

Schlub, shlub (1964) US; Yiddish, perhaps from Mainly US; from earlier sense, penis. | dork (1967) Mainly US; from earlier sense, penis | Zigzag: It will attract talentless dorks out for a taste of notoriety or a fast buck. (1977)

Pillock (1967) British; usually applied to a male; from obsolete pillock penis | J. Bash: The pillock nisetook my astonishment for ave. (1978)

Arse (1968) Mainly British; probably in use well before 1968, but its written usage perhaps disguised by the euphemistic spelling ass | C. Phillips: I got two eyes in me head which is more than I can say for the arse who umpired the game last year. (1985)

Klutz, klotz, kluchtz (1968) US; from Yiddish, from German Klotz wooden block | E.-J. Bahr: Janet is an utter klutz. (1973)

Prat (1968) British; from earlier sense, buttocks | Car: To max this thing you have to drive like an arrogant prat, running at lights-ablaze 120mph and waiting for a clear space in your lane. (1991)

Thickie (1968) From thick foolish, slow-witted + -ie | Times: Teachers still think that engineering is a subject for ‘thickies’. (1983)

Fuckwit (1969) Orig Australian; perhaps a blend of fuck and nitwit | Christopher Morris: Aren’t we a bunch of fuckwits? An elephant couldn’t get more it’s trunk up its arse than we could lick our balls. (1997)

Wally (1969) British; origin uncertain; perhaps a use of the male forename Wally | compare Charlie fool, Herbert fool, a familiar form of Walter, but compare also wallydrag, wallytrike feeble or worthless person | Daily Telegraph: They looked a right load of wallyes, said an eye-witness. (1984)

Yo-yo (1970) US; from earlier sense, toy that goes up and down | V. Bugliosi: I’ve got enough problems without some punk yo-yo threatening me. (1978)

Airhead (1972) Orig & mainly US; from the notion of having air inside the head rather than a brain | Daily Telegraph: One can imagine the media barons when they saw that these entertainment-world ‘airheads’ (the currently preferred term) . . . had concocted an irresponsibly tendentious account from these very Press reports. (1984)

Ditz, dits (1973) US; applied to an empty-headed person, especially a woman; back-formation from dizzy empty-headed | Guardian: Meryl Streep is serious. Suzanne Somers isn’t. That’s the way they’re seen.... I don’t think Miss Somers does ditsy tap dances when she gets home. I’ve been both. I used to be a ditz. Now I’m talented. (1985)

Dumb-butt (1973) US; from dumb foolish + butt buttocks

Nully (1973) Perhaps from null of no value + -y; compare Scottish nullion stupid fellow | Roger Parkes: He’s a sick, junked-up, pathetic old nully. (1973)


Gonzo (1977) Orig & mainly US; from gonzo bizarre, crazy | Custom Car: To make sure I wouldn’t make too big a gonzo of myself,... I was connected by intercom to the commander who was perched up in the turret. (1977)

Wazrock (1983) British; origin uncertain; perhaps dialectal | Independent: A plot... which boasted that hilarious device in which the hero says ‘I need to find a right wazrock’. (1991)

Woodentop (1983) British; applied to a slow-witted person; from the notion of having a wooden head; compare earlier sense, uniformed policeman | Antony Beevor: They’ve even got the bleeding Army out.... Bunch of woodentops from Chelsea barracks. (1983)
To behave foolishly, and especially in a time-wasting way

**divvy, divy (1889)** British (Midland & Northern dialect); from divvy foolish. **Box**: It was an automatic which we shouldn’t have used because you can’t get the wheel spins and loads of the criminals around Liverpool were saying ‘yah divy ya shoulda used a turbo’. (1989)

**arsa about, arse around (1545)** Perhaps an alteration of peddle sell small wares, busy oneself with trifling matters, by association with Low German piddel; in modern use identified with piddle urinate (compare piss about), which may not historically be the same word. **Sounds**: He returned to New York and ‘piddled around’ doing Public Relations. (1977)

**muck about, muck around (1856)**

- P. Mansfield: Why don’t you haul him in instead of mucking around asking me bloody silly questions? (1957)

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**faff about, faff around (1874)** British, orig dialect; compare obsolete faffle in same sense, originally meaning ‘stutter’, of imitative origin. **Noel Coward**: The Welfare Officers appeared faffed. (1970)

**fart about, fart around (1900)** From fart break wind. **John Wainwright**: Look! It’s important. Stop farting around. (1969)

**fart about, fart around (1900)** From fart break wind. **John Wainwright**: Look! It’s important. Stop farting around. (1969)

**fuck about, fuck around (1922)** **Guardian**: ‘Don’t fuck about with the arfcom,’ counters Cresswell. ‘It’s been working since Max Miller.’ (1992)

**bugger about, bugger around (1929)** British & Australian. **John Wainwright**: Let’s not bugger around being polite. (1968)

**futz around (1929)** US; probably an alteration of Yiddish arumfartzen fart around; often treated as a euphemistic substitute for fuck around. **Nathaniel Benchley**: It’s bad for your blood pressure to futz around like this. (1968)

**goof around, goof (1929)** Mainly US; from goof fool. **James Baldwin**: I used to like to just . . . go to the movies by myself or just read or just goof. (1962) **Guardian**: It was really just a lot of goofing around and listening to a lot of music that we hadn’t taken the time to listen to before. There was nothing heavy going on. (1992)

**goof off (1943)** Mainly US; often implying loafing about when one should be working; from goof fool. **Time**: Though U.S. workers have been regularly chided at home for goofing off on the job, they are veritable Stakhanovites compared with some of their European counterparts. (1977)

**piss about, piss around (1961)** British & Australian. **T. Lewis**: Are you coming in? Or do we piss all about? (1970)

**play silly buggers** (or bleeders, b’s) (1961)

- British **Kenneth Royce**: I have to pin something on him to stop him playing silly b’s. (1972) **Keith Waterhouse**: I’m sure none of this had anything to do with the supposed threat to our privacy. It was our God-given right to play silly buggers that was threatened, and the nation responded magnificently. (1976)

**prat about (1961)** British; from prat fool. **Hugh Miller**: Sit down and stop prattling about. (1973)

**yuck it up, yuk it up (1964)** Mainly North American; compare later yu(c)k (to) laugh, probably imitative

**fanny about, fanny around (1971)** British; from fanny glib talk or fanny female genitals.

**monkey tricks (1653)** **J. B. Priestley**: Any monkey tricks an’ I’ll dot yer one. (1951)

**monkey-shines (c1832)** US **F. R. Stockton**: Most of them played and cut up monkey-shines on the hay. (1894)

**mug (1859)** British; perhaps a use of mug face. **L. Griffiths**: I see mugs all around me. I see opportunities, possibilities, expectations and bargains and deals. (1985)

**fly-flat (1864)** Criminals’ slang, dated; applied to a gullible person who thinks him or herself clever; from fly clever + obsolete slang flat gullible person. **Joyce Cary**: ‘I don’t see why we should consider the speculators.’ ‘A lot of fly-flats who thought they could beat us at the game.’ (1938)

**fruit (1894)** Orig US, dated; compare earlier sense, pleasant person. **Punch**: It was a flaw in the new play that its mugs were such ‘easy fruit’. (1913)

7. Gullibility

**pigeon (1593)** **Billie Holiday**: So they handed me a white paper to sign. . . . I signed. . . . The rest was up to them. I was just a pigeon. (1956)

**sucker (1838)** Orig North American; from earlier sense, young animal not yet weaned. **Arthur Conan Doyle**: ‘I’ll see this sucker and fill him up with a false confession. (1927)

**mark (1845)** Often in the phrases soft mark and easy mark. **Edmund McGirr**: In the twenties it was the Yanks who were the suckers, but now . . . it’s us who are the marks. (1973)

**mug (1859)** British; perhaps a use of mug face. **L. Griffiths**: I see mugs all around me. I see opportunities, possibilities, expectations and bargains and deals. (1985)
patsy (1903) Orig US; perhaps from Italian pazzo fool
fall guy (1906) Orig US • Saul Bellow: Perhaps he was foolish and unlucky, a fall guy, a dupe, a sucker. (1956)
lemon (1908) • P. G. Wodehouse: I don’t know why it is, rich men’s sons are always the worst lemons in creation. (1931)
rummy (1912) US, dated: from earlier sense, drunkard
steamer (1932) Abbreviation and alteration of steam tug, rhyming slang for mug • Mario Puzo: The third player at the table was a ‘steamer’, a bad gambler who chased losing bets. (1978)
soft touch, easy touch (1940) Applied especially to someone easily induced to part with money • H. Kurnitz: Dorsey’s appetite for easy money... was honed to a razor edge.... He sensed a vast soft touch. (1955)
pusherover (1944) Orig US; from earlier sense, one who is easily pushed or knocked to the ground • New Yorker: This department, always an old pushover for a picture horse, picks Foolish Pleasure. (1975)

8. Education

Learning

get the hang of (1845) Orig US; denotes that someone has learnt how to do or cope with something; orig applied to the handling of tools
sleeping dictionary (1928) Applied to a foreign woman with whom a man has a sexual relationship and from whom he learns the rudiments of her language
sit next to (or by, with) Nellie (1963) Denotes learning how to do a job by watching others do it • Listener: Journalists are the casual labourers of the intellectual world.... Most training still consists of sitting next to Nellie. (1972)

Intensive study

swot, swat (1860) British; denoting intensive studying, especially in preparation for an exam; often followed by up; from the noun swat hard work or study • Times: Mr. Forester must have ‘swotted up’ the subject of wartime Atlantic convoys just as he ‘swotted up’ the subject of the Navy in Nelson’s time. (1955)
mug up, mug up on (1848) Used to denote learning a subject by concentrated study; origin unknown • Ezra Pound: Chiyeou didn’t do it on readin’. (1931)

Crips

pony (1827) Orig US; applied esp. to a crib used for classical translation; perhaps from the notion of the student being helped by ‘riding’ on the crib • William Faulkner: She kept the dates written down in her Latin ‘pony’. (1931)
trot (1881) US • Times Literary Supplement: The translations are rarely better than lame trots. (1984)
Teaching

lecce,r lecker, lekker (1899) British, dated; alteration of lecture • Daily Express: A dilapidated basket filled with gay-coloured ‘lekker’ notebooks. (1928)

private business (1900) Eton College; applied to extra tuition • D. Newsome: Half-an-hour’s preparation for his Private Business lecture on Napoleon. (1979)

Schools and other educational establishments

school (1767) US: applied to a college or university • Irwin Shaw: The proms at which he played the trumpet in the band, to help pay his way through school. (1977)

poly (1858) Abbreviation of polytechnic • Iris Murdoch: When he left school he went into the poly, you know, the polytechnic. . . . He had a student grant. (1978)

heifer paddock (1885) Australian; applied to the notion of female cattle • N. Pulliam: Basketball here is mainly an indoor game. Mostly its just played in the heifer paddocks—oh, pardon me, I mean in the girls’ schools. (1955)

the shop (1889) Australian; applied to the University of Melbourne

uni (1898) Mainly Australian and New Zealand; abbreviation of ‘university’ • Australian (Sydney): Unis look to industry for more funds. (1984)

tech (1906) Orig US; abbreviation of ‘technical college’ • Robert McCrum: Rosie’s pride would not let her admit that she . . . had been to the local Tech. (1980)

puppy-hole (1922) Eton College, dated; applied to a pupil-room, in which pupils work with their tutors

cram-shop (1926), crammer (1931) Applied to a school or other institution that prepares pupils for exams by intensive study; from cram to prepare pupils in this way • Joyce Cary: The young man . . . made Ella promise to play [the piano] with him every afternoon when he could escape from what he called his cram-shop. (1946) • Daily Telegraph: The spectre of January retakes at some smart London crammer. (1986)

kinder (1955) Australian; abbreviation of kindergarten • Morris Lurie: Little Norbert and little Hermione and little all the rest of them, are all tucked nicely away in their kinders and creches and day-care centres. (1983)

prepper (1956) British; used for a preparatory school; from prep (school + -er) • Richard Gordon: ‘Actually, I’m a stinks beak in a prepper,’ he confessed. (1962)

kindy, kindie (1959) Australian & New Zealand; applied to a kindergarten; from kindergarten + -y • Daily News (Perth): Lorrelle Holman (S), of Mt Pleasant, is learning pots about the animal kingdom, thanks to her local kindy. (1980)

Pupils and students

tug (1864) Applied at Eton College to a student on the foundation, a colleege as opposed to an oppidan; in wider use, applied to a studious or academic pupil, a swot; origin uncertain

fresher (1882) British; applied to a first-year university student; from fresh{man + -er • Sara Duncan: According to the pure usage of Oxonian English, he was a ‘fresher’. (1981)

co-ed (1893) Orig US; applied to a female student at a co-educational institution; from earlier sense, co-educational institution • Daily Telegraph: Undergraduates and co-eds sought more violent or dramatic ways of expressing their feelings. (1970)

frat (1895) US, college; applied to (a member of) a college fraternity; abbreviation of ‘fraternity’ • Punch: The only Frank Lloyd Wright building on my campus was a frat. house. (1967)

pledge (1901) US; applied to a student who has pledged to join a fraternity (or sorority)

bug (1909) British, schoolboys’; applied to a schoolboy, esp. of the stated sort; from earlier sense, insect • John Rae: You’re new, Curlew, and new bugs should be seen and not heard. (1960)

Tab (1914) British, university, dated; applied to a member of Cambridge University; short for Cantab.

frosh (1915) North American; applied to a college freshman or a member of a freshman sports team, and also to freshmen collectively; modified shortening of freshman, perhaps influenced by German Frosh frog, (dialect) grammar-school pupil • University of Waterloo (Ontario) Gazette: ‘A university is a very special kind of place,’ Wright told the 2,000 frosh. (1985)

rushee (1916) US, colleges’; applied to someone ‘rushed’ or entertained to assess their suitability for membership of a fraternity or sorority • American Speech: The girl rushee who does not have ‘tights-omania’ will be blackballed in short order. (1960)

upper (1929) British, public schools’; applied to a pupil of the upper school; from the adjective upper

preppy, preppie (1970) US; applied to a pupil at a preparatory school • New York: His first year as a preppie had left Junius feeling like a pound of plaster of Paris. (1970)

sweat-hog (1976) US; applied to a difficult student singled out in school or college for special instruction • Senior Scholastic: John Travolta
A hard-working pupil

swot, swat (1850) British, derogatory; from earlier sense, hard study. «Economist. Mr Augstein ... still looks like a frail sixth-form swot, peering critically through his spectacles at an imperfect world. (1987)

groise, groize (1913), groiser, groizer (1936) British public schools': from groise hard study. « Morris Margles: A corps groize is one who tries to gain favour by his efficiency in the O.T.C. (1940)

Teachers

prof (1838) Orig US; abbreviation of professor; originally spelt proff. « H. L. Wilson: I bet Wilbur thinks the prof is awful old-fashioned, playing with his fingers that way (1916)

beak (1888) British, schoolboys', dated; from earlier sense, magistrate. « John Betjeman: Comparing bruises, other boys could show Far worse ones that the beaks and prefects made. (1960)

schoolie, schooley (1889) Australian and northern English; from school+ -ie; also applied in British naval slang to a classroom instructor. « Bulletin (Sydney): The few local kids grew up until, except for the schoolie's tribe, there was only my youngest at the school. (1944)

plough (1853) British university slang, dated; reportedly a conscious substitution for the earlier pluck. « Times: My young friend was undeservedly ploughed. (1983)

Discipline and punishment

Examination and assessment

viva (1891) Short for viva (voice examination); also used as a verb, in the sense 'to examine aurally'. « Westminster Gazette: If a man has done his paperwork either very well or very badly, the 'viva' is almost entirely formal. (1897)

pilfer (1908) Dated; from earlier sense, to blackball

zap (1961) « National Observer (US): A graduate student whose 'scholarly potential' is not overwhelmingly lauded 'is going to get zapped'. (1976)

Scholars and students

... back in the classroom ... as the leader of the sweathogs in ABC's Welcome Back, Kotter. (1976)
Corporal punishment

cuts (1915) Australian & New Zealand  D. Adsett: If anyone was careless enough to use the wrong peg, their coat, hat and bag could be thrown to the floor without fear of getting the cuts. (1963)
sixer (1927) Applied to six strokes of the cane; from six + -er  Colleen McCullough: They all got sixers, but Meggie was terribly upset because she thought she ought to have been the only one punished. (1977)

To play truant

wag, wag it (1841) Compare hop the wag  W. S. Walker: They had 'wagged the wag' from school, as they termed it, which . . . meant truancy in all its forms. (1901)

play hookey, play hookey (1848) Orig US; compare hook it and slang one's hook make a hurried departure  Globe & Mail (Toronto): Youngsters who play hooky are ... merely of their classrooms. (1965)

hop the wag, (dated) play the wag (1861) wag probably from earlier sense, mischievous boy  M. Todd: The two of them had 'hopped the wag' from school one afternoon. (1964)  Jerome K. Jerome: He had caught it . . . by that unaccountable luck that appears always to wait upon a boy when he plays the wag from school, and goes out fishing on a sunny afternoon. (1889)

9. Communication

The voice

Hobson's choice, Hobson's (1937) British; rhyming slang  New Statesman. The landlady, Queenie Watts, throws her Hobsons . . . so hard that on a clear night you could hear it in Canning Town. (1961)

To speak (to)

jaw (1748) Usually derogatory, and often implying tedious or overlong speech  Winston Churchill: To jaw-jaw is always better than to war-war. (1954)

spit out (1855) Used to denote openly stating or revealing something; usually in the phrase spit it out  Anthony Price: 'Well—spit it out, man! Don't just stand there,' Willis exhorted him. (1981)

pipe up (1889) Used to denote someone boldly starting to speak  Daily Mail: When the congregation was asked for any reason why the couple shouldn't be married, her 13-year-old brother piped up: 'Yes. She can't cook.' (1991)

word (1906) Australian  K. S. Pritchard: Ted worded a mate of his on the Western Star. (1967)

mensch, mench (1937) Mainly in the phrase don't mensh don't mention it; also used as a noun; abbreviation of mention  Frederick Nolan: 'Thanks, Lucky. 'Don't mensh, don't mensh,' Luciano said. (1974)

bunk off (1877) British; from the noun bunk hurried departure  Time Out: A lot of kids here bunk off, as all kids do. The rate here is about 18%. (1973)

hook Jack (1877) US; compare play hookey  J. C. Lincoln: The boy 'hooked Jack' for a whole day. (1905)

bag school, bag it (1892) US  Philadelphia Bulletin: Threatening him with castor oil, when he seemed set to bag school, never did any good. (1948)

sag (1959) Merseyside slang; from earlier sense, sink or hang down (with intermediate naval sense, drift off course)  Woman: I re-visit childhood haunts in Liverpool, meet the next generation in the Cathedral grounds where we used to 'sag'—that is, play truant. (1965)

Expulsion

super (1902) British, dated; used to denote the removal of a pupil from a form or school because of age; short for supernumerate  Terence Rattigan: He was super'd from Eton. (1945)

flunk out (1920) Orig and mainly US; used to denote expulsion from a college, etc. for failing an examination; from flunk fail an examination  Reader's Digest: He flunked out of various high schools, not because he was too stupid. (1951)

Holiday

vac (1709) British; short for vacation  Catholic Weekly: Others lectured to working men in the vacs. (1906)

give (1956) Used in the imperative  Polly Hobson: 'Come on. Give.' 'That ruddy policeman went digging things up and he found out I'd written my own testimonials.' (1968)

To repeat what one has said

come again (1884) Orig US; used to ask someone to repeat what they have said  Anthony Gilbert: Nurse Alexander startled them all by saying suddenly, 'No scones.' Crook turned. 'Come again, sugar?' (1956)

To reply

come back (1896) Orig US  F. N. Hart: Just as I was thinking of something really bright to come back with, a nice soft little voice in the back of the hall said [etc.]. (1928)

Something said

peep (1903) Usually used in negative contexts; from earlier sense, cheep, squeak  Picture Post: 'One more peep out of you, Mister, and I'll get the boys to push you and your b— stall in the oggin,' which was a nearby canal. (1954)

mouthful (1922) Orig US; applied to something important or noteworthy said  P. G. Wodehouse: 'Nice nurse?' 'Ah, there you have said a mouthful, Pickering. I have a Grade A nurse.' (1973)

dicky-bird, dicky-bird (1932) British; rhyming slang for word; usually used in negative
yarn (1857) From the noun yarn chat, conversation. R. K. Smith: There were other negative signs, too. No one had come by to shoot the breeze (1971)

chew the fat (or rag) (1885) Usually implying lengthy discussion. Josephine Tey: We had that paper in the pantry last Friday and chewed the rag over it for hours! (1948)

schmooze, schmos(e) (1897) Orig US; used to denote lengthy gossiping; from Yiddish sh'mos. William Safire: A 'stoop', from the Dutch word for 'step', is a description of the porch and front steps on which Brooklynites sit and schmooze. (1980)

chin-wag (1920) From the noun chin-wag conversation. Alexander Baron: Didn't he send her down to the village to chinwag with the Indian chiefs? (1954)

rap (1929) Mainly US. Tucson (Arizona) Citizen: Obviously relishing the opportunity to rap with what Jordan called the 'press biggies from out of town'. (1979)

shoot the breeze (1941) US. R. K. Smith: There were other negative signs, too. No one had come by to shoot the breeze, to have a cup of coffee. (1971)

natter (1943) From obsolete dialect gnatter talk grumblingly. Sunday Times: They... nattered away for an hour about nothing. (1958)

(A) conversation, talk

chit-chat (1605) Often applied to gossipy conversation; reduplication of chat with alteration of vowel. N. Frye: The literary chit-chat which makes the reputations of poets boom and crash in an imaginary stock exchange is pseudo-criticism. (1951)

jaw (1748) J. R. Ackerley: He invited the two of us into the billiard-room of Grafton House... for a 'jaw'. (1968)

Times Literary Supplement: Without these things, committee work is just endless jaw and empty substitute. (1972)

mag. meg (1778) Dated: from the verb mag chatter. E. C. Sharlant: You go away for a while, my dear, and let me have a little mag with Emma. (1885)

yarn (1857) Mainly Australian & New Zealand; from earlier sense, narrative, story. Times: I still see some of the Roman Catholics in the street... and we have a yarn. (1984)

chin (1877) Orig and mainly US; often applied specifically to insolent talk. New Yorker: We'd like to have a little chin with you right now. (1952)

chin-wag (1879) Private Eye: Anyway, he sloped in for a chinwag with the Boss. (1980)

rag-chewing (1885) Mainly US; from chew the rag conversate.

buck, bukh (1895) Dated; often applied specifically to boastful talk or insolence; especially in the phrase old buck; from Hindustani buk, Hindi buk buk. Penguin New Writing: Nah then, none o' yer ol' buck, Ernie. (1941)

gabfest (1897) Orig and mainly US; applied to a gathering for talk or a lengthy conversation; from gab talk + fest meeting for a particular purpose, from German fest celebration

Spectator: A shambles as big as the Labour gabfest. (1960)

bull session (1920) Orig and mainly US; applied especially to a conversation among a group of males. Guardian: The kind of college 'bull session' that is common among English students. (1960)

yap (1930) Applied to a conversation or chat; from earlier sense, loquacious talk. R. Lawler: Real ear-basher he is, always on for a yap. (1957)

rhubarb (1934) Theatrical slang; a word repeated to give the impression of the murmur of conversation. John Betjeman: And in the next-door room is heard the tramp And 'rhubarb, rhubarb' as the crowd rehearse A one-act play in verse. (1960)

schmooze, schmos(e) (1897) Orig US; applied to a lengthy gossiping; from Yiddish shmues, from Hebrew shëmù'ah, rumour shmues, from Hebrew shëmù'ah, rumour.

natter (1943) From the verb natter. News Chronicle: From the swarm he singled out one bird.... That's Joey,.... he usually comes for a natter when there's nothing else doing. (1951)

skull session (1959) US. David Jordan: Joe was ready for the skull session. (1973)


To say

sez (1844) Jocular representation of the pronunciation of says. John Stroud: If I make a movement, he sez: 'Oh, don't be disgusting!' he sez. (1960)

go (1967) Orig US; used mainly in the historic present, in direct speech; from earlier sense, make the characteristic noise of an animal. M. Rosen: So I go, 'Tame for the cream, Eddie.' And he goes, 'No cream.' (1983)

To discuss

kick around (1939) Orig US. G. Douglas: They kicked the details around for a few more minutes and then left them to stew. (1971)

A discussion

confab (1701) Abbreviation of confabulation.

South China Morning Post: After a confab with our Lai See colleague, we find this to be the most expensive bottle of water yet reported in Hongkong. (1992)

pawpaw (1812) From earlier sense, Native American conference. Manchester Guardian Weekly: The associated lobbies that oppose the [St. Lawrence]...
seaway, the railroads, coal-owners, and Eastern port authorities, went into a round of emergency pow-wows. (1954)

**huddle** (1929) Applied to a close or secret discussion; especially in the phrase go into a huddle; from earlier sense, small close group

- James Bertram: He went into a huddle with one of his minions. (1947)

Loquacity

**big mouth** (1890) Orig and mainly US; compare earlier sense, loquacious person

- M. K. Rawlings: Now mistudent big-mouth. (1938)

**yackety, yakcity, yacketty, yakketty,yakkity** (1953) Used to express the sound of incessant chatter; usually reduplicated or followed by ya/c/k; imitative

- Desmond Bagley: The Sergeant... only talks when he has something to say. Everybody else goes yackety-yack all the time. (1982)

Loquacious

**mouthy** (1589) Often also implying boastfulness or impudence; from mouth + -y

- Guardian: His mouthy confidence has no limits. Sure of his place in the England side for years to come, Catt was outspoken on the subject of payments to the lads. (1997)

To talk loquaciously

**blabber** (c1375) Imitative

- Guardian: But would they like me to come down and settle up with it now? And so I blabber on. (1992)

**blether, blather** (1524) From Old Norse blaôm

- Guardian: Blabber on. (1992)

**spout** (1780)

- Times Literary Supplement: The seedy group of coffee-bar philosophers... spouting their sad rehash of dated Fascist clichés. (1957)

**gab** (1786) Apparently onomatopoeic; compare gabble

- Wall Street Journal: She often discovers that she has been gabbing long after her call has been cut off. (1989)

**talk the hind leg off a donkey (horse, etc.)** (1808)

- G. H. D. & M. Cole: You can talk the 'ind leg off any donkey. (1942)

**witter, whitter** (1808) Orig Scottish; used to denote annoyingly inconsequential or rambling talk; often followed by on; perhaps a variant of Scottish whitter

- Osmond Mills: You might try making the tea, instead of wittering on about Cordon bleu methods. (1947)

**mag, meg** (1810) Dated; from the female personal name Mag (short for Margaret), perhaps inspired by obsolete Mag's tales nonsense, trifling

- James Runciman: I'll snap your backbone across my knee if you meg half a second more. (1885)

**go on** (a1822) Often followed by about or at

- Listener: How much of what I have been so tediously going on about here is reflected in the programme itself? (1969)

**yatter** (1825) Orig Scottish dialect; imitative, perhaps after yummer + chatter

- J. N. Harris: This dear old Betty was yattering at me on Sunday morning when I was hung over to the eyeballs. (1963)

**gas** (1852) Orig US; from the noun gas lengthy but empty talk

- Rudyard Kipling: I'm 'fraid I've been gassing awf'ly, sir. (1893)

**shoot one's mouth off, shoot off one's mouth** (1864) Orig US

- Rocky Mountain News (Denver, Colorado): A Dutch married woman... was taxed $17.80 for 'shooting off her mouth' against the virtue and morality of a neighbouring maiden. (1864)

**yap** (1886) From earlier sense, bark sharply

- Daily Telegraph: A lot of women who are happy to yap away normally, became tongue-tied when they had to talk and drive. (1975)

**waffle, woffle** (1900) Used to denote inconsequential or rambling talk; from earlier sense, yelp

- Peter Dickinson: You can make the correct noises while all the old buffers are woffling on. (1982)

**run off at the mouth** (1909) US


**talk someone's ear off** (1935) US

- National Observer: Heck! I could talk your ear off. But let me just say that in all my 40 years of organizing and escorting tours, I haven't found a better one than this one. (1976)

**run one's mouth** (1940) US, mainly Black English

- Time: All there is to real estate is running your mouth a bit, knocking on doors and asking people if they want to sell their house. (1977)

**bend someone's ear** (1942) US

- Observer: What have you been getting drunk, getting laid and swearing a lot got to do with green-tinted issues? Not a lot, although the concerned chattering classes who bend my ear think otherwise. (1991)

**ear-bash** (1944) Mainly Australian; probably a back-formation from ear-basher loquacious talker

- S. Gore: Just like you hear 'em ear-bashin' each other in Parliament to this day. (1966)

**rabbit** (1950) From the noun rabbit talk

- Guardian Weekly: A girl reporter from Rolling Stone rabbits on idiotically about the Maharishi. (1977)

**yack, yak** (1950) Imitative

- J. Trenhaile: Those two will yak all day. (1981)

**yackety-yack, yackety-yacket(y)** (1953)

- Monica Dickens: Our laundry's full of yackety-yacketing women this morning. (1953)

**yacket** (1958) Back-formation from yacket

- New Yorker: We warn them, we yacket away night and day... but they never learn. (1969)

**bang on** (1959) Used to denote insistent or repetitious talk about a particular subject

- Car: So if you bang on now about how wonderful these cars were, don't be surprised by the odd hollow laugh from your more mature patrons. (1990)

**yacker, yakker** (1961) From the noun yacker

- Financial Times: "Yellow Polka-Dot Bikini"—one of the scratchy 78s... —yackers melodiously while the characters gallivant through daytime Calcutta. (1982)

**bash someone's ear** (1962) US

- Daily Telegraph: Mr Wigg bashers the ear as once he bashed the square. (1962)

**bang someone's ear** (1965) US
fat-mouth (1970) US, mainly Black English: from the noun fat-mouth loquacious talker
keep on (1977) Often followed by about or at
- Transatlantic Review: One will keep on about ‘the slicks’ he wants to write for. (1977)

Loquacious talk

gab (1790) From the verb gab ■ R. L. Stevenson: There’s no fair way to stop your gab. (1893)
gas (1847) ■ Cecil Day Lewis: The sisters would sit on the tiny patch of lawn at the back of the house, shelling peas and having a great old gas. (1960). Hence gassy (1863)
■ Lord Rosebery: The last development of the Irish question was a gassy meeting in St. James’s Hall the previous night. (1982)
yacker, yakker (1882) Australian; imitative ■ Patrick White: Couldn’t get on with me work—not with all the yakker that was goin’ on in ‘ere. (1973)
yap (1907) From the verb yap ■ Keith Weatherly: Never mind that yap. Where’s the tucker? (1988)
waffle, woffle (1937) From the verb waffle ■ Spectator: There is a special relationship between Britain and the United States, a special relationship more serious than the waffle we get at banquets. (1965)
yack, yak, yak-yak (1958) From the verb yack ■ Nicolas Freeling: The sudden head-down butt jabbed into someone’s face, is a highly effective way of putting a stop to his yack. (1983)
yackety-yack, yackety-yacket(y) (1958) From the verb yackety-yack ■ Woman: For once the place will be free of giggles and girlish yakitty-yak. (1959)
stem-winder (1973) US; applied to a vigorous rabble-rousing speech; from earlier sense, impassioned public speaker ■ Time: The 1,008 cadres and 24 fraternal foreign delegations... endured no fewer than 55 speeches, including an eight-hour stem-winder by Le Duan. (1977)

Loquacious talker

blatherskite, blatherskate (c1650) Orig and mainly US; applied to inadvertently disclosing something ■ W. J. Burley: Once he realized we had it on him he was ready to cough fast enough. (1970)

big mouth (1889) Orig and mainly US; often also implying boastfulness or lack of discretion ■ E. E. Coxhead: He was a big mouth. He picked up strangers... and told them the story of his life. (1951)
gas-bag (1889) ■ Economist: The gunmen retort by openly despising their political leaders, even ‘that gasbag Ian Paisley’. (1988)
fat-mouth (1926) US, mainly Black English; often implying exaggerated claims ■ Joseph Heller: Okay, fatmouth, out of the car. (1961)
loud-mouth (1934) ■ Daily Mail: These 625 vain, devious loud-moons... are our elected representatives. (1959)
ear-basher (1941) Mainly Australian; from bash someone’s ear
stem-winder (1942) US; applied to an enthusiastic talker or impassioned public speaker; from earlier sense, forceful person

yacker, yakker (1959) From yack talk loquaciously + -er ■ New York Times: She just brought the parrot along for the ride... . He was quite a yakker. (1984)
motor mouth (1971) Orig US ■ National Observer: The increasing number of ‘motor mouths’ posing as sports broadcasters,... statisticians and whatever. (1977)
rapper (1971) Orig US: from rap talk loquaciously + -er ■ Christina & Richard Milner: He is recognized as among the best talkers or ‘rappers’ in the hustling world. (1973)

To speak frankly

talk turkey (1903) Orig North American; in early use also as talk cold turkey ■ Agatha Christie: Send for a high powered lawyer and tell him you’re willing to talk turkey. Then he fixes... the amount of alimony. (1967)
lay it on the line (1954) Orig US ■ E. E. Sumner: I’ll lay it on the line for you, if you like. Are you thinking of asking my girl to marry you? (1967)

To speak revealingly

blow (1575) Used to denote giving away secret information ■ Edgar Wallace: This officer ‘blew’ the raid to Tommy. (1925)
blab (1583) From earlier sense, chatter ■ Evening Standard: The fact that Princess Diana seems to have blabbed to the tabloids has confused her many supporters. (1992)
let on (1725) Orig dialectal and US ■ Kylie Tennant: Maybe Orly didn’t like to let on he’d made a mistake in the first place. (1946)
blow the gaff (1812) Used to denote giving away secret information; origin uncertain ■ Bryan Forbes: It’s my hunch you were primarily responsible for blowing the whole gaff. (1988)
shoot one’s mouth off, shoot off one’s mouth (1864) Orig US ■ W. J. Burley: With Matthew Eva shooting his mouth off about Peters it could turn ugly. (1973)
cough (1901) Orig US; usually used to denote confessing ■ W. J. Burley: Once he realized we had it on him he was ready to cough fast enough. (1970)

get something off one’s chest (1902) Used to denote relieving one’s mind by making a statement or confession ■ Anthony Powell: I wanted to see you to get some things off my chest. I’ve got to tell them to somebody. (1939)
spill (1917) Orig US ■ Irwin Shaw: He picked up the phone to call the Colonel, spill everything. (1977)
tip one’s hand(s) (or mitt) (1917) Orig and mainly US; applied to inadvertently disclosing one’s intentions ■ Economist: Mr Hunt will not tip his hand on the price at which he will buy more bullion. (1979)
spill the beans (1919) Orig US ■ Sun (Baltimore): A Government publication in this country spilled the beans
concerning our urgent interest in experiments with uranium. (1945)

**open up (1921)** Used to denote speaking openly or frankly, ceasing to be secretive

M. Braithwaite: Although he never answered—or perhaps because of it—I opened up to him completely, telling him things I'd never told anyone. (1970)

**talk (1924)** • *Times Literary Supplement*: He is, as they say, not talking, and refused to be interviewed by the authors of this book. (1976)

**spill one's guts (out) (1927)** Mainly US; applied to divulging or confessing as much as one can. Arthur Hailey: The kid—he was eighteen, by the way, and not long out of trade school—broke down and spilled his guts. (1979)

See also To betray an associate to the police or other authority under *Betrayal* (pp. 287-90) and To tell the truth under *Honesty* (pp. 277-8).

A revealing speaker

**blabber (1557)** From blab + -er

**blabbermouth (1936)** Orig US • David Karp: No, Burney isn't a blabbermouth. He tells you a lot less than he knows. (1956)

**hot air (1873)** Orig US • Angus Wilson: Gerald in his new mood thought only he shouldn't have poll-parroted his life away in humbug and hot air. (1956)

**mumbo jumbo (1896)** From earlier sense, object of unintelligent veneration; perhaps ultimately from Mande mama dyumbo. *Times*: Labour's elected representatives... mouth the mumbo-jumbo of capitalism: 'The pound must be kept strong', 'We must all buy British'. (1975)

**blah, bla, blaa (1924)** From the noun blah about waste of public money. (1958)

**jazz (1918)** • Bernard Malamud: I read all about that

**jive (1928)** From the names of two US hymn writers, Dwight L. Moody (1837-99) and Ira D. Sankey (1840-1908) • Roger Busby: He... beat up three kids... when one of them smart-mouthed him. (1978)

An insolent talker

**smart-mouth (1968)** US; also applied to someone who is good at repartee • *Sun Magazine* (Baltimore): I was a smart mouth, a troublemaker in school. (1968)

A revealing speaker

**gobbledygook, gobbledegook (1944)** Orig US; applied to pretentious jargon; probably representing a turkey's gobble • Meyer Dolinsky: I had been subjected to too much psychiatric gobbledygook. (1959)

To talk (to) pretentiously or ostentatiously

**speechify (1723)** Denoting the making of pompous speeches, or talking as if one were doing this; from speech + -ify

**blah, blah-blah (1924)** From the noun blah

George Orwell: The tactless utterances of Americans who for years have been blahing about 'Indian freedom' and British imperialism. (1942)

**woof (1934)** US, Black English; from earlier sense, bark gruffly • Joseph Wambaugh: He was woofing me, because he winked at the blond kid. (1972)

To talk (of) exaggeratedly

**lay it on (1600)** Often in the phrases lay it on thick and lay it on with a trowel. *Times*: If we are laying it on a bit thick it's only because we want you to volunteer out of a mature realisation of what the Army can be like. (1976)

**pilie it on (1852)** • J. B. Priestley: I fancy you're piling it on too much. There are lots of things you can enjoy, if you set about it properly. (1943)

**strong it (1964)** British • G. F. Newman: Don't you think that's stronging it? (1970)

See also To boast at *Conceit, Boastfulness, Ostentation* (p. 273).

**Insolent talk**

**lip (1821)** • Mark Twain: 'Don't you give me none o' your lip,' says he. (1884)

**mouth (1935)** Orig US

To talk insolently to

**lip (1898)** • Alfred Draper: If anyone lips you, just swallow it. (1972)

**smart-mouth (1976)** US; from the noun smart mouth • J. L. Hensley: He... beat up three kids... when one of them smart-mouthed him. (1978)

An insolent talker

**smart mouth (1968)** US; also applied to someone who is good at repartee • *Sun Magazine* (Baltimore): I was a smart mouth, a troublemaker in school. (1968)

A revealing speaker

**spieler (1896)** Applied especially to a salesman's patter; from German Spiel game, play • *Listener*: A long spiel... from a tart about how much horrid Soho has become. (1980). Hence *spieler* a glib talker (1984)

**fanny (1933)** • Gerald Kersh: A Guardsman comes to Bill with some Fanny about needing some cash. (1942)

To talk to gibly, persuasively or cajolingly

See also at *Sincerity & Insincerity* (pp. 278-81)

**jolly along (1890), jolly up (1893)** Orig US; denoting trying to put someone into a good mood. • Helen McClay: He protested, he argued, he even tried to jolly them along. They only became bolder. (1973)
fanny (1949) From the noun fanny glib talk

■ Allan Prior: They could not fanny Norris into thinking they believed he might have been out to a woman. (1965)
fat-mouth (1971) US; compare earlier sense, talk excessively
■ Bernard Malamud: I ain’t asking you to fatmouth me, just as I am not interested in getting into any argument with you. (1971)

To shout

holler (1699) Mainly US; a variant of hollo cry out, and related to hallo ■ Times. When Colonel Aldrin jumped off the last step of the moon ladder . . . everyone in the Aldrin house was whooping and hollering. (1989)
cry (shout, yell, etc.) blue murder (1859) Applied to shouting desperately, as if being attacked ■ Anthony Gilbert: Corpses don’t yell blue murder. (1959)

rort (1931) Often applied specifically to shouting abuse or complaints; back-formation from rorty jolly, noisy ■ M. Harrison: It isn’t you . . . that I’m rotting at. (1935)

To swear

cuss (1815) Orig US; euphemistic alteration of curse ■ Washington Post. He didn’t do a lot of drinking. And in all the years I knew him, I never heard him cuss. (1993)

blind (1943) Mainly in the phrase eff and blind; from the use of blind in imprecations such as blind me!

eff (1943) Implying the use of the word fuck; usually used more broadly, especially in the phrase eff and blind swear strongly or continuously; from the use of eff as a written euphemistic representation of the first letter of fuck ■ Arnold Wesker: He started effing and blinding and . . . (1945)

Amatory talk

sweet nothings (1900) ■ Martin Amis: Half the guests, including DeForest (after a minute of sweet-nothings with Rachel), had wisely got the hell out as soon as dinner was over. (1973)

To talk amorously

chat (1898) See under To flirt, woo, court at Sex (pp. 65–6)

Misunderstanding

crossed wires, crossed lines (1932) From the notion of an incorrect telephone connection ■ Listener. This crossing of the political wires had many repercussions in politics. (1958)

To be, become or remain silent


button (up) one’s lip (or face, nose) (1836), button it (1980) Orig US ■ Harpers and Queen: I laugh involuntarily, and am met with an impatient glare. I hastily button my lip. (1992)


dry up (1853) ■ F. Scott Fitzgerald: ’Oh, dry up!’ retorted Basil. (1928)

cut the cackle (1889) Orig in the phrase cut the cackle and come to the horses, implying a cutting short of prevaricatory talk ■ Percy Wyndham Lewis: Cut the cackle Arthur—I’m pressed for time! (1930)

shurrup (1893) Representing a casual pronunciation of shut up ■ Cyril Ray: You shurrup, shutturp: I’ve just about had enough of you. (1960)

pipe down (1900) ■ Evelyn Waugh: Groans of protest rose from the other cells where various tramps and pick-pockets were trying to get some sleep: ’Aw, pipe down!’ (1945)

chuck it (1901) British; from earlier sense, stop it ■ E. W. Walters: ’Chuck it!’ snapped the ill-nourished boy. (1908)

clam (1916) Mainly US; usually followed by up or on; from the notion of the clam taciturnly but firmly closing its shell ■ M. M. Kaye: I didn’t mean to pry, but there’s no need . . . to clam up on me. (1959)

put a sock in it (1919) British ■ Nevil Shute: ’For Christ’s sake put a sock in it,’ he had said . . . ’and tell them I want an ambulance down here.’ (1944)

dummy up (1925) US ■ Raymond Chandler: You can’t dummy up on a murder case. (1942)

give something a rest (1931) Orig US; denoting stopping talking about something; often in the phrase give it a rest ■ Ruth Rendell: ’All right Mother,’ said Vera. ’Let’s give it a rest, shall we?’ (1971)

nark it (1936) British; from earlier sense, stop doing something annoying ■ R.A.F. Journal: Nark it, Flight, . . . you sound like a penny uplift. (1943)

shuddup (1940) Representing a casual pronunciation of shut up ■ Frederic Mullally: ’Shuddup,’ Macdonald snorted. (1978)

wrap up (1943) ■ Osmington Mills: ’Geoff, wrap up about the jigsaws,’ Charles entreated him. (1959)

turn it up (1945) British; from earlier sense, stop doing something ■ J. B. Priestley: ’Are you sure you can trust her?’ ’Yes, Joe. So turn it up.’ (1961)

belt up (1949) British ■ Listener: May we hope that Hamilton will do a service to art by belting up and going back to school? (1969)

shtoom up, shtool it (1958) From shtoom silent ■ J. Gash: Shhtum it. Sounds carry in this. (1982)

shtoom up on; ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■■

leave it out (1969) British; from earlier sense, stop doing something annoying. ■ Paul Theroux: No—leave it out! He had been wrong. (1986)

To force to be silent

shut someone up (1814) ■ Poor Nellie: Looks at you and shuts you up just like Snorker, my old form master. (1887)

Saying nothing; silent

mum (1521) Often in the phrase keep mum; imitative of closed lips. ■ Economist Most British ‘brand’ companies keep mum about their most important assets. (1988)

mum’s the word (a1704) Used as an injunction to say nothing; from the obsolete interjection mum hush, be quiet

nuff said, nuff(f) sed, nuff(f) sed. abbreviations N.C., N.S. (1840) Orig US; used as an indication that nothing more need be said on a particular topic; nuff abbreviation and alteration of enough. ■ John Aiken: ‘He and Steinherz knew one another at university before they were here.’ ‘Nuff said, I suppose.’ (1971)

oyster (1910) Australian; from the proverbial uncommunicativeness of the oyster

buttoned up (1936) Often implying a general reservedness or uncommunicativeness. ■ Monica Dickens: Why is she so quiet and buttoned up? (1946)

shtoom, schtoom, shtum(m), stumm, etc. (1958) Yiddish, from German stumm silent, mute

ikey, ike, iky (1936) Possibly from an unattested use of ikeymo Jew as rhyming slang for info information

Information

the goods (1877) Orig US; applied especially to information giving one an advantage or hold over another; usually in the phrase have (or get) the goods on. ■ Mary McCarthy: He had a sudden inking that they would have liked to get the goods on Mulcahy. (1952)

griﬀin (1881) British, dated; applied to a tip (in racing, etc.); from earlier sense, signal. ■ A. M. N. Lyons: ‘This is the Straight Griﬃn, Fred,’ said Mr. Cozenza: ‘the absolute straight tip.’ (1912)

grifﬁ (1891) British; applied to a tip or piece of news or reliable information; short for grifﬁ

John Wainwright: The informant was saying: ‘It’s grifﬁ, guv.’ (1936)

dopec (1899) Orig horse-racing slang, apparently from the notion of a drug (dope) administered to a racehorse to affect its performance. ■ Agatha Christie: I shouldn’t dream of. . . denying it. You’ve obviously cabled to America and got all the dope. (1945)

tip-off (1901) Orig US; applied especially to information about criminal activity; from the verb tip off. ■ Observer There was a tip-off available about when it [sc. a bank] was going to be stacked up with cash. (1960)

a line (1903) Orig US; in the phrases get a line on acquire information about, have a line on, and give someone a line on. ■ P. G. Wodehouse: If you want to get a line on how she feels, she gave me a letter to give you. . . . Here it is. (1935)


drum (1915) Australian; applied to a piece of reliable information, especially a racing tip

the low-down (1915) Orig US; denoting the relevant information or the inside story; often followed by on. ■ D. O’Grady: Gave us the drum on where to get hold of the particular rifles we had our eyes on. (1968)

good oil (1916) Australian; applied to reliable information; compare oil information, news

reader (1920) US, criminals’ slang, dated; applied to a circular notifying police officers of a suspected criminal to be arrested

ikey, ike, iky (1936) Possibly from an unattested use of ikeymo Jew as rhyming slang for info information

gen (1940) British, orig services’ slang, dated; applied to reliable information or news; from the notion of information being essential as oil is to machinery. ■ F. B. Vickers: ‘That’s if all goes well, mate,’ said the man who was giving me the oil. (1977)

good oil (1915) Australian & New Zealand; applied to reliable information; compare oil information, news

reader (1920) US, criminals’ slang, dated; applied to a circular notifying police officers of a suspected criminal to be arrested

gen (1940) British; orig services’ slang; perhaps an abbreviation of general in the official phrase ‘for the general information of all ranks’; or possibly from part of the words genuine or intelligence. ■ Daily Telegraph: A vast amount of ‘gen’ is included, and this will be invaluable for settling arguments. (1970)

poop (1941) Orig and mainly US; origin unknown. ■ Roy Hayes: How did you get the poop on Kovacs? (1973)

poop sheet (1941) Orig and mainly US; applied to a written notice, report, etc., containing information

rundown (1945) Orig US; applied to a catalogue of information, facts, etc., or a brief description; from earlier horse-racing slang sense, list of entries and betting odds

spec (1956) Applied to a detailed working description of something; short for specification
To tip information

someone **tip** (1891) Orig US • Ted Allbeury: 
Was there any mileage in tipping them off? Experience said that tippers-off always got their hands caught in the machinery. (1975)

**wise** someone **up** (1905) US • P. G. Wodehouse: 
You won't wise him up that I threw a spanner into the machinery? (1922)

**put** someone **wise**(to) (1913) Orig US • Graham Greene: I met him my first term at school. ... He was a year older and knew the ropes. He put me wise to a lot of things. (1950)

drum (1919) Australian; often followed by up; from drum information • D’Arcy Niland: Jesus, don’t bite me, son. I was only gonna drum you. (1969)

**hip** (1938) Orig US; from hip informed, aware; often followed by to • **Black World** I had just about often followed by to and saw what I was doing. (1959) • **Game of Baseball**. (1991)

gen (1943) British, orig services’ slang; from gen information; almost always followed by up • Edward Hyams: He wanted information; I had it. I was in a position to, as we said then, gen him up. I genned him up. (1958)

**pull** someone’s **coat** (1946) US, Black English • Bernard Malamud: The black . . . said: ‘Lesser, I have to pull your coat about a certain matter.’ (1971)

**clue** (1948) Usually followed by up or in • Colin Maclennes: You meet all kinds of cats . . . who can clue you up in all kinds of directions. (1959) • Independent: Main Chance clued us in on how the police play in ‘Just A Friendly Game Of Baseball’. (1991)

**mark** someone’s **card** (1961) British; denoting tipping someone off or putting someone right; from the annotation of someone’s racecard with a tip for the winning horse • G. F. Newman: The troops’ve had it all by the know being aware of the significance of what was happening. (1928)

**in the know** (1883) Denoting the possession of secret or inside knowledge • Daily Express: The surtax was slipped into the Finance Act of 1927 very much as a ‘joker’ is occasionally insinuated into an American Tariff Act—that is to say, surreptitiously, without anybody except those in the know being aware of the significance of what was happening. (1928)

on (1885) US; applied to someone who is aware of or alert to something • Rex Stout: Wolfe, turning and seeing Saul, was on as quick as I had been. He said . . . ‘What?’ (1973)

**hip** (1904) Orig US; often followed by to; origin unknown • **Spectator**: Audiences there are hip to the latest gossip. (1959)

**ready** (1867) US, Black English; applied to someone who is aware of or alert to what is going on

**sussed** (1984) British; from suss out realize • Gay Times: I butt in—‘Em, em’—in my most sussed manner. (1990)

A person with information

dopester (1907) Orig US; applied to someone who collects information on, and forecasts the result of, sporting events, elections, etc.; from dope information + ster • Economist: The inside dopesters, squeezing the latest gossip about intra-party machinations out of politicians. (1964)

Misleading information, rumour

mulga **wire**, mulga (1899) Australian; applied to the bush telegraph; from Australian mulga the outback, from earlier sense, type of acacia tree, from Aboriginal (Yuwaalaraay) mulga + wire telegraph • K. S. Prichard: The troops’ve had it all by mulga. They’ve heard too. (1950)

scuttlebutt (1901) Orig US, naval slang; used as the name of a miscellany column in the Smoking Lamp (1901–), from the earlier sense, water-butt on deck (around which sailors would gather to exchange gossip) • Sun (Baltimore): Also a cause for . betting was the ultimate destination. In navy slang ‘scuttlebutt’ was rife and had the ship bound everywhere from China to Murmansk. (1943)

furphy (1915) Australian; applied to a false rumour or absurd story; from the name of a firm, J. Furphy & Sons Pty. Ltd. of Shepparton, Victoria, manufacturing water and sanitary carts used in World War I: the name ‘Furphy’ appeared on such carts, whose drivers were sources of gossip • Sydney Morning Herald: The Premier described the rumours of changes to the legislation as a great furphy that had got out of control. (1966)

latrine **rumour**, latrine (1918) Services’ slang, dated; applied to a baseless rumour believed to originate in gossip in the latrines

dirt (1926) Applied to scurrilous information or gossip • Evelyn Waugh: Good morning, darling, what’s the dirt today? (1934)
Thought and Communication

**latrinogram** (1944) Services' slang; humorous adaptation of latrine*rumour*; from latrine* + -o- + -gram  ■ D. M. Davin: According to current latrinogram we were going to be given a rest. (1947)

**scam** (1972) From earlier sense, information  ■ William McGillivray: There's been a security break. . . . He's scheduled a press conference. . . . The scam is he's going to break what we know on Spencer. (1972)

Narrative, story-telling

**yarn** (1812) Orig nautical; applied to a story, usually a long or incredible one; originally in the phrase spin a yarn tell a story

**tear-jerker** (1921) Orig US; applied to a story or*tear-jerker* (1921)

**whodunit, whodunnit** (1930) Applied to a strongly worded*stinker* (1912)

**megillah** (1957) Applied to a long, complicated,*megillah* roll, scroll), in allusion to the whole*Lamentations*, Ecclesiastes, and*Esther* (from*Yiddish* a gantse Megillah* m

**whodunit, whodunnit** (1930) Applied to a strongly worded*stinker* (1912)

**mash note** (1890) Dated; applied to a love-letter; specifically one smuggled into or out of prison

**stiffy, stiffie** (1980) British; applied to a lovelettermash note** (1890) Dated; applied to a love-letter; specifically one smuggled into or out of prison

**stiffy, stiffie** (1980) British; applied to a formal invitation card (made of thick cardboard)

**bluey** (1990) British, services' slang; applied to an airmail letter-form available free of charge to service personnel stationed abroad and to their correspondents at home; from its colour

To write a letter

**drop** (1769) Perhaps from the notion of dropping a letter into a letter-box

**SWAK** (1925) Orig services' slang; abbreviation of sealed with a kiss (on envelopes)

**SWAL** (1948) Orig services' slang; abbreviation of sealed with a*loving* kiss (on envelopes)

**BOLTOP** (1989) Abbreviation of (kn)ickers off ready when I come home (on envelopes)

A typewriter

**typer** (1892) Dated, orig US  ■ *Morning Post* It is . . . typewritten, for . . . 'we have bagged another German typer'. (1985)

**mill** (1913) US, dated  ■ H. L. Mencken: Writers' crap was cured . . . on the advent of the*mill*, i.e., the typewriter. (1948)

A telephone

**blower** (1922)  ■ John Wyndham: I'd of said the old girl was always listenin' when there was anyone on the blower. (1957)


To telephone

**buzz** (1929)  ■ Ellery Queen: I wouldn't have buzzed you so early in the morning except that Ritter just phoned. (1929)

**give someone a buzz** (1930) From buzz sound made by a telephone  ■ G. Usher: Shall I give him a buzz? (1959)

**give someone a tinkle** (1938) From the ringing sound made by a telephone  ■ Beryl Bainbridge:
Thought and Communication

10. Greetings & Farewells

Hello

hi (1862) Orig North American; from earlier use as an exclamation to attract attention • P. G. Wodehouse: A musical voice in his left ear said 'Hi.' (1972)

what gives (1940) Orig US; used as a greeting; from earlier use as a general enquiry about what is happening

yo (1986) Orig & mainly US; used as a greeting, originally among young blacks

A handshake or other greeting

the glad hand (1895) Orig US; applied to a cordial handshake or other greeting; often used rather ironically • New Statesman: Crude economic reasons do not explain why Mikoyan should have been given the glad hand. (1959)

skin (1942) US, Black English; applied to the skin of the palm of the hand, as making contact in shaking or slapping hands in friendship or solidarity; especially in the phrases give (some) skin, gimme some skin • H. L. Foster: The viewer of TV sporting events will often observe black athletes, and whites said '10-4.' And the judge didn’t pronounce them man and wife; he said, ‘Put the hammer down.’ (1976)

squawk (1975) Applied to an identification signal given out by an aircraft; from the verb squawk signal

To signal

squawk (1956) Orig US; applied to an aircraft transmitting an identification signal, enabling its position to be located by radar • J. Gardner: His eyes remained on the huge radarscope.... The indicator numbers 12—"squawked" by the Boeing’s transponder—flicked off and changed. (1982)

Public address

squawk-box (1945) US; applied to a loudspeaker or public-address system, and also to an intercom

Language

lingo (1660) Originally applied to a foreign language, and now also to the jargon of a particular group; probably from Portuguese lingua language • Independent: ‘Chatty-Catty’ and ‘Chatty-Catty’ and friends were era-typical, smart-alecky dolls which ... talked back at you in up-to-the-minute kid lingo. (1991)

-speak (1949) Used as a suffix to denote a particular variety of language or characteristic mode of speaking; originated by George Orwell in his novel Nineteen Eighty-Four in Newspeak an artificial language for official communications and Oldspeak standard English • Guardian: I am very sorry that I cannot be with you today.... I am most grateful and touched that you have decided to name a locomotive after me,’ it [sc. a telegram] said in classic royalspeak. (1981)

Ten-four, 10-4 (1962) British • G. F. Newman: I was going to give you a bell. But I thought it best to give the phone a miss. (1986)

A signal

office (1803) Dated; especially in the phrase give (or take) the office • Rolf Boldrewood: Ride about the country till I give you the office. (1890)


Robin Fawcett turned the grin on Friday and me and said ‘Hi-ya’. (1959)

how’s tricks (1915) Orig US; used as a greeting • A. Fraser: ‘Well,’ he greeted me, ‘how’s tricks?’ (1959)

g’day, gidday, gooday (1928) Australian; representing a casual pronunciation of good day • Overland: ‘G’day,’ I said. ‘G’day,’ the fella answered. ‘G’day,’ said Benny. (1973)

yo (1986) Orig & mainly US; used as a greeting, originally among young blacks

A handshake or other greeting

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11. Complaining

To complain

squawk (1875) Orig US; denoting vociferous affronted complaining; from earlier sense, make a short high-pitched cry • Sun (Baltimore): When you pass a law and hire somebody to enforce it, you can’t squawk if your kids get pinched for violating it. (1948)

belly-ache (1881) Orig US; from the noun belly-ache pain in the stomach • Erskine Caldwell: I reckon there’s enough to complain about these days if a fellow wants to belly-ache some. (1933)

toodle-oo, tootle-oo, tootle-pip, tootle-pip (1907) British; dated; tootle, tootle perhaps from toot short blast on a motor-horn; tootle-oo, tootle-oo probably influenced by French à tout à l'heure goodbye • Standard (London): Toodlepip to the poor British Exec. (1983)

cheerio (1910) British; dated: from cheer take heart + the interjection o • Siegfried Sassoon: Cheerio! I wish they’d killed you in a decent show. (1918)

cheerio, cheerioh (1914) British; alteration of chee-wooh, influenced by cheery happy • B. W. Aldiss: My slit-trench is the first on the right, next to the cookhouse. Cheerio, Ali, you old robber! (1971)

Abyssinia (1934) Jocular, dated: punning use of Abyssinia, former name of Ethiopia, based on its supposed resemblance to a casual pronunciation of I’ll be seeing you, an expression of farewell • L. P. Hartley: Good-bye, dear, cheerio, Abyssinia. (1949)

cheerie-bye (1934) British; from cheerio + goodbye • T. Girtin: Well, cheerie-bye. Be seeing you. (1959)

(I’ll) be seeing you (1934) Implied in Abyssinia, although not independently recorded before 1937 • Joyce Porter: Well, ta ever so! Be seeing you! (1970)

T.T.F.N. (1948) British; dated; abbreviation of ta-ta for now, a catch-phrase popularized by the 1940s BBC radio programme Itma • Observer. JY [sc. Jimmy Young] said TTFN to Mr. Healey. (1976)

see you later, alligator (1956) Orig US; jocular, dated; the formulaic reply is in a while, crocodile; predated by obsolete dig you later, alligator; first recorded as the title of a song by R. C. Guildry, which was popularized by Bill Haley and the Comets; alligator probably from earlier sense, jazz fan

see you (1962) Shortened from earlier phrases such as see you around, see you later, see you soon • John Irving: ‘See ya,’ she called, and drove off. . . . ‘See ya,’ Garp mumbled after her. (1978)

bye (1964) Alteration of bye • Martin Braune: ‘I hope I haven’t made you late. ‘Bye!’ And with that trailing phrase she was off like the bad fairy. (1985)

tatty-bye (1971) British; from tatty (a fanciful alteration of ta-ta) + goodbye • Marian Babson: I’ll say tatty-bye for now then . . . And we’ll see you soon. You know the way, don’t you? (1974)

see you (1974) From see you later, alligator; see you (1962)

recess-bye (1974) From recess (a time off) + goodbye

see you later (1977) From see you later, alligator; see you (1962)

see the rag (or fat) (1885) Dated; from earlier sense, have a discussion • Punch: I got me woes . . . An’ she’s got ‘ers, the good Lord knows, Although she never chews the fat. (1916)

grouch (1885) Orig military slang; origin uncertain, but probably related to grouch
**bind (1943)** British, dated, orig services' slang; compare earlier sense, bore, weary
- D. Buckingham: Eddy's been binding to Vic about you. (1959)

**whinge (1946)** Introduced into Australian slang from Irish, Scottish and northern dialect, where the meaning 'complain peevishly' had evolved from earlier 'whine'; ultimately from a northern form of Old English hwinsian whine
- Sunday Times: 'What sort of people do Australians hate most?' 'The whingeing Pom... Poms that come over and do nothing but whinge.' (1983)

**carry on (1947)** From earlier more general sense, talk angrily and at length
- Nevil Shute: She don't half carry on about the beer I drink. (1947)

**kvetch, kvetsch (1965)** US; from Yiddish kvetsh
- Harper's Magazine: After listening to Kashouk kvetch for a couple of hours, Sol Hurok... put the question direct. 'Tell me, Kashouk; 'Hurok wanted to know. 'If you always lose so much money, why do you stay in business?' (1971)

**stink (1851)** Used in the phrase raise (or kick up, make) a stink to denote complaining vigorously; from earlier sense, row, furore
- Observer: The only 'crab' we have against this is that cavalry of old effected most of their success by charging infantry. (1927)

**niggle (1886)** Compare earlier sense, small cramped handwriting
- Times Literary Supplement: In view... of the fact that his book should... go into a second edition... one or two minor niggles may conveniently be ventilated. (1974)

**crab (1918)** From the verb crab complain, find fault
- Observer: The only 'crab' we have against this is that cavalry of old effected most of their success by charging infantry. (1927)

**beef (1888)** Orig US; also applied to a ground for complaint; from the verb beef complain
- Daily Express: The beef is, Why should every battle we fight have to be a 'Battle of Britain'? (1945)

**squawk (1909)** Orig US; applied to a sudden vociferous complaint; from earlier sense, short high-pitched cry
- Marghanita Laski: They was just told to shut down and shut down they did... there wasn't a squawk out of none of them. (1948)

**moan (1911)** Orig services' slang; in this use probably a nominalization of moan complain, grumble (although this is not recorded until later) rather than a slang revival of earlier standard English moan complain, lament
- Times: It's the one moan I have about international rugby. There ought... to be referees from neutral countries. (1974)

**grouch (1913)** Orig US; from earlier sense, (a fit of) ill humour; ultimately a variant of grutch complaint, from the verb grutch complain
- George Orwell: Part of his grouch was that he had tried to join the Air Force... and always been put off. (1940)

**bleat (1916)** Applied to a feeble complaint; from earlier sense, sound made by a sheep
- Nevil Shute: She don't half carry on about the beer I drink. (1947)
Thought and Communication

12. Criticism

Adverse criticism, disapprobation

the bird (1884) Orig theatrical slang, applied specifically to a show of disapproval by an audience, especially in the form of hissing; usually in the phrases get the bird, give someone the bird; compare earlier obsolete the big bird in same sense, and goose express disapproval of by hissing. ■ P. G. Wodehouse: Would a Rudge audience have given me the bird a few years ago? (1928)

stick (1956) British: from earlier sense, punishment (as if) by beating with a stick; usually in such phrases as get some stick, give someone stick. ■ Daily Telegraph: I told him that he could expect trouble from the branches. . . . He will come in for some stick over this. (1980)

bad mouth (1960) Orig US; applied to disparaging remarks or maligning; from earlier sense, curse, spell; ultimately a translation of da na ma in the Vai language of southern Liberia and Sierra Leone, or of some similar expression in various other African or West Indian languages. ■ Fortune: The bad-mouth went out over the CB network. Every accident was blamed on the anti-skid brake. (1979)

flak (1968) Orig US; from earlier sense, anti-aircraft fire. ■ Times: When someone left the office lights
on during a power crisis, they . . . got a good deal of flack in the morning. (1981)

licks (1971) US; from lick a blow, beating ■ Time: Barbara Streisand's A Star is Born does not deserve the licks it has got from Jay Cocks. (1977)

An instance of adverse criticism

rap (1777) Orig US; from earlier sense, a blow ■ National Observer (US): 'Mr Fixit' is coming to town, and that is no rap on Jimmy Carter. More than anything else, the American people want government to work. (1977)

slam (1884) US ■ R. L. Duncan: I don't take that description as a slam. I was a great piece of ass. (1980)

crack (1923) Orig US; applied to a sharp (humorous) remark criticizing someone; often in the phrase make a crack at; from earlier sense, brisk conversation, news ■ Listener: Mr Davis's book . . . is devoid of 'personalities' in the malignant sense, except for one snide (and unworthy) crack at Pope Paul VI on page 114. (1967)

side-sweep (1924) Applied to an indirect or passing criticism; from earlier sense, glancing blow ■ Annual Register: He allowed himself one side-sweep at the security services, declaring that 'the £60 million spent on these services under the right hon. gentleman's premiership have been less productive . . . than the security services of the News of the World.' (1964)

swipe (1932) Usually in such phrases as take a swipe at; from earlier sense, a blow ■ New Scientist: It only remained . . . for Mr Soper to have a swipe at the conservation intentions of the government, and it was all over. (1983)

hatchet job (1944) Applied to a fierce and unwarranted verbal attack on someone or something, especially in print, and especially one intended to ruin their reputation ■ Guardian: One critic . . . was the meanest son of a bitch that ever lived. His criticism was a hatchet job on every book. (1959)

To speak or write critically or disparagingly of; to criticize

roast (1782) ■ P. G. Wodehouse: I've an idea . . . that the critics will roast it. (1920)

slate (1848) From earlier obsolete sense, scold ■ George Saintsbury: You slated this [book], and it has gone through twenty editions. (1890)

get at someone (1891) ■ John Osborne: Don't look hurt. I'm not getting at you. I love you very much. (1957)

knock (1882) Orig US ■ Kingsley Amis: I shouldn't like you to get the idea I'm trying to knock Portugal and the Portuguese. (1956)

rap (1906) Orig US, often journalistic; from earlier sense, hit ■ Boston Globe: Teachers rapped for failure to understand their pupils. (1967)

pan (1911) Often applied to a film, theatrical or musical performance, etc.; compare earlier sense, cook in a pan ■ Nicholas Blake: The lurid headline, 'Famous Woman Explorer Pans Domesticity.' (1939)


sandbag (1919) Orig & mainly US; from earlier sense, coerce, bully ■ Listener: Mr Heath and Mr Wilson sandbagging each other at televised press conferences. (1974)

soak (1925) US; dated; from earlier senses, punish, hit hard ■ H. L. Foster: I found that we had on board . . . the man whose newspaper soaked my last book. (1925)

bad-mouth (1941) Orig US; see bad mouth criticize ■ P. Booth: But now Jo-Anne was a bitter enemy who could be relied on to bad-mouth her at every opportunity. (1986)

blast (1953) Mainly journalistic; perhaps from earlier sense, destroy by explosion ■ Daily Mail: House of Commons fitness trainer Vicki Rose has blasted MPs for being one of the unhealthiest groups in Britain. (1991)

rubbish (1953) Orig & mainly Australian & New Zealand; from rubbish worthless material; compare trash criticize ■ Observer: His plight, and that of the cricketers, have both been latched on to as a chance, not to be missed, of rubbishing the Poms. (1975)

clobber (1955) From earlier sense, hit, beat up ■ Wallis & Blair: The Press sure clobbered Roger Law. . . Don't know why I got off so easy. (1955)

tee off on (1955) US; from tee off hit a golf ball off the tee, from the notion of hitting out ■ Harry Kurnitz: I thought you were about to tee off on Ben. . . Let's both stop making cracks. (1955)

take someone to the cleaners (1963) Compare earlier sense, deprive someone of all their money ■ Listener: I hoped Mr Carr might round on Mr Cousins and start taking the apprenticeship system to the cleaners. (1963)

dump on (or all over) someone (1966) Mainly US; denoting unfair criticism; from earlier sense, treat unfairly ■ Woman's Own: One minute I'm with a woman who makes me feel like a man, the next I'm with someone who's dumping all over me. (1965)

give someone a serve (1967) Australian ■ Sydney Morning Herald: One gets fed up to the neck of hearing spokesmen . . . who speak in the proudest Pommy accents roasting Australia and giving Australians a serve. (1983)

slag (1971) Usually followed by off ■ Eamon Dunphy: When the game starts, if things start going wrong, everyone blames them. Everyone slags them off. (1976)

bag (1975) Australian ■ Australian: It pains me to report that Choice, journal of the Australian Consumers' Association, bags Vegemite for having too much salt in it. (1986)

do a number on someone (1975) US

trash (1975) Mainly US; denoting condemning something as worthless; probably from earlier sense, discard as worthless; compare rubbish criticize ■ London Review of Books: She writes . . . yet another trashing of radical chic. This might be more gripping had she herself not trashed radical chic already. (1981)
Thought and Communication

13. Ridicule

To make fun of someone or something; mock, tease

rag (1808) British, dated; compare earlier sense, scold
- Times: The President is now ragged mercilessly on national television, by talk show hosts, by comics, and in cartoons. (1975)

kid (1811) Probably from the noun kid, in the sense "make a goat of" or "make a child of"
- Listener: Mrs O’Hare has, of course, come in for a lot of kidding and wry jokes. (1969)

josh, joss (1852) Orig US; origin unknown
- P. H. Kocher: When Pippin and Merry are reunited with their comrades... Gimli joshes them over and over as 'truants' who had to be rescued. (1972)

pull someone’s leg (1888) Often denoting making fun of someone by telling them something untrue
- Graham Greene: ‘You aren’t pulling my leg, are you?’ the sergeant said. ‘Not this time, sarge.’ (1938)

rot (1890) British, dated; compare rot nonsense, rubbish
- Ian Hay: We don’t do any work: we just rot Duck-face. We simply rag his soul out. (1914)

horse (1901) US, dated
- P. Buranelli: Always playing jokes on each other, they began to ‘horse’ each other cryptographically. (1928)

razz (1921) Orig US; from the noun razz

To insult

signify (1932) US, mainly Black English:
denoting making insulting remarks or insinuations
- C. Mitchell: I wasn’t signifying at her, but... if the shoe fits, wear it. (1969)

Insults, abuse

verbal (1973) British; often in the phrase give... some the verbal
- Observer: Each ‘ball’ consisted of a distinctly lethargic head-high bouncer... followed by a rousing collection of verbals (money will be paid to lip-reading viewers for translation). (1982)

Being criticized

on the pan (1923) US
- A. Aylesworth: Five college professors sitting around a table... A sixth professor who wasn’t there because he had snagged a job at a better institution, was on the pan. MacSnuff leaned across at the rest of us and contributed: ‘He’s an ignoramus!’ (1939)

Someone who speaks critically or disparagingly

knocker (1898) Orig US; from knock criticize + -er
- Shooting Times & Country Magazine: Today the ‘knockers’ seem to delight in slamming anything British. (1972)

Monday-morning quarterback (1932) US;

applied to someone who criticizes something (originally the play in an American football game) only with the benefit of hindsight

nitpicker (1951) Orig US; applied to a pedantic or captious critic; from the notion of searching minutely in hair to pick out the nits
- New Statesman: Some of the... modern buildings... which provide a real feast for art-historical nippers. (1964)

hatchet man (1952) Applied to someone who criticizes with great severity, especially in order to destroy a reputation: from earlier sense, hired killer
- News Chronicle: The Kennedy family went into action with a commando team of political hatchet-men. (1960)

back-seat driver (1955) Applied to someone who criticizes or attempts to direct without responsibility, or who controls affairs from a subordinate position: from earlier sense, passenger in the rear seat of a car who gives unsolicited directions to the driver
- Guardian: She [Margaret Thatcher] is not so much a backseat driver as an obstacle lying in the road. (1991)

To moderate one’s criticism

pull one’s punches (1934) Usually used in the negative: from earlier sense, lessen the force of one’s blows
- Time Out: The film pulls all its political punches, settling instead for sentimental narrative. (1977)

have a go at (1977) From earlier sense, attack
- Catherine Aird: Pathologists had hobbyhorses, too, and obesity was... Dr Dabbe’s. He was always having a go at Sergeant Gelven... about his weight. ‘See you soon,’ was his favourite form of greeting to the portly detective, ‘on my slab.’ (1977)

tear someone or something down (1978) US
- Isaac Bashevis Singer: The insolence of a writer tearing down a piece before it’s been performed! (1978)

have (or take) a pop at someone (1992)
British; compare earlier senses, hit someone, shoot at someone
- Daily Express: Tight-head prop Probyn has had a pop at England team boss Geoff Cooke for ditching him from the national side. (1993)

To speak sarcastically; to sneer

sling off (1900) Australian & New Zealand; often followed by at
- Richard Beilby: I wasn’t sling off at your religion. (1977)

chuck off (1901) Australian & New Zealand; often followed by at
- A. E. Manning: Your friends ‘chuck off’ at you for being a ‘goodie-goodie’. (1958)

To express derision or disapproval (of); to barrack; to tease

goose (1838) Theatrical slang; denoting expressing disapproval of a play, actor, etc. by hissing; from the hissing of geese

chiack, chyack (1853) Australian & New Zealand; see chi-hike
- K. S. Prichard: The rowdy bodgie youths kept seats near this group, chiacking the buxom, brassy-haired waitress as she rushed around with a tray-load of dishes and lively back-chat. (1967)

chi-hike, chi-ike (1874) From obsolete chi-hike a shout of salutation
- Spectator: Half a dozen chi-iking louts. (1962)

To express derision or disapproval (of); to barrack; to tease
the other girls used to razz me, call me ‘Duchess’ and say, ‘Look at her, she thinks she’s a lady.’ (1956)

**rib (1930)** Orig US: from the dialect sense, beat someone on the ribs  ■ L. P. Hartley: When the chaps rib her she doesn’t quite know how to act up. (1955)

take the mickey (or micky, mike, Michael) (out of) (1935) Mainly British; origin unknown  ■ Lionel Davidson: Jesus, did we take the Michael! We used to chat ‘em up, these old bats out looking for prospects. (1966)  ■ B. W. Aldiss: Geordie looked anxiously at me, in case I thought he was taking the micky too hard. (1971)  ■ Berkeley Mather: Watch it. . . . The Swami don’t dig taking the mike out of the gods. (1973)

**wise off (1943)** US; denoting being cheeky  ■ North smart-mouth (1976)  ■ L. P. Hartley: When Hope replied ‘He’s a Hungarian’ he thought at first he was taking the micky too hard. (1971)  ■ Berkeley Mather: Watch it. . . . The Swami don’t dig taking the mike out of the gods. (1973)

get someone at it (1958)  ■ Frank Norman: He had get someone at it stuff. (1981)

take the piss (out of) (1945) British.  ■ R. Hill: When Hope replied ‘He’s a Hungarian’ he thought at first he was taking the piss. Wield seemed prepared to accept this as a serious contribution, however. (1978)

**pull someone’s pisser penis, a jocular substitution for leg**  ■ B. W. Aldiss: He was pulling your pisser, Wal. Malaria’s no worse than a cold to the Wogs, is it, Bamber? (1971)

**smart-mouth (1976)** US; denoting being cheeky to someone or being witty at their expense  ■ J. L. Hensley: He . . . beat up three kids . . . when one of them smart-mouthed him. (1978)

**wind someone up (1979)** British; often denoting making fun of someone by telling them something untrue; from the notion of activating something with a winding mechanism  ■ Match: All he kept saying was ‘boss, you’re kidding me, boss you’re winding me up’. (1987)

Ridicule

razoo, razzoo, razzooh (1890) North American; often in the phrases give the razoo to ridicule, get the razoo be ridiculed; probably an alteration of raspberry, razzberry reprimand, censure, with arbitrary suffix -oo, perhaps after razoo  ■ Washington Post: Yesterday’s hero, Fidel Castro, now gets the lustiest Bronx razzos since Adolf Hitler was flipping his wig for the cameras. (1959)

An instance of mocking; send-up

**leg-pull (1915)** From pull someone’s leg make fun of someone  ■ John Ardagh: His whole operation might be partly a leg-pull at the expense of serious literature. (1970)

mickey-take, micky-take (1968) British; from take the micky mock  ■ Listener: He parried Kenneth Allsop’s micky-take. (1968)

piss-take (1977) British; from take the piss mock  ■ Spare Rib: It’s a bit of a piss-take, sending up the whole bisexuality thing. (1977)

**wind-up (1984)** British; from wind someone up make fun of someone  ■ Times: My recollection of this is quite clear. I thought it was a wind-up to be honest with you. (1984)

Someone who mocks or ridicules

**kinder (1888)** From kid mock, tease + -er  ■ P. G. Wodehouse: ‘Mr Winklethorpe told me I was very good with the wooden clubs,’ she said defiantly. ‘He’s a great kidder,’ said Ramsden. (1922)

**piss-taker (1976)** British; from take the piss mock  ■ New Society: ‘What’s funny about a jeweller? . . . He’s a piss taker. (1976)

Mocking

sarky (1912) British; from sarcastic + -y  ■ Diary of a Public School Girl: Made some currant buns. Bob very sarky about them. (1930)

An object of ridicule

**fright (1751)** Dated  ■ Harrison Ainsworth: ‘You mustn’t marry that ridiculous old fright’, she whispered. (1864)

**sight (1862)** Applied to a ridiculous or shocking spectacle  ■ William Faulkner: ‘Ain’t he a sight now,’ Snopes cackled. (1940)

**sketch (1917)** Dated  ■ J. B. Priestley: You do look a sight, Dad. . . . I never saw such a sketch. (1930)

14. Assent & Refusal

**Expressions of assent, agreement, or acceptance**

OK, ok, okay, okey, okey-doke, okey-dockey, etc. (1839) Orig US; from original adjectival sense, satisfactory  ■ Dawn Powell: He saw that tiresome red-faced fellow . . . , the man who knew everybody and said ‘oike-dokie’ to everything. (1936)  ■ J. Montgomery: By mid-1929, when sound films had spread across Britain, there was hardly a town or village without some child who was saying ‘O.K.’ when previously he would have said ‘Yes’. (1957)

yes siree, yes sirree (1846) Mainly US; siree probably from obsolete dialect sirry, from sir  ■ Billie Holiday: Yes siree bob, life is just a bowl of cherries. (1956)

I don’t mind if I do (c1847) Often used specifically in accepting the offer of a drink
you bet, you bet you (1857) Orig US • S. E. White: ‘He’s a quick thinker, then,’ said Bob. ‘You bet you!’ (1910)
yah, ya, yar (1863) Orig a dialectal form, but in recent British use representing the speech of ‘Sloane Rangers’; a variant of yea or yes • Telegraph Sunday Magazine: ‘Can I tempt you with a crouton?’ ‘Yah, absolutely!’ (1986)
right-o, right-oh, right-ho (1896), rightly-oh, righty-ho (1927) • Rudyard Kipling: We’ll expect her at nine, then, . . . Right-o! (1930) • Joyce Porter: ‘I should make it now, Prissy.’ . . . ‘Rightie-ho!’ Lady Priscilla set off . . . for the kitchen. (1973)
same here (1896) Denoting agreement, especially as applied to one’s own case • Harry Kemelman: ‘To tell the truth, I think it was the rebbitzin that wrote it and he signed it.’ ‘Same here.’ (1972)
sure thing (1896) Orig US • Dorothy Sayers: ‘Should you care to make one in our next doped raid?’ ‘Sure thing. When do you expect it?’ (1933)
yeah (1905) Orig US; a variant of yes • B. Langley: ‘The shooting. That was Tony.’ ‘Tony?’ ‘Yeah, he done that.’ (1977)
yup (1906) Orig US; a variant of yes • John Irving: ‘Is that you, Roger?’ ‘Yup.’ (1978)
too right (1919) Australian & New Zealand • Zigzag: Something better change—too right mate! (1977)
not half (1920) From earlier adverbial sense, considerably, emphatically • James Curtis: ‘My God, you got the gaff weighed up good.’ ‘Not half. A bloke drummed it for me and put me wide.’ (1936)
right on (1925) Orig US • Black World: If Marx were alive he could see his way clear to say to this observation, ‘Right on, Brother!’ (1973)
fair enough (1926) • Agatha Christie: Wilbraham considered. ‘Fair enough,’ he said at last. ‘I agree.’ (1934)
not much (1926) Ironically from earlier sense, certainly not • Angus Ross: ‘Got a going over, did you?’ ‘Not much, I got a going over. Want to see the bruises?’ (1970)
you’re telling me (1932) Denoting strong concurrence • Times: When he declares that ‘overeatness has its dangers’ . . . the layman is inclined to reply ‘You’re telling me.’ (1954)
I wouldn’t (or won’t) say no (1939) Denoting (unenthusiastic) acceptance • Economist China . . . wants Saudi investment in China. It would not say no to the sort of cheap loans it has coaxed out of other oil producers like Kuwait. (1987)
natch (1945) Orig US; colloquial abbreviation of naturally • Peter Wildblood: ‘You don’t mean to say,’ she whispered tragically, ‘that we’re going to eat?’ ‘Why, natch. We’re going to have another drink first, though.’ (1957)

wilco, willco (1946) Orig services’ slang; an abbreviation of will comply, used to express acceptance of instructions, especially those received by radio or telephone • David Beaty: ‘Please clear the runway quickly for the President’s StarJet’ . . . ‘Wilco,’ he said. (1977)
ten-four, 10-4 (1942) Orig & mainly US; originally a radio code phrase signifying ‘message received’, one of a set of such phrases, all beginning with the number ten, used by the police in the USA and later adopted by Citizens’ Band radio operators, and hence used more broadly as a message of affirmation

An endorsement, acceptance, or authorization

OK, ok, okay, okey (1841) Orig US; from original adjectival sense, satisfactory • Review of English Studies: It is Pound who is to give the O.K. to the gods (not to God). (1956) • Freedoms: Nothing goes down without his okay. (1973)
say-so (1902) Orig US; compare earlier sense, affirmation, assertion • W. Fabian: ‘Give ‘em to me.’ ‘Not without Bob’s sayso.’ (1924)

the all-clear (1936) Denoting authorization to proceed with something; from earlier sense, signal giving information that there is no further danger

the nod (1948) Orig US; in such phrases as get the nod and give the nod; from the notion of signalling assent by nodding the head

Permission

open slather (1919) Australian & New Zealand; denoting the opportunity to act without restraint; slather from the British dialect and US verb slather use in large quantities, squander • B. Scott: The bloke who finished first was to have open slather with Maria. (1977)

to assent to, authorize, endorse

OK, ok, okay, okey (1888) Orig US; from original adjectival sense, satisfactory • R. S. Woodworth: Not that Freud would OK our account of dreams up to this point. Far from it. (1921)

To accept with reluctance

lump (1833) Usually in the phrase lump it; often in the phrase like it or lump it; from earlier obsolete sense, sulk • Cosmopolitan: I am the eccentric Squire of Sayle and I do things in my own eccentric way and if you don’t like it you can lump it because I have got the money and you haven’t. (1992)

wear (1925) Usually used in the negative; often in the phrase wear it • P. H. Johnson: The mother said this was very kind but that Peter would never—she was given to girlish slang—wear it. (1970)

Expressions of refusal, denial, or rejection

no siree, no sirree (1848) Mainly US; siree probably from obsolete dialect sirry, from sir • Joseph Di Mona: The senator wouldn’t protect him. No siree. (1973)
no sir, nossir (1856) Mainly US. ■ Edmund McGirr: Joe Silverman don’t like his neck being breathed down. Nossir. (1868) ■ Listener: In Texas, do you think they’re going to inquire about the hanging of the venison...? No, sir. They wonder if there’s any shepherd’s pie. (1973)

nothing (1883) Orig US; used to express denial or rejection of what someone has just said ■ T. Barling: ‘It just slipped out.’ ‘Slipped nothing. You couldn’t resist.’ (1974)

not much (1886) ■ Arnold Bennett: Do you suppose I was going to let you go by that steamer? Not much. (1911)

no fear (1887) ■ Arnold Bennett: I invite him to dinner! And in his own hotel! No fear! (1930)

nope (1888) Orig US; extended form of no ■ H. C. Rae: ‘Anybody asking for me?’ ‘Nope.’ (1971)

not likely (1893) ■ George Bernard Shaw: Walk! Not bloody likely. . . . I am going in a taxi. (1914) ■ C. E. Montague: The German sentries said, ‘Go back, or we shall have to shoot.’ The Englishmen said ‘Not likely!’ advanced to the German wire, and asked again for an officer. (1922)

not on your life (1896) Orig US ■ Harry Carmichael: ‘Why not get in touch with your lawyer?’ ‘Not on your life! . . . It would be a tacit admission of my guilt.’ (1972)

nix (1902) Denoting refusal; also used in the phrase nix on to signify emphatic rejection; from the noun nix nothing ■ Dorothy Sayers: If you do earn your thousand pounds you can stick it, d’you hear? Stick it right up where it belongs. I don’t want a penny of it. (1971)

nothing doing (1910) ■ People: It was suggested that she should come incognito. Nothing doing. (1947)

nah, na (1920) Representing a colloquial or vulgar pronunciation of no ■ New Society. The waiter knows better. ‘Nah, you don’t want herrings, I’m gonna give you the soup.’ (1966)

stick (1922) Used in various phrases expressing contemptuous rejection, usually with the underlying idea of inserting an object into the anus ■ Peter Driscoll: If you do earn your thousand pounds you can stick it, d’you hear? Stick it right up where it belongs. I don’t want a penny of it. (1971)

no soap (1926) Orig and mainly US ■ Edmund Crispin: ‘The police tried to trace the handkerchief, I take it?’ ‘They did, but no soap.’ (1977)

I should cocoa (or cocoa) (1936) Rhyming slang for ‘I should say so’: cocoa probably a fanciful use of cocoa chocolate drink ■ Olive Norton: What me? . . . I should coco. Sheila’d think I was off my head. (1967)

over my dead body (1936) ■ Times: If the number of distinguished gentlemen who cry ‘Over my dead body’ really mean what they say, this will be a fairly lethal summer in Whitehall. (1963)

not on your Nelly (1941) Nelly short for Nelly Duff, rhyming slang for puff (breath of) life—i.e. ‘not on your life’ ■ Globe & Mail (Toronto): I appear to be giving away most of the plot? Not on your nelly. That’s only the beginning. (1974)

not Pygmalion likely (1949) Euphemism for ‘not bloody likely’, which occurs in Shaw’s Pygmalion (1914) and caused a sensation at the time of the play’s first London production (see at not likely, above) ■ G. Fallon: ‘Are you thinking of joining in?’ ‘Not Pygmalion likely,’ Bland returned brusquely. (1967)

stuff (1955) Used in various phrases expressing contemptuous rejection, usually with the underlying idea of inserting an object into the anus ■ Joyce Porter: He should have taken a stronger line. . . . Told old Crouch to stuff it. (1973)

no way (1968) Orig US ■ New Yorker: He said he wouldn’t start up a gang today—no way. (1975)

Refusing assent

not having any (1902) ■ A. L. Rowe: Lady Mary Hastings was thought of for promotion to the bed of Ivan the Terrible. She was not having any. (1955)

A refusal, rejection, rebuff

thumbs-down (1929) From spectators in Roman amphitheatres signalling that a defeated gladiator should be killed by extending the thumb downwards ■ Daily Telegraph (heading): Baldwin statue gets thumbs down from Foot. (1982)

brush-off (1941) Orig US ■ Monica Dickens: The bleakly familiar: ‘The post has been filled’, or the more courteous brush-off: ‘We will keep your letter on record in case a suitable post arises’. (1958)

Something that must not be done

no-no (1942) Repudification of no expressing refusal ■ Sunday Advocate-News (Barbados): Plants that require a great deal of moisture are no-noes unless you have your own well. (1975)

To refuse, reject

nix (1903) US; from the noun nix nothing ■ Tucson (Arizona) Daily Citizen (heading): Nude bathing mixed. (1973)

To refuse to give something

hold out on (1907) Orig US; often denoting refusal to give information ■ Gavin Black: If I find out that you’ve been holding out on me over this identification, I’ll come down on you like a pile driver. (1972)
15. Nonsense

**rubbish (1612)** Often used interjectionally; from earlier sense, worthless stuff, trash. ■ *Mail on Sunday.* In the leaflets was rubbish about the ‘plot of worldwide Jewry’. (1981)

**balderdash (1674)** Often used interjectionally; compare earlier sense, froth; ultimate origin unknown. ■ *Economist.* In May, the development corporation wrote giving notice that it would end the management agreement, which, it claimed, the council itself had repudiated by conducting its survey. That is balderdash, says the council. (1988)

**hogwash (1712)** From earlier sense, kitchen swill, etc. for pigs. ■ *Spectator.* The whole of the artistic world has been debauched by the hogwash of the do-it-yourself vogue. (1965)

**all my eye (and Betty Martin) (1768)** Often used interjectionally; from *balls* (1857)

**twaddle (1782)** Alteration of obsolete *twattle* idle talk, itself perhaps an alteration of *tattle* in the same sense. ■ Sir Frederick Treves: He was guided by personal... experience, and not by the twaddle of theorists. (1906)

**blatherskite, bletherskite (1825)** From earlier sense, person who talks rubbish. ■ Colin Wilson: For Nietzsche... there is no such thing as abstract knowledge; there is only useful knowledge and unprofitable blatherskite. (1956)

**rot (1848)** Often used interjectionally. ■ Eugene O’Neill: It’s damned rot! I’d like to see anyone influence Edmund more than he wants to be. (a1953)

**bosh (1850)** Often used interjectionally; from Turkish *boz* empty. ■ William Gaddis: A lot of bosh, of course, but it gives these fool scientists something to do. (1952)


**bunkum (1862)** Variant of obsolete *huncombe,* from Buncombe County, North Carolina, USA, whose member gave an irrelevant speech in Congress c1820 simply to impress his constituents. ■ *Wall Street Journal.* ‘That’s bunkum,’ says Terence Meaden, a local meteorologist. ‘The idea that there is some intelligence operating is pure fantasy.’ (1989)

**poppycock (1865)** Orig US; from Dutch dialect *pappevak* soft excrement. ■ *Punch.* If you still think that harmonisation is so much Brussels poppycock... then draw comfort from this statistic. (1977)

**puck (1869)** From earlier sense, rotten wood. ■ *Times.* I don’t like the family Stein. There is Gert, there is Ep, there is Ein. Gert’s writings are punk, Ep’s statues are junk, Nor can anyone understand Ein. (1973)

**flapdoodle (1878)** Origin unknown; compare earlier sense (1833–66) ‘the stuff they feed fools on’ Frederick Marryat. ■ *Daily Telegraph.* It’s the one form of theatre which never calls for explanation or critical flapdoodle. (1987)

**guff (1884)** Orig US; from earlier sense, puff, whiff. ■ *Crescendo.* The sleeve-notes give us a lot of guff about getting with it and so on and tell us nothing constructive. (1966)

**tommy-rot (1884)** From the male first name Tommy. ■ Nicholas Blake: You know what the other side says—... ‘Woman’s place is in the kitchen’—all the rest of that Neanderthal tommy-rot. (1939)

**piffle (1890)** Often used interjectionally; from the earlier verb *piffle* talk triflingly. ■ *Guardian.* Faber used to be a good publisher under Geoffrey Faber and T. S. Eliot, but nowadays it just produces middlebrow, patronising piffle. (1992)

**tosh (1892)** Orig unknown. ■ J. Morris: Anna Novochka also denies it: pure tosh, she says. (1965)

**squeit (1893)** British; compare earlier sense, small or insignificant person. ■ Arnold Wesker: Love? I don’t believe in any of that squeit—we just got married. (1959)

**crap (1898)** From earlier sense, excrement. ■ *Punch.* And what a load of crap that was. (1964)

**bunk (1900)** Orig US; abbreviation of *bunkum* ■ Henry Ford: History is more or less bunk. (1916)

**drool (1900)** Orig US; from earlier sense, spittle. ■ Nicolas Freeling: He switched the radio on—no short wave, and the medium band was filled with drool. (1966)

**bilge (1908)** From earlier sense, foul matter that collects in the bottom of a ship’s hull. ■ P.G. Wodehouse: She wrote this novel and it was well received by the intelligentsia, who notoriously enjoy the most frightful bilge. (1954)

**bullshit (1914)** Orig US. ■ Douglas Adams: ‘With half the wealth of the former Galactic Empire stored on it somewhere it can afford to look frumpy.’ Bullshit, thought Ford. (1979)

**claptrap (1915)** From earlier sense, language designed to catch applause. ■ *Times.* Cannot our educationists turn away from the pretentious claptrap put about during the past 20 years? (1955)

**garbage (1918)** From earlier sense, material of low quality. ■ *Mail on Sunday.* All this US against Them is a bunch of garbage. (1991)

**bollocks, ballocks (1919)** Often used interjectionally; from earlier sense, testicles. ■ *It.* It’s really a load of bollocks. (1969)

**drip (1919)** Orig US. ■ B. Gray: ‘We’ll have nothing of the sort,’ interrupted Joy, putting a welcome stop to this drip. (1946)

**baloney, boloney (1922)** Orig US; often used interjectionally; commonly regarded as from...
Bologna (sausage), but the connection remains
conjectural. John Braine: All that baloney about going
upstairs to play a harp or downstairs to roast. (1959)

gup (1924) British; from earlier Anglo-Indian
sense; gossip; from Hindustani gup. Punch: Need
I give the jury any more of this gup? (1927)

hooey (1924) Orig US; often used
interjectionally; origin unknown. Germaine
Greer: The horse between a girl’s legs is supposed to be a

macaroni (1924) Mainly Australian; rhyming
slang for baloney. Joseph von Sternberg: What is
flushed from the projector overhead will be the same old
macaroni. (1965)

heifer dust (1927) Dated

horse feathers (1928) US; from the
incongruity of the notion of a horse having
feathers. John Gardner: Mostyn pointed out that . . .
they could court-martial him in camera. . . . On reflection,
Bosie realised that this was all a load of horse feathers. (1967)

eyewash (1930) From earlier sense, specious
talk, humbug. Economist: This does not mean that the
proposals . . . are so much eyewash. (1957)

shit (1930) From earlier sense, excrement.
Rolling Stone: I enjoyed Simmons’ logic that Shakespeare
is ‘shit’ simply because he can’t understand it. (1977)

pills (1935) From pills testicles. I. Miller: I explained
to him about the prayers. ‘Awful pills,’ I whispered; ‘but it
can’t be helped.’ (1935)

tripe (1935) Sometimes used interjectionally;
from earlier sense, material of low quality.
Church Times: Bomber Harris, who initially said, ‘The idea
is tripe,’ could be said to have been proved right. (1993)

cock (1937) Mainly British; from earlier sense,
fictitious narrative, short for cock-and-bull story.
Louis McIntosh: What he usually improvised was just a
load of cock. (1956)

phooey (1946) From phooey interjection
expressing incredulity, probably influenced by
hoopy nonsense. Raymond Chandler: So let’s not have
any more of that phooey about ‘as literature my stuff still
stinks’. (1946)

crud (1951) From earlier sense, dirt, filth.
T. Sturgeon: Would you say that . . . the writer of all this
crud, believes . . . in what he writes? (1955)

cobbler (1955) British; often used
interjectionally; from earlier sense, testicles.
Melody Maker: Geno Washington says Grapefruit’s recent
attack on the Maryland Club, Glasgow, was ‘a load of cobbler’s.
They are one of the best audiences in Britain, says Geno. (1968)

horse shit (1955) US; often used interjectionally.
It: ‘This is definitely the weekend of the big bust!’ ‘Horseshit!
You’ve said the same thing for the past six weekends!’ (1970)

crut (1958) US; variant of crud in same sense.

shuck (1958) From earlier sense, something of
little value. G. Lea: I know about double negative too,
but that’s a lot of shuck. (1958)

rolllooks (1961) Usually used interjectionally;
euphemistic alteration of rolllocks. B. Wells:
‘Rolllocks!’ said Maguire and his voice was deliberately gruff to
hide his embarrassment. (1961)

cod, cods, cod’s (1963) British; abbreviation of
codswallop. Miles Tripp: If you think it all a load of cod’s
why the hell waste a pound? (1970)

codswallop (1963) Mainly British; origin
unknown, despite popular theories of a Mr Cod
and his beer. Allan Prior: All that stuff about mutual
respect between police and criminal was a load of old
codswallop. (1966)

rhubarb (1963) Compare earlier theatrical use
to denote the murmur of conversation. Telegraph
(Brisbane): They gave me some rhubarb about violating the
firework zone. (1976)

shmegeggy, shmeegegge, etc. (1968) US;
from earlier sense, idiot.

Unintelligible language; gibberish.

double Dutch (1876) Daily Mail. Since, in the
popular mind, the Scots are somehow ‘out there’—another
country, so to speak—the fact that it all sounds like double-
Dutch only adds to the impression. (1991)

Insincere or exaggerated talk intended to flatter or
deceive; humbug or flattery.

See at Sincerity & Insincerity (pp. 278–81).

dreadfully (1897) Qualifying words denoting an
undesirable state of affairs; from earlier sense, badly.
Punch: Half-a-dozen dreadfully common young
bicyclists were commenting on her discomfiture with delighted
exclamations of ‘Giddy old Kipper’, ‘Sweet Seventeen’,
‘Cheero, Maude—you’ll win!’ (1907)

whopping (1706) Used with adjectives denoting
large size, especially great. Boot & Thomas: It
of course, so to speak—the fact that it all sounds like double-

Texas trouser snake. (1976)

16. Emphatic Language

Very, extremely

as anything (1542) Frederick Raphael: The soft
toys were cuddlesome as anything. (1985)

filthy (1616) Now only in the phrases filthy dirty,
filthy rich, and filthy great (the last on the analogy
of dirty great). J. B. Priestley: I organise these parties
for her—she’s filthy rich. (1954)

deadly (1688) From earlier sense, fatally.
Guardian: Matisse, visiting in 1930, described the town as
‘deadly dull’. (1992)
mighty (1715) From earlier sense, greatly
- *Times*: They left it till mighty near no-side before they got their noses thankfully in front. (1958)


thundering (1809) Dated - *Daily Mail*: Too experienced to let even a thundering smart girl swing it on him as easily as that. (1923)

awful (1818) From the adjective awful - *R. D. Paine*: A Prairie town called Follansbee that looks awful good to me. (1923)

as sin (1821) In the phrases (as) ugly as sin, (as) miserable as sin - *Nevil Shute*: I think it looks ugly as sin, and it’s starting to ponk a bit. (1944)

real (1827) Orig Scottish & US; from earlier sense, really, genuinely - *Daily Mirror*: I’m havin’ a rest—I feel real listless. (1976)

rattling (1829) Dated; used especially in the phrase rattling good - *A. G. Hays*: This is a rattling good story. (1930)

fearfully (1835) British - *Dorothy Sayers*: I’m really fearfully sorry you copped that packet that was meant for me. (1933)

jolly (1838) British; from earlier standard use as an intensifier, originally in the sense ‘pleasantly’ - *S. Thompson*: Jolly lucky the C.O. didn’t notice it yesterday—he gets ‘baity’ on these occasions. (1921)

not half (1851) - *Parker & Allerton*: It doesn’t half nark them. (1962)

whacking (1853) Used with adjectives denoting large size, especially great - *Guardian*: It was either a whacking great asteroid crash or a massive slurping of lava in the Deccan plateau in India 65 million years ago. (1992)

awfully (1859) British; from earlier sense, so as to inspire awe - *John Galsworthy*: Thanks, old man, awfully good of you—will you bob in, then? (1924)

veddy (1859) Often jocular; representing a whacking - *Saturday Evening Post*: Glad! You’re howling right I’m glad. (1928)

cracking (1903) Used in the phrase cracking good - *Ian Cross*: Probably turning out to be a cracking-good saint. (1957)

stiff (1905) Used especially after bore and scare - *English*: Billy Temple, who announced in Westminster School Hall that ‘the longer poems of Milton bored him stiff’. (1956)

stinkingly (1906), stinking (1926) Denoting excessiveness; mainly in the phrases stinking(ly) drunk, stinking(ly) rich - *Margaret Kennedy*: He is . . . frightfully good-looking . . . and stinkingly rich. (1951)

Ngaio Marsh: She was in affluent circumstances, stinking rich in fact. (1978)

pink (1922) In the phrase tickled pink extremely pleased - *Scottish Daily Express*: We are tickled pink that we were able to come home to do the concert at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall. (1976)

all (1932) - *Daily Telegraph*: You can spoof politics, sports, business—but when it comes to religion, they get all upset. (1991)

plenty (1934) US - *R. M. Pirsig*: This notebook gets plenty grease-smeared and ugly. (1974)

piss- (1940) Used in such compound adjectives as piss-poor, piss-wet, - *J. Antoine*: ‘Here we are,’ I said to Joe. ‘On a piss-wet cliff and there’s no bloody water for a brew!’ (1974)

rigid (1943) Used especially after bore and scare; modelled on stiff - *K. Campbell*: It’s no tourist place, I assure you . . . You’d be bored rigid. (1972)

zonking (1958) British; used before adjectives denoting positive quality or large size - *Times*: Rather than play these zonking great parts . . . I will try to find some dazzling little cameo roles. (1976)

thumping (1961) Used with adjectives denoting large size, especially great - *Independent on Sunday*: By then, the fraudster could be on his way to the Bahamas and you could be on your way to a thumping great overraft. (1991)

mucho (1973) Orig US; from Spanish mucho very - *Tucson Magazine*: Your magazine is mucho enjoyable. (1978)

mondo (1979) Orig & mainly US; from Italian mondo world - *New York Press*: When your train finally does arrive—especially if you’re taking the mondo weirdo J, M or Z train—you always end up the only humanoid in a car. (1990)

stonking (1980) British; used before adjectives denoting positive quality or large size - *Independent*: When they’ve got their dosh, they go out and have a stonking good time. (1990)

seriously (1981) Orig US; mainly in such phrases as seriously rich - *Daily Mail*: They could be called the Trumps of Texas—seriously wealthy with a penchant for flaunting that wealth. (1991)

well (1986) - *Face*: A city where Walters is ‘well sound’ and Led Zeppelin are ‘a better buzz’. This is Liverpool in 1988. (1989)

way (1988) - *New Musical Express*: When we recorded it originally I doubled up the drums and it sounded way Gary Glitter, way Clash. (1990)
thundering (1618) Dated. J. M. Barrie: Such a thundering lie. (1900)

defearful (1634) Daily Mail. We cut instantly to a terrible old boxing film with . . . Lee Marvin getting a fearful thumping. (1991)

frightful (1752) Ngaio Marsh: You’ll think me a frightful silly-billy. (1958)

(a or the) devil of a (1767) H. Pearson: Devil of a temper you’ve got, Doyle! By Crums, it’s hardly safe to go out with you. (1943)

(a or the, one) hell of a (1776) New Yorker. His forehand is a hell of a weapon. (1969)

ever such (1803) E. M. Delafield: My Pops says I’m ever such a lucky girl to have such heaps of friends. (1933)

awful (1818) From earlier sense, very bad Winston Churchill: Please excuse bad writing as I am in an awful hurry. (Many kisses.) xwx WSC. (1894)

almighty (1824) Observer. There was an almighty fuss when Tim Rice, lyricist, was admitted to the Cricket Writers’ Club. (1991)

one (1828) Now mainly US; see also one hell of a, one helluva. Joseph Di Mona: Tell everyone I’m not one helluva motherless broke, like I was in Sydney.’ (1946)  

unholy (1842) From earlier sense, impious New Scientist. The bitter pill of generic substitution was leaked to the press, and created a totally unwanted side effect: an unholy row. (1983)

howling (1865) Magnet. ‘You howling ass!’ shouted Bulstrode. ‘I tell you he’s busted my two-guinea camera.’ (1908)

(a or the, one) helluva (1910) helluva representing a casual pronunciation of hell of a Times. It’s very unfortunate looking like him: he must have a helluva life. (1968)

mucho (1942) Orig US; from Spanish mucho much, many. Making Music. Warm valve distortion sound, plus mucho volume make this an amp worthy of its chart placing. (1986)


Much, very much

a sight (1836). a damned (or damn) sight (1828) a sight from earlier sense, a great quantity Elizabeth Lemarchand: I’m a damn sight saner than people who spend their lives rat-racing and jabbering their heads off. (1969) Edmund Crispin: Be a sight cooler there than it is here, I reckon. (1977) Margaret Hinman: John realized his inspector was sparkling on all cylinders. He looked a damned sight fresher than Waller felt. (1977)

miles (1885) Nicolas Freeling: This hasn’t been done cold-bloodedly for money. . . . Makes it all miles easier. (1974)

way (1941) Orig US. Rolling Stone. He was a country & western singer and he drank way too much. (1977)

See also bags, heaps, loads, lots, no end, and a whole lot under A large amount at Quantity (pp. 398–9).

Completely, fully, utterly

plumb, plum (1587) Now mainly US; from earlier sense, exactly. Elizabeth Lemarchand: They must both be plum crazy. (1973)

dead (1589) From earlier sense, to the point of death Doris Lessing: ‘That’s right,’ said Charlie, ‘you’re dead right.’ (1983)

perfectly (1790) Dated. Queen Victoria: The pride of giving life to an immortal soul is very fine . . . perfectly furious as I was to be caught [= pregnant]. (1858)

proper (1816) Recorded in standard use in the 15th century Northern Echo. Alan Milburn, Darlington’s NHS conscious Labour candidate, has been proper poorly. (1992)

plenty (1842) Followed by an adjective of size and enough. M. E. Morgan: Cut the hood . . . making it plenty large enough to slip on easily over Dolly’s head. (1908)

good and (1885) Orig US. Bill Knox: [It] can wait until we’re good and ready. (1969)

motherless (1898) Australian; mainly in the phrase motherless broke K. S. Prichard: ‘But I know what it is to be hard up, don’t forget,’ he said. ‘Stony, motherless broke, like I was in Sydney.’ (1946)

Harry (1925) British; mainly nautical; used before adjectives and adverbs suffixed with -ers; from the male personal name Harry Lancet: Get in there, and strip off Harry Nuders. (1946) Guardian: In the old Imperial Aircraft days . . . the engineer would bring the old kite down harry plonkers on the grass. (1969)

tooting (1932) US; usually used with a preceding adverb Bernard Malamud: You’re plumb tootin’ crazy. (1952)

plain (1959) From earlier sense, simply Bridgewater Mercury. Others may have family problems, housing difficulties—or are just plain lonely. (1976)

totally (1972) Orig US; used as a simple intensive before adjectives, especially in such phrases as totally awesome, totally tubular, etc.; from earlier non-intensive use Washington Post. Scott Wallace is padded and pumped. . . . Awesome, man, totally awesome. (1981)

Complete, utter

regular (1821) John Rae: You’re becoming a regular creeping Jesus. (1960)

proper (1825) Recorded in standard usage from the 14th to the 17th centuries. Listener. The plebeian engineer was a proper Charlie to let himself be roped in for it. (1957)

pluperfect (1889) Dated; from earlier sense, more than perfect. Contact: I fully expect that we of the air service will lead the armies of pursuit and make ourselves a pluperfect nuisance to the armies of retreat. (1917)

pink (1896) Dated; mainly in the phrase the pink limit. Bruce Marshall: These rotten new kids really are the pink limit. (1946)
sweet (1958) Used in various phrases meaning ‘nothing at all’  
right (1960) British; from earlier sense, truly so called  
prize (1976) Probably in use earlier, but not recorded until 1976; from earlier sense, (worthy of) winning a prize  
Cursed

**damned** (1596) Used as an adjective and adverb; from the earlier adjectival sense, accursed; adverbial use first recorded in 1757  
confounded (1652) Dated; used as an adjective and adverb; from the past participle of confound, as used in various imprecations  
bloody (1676) Now mainly British & Australian; used as an adjective and adverb, and also sometimes as an infix; perhaps from earlier sense, bloodthirsty, cruel  
darn (1775) Used as an adjective and adverb; a clipped form of damned  
**drammed** (1959) Used as an adjective and adverb; from the earlier adjectival sense, cursed; adverbial use first recorded in 1757  
**dreaded** (1965) Dated; used as an adjective and adverb; from deuce, used in a range of imprecations  
dark (1789) Orig US; used as an adjective and adverb; euphemistic alteration of damn  
**blessed** (1806) Used as an adjective and adverb; used as a euphemistic substitute for cursed  
darned (1907) Orig US; used as an adjective and adverb; euphemistic alteration of damned  
**all-firedly** (1833) Mainly US; used as an adverb; from all-fired + -ly  
**concerned**, **consarned** (1834) US, dated; used as an adjective; compare earlier sense, troubled  
precious (1836) Used as an adjective; from earlier sense, egregious, arrant  
**all-fired** (1837) Mainly US; used as an adjective and adverb; probably a euphemistic alteration of hell-fired  
dad-blasted (1840), dad-blamed (1883), dad-gasted (1892) US; used as an adjective; dad euphemistic alteration of god  
dratted (1845) Dated; used as an adjective; from earlier sense, accursed  
**beastly** (1844) British; used as an adjective and adverb; from earlier sense, unpleasant(ly), offensive(ly)  
god-damn, god-damned (1844) Mainly US; used as an adjective and adverb; from the imprecation God damn (me, you, etc.)  
**droughted** (1854) Dated; used as an adjective; from earlier sense, literally dry  
doggone (1851) US; used as an adjective and adverb; from dog gone on it, a euphemistic substitute for God damn it  
gold-darned, gold-darned (1954), gold-dangered (1956) US; used as an adjective and adverb; euphemistic alteration of god-damned  
bleeding (1858) Mainly British & Australian; used as an adjective and adverb; used as a substitute, originally euphemistic, for bloody  
bloomed (1879) Mainly British & Australian; used as an adjective and adverb; used as an euphemistic substitute for bloody; from the notion of something being at full bloom, and hence at its extreme point  
**sweet** (1927) Sorry about it. (1924)
dashed (1881) Dated, mainly British; used as an adjective and adverb; from the past participle of dash stroke, used as a euphemistic substitute for damned. ■ P. G. Wodehouse: I've a dashed good mind to chuck the whole thing. (1932)

bally (1885) Mainly British; used as an adjective and adverb; used as a euphemistic substitute for bloody; perhaps from balls nonsense + -y. ■ Hugh Walpole: All the time behind you and them some force was insisting on places being taken, connections being formed. One was simply a bally pawn . . . a bally pawn. (1922)

dang, danged (1886) Mainly US; used as an adjective and adverb; euphemistic alteration of damn(ed) ■ W. A. Fraser: I was that danged near bushed, toward the last that I was feared I might go right on sleepin’. (1910)

blankety, blankety-blank (1888) Used as an adjective; used as a euphemistic substitute for bloody, damned, etc. ■ E. C. G. Lorac: I . . . knocked my head on those qualified rocks. (1949)

blistering (1889) Used as an adjective; used mainly before words denoting a fool (especially idiot); from the present participle of blither talk senselessly. ■ Gilbert Frankau: I was a blithering idiot to get in—knowing you as well as I do. (1926)

frigging (a1890) Used as an adjective and adverb; from the present participle of frig copulate, masturbate, used as a euphemistic substitute for fucking. ■ Keith Waterhouse: Take your frigging mucky hands off my pullover. (1959)

fucking (a1890) Used as an adjective and adverb; from the present participle of fuck copulate. ■ W. H. Auden: I'm so bored with the whole fucking crowd of you I could scream! (1969)

sanguinary (1890) Used as an adjective; used as a jocular or euphemistic substitute for bloody; from earlier sense, relating to blood. ■ G. B. Shaw: The inhabitants raise up their voices and call one another sanguinary liars. (1910)

flaming (1895) Used as an adjective and adverb; from earlier sense, burning hot. ■ Private Eye: He's saved my life if he only flamin' knew it. (1969)

plurry (1900) Australian & New Zealand; used as an adjective and adverb; euphemistically substituted for the expletive bloody. ■ R. D. Finlayson: It's all right for Pakeha's to spout bulls**s, but I wonder how to get manure for my plurry cow farm. (1938)

adjectival (1910) Euphemistically substituted for an expletive adjective (e.g. bloody). ■ Gladys Mitchell: Beresford told him to take his adjectival charity elsewhere. (1959)

flipping (1911) Mainly British; used as an adjective and adverb; a use of the present participle of the verb flip as a euphemistic substitute for fucking. ■ Guardian: They wax indignant about pornography but when it comes to doing anything about they are bone flipping lazy. (1971)

sodding (1912) British; used as an adjective and adverb; from the present participle of the verb sod, as used in imprecations. ■ Kingsley Amis: Cuts his own hair now, you see. Too sodding mean to pay out his one-and-six, that is what it is. My God. (1954) ■ Dirk Bogarde: I'll remember this sodding day until the day I die. (1980)

blinking (1914) British; used as an adjective and adverb; used as a euphemistic substitute for a strong expletive. ■ Observer: The type of golfer who . . . hurls the bag of clubs after it, accompanied by the remark, 'Go on, have the blinking lot'. (1927)

ruddy (1914) British; used as an adjective and adverb; euphemistic alteration of bloody. ■ Oxford Times: Most of the groups I heard there and elsewhere played too ruddy loud. (1979)

bloody (1922) Used as an adjective: from earlier sense, infected with pox. ■ Mervyn Peake: Every bloody sunrise of the year, eh, that you burst out of the decent darkness in that plucked way? (1950)

bee (1926) British; used as an adjective and adverb; a respelling of the letter B, used as a euphemistic substitute for bloody. ■ John Galsworthy: It's a bee nuisance. (1926)

mucking (1929) Used as an adjective and adverb; a euphemistic alteration of fucking. ■ Richard Adams: You'd better lend him a hand.... We'll be 'alf the mucking night else. (1974)

effing (1931) Used as an adjective and adverb; used as a euphemistic substitute for fucking, eff representing a spelling of its initial letter. ■ Private Eye: The relatives get effing tough. (1959)

hellishing, hellishun (1931) Mainly Australian & New Zealand; used as an adjective and adverb; from hellish + ing (as in fucking, sodding, etc.). ■ Edmund McGirr: I don't know that anybody ... has any knowledge of how hellishing thorough we are. (1958)


Pygmalion (1949) Used quasi-adverbially in the phrase not Pygmalion likely, a euphemism for not bloody likely; from the use of the phrase not bloody likely in G. B. Shaw's Pygmalion (1914), which caused a sensation at the time of the play's first London production. ■ G. Fallon: 'Are you thinking of joining in? 'Not Pygmalion likely,' Bland returned brusquely. (1967)

cotton-picking (1952) Orig Southern US; used as an adjective and adverb; compare earlier Southern US cotton-picker contemptible person
Thought and Communication

- Michael Kenyon: Damn Mickey McQuaid for ever bringing me to this pixilated, cotton-pickin' country. (1970)


**naffing** (1959) — British; used as an adjective and adverb; from the verb *naff* (off), used as a euphemistic substitute for *fuck* • Clement & La Frenais: Stealing your tin of naffing pineapple chunks? Not even my favourite fruit. (1976)

**steaming** (1962) — Used as an adjective • A. Garner: Roland! You great steaming chudd! Come back! (1965)

**mothering** (1968) — US; used as an adjective; from *mother* (short for *motherfucker*) + *-ing* • New Yorker: I'm out there cutting that mothering grass all day! (1975)

**pissingly** (1971), **pissing** (1974) — Used as an adverb • Peter Way: 'Pissing awful weather,' said Don. (1979)

Certainly, definitely

**bleeding** well (1884), **jolly** well (1898); **blooming** well (1907), **bloody** well (1921), **fucking** well (1922), **ruddy** well (1933), **damn** well (1941), **sodding** well (1962) • Evelyn Waugh: I should bleeding well say there was. (1928) • N. Fleming: If these jokers want to tail us, they've damn well got to do it properly from behind. Overtake and give them the shake. (1970) • William Gibson: You can fucking well buy me some clothes, okay? (1986)

Reinforcement formulae

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**my (colonial, etc.) oath** (1859) — Australian & New Zealand • John Wainwright: My oath—those couple of hours were some session. (1977)

**and how** (1865) — Orig US • Listener: 'Alas,' wrote Harrington, 'all earthly things do fail to mortals in enjoyment.' And how. (1965)

**sure 'nuff** • 'sho' • 'nuff** (1880) — US, mainly Black English; 'nuff' shortening of enough • J. D. Carr: He's sho' nuff in good shape and ought to thank you. (1971)

**cross my heart** (1908) — Used as an assertion of the truth of what one has said or of the sincerity of a promise; often in the phrase *cross my heart and hope to die*; from the notion of making the sign of the cross over one's heart • Angus Wilson: Cross her heart, might she die if she sneaked. (1952)

**py korry** (1938) — New Zealand; Maori alteration of by golly

**no shit** (1960) — US • Spectator (New Canaan High School, Connecticut): I turned to Steve and told him that Cheryl said he looked like a fruit because of his pants. I told him I liked his pants, no shit. (1978)

To the maximum extent

**with a vengeance** (1568) — From earlier sense, with a curse • Daily Chronicle: In Kiel, where the revolution started, matters appear to be going 'left' with a vengeance. (1918)

**like mad** (1653) • Daily Mail: Her 1958 Christmas card from John Lennon—on which he had written 'I love you like mad'—fetched £8,000 from a Japanese buyer. (1991)

**like anything** (1861) • Lewis Carroll: They wept like anything to see Such quantities of sand. (1872)

**like the devil** (1791) — Compare French *comme le diable* • Sylvia Plath: Each time I moved my feet hurt like the devil. (1963)

**and no mistake** (1818) — Used to emphasize a preceding statement • New Zealand Geographer: He was a tough old dag, and no mistake. (1945)

**like fun** (1825) — Dated

**like sin** (1840) • Mark Twain: I have been working like sin all night to get a lecture written. (1868)

**the (living) daylights out of** (1848) — In such phrases as *beat, scare, etc.* the (living) daylights out of; from obsolete daylights eyes • Illustrated London News: I might have chuckled throughout 'The Suitor' if its chief actor did not happen to scare the living daylights out of me, as the current saying goes. (1964)

**like hell** (1855) • D. H. Lawrence: 'And I shall miss thee, Jack,'... 'Miss you like hell.' (1922)

**talk about** (1863) • W. M. Duncan: Talk about trouble! Goodness knows what Frank will say. (1973)

**until one is blue in the face** (1864) — From the notion of being livid with effort • Observer: I've been looking into cases of dealers' rings... until I'm blue in the face. (1968)

**like billy-o** (1885) • Sunday Mail Magazine (Brisbane): There was Amundsen... with his dogs going like billyo for the Pole. (1969)

**to the wide** (1915) — In such phrases as *blind, broke, dead, out, etc.* to the wide • Laurie Lee: Wake up, lamb... He's wacked to the wide. Let's try and carry him up. (1959)

**fit to burst** (1916) • Guardian: The tumultuous foot-soldiers of his self-styled insurgency cheered fit to burst. (1992)

**like crazy** (1924) — Orig US • Punch: Here were all those guys consuming like crazy and having to be regularly restocked. (1968)

**as they come** (1925) • P. G. Wodehouse: It's his sister Beulah. She was the one who put him up to it. She's the heavy in the sequence. As tough as they come. (1936)

**good and proper** (1928) • H. E. Bates: I'm in trouble. I'm going to have a baby... I've had it. Good and proper. I'm up the creek. (1961)

**in spades** (1929) — Orig US; from spades being the highest-ranking suit in bridge • Richard Nixon: Anybody who gets to the top in the Communist hierarchy and stays at the top has to have a great deal of political ability and a great deal of toughness. All three of the Soviet leaders have this in spades. (1972)

**like stink** (1929) • D. Devine: She wasn't really clever, she just worked like stink. (1972)
seven bells out of (1929) Orig nautical; in such phrases as knock, scare, etc. seven bells out of
- Malcolm Lowry: Yis. He’s knocked seven bells out of harder cases than you in his time. (1933)

with knobs on (1930) British; indicating ironic or emphatic agreement, or in retort to an insult, etc.
- Anthony Price: If the A.S. 12 was the answer to Egypt’s Russian missile boats, the A.S. 15 was the answer with knobs on. (1970)

the pants off (1933) In such phrases as bore, scare, talk, etc., the pants off.
- P. G. Wodehouse: They were . . . creeps of the first water and would bore the pants off me. (1954)

like nobody’s business (1938) Times: Poirot . . . adds . . . ‘Never do I pull the leg.’ That, alas, is not true. He teased poor Hastings like nobody’s business. (1975)

as all get out (1941) US
- Sara Peretsky: He felt guilty as all get-out when I told him who the doctor was and how bad she’d been hurt. (1992)

one’s ass off (1946) Orig & mainly US; in such phrases as work one’s ass off, run one’s ass off, etc., denoting maximum effort; from ass = arse
- Melody Maker: You want to . . . retire to your bedroom and practise your ass off for a year till you become competent enough to try it. (1984)

well and truly (1948) From earlier sense, properly, in due form
- David Potter: As soon as the cup was well and truly won by England. (1971)

17. Imprecations

See also Exclamations of annoyance at Anger (pp. 256–7), Exclamations of surprise or astonishment at Surprise (pp. 248–50).

hang (13.) Used in a range of mild oaths usually expressing irritation or impatience; from earlier sense, execute by suspending from a rope
- F. F. Moore: He said he’d be hanged if he’d go to Madame Darius’ squeeze—meaning this joyous entertainment. (1893)
- A. P. Herbert: I’m fizzy and fiery and fruity and tense, So let’s have a wild bit of a man in him, you say he’s got no balls. When he’s a fool.... And when he’s got none of that spunky wild bit of a man in him, you say he’s got no balls. When he’s sort of tame. (1926)

kind of, kind o’, kind a’ (1804), kinder (1834)
- J. N. Harris: He was one of these handsome guys with a kind of ugly expression. (1963)

kind of sort of, kinder sorter (1901) Frank Norris: Makes it go down kind of sort of slick. (1901)

like a hole in the head (1951) Mainly in the phrase need something like a hole in the head applied to something not wanted at all or something useless; compare Yiddish ich darf es vi a loch in kop.
- William Gaddis: I need this drink like I need a hole in the head. (1955)

big-time (1957) Orig US; from the noun big time high level of prestigious achievement
- Washington Post: Everybody is turning the heat up on our organization big-time, he told a rally of more than 2,000 people in Louisville. (1993)

out of one’s mind (head, skull, etc.) (1967)
In such phrases as bored, scared, pissed out of one’s mind
- Win: Yeah, I’m scared out of my mind. The thought of prison doesn’t exactly excite me. (1968)

Quite, somewhat

on the . . . side (1713)
- A. J. Cronin: She was on the thin side . . . and her liquid, brownish eyes were too large. (1952)

sort of, sort o’, sort a’ (1790), sorta, sorter (1839)
- D. H. Lawrence: You say a man’s got no brain, when he’s a fool. . . . And when he’s got none of that spunky wild bit of a man in him, you say he’s got no balls. When he’s sort of tame. (1926)

next Saturday (1931)
- L. A. G. Strong: ‘Aren’t you perhaps afraid the inadequacy may be on your side?’ . . . ‘Damn you, Walter. You do get under a man’s skin.’ (1948)

hell (1596) Used in oaths, especially what (who, why, etc.) the (or in) hell, usually expressing impatience or irritation; often in such phrases as bloody hell, fucking hell, etc.
- Landfall: Why in hell didn’t you get John to build it for you? (1968)
- James Fraser: ‘What the bloody hell are you playing at?’ That’s ripe considering you just near broke my arm!’ (1969)

dickens (1598) Used in oaths, especially what (who, why, etc.) the (formerly also a) dickens, usually expressing astonishment, impatience, or irritation; probably from the surname Dickens, used as a euphemistic substitute for devil
- P. G. Wodehouse: I remember . . . wondering how the dickens a female of her slight build and apparently fragile physique could possibly get that wiry follow-through into her shots. (1936)

deuce (1694) Dated; used in oaths, especially what (who, why, etc.) the deuce, usually expressing impatience or irritation; from Low German duus, probably ultimately with the sense ‘a throw of two at dice’ (the lowest-scoring throw with two dice), and hence denoting the embodiment of bad luck, and used as a euphemistic substitute for devil
- Ezra Pound: And what the deuce of your punctuation? . . . How much deliberate,
and therefore to be taken [by me] with studious meticuloussness? (1918) ■ R. D. Paine: He just now cut loose with ‘Goodness gracious. . . . I should call this the deuce of a mess’. (1923)

**blow (1781)** Used in a range of mild oaths expressing irritation, usually with the underlying implication of ignoring or disregarding. ■ Frederic Hamilton: I’m absolutely bowled if I know what to do. (1922) ■ Listener: It is no longer proper to use as our second national motto in education ‘Blow you, Jack, our top five per cent. are absolutely splendid’. (1963)

**darn (1781)** Orig US; euphemistic alteration of drat (1857) US; used in mild oaths, especially in the notion of the flames of hell, the blazes; phrases what the heck your program is trying to do, it spits it out as a dump. (1981)

**tarnation (1790)** Mainly US; used in oaths, usually expressing impatience or irritation; a euphemistic alteration of damnation, apparently influenced by obsolete US slang ternal damned, an alteration of eternal. ■ M. K. Rawlings: Git away, you blasted bacon-thieves! . . . Git to tarnation! (1938)

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**bugger (1794)** Used as the equivalent of damn in various oaths and exclamations, usually expressing contempt or exasperation; from earlier sense, sodomize. ■ Samuel Beckett: I’ll be buggered if I can understand how it could have been anything else. (1953) ■ David Pinner: Bugger me, he thought, looking at the grin on his watch, it’s three o’clock! (1967)

**blazes (1818)** Used as a euphemistic substitute for hell in a range of oaths and exclamations, especially in the notion of the flames of hell. ■ Cecil Day Lewis: What is the blue blazes is all this? (1948)

**jiggered (1837)** Used in mild oaths, especially I’ll be jiggered and I’m jiggered, often expressing surprise; perhaps a euphemistic alteration of buggered

**Sam Hill (1839)** North American; used as a euphemistic substitute for hell, especially in the phrases what in (or the) Sam Hill; origin unknown, except for the substitution of hill for hell. ■ M. E. Freeman: What in Sam Hill made you treat him so durned mean fur? (1918)

**bother (1844)** Used in a range of mild oaths expressing irritation. ■ Fraser’s Magazine: Bother the parson! (1877)

**Godfrey (1853)** US; used in mild oaths, as a euphemistic substitute for God. ■ William Faulkner: They hadn’t even cast the dogs yet when Uncle Buck roared, ‘Gone away! I godfrey, he broke cover then!’ (1942)

**drat (1857)** Used in mild oaths, as a euphemistic substitute for damn; from earlier interjectional use, expressing annoyance. ■ Florence Nighingale: ‘Drat’ hockey and long live the horse! Them’s my sentiments. (1900)

**tunket, tunkett (1871)** US; used as a euphemistic substitute for hell, especially in the phrases who (what, why, etc.) in tunket; origin unknown. ■ E. Graham: ‘And why not, in tunket?’ she says. (1951)

**Gawd (1877)** British; used in oaths or as an oath; representing a nonstandard pronunciation of god, and often functioning as a euphemistic substitute for it. ■ Arthur Morrison: Run, for Gawd’s sake, or the woman’ll croak! (1896) ■ Louis Stone: Gawd, ‘e’s stiffened ‘im! (1911)

**heck (1887)** A euphemistic alteration of hell, used in a range of oaths and exclamations, especially what (who, where, etc.) the heck and by heck; compare earlier dialectal hecky in same sense ■ Punch: He insisted on St. Isinglas because he thought everything here was so well organised. The heck it is. (1933) ■ 80 Microcomputing: When a large system can’t figure out what the heck your program is trying to do, it spits it out as a dump. (1981)

**buggery (1898)** Used in various oaths, especially to go to buggery go away, get lost; from earlier sense, sodomy. ■ E. Lindall: ‘Sah. You sick.’ ‘Go to buggery,’ Minogue snarled. ‘Yes, sah,’ Basikas said, and stood aside. (1966)

**sod (1904)** Used as the equivalent of damn in various oaths and exclamations, usually expressing contempt or exasperation; from sod despicable person, male homosexual, probably on the model of bugger. ■ Paul Scott: At seven-fifteen they had to go out to dinner. Sod it. (1953) ■ John Wain: ‘He’ll come out,' said Swarthmore. ‘And if he doesn’t, we’ll sit where we are and you’ll get paid for a full day’s work, with overtime if necessary, and you won’t have to do a stroke.’ ‘I’d rather be at home,’ said the chief cameraman, ‘and sod the overtime. I’m definitely sickening for something.’ (1967)

**frig (1905)** Used as a euphemistic substitute for fuck in various oaths and exclamations, usually expressing contempt or exasperation; from sod despicable person, male homosexual, probably on the model of bugger. ■ Paul Scott: At seven-fifteen they had to go out to dinner. Sod it. (1953) ■ John Wain: ‘He’ll come out,' said Swarthmore. ‘And if he doesn’t, we’ll sit where we are and you’ll get paid for a full day’s work, with overtime if necessary, and you won’t have to do a stroke.’ ‘I’d rather be at home,’ said the chief cameraman, ‘and sod the overtime. I’m definitely sickening for something.’ (1967)

**rass (c1918)** Jamaican; used as a verb and noun in various oaths and exclamations, usually expressing contempt or exasperation; from earlier sense, copulate. ■ Laurence Meynell: And what about the rent? ‘Frig the rent.’ (1970)

**fuck (1922)** Used as a verb and noun in various oaths and exclamations, usually expressing contempt or exasperation; from sod despicable person, male homosexual, probably on the model of bugger. ■ Paul Scott: At seven-fifteen they had to go out to dinner. Sod it. (1953) ■ John Wain: ‘He’ll come out,' said Swarthmore. ‘And if he doesn’t, we’ll sit where we are and you’ll get paid for a full day’s work, with overtime if necessary, and you won’t have to do a stroke.’ ‘I’d rather be at home,’ said the chief cameraman, ‘and sod the overtime. I’m definitely sickening for something.’ (1967)

**for Pete’s sake, for the love of Pete (1924)** Pete a euphemistic substitute for pity, itself used in oaths in place of God and Christ. ■ William Golding: Marry me, Taffy. For Pete’s sake marry me. (1959)

**bee aitch (1928)** Representing the letters b h, a euphemistic abbreviation of bloody hell. ■ John Galsworthy: Mr. Blythe’s continual remark, ‘What the bee aitch are they all about?’ (1928)

**Chrisake, Chrisssake (1933)** Mainly US; usually preceded by for; representing a casual
pronunciation of Christ's sake  ■ Maurice Procter: For Chrissake gimme a cigarette. (1954)

**shag (1933)** Used as the equivalent of fuck in various oaths and exclamations, usually expressing contempt or exasperation; from earlier sense, copulate  ■ G. Pinse: 'Then shag you!' I shouted, as he swaggered away. (1973)

**screw (1949)** Used as the equivalent of fuck in various oaths and exclamations, usually expressing contempt or exasperation; from earlier sense, copulate  ■ Roald Dahl: 'Don’t shout. There might be keepers.' 'Screw the keepers!' he cried. (1960)

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### 18. Names

**moniker, monicker, monniker, monica, monekeer, etc. (1851)** Also applied to someone’s nickname; origin unknown  ■ *Times Literary Supplement*: Henry Handel Richardson herself... was able to hide behind the male signature on her books (her maiden name wedded to two favourite family monikers). (1959)

**handle (1870)** Orig US; also applied to someone’s nickname; from earlier sense, honorific title  ■ C. F. Burke: One night Jesus met a guy named Nicodemus. How’s that for a handle? (1969)

**tag (1980)** Orig US; applied to a nickname or other (often elaborately decorative) identifying mark written as the signature of a graffiti artist  ■ *Times*: Gang members... used coloured paints and red pencils to deface hundreds of buses in Birmingham with their nicknames, or ‘tags’. (1987). Hence the verb tag to decorate with a tag (1980)  ■ *New Musical Express*: Rap Kids don’t drink much and were once inclined to tag previously paint-free walls. (1990)

A signature

**John Hancock (1903), John Henry (1914)** US; from the name of John Hancock (1737–93), the first signatory of the American Declaration of Independence (1776)  ■ *Listener*: Even today an American handing you a contract is apt to say: ‘And now if you will just give us your John Hancock.’ (1972)  ■ T. Barling: Sign your John Henry there... Your name is Balkin. You’d better get used to it. (1974)

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A title

**handle (1832)** Applied to an honorific title or similar distinction attached to a personal name; from the phrase a handle to one’s name a title attached to one’s name  ■ *News of the World*: ‘I get very angry if people call me Lord David.’ David... hates the sort of questions people ask once they find out about his ‘handle’. (1977)

Pseudonymously

**aka (1955)** Orig US; abbreviation of also known as introducing a pseudonym, nickname, etc.  ■ *Times*: He is perhaps a shade too comfortable and not enough of a cad as Johnson, aka Ramirez, the outlaw. (1982)
1. Entertainment

show biz (1945) Orig US; abbreviation of show business. Liverpool Echo: Blackpool remains ... the heartland of Northern showbiz. (1976)

Broadcasting; radio and television

sparks (1914) Applied to a radio operator; especially on board ship. P.F. Westerman: A burly, jovial-featured man ... greeted Mostyn as he stepped off the gang-plank. 'Hello, you’re our Sparks, aren’t you?' (1922)

ham, radio ham (1919) Orig US; applied to someone whose hobby is sending and receiving radio messages; from earlier sense, inexpert performer

shack (1929) US; applied to a room or small building housing radio equipment


wop (1939) Applied in the RAF to a radio operator; acronym from wireless operator. R. Barker: Wireless operator/air gunners ... most of the wop/A.G.s... came straight from gunnery school. (1957)


snifter (1944) US; applied to a portable radio direction-finder; from dialect sniff + -er

the box (1950) Applied to television; from earlier sense, gramophone, radio. E. Humphreys: I saw one of your plays, Dicky. On the old box. (1963)

kidvid (1955) Orig US; applied to a television or video programme made for children, and hence to children’s broadcasting; from kid + video. Fortune: She’s bringing a new, nonviolent, Disney-created cartoon series to NBC’s kidvid schedule. (1985)

pianist (1955) Applied to a radio operator

goggle-box (1959) Applied to television; from the notion of a television's cathode-ray tube. Sunday News (New York): She ... is making a name for herself as a singer on the tube. (1965)

idiot box (1959) Applied derogatorily to a television set. P. Flower: I thought you spent all your time with the idiot box. (1972)

the tube (1959) Orig and mainly US; applied to television; from the notion of a television’s cathode-ray tube. Sunday News (New York): She ... is making a name for herself as a singer on the tube. (1965)

boob tube (1963) Orig and mainly US; applied derogatorily to television; from boob fool + tube television. M. French: I sit and watch the stupid boob tube. (1977)

tranny, trannie (1969) Mainly British; applied to a transistor radio; from abbreviation of transistor + -y. Listener: The Controller surely had her tranny in the shed with her. (1976)

God slot (1972) Applied to a period in a broadcasting schedule regularly reserved for religious programmes

prog (1975) Applied to a broadcast radio or television programme; abbreviation of programme. Listener: Nice to have you with us on the prog, we say, don’t we, fans? (1975)


ghetto-blaster (1981) Orig US; applied to a large portable radio, especially as used to play loud pop music; from its use in the Black quarter of American cities; also termed jocularly ghetto guitar and third-world briefcase. Christian Science Monitor: Six feet tall, 16 years old, and carrying a ‘ghetto blaster’. (1983)

zapper (1981) Orig US; applied to a remote-control unit for a television or video recorder; from zap deal a blow to + -er. Los Angeles Times: Hit the zapper, Maude. Maybe there’s some bowling on another channel. (1987). Hence zap to fast-forward a video recorder so as to go quickly through the advertisements in a recorded television programme, or to switch through other channels during advertisements when watching programmes off-air. (1983)

video nasty (1983) Applied to a horror video film. Listener: Unless one has seen a video nasty ... it is difficult to imagine the depths of degradation to which certain producers are willing to sink. (1984)

Films

picture (1896) Applied to a film, and in the plural to the cinema. Home Chat: The pictures one sees nowadays are ... in much better taste than those of a few years ago. (1913)

flick, (dated) flicker (1926) Applied to a film, and in the plural to the cinema; from the flickering effect of early cinema films. John Braine: Where shall we go this afternoon anyway? Tanbury and tea at the Raynton, then a flick? (1959). Frank Swinnerton: He would take her to the theatre, the ballet, the
flicks. (1949)  ■ Gish & Pinchot: Mother, guess who we saw acting in 'flickers'? (1989)

**pic** (1936) Short for picture  ■ Anne Blaisdell: All of a sudden, Latin romances sort of passed . . . Everybody doing the big war pics. (1973)

**fleas and itches** (1967) Australian; rhyming slang for pictures, with an allusion to the vermin infesting cheap cinemas  ■ D. O'Grady: When not too tired, a man was able to visit . . . the open-air fleas-'n'-itches. (1968)

**photography**

**soup** (1929) Applied to the chemicals in which film is developed  ■ Len Deighton: Any special instructions? Over or under development? Fine grain soup? (1978)

**A photograph**

**snap** (1894) Orig US; applied usually to an informal or casually taken photograph; short for snapshot, from the notion of taking an instantaneous photograph  ■ Time: They even had a prospectus put together for publishers and included some sample snaps. (1977). Also the verb snap, denoting taking a photograph (1890)  ■ Guardian: We got the job done all the same. And without all those photographers snapping our every move. (1991)

**smudge** (1931) Applied especially to a photograph taken by a street or press photographer; perhaps from the blurring of a hastily taken snapshot, but first applied in prison slang to a picture of a fingerprint (1948) Short for picture; in use since the 1880s denoting a painting, but evidence is lacking for its application to a photograph before the mid 20th century  ■ Sunday Post (Glasgow): I sent £7.22 to photographer in Wembley for two coloured photos of a show jumping event in Warwickshire. When no pics came I wrote. (1976)

**picky, picky** (1968) From picture + - y; in use since the 1880s denoting a painting, but evidence is lacking for its application to a photograph before the 1960s  ■ Hot Car: The end result of fitting these packages on your Ford can be, if the piccies are anything to go by, rather on the eye-catching side. (1977)

**A photographer**

**snapper** (1910) From snap take photographs + - er  ■ Ripped & Torn: And thanks to all you budding photographers for the offers of photos, just send ’em in you snappers. (1977)

**mug-faker** (1933) Dated; applied to a street photographer; from mug face  ■ Margery Allingham: These old photographers—mug-fakers we call ’em—in the street. (1952)

**shutter-bug** (1940) Applied to an enthusiastic (amateur) photographer; from shutter device allowing light into a camera + bug enthusiast, fan

**smudger** (1961), **smudge** (1968) Applied especially to a street or press photographer; compare earlier smudge photograph  ■ Q: Cole is on his way to a photo-session with acclaimed French smudge Claude Gassian. (1990)

**The theatre**

**rep** (1925) Applied to repertory theatre or a repertory company; abbreviation of repertory Company  ■ Manchester Guardian: She has returned to ‘weekly rep.’, producing for a sound but as yet undistinguished company which must perform potboilers for most of the year. (1959)

**On stage**

**fit-up** (1864) Applied to a temporary stage set, piece of scenery, etc., and hence (in full fit-up company) to a travelling company which carries makeshift scenery and props that can be set up temporarily  ■ Daily Telegraph: Today there are some 40 off-Broadway houses. You might add another 40 off-off-Broadway clubs and fit-ups. (1970)

**stooge** (1913) Orig US; applied to a stage hand; see stooge under Variety (p. 345)

**spot** (1920) Short for spotlight

**greengage** (1931) British; rhyming slang for stage

**nigger** (1934) Applied to a screen used in filmmaking to mask studio lights or create special lighting effects; from earlier sense, black person

**on the green** (1940) British; used to mean ‘on stage’; green abbreviation of greengage stage

**iron** (1951) Applied to a metal safety curtain; short for iron curtain

**Variety**

**stooge** (1913) Orig US; applied to a stage assistant, especially one who acts as the butt or foil for a leading character or comedian; origin unknown; the possibility has been suggested that it represents an altered form of student, students having frequently been employed as stage assistants. Hence stooge to act as a stooge (1939)  ■ Scientific American: That Strang often stooged for Geller is well established. (1979)

**jazzbo, jasbo** (1917) US; applied to a vaudeville act featuring low comedy; origin unknown; perhaps an alteration of the personal name Jasper

**revusical** (1931) Orig US; applied to a musical revue; blend of revue and musical  ■ American Speech: Pardon Us Please, ‘presenting thirty-five stars in person’, advertises itself in newspapers as a Revusical. (1941)

**tab show** (1951) US; applied to a short version of a musical, especially one performed by a travelling company; from tabloid condensed + show
second banana (1953) US; applied to a supporting comedian in a burlesque entertainment
top banana (1953) US; applied to the leading comic in a burlesque entertainment  ■ New York Times: Miss Burnett is a . . . very, very funny woman. She is a superb top banana. (1978)

Recording

platter (1931) Mainly US; applied to a gramophone record  ■ Tobias Wells: I went into Fink Roth's pad and found treasures. Good old platters and stamps. I sold them. Got a good price for the records. The stamps were only so-so. (1967)
wax (1932) Mainly US; applied to a gramophone record; from the 'wax' discs in which the recording stylus cuts its groove. Hence on wax on a gramophone record  ■ W. C. Handy: Recording companies . . . made them available on wax. (1941). Hence wax to record for the gramophone (1935)  ■ Daily Times (Lagos): Another new LP Record waxed by the Celestial Church of Christ Choir. (1976)

plate (1935) US, dated; applied to a gramophone record

side (1936) US; applied to a recording or record  ■ James Baldwin: 'How about some sides?' . . . Lorenzo put something . . . by the Modern Jazz Quartet. (1960)

Circuses and fairs

barker (1699) Now mainly US; applied to someone who calls out in public to advertise a circus or other show; from earlier sense, noisy assailant  ■ H. A. Franck: The secretary was a man . . . with the voice of a side-show barker. (1910)
tober, tobur (1890) Applied to the site occupied by a circus, fair, etc.; from Shelta tobar road  ■ E. Seago: How can I walk about the tober without me trousers, I'd be askin' yea? (1933)
razor-back (1904) US; applied to a circus hand, especially one who loads and unloads the wagons; from earlier sense, a scraggy animal  ■ New Yorker: Some people . . . were watching the roller coaster . . . I went up to the razorback who ran the controls. (1975)

rosin-back (1923) Applied to a horse used by a bareback rider or acrobat, and hence to a bareback rider; from rosin resin, with which the horse's back was rubbed for a firmer seat  ■ C. B. Cochran: A 'rosin-back' is a ring-horse used by bareback riders . . . Rosin is rubbed into the horse's back to help the rider to get a firm footing as he jumps from the ring on to the horse. (1945)

star-back (1931) Applied to an expensive, reserved seat at a circus

Venues

nigger heaven (1878) US dated, now offensive; applied to the top gallery in a theatre

peanut gallery (1888) US; applied to the top gallery in a theatre

niter, niterie (1934) Orig and mainly US; applied to a night club; from nite, arbitrary respelling of night + -ery  ■ Boston Sunday Herald: Our story begins in a narrow strip of niteries on 52nd Street. (1967)
nabes (1935) US; applied to local cinemas; from the pronunciation of neighbour.  ■ New Yorker: They picked an aging star, slapped together a moldy script, and sent the results out to the nabes. (1970)

spot (1936) Applied to a place of entertainment; especially in night spot night club  ■ F. Usher: They went to a night spot . . . where they drank champagne. (1959)

flea-pit (1937) British; applied to a shabby and allegedly verminous cinema  ■ Ink: He went to a fleapit cinema. (1971)

track (1945) US; applied to a ballroom or dance-hall  ■ Malcolm X: I dig our holding this all-originals scene at the track. (1965)

bughouse (1946) Applied to a tatty or second-rate theatre or cinema; compare earlier sense, lunatic asylum  ■ John Osborne: If there's nothing else on, I still go . . . to the bug house round the corner. (1957)

ozoner (1948) US; applied to a drive-in cinema; from ozone + -er, in allusion to the open-air viewing arrangements

skin house (1970) US; applied to an establishment featuring nude shows, pornographic films, etc.  ■ Harper's Magazine: The skin houses were mostly playing short subjects—a girl taking a bath in a sylvan stream, a volley-ball game in a nudist camp. (1970)

Organizations

indie (1942) Orig US; applied to an independent theatre, film, or record company; abbreviation of independent

auntie (1958) Applied in Britain to the BBC and in Australia to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, thought of as being conservative in style or approach; from the notion of an aunt as a comfortable and conventional figure
Abbreviation of vent (1893) Applied to free admission tickets to US; applied to an inferior or hambone (1893) ham (1882) Applied to an inexpert performer, someone who plays the fool; probably short for obsolete US slang hambone, I ignored any bumps... I may have got at first on one-eyed towns up and down the provinces.' (1937)

Performers

omeme, omie (1859) Applied to an itinerant actor; showman's corruption of Italian uomo man • Ngaio Marsh: 'A lot of omies the others were then. ... 'Ted means they were bad actors doing worse shows in one-eyed towns up and down the provinces.' (1937)
ham (1882) Applied to an inexpert performer, especially an actor who overacts; probably short for obsolete US slang hambone, I ignored any bumps... I may have got at first on one-eyed towns up and down the provinces.' (1937)

Audiences

documentation: The BBC needs to be braver and sometimes is. Let there be a faint hurrah as Auntie goes over the top. (1962)

Beeb (1967) Representing an abbreviation of the pronunciation of BBC • Times: The licence fee the 'Beeb' is asking for is a shade less than the 18p a day for a popular newspaper. (1965)

Paper (1785) Applied to free admission tickets to the theatre or other entertainment • Josephine Tey: Johnny Garson can tell you how much paper there is in the house. (1951). Hence paper to fill (a theatre, etc.) by means of free passes (1879)

Stage-door Johnny (1912) Mainly US; applied to a (young) man who frequents stage doors for the company of actresses

Aunt Edna (1953) Used of a typical theatre-goer of conservative tastes; coined by Terence Rattigan (1911–77), British playwright • N. F. Simpson: 'The author...leans forward...to make simultaneous overtures of sumptuous impropriety to every Aunt Edna in the house. (1958)

vidiot (1967) Orig and mainly US; applied to a habitual and undiscriminating watcher of television and videos; blend of video and idiot; compare couch potato at Laziness (p. 294)

Washington Times: They are eyeballing the Federal Communications Commission as carefully as any youthful vidiot ever did the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. (1991)

Genres

Panto (1852) Abbreviation of pantomime • R.A.F. News: The organizers ran an 'ad lib' version of the panto 'Cinderella'. (1977)

horse opera (1927) Orig US; applied to a 'Western' film or television series; from the prominent role of horses in such productions

Soap (1943) Orig US; short for soap opera • American Poetry Review: If you turn on day-time TV, you will see most of his actors playing rather similar roles in the soaps. (1978)

Oater (1951), (dated) oats opera, oat opera (1942) Mainly US; applied to a 'Western' film or television series; based on horse opera, from the notion of oats as horses' food

Starrer (1951) Applied to a film or play with a leading star in a principal role; from star + -er • Mario Puzo: A Kellino starrer would get the studio's two million back. (1978)

Shoot-'em-up, shoot-em-up, shootemup (1953) Orig US; applied to a fast-moving story or film, especially a Western, of which gun-play is a dominant feature • New York Times: The new or free-form Western has several choice entries.... 'Oklahoma Crude', a splendid shootemup about a lady wildcatter in the oilfields. (1973)


Skin-flick (1968) Applied to an explicitly pornographic film

Sudser (1968) US; applied to a soap opera; from suds + -er • Washington Post: Clooney's autobiography...has been turned into another drabby shabby TV sudser. (1982)

Performance

Spot (1923) Orig US; applied to a place for an individual item of entertainment in a television, radio or theatre show • Gerald Durrell: He appeared on the local television as 'Uncle Ambrose', doing a children's spot in which he always had an animal of some sort to show them and talk to them about. (1972)

Gig (1926) Applied to an engagement for a musician or musicians playing jazz, dance-music, etc.; origin unknown • L. Hairston: Pa—knockin' hissel' out on a mail-handler gig at the Post Office
where the pay is so lousy he's gotta work a part-time gig. (1964)

**preem (1937)** US; applied to the first performance of a play, film, etc.; abbreviation of premiere

**Variety**: The mother-daughter act . . . has been bought by ABC and set for an Oct. 4 preem. (1948). Hence preem to premiere (a play, film, etc.) (1942)

**shtick, schtick, shik, shik (1961)** US; applied to a theatrical routine, gimmick, etc.; from Yiddish, from German Stück piece, play

**Time**: The former Prime Minister is not at all apologetic about his Yuletide shtik, pointing out that he has chosen to write books and sell records rather than go the David Frost route. (1977)

**Acting**

**mug (1855)** Used to denote making faces, especially before an audience, a camera, etc.; from mug face

**Times**: Grinaces and gestures straight out of silent films, properly deserving the name 'mugging'. (1961)

**corpse (1873)** Used to denote laughing inadvertently on stage or forgetting one's lines

**Alan Bennett**: Mrs Brodribb: When Max - . Geoff: Max (He corpses). (1972)

**super (1889)** Denoting appearing in a play or film as an extra; from the noun super extra, short for supernumerary

**New Yorker**: Chance for man to super in new Met production of Aida. (1976)

**profesh (1901)** Abbreviation of profession, applied especially to the theatre

**E. Pugh**: Mr. Alexander, . . . being a hartist in his profesh, which there's only one thing as keeps him off the London stage at this present moment, and that is—"Eggs!" (1914)

**legit (1908)** Applied to acting in serious drama, as opposed to revue, musical comedy, etc.; abbreviation of legitimate

**John Osborne**: I'd gone legit. for a while . . . and I'd been in 'The Tale of Two Cities'. (1957)

**dry (1934)** Used to denote forgetting one's lines on stage; from earlier dry up stop talking

**Milton Shulman**: 'D.K., Alian,' said the director into his microphone. 'If she fluffs badly or dries we'll go straight to Three.' (1967)

**hoke (1935)** Orig US; used to denote playing (a part) in a sentimental or melodramatic way; often followed by up; back-formation from hokum sentimental or melodramatic material in a film or play

**Marian Babson**: Just try it straight . . . it's a mistake to hoke it up. (1971)

**ham (1942)** Applied to an inexpert or over-theatrical acting performance; from earlier sense, inexpert or over-theatrical actor

**Listener**: The mummer who thinks that all acting before his time was 'ham'. (1959). So **hammy** (1929) • **David Jordan**: Condon raised an eyebrow in a hammy attempt to be supercilious. (1973)

**hokey, hokie, hoky (1945)** Orig US; applied to something sentimental or melodramatic; from hoke or hokum + -y

**Rolling Stone**: A closing piece [on a record], 'Sometimes', is embarrassingly hokey. (1971)

**idiot board, idiot card, idiot sheet (1952)** Applied to a board displaying a television script to a performer

**Rehearsal**

**stagger, stagger-through (1964)** Applied to a preliminary rehearsal or run-through of a play, television programme, etc.

**Review**

**rave (1926)** Orig US; applied to a highly enthusiastic review; often used adjectivally

**Listener**: I yield to none in my admiration for this pianist, whose first London notice I had the honour to write long before the war (a 'rave' in case you think I am always wrong). (1958)

**Finance and administration**

**ducat, ducket(t) (1871)** Applied to a ticket of admission; probably from earlier sense, coin; perhaps influenced by docket and ticket

**Guardian**: My wife and I had a couple of ducketts to see the Marxes' Broadway musical, 'Animal Crackers'. (1970)

**angel (1891)** Orig US; applied to the financial backer of a theatrical enterprise

**P. G. Wodehouse**: Ike hasn't any of his own money in the thing. . . . The angel is the long fellow you see jumping around. (1921). Hence **angel** to finance (a theatrical production) (1929)

**Ten Pan Alley (1908)** Orig US; applied to the world of popular-music writing, publishing and administration, and also to an area where there are many song publishing houses, specifically (formerly) in New York in 28th Street and in London around Denmark Street

**ice (1927)** US; applied to profit from the illegal sale of theatre, cinema, etc. tickets

**Economist**: Kick-backs—'ice' as it is called on Broadway—on theatre tickets whose prices are marked up illegally. (1964)

**two-fer, -for (1948)** Applied to a coupon that entitles someone to buy two tickets for a theatre show for the price of one; from two + [a representation of] for

**roadie (1969)** Applied to someone who organizes and supervises a touring pop group, etc., or to an assistant who helps with this; from road + -ie, from the notion of being on the road travelling
2. Journalism & Newspapers

gonzo (1971) Orig and mainly US; applied to a type of committed, subjective journalism characterized by factual distortion and exaggerated rhetorical style; introduced by the US journalist Hunter S. Thompson to denote his own style of writing; perhaps ultimately suggested by Italian gonzo foolish (perhaps from Italian Borgonzone Burgundian) or Spanish ganso goose, fool

Newspapers

rag (1734) Derogatory

bladder (1842) Mainly US; probably from German Blätter sheets (of paper) ▪ Observer: The news of your return has caused hardly a ripple in the daily bladders. (1973)

linen-draper (1857) British; rhyming slang Pink 'Un (1887) A nickname for a newspaper printed on pink paper, especially the Sporting Times and the Financial Times; = pink one ▪ Guardian: Today . . . the first Financial Times will hit Wall Street. . . . But for all the . . . computer setting . . . the new international Pink 'un depends very much for its birth on the weather. (1979)

blat, blatt (1932) Orig US; from German Blatt sheet, newspaper ▪ Times: An otherwise bald and unconvincing interview on the telly or column in the blats. (1986)

tab (1939) Applied to a tabloid newspaper; abbreviation ▪ Jane Leavy: It's days like this that make me glad I work for a feisty little tab like the Trib, which is to say a scummy rag specializing in boobs, bodies, and baseball. (1990)

the heavies (1950) Applied to serious newspapers ▪ Author: The popular press, thrown off balance and uncertain of its role, lost out to the heavies and the provincials. (1971)

Magazines

mag (1801) Abbreviation

The media

meeja, meejah, meejah (1983) Jocular or derogatory; respelling of media; representing a common informal pronunciation of the word ▪ J. Neel: We aren't middle-class poor anymore, you know. I am part of the rich meeja. (1988)

News, features, etc.

funnies (1852) Orig US; applied to (the section of a newspaper containing) comic strips ▪ P. G.

Wodehouse: We've only read the movie section and the funnies. (1936)

obit (1874) Abbreviation of obituary; earlier non-slang use in the 15th–17th centuries derived directly from Old French obit death

screamer, screamer headline (1926) Applied to a large headline

snap (1937) Applied to a short news report, especially one dispatched or broadcast from the scene ▪ Louis Heren: Valentine found a telephone . . . dictated a couple of snaps, and then . . . removed the microphone from the phone thus making it useless for the opposition. (1978)

Journalists

hack (1810) British; applied especially to a staff newspaper writer; a slight development from the earlier sense, literary scribbler; the term is often applied jocularly by journalists to themselves ▪ Arena: 'Good story'. The other hacks had seen bodies float by: we were the first to see them being fished out. (1986)

sob sister (1912) Orig US; applied to a female journalist who writes sentimental stories ▪ Sun (Baltimore): Forecasting opposition to his plan by 'sob-sisters' Goodwin said 'it wouldn't do any harm to give these sob-sisters a couple of wallops too'. (1939)

slot man (1926) US; applied to a newspaper's chief sub-editor or a news editor; from slot the middle of a semi-circular desk at which sub-editors work, occupied by the chief sub-editor

tripe-hound (1928) From earlier sense, unpleasant person

scribe (1929) Mainly US; from earlier sense, writer of documents

journo (1967) Orig Australian; from journalist + -o ▪ Times: Journo's who work with the written word are seldom at ease with spoken English. (1985)

hackette (1984) British; applied to a female journalist; from hack + -ette ▪ Times: The worlds of newspapers and publishing are unbuttoned, and hackettes can wear pretty well anything. (1987)

A newspaper seller or delivery boy

newsie, newsy (1875) Mainly US and Australian; from news + -ie ▪ John o' London's: To be polite the newsie took a couple of swigs of it. (1962)
3. Music & Dance

Music

dots (1927) Mainly jazz slang; applied to the notes on sheet music, and hence to written or printed music itself

lick (1932) Mainly jazz slang; applied to a short solo or phrase, usually improvised. Globe & Mail (Toronto): The blues riffs is even better, full of Charlie Parker-like bebop licks. (1970)

rideout (1939) Jazz slang; applied to a final chorus. New Yorker: On the Other Side of the Tracks... has an eulogistic and remarkable rideout section. (1977)

screamer (1940) Jazz slang; applied to a passage containing shrill notes on a woodwind instrument, and also to a note of this kind

mop (1944) US; applied to a final cadence of three notes at the end of a jazz number

sounds (1955) Orig US; applied to pop music, especially records. Daily Mirror: Together cats don’t buy records, they buy sounds, and they never blow their cool. (1968)

The Arts, Entertainment, and the Media

A musical instrument

ivories (1818) Applied to the keys of a piano or other instrument; from the keys being made of ivory. Times: Its cover portrays the Prime Minister, seated at the organ, tinkling one lot of ivories and flashing the other lot. (1974)

joanna, joana, Johanna, Rhyming etc.

Strad (1884) Short for Stradivarius; applied to a violin, etc. made by Antonio Stradivari. Sunday Times: It was all right for rehearsal, but not quite fair when people turn up with their £200,000 Strads, mused Gordon, a music teacher and church organist. (1993)

bull-fiddle (1880) US; applied to a double bass or cello. Steinbeck & Ricketts: A deep and yet penetrating tone like the lowest string of an incredible bull-fiddle. (1941)

Strad (1884) Short for Stradivarius; applied to a violin, etc. made by Antonio Stradivari. Sunday Times: It was all right for rehearsal, but not quite fair when people turn up with their £200,000 Strads, mused Gordon, a music teacher and church organist. (1993)

traps (1903) Orig US; applied in a jazz or dance band to percussion instruments or devices (e.g. wood-blocks, whistles) used to produce a variety of special effects, and also to these together with the standard jazz or dance band drum-kit; origin uncertain; probably some slang application of trap device for capturing

dog-house (1920) Jazz slang; applied to a double bass; from its supposed resemblance in wooden bulkiness to a dog’s kennel. H. T. Webster: When the bull-fiddler plucks the strings he is slapping the doghouse. (1933)

gob-stick (1923) Jazz slang, dated; applied to a clarinet; from gob mouth + stick; compare earlier dialect sense, spoon or other eating implement. Dylan Thomas: The double-bed is a swing-band with coffin, oompah, slush-pump, gob-stick. (1938)

sax (1923) Abbreviation of saxophone. Picture-Play Magazine: How I used to envy Laura playing beautifully mellow notes on her sax. (1926)

kitchen (1931) Applied to the percussion section of an orchestra or band; probably from the fanciful resemblance between the timpani (kettledrums) and other percussion instruments to kitchen implements and vessels. S. R. Nelson: Next in the rhythm section we will have a look at the ‘gentlemen of the kitchen’. (1934)

horn (1935) Jazz slang; applied to a trumpet, or more broadly to any wind instrument. G. Avakian: Each of these trio cuttings ends with Bix picking up his horn to play the coda. (1959). Crescendo: If I’m happy with the horn I’ve got, the mouthpiece, the set-up, the reed and everything. (1966)

liquorice-stick (1935) Jazz slang; applied to a clarinet; from the instrument’s long thin black appearance

peck horn (1936) Jazz slang; applied to a mellophone, saxophone, or other similar instrument; origin unknown. Sunday Times: Straight band singers were unknown in the Twenties—everyone, even Bing Crosby, had an instrument to hold. ‘I had a peckhorn, like a flugel-horn.’ (1975)

pretzel (1936) Applied to a French horn; from earlier sense, knot-shaped savoury biscuit; from the French horn’s convoluted shape

squeez-box (1936) Applied to an accordion or concertina; from its being played by pushing the two parts together; compare earlier obsolete nautical sense, ship’s harmonium. Chris Bonington: He was already ensconced in the bar at the Glaciahg, his squeeze box out, a dram of whisky at his side and a cigarette in his mouth. (1973)

woodpile (1936) Applied to a xylophone; from its tuned wooden bars. Time: Red Norvo kept salting its tuned wooden bars • H.T. Webster: What is a woodpile? (1944)


piccolo (1938) US; applied to a juke-box. New York Amsterdam News: The Harlem Hanfats grind out the tune on myriad Harlem piccolos. (1938)

skin (1938) Jazz slang; applied to a drum; usually used in the plural

vibes (1940) Abbreviation of vibraphone + s. Rolling Stone: He fell back on his musical training to support the family, playing trumpet and vibes in a succession of third-rate cabaret bands. (1977)

easy rider (1949) Applied to a guitar; probably from a guitar’s portability, but compare earlier sense, sexually satisfying lover, perhaps suggesting a link between the guitar’s curved outlines and those of a voluptuous woman.
tickler (1948) Applied to a pianist; from the things) up (1932) tear it US; applied to

To play music

The band

An instrumentalist

sticks (1909) Naval slang; applied to a drummer

bull-fiddler (1933) Applied to a double-bass player ■ W. C. Handy: As usual the bull-fiddler sawed away in G. (1957)

monkey-hurdler (1936) US; applied to an organism; perhaps from the traditional organ-grinder's monkey ■ W. Morum: Nelson's a monkey hurdler. . . . He plays one of those Wurlitzer organs at the talkies. (1951)

pretzel-bender (1936) Applied to a French-horn player

skin-beater (1936) Dated; applied to a drummer in a jazz or dance band ■ New York Times Book Review: Red, the reether-smitten skin beater. (1953)

tickler (1948) Applied to a pianist; from the phrase tickle the ivories play the piano ■ James McClure: I'm the tickler. Pianist. Y'know. (1975)

axeman (1976) Jazz and rock music slang; applied to a guitarist, especially one who plays in a band or group ■ Washington Post: He learned guitar from Fats Domino's axeman, Walter (Papoose) Nelson. (1985)

To play music

spiel (1870) US: from German spielen play ■ G. S. Perry: Denver's Symphony chooses to spiel only when winter's winds doth blow. (1947)

fake (1926) Jazz slang; applied to improvising ■ Spotlight There was enough good music 'faked' in those days. (1944)

sock (1927) Applied to performing jazz in a swinging manner; often in the phrase sock it (out) ■ New Yorker: From the top—'Watermelon Man'. Let's sock it out and give Mrs. Ritterhouse a chance to really cook. (1976)

ride (1929) Applied to playing jazz with an easy-flowing rhythm ■ John Winwright: When Ellington opens on an eight-bar piano intro . . . you know that . . . when the full outfit starts leaning back and riding, you are going to be lifted cloud-high. (1977)

tear it (or things) up (1932) US; applied to performing with unrestrained excitement ■ Listener: The trumpeter Wild Bill Davison, who 'tore it up' with admirable primitivity and sensuality. (1983)

get off (1933) US, jazz slang; applied to improvising skilfully ■ Rudolph Blesh: The present-day solo is esteemed modern and full of ideas in direct proportion to the more unrecognizable it makes the melody. Such 'getting off' conceals lack of true invention. (1955)

slap (1933) US; applied to playing the double bass without a bow in jazz style, specifically by pulling the strings so as to let them snap back on to the fingerboard

groove (1935) Orig US; applied to playing jazz or similar music with swing, and also to dancing to or listening to such music with great pleasure; from the groove in a gramophone record ■ Melody Maker: The rhythm section . . . grooves along in true Basie manner. (1967)

give (1936) Orig US; applied to playing music, especially jazz, excitingly or enthusiastically; often followed by out ■ Woman's Own: You feel that you're in a real jam session with everybody giving, the joint jumping. (1958)

woodshed (1936) Applied especially to performing or rehearsing in private; from the notion of a woodshed as a secluded place where one can do things unobserved. ■ A. Young: Drew's got an alto [horn]. . . . Drew don't hardly touch it, he too busy woodsheddin his drums. (1968)

cook (1943) Orig US; denoting playing with excitement, inspiration, etc. ■ Crescendo: The band used to get up on the bandstand and really cook. (1968)

run down (1948) US; applied to rehearsing or performing music ■ R. Russell: Bernie struck off a rich chord and began running the tune down in his immaculate post-Teddy Wilson style. (1961)

belt out (1953) Applied to playing or singing with great vigour or volume ■ John Steinbeck: One of the finest jazz combos I ever heard was belting out pure ecstasy. (1959)

wail (1955) US; applied to performing jazz very well, with great feeling, etc. ■ Shapiro & Hentoff: I revered the amazing Fats Waller, who had lately made a splash wailing on organ at the Lincoln. (1955)

Performance

woodshed (1946) Applied to a place where a musician may, or should, practise in private; from the verb woodshed play privately ■ Rolling Stone: Leavell's playing won't scare many jazz pianists into the woodshed. (1977)

groove (1954) Orig US; applied to a session at which jazz or similar music is played, especially well or with inspiration; from the verb groove play with swing ■ Jive Jungle: The all night 'grooves' began. (1954)

tear-up (1958) Orig US; applied to a period or passage of wild and inspired jazz playing; from tear it up perform enthusiastically ■ Listener: The music is not the tear-up associated with jazz at the Phil. (1983)

Playing music

in the (or a) groove (1932) Orig US; applied to playing jazz or similar music with fluent inspiration; from the groove in a gramophone record ■ Hot News: The Boswells are not in the hot groove. (1935)

A musician

red-hot momma (1926) Applied to an earthy woman jazz-singer
jitterbug (1938) US; applied to a jazz fan; a groupie, groupy (1967) applied to an ardent fan of jazz; a jazz musician; muso (1967) Orig Australian; applied especially to a professional musician; from musician + -o

gate (1937) US; applied to a jazz musician; often used as a term of address; perhaps short for gate-mouth, a nickname given to the US jazz trumpeter Louis Armstrong, or alternatively a shortening of alligator • Collier’s: You’ve handicapped your tunes with stuff no gate wants to play. (1939)

jitterbug (1937) Applied to a jazz musician; compare earlier sense, nervous person

swingster (1937) Orig US; applied to someone who plays jazz with swing; from swing + -ster

muso (1967) Orig Australian; applied especially to a professional musician; from musician + -o

A music fan
cat (1932) Orig US; applied to an expert in, or someone expertly appreciative of, jazz • Woman’s Own: It’s got beat and a lot of excitement,” said one teenage ‘cat’ I talked to. (1958)

alligator (1936) Orig US; applied to a fan of jazz or swing music; perhaps related to earlier obsolete US sense, worthless person • Collier’s: It’s this jive, hep-cat, alligator, jitterbug craze—this swing mania! (1939)

icky, ikky (1937) US; applied to someone who is ignorant of true swinging jazz and likes the ‘sweet’ kind; probably from the sense (not recorded until later) sweet, sickly, sentimental. So icky, ikky used as an adjective to denote such a person (1935)

hep-cat (1938), hip-cat (1944) Orig US; applied to an enthusiast for jazz, swing music, etc.; from hep, hip fully informed + cat • Colin MacInnes: It was like getting a hip cat into a symphony concert, but I succeeded. (1959) • Times: Mr. Louis Armstrong and his fellow hepatids. (1961)

hepster (1938), hipster (1956) Orig US; applied to an enthusiast for jazz, swing music, etc.; from hep, hip fully informed + -ster • Spectator: Yet although jazz seems to have burst out of the locked treasure casket over which an egghead minority of hepatids—fully informed +allets—has still remained a curiously unreal cult. (1958)

jitterbug (1938) Orig US; applied to a jazz fan; compare earlier sense, jazz musician • Times: I am told that in the U.S.A. there is a class of people who sit listening in hysterical excitement to what is called ‘hot-music’ and waiting for the final crash. Americans in their forcible language call them the ‘Jitter-bugs’. There are many people in Europe to-day who seem to be behaving in much the same way. (1939)

groupie, groupy (1967) Applied to an ardent follower of a touring pop group, especially a girl who tries to have sex with them; from group + -ie • Times: His defence described the sisters as ‘groupies’, girls who deliberately provoke sexual relations with pop stars. (1970)

head-banger (1979) Applied to a young person shaking voluntarily to the rhythm of pop music, especially heavy metal • Telegraph (Brisbane): Brisbane headbangers will have a chance to scream and wave their fists when Dio plays at Festival Hall. (1986)

Musical style
razzamatazz, razzamatazz (1894) Orig US; applied to rag-time or early jazz or to old-fashioned ‘straight’ jazz, and hence to sentimental jazz; origin unknown; perhaps an alteration of razzle-dazzle excitement, bustling • C. Coben: And while we kiss, kiss, kiss away all our cares, The player piano’s playin’ razzamatazz, I wanna hear it again. (1950)

gut-bucket (1929) Orig US; applied to a primitive unsophisticated style of jazz; perhaps from a type of improvised double bass used in such music, made from a washtub and a catgut string

ride (1930) Applied in jazz to an easy swinging rhythm or passage: from the verb ride play rhythmically • John Wainwright: The washboard player tapped the off-beats... lifting the rhythm and giving it ride. (1973)

screwball (1936) Mainly US; applied in jazz to fast improvisation or unrestrained swing; compare earlier sense, eccentric person • R. P. Dodge: When inspiration leaves the player... he becomes what is known as a screw-ball player. I must say that I prefer the jump style to the screw-ball style. (1947)

hotcha (1937) Mainly US; used to denote jazz or swing music that has a strong beat and a high emotional charge; compare earlier use (1932), in combination with the traditional interjection hey nonny nonny; originally a fanciful extension of hot • Cyril Ray: There are hotcha gramophone records. (1960)

ricky-tick (1938) Applied to a simple repetitive rhythm, as in early ‘straight’ jazz, and hence to rag-time and old-fashioned jazz; imitative • New York Times: To the ricky-tick of Guy Lombardo’s ‘I don’t want to get well, I’m in love with a beautiful nurse’, three maimed Army veterans fumble through a dance routine. (1968) Hence ricky-tick, ricky-ticky used as an adjective to denote music or a tempo that is repetitive or dull (1942) • Times Literary Supplement: We’ll err and loudly stated bass-line throwing up the odd chord that violently subverts the triteness of the ricky-ticky melody. (1976)

funky (1954) Orig US; applied to jazz or rock music which is earthy or bluesy, with a heavy rhythmical beat; from earlier sense, smelly • Freund: Brown Sugar and Bitch are Jagger at his foxy, dirty, funky best. (1971) Hence funk such music (1959) • Making Music: The bass rhythm is an extension of the pattern that dominated funk in the mid seventies. (1987)
**rinky-tink (1962)** Mainly US; applied to a jazz or ragtime piano on which simple repetitive tunes are played; imitative. ■ *News & Courier* (Charleston, S. Carolina); Scott Joplin played his toe-tappers on a rinky-tink piano. (1974)

A musical group

**combo (1935)** Orig US; applied to a small instrumental band, especially playing jazz; from earlier sense, combination, partnership. ■ *New York Times*: The Conspiracy is a chatty three-guitar combo that sings songs and makes jokes. (1970)

**ork (1936)** Mainly US; applied especially to a jazz or dance band; abbreviation of orchestra. ■ *Zigzag*: 'Weeping Willow'—recorded in London backed ... by Georgie Fame, Colin Green and the Norrie Paramour Ork! (1977)

To dance

**hoof (1925)** Orig US; used intransitively or with it; from hoof foot. ■ Anthony Gilbert: A pretty nifty dancer himself in his young days and still able to hoof it quite neatly. (1958)

**juke, jook, jouk (1937)** Orig and mainly US; applied especially to dancing at a cheap roadhouse or to the music of a jukebox; from juke brothel, cheap roadhouse. ■ *Tennessee Williams*: I'd like to go out jooking with you tonight. ... That's where you get in a car and drink a little and drive a little and stop and dance a little to a juke box. (1958)

**terp (1942)** Orig US; compare terp dancer. ■ *Spartanburg (S. Carolina) Herald*: Donna McKechnie is the best dancer in the musical comedy theater (one dance critic tripped over his typewriter when he suggested Donna can't terp). (1974)

**bop (1962)** Mainly British; applied to dancing to pop music; from earlier senses, play bop music. ■ Jilly Cooper: The conference gang, on the other hand, bop or know each other from London. (1982)

**groove (1968)** Orig US; applied to dancing to rock music; from earlier senses, play jazz or rock music excitingly, enjoy oneself. ■ *Time Out*: Lope down to Bar Rumba and see if there's still room to groove at That's How It Is, the essential stop-off for Soho's jazzamataz cognoscenti. (1994)

4. Sport

**Physical exercise**

**ekker (1891)** British, school and university slang; from the first syllable of exercise + -er. ■ *Wykehamist*: Whatever the supposed range of activities that qualify as ekker, the demands of the major games ... usually over-ride all others. (1970)

**physical torture (1900)** Jocular alteration of physical training. ■ W. C. Anderson: The physical torture program ... started promptly at 0630 every morning at Eglin Air Force Base. (1988)

**physical jerks (1919)** Jocular. ■ Albert Sachs: In the afternoon, I am busy doing physical jerks. (1966)

**rec (1929)** Abbreviation of recreation. ■ *Emma Lathen*: The wedding presents were supposed to go on the Ping-Pong table in the rec room. (1975)

To take exercise

**pump iron (1972)** Orig US; applied to exercising with weights as a form of fitness training or body-building technique. ■ *New York Times*: Arnold

**To dance erotically**

**grind (1928)** Denoting dancing while gyrating or rotating the hips. ■ Milton Machlin: Deidre began to grind very hard and very close to him. (1976). Hence the noun grind such a movement. (1938)

**bump (1936)** Denoting a striptease dancer thrusting forward the abdomen or hips. Hence the noun bump such a movement. ■ *Punch*: Sing a song ... and do a bump-and-grind routine. (1964)

An informal dance party

**hop (1731)** ■ D. M. Davin: What about coming to the Arts Faculty bob hop on Saturday? (1970)

**bop (1970)** Mainly British; from earlier sense, dancing to bop music. ■ Barr & York: Couples meet at bops or know each other from London. (1982)

A dancer

**hoof (1923)** Applied to a (professional) dancer; from hoof dance + -er. ■ *Sunday Express*: She was impressed by one of the male dancers. ... The one-time hoofer ended up by working for her for 40 years. (1973)

**torso-tosser (1927)** Dated; applied to a female erotic dancer. ■ F. P. Keyes: Barbara Villiers, a torso-tosser who got to be no less than the Duchess of Cleveland. (1954)

**stepper (1934)** Orig US. ■ *Westindian World*: It's a great steppers tune with a good, hard rhythm all the way through it. (1981)

**rug-cutter (1938)** US; applied to an expert or enthusiastic dancer. ■ Norman Mailer: He seemed full of dancing energy. ■ *Spartanburg Herald*: Downtown Charleston, S.C., was busy and jumping, and the local college crowd headed down to Bar Rumba and great steppers tune with a good, hard rhythm all the way through it. (1981)

**toe-tapper (1938)** US; applied especially a chorus girl, and also to a ballroom dancer; abbreviation of terpsichorean of dancing.

A disc jockey

**jock (1952)** Abbreviation. ■ *Blues & Soul*: He may be the top radio jock in the land as far as our music’s concerned ... but he should realise that he’s no expert on all manner of other things. (1987)
Players

**skipper (1830)** Applied to the captain of a sports team (originally a curling team, later any team); from earlier sense, ship's captain. ■ *Daily Mail*: It will be hard for skipper Graham Gooch to discount yesterday's two-and-a-half hour innings from Botham, especially as Hick failed again. (1991) Hence the verb skipper act as captain of a team (1950) ■ *Daily Mail*: Trevor Peake will skipper the side. (1991)


**bend-warmer (1905)** US; applied to a substitute in a sports team; from earlier sense, someone who sits idly on a bench. ■ *Los Angeles Times*: He thought about leaving after the '1984 season, his third straight year as a bench-warmer. (1986)

**fresh (1922)** North American; applied to a male freshman sports team, and to such a team collectively; from earlier sense, freshman prepper (1945) US; applied to a member of a preparatory sports team; and also to such a team; from preparatory + -er. ■ *Anderson* (South Carolina) *Independent*: Audie Mathews, 6-4, of Chicago Heights, Ill., one of the nation's most coveted prep- ers, is a prepper. (1972)

**stickout (1942)** US; applied to an outstanding sportsman or -woman; from earlier sense, horse that seems a certain winner. ■ *Washington Post*: As for third base, ball players and fans alike have no range of choice. Frank Malone of the Red Sox is a stickout. (1958)

**prepper (1945)** US; applied to a member of a preparatory sports team, and also to such a team; from preparatory + -er. ■ *Anderson* (South Carolina) *Independent*: Audie Mathews, 6-4, of Chicago Heights, Ill., one of the nation's most coveted prep- ers, is reported to be considering North Carolina State, Illinois, Oregon, Purdue and UCLA. (1974)

**jock (1963)** North American; applied to a male athlete, especially at university; from the wearing of jockstraps by athletes. ■ *Time*: Rocks for jocks, elementary geology course popular among athletes at Pennsylvania. (1972)

**swing man (1969)** US; applied to a versatile player who can play effectively in different positions

**scrubber (1974)** Mainly Australian & New Zealand; applied to a second-rate player or competitor, one not of professional standard; compare earlier sense, inferior horse. ■ *New Zealand Herald*: The three winners . . . have rather enjoyed their reputation as 'scrubbers' since they unexpectedly won their club titles. (1977)

Instructors

**springer (1935)** Nautical; applied to a physical-training instructor in the navy. ■ *John Hale*: The springers all fancy their chance in the training line. (1964)

Officials

**ref (1899)** Abbreviation of referee. ■ *Listener*: Adam is able to make good jokes about Cambridge . . . and there is no ref to blow the whistle on him. (1976). Hence the verb ref act as referee (1929). ■ *Punch*: Who says the game was badly refereed? The sending-off of Nobby Stiles, For nothing, was supremely deft. (1968)

**ump, umps (1915)** Mainly US; orig baseball slang; abbreviation of umpire. ■ *New Yorker*: That's why Nick Colosi, National League ump, was a featured attraction at the Auto Show last week. (1975)

Venues

**rec (1931)** Abbreviation of recreation (area, ground, etc.) ■ *J. R. Ackerley*: The only open space, besides the Rec., in the neighbourhood. (1960)

**the outer (1943)** Australian; applied to the uncovered area for non-members at a sports ground; from earlier sense, part of a racecourse outside the enclosure. ■ *Alan Ross*: Fine drizzle delayed things for half an hour, then shirts were ripped off again in the Outer, the beer cans were set up, and play proceeded. (1963)

The ball

**pill (1908)** Used in football, golf, and other sports. ■ *P. G. Wodehouse*: 'I don’t mind her missing the pill,' said the young man. 'But I think her attitude toward the game is too light-hearted.' (1922)

Baseball

**hardball (1883)** Applied to baseball, in contrast to softball. ■ *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, Ohio): We both knew Eric Miller from our days at St. Ed. He had expressed an interest in athletics and we knew that he backed a AAA hardball team. (1974)

**slugger (1883)** Applied to a hard-hitting batter; from earlier sense, more general sense, hard hitter. ■ *Times of Zambia*: The new holder of baseball’s all-time Home Run record, Japanese slugger Sadaharu Oh. (1977)

**whiff (1913)** Denoting a missing of the ball by the batter, and also applied to the pitcher causing the batter to strike out; from earlier sense, blow or puff slightly. ■ *Nebraska State Journal*: Hurler whiffs. (1941)

**sacker (1914)** Applied to a fieldsman who guards a base; usually in first sacker (= first baseman), etc. ■ *H. E. West*: Wally Pipp became the Yankee first sacker in 1915, and Lou Gehrig succeeded him ten years later and is still going strong. (1938)

**slug-fest (1916)** Applied to a hard-hitting encounter; from slug hit + fest special occasion, festival. ■ *Arizona Daily Star*: Powers gave up four runs on seven hits, a contrast from the 33-hit slugfest of Friday night. (1979)

**gopher ball (1932)** Applied to a pitch that can be scored from, especially one hit for a home run; from the verbal phrase go for, because the batter ‘goes for’ runs, or the ball ‘goes for’ a homer. ■ *R. Coover*: Partridge was throwing gopher balls and his . . . teammates were fielding like a bunch of bush- leaguers. (1970)

**shell (1942)** Denoting scoring heavily against an opposing player or team; often used in the passive; from earlier sense, bombard with
explosive shells ■ *First Base*: Gooden . . . was shelled twice by Boston in the World Series, finishing 0-3 in the post-season. (1987)

**Boxing**

mill (1810) Denoting fighting as a boxer; from earlier sense, hit ■ *London Daily News*: He was an ageing journeyman boxer who had spent years milling in small halls, and then got a chance to make it big. (1987)

pug (1858) Dated; applied to a boxer or prize-fighter; abbreviation of pugilist ■ John Buchan: The man had been in the ring, and not so very long ago. I wondered at Medina’s choice, for a pug is not the kind of servant I would choose myself. (1924)

mittens (1883) Dated; applied to boxing gloves; from earlier sense, type of glove ■ James Greenwood: That’s their mittens they’ve got tied up in that hankercrcher. They’re fighting coves. (1883)

ham (1888) US; applied to an incompetent boxer or fighter; from earlier sense, inexpert performer ■ *Saturday Evening Post*: They want me to slug with this big ham. (1929)

dive (1921) Orig US; applied to a feigned knock-out; mainly in the phrase take a dive; originally applied to a genuine knock-out. Hence the verb dive feign a knock-out (1921)

palooka, palooker, paluka (1925) Mainly US; applied to an unexceptional boxer; origin unknown ■ *New York Times*: Leon Spinks . . . does not rate highly with at least one former heavyweight title holder. ‘He is a palooka,’ says Ingemar Johansson. (1978)

round heels, round-heeler (1926) Mainly US; applied to a low-quality boxer; from the notion that someone with round heels easily falls over

ring-worm (1929) US, dated; applied to someone who regularly attends boxing matches ■ *Sun* (Baltimore): ‘Ring worms’, as some are in the habit of referring to fight fans, have a hot one coming up Friday night when Kid Galvan takes a shot at Bobo Olson and his middleweight title. (1954)

slug-fest (1933) US; applied to a hard-hitting boxing contest; from slug hit + fest special occasion, festival; compare the earlier application to baseball games ■ *Gene Tunney*: If Dempsey would gamble with me in a slug-fest I would beat him to the punch every time. (1933)

slug-nuttiness (1933) US; denoting someone who is punch-drunk; from slug hit + nutty mad ■ Ernest Hemingway: He’s been beat up so much he’s slug-nutty. (1950). Hence slug-nuttiness punch-drunkleness (1943)

**Caving**

spelunker (1942) North American; applied to one who explores caves, especially as a hobby; from obsolete spelunk cave, from Latin spelunca, Old French spélonque, spelunque ■ Ed McBain: The cave seemed not in the least bit inviting. He had always considered spelunkers the choicest sorts of maniacs. (1980). Hence spelunk explore caves as a hobby (1946)

Chess

patzer (1959) Applied to a weak player; origin uncertain; compare German patzer bungle ■ *Daily Telegraph*: So Fischer after beating off a ferocious attack . . . played like a patzer, said one American Grandmaster, ‘went to sleep on the job’, said another. (1972)

Cricket

keeper (1744) Short for wicketkeeper ■ *Cricketer*: A tall ‘keeper’s rise from his crouch is less rapid than a smaller man’s. (1975)

peg (1865) Applied to a stump ■ Ray Robinson; Cusin swung one so late and so far that it hit Gandotra’s leg peg. (1972)

slog (1869) Denoting hard, wild hitting (at) the ball; from earlier, more general sense, hit hard; ultimate origin uncertain, but probably connected with slug hit hard ■ *International*: The incredible thing is that he never had to slog once to make his runs (1980). Hence the nouns slog a wild hit (1865) and slogger a wild hitter (1850) ■ *Daily Telegraph*: He . . . hit, in all, 17 fours and a six without a single slog. (1991) ■ *Independent on Sunday*: This time, though, we will not be seeing a wayward quickie and tail-end slogger: De Freitas should be travelling as a senior player. (1991)

timers (1876) Applied to the Stumps or wicket; from Stumps being made of wood, and falling when hit ■ *Times*: It must have interested elder listeners when they recently heard one of the B.B.C.’s fluent commentators on Test match cricket call the wickets the timers. (1963)

blob (1889) Applied to a batsman’s score of nought ■ Bruce Hamilton: A cricketer . . . may make a string of blobs, and then hit a couple of hundreds. (1958)

Aunt Sally (1898) Dated; applied to a wicketkeeper; from the notion that the bowler ‘aims’ the ball at the wicketkeeper in the same way as people aim balls at a fairground Aunt Sally, a dummy typically in the shape of an old woman smoking a clay pipe ■ *Observer*: A ‘keeper . . . who combines batsmanship with all the ‘Aunt Sally’s’ excellencies. (1927)

gaper (1903) Applied to an easy catch, especially one that is dropped; probably from the notion that something which ‘gapes’ open offers easy success; see also sitter at *Easiness* (p. 406) ■ *Times*: Certain of the younger members of the side were dropping some regular ‘gapers’. (1963)

sticky dog (1925), sticky (1954) Dated; applied to a wicket made difficult to bat on by rain and hot sun ■ A. G. Moyes: Again, the ‘sticky’ provides plenty of excitement. (1954)

quickie (1934) Applied to a fast bowler; from earlier more general sense, something quick ■ *News of the World*: Their other unknown quickie, Len Pascoe . . . isn’t as fast as Lilie or Thomson. (1977)

agricultural (1937) Used to characterize a stroke as ungraceful or clumsy; from the unsophisticated strokeplay associated with
village cricket • Times: Keith ... took an agricultural swing at Wardle and was bowled. (1955)

ton (1958) Applied to a century; apparently from earlier darts use • Lancashire Life: Scoring a century didn’t mean a hoot to me then. ... Now, as an experienced pro, I know I must make a ‘ton’ and then keep going to get another. (1978)
sledging (1975) Orig Australian; applied to unsportsmanlike attempts by fielders to upset a batsman’s concentration by abuse, needling, etc.; from sledge large hammer • Guardian: Geoff Howarth says he intends to complain about the amount of swearing, sledging and unchecked short-pitched bowling New Zealand have faced. (1983)

Croquet

Aunt Emma (1960) Applied to an unenterprising player or unenterprising play • Croquet: He played too much ‘Aunt Emma’. (1967)

Darts

ton (1936) Applied to a score of one hundred; probably from earlier sense, large amount • Atlantic Monthly: Now he’s averaging 60 or more, frequently throws a ‘ton’—a round of 100 or more points—and can put a dart into a fifty-cent piece area every time. (1973)
arow (1946) Applied to a dart • Morecambe Guardian: Best individual scores: B. Lilly (Royal) 180 in three arrows; B. Norris (Smugglers) 180 in three arrows. (1976)

Football

footer (1863) British, dated; applied to the game of football; from football + -er • Evelyn Waugh: I had to change for F-F-footer. (1945)
pigskin (1894) US; applied to a football; from its originally being made of pigskin leather • Anderson (South Carolina) Independent: He carried the pigskin on the end around 11 times for 73 yards, or an average of 6.6 yards per carry. (1974)
footy, footie (1906) Mainly Australian & New Zealand; applied to the game of football; from football + -ie • Southern: Evans ... strides off with her to ask race-goers, cinema queues and footy fans to sign peace petitions. (1967)

get a (or the) guernsey (1918) Australian; denoting selection for a football team; from guernsey sleeveless shirt worn by Australian Rules footballers, from earlier sense, thick shirt worn by seamen; ultimately from Guernsey, name of one of the Channel Islands

goalie (1921) Applied to a goal-keeper (in ice-hockey as well as soccer); from goal + -ie: in early use spelt goalee—the spelling goalie is not recorded before 1957 • Jeremy Potter: Most English goalies were prize examples of British phlegm, but Basil outdid the continental keepers in panache. (1967)

subway alumni (1947) US; applied to city-dwelling supporters of a college football team who, though not graduates of the college, attend games or follow the results

sticks (1950) Applied to soccer goal-posts; especially in the phrase between the sticks; usually with reference to the position of the goalkeeper • Wymondham & Attleborough Express: Wortwell could not produce the form of recent weeks and crashed heavily to their hosts. David Loome took over between the ‘sticks’. (1976)
stiff (1950) Applied in soccer to a member of the reserve team; usually used in the plural • Sun: Gunners sign Metcick for stiffness. (1970)

keeper (1957) Abbreviation of goal-keeper • Oxford Mail: Bicester’s Phillip Pratt (10) heads the ball past Thame keeper Micky Taylor for his second goal. (1974)

the box (1960) Applied in soccer to the penalty area; short for penalty box • FourFourTwo: When he wasn’t directly involved Yeboah was crouched on the edge of the box, waiting for that Brian Deane knock-down, Gary McAllister through-ball or Rod Wallace cut-back. (1995)

woodwork (1960) Applied to the frame of soccer goalposts • Grimsby Evening Telegraph: Twice in the first half, Scunthorpe hit the Bradford woodwork. (1977)

aerial ping-pong (1964) Australian, jocular; applied to Australian Rules Football; from the frequent exchange of high kicks in the game • Bulletin (Sydney): In Europe ... cycling is about the same mad preoccupation as aerial ping pong is to the Melbourne crowds. (1985)
nutmeg (1968) British; applied in soccer to the act of kicking the ball between the legs of an opposing player (and retaining it afterwards); perhaps from earlier slang nutmegs testicles • Times: Woodcock ... could include successive ‘nutmegs’ on Donachie and Booth among his contributions. (1977). Hence the verb nutmeg denoting outsmarting an opponent by doing this (1979)
sack (1969) North American; denoting tackling the quarterback behind the line of scrimmage before he can make a pass • Washington Post: Kilmer ... was sacked hard early in the second quarter by Bears tackle Ron Rydalch. (1976). Hence the noun sack applied to such a tackle (1972) • Detroit Free Press: Other changes have been made, this year and in recent years, to put juice into the offence, the feeling being that people come to see touchdowns and not quarterback sacks. (1978)
clogger (1970) British; applied to a soccer player who tackles heavily, usually foulng his opponent • Times: There are cloggers in football and it is more than a healthy reaction to cherish the thought of one day getting one’s revenge. (1970)
dive (1984) Applied to an intentional fall taken, usually on being tackled, in order to deceive an opponent or official; from earlier boxing sense, feigned knock-out

Golf

fooze (1888) Orig US; denoting playing an inept shot; from earlier obsolete sense, do something clumsily, fool around; ultimately from German dialect fuseIn work hurriedly and badly, work slowly • Graham McInnes: The rest of the eighteen holes were a miserable exhibition of foozeing, duffing, etc. (1965)
duff (1897) British; denoting mishitting a shot or a ball; perhaps a back-formation from duffer incompetent person ■ Sunday Express: The ninth provided Landale's crowning error, for he duffed two mashie shots. (1927)
nineteenth hole (1901) Jocular, orig US; applied to the bar-room in a club-house; from its use by golfers after playing the eighteen holes of the course ■ Josephine Tey: A good chap who played a very steady game and occasionally, when it came to the nineteenth, expanded into mild indiscretions. (1948)
whiff (1913) US; denoting missing the ball; also used as a noun, applied to a failure to hit the ball; probably originally a baseball usage ■ New York Herald Tribune: On the first tee he took a careful stance and then fanned the air four times. After the fourth whiff he growled, 'This is the hardest course I ever played.' (1952)
shoot (1922) Orig US; denoting recording a particular score for a hole or a round ■ Saturday Evening Post: They shot a twelve-under-par score in winning their first match. (1941)
pin-splitter (1926) Applied originally to an excellent golfer, and subsequently (1961) to an accurate shot to the pin (the flag marking the hole), or a club used for this ■ Country Gentleman's Magazine: Gents Pinsplitter Golf Clubs. (1973)
gimme (1929) Applied to a short putt conceded to one's opponent; contraction of give me, from the notion of being so easy that it can be given
Mulligan (1949) Applied to an extra stroke awarded after a poor shot, not counted on the score card; probably from the surname Mulligan ■ Guardian: He [sc. Bill Clinton] scores between 80 and 90 depending on how many mulligans he gives himself. (1996)

Greyhound racing

the dogs (1927) Applied to greyhound racing or greycing (1928) British, dated; blend of greyhound and racing ■ E. C. Ash: Greyhound Racing, or 'Gracing', as it is sometimes termed, started in 1926. (1935)
gracing, greycing (1928) British, dated; blend of greyhound and racing ■ E. C. Ash: Greyhound Racing, or 'Gracing', as it is sometimes termed, started in 1926. (1935)
roughie (1934) Australian; applied to an outsider in a dog race

Horse racing

jock (1826) Abbreviation of jockey ■ National Observer (US): Yarosh had been getting threats from the male jockeys who said they were going to 'put her through the rail', on the way to the hospital, Yarosh scribbled a note saying, 'Did the other jocks say he did it on purpose too?' (1976)
noble (1847) Denoting drugging, laming, etc. a racehorse to prevent its winning; from earlier, obsolete sense, hit; probably the same word as British dialect knobbe, knubbie knock, hit, from the noun knob ■ News Chronicle: Lord Rosebery confirms today that his horse which was nobbled was Snap. (1951)
stiff one, stiff 'un (1871), stiff (a1890) Orig US; applied to a horse which is unlikely (or not intended) to win; perhaps from stiff corpse, in jocular allusion to the horse's sluggish progress ■ Damon Runyon: There is also a rumor that Follow You is a stiff in the race. (1935)
pea (1888) Mainly Australian; applied to a horse tipped to win; perhaps from the phrase this is the pea I choose in thimble-rigging ■ F. Hardy: I've got the tip about it. Old Dapper Dan earwrigged at the track. Swordman is the pea. (1958)
cert (1889) Applied to a horse that is considered certain to win; often in the phrase dead cert; abbreviation of certainty ■ Man of the World: Love-in-Idleness is bound to take the Rous Memorial, and I hear Pioneer is a cert. for the St. James's. (1889)
wrong 'un (1889) Applied to a horse held in check so that it loses the race ■ Howard Spring: Hansford had never been known to tip a wrong 'un. (1935)
stipe (1902) Mainly Australian; applied to a stipendiary racing steward; abbreviation of stipendiary ■ Australian: The racing page screamed Stipes Probe Jockey. (1977)
mudder (1903) Orig and mainly US; applied to a horse which runs well on a wet or muddy racecourse; from mud + -er m New Yorker. In my book, Stardust Mel is the best mudder in California. Early last month Mrs. Marjorie Lindeheimer Everett's rangy gray gelding splattered through the rain and murk to win. (1975)
hot pot (1904) Australian; applied to a horse strongly fancied or backed to win ■ Sporting Globe (Melbourne): A southern 'hot-pot'—Lord Setay—dismally let his supporters down at Albion Park last Saturday night. (1969)
outier (1915) Australian; applied to the part of a racecourse outside the enclosure
no-hoper (1943) Australian; applied to a racehorse with no chance of winning

the nanny-goat (1961) Applied to the Tote; rhyming slang. ■ Daily Mail: The poor old ailing Tote—the Nanny Goat, as they call it. (1970)

Running

sweat (1916) British, public schools' slang; applied to a long training run. ■ Wilfred Blunt: Long melancholy 'sweats' (runs) over the downs [at Marlborough]. (1983)

Skiing

snow bunny (1953) North American; applied to an inexperienced skier, usually female, or to a pretty girl who frequents ski slopes. ■ Globe & Mail (Toronto): "Watching you for only two runs, I can see you're not just a "snow bunny", Coral!" No, I was on the women's ski-team at college. (1986)


Surfing

surf-bum (1958) Applied to a surfing enthusiast who frequents beaches suitable for surfing

gremlin (1961) Applied to a young surfer, and also (1967) to a trouble-maker who frequents the beaches but does not surf; compare earlier sense, mischievous sprite that causes mechanical faults. ■ International Surfing: There is really a lot of talent running around these days in the form of young gremlins. (1967)

kook (1961) Applied to a novice or inexpert surfer; from earlier sense, crazy person. ■ Surfer: All most of [these surfers] are is a bunch of loud-mouthed kooks who come down here and clutter up the beach. (1956)

greenie (1962) Applied to a large wave before it breaks

gremmie, gremmy (1962) Short for gremlin. ■ Surfer Magazine: He worked all morning with several beach gremmies piling 12-foot sections of plywood and rocks into a small reef on the wet sand. (1968)

hodad (1962) Applied to a non-surfer who hangs around surfing beaches; origin unknown

outside (1962) Denoting an area out at sea, beyond the breaking waves

soup (1962) Applied to the foam of a breaking wave

surfie, surfy (1962) Orig and mainly Australian; applied to a surfing enthusiast who frequents beaches suitable for surfing, and also to one who frequents surfing beaches but does little or no surfing; from surf + -ie. ■ Times Literary Supplement: He agrees to deliver a deal for this scruffy surfie and the plot is primed. (1981)

wipe out (1962) Denoting knocking or being knocked off a surfboard. ■ Surfer: Frye misjudged one of his turns high in the curl and wiped-out in the white water. (1968). Hence wipe-out a fall from a surfboard as a result of a collision with another surfboard or a wave. (1962). ■ People (Australia): One bad wipeout—at Sunset Beach, Hawaii—earned him broken ribs. (1970)

gun (1963) Applied to a large heavy surfboard used for riding big waves. ■ Surf '70: While in Hawaii I had two boards. They were an 8 ft 9 in 'hot-dog' and a 9 ft 6 in tracker type gun. (1970)

hot dog (1963) Applied to a type of small surfboard; compare earlier sense, highly skilled (and boastful) person

pipe-line (1963) Applied to (the hollow part of) a large wave, and also to the coastal area where such waves occur. ■ New Zealand Listener: The achievement by which the champion surfers are judged is their ability to ride the Hawaiian pipeline. . . . The pipeline breaks less than 50 yards from the beach over a coral reef. (1985)

wahine (1963) Applied to a girl surfer; from earlier sense, Maori woman; from Maori, Hawaiian, and other Polynesian languages. ■ Surfer: There are other things he did on the board, too, especially the full-moon tandem rides with wahines. (1966)

greenback (1965) Applied to a large wave before it breaks

pounder (1967) Applied to a large breaker

mush (1969) Applied to the foam produced when a wave breaks. ■ Surf '70: If there is any flat mush the board tends to stop and lose its turning ability. (1970)

shred (1977) Denoting cutting rapidly through the water on a surfboard. ■ Surfer: I love the way they...just shred everything in sight—carving, slashing aerials and snapbacks. (1985)

grommet, grommit (1986) Applied to an enthusiastic young surfer or skateboarder; origin uncertain; compare grommit ship's boy, ring or wreath of rope (especially in nautical contexts). ■ Wavelength Surfing: If you want the city surf life of Sydney, sharing each wave with a hoard [sic] of surf-crazed young grommets, then Manly is definitely the place for you. (1986)

Swimming

dip (1843) Applied to a brief swim. ■ Leslie Stephen: He rode sixty miles from his house to have a dip in the sea. (1874)

bogy, bogey, bogie (1849) Australian; used as a noun and a verb denoting bathing or swimming, and also (taking) a bath; from Aboriginal (Dharuk) bu-gi. ■ F. D. Davison: They went...just shred everything in sight—carving, slashing aerials and snapbacks. (1985)

shark-bait (1920), shark-baiter (1924) Australian; applied to a lone or daring swimmer far out from shore. ■ Australian Encyclopedia: Solitary bathers are more often attacked than groups, but the 'shark-baiter' farthest off shore is not necessarily the victim. (1965)
belly-flop (1937) Applied to a dive in which one hits the water abdomen-first; from earlier sense, sudden drop to the ground to avoid enemy fire. ■ Robin Hyde: 'It hurt,’ she added... 'So I didn't do any more worshipful belly-flops.’ (1937)

Tennis

tramlines (1937) Applied to the two parallel lines marking the edge of the singles court and the doubles court. ■ G. Forbes: Cliff... hit a two-hander down Rodney’s tramlines. (1978)

Wrestling

matman (1923) Applied to a wrestler; from mat-floor-covering in a wrestling ring. ■ Globe & Mail Magazine (Toronto): He became one of the best known mat men in Canada. ‘Wrestling always fascinated me,’ he says now. (1968)

5. Cards & Gambling

Playing-cards

broads (1781) Dated; used especially in the game of three-card monte. ■ F. D. Sharpe: They... were also playing the Broads on the train. (1938)

flats (1812) Dated.

paper (1842) US; applied to a playing-card, and also collectively to card-sharpers' marked cards.

puppy foot (1907) US; applied to the ace of clubs, or to any club card; from the resemblance of the club symbol to a small paw-print. ■ Daily Progress (Charlottesville, Virginia): The ace of clubs is often called the puppyfoot. (1932)

A card (to be played)

bullet (1807) Applied to an ace in the game of brag or poker; often in the phrase two bullets and a bragger a winning hand.

bragger (1807) US; applied to a nine or jack in the game of brag. ■ Herbert Asbury: In American Brag there were eight 'braggers'—the jacks and nines of each suit. (1938)

ace in the hole (1915) Mainly North American; applied to a high-value card or trump card concealed up one’s sleeve.

Dice

tats, tatts (1688) Dated; often applied specifically to false or loaded dice; origin unknown.

A throw at dice

snake eyes (1929) North American; applied to a throw of two ones with a pair of dice.

A gambler

spieler (1859) Orig US, now mainly Australian; from German Spieler player, gambler. ■ Detective Fiction Weekly: Hard on their trail would come all the 'magsmen', the 'spielers', the dips, the 'broadsmen', and the 'pickers up.’ (1929)

broadsman (1860) Dated; applied to a card-sharper, especially in the game of three-card monte; from broads cards + -man. ■ F. D. Sharpe.

tank (1976) Denoting losing deliberately. ■ Guardian: But it is ironic that Connors, a player generally considered too honest to 'tank' to anyone, should be the one to suffer. (1979)

Wrestling

matman (1923) Applied to a wrestler; from mat-floor-covering in a wrestling ring. ■ Globe & Mail Magazine (Toronto): He became one of the best known mat men in Canada. ‘Wrestling always fascinated me,’ he says now. (1968)

Gambling games

sweep (1849) Shortened from sweepstake

bunco, bunko (1873) US; applied to a type of dishonest gambling game played with dice; from banco, variant of Spanish banca card-game similar to monte.

swy, swey, swi, zwei, swy-up (1913) Australian; applied to the game of two-up; from German zwei two. ■ Action Front: His income from ‘Swi’ will be a thing of the past. (1941)

chemmy, shemmy (1923) Abbreviation and alteration of chemin de fer a card-game. ■ Punch: How to behave when a... bingo-club or a chemmy-party... is visited by the police. (1962)
rats and mice (1932) Applied to a game of dice; rhyming slang for dice. F. D. Sharpe: We used to play dice with them. . . . Rats and Mice the game was called. (1938)

Gambling activity

action (1887) Orig US. Damon Runyon: And he is well established as a high player in New Orleans, and Chicago, and Los Angeles, and wherever else there is any action in the way of card-playing, or crap-shooting. (1933)

A gambling establishment

spieler (1931) Orig US; compare earlier sense, gambler. Jimmy O'Connor: A well-known boxing referee who used to run a dirty low-down dive of a spieler. (1976)

pad (1970) US; applied to a gambling saloon which provides police with regular pay-offs

To gamble


punt (1873) From earlier more specific sense, lay a stake against the bank in card-games such as baccarat and faro; ultimately from French punter in same sense. Observer Institutions. . . . used the traded options market to punt on stock. . . . which would benefit from increased military spending. (1991)

fade (1890) US; denoting betting against the player throwing the dice in the game of craps

roll the bones (1929) US; denoting playing dice. Saxon, Dryer, & Tallant: Today in the colored sections of the city there are always circles of men 'rollin' the bones' playing Indian Dice, which is any game of Craps unsupervised by a syndicate and without a player for the 'house'. (1945)

seven out (1934) US; in the game of craps, denoting throwing a seven and so losing one's bet

sandbag (1940) Orig & mainly US; in poker, denoting holding off from raising at the first opportunity in the hope of raising by a larger amount later. D. Anthony: He fondled his stack of blue chips. He was sandbagging me. I gave him the same dose of silence. (1977)

go for the doctor (1949) Australian; denoting betting all one's money, specialized use of the more general sense, make the maximum effort. Lawson Glassop: Go for the doctor. Slap a tenner on it. (1949)

An instance of gambling

flutter (1883) British; applied to a small bet; from earlier sense, an attempt, try. Daily Telegraph: The British are great gamblers, as the success of betting shops, the pools and bingo shows. The human instinct to have a flutter is as strong in Britain as anywhere else. (1991)

punt (1965) From punt gamble. Daily Telegraph: People will still have a punt on Wimbledon. (1976)

Something gambling on

springer (1922) Applied to a racehorse on which the betting odds suddenly shorten

A stake

shirt (1892) In the phrases bet one's shirt, put one's shirt on stake all one's money, especially on a horse in a race, and lose one's shirt lose all one's stake. T. S. Eliot: Marriage is a gamble. But I'm a born gambler. And I've put my shirt—no, not quite the right expression—Lucasta's the most exciting speculation I've ever thought of investing in. (1954)

Winnings

pay-off (1905) Applied to money paid to the winner of a gambling game. Globe & Mail (Toronto): How about the $800 daily payoff the track made one day on a bet that never was made. Is that not bookmaking? (1970)

vigorish, viggerish (1912) US; applied to the percentage deducted by the organizers of a game from the winnings of a gambler; probably from Yiddish, from Russian vyigrysh gain, winnings. Ed McBain: 'Was he taking a house vigorish?' 'Nope. 'What do you mean? He wasn't taking a cut? . . . Then why'd he risk having the game in his basement?' (1964)

Bookmaking

pick-up man (1944) US; applied to someone who collects (and pays out) money wagered with bookmakers. Alan Wykes: These agents are known as 'pickup men'. . . . they collect and pay out on behalf of the bookmakers, who pay them 10 per cent of their net winnings. (1964)

A tipster

tip-slinger (1915) Australian; applied to a racecourse tipster. Bulletin (Sydney): By their conversation most of them were tip-slingers or urgers. (1934)

urger (1919) Australian; applied to a racecourse tipster. A. Kimmins: 'An urger,' explained Lugs patiently, 'is a man who looks around for suckers like you and tips each one a different horse. Someone's got to win.' (1960)

A fruit-machine

one-arm(ed) bandit (1938) Orig US; from the single lever at the side by which it is operated. Dick Francis: There's more cars parked along the streets down there than one-armed bandits in Nevada. (1972)

pokey, pokie (1965) Australian; applied to a fruit-machine with card symbols; from pok(ier) machine + -ey. Telegraph (Brisbane): He bought a beer and walked over to the nearest 'pokey' with the change from a £5 ($10) note. He put this through the machine and tripled his money. (1969)
Time and Tide

1. Time

**nickel and dime (1935)** Dated; rhyming slang

**A very long time**

**a month of Sundays (1832), a week of Sundays (1898)** Perhaps from the notion of the tedium of the traditional Sunday, but compare the contemporary but obsolete a week of Saturdays (1831) in same sense (1841). (1901) • Chicago Tribune: This was the first time that a press agent had hit on a truthful first page story in a month of Sundays. (1949)

**a dog’s age (1836)** Orig US. Mazo de la Roche: She hasn’t laid an offering on the altar of Jalna for a dog’s age. (1933)

**donkey’s years, donkeys’ years (1916)** J. I. M. Stewart: It was donkey’s years since he had been in an English train. (1955)

**yonks (1968)** Mainly in the phrase for yonks; origin unknown. Anthony Blond: Nicholas Bagnall and David Holloway have run the Telegraph’s book pages for yonks. (1985)

**light years (1971)** From light year distance that light travels in one year. Guardian: By the end of the second half of normal time the first 45 minutes seemed light-years away. (1991)

**A very short time**

**jiffy (1785)** Often in the phrase in a jiffy in a very short time; origin unknown. Guardian: If his car had a puncture he wouldn’t sit in the back seat until someone put the spare wheel on. He would be out in a jiffy, giving a hand to speed things up. (1992)

**tick (1879)** Mainly British; from the notion of the time between two ticks of a clock. E. Reveley: Just wait a tick while I tell George where we’ll be, and then we can go down together. (1983)

**mo, mo’ (1896)** Especially in the phrase half a mo (wait for) a short time; abbreviation of moment. T. S. Eliot: ‘Arf a mo’, ‘arf a mo’. It’s lucky for you two as you’ve got someone what’s done a bit o’ lookin’ into things to keep you in line. (1934)

**jig-time (1916)** Mainly US; usually in the phrase in jig-time in a very short time. L. W. Robinson: If I was you, I’d see Gracie Hutchinson. . . . She’d solve your problem in the jiggly. (1993)

**sec (1956)** Abbreviation of second. Alison Lurie: I wonder if you could hold the baby for me, Missus Turner, please, just for a sec. (1962)

**Temporarily**


**Permanence**

**fixture (1788)** Applied, often derogatorily, to a person or thing permanently in a particular place or situation. Guardian: Dr Al-Anbari became a fixture at all the Arab social gatherings in New York. (1991)

**(have) come to stay, be here to stay (1863)** Orig US; denoting a permanent presence. John Wainwright: ‘I don’t go for them [sc. automatic gears]. They’ll kill real driving.’ . . . ‘They’re here to stay, mate, whether you go for ‘em, or not.’ (1971)

**for keeps (1871)** Orig US; denoting that something will continue for ever. Guardian: Economic and Monetary Union . . . means that a Dutch uncle will move into the household for keeps. (1992)

**Punctual(ly)**

**on the dot (1909)** W. R. Burnett: She’s always been very scrupulous about settling her bill on the dot. (1953)

**A very long time in the past**

**the year dot (1895)** From the notion of a date so old that it cannot be particularized. Anthony Gilbert: It’s . . . the wife who poisons the husband, not some confederate he met in Cuba in the year dot. (1956)

**Until a long time in the future**

**until the cows come home (1610)** Cosmopolitan: I could go on lapping up Pimms number one till the cows come home, I’m in that sort of mood. (1992)

**until kingdom come (1898)** From kingdom come heaven, paradise (from the clause thy kingdom come in the Lord’s Prayer), from the notion of lasting until the end of the world. New Scientist: If she fancies short, hairy men with bow legs then that’s her problem. She could have him till kingdom come as far as I was concerned. (1991)

**Dawn**

**sparrow-fart (1886)** Orig dialectal. Hugh McLeave: It was important enough to bring you out here at sparrow fart. (1974)

**crack of dawn (1923)** Compare earlier crack of day. Somerset Maugham: He had slipped away at crack of dawn. (1948)
2. Beginning

To begin

See also Speed (pp. 380–2).

fire away (1775) Now used mainly in the imperative as a demand or invitation to begin or continue. ■ Guardian: A multi-coloured God ... said he would like to discuss a few questions about the meaning of life. Without hesitation Yudhishtihra responded with the Hindi equivalent of: 'Fair enough squire, fire away.' (1991)

kick off (1911) From earlier sense, begin a football match by kicking the ball. ■ Frank Sargenson: To kick off with we'd fool about in the water. (1942)

shoot (1915) Orig US; used mainly in the imperative as a demand or invitation to begin or continue. ■ Herman Wouk: 'Can I pick your brain on one more point?' 'Shoot.' (1978)

snap in to it (1918) Applied to beginning with haste or urgency. ■ Boston Sunday Herald: The Senator ... spent half an hour persuading a very reluctant repairman to come. 'Why,' asked a guest, 'didn't you just tell him to snap to it?' (1967)

hoe in (1935) Australian & New Zealand; often applied specifically to starting to eat eagerly. ■ I. L. Idriess: The local cow... took a lick; fancied the salty taste and hoed in for breakfast. (1939)

get cracking (1937) Usually applied to beginning with haste or urgency. ■ New Yorker. Before Dr. Latham can get cracking with his computer, someone at the Mission Control ... will flip a switch. (1969)

get stuck in (1941) Orig Australian; usually applied to beginning eagerly or with gusto. ■ Mirage: Noticed old J. D. was getting stuck into a feed in the Flight kitchen yesterday. (1966)

get weaving (1942) Orig R.A.F. slang; usually applied to beginning with haste or urgency; from weave move repeatedly from side to side, in R.A.F. usage, fly a devious course, especially in avoiding or escaping danger. ■ B. W. Aldiss: Pack your night things in a small pack and get weaving, while I lay on transport. (1971)

get moving (1963) Usually applied to beginning with haste or urgency. ■ Grimsby Evening Telegraph: 'Like sexism and racism, ageism has had its day,' said Dr. Alex Comfort, a world expert on ageing. Old people had to get moving and be body-minded to improve their lot. (1977)

arvo (1927) Australian; representing a voiced pronunciation of af- of afternoon + the Australian colloquial suffix -o. ■ Jon Cleary: That how you spend your Sunday arvos, Rupe? (1952)

pip emma (1913) Orig military slang, now dated; from the former military communications code-names for the letters p and m. ■ Colleen McCullough: The second hand was just sweeping up to 9:40 pip-emma. (1977)

To use for the first time

christen (1990) First recorded in 1990, but in use earlier; from earlier sense, baptize. ■ Daily Star: Huddersfield's Lee Makel bought a new pair of boots before this game—and christened them with his first goal at the McAlpine Stadium. (1996)

from the top (1976) Orig and mainly applied to the starting of a performance from the beginning of a piece; first recorded in the 1970s, but in use before that. ■ New Yorker. From the top—'Watermelon Man'. Let's sock it out and give Mrs. Ritterhouse a chance to really cook. (1976)

As a beginning, to start with

as (or for) a starter, for starters (1873) Orig US. ■ New Yorker. Most of the program was devoted to the lessons in campaign management that could be learned from Presidential races, real and fictional. A scene was shown from the movie 'The Candidate', in which the media advisor said to Robert Redford, 'O.K., now, for starters, we got to cut your hair and eighty-six the sideburns'. (1980)

first off (1880) Orig US. ■ Nation (New York): Men of science ... no longer admit first off what simple good sense shows to us. (1915)

for (or as) openers (1967) Orig US. ■ Paul Erdman: I’d like to ask you a few simple questions ... for openers, what’s with this place here? (1974)

Let’s begin!

here goes (1829) Said when one is about to start something exciting, risky, etc. ■ Washington Post: Dear Mr. President, At a holiday dinner at the New Year, you challenged those present to do something for you: to tell you if we felt you were making a mistake. ... So here goes: Mr. President, don’t feel so besieged. (1993)
3. Deferral & Stopping

To defer, postpone

**sleep on** something (1519) Denoting postponing a decision on something until the next day, with the implication that a night’s sleep will facilitate judgment. ■ P. Gregory: Let me think about it, though. I’d like to sleep on it. (1962)

**sit on** something (1906) Denoting failing to deal with something over a long period. ■ Margaret Hinman: She’d ‘sat’ on the article . . . until . . . a deadline had galvanized her into putting words on paper. (1983)

**let** something **ride** (1921) Denoting taking no immediate action about something. ■ J. Wade: I let it ride. I couldn’t be bothered to reply. (1961)

**take a rain check** (1959) Orig & mainly US; denoting reserving the right not to take up a particular offer until convenient; often followed by on; from rain check ticket given to a spectator at an outdoor event providing for a refund of their entrance money or admission at a later date if the event is interrupted by rain. ■ Len Deighton: ‘Let me take a rain-check.’ ‘On a love affair?’ I said. (1976)

In a state of being deferred or postponed

**on the back burner** (1963) Orig US; from the use of the rearmost ring, hotplate, etc. on a cooking stove for simmering rather than boiling. ■ Times: He had misgivings about the GM bid for BL because under its global strategy Britain had been put on the ‘backburner’ for the last decade. (1986)

To delay, hold back, hesitate, wait

**dilly-dally** (1741) A fanciful reduplication of daily. ■ R. L. Stevenson: There is no time to dilly-dally in our work. (1883)

**hold one’s horses** (1844) Orig US; usually used in the imperative (hold your horses!) urging someone not to take precipitate action. ■ N. Fitzgerald: ‘I’m going in to the station now,’ he said. ‘Hold your horses,’ Marr said. ‘The night’s young.’ (1967)

**hang about, hang around** (1892) ■ G. F. Newman: He didn’t hang around afterwards. (1970)

**watch this space** (1917) Used to indicate that one should wait for further developments to be announced; originally an injunction to look regularly at a particular portion of a newspaper so as not to miss future announcements. ■ Julian Rathbone: Where is he? Watch this space for exciting revelations in the next few days. (1979)

**hold it** (1926) ■ Evelyn Berckman: ‘Let’s go and talk to her quickly, quickly—.’ ‘Hold it, darling,’ she interrupted. (1973)

**hang on** (1939) ■ Woman’s Own: Hang on a minute. . . . I’m coming with you. (1971)

To stop doing something; desist

**leave off** (c1400) Orig standard English; colloquial mainly when used with a gerund as object and as an order to stop doing something annoying. ■ Guardian: When I muttered privately about possible humbuggery not only Attenborough’s friends, but also those who reasonably should have been enemies, gave vent to similar cries of ‘No, no! ’ ‘Leave off!’ ‘Shame!’ (1992)

**give over** (1526) Orig standard English; often as an order to stop doing something annoying. ■ Isobel Lambot: ‘Elinor,’ said Lucton, exhausted, ‘for pity’s sake, give over.’ (1987)

**stow** (1676) Dated; often in an order to stop doing something annoying; often in the phrase stow it. ■ Kingsley Amis: No use telling her to stow it or cheese it or come off it because she really believes it. (1984)

**stash, stach** (1794) Orig criminals’ slang, dated; origin unknown. ■ W. Craig: She is requested to ‘stash’ tragedy and give them comedy. (1903)

**cheese** (1812) Orig thieves’ slang, dated; often in the phrase cheese it; origin unknown. ■ P. G. Wodehouse: He had been clearing away the breakfast things, but at the sound of the young master’s voice cheesed it courteously. (1923)

**turn** something **up** (1885) Often in an order to stop doing something annoying; often in the phrase turn it up. ■ Illustrated Sporting & Dramatic News: After one disastrous round . . . I intimated to the champion my intention to turn it up. (1893)

**chuck** (1888) Dated; often in an order to stop doing something annoying; often in the phrase chuck it

**nark** (1889) British; often in an order to stop doing something annoying; usually in the phrase nark it. ■ I. & P. Opie: Saying by the one being tortured: ‘Ere, nark it.’ (1959)

**chop** (1896) US; often in the phrase chop it

**knock** something **off** (1902) Often in an order to stop doing something annoying; often in the phrase knock it off. ■ Joseph Heller: ‘Hey, knock it off down there,’ a voice rang out from the far end of the ward. ‘Can’t you see we’re trying to nap?’ (1961)

**cut** something **out** (1903) Often in an order to stop doing something annoying; often in the phrase cut it out. ■ M. Guybon: ‘Cut it out!’ said Pryanchikov, struggling violently. ‘I’m sick of prosecutors and trials.’ (1970)

**can** (1906) Orig US; often in an order to stop talking or making a noise; often in the phrase can it. ■ Elizabeth Ferrars: Carver winced at the noise. ‘Can it, Carver.’ (1984)

**lay off** (1908) ■ Dulcie Gray: I’d lay off stirring up trouble for a bit if I were you. (1974)

**snap out of** something (1918) Denoting desisting from an attitude, changing a mood, pattern of behaviour, etc. by sudden effort; often
imperative in the phrase **snap out of it!**  
Rhona Petrie: Oh, snap out of it. You'll pull through on your own sometime.  
(1967)

**call it a day** *(1919)* Denoting stopping or abandoning what one is doing; compare earlier *call it half a day* in same sense *(1838)*  
John Braine: We'll call it a day. . . . Don't think badly of me.  
(1957)

**tie a can to** *(1926)* P. G. Wedehouse: Tie a can to the funny stuff, see? If I want to laugh, I'll read the comic strip.  
(1942)

**break something down** *(1941)* Australian & New Zealand; often in an order to stop doing something annoying, especially talking or making noise; usually in the phrase **break it down**  
Hugh Atkinson: The barman was worried about the noise and kept saying uselessly, 'Now, now, blokes, break it down,' and 'Fair go there, fellars.'  
(1961)

**pack something up** *(1942)* Orig US; often in an order to stop doing something annoying; often in the phrase **pack it up**  
Alexander Baron: Pack it up, Joyce. I'm telling you.  
(1951)

**pack something in** *(1943)* Often in an order to stop doing something annoying; often in the phrase **pack it in**  
Daily Mirror. Hey! You! That's my missus—pack it in!  
(1977)

**kiss off** *(1945)* Often in an order to stop doing something annoying  

**jack something in** *(1948)* British; often in an order to stop doing something annoying; often in the phrase **jack it in**  

**wrap it up** *(1957)* Often in an order to stop doing something annoying; from **wrap up** finish  
George Sanders: 'Wrap it up,' he would shout.  
(1980)

**get off** someone's **back** *(1961)* Denoting stopping harassing or annoying someone  
Joseph Heller: Then stop picking on me, will you? Get off my back, will you?  
(1961)

**leave it out** *(1969)* British; often in an order to stop doing something annoying  

See also To be, become or remain silent at **Communication** *(pp. 321–2).*

**Something cancelled**

**scrub** *(1952)* Applied especially to a flying mission  
Virgil Grissom: I was prepared for the scrub, and it was not long in coming.  
(1982)

**To give (something) up**

**shut up shop** *(1650)* Denoting giving up one's former activity; from earlier sense, close one's business  
George Orwell: Office babus are the real rulers of this country now. . . . Best thing we can do is to shut up shop and let 'em stew in their own juice.  
(1934)

**give something up as a bad job** *(1862)* Denoting abandoning something that has no chance of success  
Listener: Harold and Bernard Cohen were the two foremost British painters during the early 'sixties who were trying to evolve a visual language to correspond to what 'the artist thinks'. Now both seem to have given this up as a bad job and fallen in line with current reductivist tendencies.  
(1967)

**chuck** *(1883)* D. G. Mackail: He. . . . concluded by asking her to chuck it all and marry him.  
(1929)

**pack something up** *(1951)* Omsting Mills: I packed up my job last week.  
(1959)

**pack something in** *(1953)* Kenneth Clark: He had long ago 'packed it in,' and spent his life sitting by the window doing, with a volume of Pepys' Diary upside down on his knee.  
(1974)

**toss it in** *(1956)* New Zealand  
New Zealand Listener. In the end they saw some hogsbacks up above the col so they tossed it in and glissaded down back to their bivvy.  
(1971)

**jack something in** *(1958)* British; from earlier sense, stop doing something  
Kenneth Royce: I'm beginning to wonder if it's worth it. . . . Let me jack it in.  
(1972)

To dispense with

**skip it** *(1934)* Orig US; used as an order or exhortation to drop a subject or avoid doing something  
Mary McCarthy: 'Oh, Dr James,' she sighed. 'Let's skip it this time.'  
(1943)

**scrub round** *(1943)* British, orig services' slang  
T. White: I was required to do no less than fifteen days' cells. Reason: disobedience. Luckily, the captain had a sense of humour and finally scrubbed round it.  
(1964)

To put a stop to

**choke something off** *(1818)* Perhaps originally from the notion of making a dog loosen its hold by choking it  
Economist. Yet it did not want high rates by choking it •  
Observer. Any prudent banker would have pulled the plug on economic recovery.  
(1987)

**put the fritz on something** **put something on the fritz** *(1903)* Orig & mainly US; origin unknown  
R. H. R. Smithies: It's Mother's plan to put the fritz on shoplifting.  
(1968)

**put the tin hat on something** *(1919)* Denoting bringing something to a usually unwelcome close or climax  
C. Dickson: Next . . . came the point that put the tin hat on it.  
(1943)

**wash something up** *(1925)* US  
John O'Hara: They said act of God and fire etc. wash up a contract automatically.  
(1940)

**pull the plug on something** *(1961)* Orig from the notion of flushing something down the lavatory, but latterly usually with reference to the disconnecting of a piece of electrical equipment, specifically a life-support system  
Observer. Any prudent banker would have pulled the plug on Court Line long ago.  
(1974)

**zero** *(1965)* Denoting the elimination or deletion of something; often followed by out  
Tennis: 'Zero Screen 311!' he bellowed.  
(1990)

**zap** *(1976)* Orig US; from earlier sense, kill (with a ray gun)  
Sunday Sun-Times (Chicago): Atari seeks to zap X-rated video games.  
(1982)
To turn off

**kill** (1886) Orig US; applied to a motor, a light, etc. ■ Donald MacKenzie: I moved the hired car into the cobbled courtyard. . . . I killed the motor. (1971)

To squash someone, prevent someone acting; check, snub

**sit on** someone (1865) ■ Noel Streatfield: In the tube going home, Pauline and Petrova pestered Posy for criticism of the production; but the moment she made any, they sat on her, asking her what she thought she knew about it. (1936)

**slap** someone down (1938) ■ Times: The police sergeant who conducted the prosecutions was often slapped down by the clerk of the court for leading his witnesses. (1973)

Something finished

**history** (1884) Applied to something that is past and no longer relevant or important; often in the phrase ancient history ■ P. Spencer: You won’t get anywhere by fretting about it. . . . It’s ancient history by now. (1961)

**the end**

**thirty** (1895) US, used by journalists, printers, etc.; from the use of the figure 30 to mark the end of a piece of journalist’s copy ■ Gore Vidal: ‘When we know those two things, it’s fat thirty time.’ Bruce had obviously been impressed by journalism school. (1978)

**end**

**end of the line** (1948) Orig US ■ E. Burgess: It looks like the end of the line for Roylake. Unless he can think up something—fast! (1959)

**end of the road** (1954) ■ Guardian: The end of the road for Mr. Dubcek’s Czechoslovakia may not have been reached after all. (1968)

**endsville, Endsville, Endville** (1961) US; from end (+ -s-) + -ville ■ Frank Sinatra: You can be the most artistically perfect performer in the world, but the audience is like a broad—if you’re indifferent, endsville. (1984)

The game is up

**the jg is up** (1800) From jg game, trifle ■ Nature: The weight of opinion seems to be that the jg is up for the map’s supporters. (1974)

4. Experience & Inexperience

An experienced person

**old stager** (1570) Stager perhaps originally from Old French estagier inhabitant, resident, although later associated with obsolete stager actor ■ Observer: He closed quickly on the Kenyan David Kibet and another old-stager, Said Aouita. (1991)

**old sweat** (1919) Applied to an old soldier

To gain experience

**see** (get a look at, etc.) **the elephant** (1835) US; denoting seeing the world, or the bright lights of the big city, or more broadly getting experience of life; from the notion of the elephant as an exotic animal seen only rarely, in zoos and circuses ■ T. V. Olsen: Saturdays some of the boys from the three big outfits come in to see the elephant. (1960)

An inexperienced person; a beginner

**greenhorn** (1862) Often applied specifically to a novice in a trade; from earlier, obsolete sense, raw recruit in the army (1650); ultimately from the notion of a calf with ‘green’ or young horns ■ Rider Haggard: I suppose you are not hoaxing us? It is, I know, sometimes thought allowable to take a greenhorn in. (1885)

**greenie** (1848) US; from greenhorn + -ie

Fashionable, up-to-date

O.K., okay, okey (1889) Applied to something currently socially or culturally acceptable; from earlier sense, satisfactory. Stephen Potter: The word ‘diathesis’... is now on the O.K. list for conversation men. (1950)

hot (1908) Applied to someone or something (originally news) excitingly of the moment. Daily Mail: Miss Roberts hasn’t done badly either. The hottest female star of the moment has already been paid £2 million. (1991)

with it (1931) Orig US. Daily Mail: Home made a strong attempt to get with it. Result: the stronger emphasis on fashionwear. (1971)

5. Fashionableness, Stylishness

Fashion


Fashionable, up-to-date

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in (1960)  
Olive Norton: It is the in place. You’d be surprised who you meet there. (1970)

way-in (1960)  
From the adverb way + in, after way-out eccentric, unconventional  
Punch: There’s a real way-in guy looking like how a guy on The Times Saturday Review ought to look like. (1967)

trendy (1962)  
Sometimes used derogatorily; from trend + -y  
Lancet: Pathobiology (a trendy name for general pathology) seems to be a fashionable subject in the United States. (1972)

switched on (1964)  
D. Devine: Her mother wasn’t switched on, she knew nothing of modern fashion. (1970)

where it’s at (1965)  
Orig US  
Melody Maker: The musicians frequently became frustrated... not really believing their own bands were where it was at. (1971)

together (1968)  
Daily Mirror: No finer honour can be bestowed on a man down the King’s Road than to be called a together cat. (1968)

funky (1969)  
Orig US; from earlier sense, (of jazz or rock) earthy, bluesy  
Holiday Which?: Once across Broadway from Washington Square, you’re in East Village, which is where funky New York is now found. (1990)

big (1970)  
Daily Telegraph: A bale of soft material, patterned in that modernismus which was so big in the Thirties, and now survives mainly in British Rail. (1970)

fash (1977)  
Abbreviation of fashionable  
Hair: Flash and fash feeling for a successful new season style. (1985)

happening (1977)  
Orig US  
Jackie Pop Special: Some people must really go trainspotting because they think it’s the happening thing to do. (1989)

(Fashionably) stylish or smart

natty (1785)  
Apparently related to neat  
Daily Telegraph: Alex Higgins entered the arena without a tie, attire bottomed off with a natty pair of purple suede shoes. (1991)

dressy (1785)  
Denoting clothing that is elaborately elegant; from earlier sense, fond of (elaborate) dressing  
Daily Mail: It looked wonderful but, with its full-length overskirt, perhaps just a little ‘too dressy’, felt Andrea, for a ball that wasn’t black tie. (1991)

spiffy (1853)  
Mainly US; origin unknown; compare obsolete dialect spiff smart, obsolete slang spiff well-dressed man, swell, and spiv  
Herman Wouk: She’s turned into quite the spiffy New York gal. (1978)

spiffing (1861)  
Dated; compare spiffy

nifty (1868)  
Orig US; origin uncertain; a connection with magnificent has been suggested  
Joanna Cannan: I... got the niftiest white overalls. (1958)

swish (1879)  
Orig uncertain; perhaps from swish hissing sound  
Peter Dickinson: The architects... had made their name running up swish hotels in Beirut. (1974)

snappy (1881)  
Especially in the phrase snappy dresser  
Paul Theroux: A woman waiting for her lover... whom she would describe as a snappy dresser, a riot, a real card. (1977)

doggy (1885)  
Dated; from dog (compare put on (the) dog behave ostentatiously) + -y  
A. J. Worrall: I like your tie, it is very doggy. (1932)

classy (1891)  
From class + -y  

posh (1918)  
Perhaps related to obsolete posh money, a dandy; apparently nothing to do with ‘port out, starboard home’, of cabins on the sea-path between Britain and India  
Lancashire Life: The poshest Granada Ghas... have electric windows. (1977)

ritzy (1920)  
Orig US; from the name of César Ritz (1850–1918), Swiss-born proprietor of luxury hotels + -y  
People: That glamour gal of British trains, the rizy, resplendent Golden Arrow. (1947)

dicty (1925)  
US, Black English; from earlier sense, wealthy, snobbish, conceited

snazzy (1932)  
Orig US; origin unknown  
Joan Lock: They’ve made the plain uniforms look as snazzy as possible with whiter-than-white hat-bands, belts and gaiters. (1968)

sharp (1940)  
Orig US  
Observer: It’s more a desire for things you haven’t got but feel you’ve a right to, because other people have them—a sharp suit, good things, neat things, flashy things. (1962)

swanky (1940)  
From earlier sense, (of a person) swaggering, pretentiously grand  
Spectator: An English producer and a London critic... in the swanky bar of the Excelsior. (1959)

groovy (1941)  
Orig US; from earlier sense, playing with inspiration  
Listener: There are a lot of guys going round with groovy hair-styles. (1968)

cool (1946)  
Orig US; from earlier sense, sophisticated  
Observer: They got long, sloppy haircuts and wide knot ties and no-press suits with fat lapels. Very cool. (1959)

zooty (1946)  
From zoot (suit) (in allusion to the zooty sideburns)  
Observer: Their heavy... lover, too, with long jaws and zooty sideburns. (1964)

hip (1951)  
Orig US; from earlier sense, fully informed  
V. Ferdinand: We sometimes... go in for that kind of living thinking it’s hip. (1972)

hep (1957)  
Orig US; variant of hip  
Guardian: Not even its bitterest critics could accuse the Labour party of being ‘hep’. (1960)

swinging (1958)  
Applied to something lively and modern  
Weekend Telegraph: Diana Vreeland... editor of Vogue... has said simply ‘London is the most swinging city in the world at the moment’. (1965)

go (1962)  
Orig US, dated; compare the go that which is fashionable  
Time: Beantins, whose heavy black turtleneck sweaters had never looked particularly go with white tennis socks. (1963)

glam (1963)  
Abbreviation of glamorous  
Celia Dale: She was... wearing eye-shadow and a great deal of lipstick. ‘You’re looking very glam,’ he said. (1964)
radical (1971) Orig surfers' slang; from earlier sense, at or exceeding the limits of safety


preppy (1980) US; applied to clothes, etc. that are fashionably smart, like a student's uniform; compare earlier sense, suitable to a preparatory school, immature ■ Guardian: The look is smart but casual, preppy without being prim, sporty without being impractical. (1992)


fresh (1984) Orig & mainly US; a slight shift from the standard meaning, associated with the language of rap and hip-hop ■ T. Kidder: Bro, that was fresh! (1989)

piss elegant (1991) Used ironically ■ J. Keenan: 'What's he supposed to be like?' asked one. 'Very piss elegant,' said the young mimic. 'Stuck-up British chintz queen.' (1991)

That which is fashionable

the kick (a1700) Dated ■ E. Lynn Linton: Mrs. West naturally wanted 'the last new kick'. (1894)

(all) the rage (1785) ■ Daily Express: Cut-outs are all the rage-cut-outs in wood and in cardboard painted. (1927)

all (or quite) the go (c1787) Dated ■ Sunday Mail Magazine (Brisbane): In Brisbane, Aroma's in Savoir Faire in Park Road is all the go, too. That one's a ton of fun, with a clientele to match. (1988)

A fashionable or stylish person

swell (1786) Dated; in later use also applied to someone of high social position ■ Law Times: The plaintiff stated that the defendant was one of the greatest swells in the City... and had often readily paid £20 or £30. (1892)

slicker (1900) Orig & mainly US; applied to a smart and sophisticated person; especially in the phrase city slicker ■ Xan Fielding: The two city slickers were travelling on business. (1953)

nut (1904) Dated; applied to a fashionable or showy man of affected elegance ■ Rose Macaulay: He always looked the same, calm, unruffled, tidy, the exquisite nut. (1920)

hipster (1941) Orig US; applied to someone who is in touch with contemporary ideas and fashions; from hip fully informed + -ster ■ Partisan Review: Carrying his language and his new philosophy like concealed weapons, the hipster set out to conquer the world. (1949)

hippie, hippy (1953) US, dated; applied to someone who is in touch with contemporary ideas and fashions; from hip fully informed + ie; compare later sense, person leading an unconventional life, taking hallucinogenic drugs, etc. (1965) ■ D. Wallop: Man, I really get a bellfly of these would be hippies. (1953)

slick (1959) US; applied to a smart and sophisticated person; apparently a back-formation from slicker ■ E. Bullins: Dandy's mother had a civil-service job in the city, and the city slick Dandy was from Philly. (1971)

swinger (1965) ■ Joseph Gores: The Dukum Inn... looked... like an aging swinger getting up in the morning with his teeth still in the water glass. (1972)

trendy (1968) Often used derogatorily; from the adjective trendy ■ Listener: The 'trendies' concern for the individual seems to relate more to his place in society than to his soul. (1982)

Something smart or stylish

sharpie (1970) North American; compare sharp stylish ■ Tucson (Arizona) Citizen: Starter home... carpeting, drapes and remodeled kitchen. Call... to see this little sharpie. (1979)

Something fashionable or popular

crowd puller (1955) ■ Mail on Sunday: 'HDTV will be a crowd puller,' claims Dixons' Danny Churchill. (1991)

hot property (1958) ■ Rolling Stone: The Hagers, potentially hot property, now have Record One. (1969)

To become or be fashionable

catch on (1887) ■ Daily Mail. Fortunately the great British blue overall does not look like it's going to catch on in the United States. (1991)

swing (1957) ■ Times: The fashion collections... are supposed to have proved... that 'London swings again'. (1983)

To make or become more stylish or smart

spiff (1877) Used transitively; usually followed by up; back-formation from spiffing or spiffy ■ Arizona Daily Star: The man doing it was an interior decorator, not an art conservator, and he did what he felt was best—he went in and spiffed up the church. (1979)

posh up (1919) Often in the phrase posed up; from posh stylish, smart ■ Philip Purser: We... had dined at a rotten, posed-up Thames pub. (1968)

glam (1937) Used transitively and intransitively; denoting making oneself glamorous; usually followed by up; abbreviation of glamour ■ John Osborne: Get yourself glammed up, and we'll hit the town. (1957)

tart (1938) Mainly British; used transitively and intransitively; usually denoting flashiness or gaudiness; usually followed by up; from tart promiscuous woman, prostitute ■ Jilly Cooper: They were tarting up in the Ladies. (1976) ■ Observer: American dealers would tart up the junk and sell it at suburban auctions at three times the English price. (1978)

spiv (1959) British; used transitively; denoting dressing oneself up flashily; from spiv (flashily
dressed) small-time criminal  ■ B. W. Aldiss: We spoofed ourselves up, put on clean shirts, and strolled out of camp. (1971)

Unfashionable, unstylish

out (1966)  ■ Daily Telegraph: They [sc: children] want to eat savoury things most of all; but there are certain 'in' sweet-stuffs and a very great many 'out' ones. (1966)

naff (1970) Mainly British; from earlier sense, worthless, faulty  ■ Times: Gaulther had turned everything that fashion most despises, what English youth calls 'naff', into high style. (1985)

6. Old

one foot in the grave (1632)  ■ James Payn: He has twenty thousand a year . . . And one foot in his grave. (1886)

the wrong side of (a1663) Denoting an age in excess of the stated age; formerly also the shady side of  ■ G. F. Newman: Tasting stir, Goldby suddenly realized he was the wrong side of thirty for acquiring the habit. (1970)

Anno Domini (1885) From earlier use, applied to years of the Christian calendar; from the notion of the passing of the years  ■ E. V. Lucas: When the time came for A. to take the bat he was unable to do so. Anno Domini asserted itself. (1906)

pushing . . . (1974) Used to denote that someone is nearly a particular (advanced) age  ■ Guardian: In the mid-1930s, when his own work had run dry and he was pushing 70, any normal professional would have retired. (1993)

An old person

oldster (1848) From old + -ster, after youngster  ■ Wall Street Journal: The youngsters are chafing at the bit and aren’t willing to wait and see how the civil rights bill shapes up, ’he adds, ’and we oldsters can’t hold back any longer.’ (1964)

coddle, oldy (1874) From old + -ie  ■ John Brown: We’ve got our rights, haven’t we, same as the oldies. (1972)
crock (1876) Applied especially to an old person who is debilitated or an invalid; often in the phrase old crock; from earlier meaning, old ewe  ■ Guardian: Behind him at yesterday’s launch . . . were enough old crocks to remind you that Major does come from a new generation. (1992)

An old man

old boy (a1500)  ■ Daily Mail: But then the old boy, refusing to admit that he’s a widower and prone to long, animated conversations with his late wife, does not set great store by reality. (1991)

buffer (1749) British; applied to a silly, incompetent, or reactionary old man; usually in the phrase old buffer; probably from the obsolete verb buff imitative of the sound of a soft body being struck, or from the obsolete verb buff stutter  ■ London Review of Books: I take my stand among the other old buffers here. (1979)

codger (1756) Applied especially to an old man with strange habits; usually in the phrase old codger; perhaps a variant of codger sponger  ■ Percy Bysshe Shelley: I . . . sign the agreement for the old codger’s house. (1821)

poppa stoppa (1944) US, Black English; applied especially to an elderly man who is smart or effective; rhyming form on poppa father

An old woman

trot (1530) Dated, derogatory; usually in the phrase old trot; from Anglo-Norman trote, of unknown origin  ■ E. V. Lucas: Miss Graham got an old trot after a good deal of messing about. (1906)

old girl (1791)  ■ Guardian: If she felt any real regret over her final farewell, Dame Joan Sutherland never showed it . . . Besides, she didn’t want anyone to start saying ’Why does the old girl go on still?’ (1991)

tab (1909) Derogatory; usually in the phrase old tab; short for earlier obsolete slang tabby (catty) older woman  ■ Ruth Rendell: We’ve got some old tab coming here . . . Pal of my ma-in-law’s. (1971)

biddy (1938) Derogatory; usually in the phrase old biddy; from earlier (derogatory) sense, woman  ■ Sunday Times: Most can look upon La Ciccolina and think only what an entirely unerotic old biddy she is. (1993)

ma (1951) Used as a title or form of address for an old (married) woman; from earlier sense, mother; shortening of mamma  ■ P. G. Wodehouse: ’Did Ma Purkiss make a speech?’ ’Yes, Mrs Purkiss spoke.’ (1966)

See also bag, boiler, crow, old boot, and trout under An ugly person or thing at Beauty & Ugliness (p. 219).
An (old) person with old-fashioned or reactionary ideas or habits

**has-been (1606)** Applied to someone who is no longer as successful, famous, important, etc. as they once were; from has 3 present singular of have + been past participle of be • Joseph Wambaugh: When I retire I’m just a has-been. (1972)

**fogy, fogey (1780)** Usually in the phrase old fogy; related to obsolete slang fogram old-fashioned person, of unknown origin • John Rae: Some old fogey they have dragged out of retirement.

**fossil (1857)** From earlier sense, remains of a living thing preserved in the ground • Guardian: Today’s young bloods, though heirs to the Osborne revolution, mostly regard the man himself as an old fossil. (1992)

**moss-back (1878)** US; from earlier sense, large old fish so sluggish that it has a growth of algae on its back • Trevanian: The moss-backs of the National Gallery had pulled off quite a coup in securing the Marini Horse for a one-day exhibition. (1973)

**fuddy-duddy (1904)** Origin unknown • Nevil Shute: People may call the Sheikh of Khulal an old fuddy-duddy, but he’s an important man in these parts. (1951)

**fud, fudd (1910)** Orig and mainly US; usually in the phrase old fud; shortened from fuddy-duddy, perhaps later reinforced by the name of Elmer Fudd, character in Bugs Bunny cartoons from c1939 • New Yorker: Steve Martin playing straight man to his fud, they’re a manic-depression team. (1984)

**dug-out (1912)** Applied to someone of outdated appearance or ideas, especially a retired officer, etc. recalled to temporary military service; from the notion of digging out something previously disposed of by burying; compare earlier dug-out canoes made from a hollowed-out tree trunk, excavated shelter • A. J. Toynbee: These ‘elder statesmen’ are the last people to whom a community can safely commit its destinies in an emergency, since . . . these ‘dug-outs’ are doubly incapacitated. (1939)

**blimp, Blimp, Colonel Blimp (1934)** British; from Colonel Blimp, the name of a character invented by David Low (1891–1963), cartoonist and caricaturist, pictured as a rotund pompous ex-officer voicing a rooted hatred of new ideas • Daily Telegraph: His usual comic character of pub pundit or cockney blimp. (1968). Hence blimpish (1938), blimpishness (1941)

**fart (1937)** Usually in the phrase old fart; from earlier sense, escape of intestinal gas from the anus • Ink: Marty Feldman said to the judge as he left the witness stand, ‘I don’t think he even knew I was here, the boring old fart.’ (1971) • Radio Times: He has been critical of some of the more ‘right-on’ comedians, some of whom he thinks have sold out. ‘You get older and turn into more of a fart. That’s what everyone does really.’ (1994)

Old-fashioned, outdated

**mossy (1904)** US; applied to someone or something extremely reactionary or conservative; from the notion of moss growing on old things

**old hat (1911)** • Val Gielgud: She . . . had made all jokes on the subject of mothers-in-law not only ‘old hat’ but . . . meaningless. (1974)

**hairy (1950)** Orig US; from the notion of something so old that it has grown hairs

**dodder (1819)** Used of an old person to denote slow and shuffling progress; from earlier sense, tremble • Mrs. Humphry Ward: Old Alresford, too, was fast doddering off the stage. (1894). Hence doddery (1866) • Chambers’s Journal: The old man . . . seemed to have become very doddery as he descended from the buggy. (1921)

**gaga (1917)** Applied to dottiness in old age; from French gaga senile person, senile • Angus Wilson: If Godmanchester was so gaga that he blabbed like this, then our prospects were alarming. (1961). Hence gaga used as a noun to denote a senile person (1938) • Arthur Koestler: Couldn’t understand what he said . . . Disastrous old gaga. (1941)

An old or worn-out thing

**chestnut (1880)** Orig US; applied to a too-often-repeated story, and hence to anything stale or trite; origin uncertain, but the following is recorded by W. Dimond Broken Sword (1816): Zavor . . . When suddenly from the thick boughs of a cork tree—Pablo. (Jumping up.) A chestnut, Captain, a chestnut . . . Captain, this is the twenty-seventh time I have heard you relate this story, and you invariably said, a chestnut, till now • Listener: Souzay’s recital [of songs] . . . is a rare and welcome experience—the more so as on this occasion the chestnuts of the repertoire are avoided. (1962)

**rinky-dink (1956)** US; applied to something worn out or antiquated; from earlier sense, something worthless • New Yorker: Red Garter . . . is a music-hall rinky-dink, complete with fire engine, but the banjo band is above average. (1969)

An old or worn-out vehicle

**crock (1903)** From earlier sense, debilitated old person • H. G. Wells: I understand you want all of these out-of-date crocks of yours . . . to fly again. (1935)

**tin Lizzie (1915)** Applied to an old or decrepit car; Lizzie from the female forename, an abbreviation of Elizabeth; originally applied to an early model of Ford car • D. M. Davin: The pace they drove their old tin lizzies. (1949)

**struggle-buggy (1925)** US, dated; applied especially to a battered old motor vehicle

**heap (1926)** Applied especially to a battered old motor vehicle • C. F. Burke: You will be like a guy who paid no attention to his heap and it broke down in the traffic. (1969)

**jalopy, jallop, jalopp(e), jollop (1929)** Orig US; applied to a battered old motor vehicle, and also to an old aeroplane; origin unknown • M. E. B. Banks: Perhaps a succession of broken down
jaiopies has impaired my faith in the internal combustion engine. (1955)

**oil-burner** (1938) Applied to a run-down vehicle which uses too much engine oil

**orphan** (1942) Applied to a discontinued model of motor vehicle

**rust-bucket** (1945) Applied (North American) to an old rusty ship or (mainly Australian) to an old rust-ridden car. **Truck & Bus Transportation:** The oldest Volvos . . . are far from being rust buckets. (1984)

**banger** (1962) British; usually in the phrase old banger; from the noise it makes when running

**beaten-up** (1930) Mainly US • W. R. Burnett: The girl played out (1863) • Independent on Sunday.

**moth-eaten** (1551) • Daily Telegraph: Alf Gover’s precious but cramped, moth-eaten old cricket school in Wandsworth. (1991)

**the worse for wear** (1782) • T. Berger: The vehicles in view were routine automobiles, two of them the worse for wear, with dents and rust and jagged antenna-stems. (1982)

**rusty** (1796) Applied to something that has deteriorated through lack of practice; from earlier sense, affected by rust • James Payn: To have to admit that her French was a little rusty. (1888)

**played out** (1863) • Independent on Sunday: Romania’s National Theatre of Craiova . . . had previously seemed to offer no more than redundant allegories on played-out revolutions. (1991)

**warby** (1923) Australian; compare warb disreputable person • Robert Conquest: They’re old police boots, a bit worn down in the heels and warby in the soles. (1978)

**past it** (1928) Applied especially to people past their prime • John Guthrie: One never dreamed of going to people past their prime • New York Times Book Review. Must you feel ‘over the hill’ after 40? (1962)

**beat-up** (1930) Mainly US • W. R. Burnett: The girl was sitting once more in the beat-up leather chair. (1953)

**shot** (1933) Mainly US • G. V. Higgins: Your boiler is one of those old things . . . I think it’s about shot. (1981)

**clapped out** (1946) British; from the past participle of clap hit • Daily Express: The clapped-out car handed in for replacement. (1960)

**over the hill** (1950) Orig US; applied especially to people past their prime • New York Times Book Review: Must you feel ‘over the hill’ after 40? (1962)

**stove-up** (1974) North American; from earlier sense, (of a person) exhausted • D. Sears: An elderly man in levis and stove-up range-boots was . . . in the lower bunk. (1974)

To be old or worn out

**have** (or have grown) **whiskers** (1935) Applied especially to news, a story, etc. that is no longer novel • D. O’Sullivan: ‘Did I ever tell you the one about the Scotsman and the octopus?’ . . . ‘It has whiskers.’ (1977)

**have had it** (1959) From earlier sense, defeated or killed • New Zealand Listener: He re-wound the cord and tried again: no spark. ‘It’s had it, I think.’ (1959)

To remove or dismiss because of old age or obsolescence

**pension off** (1848) From the notion of giving a pension to an old person on retirement • Listener: The convention system . . . is an old and cunning harridan, as irrelevant as Mayor Daley, and should be pensioned off. (1968)

A place for old people

**granny flat** (1965) Applied to a flat for an old person, especially in a relative’s house

**Costa Geriatrica** (1977) British, jocular; applied to a coastal area with a large residential population of old and retired people, especially the south coast of England; after Costa Brava, etc. from Spanish costa coast + mock-Latin geriatrica of or for the elderly

**snow** (1989) Falling in small scattered drops • John Service: Feeling that it was spittin’ through the win’, I quickened my step. (1887)

**spot** (1849) Orig dialectal; applied to rain falling in scattered drops • Westminster Gazette: It began to spot with rain. (1909)

**send her** (or it) down, Davy (also Hughie, etc.) (1919) Australian & New Zealand; used to express a wish for rain to fall • K. S. Prichard: Miners and prospectors would turn out and yell to a dull, dirty sky clouded with red dust: ‘Send her down! Send her down, Hughie!’ (1946)
**8. Temperature**

### Cold weather

**brass monkey (1857)** Used allusively in referring to very cold weather; mainly in the phrase *cold enough to freeze the balls off a brass monkey*; possibly from *brass monkey* plate on a man-of-war's deck on which cannon balls were stacked, which contracted in cold weather and made its load of balls unstable. *Guardian.* Brass monkey weather. (1973)

### Uncomfortably cold

**parky (1895)** British; origin unknown. *Tim Heald:* ‘Cold isn’t it?’ ‘Pretty parky.’ (1975)

### Hot weather

**scorcher (1874)** Applied to a very hot day. *F. V. Kirby:* A heavy mist . . . gave promise of a hot day, and it turned out a scorcher. (1899)

**sizzler (1901)** Orig US; applied to a very hot day or period. *G. H. Lorimer:* Satan may be down in Arizona cooking up a sizzler for the corn belt. (1904)

### Comfortably warm

**warm as toast (1855)** *Robert Louis Stevenson:* It keeps this end of the valley as warm as a toast. (1883)

### (Uncomfortably) hot

**roasting (1768)** *W. C. Baldwin:* In the middle of a regular roasting hot day. (1863)

**baking (1786)** *George Orwell:* It’s getting beastly hot, isn’t it? . . . Isn’t it simply *baking!* (1934)

**boiling (1930)** *Rosamond Lehmann:* He was the sort of boy who would . . . declare on the coldest day that he was boiling. (1930)

**scorching (1940)** *Arnold Wesker:* This hut . . . is going to be your home for the next eight scorching weeks. (1962)
Location and Movement

1. Places

A locality

**parts (c1400)** Often in the phrase in these/those parts. *Oxford Mail* When we first saw the man we thought nothing about it. Roadsters are a common sight in these parts. (1970)

**way (1573)** Used after a place-name to denote a particular locality. ■ Chester Himes: Then he met a high-yellah gal, a three-quarter keltz, from down Harlem way. (1938)

**neck of the woods (1839)** Orig US; applied originally to a settlement in wooded country, and hence to any district or neighbourhood, especially one in which a particular person lives. ■ *Listener*: Some jerk has applied for a job as the new Cyril Connolly. Perhaps you would look him over, he lives in your neck of the woods. (1967)

**possie, pozzy (1915)** Orig & mainly Australian & New Zealand; applied specifically to a military position; from position + -ie. ■ Chronicles of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force: In the small hours we reached our next 'possie'—a shell-torn gully near Fusieux. (1919)

**nabe (1935)** US; from the pronunciation of neighborhood

**turf (1953)** Orig and mainly US; applied to the streets controlled by a juvenile street gang and regarded by them as their territory, and hence (1962) to the part of a city or other area in which a criminal, detective, etc. operates. ■ H. E. Salisbury: These blocks constituted the 'turf' of a well-known street-gang. (1959) ■ D. Bennett: Special Branch would not want to be involved in a killing so far from their own turf. (1976)

**twenty (1975)** Orig and mainly US; used on Citizens' Band radio to denote one’s location or position; shortened from 10-20 in the ‘ten-code’, a police (and subsequently CB) communication code. ■ *Citizens’ Band*: Thank you Silver Fox for your excellent work in what is a very important area, with . . . all the fender-benders that occur around that twenty. (1985)

Everywhere

**all over the shop (1874)** Often implying random or disordered scattering. ■ J. I. M. Stewart: At one of Anthea Gender’s [parties] one was substantially although not too obtrusively in the presence of grandees drawn from all over the shop. (1978)

**all over the auction (1930)** Australian. ■ Nevil Shute: You’d be surprised at the number of letters that there are—all over the auction. (1960)

Cities and towns

**the Smoke, the Big Smoke, the Great Smoke (1848)** British & Australian; applied to any large city, especially (British) London. ■ *Telegraph* (Brisbane): He falls for a beautiful blonde who wants him to stay in the Big Smoke—but city life has no appeal. (1968) ■ *New York Daily News*: ‘Casinos . . .? ’ echoed Harry, Derek nodded. ‘One in Brighton, one up in the Smoke.’ (1989)

**Birmingham**

**Brum (1862)** Shortening of Brummagem, dialect form of Birmingham

**Boston, Massachusetts**

**Bean Town (1901)** From the inhabitants’ legendary liking for beans. ■ Robert Ludlum: He’s what they call a functioning alcoholic, something of a character in Bean Town’s shadier districts. (1990)

**Chicago**

**the Windy City (1887)** ■ Kyrl Bonfiglioli: The scent of the Chicago River as it slides greasily under the nine bridges in the centre of the Windy City. (1979)

**Chi (1895)** Abbreviation; pronounced /jaɪ/

**Dallas, Texas**

**Big D (1930)** ■ Norman Mailer: They found her vagina in North Carolina and part of her gashole in hometown Big D. (1967)

**Hollywood**

**Tinseltown (1975)** Often used in allusion to the supposedly glittering world of Hollywood cinema. ■ *Economist*: It is sad for Tinseltown that Mr Puttnam could not find out whether his hunch was right. (1987)

**New Orleans**

**the Big Easy (1970)** Apparently coined by James Conaway as the title of a novel, and popularized by the 1986 film based on this

**New York**

**the Big Town (1902)**

**the Big Apple (1909), the Apple (1938), the Big A (1980)** Apparently from earlier obsolete US slang big apple important person, big shot (compare top banana big shot); in early use mainly applied specifically to the top New York City racetracks; adopted into jazz musicians’
slang in the 1930s, and often applied specifically to Harlem; revived and popularized in 1971 by Charles Gillett, president of the New York Convention and Visitors Bureau, as part of a publicity campaign for the city. ■ United States 1980/81: Many Broadway-bound shows play Chicago before heading for the Big Apple. (1979)

Philadelphia

■ Rogue: After a while, Kitty murmured something to Cappy, and he held her close, answering, 'We'll just have to wait till we pull into Philly, honey.' (1961)

Portsmouth

Pompey (1899) Applied to the town and dockyards of Portsmouth, and also to Portsmouth Football Club; alteration of Portsmouth, perhaps influenced by the name of the Roman general ■ C. S. Forester: The grim wife he had in Pompey. (1943)

San Francisco

Bay City (1879) ■ Raymond Chandler: They put Dad in charge of the Bureau of Records and Identification, which in Bay City is about the size of a tea-bag. (1940)

Sydney

steak and kidney (1905) Australian; rhyming slang

Ypres

Wipers (1914) Representing the anglicized pronunciation of Ypres adopted by Allied servicemen during World War I, when the town was the site of three significant battles involving great loss of life ■ Nancy Mitford: We'd like to see old Wipers again.... We had the time of our lives in those trenches when we were young. (1960)

A city, place or situation with the stated characteristics

-ville (1843) Orig US; used as a suffix forming the name of fictitious places with reference to a particular (often unpleasant) quality; from French ville town, as in many American town names ■ J. Aitkin: University? Man, that's just dragsville. (1967)

city (1960) Orig US ■ Rolling Stone: All my life I’ve taught by my family to keep it going, don’t get bored at the dinner table. When I learned I could do that by just being honest, whole vistas of trouble opened up. I get on a talk show, I get talking and whoa! Trouble city! (1979)

Countries and states: Australia

the other side (1827) Australian & New Zealand; applied to the other side of Australia

Oz (1908) Orig Australian; alteration of initial element of Australia ■ Private Eye: If they guess I'm from Oz the shit will really hit the fan. (1970)

Aussie (1917) Australian; compare earlier sense, an Australian ■ Australian: 'Cheers from A Sunburnt Country!' the advertisement trumpets. 'Toast your Pommie mates with a gift from good old Aussie.' (1974)

Australasia; the antipodes

down under (1886) Usually applied to Australia or New Zealand or both ■ Daily Mail: The steeplechaser Kinlark, a gift to the Prince from 'down under'. (1922)

Britain

the Old Dart (1892) Australian & New Zealand; applied to Britain (or England) as the mother country; dart apparently an alternation of dirt ■ Bulletin (Sydney): He was a forward in the British team of 1904, led by Bedell Siewwright, about the best side from the Old Dart to visit these shores. (1933)

Blightly, blightly (1915) British, army slang, dated; used by soldiers serving abroad; contracted form, originating in the Indian army, of Hindustani bilyardi, wildyaffi foreign, European ■ J. R. Ackerley: I was not happy in Blightly. (1968)

Gibraltar

Gib (1869) Abbreviation ■ Scotsman: For an imaginatively designed haven of peace amid the bustle of Gib's traffic visit the Almeda Botanical Gardens. (1995)

Hong Kong

Honkers (1987) From Hong Kong + -rs, perhaps subliminally influenced by honkers drunk ■ Guardian: In describing, not exactly flatteringly, the attitudes of pink-faced young westerners in Hong Kong, he writes as follows. '... They take these Cathay Pacific stewardesses (known in the local argot as LBFDs, little brown fucking machines) to the discotheques....' Word of this broke in Honkers. Cathay Pacific, seething, politely turned the author away at the departure gate. (1992)

Mesopotamia

Mespot, Mess-pot (1917) Dated; abbreviation ■ John Buchan: What front were you on—the Western, Palestine, Mesopot? (1933)

New South Wales

Ma State, Ma (1906) Australian; from ma mother; from the fact that New South Wales was the earliest Australian colony ■ Bulletin (Sydney): South Australia... missed a great opportunity by not bunging a few million over to the Ma State. (1954)

New Zealand

Pig Island (1917) Australian & New Zealand; from the introduction there by Captain Cook of pigs, which later reverted to a wild state ■ Frank Sargeson: 'Young man,' he said, 'it’s my advice that you get off back to England.... Pig Island is no place for the likes of you.' (1967)

the Shaky Isles, the Shivery Isles (1933) Australian; from the frequency of earthquakes in New Zealand
Queensland

Bananaland (1893) Australian, jocular; from the abundance of bananas grown in the state

Soviet Union


Tasmania

Tassie, Tassey, Tassy (1892) From Tas(mania) + -ic. Herald (Melbourne): Come to 'Tassie' the Casino State. (1977)

USA

Uncle Sam (1813) Usually applied to the US nation or government; jocular extension of the letters US. Economist Israel, of course, was helped by having Uncle Sam on its side. (1988)

Stateside, stateside (1943) Used as an adjective and adverb denoting the USA. Len Deighton: Fernie fixed the consignment to a ship heading stateside. I notified my contacts in New York. (1963)

the Big PX (1962) US, military slang; applied to the USA as a place of easily available consumer goods and home comforts; from PX the name applied to shops on US military bases

the world (1971) US, military slang; used by soldiers serving abroad, originally in Vietnam; mainly in the phrase go (get, etc.) back to the world. D. A. Dye: You'll kill boo-coo gooks before you go on back to the World. (1987)


Vietnam

Nam, 'Nam (1969) US; used especially in the context of the Vietnam War; abbreviation. Publishers Weekly: Four Americans caught in Vietnam. . . . The GIs become buddies in Germany. . . . Now in 'Nam' they hope their camaraderie will be closer still. (1974)

Buildings and institutions

the Rag (and Famish) (1858) Dated; applied to the Army and Navy Club in London. Nevill & Jerningham: The familiar name of the 'Rag', by which it is generally known, was invented by Captain William Duff, of the 23rd Fusiliers. . . . Coming in to supper late one night, the refreshment obtainable appeared so meagre that he nicknamed the club the 'Rag and Famish'. (1906)

the Yard (1888) Short for Scotland Yard, the name of the headquarters of the Metropolitan Police. Daily Mail: The Yard was called in after the collapse of a small engineering company, which had traded successfully with the MoD for more than 25 years. (1991)

Buck House (1922) Jocular alteration of Buckingham Palace, the name of the British sovereign's residence in London. George Sims: They said it was like Buck House but it was a right load of old schmutter! You see, everyone's an antique dealer today. (1967)

the 'In' and 'Out' (1925) Applied to the Naval and Military Club in London; from the words 'in' and 'out' painted on pillars at the entrance and exit from the club. Guardian: Two London clubs, the 105-year-old Naval and Military, better known as the 'in and Out', and the 52-year-old Devonshire, may merge. (1967)

Ally Pally (1949) Rhyming abbreviation of Alexandra Palace, the name of a building in Muswell Hill, North London, the original headquarters of BBC Television. Simon Brett: Back in Ally Pally days . . . you were just a technical boffin with all the sound recording stuff. (1979)

Thiefrow (1973) Applied jocularly to London's Heathrow Airport, after its then reputation for lax security, luggage theft, etc.: alteration of Heathrow, after thief. E. Ward: Jewel couriers are hired for . . . security and insurance. Special air freight is available but London Airport is still called Thief Row. (1981)


Prisons

come to the Moor (1869) Applied to Dartmoor Prison in Devon; abbreviation. Frank Norman: I'm doing a bleeding neves. I'll be going down the Moor soon that will be the third poxy time. (1958)

come to the Ville, the 'Ville, the (')ville (1903) Applied to Pentonville Prison in London; abbreviation. L. Henderson: Yeah, that's right, he was in the 'Ville. (1972)

come to the Scrubs (1923) Applied to Wormwood Scrubs Prison in London; abbreviation. Allan Prior: He had . . . taken his medicine, which had turned out to be three years in the Scrubs. (1966)

Big Q (1961) Applied to San Quentin Prison in California

Roads

drag (1851) Now mainly US; especially in the phrase the main drag. J. P. Carstairs: We drove through . . . the main drag of Babaki. (1965)

stem (1914) US; especially in the phrase the main stem

the Main Stem (1928), the Big Stem (1934) US; applied to Broadway or the entertainment area around it. J. P. McEvoy: The Main Stem hears under cover that 'Get Your Girl' may fold up soon for lack of suitable house. (1928)

The sea

come to the pond (1641) Now mainly US; mainly applied specifically to the North Atlantic Ocean; often in the phrase on this (or the other) side of the pond
in Britain, or North America  ■ John Motley: I should have been very sorry to have crossed the Atlantic (or the pond, as the sailors call it) without a single storm. (19832)

the **herring-pond** (1833) Mainly applied specifically to the North Atlantic Ocean

**the big pond** (1833) Applied to the (North) Atlantic Ocean  ■ *Outing* (US); [They] have hardly sustained their reputation on either side of the big pond. (1902)

**the ditch** (1841) Applied in naval slang to the sea; formerly applied specifically in US slang to the Atlantic Ocean, and in R.A.F. slang to the English Channel  ■ *Manual of Seamanship*: A smart seaman would not talk officially of the sea by a favourite slang expression 'the ditch'. (1922)

**the drink** (1856) Orig US; from earlier sense, any body of water, including a river  ■ Laurence Meynell: [He] had fished us out of the drink just, and only just, in time. (1960)

**the salt chuck** (1868) W Canadian and NW US; Chinook jargon, from salt + chuck water  ■ *Islander* (Victoria, British Columbia): In 1905, most people lived close to the saltchuck and along Rainey Creek. (1975)

**the big drink** (1882) US; applied to the ocean, often specifically the Atlantic Ocean; compare earlier application to the Mississippi River  ■ M. E. Braddon: I was coming across the Big Drink as fast as a Cunard could bring me. (1882)

2. **Habitation, Territory**

**A dwelling, a house, a building**

**drum** (1846) Applied especially to someone's home: from earlier sense, street, from Romany drom road  ■ Louis Southworth: They probably checked at the Probation Office as soon as they left my drum. (1966)

**place** (1891) Applied to a person's home  ■ *Screw*: Young male nude model. Experienced, handsome. . . . Completely versatile and cooperative. Your place or mine. (1972)

**pogey** (1891) North American, dated; applied to a hostal or poor-house; origin unknown

**digs** (1893) British: applied to lodgings; short for obsolete *diggings* in same sense, perhaps from the notion of entrenching oneself in a place  ■ Anthony Lejeune: His old digs . . . where he lived when he used to work for us. (1959)

**hang-out** (1893) Applied to a place one lives in or often visits; from hang out reside, frequent  ■ *Globe & Mail Magazine* (Toronto): It is 3 a.m. in a steam bath known as an after-midnight homosexual hangout. (1968)

**semi** (1912) British; short for semi-detached (house)  ■ Barbara Pym: That house which, in the estate agents' language, was on its way to becoming a 'twenty thousand semi'. (1977)

**the puddle** (1889) Mainly applied specifically to the North Atlantic Ocean; often in the phrase on this (or the other) side of the puddle in Britain, or North America  ■ *SLR Camera*: For many years the American company . . . have made fine enlarging frames (masking frames this side of the puddle) both for retail distribution and for exclusive use by Simmon-Emega. (1978)

**the Big Ditch** (1909) US; applied to the North Atlantic Ocean

**the oggin** (1946) Naval slang; apparently from hog-wash, from an earlier contemptuous application of hogwash 'disgusting liquid' to the sea  ■ Dan Lees: No one told the two gunners that the sub was about to crash-dive and they had to run like hell to avoid being left behind in the oggin. (1973)

**the Med** (1948) Applied to the Mediterranean Sea; abbreviation  ■ Gillian Freeman: We went all round the Med., Istanbul, Capri, Gib. (1955)

Heavenly bodies: The moon

**Oliver, oliver** (1781) Dated: possibly from Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658), but no convincing reason for the application has ever been suggested  ■ *New Review*: There's a moon out. ’The better for us to pick 'em off, Dan,’ I returned, laughing at him. 'What—Oliver? damn Oliver!’ said Zachary. 'Let's push forward and come to quarters.’ (1895)

The sun

**currant bun** (1938) Rhyming slang

**pad** (1914) Applied to a place to sleep, a lodging (from earlier sense, bed), and hence to someone's home

**gaff** (1932) Applied especially to someone's home; compare earlier senses, fair, cheap place of public entertainment; ultimate origin unknown  ■ Julian MacLaren-Ross: I was keeping an eye on the gaff—seen you going in. (1961)

**walk-back** (1945) US; applied to a rear apartment

**stash** (1946) Mainly US; from earlier sense, hiding place  ■ *Listener*: Susan Sontag went to see Philip Johnson, the New York architect, or rather she 'moseyed along to his stash on Park’. (1965)

**hoochie, hoochy, hooch, hootch** (1952) Services' slang; applied to a shelter or dwelling, especially one that is insubstantial or temporary; perhaps from Japanese uchi dwelling  ■ *Fremdsprachen*: A stereo set was blaring in an enlisted men's hootch shortly after midnight. (1971)

**condo** (1964) Orig & mainly North American; applied to an owner-occupied flat; abbreviation of condominium

**grandy flat** (1965) Applied to a flat for an old person, especially in a relative's house  ■ Michael
Innes: It seemed wholly amiable in the Mullions to incorporate this not particularly close kinswoman in their household, even if it was on what was coming to be known as the granny-flat principle. (1981)

warehouse (1970) US; applied to a large and impersonal institution providing accommodation for mental patients, old people, or poor people

des res (1986) British, orig estate agents’ slang; applied to a house or other dwelling presented as a highly desirable purchase; shortened from desirable residence. Times: The days of the ‘des res’ that clearly isn’t are set to end for estate agents. (1990)

Parts of a dwelling: A door

Rory O’More, rory (1892) Rhyming slang: from the name of a legendary Irish rebel. Curtis: Some lousy berk must have been snooping around the place and found that rory open. (1936)

The floor

Rory O’More, rory (1857) Rhyming slang: from the name of a legendary Irish rebel

stairs

apples and pears, apples (1857) British; rhyming slang. Bennett: One of the removal men asked him if a sofa was to go ‘up the apples’. (1962)

A dweller

slummy, slummie (1934) Applied to a slum-dweller; from slum squalid neighbourhood + -y

3. Remoteness & Nearness

town; from the name of a small town southeast of Melbourne. Age (Melbourne): Television football commentaries generally tend to be about as rewarding as a night game at Nar Nar Goon football ground in a power strike. (1981)

Woop Woop (1918) Australian; used as the name of an imaginary town in the remote outback, supposedly backward; jocular formation, probably influenced by the use of reduplication in Aboriginal languages to indicate plurality or intensity. Sydney Morning Herald: It was like council night in Woop Woop—Federal Parliament on Tuesday, that is. (1986). Hence the woop-woops remote country (1950)

boonie (1956) US; usually used in the plural; from boon(dock + -ie the middle of nowhere (1960) Adelaide Lubbock: I got going again pretty quickly as I didn’t want to be caught by the storm in the middle of nowhere. (1983)

An (unsophisticated) person from a remote place

hick (1565) Now mainly US; pet-form of the personal name Richard. J. Hansen: He was killed. . . . They just stopped playing him. As though we was such hicks we didn’t know there’s such a thing as tapes these days
(170). Hence hick used adjectively to denote lack of sophistication (1920) ■ Listener: Telly was still rather a hick affair back in 1951. (1967)

Reuben (1804) North American, dated; from the male personal name

dude (1887) US; applied to a non-westerner or city-dweller who tours or stays in the west of the US, especially a holiday-maker on a ranch; from earlier sense, fastidiously dressed man, dandy; probably from German dialect Dude Fool ■ Homer Croy: I'm going to put up the finest cattle barn in the state—that is, belonging to a real dirt farmer, not to one of them city dudes. (1924)

jasper (1896) US; from the male personal name Jasper

Reub, Rube, rube (1896) North American; short for Reuben ■ Joseph Gores: The rube who short for Reuben Reuben Mail: At 47 the hillbilly who used to scratch a living as a dirt farmer at Greasy Creek in the Ozark Mountains has come a long way. (1957)

hill-billy (1900) Mainly US; from hill + Billy, pet-form of the male personal name William ■ Daily Mail: At 47 the hillbilly who used to scratch a living as a dirt farmer at Greasy Creek in the Ozark Mountains has come a long way. (1957)

woodchuck (1931) US; from earlier sense, species of North American marmot ■ R. Banks: He could go to weddings or funerals . . . and not look like a hick, a woodchuck. (1989)

ridge-runner (1933) US; applied to a Southern mountain farmer

dread (1830) US ■ Dialect Notes: Dread, n., An uncouth countryman. 'The hill-billies came from the hills, and the rednecks from the swamps.' (1904)

Hoosier (1846) US; from earlier sense, inhabitant of Indiana

Hayseed (1851) US, Australian & New Zealand ■ Frank Sargeson: He might be identified as either peasant or hayseed. (1965)

yomp (1982) British, orig military slang; applied to marching with heavy equipment over difficult terrain; brought into prominence when used by the Royal Marines during the Falklands conflict; origin uncertain; compare yump (of a rally car or its driver) leave the ground while taking a crest at speed ■ Sunday Times: So the sweaty soldier yomping to battle ends up with blisters and a pool of water inside the boot. (1984)

yump (1984) British: origin uncertain; perhaps a fanciful blend (compare trudge, trapeze, trek, slog, jog, etc.) ■ Sunday Times: Saudi newspapers . . . made much of the fact that Charles had yumped all the way out to Gatwick and set a precedent. (1987)

Distance

klick, click, klik (1966) US ■ Frank Sargeson: He might be identified as either peasant or hayseed. (1965)

Near

within a cooee/cooey (of) (1836) Australian & New Zealand; from the notion of being within hailing distance; cooe from Aboriginal (Dharuk) guwri a call used to communicate over distance ■ Weekly News (Auckland): But nothing that Roux has achieved on this tour came within coo-ee of the effort of Gainsford. (1965)

To walk

ankle (1926) Dated ■ P. G. Wodehouse: Ankling into the hospital and eating my grapes with that woman's kisses hot upon your lips. (1932)

choof, chuff (1947) Australian; from chuff puff as a steam-train does ■ B. Hardy: 'If my presence is going to cause trouble,' I said, 'I'd rather not be here, so I think I'll choof off.' (1979)

To go laboriously

trapse, trapes (1593) Origin unknown ■ R. V. Jones: For days we had to trapse for water down six flights of stairs and hundreds of yards to a stand pipe in the road. (1978)

flog (1925) ■ Times: [Lorry drivers] are being encouraged to 'flog on' even in bad weather. (1964)

schlep, schlepp, shlep (1963) Mainly US; from earlier sense, drag, carry ■ D. E. Westlake: We don't both have to hang around. Why don't you shlep back to the station? (1972)

To go aimlessly

mooch, mouch (1851) From earlier sense, skulk, loiter; ultimately probably from Old French mouchier (Norman dialect mucher) hide, skulk ■ Guardian: The day before I was mooching through Soho, thoughts of fate and folly uppermost. (1991)
shag (1851) Origin unknown • W. H. Canaway: We'd been shagging around over these mountains for four days now, and we hadn't seen one single musk deer. (1976)

To go in a particular direction

hang (a) left/right (1966) Orig & mainly US; denoting making a left/right turn, especially in driving or skiing • Sunday Telegraph: Hang a right on Santa Monica Freeway, hang a left on Harbour and another on Sixth Street. (1984)

To go casually
toddle (1724) Implying short leisurely steps; often used familiarly to mean simply 'walk, go'; from earlier sense, (of a very young child) walk unsteadily • Sunday Times: So would the MP toddle up unsteadily • Sunday Times: Hang a right on Santa Monica Freeway, hang a left on Harbour and another on Sixth Street. (1984)

To move with a view to initiating action

chassé (1927) Representing an altered pronunciation of cossè; representing an altered pronunciation of chassè; ultimately denoting making a left/right turn, especially in driving or skiing • Daily Telegraph: The Nimrod [aircraft] then waggled its wings and started back. (1972)

sashay, sasshay, sashy (1865) Mainly US; from earlier sense, perform a chassè; ultimately representing an altered pronunciation of chassè gliding dance step • James Michener: I see her sashayin' past in a dress I know she stole from Miss Susan. (1978)

To pour carefully

slosh (1975) From earlier sense, splash about in mud or wet • Eugene O'Neill: He sloshes whiskey from the decanter into both their glasses. (a1953)

To move from side to side or up and down

wiggle (a1225) From or related to (Middle) Low German wiggen, Middle Dutch wighelen, wighelen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghellen, waghell - frequentatives formed from the base wig- (compare obsolete English and Scottish dialect wig move from side to side) • G. S. Porter: Father . . . pulled his lower lip until his ears almost wiggled. (1913)

To move from side to side or up and down

shlep (1922) Mainly US; from Yiddish shelep, from German schleppen drag • Publishers Weekly: The one thing you would not want to
5. Falling

A fall

**mucker (1852)** British; from muck dung, dirt + -er; from the notion of falling into muck • John Galsworthy: You're riding for a fall and a godless mucker it'll be. (1914)

**cropper (1858)** Used especially in the phrase come (fall, get) a cropper; perhaps from the phrase neck and crop • *Times*: I came a proper cropper, dearie, all black and blue I was. (1963)

**purler (1869)** From purl overturn + -er • *Horse & Hound*: Even Up went a real purler at the last fence on the far side. (1976)

**gutser, gutzer (1918)** Australian & New Zealand; from guts belly + -er • Norman Lindsay: Snowy ... threw himself recklessly off it and landed such a gutser that he knocked all the wind out of himself. (1933)

**smeller (1923)** Used especially in the phrase come a smeller, perhaps from the notion of 'smelling' the ground • P. G. Wodehouse: A man's brain whizzes along for years exceeding the speed limit, and then something suddenly goes wrong with the steering gear and it comes a smeller in the ditch. (1934)

**pratfall (1939)** Theatrical slang, mainly North American; applied to a comedy fall (on to the buttocks); from prat buttocks + fall

**wipe-out (1962)** Surfing; applied to a fall from one's surfboard as a result of a collision with another surfboard or a wave; from the verb wipe out

To fall

**keel over (1897)** From previous sense, capsize • *Daily Mail*: The moment when the hero's uncle keeled over in the lobby of the Ritz Hotel with a fatal heart attack. (1991)

**pratfall (1940)** Theatrical slang, mainly North American; used to denote falling on the buttocks; from the noun pratfall

**hit the deck (1954)** Often used to denote deliberate falling, usually in taking avoiding action • *Independent*: As the gunman sprayed shoppers with bullets, Gregory Read, an Australian Vietnam War veteran, ran through the mall yelling to people to 'hit the deck'. (1991)

**wipe out (1962)** Surfing slang; used to denote knocking or being knocked off one's surfboard; from previous sense, destroy

6. Speed

Rate of speed

**bat (1824)** From earlier sense, a blow or stroke with a bat, club, etc. • John Welcome: We turned on to the main ... road and started going a hell of a bat across the Cotswolds. (1961)

**lick (1847)** From earlier sense, a spurt at racing • Patrick Ruell: Caroline contrived to be first down the gangway and set off along the quay at a good lick. (1974)

A speed of one hundred miles an hour

**ton (1954), ton-up (1961)** British; used especially with reference to motor cycles; ton used especially in the phrase do the (or a) ton; from earlier sense, score of one hundred in a game • Hansard Lords: In that case you must have been doing a 'ton', if very few cars passed you. (1973)

Fast

**like a shot (1809)** • W. E. Norris: If I could hear of any chance of employment elsewhere, I’d take it like a shot. (1894)

**in two (or three) shakes (of a lamb’s tail), in a brace (or couple) of shakes (1816)** • Elizabeth Lemarchand: I’ll knock you up bacon and eggs in a brace of shakes. (1973)

**double-quick (1822)** Orig military, from the notion of marching at twice the speed of 'quick' time • John Braine: If we were married and I made just one mistake in business ... she’d be off double-quick. (1959)

**like a dose of salts (1837)** From the sudden effect of aperient salts • *John Wainwright*: If we don’t hold ’em they’ll go through this city like a dose of salts. (1868)

**pronto (1850)** Orig US; from Spanish pronto fast • P. Cave: You tell that bastard to come and see me pronto. (1976)

**nippy (1853)** From earlier sense, inclined to nip, sharp • I. M. Banks: It’s a limited edition; the go-faster model; even nippier than this beast, once it gets going. (1990)

**spanking (1857)** Dated; from earlier sense, very big or fine • F. T. Bullen: A large canoe ... was coming off to us at a spanking rate. (1899)

**lickety-split, lickerty- -ity- -oty- -spit (1859)** US; fanciful coinage • *Last Whole Earth Catalog*: Just like that. Stopped in here a few minutes, then took off up that creek lickety-split. (1972)

**on the double, at the double (1865)** From earlier sense, (of marching) at a double rate, twice as fast

**PDQ, pdq (1875)** Abbreviation of pretty damn quick • Rudyard Kipling: He went as his instructions advised p.d.q.—which means 'with speed'. (1891)

**pacey, pacy (1906)** From pace + -y • *Daily Telegraph*: The Celeste's low slung, pacey appearance isn't just for show. The 2 litre model has a top speed of 105 mph. (1977)

**off the bat (1907)** US; used to imply no delay; from the notion of the ball having just been hit
by the baseball bat  ■  New Yorker. You can tell right off the bat that they’re wicked, because they keep eating grapes indolently. (1955)

jildi, jeldi, jildy, juldie, etc. (1919) Military, orig Anglo-Indian; from the noun jildi haste ■ M. K. Joseph: Hey, Antonio, where’s me rooty (= bread)? And make it jildy, see? (1957)

like a bat out of hell (1921) ■ Ian Fleming: The motor cyclist . . . had gone like a bat out of hell towards Baker Street. (1961)

in two ups (1934) Australian ■ J. Morrison: Too close to dark now, Mister, but we’ll have you out of that in two ups in the morning. (1967)

like gangbusters (1942) Orig and mainly US; from gangbuster aggressively successful policeman

like the clappers (1948) British; from clapper tongue of a bell ■ John Wain: Seeing it’s you, I’m going to surrender like the clappers. (1958)

sharpish (1952) ■ Ted Allbeury: They shuffled him back to Moscow pretty sharpish. (1975)

like a bomb (1954) Orig US

High speed
toe (1889) Australian & New Zealand ■ Sun-Herald (Sydney): In Lawson and Hogg we have two penetrating fast bowlers who have enough ‘toe’ to keep any batsman honest. (1983)
a rate of knots (1892) Originally in the form (at) the rate of knots ■ Colin Bateman: His eyes were darting from front to wing mirror and our speed was still picking up. You can do a fair rate of knots in a Saab. (1995)

Haste
jildi, jeldi, jildy, juldie, etc. (1890) Dated military, orig Anglo-Indian; used in such phrases as on the jildi in a hurry, and do or move a jildi; from Hindustani jaldi quickness

To go fast
whizz, whiz (1591) From earlier sense, make a rushing, buzzing sound ■ Ian Hay: Watching for the motors that whizzed . . . along the straight white road. (1914)
streak (1768) Probably an altered spelling of obsolete streek go fast, influenced by such phrases as like a streak (of lightning) fast ■ Elizabeth Lemarchand: I got out at last, and streaked up to the lavatory so the Labor candidate... and his helpers nick across parked?... I wondered how they knew I had a car. (1948)
nip (1825) From earlier sense, pinch ■ Michael Gilbert: If you nip along now... you could catch her before the practice starts. (1955)
scoot (1847) Orig US; apparently a variant of earlier obsolete nautical slang scout in the same sense ■ Saturday Review: He scoots off like a rabbit in the opposite direction. (1892)
travel (1884) ■ Michael Kenyon: Mercy, the lorry’s travelling. Foot down. (1970)
belt (1890) Orig dialect and US ■ New Statesman: Cor, we used to belt along that road. (1962)

nick (1896) Australian; used to denote going quickly or unobtrusively; perhaps related to nip go quickly ■ Sydney Morning Herald: There is no lavatory so the Labor candidate... and his helpers nick across the road to use Ansett’s. (1981)

swing the gate (1898) Australian & New Zealand; used to refer to the fastest shearer in a shearing shed

scorch (1906) From earlier sense, burn ■ A. C. Clarke: By keeping the torp tail-heavy and nose-up he was able to scorch along on the surface like a speed-boat. (1957)
go some (1912) US; from earlier sense, go well ■ James Hackston: He had the easy movements of the retriever, and for a big dog could go some. (1966)
shift (1922) ■ Michael Kenyon: You’ll have time for a bite at Murphy’s if you shift. (1970)
blind (1923) From the notion of going blindly or heedlessly ■ Daily Express: By recreation I do not mean blinding along the Brighton road at fifty miles an hour. (1928)
ball the jack (c.1925) US ■ J. H. Street: They think as soon as you die you go balling-the-jack to God. (1941)
highball (1935) US; from earlier sense, to signal a train driver to proceed, from the noun highball signal to proceed originally given by hoisting a ball ■ Saturday Evening Post: Everyone else had highball’d... out of there. (1946)
pour (on) the coal (1937) Applied to flying an aircraft or driving a motor vehicle; from earlier sense, cause an aircraft to accelerate

bat (1938) From earlier sense, move, go ■ Reader’s Digest: A Department Sanitation truck was batting along as fast as it could go. (1938)
burn (1942) Applied especially to a motor vehicle ■ Sunday Mail (Brisbane): In burns a police car. . . Out jumps a senior sergeant. (1972)
beetle (1948) From earlier slang sense, move like a beetle ■ Noel Coward: There was... a terrible scene . . . and Freda beetled off to America. (1952)
bomb (1960) Orig US ■ Irene Welsh: Then it comes back: Swanney and Alison takin us doon the stairs, gittin us inte a taxi n bombin up tae the Infirmary. (1993)
zap (1968) From earlier use, representing the sound of a bullet, laser, etc. ■ Times: Several smaller craft zap past. (1985)

A fast person or thing
goer (1613) From earlier sense, one who or that which goes ■ Thomas Hughes: The Tally-ho was a tip-top goer, ten miles an hour including stoppages. (1857)
scooter (1917) Mainly US; applied to a fast vehicle, especially a train or car; from scoot go fast + er ■ J. Evans: "We’ll use your scooter, Mac. . . Where’s she parked?"... I wondered how they knew I had a car. (1948)
quickie, quicky, quickly (1940) Applied especially to something quickly or briefly done;
from quick + -ie  ■ R. H. Rimmer: Yesterday they were asking some of the girls if they were hookers or 'hos'. Kathy told Mohammed that a tough Irish kid offered her ten dollars for a 'quickie'. (1975)

swiftie, swifty (1945) Applied to someone who thinks or acts fast; from swift + -ie

To accelerate

let rip (1843) From rip go unchecked  ■ Dumfries Courier: The present difficult decision... will be thrust into insignificance if inflation lets rip again. (1978)
give her (it, etc.) the gun (1917) Orig US  ■ George Bagby: She slid behind the wheel, gave the hearse the gun, swung it around. (1968)

step on the gas, step on it (1920) Orig US; applied to acceleration in a motor vehicle, from the notion of pressing the gas pedal with the foot  ■ Graham Greene: 'Step on it, Joe.' They ricocheted down the rough path. (1939)

gun (1930) From the phrase give her the gun accelerate a vehicle  ■ Paul Durst: He gunned the Volkswagen and fell in behind. (1968)
pour (on) the coal (1937) Applied to accelerating an aircraft  ■ J. M. Foster: He poured the coal to his plane and banked to avoid passing too close. (1961)

Acceleration

welly, wellie (1977) British; from earlier sense, forceful kick, from the notion of 'kicking' the accelerator of a motor vehicle  ■ D. Gethin: 'When I say go, give it some welly.... Go.'... Explosions sounded. (1983)

To hurry

stir one’s stumps (1559) From the notion of moving one’s stumps (= legs) quickly

crack on (1837) Orig mainly nautical

get a move on (1888) Orig US  ■ C. E. Mulford: Come on! Come on!... Get a move on! Will you hurry up! (1911)
buck up (1890)  ■ Ian Hay: 'Hallo, you fellows—finished?' 'Yes, buck up!' commanded Rumbold. (1913)

get a hump on (1892) US  ■ W. E. Wilson: 'Let’s get a hump on, Allen,' Abe said; and the two boys dipped their oars deeper into the brown water. (1940)

get or put one’s skates on (1895) British, orig military  ■ W. J. Burley: I’d better be getting my skates on, I’m catching the night train and I haven’t done a thing about getting ready. (1976)

get a wiggle on (1896) Orig US  ■ Newsweek: If Americans don’t get a wiggle on... they may forfeit their place in the vanguard of the human future that will be lived outside the cradle of Earth. (1990)

shake a leg (1904) Compare earlier sense, dance  ■ P. G. Wodehouse: 'Clean this place up.'... 'Yes, sir.' 'And shake a leg.' (1952)
drag ass, haul ass, tear ass (1918) US  ■ L. Erdrich: Well, all I can say is he better drag ass to get here, that Gerry. (1984)  ■ Dr. Dre’ et al.: But you know I never stumble or lag last I’m almost home so I better haul ass. (1990)  ■ P. Auster: There was no way I was going to let them catch me again. I tore ass out of there and headed for the woods, running for all I was worth. (1991)

rattle one’s dags (1968) Australian & New Zealand; from the phrase give her the gun accelerate a vehicle  ■ S. Thome: Hurry up! Get down there ‘n bleed him! Rattle your dags! (1980)

Be quick!

chop-chop (1834) Pidgin English, from Chinese k’wâi-k’wâi  ■ Chinese Repository: 'More soon, more better; sendee chop-chop,' I told him. (1836)

A direct and speedy route

beeline (1830) Orig US; especially in the phrase make a beeline for, from the notion that bees take the most direct route in returning to their hives

Slowness

the slows (1843) Applied to an imaginary disease accounting for slowness  ■ Dick Francis: They might as well send him [a racehorse] to the knackers. Got the slows right and proper, that one has. (1970)

A slow person or animal

slowcoach (1837)  ■ Jerome K. Jerome: There are plenty of lazy people and plenty of slow-coaches, but a genuine idler is a rarity. (1886)

slowpoke (1848) Mainly US; from slow + obsolete US poke lazy person  ■ Salman Rushdie: Come on, slowpoke, you don’t want to be late. (1981)

To go slowly

drag the chain (1912) Australian & New Zealand; often used to denote falling behind the rest  ■ Gordon Slatter: Stop dragging the chain and have one with me. (1959)

7. Arrival

To arrive

show up (1888) Also used elliptically without up  ■ Guardian: The unfortunate Princess of Wales was disappointed when both Meryl Streep and Shirley Maclaine failed to show up for the premiere of Postcards From The Edge. (1991)  ■ John le Carré: She didn’t show.... It was the first time she’d broken a date. (1974)
blow in (1895) Orig US  ■ War Illustrated: He just blew in out of the black-out and asked if he might use the telephone. (1940)
lob (1911) Australian; usually denoting unceremonious arrival; often followed by in; probably from earlier sense, move heavily or clumsily  ■ Age (Melbourne): The Chinese Noodle Shop Restaurant seemed the logical choice, so three of us lobbed there at 8 o'clock. (1984)

roll up (1920) Orig Australian; from earlier sense, congregate, assemble  ■ Martin Woodhouse: They had to wait for me to roll up because I had the D.F. set, which meant I was the only one who could pin it down precisely. (1968)

roll in (1985)  ■ More: Toby stayed out till gone three one night and then rolled in absolutely plastered. (1992)

To arrive eventually in the stated place or condition

fetch up (1858) Orig US; from earlier sense, wind up (1918)  ■ National Observer (US): Somebody to arrive eventually in the stated place or condition

wind up (1918)  ■ National Observer (US): Somebody to arrive eventually in the stated place or condition

8. Departure

To go away

cut and run (1704) Orig nautical; applied to a hurried departure in order to escape; from the notion of escaping by cutting the anchor rope rather than taking the time to haul the anchor up  ■ Hutchinson's Pictorial History of the War: We anticipated a cut-and-run operation by a force consisting of two or three battleships and a couple of carriers. (1945)

cut dirt (1829) US, dated  ■ Western Scenes: Now you cut dirt, and don't let me see you here again. (1883)

To announce one's arrival

make one's number (1942) Also in broader sense, make oneself known  ■ Donald Seaman: 'Will you go to the conference site today?' 'Might as well make my number with the R.U.C.' (1974)

To approach

belly up (1907) US; denoting a bold approach; originally applied literally to walking up to something (e.g. a bar) and standing with one's stomach against it; usually followed by to  ■ Wall Street Journal. Only a handful of FDIC-administered institutions have been allowed to belly up to its [sc. the Federal Reserve's] window. (1989)

A welcome or reception of the stated sort

mitt (1904) In the phrases the glad mitt a friendly welcome, the frozen (or icy) mitt an unfriendly welcome; from earlier sense, hand  ■ Allan Prior: She'd have taken it and then handed me the frozen mitt. (1960)

vamoose (1834) Orig and mainly US; applied to a hurried departure; often used in the imperative; from Spanish vamos let us go  ■ J. Reeves: 'See anyone?' asked Winston. 'Not a soul. Whoever it was has vamoosed.' (1958)

make tracks (1835) Orig US  ■ Guardian: 'I've got to make tracks,' I informed the driver in a singsong voice. (1992)

take oneself off (1836) Dated  ■ Charles Dickens: He... took himself off on tip-toe. (1838)

leg it (1837) From earlier senses, go on foot, walk fast or run  ■ Today: It was then, on May 4, that Nadir decided to leg it—leaving behind personal debts of £80 million. (1993)

shove (1844) Orig US; usually followed by off; from earlier sense, set a boat going by pushing against the shore  ■ Nicolas Freeing: I have to ferry you down to the office. ... Let's shove, shall we? (1975)

scramble (1846) Implying a hasty departure; probably from Italian soprare escape, get away, reinforced (at the time of World War I) by rhyming slang Scopa Flow go  ■ Edmund Crispin: He's downstairs now with the others—and they're keeping a sharp eye on him; he won't have a chance to scrambler again. (1977)

scoot (1847) Orig US; implying a hasty departure; from earlier senses, slide, go quickly  ■ J. Sweeney: Forster always got wind of the warrant's being reinforced (at the time of World War I) by rhyming slang Scopa Flow go  ■ Edmund Crispin: He's downstairs now with the others—and they're keeping a sharp eye on him; he won't have a chance to scrambler again. (1977)

hook it (1851) ■ Xavier Herbert: Pack your traps and get ready to hook it first thing mornin' time. (1939)

slide (1859) Dated, orig US; applied to a hurried and secretive departure  ■ Edgar Wallace: There's
only one word that any sensible man can read in this situation, and that word is—slide! (1932)

**slope off** (1861) Usually applied to a surreptitious or sheepish departure. ▪ **Sunday Times**: Outside Brixton Mosque there is much gathering and gossiping. One group of flamboyantly-attired young bloods arrives, hovering by the bus-stop and cackling like drains at a succession of private jokes. Thirty minutes later they slope off without so much as a prayer within. (1993)

**skedaddle** (1882) Orig US military slang, introduced during the Civil War of 1861–5; applied to a hurried departure; probably a fanciful formation ▪ **Guardian**: Once the shooting began, many stars cancelled foreign trips or skedaddled from Israel/Middle East film location sites. (1991)

**get, git** (1864) ▪ Kenneth Giles: Anybody in a room either gets or pays for another twenty-four hours. (1967)

**skip out** (1865) Applied to a hurried departure, usually in order to escape obligations ▪ June Thomson: Bibby hadn’t turned up. He wondered if he had skipped out. (1977)

**light out** (1866) US; perhaps from the nautical verb light lift, haul ▪ Josephine Tey: The girl had lighted out... She had dressed in a hurry and gone. (1948)

**do a bunk** (c1870) British; applied to a hurried departure; origin unknown ▪ G. B. Shaw: If my legs would support me I’d just do a bunk straight for the ship. (1921)

**hit the road** (or US) trail, (dated) grit (1873) ▪ **Christian Science Monitor**: These two hit the road together, modern pilgrims making very little progress. (1973)

**sling one’s hook** (1874) ▪ L. P. Hartley: Anyhow, she’s gone, walked out, slung her hook. (1955)

**bunk** (1877) British; usually applied to leaving or being absent from school without permission; usually followed by off ▪ **Time Out**: A lot of kids here bunk off, as all kids do. The rate here is about 18%. (1976)

**beat it** (1878) Orig US ▪ John Wyndham: Fedor had not waited once the plane was down. He had switched off the lights, and beat it. (1951)

**guy** (1879) Orig unknown ▪ **Times**: Hurry up, I have had to do a chap, we will have to guy out of here. (1963)

**hit (or punch, split, take) the breeze** (1883) ▪ Damon Runyon: And with this she takes the breeze and I return to the other room. (1931)

**lam** (1886) US; often followed by out; perhaps from lam to beat ▪ M. Mackintosh: The time of death [was] four days before Fisher lammed out. (1973)

**shoot the crow** (1887) Scottish; implying a hasty departure or absconding, especially to avoid paying a bill ▪ William Mclvanney: There’ll only be his mother in the house. His father shot the crow years ago. (1977)

**smoke** (1893) Australian; usually implying a hurried departure; usually followed by off; perhaps from the phrase like smoke very quickly ▪ Patrick White: Dubbo had gone all right. Had taken his tin box, it seemed, and smoked off. (1961)

**blow** (1897) Orig US; usually implying a hurried departure ▪ Eric Linklater: ‘And what’s happened to Rocco?’ ‘He’s blown. He’s gone up north.’ (1937)

**do a guy** (1897) From the verb guy leave ▪ Norman Venner: He’s just picked me up out of the road with a sprained ankle, or very near it, bandaged me up like a medical student, and brought me home. Then he wants to do a guy at the front door. (1925)

**nick off** (1901) Australian; usually used to convey contemptuous dismissal; from nick go quickly ▪ Xavier Herbert: He’s the biggest shikker in Town. Now nick off, you old sponge. (1956)

**cut along** (1902) Often used in the imperative to children and subordinates ▪ **McInnes**: Tell your Mother we’re going to the flicks and I’ll be back about eleven. Better run along now. (1956)

**screw (off) out** (1903) Orig US ▪ D. Richards: Now if you don’t screw out of here, I’ll use the phone. (1974)

**shemozzle, schemozzle** (1903) Dated; presumably from the noun shemozzle ▪ Bernard Malamud: ‘If you skidoo now... you’ll get spit.’ ‘Who’s skidooing?’ (1963)

**get the (or to) hell out** (a19H) Applied to a speedy departure ▪ P. G. Wodehouse: You ought to be in bed. Get the hell out of here, Bodkin. (1972)

**buzz off** (1914) Often used to convey contemptuous dismissal; probably a euphemistic substitution for bugger off (although that is not recorded until later) ▪ **Morecambe Guardian**: When a 79-year-old motorist was asked to move his car he told a police sergeant to ‘buzz off’. (1976)

**hop it** (1914) Often used to convey contemptuous dismissal; perhaps from hop the twig ▪ T. S. Eliot: The commission bloke on the door looks at us and says: ‘op it!’ (1954)

**skate** (1915) Implying a hasty departure ▪ Gilbert Frankau: When one’s happy—well, time simply flies. Me for the hay. Let’s get our bill, and skate. (1937)

**do (or pull) a fade-out** (1918) US

**drag (or haul) (one’s) ass (or tail)** (1918) Mainly US
take a run-out powder (1920), take a powder (1934) Mainly US; applied to a hasty departure or absconding. 
- Eugene O’Neill: I stuck it till I was eighteen before I took a run-out powder. (a1953)
- Nicholas Blake: ‘Where’s the Yank?’ . . . ‘Gone. He took a powder.’ (1954)

bugger off (1922) Often used to convey contemptuous dismissal. 
- Private Eye: Let’s get up to palace, pick up O.B.E.’s and bugger off ‘ome, like. (1969)

go fly a kite (1927) Orig US; used to convey contemptuous dismissal. 
- Hugh Pentecost: ‘He suggested,’ said Bradley, with a sigh, ‘that I go fly a kite!’ (1942)

see a man about a dog (1927) Orig US; used as a jocular or euphemistic excuse for leaving or being absent, especially when going to the lavatory or going to buy a drink. 
- Private Eye: I got to see a man about a dog! (1969)

scram (1928) Orig US; implying a hasty departure; often used in the imperative; probably short for scramble. 
- P. G. Wodehouse: ‘Go away, boy!’ he boomed. ‘You mean “Scram!”, don’t you, chum?’ (1938)

fuck off (1929) Often used to convey contemptuous dismissal. 
- Samuel Beckett: She wants to know if you’re the one in charge. Fuck off, said Lemuel. (1958)

amscreay (1931) Pig Latin for scramble. 
- M. Bishop: I told that . . . daddy bastard to amscreay. (1989)

dash (1932) From earlier sense, move quickly. 
- Independent: Anyway, must dash: I hear there’s a free cheese-tasting on at Sainsbury’s. (1995)

jack off (1935) George Orwell: Flo and Charlie would probably ‘jack off’ if they got the chance of a lift. (1935)

run (1935) Implying a speedy or urgent departure. 
- Andrew Bergman: ‘Helen, we’ll be running,’ said Wohl. . . . There was a final chorus of good-byes. (1975)

do a mickey (or micky, mick) (1937) Mick a variant of mike period of idleness or shirking, reinterpreted as a personal name. 
- S. Chaplin: I laid the ring on the notepaper and did a mickey as soon as I heard the front doorbell go. (1961)

go and have a roll (1941) Usually used to convey contemptuous dismissal.

do (or take) a fade (1942) US; fade short for fade-out. 
- Kenneth Orvis: Then, pal, we’ll both do a fade. (1962)

run through (1943) Australian; applied to a hurried departure, especially in order to avoid an obligation.

eff off (1945) Usually used to convey contemptuous dismissal; eff a variant of ef, name of the letter F, euphemistically representing the verb fuck. 

shoot through (1947) Australian & New Zealand; applied to a hurried departure, especially in order to avoid an obligation. 
- Bulletin (Sydney): Me wife’s shot through . . . Can’t get a bird . . . Can’t pay the rent. (1985)

bug off (1952) US; often used to convey contemptuous dismissal; compare bugger off. 
- Guardian: If you happen to be a worker, a homosexual, a woman, a Hispanic, you can bug off. Bush is playing to ITT, IBM, ATT, Dow Chemical, GM. (1992)

split (1954) Orig US. 
- Sounds: In the main hall Roger Scott from London’s Capital Radio arrived, took one look at the wasteland and split. (1977)

bug out (1955) Mainly US; from earlier military sense, run away, desert; ultimate origin uncertain. 
- J. Christopher: There was no sign of movement. . . . ‘Give it five minutes. If there’s nothing showing by then, either he’s bugged out or he’s asleep.’ (1959)

piss off (1958) Often used to convey contemptuous dismissal. 
- B. W. Alidiss: I’ll have a drink when I feel like it, and not before. You two piss off if you’re so bloody thirsty! (1971)

do a scarper (1958) From the verb scarper leave hastily. 
- Frank Norman: We had all planned to do a scarper. (1958)

have it on one’s toes (1958) Applied to making a quick escape, originally on foot. 
- P. B. Yuill: I had it across the road on my toes. (1976)

naff off (1959) British; usually used (as a euphemistic substitute for fuck off) to convey contemptuous dismissal; origin of naff uncertain; perhaps from eff, with the addition of the final -n of a preceding word (as in the noun phrase an eff); compare also obsolete backslang naf=fan female genitals. 
- Sunday Times: Princess Anne . . . lost her temper with persistent photographers and told them to ‘naff off’. (1992)

skip it (1959) Applied to a hurried departure. 
- Myles na Gopaleen: The son turned out to be a very bad bit of work, sold all the furniture to buy drink and then skipped it to America. (a1966)

take off (1959) Judson Philips: You’d better take off. I’ve just got to get some sleep. (1972)

sod off (1960) Usually used to convey contemptuous dismissal. 
- Observer: I am simply waiting for the day when I can say ‘sod off’ to your institution. (1977)

do a runner (1981) British; applied to a hurried departure, and originally specifically to a quick escape from the police or other authority. 
- More!: They sense you want something else, but they’re so scared of whatever it might be that they do a runner. (1992)

To leave the ground; take off.

unstick (1912), get (come, etc.) unstuck (1913) Applied to an aircraft. 

scramble (1940) Applied to a rapid taking off by a group of military aircraft. 
- Brennan & Hesselyn: The signal to scramble came at about eleven o’clock. . . . We rushed to our aircraft and in less than two minutes were off the ground. (1942). Hence the noun scramble applied to such a take-off (1940)
To leave an aircraft by ejecting

**punch out (1970)** US; It never occurred to me to ‘punch out’ (eject). (1974)

To depart frequently

**do a Melba** (1971) Australian, jocular; applied to someone who makes several farewell performances or comebacks; from the name of Dame Nellie Melba (stage name of Helen Mitchell) (1861–1931), Australian soprano, who was famous for being unable to retire conclusively; *Sydney Morning Herald*: It has been intensified by talk from Sir Robert that he is under pressure to stay on, thus giving rise to speculation that he is planning to ‘do a Melba’. (1974)

To leave (a place)

**vamoose** (1847) US, dated; from earlier sense, depart

**skip** (1884) Orig US; *Detroit Free Press*: Cliff won’t go along with Molly’s scheme to take Olive’s $10,000 and skip town. (1977)

**stash** (1889) Criminals’, dated; from earlier sense, depart; mainly in the phrase ‘leave one’s stash’—the defaulters who have ‘skipped’ out. (1978)

**blow** (1902) Orig and mainly US; J. Davis: ‘Let’s blow this joint, Garfield.’ ‘Hang on!’ (1984)

**scarper** (1937) From earlier sense, depart; mainly in the phrase scarper the letty; depart hurriedly, abscond

**split** (1956) Orig US; from earlier sense, depart; often in the phrase split the scene leave a particular place; *Sunday Sun* (Brisbane): When he split the Brisbane scene he left behind documents that could be incriminating to the drug gangsters. (1971)

**take a step** (1979), **a step** (1979); **step out** (1979), **step** (1979); **do a Melba** (1971) Australian, jocular; applied to someone who makes several farewell performances or comebacks; from the name of Dame Nellie Melba (stage name of Helen Mitchell) (1861–1931), Australian soprano, who was famous for being unable to retire conclusively; *Sydney Morning Herald*: It has been intensified by talk from Sir Robert that he is under pressure to stay on, thus giving rise to speculation that he is planning to ‘do a Melba’. (1974)

**locate 'skips'**—the defaulters who have ‘skipped’ out. (1978)


**twenty-three skidoo** (1928) US, dated; origin unknown; compare skidoo leave; Desmond Bagley: This elderly, profane woman . . . used an antique American slang . . . I expected her to come out with ‘twenty-three, skidoo’. (1978)

**on your bike** (1967) British; now often also with the implication that the person addressed should go and look for work; this was popularized by a speech given by Employment Secretary Norman Tebbitt at the 1981 Conservative Party Conference, in which he pointed out that his father had not rioted in the 1930s when unemployed, but ‘got on his bike and looked for work’; *Times*: ‘On your bike, Khomeini’, the crowd shouted outside the Iranian Embassy during the siege. (1981)

A departure

**moonlight flit** (1824), **flit** (1952), **moonlight** (1958) Applied to a hurried departure by night, especially to avoid paying a debt; *Sunday Truth* (Brisbane): They live on the generosity of the small country storekeeper, then do a flit. (1970) R. Parkes: It’s no good him trying to find ‘em. . . . Done a moonlight, they did. (1971)

**one who departs**

**fly-by-night** (1823) Dated; applied to someone who runs away in order to evade creditors; from such people’s nocturnal departure

**moonlighter** (1903) Applied to someone who does a moonlight flit; *Sunday Mail* (Brisbane): Brisbane flat owners . . . estimate that moonlighters—tenants who slip away overnight without paying the rent—are costing them £100,000 a year. (1964)

**skip** (1915) North American; applied to someone who runs away in order to evade creditors; compare skip out depart hurriedly, abscond

**Desmond Bagley**: He had knocked about all over the Pacific and would have been a splendid companion. (1929)

**Wall Street Journal**: Jean Phelan traces all kinds of hard-to-locate ‘skips’—the defaulters who have ‘skipped’ out. (1978)

To wish to leave

**want out** (1870) Orig Scottish, Northern Irish, & US; *Time Out*: One of the kids who had paid his money . . . wanted out. (1973)

9. Transport

To transport, carry, take

**tote** (1676) Orig US; probably of dialect origin; *Chatelaine* (Canada): I toted a canvas bag over one shoulder. (1979)

**cart** (1881) Implying taking something heavy or cumbersome over a long distance or with considerable effort; from earlier sense, convey in a cart; B. Trapido: I tell him how . . . we carted home a great quantity of accumulated litter from our desks in a plaid blanket which we carried between us down the hill. (1982)

**schlep, schlepp, shlep** (1922) Mainly US; Yiddish shlepn, from German schleppe drag

**New Yorker**: When her husband, Sidney, was alive he sustained a rupture, and Mrs. Singer says she had to schlepp him in and out of bed several times a day. (1975)

To travel, go on a journey

**knock about** (1833), **knock (a)round** (1848) Denoting travelling and living in various places

**Compton Mackenzie**: He had knocked about all over the Pacific and would have been a splendid companion. (1929)

**Wall Street Journal**: Dirk de Jong knocked around the Caribbean for 20 years. (1989)

**hop** (1923) *Sunday Times*: There is this blinding deal in France, son. Hop over there quick and you’ll be in. (1993)
jet (1946) Denoting travel by jet aeroplane; used both intransitively and transitively; from jet jet aeroplane. **Time:** Jetting home to Moscow... Krushchev exuded confidence. (1959) **Daily Telegraph:** Clarksons jet you to top resorts like Alpbach, Auffach, [etc.]. (1968)

A journey, trip

hop (1909) Often applied specifically to a stage of a journey. **Keith Weatherly:** They had about three hundred miles to go, and because of the road conditions they decided to do it in two hops. (1968)

jump (1923) Orig US • Billie Holiday: We were playing the desire to travel. (1992)

jet (1946) Both intransitively and transitively; from jet jet aeroplane. **Jetting home to Moscow... Krushchev exuded confidence.** (1959)

A ticket

ducat, ducket (-t) (1871) Applied especially to a railway ticket; probably from earlier sense, coin; perhaps influenced by docket and ticket. **Macmillan's Magazine:** So I took a ducat (ticket) for Sutton in Surrey. (1879)

The desire to travel

itchy feet (1943) • Sun: Most Capricorn goats normally have their feet planted firmly on the ground. Not this week. If anything, you appear to have itchy feet, not to mention the travel bug. (1992)

Driving and road manoeuvres

tailgate (1951) Orig US; denoting driving too close behind another vehicle; from US tailgate tail-board on a lorry, etc. **Good Morning:** In the dangerous sphere of motorway driving, for example, they would not tailgate at speeds where if the man in front stopped suddenly they could not... help but stop in exactly the same place on the road. (1976)

Mexican overdrive (1961) US; jocular; applied to the putting of the gears of a vehicle, especially a truck, into neutral while coasting downhill

wheelie (1966) Orig US; applied to the stunt of riding a bicycle or motor-cycle for a short distance with the front wheel off the ground; from wheel + -ie **Daily Mail:** That's the bike seen on TV with crash-hatted kids doing wheelies. (1985)

U-ey, uy, youee (1973) Australian; applied to a U-turn; from U-turn + -y **Truckin' Life:** The turning circle is 15.2 m (49.8 ft). Not natural U-ey material but adequate for a six-tonner. (1983)

wheelie (1973) Australian; applied to a sharp U-turn made by a motor vehicle, causing skidding of the wheels; compare earlier sense, riding a cycle with the front wheel off the ground. **J. S. Borthwick:** Tom did a wheelie into Route 77. (1982)

A driver

road hog (1891) Applied to an inconsiderate (usually obstructive) driver or cyclist. **Kyril Bonfiglioli:** 'Lost my temper... Bloody road hog.' 'He might easily have done us a mischief,' I agreed. (1972)

cowboy (1928) Orig US; applied to a reckless or inconsiderate driver; from cowboys' reputation for boisterousness. **Truckin' Life:** Equipment Manager Lindsay King demands... minimum of five years interstate driving... and a steady nature and background.... 'We have to weed out the cowboys... we need the top professional drivers.' (1994)

hackie, hacky (1937) US; applied to a taxi-driver; from US hack taxi + -ie, -y **Margot Neville:** And now... unearth some other blasted hacky that drove me there. (1959)

gipsy, gypsy (1942) US; applied to the driver of an independently operated truck. **Boston Sunday Globe:** The primary violators among truck drivers are the so-called 'gypies' who operate independently. (1967)

greaser (1964) Orig US; applied to a member of a gang of youths with long hair and riding motorcycles

bikie (1967) Australian & New Zealand; applied to a motor-cyclist, specifically a member of a gang of motor-cyclists, usually leather-jacketed, with a reputation for violent or rowdy behaviour; from bike + -ie **Sydney Morning Herald:** The NSW police are still seeking a member of the Bandido bikie gang over the Milperra massacre on September 2. (1984)

See also A transport worker at Work (p. 199).

A pilot

Geoff (1931) British; applied to the automatic pilot of an aircraft; from earlier services' slang sense, airman

A passenger

strap-hanger (1905) Applied to a passenger on a bus, train, etc. who has to stand, holding on to an overhead support, because all the seats on the vehicle are taken, and hence more broadly to a commuter on public transport. **Times:** Washington... commuters... are not strap-hangers like New Yorkers, Londoners and Parisians. (1981)

legal (1923) British; applied to a taxi passenger who pays the exact fare without a tip. **Herbert Hodge:** Some 'legals' are simply mean, and give excuses instead of a tip. (1939)

A pedestrian

ped (1883) A ped about three-quarters of a block away. (1973)

Walking

per boot (1895) Australian, jocular **Bulletin** (Sydney): Touring Grippsland per boot, Mat was hailed... by a dog-tired cocky. (1941)

Shanks' pony (1898) Applied to going on foot as opposed to being transported; from earlier parallel expressions such as Shanks's nag (1774) and Shanks's mare (1793); Shanks's jocularly from shank leg

Traffic offences

run (1935) Mainly Australian; denoting driving through a red traffic light
feed the bears (1975) Orig and mainly US; denoting receiving a ticket or paying a fine for a traffic offence; compare bear police officer

hotting (1991) British; applied to joyriding in stolen high-performance cars, especially dangerously and for display; from hot stolen, perhaps reinforced by hot-wire steal a car by bypassing the ignition system • Observer: What started as a campaign against ‘hotting’—displays of high-speed handbrake turns in stolen cars—has turned into a dispute over territory. (1991). Hence hotter one who engages in hotting (1991)

Accidents

pile-up (1929) Applied to a (motor) accident involving a collision, typically a multiple one • New Scientist: A recent pile-up on the M1 in Bedfordshire involving 30 cars has apparently moved the Ministry of Transport to do some thinking. (1968)

prang (1942) British, orig R.A.F. slang, applied to a crash or crash-landing of an aircraft, and subsequently to any crash involving vehicles; origin uncertain; perhaps from the sound of a crash • Hunt & Pringle: ‘P/O Prune’ is the title bestowed upon a pilot who has several ‘prangs’ on his record. (1943)

shunt (1959) British; applied to a motor accident, especially a nose-to-tail collision • G. Vaughan: ‘Another bloody shunt,’ Yardley groaned. The Zagreb trunk was in涉及到a collision, typically a multiple one involving 30 cars has apparently moved the Ministry of Transport to do some thinking. (1968)


shunt-up (1976) British; applied to a multiple motor accident; from shunt motor accident, modelled on pile-up

To crash

prang (1941) British, orig R.A.F. slang; applied to crashing an aircraft or other vehicle; from the noun prang crash • New Scientist: After so many operations it was an acute personal grief to him that he had pranged his Wimpey. (1944)

wrap something (around) something (1950) Denoting crashing a vehicle into a stationary object • Times: The men towing the boat from one training venue to another wrapped it round a traffic light. (1984)

total (1954) North American; denoting wrecking a car, etc. completely • Guardian: Daddy’s BMW which she can drive any time she wants as long as she doesn’t total it. (1982)

buy the farm (1955) Orig US services’ slang; denoting crashing an aircraft, usually fatally; explained as referring to government compensation paid to a farmer when a jet aircraft crashes on his farm • Economist: These demonstrations cost money and lives. A number of commercial test pilots have ‘bought the farm’ while doing demonstrations. (1988)

Vehicle registration

tag (1935) North American; applied to a vehicle licence plate • Billings (Montana) Gazette: [They] observed a Thunderbird with Louisiana tags circling the block. (1976)

rego, reggo (1967) Australian; from registration • Daily Mail: At midnight, a businessman and his female companion took a drive to the beach in his H-reg Mercedes. (1991)

Taxis

hack (1704) Now only US; short for hackney carriage

duck-shoving (1870) Australian & New Zealand; applied to the practice of taxi-drivers not waiting their turn in the rank, but touting for passengers

Jixi, Jixie (1926) British; dated; applied to a two-seater taxi licensed in 1926; from jix, nickname of Sir William Joynson-Hicks (1865–1932), Home Secretary in 1926 + i, after taxi

clock (1930) Applied to a taximeter • Anthony Armstrong: Unscrupulous young men . . . who didn’t mind paying what was already on the clock and a bribe besides. (1930)

roader (1939) Applied by taxi-drivers to a long-distance fare or journey • London-Wide Radio Taxis: Roaders are an everyday event on radio. Put yourselves into the shoes of a director of a company who requires a taxi for a long distance haul. Does he go out into the street and hail a cab or send his secretary to find one? Of course he doesn’t. He rings for a cab. (1978)

Railways

gricer (1968) Applied to a railway enthusiast, especially one who assiduously seeks out and photographs unusual trains, and hence more loosely to a train-spotter; origin uncertain; variously associated with grouse-shooting (likened to train-spotting), Gricer as a surname, etc. • New Scientist: Some of the gricers, earnest fresh-faced young men . . . who had cut their milk teeth on Hornby trains, had booked on this train two years ago. (1981)

See also gandy dancer, rounder, shack, snake, snake charmer under A transport worker at Work (p. 199).

Flying and air travel

split-arse, split-ass (1917) Services’ slang, dated; applied to a pilot given to performing
stunts and to an aircraft having good manoeuvrability, and hence used as a verb denoting making a sudden turn in an aircraft and performing stunt flying, and as a noun denoting a flying stunt and an aircraft performing such a stunt. V. M. Yeates: They were sufficiently splitarse and did all the stunts, but there was nothing like a Camel for lightness of touch. (1934) V. M. Yeates: Something fired at him. He splitarsed and nearly hit an SE. (1934)

stooge (1941) R.A.F. slang; denoting flying without any fixed purpose or target; from earlier sense, act compliantly, or as the puppet of another. M. K. Joseph: Been in 891 Squadron, stooging around the Channel ports all winter. (1958). Hence stooge a flight during which one does not expect to meet the enemy. (1942) Miles Tripp: At one stage we saw a Fortress orbiting slowly, presumably on a stooge with a team of W/Ops jamming enemy frequencies. (1952)

grease job (1961), greaser (1972) Applied to a smooth landing; compare the earlier phrase grease (a plane) in land smoothly. Amateur Photographer: The undercarriage structure was intact and the plane could make a 'greaser'. (1980)

red eye (1968) Applied to aeroplane flights on which passengers are unable to get enough sleep because of differences in time-zones between the place of departure and arrival. National Observer: Schweiker... and Newhall took the red-eye special back to Washington that same night. Newhall just wanted to sleep, but Schweiker was, in Newhall's words, 'euphoric'. (1976)

viff (1972) Applied to an aircraft's ability to change direction abruptly as a result of a change in the direction of thrust of the engine(s), and also used as a verb denoting such a change; from the initial letters of vectoring in forward flight. Times Literary Supplement: The VSTOL Harrier with its swivelable jets and ability to 'viff'. (1983)

10. Vehicles

A vehicle

machine (1867) Usually applied to a wheeled vehicle; in the 18th and early 19th centuries commonly applied to a stage-coach or mail-coach, and in the 20th century reapplied to a mechanized vehicle, such as a car, bicycle, or aeroplane. Saturday Evening Post: As I neared my own house I slowed the machine. (1919)

A towed vehicle

Queen Mary (1943) British, dated; applied to a long low-loading road trailer; after the Cunard passenger liner, the Queen Mary

pup (1951) US; applied to a four-wheeled trailer drawn by a tractor or other road vehicle

A motor vehicle

motor (1900) British; applied to a car; originally standard English (short for motor car), but latterly in slang use. Anthony Masters: Mr Sprott flashed a warrant card and Arthur's indignation quietened. 'Ever seen one of these before? 'It's not a Fulham season ticket, is it?' In the motor. 'Hang about!' I said—in the motor, Dailey.' (1984)

runabout (1900) Applied to a small light car. Times: Whereas the Mini is really a Town runabout, the Metro is conceived as a family car that will be more comfortable for longer runs. (1980)

one-lunger (1908) Applied to a vehicle driven by a single-cylinder engine; from earlier sense, such an engine

flivver (1910) Orig US; applied to an old or cheap car, originally especially an early model of Ford car; from the female personal name Lizzie, pet form of Elizabeth

bus (1921) Dated; applied to a car, especially an old or dilapidated one. Jonathan Gash: You will be like a guy who paid no attention to his heap and it broke down in the traffic. (1977)

struggle-buggy (1925) US; dated; applied especially to an old or dilapidated car

heap (1926) Applied to an old or dilapidated vehicle. C. F. Burke: You will be like a guy who paid no attention to his heap and it broke down in the traffic. (1969)

crate (1927) Orig US; applied to an old or dilapidated vehicle. F. E. Baily: His Rolls II give you more respect in the eyes of the reporters than my old crate would. (1937)

jalopy, gillogy, jalapa, jollopy, jallopy, jallopy (1926) Orig US; applied to an old or dilapidated car; origin unknown

red-eye special back to Washington that same night. Newhall took the red-eye special back to Washington that same night. Newhall just wanted to sleep, but Schweiker was, in Newhall's words, 'euphoric'. (1976)

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jam jar (1934) British; rhyming slang for car
- Robin Cook: Parking this dreadful great orange-and-cream jamjar... slap under a no-parking sign. (1962)

drag (1935) Applied to a car; compare earlier obsolete sense, horse-drawn vehicle ■ Observer: A stately great drag... with a smart chauffeur at the wheel. (1960)

iron (1935) Orig US; applied to an old motor vehicle ■ Mack Reynolds: Well, it would mean being able to maintain a decent hovercar rather than the... four wheel iron he was currently driving. (1967)

oil-burner (1938) Applied to a run-down vehicle which uses too much engine oil ■ Brian Garfield: Even in an old oil-burner he could have gone three times as far in a day's drive if he'd wanted to. (1975)

orphan (1942) Applied to a discontinued model of motor vehicle

hot rod, rod (1945) Orig US; applied to a motor vehicle modified to have extra power and speed

crummy (1946) US; applied to a truck or other vehicle used to transport loggers to and from the woods; from earlier sense, caboose ■ B. Hutchison: Most of these men... travel perhaps forty miles to work in a 'crummy'. (1957)

passion wagon (1948) Jocular; applied to an old jalopy suitable for petting, etc. in

bomb (1953) Australian & New Zealand; applied to an old car ■ Frank Sargeson: We had a job shoving her into the bomb. (1987)

rag-top (1955) US; applied to a convertible car with a soft roof ■ Springfield (Massachusetts) Daily News: The last U.S. built convertible, a Cadillac Eldorado, rolls along the assembly at the General Motors' plant in Detroit Wednesday. It ended an era for ragtops that began 74 years ago. (1976)

wheels (1959) Orig US; applied to a car ■ Gavin Lyall: 'Did you find me some wheels'?... 'Yep: a Renault 16TX.' (1982)

woody, woodie (1961) Orig surfers' slang, mainly US; applied to an estate car with timber-framed sides; from wood + -y

banger (1962) Applied to an old, dilapidated, and noisy vehicle; usually in the phrase old banger ■ Times: It is true though that one misses out on one's husband's early years of struggle: the rented flats... the third-hand old bangers, the terrifying overdraft. (1985)

rust-bucket (1965) Mainly Australian; applied to an old rusty car; from earlier sense, old rusty ship

hog (1968) US; applied to a large, often old, car ■ Black Scholar: He bought him a 'Hog' with all the accessories on it. Man, this Cadillac had air horns, white-walls, [etc.] (1971)

limo (1968) Orig US; abbreviation of limousine ■ R. Moore: The company should be sending a limo for me. I'd be happy to drop you off. (1973)

sheen (1969) US; applied to a car or van; probably an abbreviation of machine ■ American

Speech: Hey, look down the street pas' that sheen double-parked. (1975)

pig (1971) British; applied to a type of armoured personnel carrier; from its snout-shaped bonnet ■ Times: The Pig, the armoured vehicle most used in Belfast. (1978)

gas guzzler (1973) Orig US; applied to a large car with excessively high fuel consumption; from US gas petrol ■ Washington Post: The big American family sedan may be a gas-guzzler. But it can also be an insurance bargain. (1985)

pimpmobile (1973) US; applied to a large flashy car used by a pimp ■ Daily Mail: The pimpmobiles—the long, long Cadillacs with a Rolls front—no longer cruise everywhere. They are finding it less profitable to keep girls here. (1975)

scOOT (1977) Applied to a car; compare earlier sense, motor-cycle and scooter fast car ■ Custom Car: For this season he's gone over to a radical Volvo-engined scoot. (1977)

stink-pot (1978) Applied to a lorry or other vehicle that gives off foul exhaust fumes; compare earlier application to a ship ■ Desmond Bagley: The truck broke through... it killed them.... Louisy stinkpots! Never have liked them except when I'm in a hurry. (1978)

A lorry

red ball (1934) US; applied to a fast goods lorry; from earlier sense, fast goods train

rig (1938) US; compare earlier sense, horse vehicle ■ Times: Mr Nixon came on the air... to urge the drivers to get their 'big rigs' back on the road. (1974)

six by six, six by (1942) US, services' slang; applied to a six-wheel truck with six-wheel drive

ute (1943) Mainly Australian & New Zealand; applied to a small truck for carrying light loads; abbreviation of utility, as in utility truck or vehicle ■ NZ Farmer: Now Nissan has followed it with a tough new 4 x ute, known at this stage just as the 720. (1984)

passion wagon (1948) Applied to a truck taking service personnel on short leave to a town or other place of entertainment

artic (1951) British; short for articulated lorry ■ Douglas Rutherford: To see a woman at the wheel of a big artic was surprising. (1977)

gipsy, gypsy (1960) US; applied to an independently operated truck; from earlier sense, driver of such a truck

A bus

short (1914) US, dated; applied to a street-car or tram; apparently from the relatively short duration of tram-rides as compared with those on a train

tub (1929) Mainly criminals' slang; often in the phrase work the tubs pick pockets on buses or at bus-stops

A make of car

Merc (1933) British; short for Mercedes • John Wainwright: There is a pale blue Merc parked not far from the club entrance. (1974)


Roller (1977) British; applied to a Rolls-Royce car; from Rolls-Royce + -er, probably influenced by roller one that rolls • Observer: In the new series . . . Jools meets a Martian . . . and takes him on a guided tour of Britain in the Roller. (1989)

A bicycle

bone-shaker (1874) Applied originally to an early type of bicycle with solid tyres (from its effect on the rider), and subsequently jocularly to any (old or dilapidated) bicycle

push-bike (1913) Applied to an ordinary bicycle, as opposed to a motor-cycle • Dorothy Halliday: Derek . . . thought of a push-bike. . . . He didn’t want to be followed. (1970)

grid (1922) • Coast to Coast 1942: I’ll walk and wheel the bike, and if my dad’s home he can drive out in the car to meet me. ‘Gosh, no!’ you said. ‘Here, you go on, on my grid, an’ I’ll do the walking.’ (1943)

chopper (1965) Orig US; applied to a motorcycle, especially a large powerful one or one with high handlebars • Economist: An Evel Knievel doll on the notorious chopper motor bike. (1977)

hog (1967) US; applied to a large, often old, motorcycle

scoot (1968) US; applied to a motor-cycle; abbreviation of scooter

drag (1925) US; applied to a freight train

red ball (1927) US; applied to a fast goods train

locie, loci, lokey, etc. (1942) North American & New Zealand; abbreviation of locomotive • A. P. Gaskell: She often saw wisps of smoke rising against the bush on the hills at the back. . . . Sometimes she heard a lokey puffing. (1947)

Spam can (1967) British; applied to a streamlined steam locomotive formerly used on the Southern Region of British Rail

A ship, boat

tub (a1618) Applied to a slow clumsy ship • Hall & Osborne: His old tub of a vessel. . . . was known from one end of the Pacific to the other. (1901)

sub (1917) Applied to a submarine; abbreviation • Adam Diment: Bots snooping round Holy Loch and the nuclear subs. (1968)

pig boat (1921) US; applied to a submarine • Newsweek: Presumably Germany will now build up to this by constructing ocean-going pigboats. (1939)

windbag (1924) Applied to a sailing ship or windjammer • W. McFee: He had been cook in a windbag and a sailor before the mast. (1946)

tin fish (1928) Dated; applied to a submarine; compare earlier sense, torpedo

crate (1933) Applied to an old or unseaworthy vessel

flat-top (1942) US; applied to an aircraft-carrier • C. S. Forester: Escort vessels and destroyers and baby flat-tops were coming off the ways as fast as America and England and Canada could build them. (1955)

rust-bucket (1945) North American; applied to an old rusty ship

skunk (1945) Military; applied to an unidentified surface craft • New York Times Magazine: The cruiser is . . . useful at times for coastal bombardment or to seek out and destroy enemy ‘skunks’ (surface craft). (1952)

stink-pot (1972) Applied to a boat that gives off foul exhaust fumes • Howard Fast: They’re gone now, all of them [zc. fishing-boats with sails]. Nothing but stinkpots—I’m sorry—oil burners. (1977)

fizz-boat (1977) New Zealand; applied to a motor boat or speedboat; from the noise made by the engine • Metro (Auckland): There are everyman’s little fizz-boat to the great petrol guzzling twin 200 horsepower outboard motor driven racing machines. (1984)

Parts of a ship

mud-hook (1827) Dated; applied to an anchor

monkey island, monkey’s island (1912) Applied to a small bridge above the pilot-house • P. J. Abraham: Up on the monkey island he had realized there would be no power for the lights. (1963)

perisher (1925) Naval; applied to a periscope; jocular re-application of perisher annoying person
the sharp end (1948) Applied to the bows Dick Francis: Ame pointed the sharp end back, . . . The dinghy slugged busily through the little waves. (1973)

An aircraft

bus (1910) Dated; applied to an aeroplane, especially an old or dilapidated one John Buchan: Got here last night after a clinkin’ journey, with the bus [sc. an aeroplane] behavin’ like a lamb. (1924)
penguin (1915) Services’ slang, dated; applied to a low-powered machine incapable of flight, used to train aircrew kiting (1917) British, mainly services’ slang; applied to an aeroplane Miles Tripp: The Squadron hasn’t lost a single kite in the last three raids. (1952)

quirk (1917) British services’ slang, dated; applied to a type of slow steady aeroplane, to a plane used to train novice pilots, or to any peculiar plane; compare earlier sense, inexperienced airmen

crate (1918) Orig services’ slang; applied to an old aeroplane Times: You must travel in an antiquated two-engined crate which goes puttering over Central Asia at about 90 miles an hour. (1957)

flying boxcar (1918) US services’ slang; applied to a large cumbersome aeroplane flivver (1926) US; applied to a small aeroplane; compare earlier sense, old or dilapidated car

ruptured duck (1930) US services’ slang, dated; applied to a damaged aeroplane
duck (1931) US; applied to an amphibious aeroplane

bird (1933) Applied to an aeroplane, a guided missile, a rocket, or a space-craft Alan Shepard: I really enjoy looking at a bird that is getting ready to go. (1962)
gasshopper (1941) US; applied to a light military aircraft used for observation, liaison, etc.
puddle-jumper (1944) US; applied to a small, light, manoeuvrable aeroplane Detroit Free Press: Any one . . . can call his plane an air ambulance even if it’s just a ‘puddle-jumper’ without medical equipment. (1978)
squirt (1945) Services’ slang, dated; applied to a jet aeroplane L. R. Gribble: To fly the squirts in combat meant the development of a new technique. (1945)

A helicopter

egg-beater (1936) US; from the resemblance of the rotors to those of a mechanical egg-whisk

chopper (1951) Orig US services’ slang Listener: A naval helicopter or ‘chopper’ going about its flights and hoverings. (1958)

whirlybird (1951) Orig US

sky bear (1975) North American; applied to a police helicopter

A type of aircraft

Rumpty (1917) Applied to the Farman training aeroplane, used in World War I; from rump, after rumpty V. M. Yeates: Tom told them the first time he went up was in a Rumpty, that was to say, a Maurice Farman Shorthorn, a queer sort of bus like an assemblage of birdcages. (1934)

Spit (1941) Abbreviation of Spitfire, name of a British fighter aeroplane used in World War II James McClure: I was flying Spits, Hurricanes, while Bonzo . . . was in Bomber Command. (1980)

Wimpey, Wimpy (1941) Applied to a Wellington, a British bomber aeroplane used in World War II; from J. Wellington Wimpy, name of a character in the ‘Popeye’ cartoons Nevil Shute: There was a Wimpey running up one engine, somewhere away out in the middle distance of the aerodrome. (1944)

Parts of an aircraft

the office (1917) Applied to an aeroplane’s cockpit V. M. Yeates: He put his head in the office and flew by the instruments. (1934)

the pulpit (1933) British services’ slang, dated; applied to an aeroplane’s cockpit Dan: A fighter pilot climbs into the ‘pulpit’ of his plane. (1942)

undercart (1934) Applied to an aircraft’s undercarriage Nevil Shute: Honey had ruined a Reindeer at Gander by pulling up its under-cart. (1948)

greenhouse (1941) Dated; applied to a cockpit canopy W. H. Auden: ‘Why have They killed me? wondered Bert, our Greenhouse gunner. (1947)

An engine and its parts

rev (1901) Applied to a rotation of an engine; abbreviation of revolution Daily Telegraph: As I got round the bend onto the main road I felt the revs begin to build up. When this happened I changed up a gear. (1972)

one-lunger (1908) Applied to a single-cylinder engine

mill (1918) Applied to the engine of an aircraft or a hot-rod racing car Brian Garfield: This was an old car but it must have had a souped-up mill. (1975)

pot (1941) Mainly services’ slang; applied to an aircraft cylinder or carburettor

carb (1942) Abbreviation of carburettor Hot Car: I would like to fit an S.U. carb from a Mini or a Morris 1100 to the Escort. (1977)

percolator (1942) Mainly US; applied to a carburettor

tranny (1970) Orig & mainly US; applied to the transmission of a motor vehicle, especially of a truck or van; from transmission + -y Billings Gazette: That was $1,500 or $1,700 damage to the tranny and the guy in the coffee pot cost $150. (1976)

cat (1988) British; abbreviation of catalytic converter Performance Car: If I remove the cat, could I use leaded petrol or will it damage the engine? (1989)

Given enhanced engine performance

souped-up (1931) Orig US Brian Garfield: A souped-up car with enormous rear tires growled past him. (1975)

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hopped-up (1945) Compare earlier sense, under the influence of drugs. Islander (Victoria, British Columbia); At the urge of the hopped-up motor in seconds they were tearing up Nanaimo Street. (1971)

Instrumentation

dash (1902) Abbreviation of dashboard. Martin Woodhouse: I fitted the key into the truck's dash and backed off. (1966)

gyro (1910) Abbreviation of gyro-compass

clock (1934) Applied to a speedometer or milometer; from the clock-like dial. Commercial Motor: Neither vehicle had much mileage on the clock. (1970)

speedo (1934) Abbreviation of speedometer. Peter Hill: The car [was as] steady as a rock... as the speedo reached up towards its limit. (1976)

electrics (1946) Applied to the electric circuits in a vehicle. Sunday Times: He tried to lower his flaps part way—forgetting, in the anxiety of the moment, that without electrics his flap position indicator would not work. (1963)

Brakes

anchors, anchor (1936) Priestley & Wisdom: There is more to it... than just putting on the brakes—or, to use the colourful language of the sporting motorist, 'clapping on the anchors'. (1965)

A tyre

skin (1954) Hot Car: The answer is to run at the same pressure as the standard tyres, as by dropping the pressure any more than two pounds, you could cause sidewall failure, even in the big American skins. (1977)

Fuel

juice (1909) Applied to petrol. Keith Weatherly: The Rover had him worried. If she ran out of juice... he had to walk in. (1968)

A mechanical fault

gremlin (1941) Orig R.A.F. slang; applied to a mischievous sprite imagined as the cause of mechanical faults, originally in aircraft; origin unknown, but probably formed by analogy with goblin; a single instance of an earlier sense, junior officer in the R.A.F., is recorded (1929). Times: The King said that on his way back from Italy they thought they heard a gremlin in the royal aeroplane. (1944)

A shop selling vehicle accessories and spares

speed shop (1954) Orig US. Hot Car: You can often pick up reasonable headers off the shelf from a good speed shop. (1977)
Abstract Qualities and States

1. Size

Large

thumping (1576) From the verb thump + -ing

hulking (1698) From the noun hulk large unwieldy person or mass + -ing  J. Collins: They gave me a Thumper of a Christmas Box. (1804)

whopping (1706) From the verb whop hit + -ing

walloping (1847) From the verb wallop + -ing

hefty (1871) From earlier sense, weighty

tidy (1838) From earlier sense, fairly good  Montagu Gerard: They do swear a tidy bit. (1803)

great (1715) Used to emphasize other adjectives denoting large size, such as big, huge, thick  Montague Gerard: A great bight thing, the size of a small haystack. (1961)

whacking (1806) From the verb whack + -ing  J. Davis: She looks... like a whacking frigate. (1806)

corking (1895) Compare corker large one

boomer (1843) Australian; from earlier sense, large kangaroo  Tom Ronan: Fights you’re talking about! Well, I just seen a boomer! (1956)

daddy (1865) Used to denote the most impressively large example; usually followed by of  William Garner: You graduate from taking little chances to taking big ones. This one was the daddy of ‘em all. (1969)

jumbo (1883) Often used as an adjective; from earlier sense, big clumsy person, probably from the second element of mumbo-jumbo (perhaps from Mande mama dyumbo); popularized in the late 19th century as the name of an elephant, famous for its size, originally at London Zoo and in 1882 sold to a circus  Julian May: There were... stiff jumbos... capable of bearing a man’s weight. (1982)

megaphone (1988) From the prefix mega- great, as in megastar, mega-millionaire, etc.  Investors Chronicle: The insurance companies helped promote the industry as a whole with their mega launches and promotions. (1988)

Large one

thumper (1660) Dated; from the verb thump + -er  J. Collins: They gave me a Thumper of a Christmas Box. (1804)

monster (1759) From earlier sense, animal of huge size; often used as an adjective  Kingsley Martin: Buying from the all-purpose shop bullseys and, for a penny, ‘monsters’, which were big bottles of fizzy lemonade. (1986)

hefty (1871) From earlier sense, weighty

corker (1882) From earlier sense, excellent or astonishing person or thing  Sun: First he netted a corker of 6lb 12 oz and followed it up an hour later with a 6lb 4oz specimen. (1992)

megaliths (1988) From the prefix mega- great, as in megastar, mega-millionaire, etc.  Investors Chronicle: The insurance companies helped promote the industry as a whole with their mega launches and promotions. (1988)
exceptionally large example of its species; origin unknown. ■ Sports Afield: A bronze lunker came out of the shadowy depths and smashed the pigskin. (1947)

doozy (1916) Orig & mainly North American; from earlier sense, excellent or astonishing thing


blockbuster (1946) Applied to something large in scale or effect; from earlier sense, aerial bomb capable of destroying a whole block of buildings ■ Guardian. The main work was a purely orchestral blockbuster; Shostakovich's Leningrad Symphony. (1991)

King Kong (1955) Used as a nickname for anyone of outstanding size or strength; from the name of the ape-like monster featured in the film King Kong (1933) ■ Guardian. Finn MacCool was a legendary Irish giant, a King Kong with a generous heart. (1974)

granddaddy (1956) Used to denote the most impressively large example; usually followed by of ■ Muriel Beadle: The granddaddy of all electrical storms dumped a cloudburst. (1961)

as long as one's arm (1846) Used to indicate great length ■ Margery Allingham: Jock has a record as long as your arm. (1938)

A tall person

beanpole (1837) Applied jocularly to a very tall thin person; from earlier sense, stick up which a bean plant is grown

lofty (1933) Used as a nickname for a very tall (or ironically, very short) person

Small

tiddy (1781) Origin uncertain; perhaps a baby-form of little ■ Mary Kelly: Do you know this Richborough? . . . There's a tiddy railway, power cables, and the castle. (1958)

weeny (1790) Orig dialect; from wee small ■ W. J. Locke: They're little tiny weeny shells. (1922)

itty (1798) Baby-form of little; used mainly in addressing or referring to small children and animals ■ Guardian. Now, ah reckon Lady Bird an' ah will git ahseives an itty bit o' sleep. (1984)

teeny (1817) Variant of tiny ■ New Yorker. Their [videodisc] system has a teeny laser beam instead of a needle with petty matters ■ Daily Telegraph: A pokey, little, highly rented flat. (1971)

dinky (1858) From earlier sense, neat, dainty; ultimately from obsolete Scottish dink (of unknown origin) + -y ■ K. M. Wells: You will need a stove of sorts, something better than the dinky little two-burner alcohol contraption with which so many so-called cruising ships are fitted. (1960)

ickle (1864) Baby-form of little ■ Polly Hobson: She changed her role. Now she was Daddy's ickle girl. (1968)

tiddly (1868) Variant of tiddy ■ J. Goodman: The whole bally case for the prosecution is built on tiddly bits of non-evidence. (1978)

teeny-weeny (1894) ■ H. Lawrence: Jewel has a bird brain. You know what a bird brain is? Teeny-weeny. (1948)

teesny, teenzy (1899) Orig US dialect; probably from teeny + -sy ■ S. Strutt: 'Would you like a drink? . . . 'Darling, that would be lovely. Perhaps just a teensy one!' (1981)

bitsy (1905) US; from earlier sense, consisting of little bits ■ Raymond Chandler: That toy . . . It's just a little bitty gun, a butterfly gun. (1940)

bitty (1905) US; from earlier sense, consisting of little bits ■ Guardian: A bitsy village with reed thatch and wrought-iron work. (1959)

teensy-weenesy, teensie-weenies (1906) ■ Times: The statement as it stands is . . . just a teensie-weenies bit unfair to my own firm. (1973)

mingy (1911) Used to denote a disappointing or meanly small amount or size; perhaps from m(ean + st) ingy, and stingy ■ Cecil Beaton: A mingy little trey he had picked up from a heaven-knows-where. (1926)

itsy-bitsy (1938) Baby-form of little + bitsy ■ Hartley Howard: If Frankie was here he'd break you into itsy-bitsy pieces. (1972)

itty-bitty (1938) ■ Ludovic Kennedy: I felt, here I am in this itty-bitty tropical village, a tremendous long ways from anywhere. (1969)

pint-size, pint-sized (1938) Applied to a child or small person; from the notion of a pint being a small amount ■ Guardian. Long double-breasted riding macs for the pint-sized. (1973)

titchy (1950) British; from titch, variant of tich small person + -y ■ Spectator. Towering six foot three inches over a titchy Laertes. (1958)

Small one

shrimp (c1386) Applied to a small or puny person ■ Naryantara Sahgal: At least one could hold up one's head with a distinguished-looking Kashmiri Brahmin Prime Minister, but here was this shrimp who was a Kayasath as well, and filling up the secretariat with Kayasaths. (1985)

squib (1586) Now Australian; applied to a small or insignificant person; from earlier sense, explosive device ■ Courier-Mail ( Brisbane): We have numerous utility expressions for people such as . . . sparrow, squib, nugget and streak, for men of varying sizes. (1979)

pinkys, pinkie (1808) Applied especially to the little finger; partly from obsolete pink small,
partly from Dutch pink little finger, + - y W. H. Auden: 0 lift your pin-kie, and touch the win-ter sky. (1962)

**tiddler (1927)** Applied to a small person or thing, or to a child; from earlier sense, a stickleback or other small fish ■ Edward Blishen: A couple of days with Class 1A and . . . he will know a deuce of a lot . . . about the little tiddlers. (1980)

**peanuts (1934)** Orig US; applied especially to an insignificant amount of money or an inadequate payment ■ J. B. Priestley: 'How was the poker game?' Peanuts. All I got was about twenty-five dollars and a headache.' (1946)

**tich, titch (1934)** Applied to a small person or a child; from Little Tich, stage name of the diminutive English music-hall comedian Harry Relph (1868–1928), who was given the nickname as a child because of a resemblance to the so-called 'Tichborne claimant' (Arthur Orton (1834–98), who claimed to be the long-lost Roger Tichborne, heir to an English baronetcy)

**famous person**

**Dorothy Savers:** I'll tell you my story

**Alison Lurie:** You don't know fuck-all

**Amos Adamson:** Nothing (Sydney): Ask any modern saifor who has...bulletin* for twopence. (a1960)

**Mainly in the phrases**

**'What did they offer to give you?' 'Bugger-all.' (1961)**

**fuck-all (1918)** ■ Alison Lurie: You don't know fuck-all about life. (1985)

**Fanny Adams (1919)** British; mainly in the phrase sweet Fanny Adams; from the name of a young woman murdered c1867; sometimes understood as a euphemism for (sweet) fuck-all in the same sense ■ J. R. Cole: What do they do? Sweet Fanny Adams! (1949)

**damn-all (1922)** ■ Dorothy Sayers: I'll tell you my story as shortly as I can, and you'll see I know damn all about it. (1926)

**sweet F. A. (1930)** British; abbreviation of sweet Fanny Adams ■ John Gardner: The small industrial organisation whose own security officers know sweet FA. (1967)

**S.F.A. (1933)** British; abbreviation of sweet Fanny Adams ■ Bulletin (Sydney): Ask any modern sailor who has been refused an issue of pay or rations 'What luck?' and he will be apt to reply 'Sweet Fanny Adams', or just 'S.F.A.', meaning that he received nothing. (1933)

**not a sausage (1938)** ■ Times: Mr Healey said the press did not print Labour's actual policies. 'Not a sausage.' (1981)

**wot no . . .? (1945)** British; originally a World War II catchphrase protesting against shortages, written as the caption accompanying a drawing of the imaginary character Mr Chad; later also in extended humorous use; not representing a casual pronunciation of what ■ K. Conlon: Joanna sent a postcard which said, 'Wot no tulle and confetti?' (1979)

**sod-all (1958)** ■ Kingsley Amis: There's been sod-all since. (1958)

**zilch (1966)** Orig and mainly US; origin unknown ■ Sounds: Three further 45s ensued in 1979 and '80, plus an album which didn't sell. After that, zilch. (1984)

**A trivial or insignificant amount or number**

Used mainly in negative contexts, to connote 'nothing at all'. For words used in the phrases not give a — and not care a —, expressing indifference, see To be indifferent to something at Indifference (p. 210).

**twopence, tuppence (1691)** In such phrases as not worth twopence and not give (or care) twopence, and also for twopence with the smallest encouragement ■ E. M. Forster: I'd jump out of the window for twopence. (1960)

**a damn (1760)** In the phrases not worth a damn, not give (or care) a damn ■ American Mercury: Dat what you shooting ain't worth a damn! (1942)

**tinker's cuss, a tinker's curse, a tinker's damn (1824)** In such phrases as not worth a tinker's cuss, not matter a tinker's cuss and not give (or care) a tinker's cuss; from the former reputation of tinkers for profanity ■ Osbert Sitwell: The human being who is not worth a tinker's cuss,—or, in a more elegant simile, two hoots—does not exist. (1942)

**Jewish Chronicle:** It doesn't matter a tinker's cuss whether you amend the constitution to call the chairman president. (1973)

**a rap (1834)** Mainly in the phrases not give (or care) a rap, not matter a rap; from earlier sense, small coin; ultimately a contraction of Irish *rapaire* robber, counterfeit coin ■ Punch: It don't matter a rap whether it's rough or fine. (1875)

**to reduce**

**boil down (1880)** ■ Saturday Review: It is surprising to see how much research Mr. S. has sometimes contrived to boil down into a single line. (1880)
a hooter (1839) US; dated; origin unknown
  ■ E. A. Dix: 'Do you mean that you don’t know anything about the matter at all?... Not a hooter.' (1900)

a hill of beans (1863) Orig US; D. H. Lawrence: Saying my say and seeing other people sup it up doesn’t amount to a hill o’ beans, as far as I go. (1928)

a hoot (1878), two hoots (1925) Mainly in the phrases not give (care, matter) two hoots (a hoot); probably the same word as hoot loud cry, but compare earlier US slang hooty anything at all
  ■ Listener: The bonus payments scheme takes into account not merely the important nutrients in milk (protein, vitamins and minerals, commonly known as the 'non-fat solids') but also fat content, which doesn’t make a hoot to anyone who doesn’t want to make butter or cheese. (1969)

doodly-squat (1934), diddly-squat (1963), diddly-shit (1964) US; a fanciful formation
  ■ Sunday Times Magazine: When it was all over, I got a huge free bag of ginseng. Lucy got diddy-squat. “You see?” I told her smugly, as we walked back out on the street. ‘Sometimes it pays to be a crybaby.’ (1997)

doodly (1939) US; shortened from doodly-squat

diddly (1964) US; shortened from diddly-squat
  ■ New York Times Magazine: This ballplayer would be shown fumbling on the guitar, prompting the veteran rock musician to say, ‘Bo, you don’t know diddly’. (1990)

squat (1967) US; probably shortened from doodly-squat, or perhaps from squat defecate • Peter Benchley: It’ll be another forecast-of-Armageddon cover that won’t amount to squat. (1979)

A small amount or number

spot (a1400) D. B. Wyndham Lewis: What about a spot of lunch? (1924)

skerrick (1825) Now mainly Australian; origin unknown
  ■ Frank Clune: These wadless blokes of the US; probably a fanciful formation based
  ■ Rex Stout: I merely thought some women were a little shy on brains, present company not excepted. (1975)

lick (1841) Now US; often used adverbially in a lick slightly, somewhat, mainly in negative contexts; from the notion of as much as can be licked
  ■ Black Scholar: His grandfather was a preacher and he couldn’t read a lick. (1971) ■ M. & G. Gordon: If you’ve got a lick of sense, you’ll mosey back into the law’s certainty and on the roominess of New York’s prisons. (1980)

skosh (1959) US, orig services’ slang; mainly used adverbially in a skosh slightly, somewhat; from Japanese sukoshi a little, somewhat, apparently picked up by US servicemen in the Korean war ■ Cycle World: The GSK-R’s seat is more comfortable than the Yamaha’s thinly padded perch, and its bars are a skosh higher. (1988)

Having less than desirable

shy (1895) Orig US betting slang • E. A. Dix: 'Do you mean that you don’t know anything about the matter at all?... They’re rather short on influence these children need.... They’re rather short on culture at the moment. (1942)

An amount or quantity

gob (1555) British; applied to a lump of slimy matter; from earlier more general sense, lump

dole (1607) Applied especially to an amount or period of something beneficial or unpleasant; from earlier sense, quantity of medicine taken

The Mayor’s pitch is a tad exaggerated both on the roominess of New York’s prisons. (1974)

glob (1900) Applied to a lump of slimy matter; probably a blend of blob and glob ■ New Scientist: Throughout the long coasting time, the fuel has been free of something soft; from earlier sense, tuft of grass

Dun’s Review: Playing the most ghastly trio, sandwiched in with snacks of Mendelssohn and torn-off goblets of the ‘unfinished’. (1930)

dollop (1812) Applied to a shapeless lump of something soft; from earlier sense, tuft of grass

glob (1900) Applied to a lump of slimy matter; probably a blend of blob and glob ■ New Scientist: Throughout the long coasting time, the fuel has been free of the pull of gravity. It is probably floating around the half-empty fuel tank in globs. (1962)

nibble, nybble (1970) Jocular; applied in computing to half a byte or four bits; based on byte

drible, drab (1861) drib probably short for dribble; drab probably a fanciful formation based on drib, although compare earlier drab prostitute ■ Daily News: If [sc. a payment] was received in dribs and drabs. (1888)

fat lot (1892) Ironical ■ Barbara Wright: Fat lot of use it was me getting my posterior frozen for a whole night to do my host a favour. (1967)
Abstract Qualities and States

Number

See also at Money (p. 180)

One

Kelly's eye (1925) Used in the game of bingo and its forerunners ■ L. A. G. Strong: A game of 'house' was in progress, and a voice monotonously droned the numbers: ' . . . Kelly's eye.' (1933)

Three
trey, tray (1887) From earlier sense, the three at dice or cards, from Old French and Anglo-Norman tres, tret three (modern French trois)
■ Dan Burley: A deuce or tray of haircuts ago. (1944)

Four

rouf, roaf, rofe, roof (1851) Dated British backslang, mainly criminals'

Eleven

legs eleven (1919) Used in the game of bingo and its forerunners ■ Evelyn Waugh: Kelly's eye—number one; legs, eleven, and we'll Shake the Bag. (1945)

Sixty six

clickety click (1933) Used mainly in the game of bingo and its forerunners; rhyming slang ■ Daily Telegraph: Clickety click, 66; Gates of Heaven, No. 7.

A thousand

thou (1867) Often applied specifically to a thousand pounds, dollars, etc., and also (1902) to a thousandth part; abbreviation ■ New Yorker: The gesture cost me a cool ten thou, but I didn't begrudge it. (1965)

K, k (1968) Applied especially to a thousand pounds, dollars, etc., often with reference to salaries offered in job advertisements; from its use in computing to represent 1000; orig from its use as an abbreviation of kilo-

An unspecified number

umpty (1905) Dated; often used on an analogy with twenty, etc.; a fanciful verbal representation of the dash in Morse code ■ W. Faulkner: 'I never got to Heidelberg,' Charles said. 'All I had was Harvard and Stalag umpty-nine.' (1959)

To increase

skyrocket (1895) Orig US; used of prices, statistics, etc. to denote a sudden steep rise ■ John Steinbeck: The incidence of Gl dysentery skyrocketed. (1943)


jack something up (1904) Orig US; from earlier sense, raise with a jack ■ Daily Telegraph: Reinvestment would then jack up earnings per share and hence the value of the equity. (1971)

up (1934) Orig US; from earlier more specific sense, raise a bid, stake, etc. at cards; ultimately from the adverb up ■ Richard Crossman: I'd talked this over with the Dame before lunch and cautiously suggested that we should make our target 135,000 houses . . . Harold immediately upped me to 150,000. (1974)

bump something up (1940) ■ Spectator: It is wise at night to look out for places which bump up the prices without warning. (1958)

zoom (1970) Used to denote a sudden sharp rise, especially in prices, costs, etc.; from earlier sense, (of an aircraft) to climb suddenly ■ National Observer: By March 1976 . . . the dropout total would zoom to 498,300—50 times the total as of March 1972. (1976)

An increase

bulge (1930) Applied to a temporary increase in volume or quantity ■ Times: The school population 'bulge' is moving up toward the 11–15 ages. (1956)

A large amount (of)

heaps (1547) Also used adverbially in the sense 'much' ■ Guardian: There was so much demand, we put heaps of pressure on the workmen to get it all done. (1991)
■ Susan Coolidge: I'm glad she did, for I feel heaps better already. (1972)

loads (1606), a load (1655) loads also used adverbially in the sense 'much' ■ Guardian: There have been loads of cancellations, no doubt about it. (1991)
■ Guardian: Expect loads more of this sort of thing over the coming months. (1992)

piles (1622) ■ Sylvia Plath: It would be nice, living by the sea with piles of little kids and pigs and chickens. (1963)

no end (1623) Also used adverbially in the sense 'much' ■ R. E. Knowles: You'll have no end of fun with him. (1909) ■ New Yorker: Thomas had been impressed no end by the sight of Klüver . . . fixing an art-and-technology malfunction with a pair of pliers. (1970)

more than you can shake a stick at (1808) Orig and mainly US ■ Ed McBain: We get more damn cancellations than you can shake a stick at. (1960)

lots (1812) Also used adverbially in the sense 'much' ■ Radio Times: All that time my money's sitting in the bank earning lots of lovely interest. (1992)

swag (1812) Now mainly Australian & New Zealand; from earlier sense, loot ■ New Journalist (Australia): It is cheaper to buy a swag of aged situation comedies . . . than to produce even the simplest studio-bound program in Australia. (1973)

lashings (1829) Orig Anglo-Irish ■ Lancet: The crusty wholemeal bread . . . eaten with lashings of butter. (1966)

raft (1830) US; often in the phrase a whole raft of; variant of raft abundance (obsolete except in raft-raft), probably influenced by raft log-boat ■ Time: There were a whole raft of programs in the '60s followed by
eight years when there was no attempt to work with any
degree of compassion. (1977)

gobs, a gob (1839) US; from earlier more
specific sense, a large amount of money

- Washington Post: Jacobs said it would actually gain
revenue because it would encourage ‘oodles and gobs of
compliance’. (1993)

slew, slue (1839) Orig US; from Irish sluágh(gh)
crowd, multitude. 
- Radio Times: Roger Dennhardt had
served three years of a 13-year sentence for armed robbery
when... he offered to give evidence for the Crown against a
slew of former associates. (1982)

oceans (1840) • Marghanita Laski: Poor People’s
children... had oceans of pocket-money because Poor People
didn’t understand the value of money. (1952)

wodge, wadge (1860) Applied orig to
Orig US; also used

- E. F. Davies: Chesshire had stacks of letters from a girl friend and
decided to read one a day for a month. (1952)

bushels (1873) Now mainly US; from earlier
sense of bushel, unit of capacity equal to eight
gallons. 
- Guardian: The Tracey Ullman Show (BBC 2)... has won rave reviews and bushels of Tony Awards. (1991)

steen, ‘steen (1886) US; used to denote an
indefinite (but fairly large) number; shortened
from sixteen

- Kenneth Giles: I leave business to the Estate managers, six of ‘em with umpteen
clerks and typists. (1973). Hence umpteenth (1918)

oodles (1869) Origin unknown • She: The cover
assures me that there are ‘oodles of prizes’, which indeed
there are. (1967)

scads (1869), a scad (1950) Mainly US; from
scad dollar, hence (in the plural) money; ultimate origin unknown • Washington Post In
addition to King, scads of other veteran players should
contend. (1993)

a stack (1870), stacks (1892) Orig US • E. F.
Davies: Chesshire had stacks of letters from a girl friend and
decided to read one a day for a month. (1952)

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sense of bushel, unit of capacity equal to eight
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chunk (a1889) • G. Paley: He owes me a chunk of
dough. (1985)

masses (1892) • Anne Morice: I’m sure you’ve got
masses to do. (1974)

tons (1895) Also used adverbially in the sense
‘much’ • J. M. Barrie: ‘I say! Do you kill many [pirates]?’
‘Tons’. (1911) • Dorothy Halliday: He was looking tons
better, with his ribs done up in crêpe. (1970)

steenth, ‘steenth (1899) US; used to denote the
latest in an indefinitely long series; from earlier
sense, sixteenth • B. Reynolds: For the steenth time,
you ride in a Chandler car. (1927)

lotte, lotter (1906) Contraction of lot of • Black
World: Lotta big talk, but when you get there nothin is
happenin. (1971)

a whole lot (1907) Orig US; also used
adverbially in the sense ‘much’ • Punch: As soon as
you join the Land Army you will find... that you are in
the thick of a whole lot of live stock. (1940) • James Curtis:
‘Well,’ said the Gilt Kid, ‘this is a whole lot better than making
scrubbing brushes back in the old Monastery Garden.’ ‘Yes, and
saying to yourself, “Roll on Cocoa”.’ (1958)

reams (1913) From an earlier, more specific
application to a large amount of paper • San Francisco Examiner: Spacecraft sent there in recent years have dispelled legends and added reams of sound, ordered
data, yet the charisma of Mars remains. (1976)

bags (1917) From bag quantity of game shot; also
used adverbially, in the sense ‘much’ • Arnold
Wesker: ‘We’ad bags o’ fun, bags o’ it. (1962) • J. B.
Morton: It’s not gay, this life, but it might be bags worse. (1919)

umpteen, umteen (1918) From umpt(y
indefinite number + -teen • Kenneth Giles: I leave
business to the Estate managers, six of ‘em with umpteen
clerks and typists. (1973). Hence umpteenth (1918)

lotsa (1927) Contraction of lots of • It The Notting
Hill Carnival was lotsa fun for seven days and nights. (1971)

mucho (1942) From Spanish mucho much, many

- Making Music: Warm valve distortion sound, plus mucho
volume, make this an amp worthy of its chart placing. (1986)

squillion (1943) Used to denote an
indeterminably large number of millions; arbitrary alteration of million, billion, etc. • Independent The Prime Minister intends to fill the gap between the Queen’s Christmas broadcast and the Boxing Day walk by reading Sir Frank Layfield’s squillion-word report on Sizewell. (1986)

zillion (1944) Mainly US; used to denote an
indeterminably large number of millions; from z [representing the last in a long sequence] +
million • Guardian: The whiff of news managers at work, rather than an urge to hear about British Telecom’s zillion-
pound share sale from the horse’s mouth, took me to BT’s big

loadsa (1988) Contraction of loads of • The Sport
It [Clare Short MP’s bill to outlaw certain sorts of pornography]
stands no chance and would deprive loadsa people—men and
women—of a lot of pleasure. (1988)

Having a large amount

long on (1913) Orig US • Good Food Guide: Two
inspectors describe it [sc. a restaurant] as long on
gemütlichkeit and short on good cooking. (1973)

Everyone

(All) the world and his wife (1731) • World So
much has been heard of Hardeleton lately... that its name must
be familiar to all the world and his wife. (1912)

Everything

the whole lot (1805) • R. D. Symons: It only takes
one old’ mossy-horn to take fright at his own shudder to start
the whole lot off. (1973)

the whole boodle (1833), the whole kit
and boodle (a1861) US; dated; boodle possibly from Dutch boedel
estate, possession

- Newsweek: It gave the farm and the whole kit and boodle to Stanley. (1946)
the whole boiling (1837) Dated; from boiling a quantity boiled at one time • F. P. Verney: I'd like to hoke out the whole boiling o' um. (1870)

the whole caboodle (a1848), the whole kit and caboodle (1888) Orig US; caboodle an alteration of boudle • Listener: The whole kit and caboodle of us were then investigated by the FBI to see how many subversives there were among us. (1969) • Strand Magazine: Actually, the whole caboodle, sold, not pawned, produced seventy, not fifty—hundred and twenty in all. (1923)

the lot (1867) • Times: The death of his father . . . triggers off a crisis for him too, producing a temporary breakdown, dismissal from his job, separation from his wife, the lot. (1970)

shebang, shee-bang. (obsolete) chebang (1869) North American; mainly in the phrase the whole shebang; from earlier senses, hut, tavern; ultimate origin unknown • R. E. Megill: The standard deviation is then calculated by dividing the total number of wells, N, into the sum of all the group deviations . . . and then taking the square root of the whole shebang. (1977)

the whole bag of tricks (1874), the whole box of tricks (1964) An allusion to the fable of 'the Fox and the Cat' • Arnold Bennett: I've had three 3 a.m. midwifery cases this week—forceps, chloroform, and the whole bag of tricks. (1898) • Times: Abolition would lead to the whole bag of tricks based on 'kidology', with gimmicks of every kind and stamps of every colour. (1964)

sub-cheese, sub-cheeze, sub-chiz (1874) Dated military slang, orig Anglo-Indian; also in the phrase the whole sub-cheese; from Hindustani sab all + chiz thing • B. W. Aldiss: Of course we were thinking of the whole shebang. (1972)

the whole shooting match (1896) Orig US • BP Shield International: This had the effect of tilting up the whole shooting match. (1974)

the (whole) works (1899) Orig US • L. Kallen: I've had a bellyful of trouble over the years, with white cops in particular. (1992)

orgy (1883) From earlier sense, licentious revelry • Guardian: By the time the present orgy of take-overs has finished, it will be even worse. (1991)

earful (1917) Used to denote as much as one can tolerate hearing • Sewell Ford: A parlor Bolshevist . . . had started to give me an earful about the downtrodden. (1922)

gutful (1923) • Daily Telegraph: Lately, we have had a 'gutful' of the permissiveness that seems to tolerate violence against the police. (1970)

basinful (1935) British • News Chronicle: I've had a basinful of bowler-hat and furled-umbrella parts. (1950)

Having more than is desirable

lousy with (1843) Orig US; lousy from earlier sense, infested with lice • Winifred Holtby: Leckton told me last month they threw in sixteen and a half couple of hounds and couldn't see a dog. Lost in thistles and willow herb—but lousy with foxes. (1936)

awash with (1954) • Times: Perhaps Britain was awash with voters who wanted Wilson on a free home trial. (1985)

Full

choc-a-block (1889) From earlier nautical sense, (of a tackle) with the two blocks run close together so that they touch each other, and are at the limit of hoisting • W. S. Maugham: The city's two or three inns were choc-a-block and men were sleeping three, four and five in a bed. (1946)

bursting (or bulging) at the seams (1962) • Economist: A doctor in one of the orphanages is only too happy to see children leave. 'The orphanages are bursting at the seams,' he says. (1988)

Behaviour, an event, etc. that is more than one can tolerate

a bit thick (1902) From the notion of thickness as being excessive • W. E. Johns: The way you snaffled my Hunl I call that a bit thick . . . He was my meat, absolutely, yes by Jingo. (1942)
toss-up (1809) • Wall Street Journal

Some said it's a

The perverse workings of fate

North American;

a dime a dozen (1930)

wall-to-wall (1967)

That which is preordained

one's name (and number) is on something (1917), one's number is on something

carton covering the entire floor • New Statesman: Their sponsors include the IBA. . . and the BBC (in whose Reithian corridors the epithet ‘wall-to-wall Dallas’ was reportedly coined). (1984)

Curbing excess

eighty-six on (1981) US; used to request no more of something; from eighty-six, used in restaurants to denote that the supply of an item has run out • William Safire: Eighty-six on etymologies for ‘cocktail’. (1981)

Calculation

tot something together (1760), tot something up (1839) Used to denote adding up; tot from the dated noun tot total, short for total • Stuart & Park: A waiter totting up the account as you passed through. (1895)

ey, yea (1960) US; used in estimating quantity or size, especially in the phrases yay big and yay high; probably from yea yes • Thomas Kochman: Jeff fired on him. He came back and all this was swelled up bout yay big, you know. (1972)

number crunching (1971) Applied to computer calculations involving very large numbers • Nature: If that mini can also be connected in to a large mainframe computer as a ‘front-end machine’, then the tasks which can be carried out (particularly ‘number crunching’) can be that much more sophisticated and complex. (1975)

3. Fate

Something dependent on chance

toss-up (1809) • Wall Street Journal Some said it’s a toss-up whether oil prices go up or down. (1969)

The perverse workings of fate

(that’s) how (or the way) the cookie crumbles (1956) Orig US; denoting the way things turn out, as fate decrees, without any possibility of alteration • P. G. Wodehouse: Oh well, that’s the way the cookie crumbles. You can’t win ‘em all. (1961)

Murphy’s law (1958) Orig US; applied to a humorous principle embodying the tendency of things to go wrong; apparently developed from a remark of Captain E. Murphy of the Wright Field Aircraft Laboratory in 1949 • New York Times Magazine: ‘If anything can go wrong, it will,’ says Murphy’s Law. (1974)

Sod’s law (1970) Applied to a humorous principle embodying the tendency of things to go wrong; from sod despicable person

That which is preordained

one’s name (and number) is on something (1917), one’s number is on something

(1925) Used with reference to a bullet, shell, etc., with the implication that one is doomed to be killed by it • Dick Francis: The bomb probably had my name on it in the first place. (1973) • Celia Fremlin: I’m as safe here as . . . any where . . . if it’s got your number on it, you’ll get it, no matter where you are! (1974)

A run of (good or bad) luck

spin (1917) Australian & New Zealand; from the spinning of a coin in the game of two-up • H. P. Tritton: When I remarked that he’d had a tough spin he grinned, ‘Served me right for being such a blanky fool.’ (1964)

Bad luck

hard lines (1824) Probably of nautical origin • John Wainwright: It was hard lines about the Wilture chap. Being shot could not be a pleasant experience. (1985)

hard cheese (1876), hard cheddar (1931) British; often used as an exclamation of commiseration • J. I. M. Stewart: It was hard cheese on him coming up against another top-class specimen. (1973)

Saltash luck, Saltash chance (1914) Applied to luck resulting in a miserable task that involves getting wet through; supposedly from the lucklessness of the fishermen of Saltash, a
4. Possibility, Probability, & Certainty

A negligible prospect

With the exception of *fat chance* and *fat show*, these expressions are used in negative or other non-assertive contexts.

**fat chance** (1899) Elliptical for *an earthly chance*

any chance at all • *Listener.* Received standard, like the Liberals, won’t stand an earthly. (1965)

**fat show** (1948) New Zealand • David Ballantyne: It would be corker if he could go outside with Carole Plowman. ... Fat show! (1948)

Something unlikely to happen

**pie in the sky** (1911) Orig US; usually applied to an extravagant claim or promise that is unlikely to be fulfilled • *Undercurrents:* To expect the NHS to encompass all sorts of fringe or alternative practices whilst even the level of basic medical care that people want is unobtainable in some areas (abortion) is pie in the sky. (1977)

Something certain

**a sure thing** (1836) Orig US • Ngaio Marsh: I appreciate your reluctance to form a theory too soon. ... But it looks a sure thing to me. (1963)

**a moral** (1861) Australian; short for a moral certainty • *Canberra Times:* The senior puisne judge who asked, ‘For you—not a chance in hell.’ She spoke matter-of-factly. (1983)
is an absolute moral for the Chief Justiceship come February next year... is almost certainly among the ranks of the deeply concerned. (1986)

**a cinch** (1888) Orig US; often applied specifically to a horse considered certain to win a race; from earlier sense, saddle-girth, hence a firm or secure hold

**cert** (1888) Often applied specifically to a horse considered certain to win a race; often in the phrase a dead cert; abbreviation of certainty  
  ■ Mr. Jack Nicholson—as a menacing colonel who’s trying to fix the case—looks a dead cert for an Oscar nomination. (1993)

**a monty, a monte** (1894) Australian & New Zealand; often applied specifically to a horse considered certain to win a race; probably from US monte game of chance played with cards, from Spanish monte mountain  
  ■ J. Wynnum: I was given the drum... that if I put my name to the dotted line, I’d be a monty to get drafted to the U.S. destroyer. (1965)

**a lead-pipe cinch** (1898) US  
  ■ *New York Times*: To be sure, speculation in gold is not a lead-pipe cinch; its price can go down as well as up. (1973)

**a lay-down** (1935) Orig US  
  ■ *Times*: A prize will go to the best-dressed trainer of the meeting. It sounds like a lay-down for Henry Cecil. (1984)

**a motser, a motsa, a motza, a motzer** (1936) Australian; probably from earlier sense (not recorded until later), a large amount of money  
  ■ Richard Beilby: You better let that bugger get well ahead... The Stuka’ll be a motsa to have a go at him. (1984)

**a stone ginger** (1936) From the name of a celebrated New Zealand racehorse

**stickout** (1937) US; applied to a horse that seems a certain winner  
  ■ *Sun* (Baltimore): A ‘stickout’ on paper, Nokomis was in front most of the way along the six-furlong route. (1949)

Impossible

**no go** (1825) Often in the phrase it’s (or it was) no go  
  ■ J. R. Lowell: ‘You must rise’, says the leaven; ‘I can’t’, says the dough; ‘Just examine my bumps, and you’ll see it’s no go’. (1888)

Possible, possibly

**on the cards** (1849) Perhaps from the notion that any given number on a playing card is equally likely to be turned up, or perhaps from the notion of playing cards being used to foretell the future  
  ■ *Daily Mail*: The Footsie fell 12.1 to 2573.3 on lack of support. A rally could be on the cards today. (1991)

**Certain(ly)**

**as sure as eggs is (or are) eggs** (1699) The original recorded form is as sure as eggs be eggs

**as sure as God made little (green) apples** (1874) Mainly US  
  ■ M. Lasswell: I’m gonna learn to read sure as God made little apples. (1942)

**in the bag** (1922) Orig US; applied to something that is certain to be successfully achieved  
  ■ *Economist*: The message... contains a frank warning that independence is not in the bag. (1957)

**for sure** (1971) In standard use since the 16th century; in modern colloquial use, mainly in the phrase that’s for sure  

**as sure as hell** (1976) Orig US  
  ■ Listener: Wayne... introduces me to Commemorativo Tequila. ‘It doesn’t hurt your head, but it may hurt your back, as you sure as hell fall over a lot.’ (1976)

To be certain

**bet one’s life** (1852) Orig US  
  ■ P. G. Wodehouse: ‘You will order yourself something substantial, marvel-child?’ ‘Bet your life,’ said the son and heir tersely. (1913)

**bet one’s boots** (1856) Orig US  
  ■ Malcolm Lowry: ‘You bet your boots,’ he replied. (1933)

**I bet, I’ll bet, bet (1857)**  
  ■ *Independent*: I bet Derek Jarman never had as much fun as this. (1991)

**bet one’s bottom dollar** (1866) Orig US  
  ■ *Dissent*: And I’d bet my bottom dollar that Negro hipsters, among themselves, often put down the whites. (1958)

**betcha, betcher** (1922) Representing a colloquial pronunciation of bet you or bet your (life)  
  ■ G. Butler: I collared a kid... and asked him if he wanted to earn a shilling. ‘You betcha, mister,’ he said. (1940)

Uncertain

**touch and go** (1815) Denoting something that is uncertain as to the result; compare earlier application to something quickly done  
  ■ *Daily Mail*: James is one of two surviving triplets born 12 weeks early, and it was touch and go whether he would make it. (1991)

**on spec** (1832) British; denoting doing something without the certainty of success; spec abbreviation of speculation  
  ■ B. Hines: ‘Is he expecting you?’ ‘No, we just came on spec.’ (1981)

To cause to be uncertain

**keep guessing** (1896) Orig US  
  ■ H. Zink: Murphy proceeded with considerable caution, sometimes withdrawing from a position, sometimes forcing it, and altogether keeping his opponents guessing what he would do next. (1930)
5. Risk

Risky

dicey (c1944) Orig airforce slang; from dice (from the risk of gambling with dice) + -y  P. Capon: The river got a little dicey. I thought we’d wait for the moon. (1959)

A risky or dangerous experience or situation

scrape (1709) Perhaps from the notion of being ‘scraped’ when going through a narrow passage  Independent: Mickey Rooney and his friends would go off, they’d get into a scrape and his father . . . would . . . get them out of trouble. (1991)

shaky do (1942) Dated, orig RAF. slang  Fitzroy Maclean: The earth all round was kicked up by a burst from the plane’s tail-gunner. . . . This,’ said the Australian, ‘is going to be a shaky do.’ (1949)

To do something risky; take a risk

chance it (1870) Edward Copeland: Genteel novelists almost never make their heroines authors; didactic novelists must have a very pressing moral justification indeed for them to chance it. (1994)

chance one’s arm (1889), chance one’s mit (1919) Economist: Mr. Macmillan may have no more by-elections in this Parliament by which to judge when to chance his arm. (1959)

ask for trouble, ask for it (1909) Harold Pinter: I don’t know how they live down there. It’s asking for trouble. (1960)

push one’s luck (a1911) From the notion of presuming on the continuation of a run of good luck  John Welcome: He had never won the Derby and . . . had . . . announced that he would not die until he did. As he must by now be touching eighty . . . this was pushing his luck pretty hard. (1959)

lead with one’s chin (1949) Denoting behaving or speaking incautiously; from earlier boxing slang sense, leave one’s chin unprotected against an opponent’s punches  Listener: I thought it was a good idea to say that I was prejudiced to begin with, to lead with my chin. (1968)

stick one’s neck out (1926) Orig US; denoting exposing oneself to danger, criticism, etc.  H. Hastings: We’ve stuck our necks out—we’re looking for trouble, see? (1950)

dice with death (1941) Orig motor-racing slang  Guardian: The President may yet be dicing with political death. (1992)

go for broke (1951) Orig US; denoting risking everything in one determined effort at something  Guardian: If he were to go for broke on behalf of the Negroes . . . the President would endanger the moral reform cause. (1963)

go (out) for one’s tea (1978) Northern Ireland; denoting going out on a dangerous mission  F. Burton: A Provo would scoff at the Officials’ merely elocutionary skills while they were ‘going out for their tea’ (that is, going on military operations which might result in their death). (1978)

As a speculation; without certainty of success

on spec (1832) Orig US; spec short for speculation  B. Hines: ‘Is he expecting you?’ ‘No, we just came on spec’ (1981)

6. Advantage & Disadvantage

An advantage

plus (1708) Washington Post: Radio city is one block from the Hotel Victoria. Other location plusses: Madison Square Garden is two blocks away, so are all subways. (1959)

the bulge (1941) Dated, orig US; especially in the phrase have the bulge on have the advantage over  P. G. Wodehouse: The Assyrians had the bulge on him. (1963)

grouter (1902) Australian; applied to an unfair advantage; especially in the phrase come in on the grouter gain an unfair advantage; often applied specifically, in the game of two-up, to waiting until a long run of heads or tails and then betting on the opposite on the assumption that it must soon come up; origin unknown

ace in the hole (1908) Orig US; applied to an advantage so far held in reserve; from earlier sense, high-value playing card concealed up one’s sleeve  New York Times: In the long haul, . . . AM’s ace in the hole may be the $213 million net operating loss carryforward it still has left from its 1981–82 losses. (1984)

the catbird seat (1942) US; especially in the phrase in the catbird seat in a superior or advantageous position; from catbird an American thrush

mileage (1962) Applied to advantage or benefit to be extracted from a particular situation; from earlier sense, miles travelled  Ted Allbeury: They’d enjoy stirring up the Canadians, and the French-Canadians would . . . get a lot of political mileage. (1974)

In an advantageous situation

sitting pretty (1921) Listener: At the moment the motor industry is ‘sitting pretty’. (1959)

To be in an advantageous situation

have (got) it made (1955) Orig US  Adam Diment: She had . . . big, well-proportioned hips. I tell you, if the derrière gets with-it again this bird had it made. (1968)
**Abstract Qualities and States**

**have (got) it wired (1955) Orig US**
- Dirt Bike: All he had to do was stay on time—maybe even drop a few more points, and he still had it wired. (1985)

**The most advantageous course of action**

**best bet (1941) Orig US**
- John o’London’s: The best bet would have been to ship this Mexican funny [sc: a film] straight out on circuit. (1961)

To get an advantage over someone; put someone in a disadvantageous situation

**get (or have) the dead-wood on (1851)**
- US; from dead wood pin in tenpin bowling that has been knocked down and lies in the alley in front of those remaining
- Erle Stanley Gardner: Well, they’ve evidently got the dead-wood on you now, Perry. They know that you took Eva Martell to that rooming-house. (1951)

**have someone by the short hairs (1888)**
- Compare earlier obsolete have where the hair is short (1872); short hairs = pubic hair
- Sayers & Eustace: She’s evidently got her husband by the short hairs. (1930)

**have someone on toast (1889)**
- E. F. Benson: To think that half an hour ago that little squirt thought he had us on toast. (1916)

**catch someone bending (1910)**
- From the notion of the vulnerability of someone bending over
- Angus Wilson: He then goes off singing, ‘My word, if I catch you bending, my word, if I catch you bending.’ (1967)

**have (or get) the jump on (1912)**
- Orig US
- Real Estate Review: Each of these new developers hopes to get the jump on the other by adding more square footage to the units and giving more in amenities. (1972)

**have the goods on (1913)**
- Denoting having knowledge or information that gives one a hold over someone
- Mary McCarthy: He had a sudden inkling that they would have liked to get the goods on Mulcahy. (1952)

**have the wood on (1926)**
- Australian & New Zealand; perhaps in allusion to the Australian slang verb wooden hit, knock unconscious
- Leslie Haylen: It was another of his occasions of fear; she liked having the wood on you. (1965)

**have someone over a barrel (1939)**
- Orig US; apparently in allusion to the state of someone placed over a barrel to clear their lungs of water after being rescued from drowning
- Letitia McClung: You sure have me over a barrel. You caught me red-handed. (1945)

**have someone by the short and curlies (1948)**
- short and curlies = pubic hair

**have someone by the balls (1950)**
- Harper’s: As you can see, I’m one of the fortunate few who has Blue Cross by the balls. (1953)

A disadvantage

**minus (1708)**
- Economist: Moreover, London’s rivals are still affected by plenty of minuses. Zurich’s stamp tax continues to smother the development of Swiss securities trading. . . (1988)

Someone or something disadvantageous

**a liability (1974)**
- Lancaster Guardian: British Rail want to close it because it is a maintenance liability. (1987)

A disadvantageous situation

**the short end (1904)**
- Orig US
- Time: Annie went back to Broadway on the short end of a 6-2 score. (1977)

In a disadvantageous situation

**snookered (1915)**
- British; from earlier literal sense, (in snooker) unable to hit the object ball because another ball is between it and the cue ball

**behind the eight ball (1932)**
- US; from the disadvantage, in a variety of the game of pool, of having the black ball (numbered 8 and which one is penalized for touching) between the cue ball and the object ball
- New York Herald: An attempt to describe what makes the drawings funny lands you behind the eight ball. (1944)

**with one’s pants down (1932)**
- (mainly British) with one’s trousers down (1966)
- Orig US; mainly in the phrase caught with one’s pants (or trousers) down caught in a state of embarrassing unpreparedness
- F. Clifford: By that time the shooting will seem to be as haphazard as can possibly be, as if we’d almost been caught with our trousers down. (1967)

**off the pace (1951)**
- Orig US; denoting a position behind the leader in a contest; originally applied in horse-racing to one who is slower than the leading horses, especially in the early part of a race
- Rally Sport: The best two-wheel drive car was in 20th place, seven seconds per mile off the pace. (1987)

Lack of advantage; a stalemate

**Mexican stand-off (1891)**
- Orig and mainly US
- Donald MacKenzie: As things stood it was a Mexican standoff. He couldn’t go to the law but ... nor could the Koreans. (1979)
7. Easiness

Easy

like/as easy as shelling peas/(dated) beans (a1688)
like/as easy as falling off a log (1839)
  ■ Times: Acting? said Ernest Borgnine. Why, there was nothing to it, really. ‘For me,’ he said, ‘it’s as easy as falling off a log.’ (1973)
soft (1841) Applied derogatorily to something that is easy and pleasant; current in standard English in the 17th century ■ Kingsley Amis: ‘Damon, what’s a wanker?’ . . . ‘These days a waster, a shirker; someone who’s fixed himself a soft job or an exalted position by means of an undeserved reputation on which he now coasts.’ ‘Oh. Nothing to do with tossing off then?’ ‘Well, connected with it, yes, but more metaphorical than literal.’ (1978)
as easy as winking (1907) From earlier obsolete like/winking (1827) ■ H. Wyndham: She’ll . . . make a hundred and fifty a week as easy as winking. (1907)
as easy as ABC (1912)
cushy (1915) Applied to a post, job, etc. that is easy and pleasant; Anglo-Indian, from Hindustani khùsh pleasant ■ Alan Sillitoe: You were always on the lookout for a cushy billet. (1970)
like/as easy as taking candy from a baby/child/ etc. (1926) ■ Flynn’s: Jack rollin’ th’ workstiffs was like takin’ candy from th’ kids. (1926)
Bob’s your uncle (1937) British; used to express the ease with which a task can be completed successfully ■ Nicholas Blake: Three curves and a twiddle, label it ‘Object’, and bob’s your uncle. (1949)
no sweat (1955) Orig US; used to emphasize that something can be done easily ■ Publishers Weekly: Mrs Wallach complains that she cannot use plastic book jackets on books with maps on the inside covers. No sweat! We paste the book pocket . . . on the next inside page, [etc.],. (1972)
no problem (1963) Orig US; used to emphasize that something can be done easily ■ Martin Amis: Finally, every time I emptied my glass, he took it, put more whisky in it, and gave it back to me, saying ‘No problem’ again through his nose. (1973)
easy-peasy (1976) Orig children’s slang; arbitrary reduplication of easy ■ Fast Forward: ‘Easy-peasy,’ we hear you cry. ‘We’ll wait until we hear the chart and then rush a postcard in,’ we hear you cheatingly thinking to yourself. (1990)

Something easy to do

card’s play (c1386)
gift (1832) ■ Gramophone: Even in No. 6 (a gift, I would have thought, for so nimble-fingered a pianist), . . . Kazkevich shows little beyond a token involvement. (1994)

snap (1877) Mainly North American ■ Technology Week: Blazing a path to the moon is no snap. Neither is charting a career. (1967)

pudding (1887), pud (1938) US; applied especially to an easy college course
pie (1889) Orig US; especially in the phrase as easy (simple, etc.) as pie ■ P. G. Wodehouse: This kid Mitchell was looked on as a coming champ in those days. . . . I guess I looked pie to him. (1929)
snip (a1890) ■ Nevil Shute: It is a snap; we will get both of them. (1945)
dolly (1895) Applied to cricket to a very easy catch; often used adjectively ■ Times: Lane-Fox . . . failed to get to the pitch of the ball andcocked up a dolly catch. (1955)
sitter (1898) Used especially in sporting contexts; probably from the notion of a game bird that sits and is therefore easy to shoot ■ Observer: A series of very bad shots, including a double fault by Borotra, the missing of absolute ‘sitters’ by both players and the driving of many easy balls into the net well over the baseline. (1927)
duck soup (1902) Orig and mainly US ■ Ogilvy & Anderson: The number 307, comes out, in binary notation, to be 100111001, which would not have the convenience of 307 at the grocery store, but is duck soup for the Computer. (1966)
pipe (1902) US ■ P. G. Wodehouse: This show’s a pipe, and any bird that comes in is going to make plenty. (1952)
gaper (1903) Applied in cricket to an easy catch, especially one that is dropped; probably from the notion that something which ‘gapes’ open offers easy success ■ Times: Certain younger members of the side were dropping some regular ‘gapers’. (1963)
cinch (1904) Orig US; from earlier sense, a certainty ■ Herbert Quick: The recent progress in bacteriological science . . . seemed to make the diagnosis a cinch. (1911)
pushover (1906) Orig US; from the notion of pushing something over without any effort ■ Peter Malloch: About the security van . . . It’s going to be hard to take . . . Eight years ago they were a push-over. (1973)
soda (1917) Australian; perhaps from earlier sense, the deal card in the game of faro ■ G. H. Johnston: ‘The Middle East was a soda beside this,’ one of them told me. (1943)

money for jam (1919), money for old rope (1936) Orig services’ slang ■ Evelyn Waugh: At the moment there were no mortars and he was given instead a light and easily manageable counterfeit of wood which was slung on the back of his haversack, relieving him of a rifle. At present it was money for old rope. (1942)
breeze (1928) Orig US ■ S. Carpenter: All in all, the test was a breeze. (1962)

kid stuff, kid’s stuff, kids’ stuff (1929) Orig US
a piece of cake (1936) ■ Terence Mclean: They took the field against Canterbury as if the match were a ‘piece of cake’. (1960)
doddle (1937) British; perhaps from the verb doddle walk unsteadily ■ Martin Woodhouse: If the
climb had reached any level of difficulty higher than Moderate, which is the Climbers' Club's polite way of labelling a gumshoe doddle, we'd have died. (1966)

drop-in (1937) US; often applied to money easily acquired from someone; perhaps from the notion of a gullible person 'dropping into' a confidence trick

snack (1941) Australian  ■ R. Beilby: 'How could I do that, Harry?' 'Easy. It'll be a snack.' (1970)

turkey shoot (1947) US; applied to a military engagement in which the enemy are easily routed; first recorded in 1947, but brought to prominence in the Gulf War (1991); from the fact that the turkey, a cumbersome bird, often presents a sitting target  ■ New Yorker. The Administration was ... coming under substantial fire for engaging in 'overkill': Kuwait had been liberated; tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers had surrendered; and it was clearly no contest. Even American soldiers were expressing some revulsion at being engaged in a 'turkey shoot'. (1991)

a piece of piss (1949)  ■ Observer. John Lines, who has a tough fight defending his seat in Bartley Green ward, snorted when asked if his task would be easier under a Labour government and answered bluntly: 'Piece of piss'. (1996)
cushy number (1959)  ■ Listener. Transferred to what was described as a 'cushy number' with the Commandos. (1968)

8. Difficulty

Difficult

ticklish (1591) Applied to something that is difficult because it requires sensitive handling; from earlier sense, sensitive  ■ New York Daily News: The older man ... headed for the Grand Hotel where he was so well-known as to be considered an honorary resident when it came to the ticklish question of late-night drinking. (1989)

hairy (1848)  ■ William Cooper: The problem was of the kind that Mike described in his up-to-date slang as 'hairy'. (1966)

no picnic (1888)  ■ Bernard Ferguson: It was going to be no picnic co-ordinating land, sea and air forces from so many different points of departure at so many different speeds. (1961)

dodgy (1898) Implying difficulty with an element of risk; from earlier sense, full of dodges, evasive  ■ Harold Pinter: It'd be a bit dodgy driving tonight. (1960)

solid (1916) Australian & New Zealand  ■ Ruth Park: After all, Auntie Josie's got all them kids to look after. It must be pretty solid for her with Grandma as well. (1948)

no joke (1920) From earlier sense, a serious matter  ■ Daily Telegraph. It is no joke, day after day seeking to plead a cause which Mother Russia has declared beyond redemption. (1991)

fiddly (1926) Applied to something small and awkward to do or use; from fiddle tinker + -y  ■ Times: 'Fiddly things' should be done by automatic machines. (1960)

Something difficult

brute (1876) From earlier sense, unpleasant person

a tall order (1893) Orig US  ■ C. A. W. Monckton: I ... told the police we would make the attempt; clearly they thought we were taking on a devil of a tall order. (1920)

bastard (1915) From earlier sense, unpleasant person  ■ Maurice Shadbolt: At first Ned and Nick had to milk in the open, which was a bastard when it rained. (1972)

bugger (1915) From earlier sense, unpleasant person  ■ R. Russell: That solo is a bugger to play. (1981)

pig (1925) From earlier sense, unpleasant person  ■ Hot Car: The car became a pig to start. (1978)

bitch (1928) From earlier sense, something unpleasant  ■ Guardian. He thinks the script is too long and perfunctory. I thought that was a bitch of a combo to pull off, myself. (1992)

cow (1933) Australian & New Zealand; from earlier sense, something unpleasant  ■ Dorothy
Hewett: I starched your petticoat stiff as a board, and it was a cow to iron. (1956)

swine (1933) From earlier sense, unpleasant person. Helen MacInnes: This car’s . . . a swine to drive at slow speeds. (1976)

honey (1934) US; ironical re-application of earlier sense, someone or something good of its kind

sod (1936) From earlier sense, unpleasant person. Hot Car: The finish will be a nice satin which is a sod to keep clean. (1977)

ball-breaker (1942), ball-buster (1954) Orig US; applied to a difficult, boring, or exasperating task, problem, or situation; from balls testicles

hot potato (1952) Applied to a thing or situation that is difficult or unpleasant to deal with; from the notion of being difficult to hold; compare the earlier phrase drop something like a hot potato get rid of something quickly. New Scientist: The current hot potato in the sociological field is the question of poverty in Britain today. (1969)

tough nut (1977) Often in the phrase a tough nut to crack something difficult to do. Independent: It’s difficult to beat the three-year-olds in the King George because of the weight concession. . . . Generous [sc. a horse] will be a tough nut to crack. (1991)

9. Precision, Approximation, & Correctness

Precisely

to a T, to a tee (1693) T perhaps short for tittle the smallest detail. Listener: John Hollis had Walter off to a tee. (1966)

bang (1828) Orig US; L. A. G. Strong: Bang opposite him . . . hung a . . . blue cylinder. (1931)

on the button (1903) Orig US; New Yorker: I . . . then strolled jauntily over to Ricky’s, at five o’clock on the button. (1952)

straight-up (1910) Arnold Bennett: This new Licensing Act will close every public house . . . at eleven o’clock, and a straight-up eleven at that! (1910)

spot on (1920) Notes and Queries: His thesis is provocative, its evidences spot-on, and his conclusions pretty convincing. (1982)

bang on (1936) Spectator: As a realistic tale of low life in London, it is bang on. (1958)

on the nose (1937) US; Norman Mailer: Malcolm Cowley was right on the nose when he wrote that The Deer Park was a far more difficult book to write than The Naked and the Dead. (1959)

on the schnozz (1949) US; from schnozz nose. Ellery Queen: Twenty minutes to twelve on the schnozz. (1967)

Something difficult to solve; a problem

teaser (1759) Noel Coward: Oh Lord! That’s a teaser—arithmetic’s never been my long suit. (1959)


brain-teaser (1923) Ogilvy & Anderson: Here are some of the super brain-teasers that Sierpinski asks us to ponder. (1966)

skull buster (1926) US; Mezzrow & Wolfe: Most of my skullbustes got solved at The School. (1946)

The most difficult situation

the hot seat (1942) Usually in the phrase in the hot seat. Listener: After fifteen months in this critical hot seat . . . between listeners and the BBC I am saying my farewell. (1966)

the sharp end (1976) Usually in the phrase at the sharp end; from earlier nautical slang sense, the bows of a ship. Anthony Price: The distant sound of bombing indicated that he was very close to the sharp end of the war. (1980)

To have something difficult to do

have one’s work cut out (1862) R. A. Freeman: You will have your work cut out, ‘I remarked, ‘to trace that man. The potter’s description was pretty vague.’ (1927)

Approximation

guesstimate (1934) Orig US; applied to an estimate based on both guesswork and reasoning; blend of guess and estimate. Daily Telegraph: £1000 tax free clear profit. . . . This is proved performance—not an optimistic guesstimate. (1970)

ballpark (1957) Orig US; used adjectivally to denote that something is approximately but not precisely right, and also in the phrase in the (right) ballpark, denoting plausible accuracy; from ballpark baseball stadium, from the notion of a broad area. New Yorker: How many times per week do you have sexual relations? On the average—just a ballpark figure. (1984)

Correct, right

on the beam (1941) From the notion of being on the course indicated by a radio beam. Observer: Hugh Burden, as Barnaby, was right on the beam from the start. (1948)
To be correct

cook with gas (or dated) electricity, radar (1941) Orig US • Time: Many a student... figured that... Thurman Arnold was cooking with gas. (1942)

cook on the front burner (1945) US, dated
- N. Carter: ‘These pens are no good.’... ‘You’re cooking on the front burner, Mac,’ I replied in a kind of English to relieve my feelings. (1965)

To correct, put right

straighten out (1956) Denoting showing someone where they are mistaken • William Styron: Look, Sophie, you’re confusing me. Straighten me out. Please. (1979)

10. Mistakes

bloomer (1889) Orig Australian; from blooming error • Economist ‘The Times’... has this week made a bloomer about a president. (1959)

howler (1890) From earlier sense, something glaring or excessive • The Month: The specimens of glaring or excessive... about finish him. (1960)

flub (1900) Orig US; applied especially to a bad shot in golf or other sports; origin unknown • John Steinbeck: In my younger days I played tennis... A servant... could pick up his masters flubs at doubles. (1952)

blob (1903) British; from earlier sense, score of a blunder • Guardian: Probably I should have to... leave Government service altogether, having put up such a black as that. (1948)

slip-up (1855) Applied esp. to a mistake in speaking lines, playing music, etc. or in a sporting activity; from the verb fluff make a mistake (in) • Times: In addition he achieved four clanger that provide unintentional amusement because of the ineptitude with which they are made. (1986)

boner (1912) Applied esp. to a mistake that provides unintentional amusement because of the ineptitude with which it is made. • Observer: My fear was that it was Lord Hill, then chairman of the BBC, and that I was going to be hauled over the coals for making some awful ricket. (1996)

fluff (1837) Applied especially to a mistake in speaking lines, playing music, etc. or in a sporting activity; from the verb fluff make a mistake (in) • Times: In addition he achieved four astonishing place kicks, which made his costly fluff against France unbelievable. (1980)

black (1839) Orig services’ slang; especially in the phrase put up a black make a blunder • Observer: My fear was that it was Lord Hill, then chairman of the BBC, and that I was going to be hauled over the coals for making some awful ricket. (1996)

rock (1939) Orig US; used in baseball, esp. in phrase pull a rock to make a mistake • Birmingham (Alabama) News: How does a guy who has been labeled ‘the perfect player’ feel after pulling his first ‘rock’ in a long and brilliant baseball career? (1951)

blue (1941) • Barry Crump: Trouble with you blokes is you won’t admit when you’ve made a blue. (1961)

blooper (1947) Orig and mainly US; applied specifically to a mistake in a radio or television broadcast; from earlier baseball slang sense, a weakly hit ball • Daily Telegraph: The Administration had made a ‘blooper’ over the custom of allowing members of Congress to provide constituents with guided tours of the White House. (1961)

clanger (1948) Applied esp. to a mistake that provides unintentional amusement because of the ineptitude with which it is made. • Observer: My fear was that it was Lord Hill, then chairman of the BBC, and that I was going to be hauled over the coals for making some awful ricket. (1996)

whiff (1952) US; applied to a failure to hit the ball in baseball or golf; from earlier verb sense, miss the ball

boo-boo (1954) Orig US; probably a reduplication of boob • Osmington Mills: My fault, I’m afraid. I’ve just made what the Yanks call a boo-boo. (1967)

goof, goof-up (1954) From verb sense, make a blunder • Daily Telegraph: I believe they have made a goof. (1970)

ricket (1958) Orig criminals’ slang; origin unknown • Observer: My fear was that it was Lord Hill, then chairman of the BBC, and that I was going to be hauled over the coals for making some awful ricket. (1996)

clink (1968) US; used mainly in baseball; transferred use of clink sharp ringing sound • Washington News: Ed Brinkman, the shortstop, merely yelled, ‘clink’. (1968)

To make a mistake

slip up (1955) Orig US • Anne Morice: Somewhere along the line I had slipped up. (1971)

fluff (1834) Denoting especially making a mistake in speaking lines, playing music, etc. • Cecil Day Lewis: I had kept fluffing when I practised them [sic; sc. songs]. (1960)
11. Success

See also Defeat & Victory (pp. 419–21)

To succeed, achieve success

win through (1664) Implying eventual success after difficulty. ▪ Edmund Crispin: I won through, though… I survived. (1977)

come off (1864) From earlier sense, happen. ▪ Listener: Another fascinating original… appeared to be about a man in hell. I am not sure that it entirely came off. (1966)

strike oil (1875) Applied especially to suddenly hitting on a source of rapid profit and wealth. ▪ Sapper: The general consensus of opinion was that if his cricket was up to the rest of his form, Bob had struck oil. (1930)

work like a charm (1882) Applied to something that achieves its object with perfect success; from the notion of a magic charm that brings success; compare earlier act like a charm, work to a charm. ▪ F. N. Hart: Bill Stirling gave her one the other night, and she said it worked like a charm. (1934)

arrive (1889) Usually applied specifically to successfully establishing one’s position or reputation; after French arriver ▪ English Studies: The book was Herrick’s greatest success. . . . With Together Herrick arrived. (1936)

make out (1891) From earlier sense, manage, get along ▪ W. G. MacAdoo: Without my wife’s . . . help I could not have made out at all. (1931)

win out (1896) Orig US; implying eventual success after difficulty. ▪ Times Educational Supplement: The book has a brisk story and impeccable moral attitudes; gypsies, orphans, teachers and policemen are all good, ordinary people who win out in the end. (1984)

maškim ‘rising early in the morning’ (where the im is part of the root). (1980)

To make a mistake in understanding

get hold of the wrong end of the stick (1890) ▪ George Orwell: Listen, Hilda. You’ve got hold of the wrong end of the stick about this business. (1939)

get someone wrong (1927) Orig US ▪ Nicolas Freeling: Don’t get me wrong; there’s no offence meant. (1974)

Mistaken

all wet (1923) Orig and mainly US; wet from earlier sense, ineffectual ▪ Alexander Baron: You’re all wet if you think I’m giving up that easy. (1951)

off (the) beam (1941) From the notion of not being on the course indicated by a radio beam. ▪ Nicholas Blake: Never heard of him. You’re off the beam. (1954)


cut the mustard (1902) Mainly US; applied to something that comes up to expectations or meets requirements ▪ Citizen (Ottawa): What if it doesn’t work out? What if I’m bored with it? What if I’m no good at it? What if I just can’t cut the mustard? (1974)

bring home the bacon (1909) From the notion of being the person who supplies his or her household with food, and hence more broadly of providing the means to keep others going. ▪ Philip Larkin: The College takes a number of fellows like him to keep up the tone. . . . but they look to us to bring home t’ bacon. (1946)

make the grade (1912) Orig US; implying reaching a required standard. ▪ Listener: A would-be thief who cannot make the grade. (1958)

make it (1912) ▪ Observer: Bombers . . . lurching along the runway like a swarm of crippled insects, until finally they make it into the air. (1970)

get somewhere (1923) ▪ E. H. W. Meyerstein: Even when Jews ‘get somewhere’—if they marry Englishwomen they are condemned by their wives. (1940)

curl the mo (1941) Australian; probably from mo moustache, denoting self-assured twirling of the moustache ▪ Truth (Sydney): Breasley saw Kintore donkey-lick a field of youngsters in the Federal Stakes, and had salt rubbed into his wound when the Lewis cuddy Valour curled the mo in the Bond Handicap. (1944)

hit the jack-pot (1944) Implying success due to luck; from the notion of winning a large (accumulated) prize in gambling or a lottery ▪ South China Morning Post I don’t think that it is possible indefinitely to spend one’s weekends working out different sorts of proposals in the hope that, somewhere along the line, one will hit the jackpot. (1992)
pay off (1951) Applied to something which has a successful or profitable outcome 

strike (it) lucky (1951) Applied to achieving sudden success through luck 

ace it (1955) US: often applied specifically to achieving high marks in an exam 

got the (or a) guernsey (1959) Australian; applied to something which has a successful or profitable outcome 

not look back (1893) Used to denote unbroken success since a particular point in time 

go great guns (1913) The Bush strikes lucky more often than any fringe theatre has a right to. (1984) 

have (got) it made (1955) Orig US; implying someone who gains recognition or selection; from earlier sense, be selected for a director... confirms: 'David has informed us of his decision. (1991)

have one’s moments (1926) implying intermittent success 

do a gangbusters (1975) US: applied especially to commercial success in the entertainment industry; compare like gangbusters successfully 

be, do) gangbusters (1975) go on a roll (1976) Orig North American; implying a sequence of successes 

come up roses (1969) Applied to a situation which is developing very favourably or successfully 

go places (1934) Orig US: implying increasing success or rising status in one’s career, social life, etc. 

crack (1712) Denoting dealing successfully with a difficult or puzzling situation 

make a go of (1877) Denoting making an undertaking successful 

pull off (1887) From earlier sense, win (a prize) 

bring off (1928) 

make a go of (1877) Denoting making an undertaking successful 

notch (1837) Often followed by up; originally applied to obtaining a score in a sport, from the practice of keeping score by cutting notches in a piece of wood 

land (1854) From the notion of catching or landing a fish 

swing (1934) 

To succeed in obtaining 
notch (1837) Often followed by up; originally applied to obtaining a score in a sport, from the practice of keeping score by cutting notches in a piece of wood 

land (1854) From the notion of catching or landing a fish 

swing (1934) 

To have been successful 

have had a good innings (1870) Applied to someone whose successful turn at something has come to an end, especially someone who has died after a long life 

To succeed in doing or dealing with 

To succeed in obtaining 

To have been successful 

To succeed in doing or dealing with 

To succeed in doing or dealing with
To succeed in catching (a vehicle)

**make** (1955) Michael Crichton: You be there at five p.m. tomorrow and I'll be waiting for you. . . . Can you and Dr. Sattler make that plane? (1991)

To succeed in providing what is required

**deliver** (or come up with) the goods (1879), **deliver** (1942) Orig US Duke of Devonshire: I am convinced that the Irish Government intend . . . to deliver the goods. . . . in the true spirit of the Act. (1922) Fred Astaire: I have a horror of not delivering—making good, so to speak, and I can't stand the thought of letting everybody down—studio and public as well as myself. (1959)

To ensure or bring about success

**do the trick** (1812) Guardian: Sanctions will do the trick, they contend, or rather must be given time to do the trick. (1991)


To ensure success in or against

**sew up** (1904) Often applied specifically to ensuring the favourable outcome of a match News of the World: Charlton appeared to have the game sewn up. (1977)

**wrap up** (1937) Often applied specifically to ensuring the favourable outcome of a match Billings (Montana) Gazette: Nastase wrapped up Ramirez, 6-2, 9-7, 6-3. (1976)

To improve

**look up** (1806) Sunday Telegraph: All the evidence around me suggested that for rodents, at least, life ought to be looking up. (1991)

**pull one's socks up** (1893) British; applied to trying to improve one's performance, work, behaviour, etc. Southern Evening Echo (Southampton): The dismissal was unfair because Mr. Collier had not been given adequate warning and a chance 'to pull his socks up' before dismissal. (1976)

**pull (lift, raise, etc.) oneself (up) by one's (own) boot-strap**s (1936) Applied to improving one's position by one's own efforts Listener: A rather naive faith in humanity's ability to pull itself up by its own bootstraps. (1962)

Success

joy (1945) Mainly in negative and interrogative contexts Scotsman: Parking the car in this bay we started to look for a path and a break in the barbed wire—again with no joy. (1973)

A great success

**good thing** (1820) Applied to something that will ensure success; often in the phrase on to a good thing. J. D. Brayshaw: As luck would have it, I managed to put the old man on to a good thing. (1988)

**tear** (1869) US; applied in sport to a winning streak; mainly in the phrase on a tear Chicago Tribune: In the fifth, Mitch Webster, who has been on a tear, hustled his second single of the night into a double. (1988)

**winner** (1913) Applied to something that succeeds or is a potential success; from earlier sense, one that wins Times: The last crop of new ballets commissioned for the Edinburgh International Ballet company includes one winner, a near miss, and a very honourable mention. (1958)

**wow** (1920) Orig US; from the interjection wow expressing surprise, admiration, etc.

V. Connaught: From that moment forward, she was a wow with every Australian in the land. (1962)

**smash** (1930) Short for smash hit Times: [His] aim . . . has been to expand a truthful little ethnic comedy into a popular smash. (1978)

**socko** (1937) Orig and mainly US; from earlier sense, imitative of the sound of a blow P. G. Wodehouse: Triumph or disaster, socko or flop, he went on forever like one of those permanent officials at the Foreign Office. (1973)

sockeroo (1942) Orig US; from sock hit .-.croo Guardian: This latest box-office sockeroo also provides a modest example of the industry's throat-cutting activities. (1964)

**smasheroo** (1948) Orig and mainly US; from smash success .-.croo New Yorker: Is one going to make the burning a big Broadway smasheroo of a scene? (1975)

**blockbuster** (1957) Applied especially to a best-selling book, film, etc.; from earlier sense, very large bomb Church Times: If we really want our children to be Green, our best hope probably lies in persuading Steven Spielberg to feature rampant pelargoniums in his next blockbuster, under the title Botanic Park. (1983)

The highest level of success

the big time (1910) Orig US Crescendo: Scores of drummers who hit the big time play Premier. (1966)

A successful person

**comer** (1879) Mainly US; applied to someone who shows promise of achieving success Guardian: Congressman John Lindsay. . . . has sprung into national notice as the most attractive 'comer' in his party. (1965)

**whizz-kid, whiz-kid** (1960) Applied to an exceptionally successful or brilliant young person, especially in politics or business Sunday Express: Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher will meet Britain's latest whiz-kid inventor when she hosts a unique gathering of inventors and financiers at Downing Street tomorrow. (1985)

Successful

socko (1939) Applied to something stunningly successful or effective; from the noun socko success T. P. McMahon: The blue of the incense rising to

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the white gold of the altar... the soaring voices of the seventy
or so nuns... provided a socko finish. (1972)

Successfully

**swimmingly** *(c1622)*  ■ *Daily Telegraph:* All went swimmingly until he brought in the pudding, soft strawberry meringue on a bed of cream, and stood too close behind his
mother. (1991)

**like gangbusters** *(1940)*  Orig and mainly US; from the notion of forcefulness and energy as exemplified in the opening sound effects of the US radio crime serial *Gangbusters* *(1936–57)*

**like a dream** *(1949)*  Implying effortless success like a dream *(1949)*

A prize

**pot** *(1885)*  Applied to a (silver) cup or other

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**12. Spoiling, Ruination**

To spoil, ruin, botch, make a mess of

**dish** *(1788)* From the notion of food being *done*, and *dished up* ■ *Tim Heald:* This effectively dished Lady Antonia's chances of the same treatment. (1983)

**pox** *(1802)* From earlier sense, infect with ball up *(1884)*

**bitch** *(1823)* • *R. Daniel:* But for a squall bitching his escape route... he would be in France. (1960)

**make a hash of** *(1833)* From hash medley, jumble ■ *Laurence Meynell:* Frankly I'm terrified I'll make two-story homes. (1977)

**bugger** *(1847)* Usually followed by *up* ■ *Angus Wilson:* No hippos in their natural lovely setting of the Severn or beavers buggering up the Broads. (1981)

**ball up** *(1884)* Orig US; ultimately from *ball* spherical object, and perhaps influenced by *balls nonsense*, but the semantic development is not clear ■ *June Drummond:* These electrical devices are always getting balled up. (1959)

**puckeroo, buckeroo, pukeru** *(1885)* New Zealand; from Maori *pukaru* break ■ *New Zealand Listener:* Bad show, fighting. I puckerooed things properly last night. (1970)

**boss** *(1887)* Dated; sometimes followed by *up*; compare *boss-shot* unsuccessful attempt ■ *Marjoribanks:* You're simply bossing up the whole show by philandering with a widow. (1903)

**foozle** *(1888)* Mainly golf slang; from earlier, obsolete sense, foozler; ultimately probably from German dialect *fuseln* work hurriedly and badly, work slowly ■ *Graham McInnes:* The rest of the eighteen holes were a miserable exhibition of foozling, duffing, etc.]. (1965)

**make a balls of** *(1889)* From balls nonsense ■ *Samuel Beckett:* I've made a balls of the fly. (1958)

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**trophy awarded to a winner** ■ *Windsor Magazine:* A few pots won upon playing-fields. (1897)

**Congratulations!**

**bully for you** *(him, etc.)* *(1864)* Often used ironically; from earlier bully excellent, capital

**congrats** *(1884)* Abbreviation of congratulations ■ *Melody Maker: Congrats! Congratulations, Acker Bilk,* on your stand about poor amplification. (1962)

**congratters** *(1906)* British; from *congratulations* + -ers ■ *Olive Norton:* The Brig lifted his glass. 'Congratters, my dear. Good show.' (1966)

**good on you** *(him, etc.)* *(1907)* Mainly Australian & New Zealand ■ *New Zealand Listener:* 'Good on you!' said Dad, smacking my new leg approvingly, that's the spirit.' (1959)

**put a crimp in** *(or into, on)* *(1896)* US ■ *New Yorker:* Finally, a giant black panther leaps upon me and devours my mind and heart. This puts a terrific crimp in my evening. (1969)

**crueI** *(1899)* Australian ■ *Ian Hamilton:* I've got a good job and I don't want to cruel it while everything's going for me. (1967)

**fluff** *(1902)* Applied especially to botching a shot or other action in sport or to wrongly speaking lines, playing music, etc.; from earlier intransitive sense, make a mistake ■ *Times:* Palmer fluffed it because there was a hedge where his backswing should have gone. (1971)

**make a muck of** *(1906)* British ■ *Nevil Shute:* He's made a bloody muck o' things, the way I knew he would. (1947)

**rot** *(1908)* Often followed by *up* ■ *Ann Bridge:* I've got a complex about the whole business, and you know why. Well, that might rot it all up, at any moment. (1932)

**flub** *(1916)* Orig US; sometimes followed by *up*; origin unknown; compare earlier noun *flub* mistake ■ *Stanley Kauffman:* They'll bring someone else in for the other job if you flub it. (1952)

**fuck up** *(1916)* ■ *It:* The... neatly planned plot to fuck up their transport scene. (1969)

**fritz** *(1918)* US; usually followed by *up or out*; from *on the fritz* ruined, defective, out of order

**muck up** *(1922)* Mainly British ■ *Michael Cronin:* 'Lena could muck it all up.' 'I don't think she will, so long as she's scared about herself.' (1959)

**jigger** *(1923)* Usually followed by *up*; apparently a back-formation from *jiggered up* tired ■ *Daily Mail:* I've 'jiggered' up my Rolls-Royce. (1923)

**louse up** *(1934)* Orig US ■ *Human World:* If... he tries to sabotage his actions—he louses up a machine he is purporting to work, for example [etc.]. (1972)
To put a stop to, thwart trash (1975) Mainly US; perhaps from earlier from the phrase kibosh, kybosh (1884) put the foul up (1942) (or put the kibosh kybosh) on (1834)

Origin cock up (1948) British; from slang senses of the from goof (1938) up; Orig US; usually followed by make a pig's ear of (1954) British • Douglas Adams: What use is your life to anyone? When I think of what you've made of it the phrase 'pig's ear' comes irresistibly to mind. (1979)

trash (1975) Mainly US; perhaps from earlier sense, vandalize • Time: The presentation is ignorant, cluttered and coarse, and it trashes the sculpture. Works that seemed snafued. I guess the lines got crossed. (1981)

put the skids under (1918) Dated, orig US; from earlier sense, cramp ditch (1899) From earlier sense, surprise and scupper (a1918) From earlier sense, stop

put the bee on (1908) Dated, mainly US; perhaps suggested by sting • P. G. Wodehouse: The old boy ... got the idea that I was off my rocker, and put the bee on the proceedings. (1927)

sprag (1911) Australian, dated; from earlier sense, stop a wheel moving with a bar or chock, from the noun sprug such a bar or chock; ultimate origin unknown • U. R. Ellis: Attempt to sprag New State Referendum. (1965)

scupper (a1918) From earlier sense, surprise and massacre • Economist: The suspicion is still alive that there would have been secret rejoicing in Whitehall if the French Assembly had scuppered the common market. (1957)

put paid to (1919) • John Braine: I wanted to put paid to Communism once and for all. (1957)

stonker (1941) Australian & New Zealand; from earlier sense, kill • R. L. Seddon: Benzine restrictions have stonkered my car. (1945)

put the mockers (or mocker) on (1949) Orig Australian; from earlier mocker jinx • Bulletin (Sydney): The double loss put the mockers on everything. Lake Macquarie is not the place to live without wheels. (1983)

To frustrate someone's purposes...

settle someone's hash (1803) Compare earlier hash dish of recooked meat • R. H. Mottram: He's settled my hash, right enough. (1930)

cook someone's goose (a1851) • Evening Standard: Far from ... pouring oil on troubled waters you were very positively using your talents to cook Mr Mudd's goose. (1981)

put the (or someone's) pot on (1864) Australian • Vance Palmer: There's an election coming on, and there's a chance I'll be dumped. ... This afternoon's work has probably put my pot on. (1957)

nark (1891) Australian; from earlier sense, stop • Richard Beilby: Ya'd do anything to nark me, anything to put me down, wouldn't ya? (1975)

ditch (1899) Dated, orig US; from earlier sense, throw into a ditch, probably influenced by dish ruin • Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican: Its enactment into law would have ditched them in their present reciprocity campaign. (1911)

tear it (1909) British; usually in the phrase that's torn it • M. Procter: He looked at his watch. 'That's torn it,' he said. (1954)

put the (or a) mock(s) on (1911) Australian • Wally Grout: I hope I am not 'putting the mock' on Norm because my feelings are the same as the rest of the Australian Test players: When O'Neill is a doubtful Test starter the job always looks grimmer. (1965)

cramp someone's style (1917) • R. C. Guidry: See you lat-er, all-ig-a-to-t, Aft-er 'while, croc-o-dile,—Can't you see to Communism once and for all. (1957)

put the skids under (1918) Orig US • Julian Symons: A plan by one gang to put the skids under another. (1975)
put the moz (or mozz) on (1924) Australian; mozz(e) an abbreviation of dated Australian slang mozzle luck, from Hebrew mazzal luck. ■ Keith Stackpole: She felt she put the moz on him. . . . She couldn’t bear to go in case she was a jinx. (1974)

queer someone’s pitch (1927) From earlier sense, interfere with or spoil the business of a salesman or showman. ■ Elizabeth Lemarchand: He’s a decent lad. . . . He would never have risked queering Wendy’s pitch with Eddy. (1973)

rock the boat (1931) Denoting making things awkward for others. ■ Punch: The trouble with these people who nail their colours to the mast—they always rock the boat. (1958)

moz, mozz (1941) Australian; from the phrase put the moz on. ■ John Powers: Don’t let him mozz you, Monk. You’ve made it through the first week—that’s the hard one. (1973)

root (1944) Australian; often in the phrase wouldn’t it root you! denoting frustration and exasperation; perhaps from Australian root copulate with. ■ Telegraph (Brisbane): Mr. Whitlam later admitted having said in an aside: ‘It is what he put in his guts that rooted him.’ (1973)

put the mockers (or mocker) on (1949) See under To put a stop to, thwart (p. 414).

fix someone’s wagon (1951) US. ■ J. D. Salinger: What ever became of that stalwart bore Fortinbras? Who eventually fixed his wagon? (1959)

banjax (1956) From earlier sense, spoil, ruin. ■ Terry Wogan: I am out to banjax the bookies. (1979)

To go wrong

snafoo (1975) US; from earlier transitive sense, mess up, ruin. ■ J. Grady: Every now and then something snafoo and there is one hell of a mess. (1975)

An instance of spoiling or ruining something; a bungle, botch, mess

balls-up (1934) Compare ball up and make a balls of spoil. ■ Roy Fuller: Stuart Blackledge made a ballsup of the valuation. (1958)


muck-up (1939) From muck up spoil. ■ Evelyn Waugh: You seem to have made a pretty good muck-up. (1942)

foul-up (1943) Orig US services’ slang; from foul up spoil, bungle. ■ Observer: He traces the foul-up back to 1953. (1967)


cock-up (1948) British; from cock up spoil. ■ Joyce Porter: George turned the local boys on it and you’ve never seen such a cock-up in your life! (1964)

fuck-up (1950) From fuck up spoil. ■ Mordecai Richler: I’m sorry about this fuck-up, Mr Griffin. (1968)

divert the skids (1920) Orig US; denoting going into a decline. ■ Daily Mirror: They were only 378p when the £ hit the skids a week ago. (1976)

pfft, pffft (1930) US journalists’ slang, dated; denoting especially a relationship that is about to break up; verbal use of pfft. US variant of phut (as in go phut). ■ New Yorker: International Politics, March 29, 1937. ‘Adolf and Benito have pffft! The break will be announced soon enough.’ (1940)

have had one’s (or its) chips (1959) British; probably from the notion of relinquishing poker chips after losing. ■ Guardian: That’s why the traditional mainframe . . . has ‘had its chips’. (1991)

come (fall, etc.) apart at the seams (1965) ■ Times: My marriage . . . came apart at the seams. (1977)

go down the Swanee (1977) From the name of a river in Georgia and Florida, USA

To become inoperative; go awry

go phut (1888) Phut imitative of the sound of a dull impact, or from Hindi phat crack, sound of a slap. (first recorded in English in the writings of Rudyard Kipling, who was born in India)
on the fritz (1902) US; usually applied to machinery that is no longer working; origin unknown. 

conk, konk (1917) Usually followed by out; perhaps from conk hit on the head. Daily Mail. The old boat 'conked out' miles from anywhere. (1929)

go blooey, go blooie (1920) US; from earlier sense, explode; ultimately from blooey representing the sound of an explosion. 

Whitman & McBride: I spilled the salt. It rained. At rehearsal my fiddle went blooey. (1926)

pack up (1928) From the notion of packing up one's equipment after finishing a task, preparatory to leaving. J. L. Anderson: None of us had much confidence in it [sc. our ancient engine] and it packed up a few days later. (1967)

poop (1931) Orig US; denoting a machine, etc. breaking down; often followed by out; origin unknown. Bernard Malamud: If it [sc. the heating system] poop out, and it poop often—the furnace had celebrated its fiftieth birthday—you called the complaint number of Rent and Housing Maintenance. (1971)

In a spoiled or ruined condition; inoperative.

up the spout (1829) Compare earlier sense, in pawn. L. P. Hartley: Where would the Knights be if it wasn't for Mrs Knighton? Up the spout, down the drain—anywhere but in the position of influence and honour. (1955)

on the slide (1884) Applied to someone or something on the decline. Nik Cohn: He began to flag. By early 1964, he was definitely on the slide. (1969)

bung (1885) Australian & New Zealand; often in the phrase go bung; from earlier sense, dead. A. Groom: The telephone line's been mostly bung and broke since, but I got through. (1930)

out of whack (1885) Mainly US. Martin Amis: Everything is out of whack at Appleseed Rectory; its rooms are without bearing and without certainty. (1975)

puckerood, buckerooed, pukerued (1885). puckeroo, buckeroo, pukeru (1925) New Zealand; from Maori pakaru broken; to break. S. T. Ollivier: I come to see if you've got a spare shovel. Mine's puckeroed and I got a cow in the drain. (1965)

on the rocks (1889) Often applied specifically to a marriage or other relationship that is on the point of ending. Edmund Wilson: [Roberto Rossellini's] headlined romance with Sonali Das Gupta is now over. (1970)

Maureen Duffy: The device seems to have gone U/S, U.S. (1942) Usually applied to machinery that is no longer working properly; originally a services' slang abbreviation of unserviceable. Maureen Duffy: The device seems to have gone U.S. They're dodgy things because they're so small. (1970)

on the toboggan (1910) US; applied to someone or something on the decline; from the notion of a toboggan sliding downhill. Jack Dempsey: A veteran of thirty or thirty-one who is on the 'toboggan'. (1950)

spitched (1920) Orig nautical; from Maltese spica finished, ended, perhaps ultimately from Italian spezzare break into pieces. Peter Dickinson: That damned gadget might... be functioning right as rain in thirty seconds, or it might be spitched for ever. (1970)

on the skids (1921) Orig US; applied to someone or something on the decline. Irish Press: The Irish shoe industry, after being on the skids for six years, may be finding its feet again. (1977)

sunk (1922) A. P. Herbert: 'Hell!' thought Mr. Ransom, 'we're sunk!' (1934)

buggered up (1923), buggered (1947)

washed up (1923) Orig & mainly US. William Saroyan: We're washed up as a race, we're through, it's all over. (1934)

trashed (1926) Mainly US; often followed by an adverb; probably from the obsolete trash treat as trash. Tucson (Arizona) Citizen: 'I've sat through this movie three times... 'In this trashed-out theater? The picture's that good?'' It's a lousy picture! I can't get my feet unstuck from the floor!' (1979) Dirt Bike: Track-N-Trail has just come up with a solution to the age-old problems of mud, cold, rain, and trashed knuckles for you offroaders. (1980)

goosed (1928) John Welcome: If I've guessed wrong and Jason has found out right, then we're goosed. (1959)

down the drain (1930) Especially in the phrase go down the drain. J. H. Chase: We had paid out good money to get those policies, and we couldn't afford to let them go down the drain. (1952)

shot (1933) Mainly US. T. T. Ollivier: I come to see if you've got a spare shovel. Mine's puckeroed and I got a cow in the drain. (1965)

fucked up (1939), fucked (1955) William Gibson: Your lungs are filling up with fluid, your kidneys aren't working, your heart's fucked. (1988)

finito (1945) Applied to something that is finished for the worse; from the past participle of Italian finire to finish. Armistead Maupin: You tell your friend that she'd better report to me on Friday or she's out on her ass... Friday... After that, finito. (1982)

snafu (1942) Orig US services' slang; acronym of 'situation normal: all jucked (or/ouled) up'. David Divine: Situation Snafu.... Send for the Seabees. (1950)

U.S., U.S. (1942) Usually applied to machinery that is no longer working properly; originally a services' slang abbreviation of unserviceable. Maureen Duffy: The device seems to have gone U.S. They're dodgy things because they're so small. (1970)

fubar (1944) US, euphemistic, often jocular, orig services' slang; acronym of 'fucked (or fouled) up beyond all recognition', probably inspired by
13. Failure

Something that fails; an unsuccessful person or thing; a fiasco
damp squib (1847) Applied to something anticlimactic

rooted (1951) Australian; often in get rooted! an expression of contempt or annoyance; from root ruin, frustrate someone’s purposes ■ Dal Stivens: ‘It looks as though we’re rooted, smackier,’ I told Herb. (1951)
don down the pan (1961) Especially in the phrase go down the pan; from pan lavatory bowl ■ independent He agreed his game had ‘gone down the pan’ since victory in the US Open last year. (1992)
down the tubes (1963) Orig US; especially in the phrase go down the tube(s) ■ Guardian: Four years’ work down the tubes with little to show for it. (1992)
down the gurgler (1981) Australian; especially in the phrase go down the gurgler; from gurgler plughole, drain ■ Courier-Mail (Brisbane): Channel 7 is making a big comeback locally but Channel 0 is going down the proverbial gurgler. (1988)

Something that spoils or ruins
fly in the ointment (1833) After Ecclesiastes 10:1: Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour ■ Aldous Huxley: There is only one fly in the ointment

frost (1885) Australian; often in get rooted! an expression of contempt or annoyance; from root ruin, frustrate someone’s purposes ■ Dal Stivens: ‘It looks as though we’re rooted, smackier,’ I told Herb. (1951)

nigger in the woodpile (1852) Orig US, offensive, now taboo; applied to an unsuspected or hidden factor that has an adverse effect ■ Anthony Gilbert: The nigger in the woodpile on this occasion being an elderly spinster of decided views. (1958)

spanner in the works (1934) Especially in the phrase throw a spanner in the works ■ News Chronicle: Mr. Cousins has thrown a spanner into the Labour Party’s works. (1959)

A spoilsport
wet blanket (1857) ■ Susan Faludi: The wet-blanket girlfriend of Peter. Rebecca recoils with disgust at their new bundle of joy. (1992)

wowsers. (1986)
wet smack (1927) Orig US ■ P.G. Wodehouse: The wet-blanket man is beyond question a flat tyre and a wet smack. (1929)

party pooper (1954) US; applied to someone who throws a pall of gloom over a party or other social engagement

offered by commercial propagandists; they want your money. (1936)

worse than (1890) Applied to something that fails to explode or ignite; from earlier sense, small or cheap car
dud (1915) Applied to a bomb, shell, firework, etc. that fails to explode or ignite; from earlier sense, worthless or counterfeit item ■ Public Opinion All the torpedoes they carry are duds. (1923)
A failure of function

**turkey** (1927) US; applied to an unsuccessful film or theatrical production. **Groucho Marx:** The boys at the studio have lined up another turkey for us. . . . I saw the present one the other day and didn't care much for it. (1939)

**no dice** (1928) Orig US; used to denote a completely unsuccessful attempt. **P. G. Wodehouse:** I was around at her bank this morning trying to find out what her balance was, but no dice. Fanny won't part. (1952)

**fizzer** (1957) Australian; from earlier sense, insect. **bug** (1889) Orig US; compare earlier sense, insect. **Engineering:** The seven-and-a-half years . . . was not an excessive time to . . . get the 'bugs' out of a new system of that kind. (1958)

**fizzer** (1957) Australian; from earlier sense, insect. **bug** (1889) Orig US; compare earlier sense, insect. **Engineering:** The seven-and-a-half years . . . was not an excessive time to . . . get the 'bugs' out of a new system of that kind. (1958)

**non-starter** (1934) Applied to one with no chance of success, especially due to impracticability: from earlier sense, competitor who does not start. **Ann Bridge:** That's one reason why non-intervention is such a non-starter. (1942)

**stiff** (1937) Orig US; applied especially to a theatrical venture that fails; from **flop** fail + the jocular suffix -eroo. **Roderic Jeffries:** His case was a real flooperoo. (1970)

**come to grief** (1862) Denoting something that proves abortive; from earlier sense, suffer a disaster, especially a fall. **Economist:** Several existing projects have come to grief on the rocks of over-ambition and shortsightedness. (1987)

**come (or go) a mucker** (1869) British; from **mucker** heavy fall. **Gladyts Mitchell:** I like old Jimmy boy and I wouldn't want to see him come a mucker. (1974)

**come a cropper** (1874) From earlier sense, fall heavily. **Terence Rattigan:** We bachelors welcome competition from married men. We so much enjoy watching them come the inevitable cropper. (1951)

**duffer** (1880) Australian & New Zealand; denoting a mine proving unproductive or becoming exhausted; often followed by **out**; from **duffer** mine that fails. **C. Simpson:** Billy's tin show must have duffered out by now. (1952)

**miss the bus** (1886), **miss the boat** (1929) Denoting failure due to losing an opportunity; originally recorded in the form miss the omnibus. **Manchester Guardian Weekly:** He [sc. Neville Chamberlain] . . . boasted that Hitler has 'missed the bus'. (1940) **Times:** Some firms were missing the boat because their managements were not prepared to be adventurous. (1973)

**flop** (1898) From the notion of collapsing limply. **Peter Fleming:** She published a book on that journey, which flopped. (1936)

**crap out** (1908) US; from earlier technical use in craps (a game of chance played with dice). **Times:** The Opposition, raged Mr Dawkins during Wednesday's Question Time in the House of Representatives. (1983)

**get (or go) nowhere, not get anywhere** (1925) **Willa Cather:** Mrs. Rosen felt that she was not getting anywhere. (1932)
fold (1928) Applied to a business, project, etc., or to a theatrical venture; often followed by up
   ■ Noel Coward: In spite of excellent press notices . . . the play folded up at the end of eight weeks. (1937) ■ Sunday Times: This generous subsidy could not go on for ever and when it was withdrawn the magazine folded. (1971)

lay an egg (1929) Applied to a performer or performance that fails ■ Leonard Feather: The singer had been laying eggs at the Zanzibar . . . and Shaw was undecided what to do with him. (1949)

not get to first base (1938) US; denoting failing at the very beginning of an undertaking; from the notion of the batter in baseball being thrown out before reaching first base ■ P. G. Wodehouse: She gives you the feeling that you'll never get to first base with her. (1962)

bomb (1953) Orig US; often followed by out ■ TV Times (Australia): Everyone had expected it to be [good], so when it bombed it was a shock. (1966)

fuck up (1953) Orig US; compare earlier sense, make a mistake, blunder ■ Rolling Stone: We fucked up in New York. (1977)


To fail at or in

fall down on (1899) Orig US ■ Spectator: The Congress party is falling down on the job of rallying public confidence in the present policies of the Government of India. (1959)

flunk (1924) Orig & mainly US; denoting failing an exam, course, etc.; compare earlier sense, fail a candidate ■ Times: I was utterly, deeply, completely depressed and flunked my A levels. (1970)

fluff (1955) Denoting failing an exam; from earlier sense, do badly, make a mistake in ■ Daily Telegraph: Many school-children . . . awaiting their summer exam results have now got this particular worry. Has mother fluffed hers—or has she got through? (1970)

bomb (1962) US; denoting failing an exam To designate as failing

flunk (1843) Orig & mainly US; denoting failing an examination candidate; from earlier intransitive sense, fail ■ Word Study: For if English teachers had always based their grades in English on the moral probity of their students' private lives, they would have had to flunk such naughty boys as Christopher Marlowe, James Boswell, Dylan Thomas, and Baltimore's own Edgar Allan Poe. (1966)

plough (1853) Dated, orig university slang; denoting failing an examination candidate ■ Times: My young friend was undeservedly ploughed. (1883)

pill (1908) Dated; denoting failing an examination candidate; from earlier sense, blackball ■ Warwick Deeping: Gorringe had a sick face. . . . 'Pilled,' thought Kit, and was not sorry, for Gorringe needed a course of pilling. (1925)

14. Defeat & Victory

To defeat (heavily)

whip. (US dialect) whup (1571) Now US ■ R. S. Warren Bell: If Eccles uses his weight cleverly, Wardour will be whipped to a cert. (1901) ■ Punch: The Matt Dillon urge to 'whup' the Commies. (1968)

thrash (1606) ■ Westminster Gazette: It touched land, and a man jumped out waving his hat and exclaiming, 'Hurrah, Wellington has thrashed Boney!' (1903)

pulverize (1631) From earlier sense, crush to dust ■ Guardian: And a 'much weaker' opponent must not merely be defeated but pulverized if the central lesson of World Order is to be learned. (1991)

do (1794) ■ L. A. G. Strong: If I do Sid, I'm to have a go at Sailor Berndge. (1948)

lick (1800) ■ John Steinbeck: 'S'pose Curley jumps a big guy an' licks him. Ever'body says what a game guy Curley is. And s'pose he does the same thing and gets licked. (1937)

smash (1813) ■ Western Daily Press: To join in a British expedition to 'smash' the Mahdi. (1884)

walk over (1823) ■ Guardian: They thought they could walk all over us. But we have won. (1991)

skunk (1843) US ■ David Delman: She'll skunk Nell Duncan today, and win. (1972)

knock (or beat) the socks off (1845) US ■ Arizona Daily Star: 'Trucks have been beating our socks off,' said . . . a spokesman for the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway in Chicago. 'But now we have a chance to get some of the business back.' (1979)


whitewash (1867) Orig US; applied originally, in baseball and other games, to defeating opponents while preventing them from scoring, and hence to inflicting a heavy defeat ■ Korean Times: Husky south Korean girls white-washed Thailand 106-17 . . . in the second game. (1972)

make mincemeat of (1876) From earlier sense, chop into small pieces ■ Times: Thames R.C. made mincemeat of all their opponents in the Grand Eights. (1955)

wax (1884) US; origin unknown

wipe the floor with (1887) Orig US; used to denote humiliating defeat ■ G. A. Birmingham: He was so infernally certain that the Emperor would wipe the floor with us. (1918)

donkey-lick, donkey-wallop (1890) Australian; applied especially to horse-racing;
lick from lick defeat  ■  National Times (Australia): The Pommies . . . threw in a quartet of speedsters that had been donkey-licked by every cricketing nation around the world. (1981)

run (or make) rings round (1891) Used to denote comprehensive and humiliating defeat ■ Sporting Mirror: The return of Doods revitalised the Everton attack which ran rings round Sheffield United. (1947)

ring (1894) Australian; applied to defeating other shearers in a shed in a speed contest

wallop (1895) ■ Sunday Times: Boro were walloped 5-1 at Villa last weekend. (1993)

walk round (1901) US ■ Westminster Gazette: To use a colloquial expression, they 'walked round' Gamble and Davies. (1901)

slaughter (1903) Orig US ■ C. E. Merriam: He was hopelessly beaten . . . in the primaries of 1907, and again slaughtered . . . in the primaries of 1915. (1929)

slather (1910) North American; from earlier sense, kill cane (1960) From earlier sense, beat with a cane; ■ Times: Shell . . . now have a record eight managing directors; BP . . . have just been pipped at the post—they have only seven. (1969)

nip (1942) US; applied especially to a sporting contest ■ Anderson (South Carolina) Independent: Danny Ford banged out four hits and knocked in two runs as Augusta College nipped Erskine, 6-5, here Thursday. (1974)

A (heavy) defeat

dubbing (1789) From earlier literal sense, a beating, from drub hit, probably ultimately from Arabic ḏarābah beat ■ Times: The Communists, who are still licking their wounds after the drubbing they got in 1950. (1955)

thrashing (1815) ■ Liverpool Daily Post: The county suffered a 'one innings' thrashing [at cricket] at the hands of their antagonists. (1885)

licking (1831) ■ Wall Street Journal: When interest rates were rising last autumn, many Wall Street firms took a licking on their big bond portfolios. (1989)

whitewash (1867) Orig US; originally applied to a defeat in which the loser fails to score, and hence to any heavy defeat ■ Times: Miss Truman who yesterday allowed Mrs. Cowthorn but 23 points in what the players of darts would term a 'whitewash'. (1961)

hammering (1900) ■ Guardian: Wales . . . were given a record 34-6 hammering at Twickenham last February. (1991)

shellacking (1931) Orig US ■ Herman Wouk: The Japs can't recover from the shellacking they took at Midway. (1978)

massacre (1940) ■ Guardian: In the fall-out from last week's massacre at Murrayfield, the columns of Welsh newspapers have been filled with less than polite urgings to return to a set-piece base. (1991)

caning (1976) ■ Guardian: Perhaps it is not so surprising to see Oldham . . . taking a 5-1 caning at Oxford United. (1991)

wipe-out (1977) From earlier sense, annihilation ■ Daily Mirror: A record 140,000 [motor-cycling] fans have watched the embarrassing wipe-out by 410 points to 379. (1977)

Completely defeated

gone a million (1913) Australian & New Zealand ■ New Zealand Listener: We scraped in in that

shredded the Los Angeles Lakers with a third-quarter explosion. (1986)

zilch (1969) US; from zilch zero, nothing, from the notion of preventing one's opponent from scoring

starch (1974) North American; used in boxing to denote defeating one's opponent by a knockout; from the notion of rendering stiff or rigid on the canvas ■ Los Angeles Times: A promotional video cassette sent out to the boxing media showing scences of Pazienna starching inferior opponents. (1990)

To defeat narrowly

pip (1891), pip at (or on) the post (1924) pip from earlier sense, blackball, from the noun pip small ball ■ Scottish Daily Express: As anchorman, Ian Hutcheon did a magnificent job, shooting a final 71 to pip the Japs and tie for the individual section. (1976) ■ Times: Shell . . . now have a record eight managing directors; BP . . . have just been pipped at the post—they have only seven. (1969)

pip at the post (1924) pip from earlier sense, blackball, from the noun pip small ball ■ Scottish Daily Express: As anchorman, Ian Hutcheon did a magnificent job, shooting a final 71 to pip the Japs and tie for the individual section. (1976) ■ Times: Shell . . . now have a record eight managing directors; BP . . . have just been pipped at the post—they have only seven. (1969)

A (heavy) defeat

dubbing (1789) From earlier literal sense, a beating, from drub hit, probably ultimately from Arabic ḏarābah beat ■ Times: The Communists, who are still licking their wounds after the drubbing they got in 1950. (1955)

thrashing (1815) ■ Liverpool Daily Post: The county suffered a 'one innings' thrashing [at cricket] at the hands of their antagonists. (1885)

licking (1831) ■ Wall Street Journal: When interest rates were rising last autumn, many Wall Street firms took a licking on their big bond portfolios. (1989)

whitewash (1867) Orig US; originally applied to a defeat in which the loser fails to score, and hence to any heavy defeat ■ Times: Miss Truman who yesterday allowed Mrs. Cowthorn but 23 points in what the players of darts would term a 'whitewash'. (1961)

hammering (1900) ■ Guardian: Wales . . . were given a record 34-6 hammering at Twickenham last February. (1991)

shellacking (1931) Orig US ■ Herman Wouk: The Japs can't recover from the shellacking they took at Midway. (1978)

massacre (1940) ■ Guardian: In the fall-out from last week's massacre at Murrayfield, the columns of Welsh newspapers have been filled with less than polite urgings to return to a set-piece base. (1991)

caning (1976) ■ Guardian: Perhaps it is not so surprising to see Oldham . . . taking a 5-1 caning at Oxford United. (1991)

wipe-out (1977) From earlier sense, annihilation ■ Daily Mirror: A record 140,000 [motor-cycling] fans have watched the embarrassing wipe-out by 410 points to 379. (1977)

Completely defeated

gone a million (1913) Australian & New Zealand ■ New Zealand Listener: We scraped in in that
15. Power, Influence

game, only because Elvidge scored his usual try. . . . Otherwise, we were gone a million. (1958)

lurked (1917) Dated; applied to someone beaten in a game of chance; perhaps connected with lurk in a game of skill, leave in the lurk
Charles Morgan: Four straight aces. Good enough? You’re lurked, Sandford. (1938)

To admit defeat (and give up)

throw (or chuck) up (or in) the sponge (1860) From the throwing of a sponge into the ring as an admission of defeat in boxing
David Gervais: The best he can get out of England is to throw in the sponge, return to work at the advertising agency and settle down with Rosemary in suburbia. (1993)

climb down (1889) Used to denote withdrawal from a position previously maintained. Hence the noun climb-down (1887)
Angus Wilson: The French have sent a tremendous climbdown note. (1961)

drop one’s bundle (1897) Australian & New Zealand
S. Gore: It started to rain, too. And at this, he really drops his bundle. (1968)

throw (or chuck, toss) in the towel (1915) From the throwing of a towel into the ring as an admission of defeat in boxing
M. Russell: ‘Don’t give up. ’ . . . ’ ‘Have no fear. . . . I shan’t throw in the towel, I promise you.’ (1979)

sky the wipe (1916) Australian, dated; used to denote admitting defeat in boxing; from sky throw and wipe handkerchief (after throw in the towel)
Bulletin (Sydney): It is generally understood that a boxer must consider himself beaten when his seconds ‘sky the towel’ (1933)

say (cry, holler, etc.) uncle (1918) North American; uncle perhaps from Irish analoc deliverance, mercy, assimilated to English uncle parent’s brother
David Delman: ‘Stop it, darling, please.’ ‘Say uncle.’ ‘Uncle.’ (1972)

throw in one’s hand (1923) From earlier sense, retire from a card game, especially poker

Economist: An international understanding outside Egypt is needed before the board can throw in its hand. (1957)

To lose deliberately

throw (1868) Orig US
Times: During the Chancellorship of Mr Roy Jenkins, Lord Allen had to ‘throw’ their occasional [tennis] matches for fear of puncturing the considerable vanity of his political master. (1978)

take a dive (1942) Orig US; from earlier more specific boxing sense, fall over deliberately when hit

A trophy for defeat

wooden spoon (1858) Jocular; applied to a hypothetical trophy awarded to one who finishes last in a competition; from an earlier application to a wooden spoon presented by custom at Cambridge University to the lowest of those taking honours in the mathematical tripos. Hence wooden spoonist (1927), wooden spooner (1954) a winner of the wooden spoon
Nation Review (Melbourne): 4BH slips to fourth place in the five station market, with perennial wooden spooners, 4BK, only 2000 listeners behind. (1973)

To win easily

win hands down (1882) Originally applied to a jockey dropping his hands, and so relaxing his hold on the reins, when victory appears certain
Times: Double this speed, however, and the submarine wins hands down. (1958)

walk (1937) Times: I went to the British [championship] thinking I’d walk it. . . . This was a mistake. . . . It was a close shave. (1976)

A victory

result (1973) British; used especially in sport
Mail on Sunday: Cricket is sport, not war. You work hard to get a result. Somebody wins and somebody loses. (1991)

15. Power, Influence

clout (1868) Orig US; applied especially to political or commercial influence; after one isolated 19th-century occurrence, the usage is not recorded again before the 1930s; from earlier sense, heavy blow
Ink: France and other countries have large agricultural surpluses and farmers with electoral ‘clout’. (1971)

pull (1889) Orig US
Judith Krantz: His future in the giant corporation was assured in the long run through family pull, since he had, on his mother’s side, as one said in slang, du piston. (1978)

drag (1896) Orig US; applied especially to political influence; compare pull
Ernest Hemingway: We had a big drag with the waiter because my old man drank whisky and it cost five francs, and that meant a good tip. (1923)

in (1929) Orig US; usually in the phrase have an in with have a means of access to or influence with
J. B. Priestley: I have an in with a couple of the directors. (1965)

poke (1965) Applied mainly to horsepower
Sunday Mail Magazine (Brisbane): I expect you’d prefer something with a bit more poke. A Ferrari say, or an Aston Martin. (1979)

To have in one’s power

have (or get) someone by the short hairs (1888) From the notion of seizing someone by the pubic hairs so that they are immobilized; compare earlier obsolete get someone where the hair is short
Sayers & Eustace: She’s evidently got her husband by the short hairs. (1930)
have (or get) someone over a barrel (1938)
Orig US; apparently in allusion to the state of someone placed over a barrel to clear their lungs of water after being rescued from drowning. Letitia McClung: You sure have me over a barrel. You caught me red-handed. (1945)

have (or get) someone by the short and curleys (1948)
Orig services’ slang. Peter Hill: There is no need for kid gloves now, we’ve got him by the short and curleys. (1976)

To assert one’s power

throw (chuck, etc.) one’s weight about (or around) (1917) Usually implying objectionable officiousness. J. P. Marquand: Bill King... always used to say that Bo-jo was a bastard, a big bastard. Perhaps he meant that Bo-jo sometimes threw his weight around. (1941)

16. Coercion

Coercion, pressurizing

squeeze play (1916) Mainly US; from earlier baseball sense, tactic involving bunting or hitting the ball softly so that the runner at third base can reach home. D. Wecker: You perhaps mentioned the fact that Hitler was putting the squeeze play on Hindenburg a few years later. (1944)

heat (1928) Orig US. Listener: The moment seemed opportune to turn the heat on Turkey. (1957)

hardball (1973) US; applied to uncompromising and especially intimidating methods, especially in politics; especially in the phrase play hardball; from earlier sense, baseball (as opposed to softball). Fortune: If anyone wants to play hardball, Cub can operate in the 5% to 6% range and still be profitable, because its costs are so lean. (1983)

To pressurize

sweat (1764) Denoting interrogating someone closely, often with (threats of) violence. John Le Carré: Probably Mikhail intercepted and read it... We could sweat him, but I doubt if it would help. (1979)

crowd (1828) Orig US. Sara Paretsky: Sure, I like him. But don’t crowd me into making any other declarations. (1992)

put the screws on (1834) Orig US; often denoting the enforcing of a debt repayment; from screws thumb screw

crowd the mourners (1842) US, dated; denoting exercising undue or unseemly pressure

prod (1871) Denoting strong urging or goading. Independent: The Soviet Union’s descent into chaos might prod the European Community into action. (1991)

press-gang (1882) Denoting making someone do something against their will; from earlier sense, force to join the navy or army by means of a press-gang. Guardian: You might imagine recruits to succeed Speaker Weatherill would have had to be pressganged. Far from it. They’re queueing up for the job. (1982)

hustle (1887) US; denoting selling or obtaining things by pressurizing people. Black World: He hustled the watch to a barber for 35 bills. (1973)

sool (1889) Australian & New Zealand; denoting strong urging or goading; often followed by on; compare earlier sense, (of a dog) attack or worry an animal. P. Barton: The cooking teacher, sooled on by half a dozen or so by-now-tearful girls, took to me with a large wooden spoon. (1981)

jolly someone along (1890) Orig US; denoting using pleasant behaviour as a way of getting someone to behave as one wants; from the adjective jolly. Helen McCloy: He protested, he argued, he even tried to jolly them along. They only became bolder. (1970)

put the acid on (1906) Australian; denoting putting pressure on someone for a loan, a favour, etc. Patrick White: And a woman like that, married to such a sawney bastard, she wouldn’t wait for her to put the acid on her. (1966)

put the bite on (1919) Orig & mainly US; denoting putting pressure on someone for a loan, a favour, etc. Stephen Ransome: Everybody keeps putting the bite on me for money I haven’t got. (1950)

be on someone’s wheel (1922) Mainly Australian; denoting hounding or pressurizing someone. Osmar White: The inspector’s been on my wheel to trace him. (1969)

muscle (1929) Orig US. C. F. Coe: Mbebe it’s a new mob. If they’re musclin’ Rap, it won’t be long before they’re musclin’ us too. (1935)

put the lug on (1929) US; denoting putting pressure on someone for a loan, a favour, etc. Margaret Truman: My father also knew, from his inside contacts with Missouri Democrats, that the governor... was...
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'putting the lug' (to use Missouri terminology) on state employees to contribute to his campaign fund. (1973)

goo (1932) Denoting urging or encouraging someone to greater activity; usually followed by up; from earlier sense, direct a horse by the call of "goo" • R. Fuller: The directors of the company must be goo'd up. (1956)

stand over someone (1939) Australian; denoting intimidating or threatening someone, especially in order to extort money • Frank Hardy: We'll have to stand over them to get our money. (1958)

put the squeeze on (1941) Orig US • S. Brill: Spilotro's army of enforcers . . . put the squeeze on hard-pressed loan-shark victims. (1978)

strong-arm (1941) From earlier sense, manhandle • Observer. The OAS had financed themselves initially by strong-arming contributions from rich settlers, who usually shared their sympathies. (1977)

railroad (1952) Orig US; from earlier sense, rush someone or something into, through, etc. somewhere • Brian Garfield: Take all the time you want. Nobody wants to railroad him. (1975)

twist someone's arm (1953) • R. V. Beste: I had to twist his arm a bit but he came through. (1969)

lean on (1960) Orig US • New York Times: 'An Attorney General would resign too if he thought he was being leaned on by the Prime Minister or senior ministers on a pending prosecution,' a former Attorney General said. (1975)

goe (1932) • Denoting urging or encouraging someone to greater activity; usually followed by up; from earlier sense, direct a horse by the call of "go" • Observer. She rebelled occasionally, hard-balling O'Neil into attaching to a Bill an Amendment that would help her District, by threatening to kill a million dollar pork-barrel destined for his. (1984)

Someone who intimidates or coerces others

enforcer (1929) US; applied to a criminal gang's strong-arm man • Estes Kefauver: Dead beside him was his lieutenant and 'enforcer', Charlie Gargotta. (1951)

muscle man (1929) Orig US; applied to a muscular man employed to intimidate others with (threats of) violence • Paul Oliver: With the considerable returns accruing from operating policy wheels the racket came under the control of syndicates with muscle-men and hired gunmen ensuring that their 'rights' were protected. (1968)

standover man, standover merchant (1939) Australian; from stand over intimidate • Cusack & James: It was Joe's bodyguard, Curly—standover man as well, they said. (1951)

Inducement

come-on (1902) • Monica Dickens: They like the sound of foreign investments. It has that magic, millionaire ring to it, like foreign exchange. Just another come-on. (1958)

Organization

Organization, administration, bureaucracy

bumf, bumph (1930) British, derogatory; applied collectively to documents; from earlier sense, toilet-paper • M. K. Joseph: Matthews is bringing the bumph . . . He says be sure and type it on Army Form A2. (1957)

admin (1942) Applied (often derogatorily) to administrative functions or duties, or to the department of an organization that deals with these; short for administration • W. Buchan: A mass of practical details—sheer 'admin'. (1961)

To organize

jack something up (1942) New Zealand • New Zealand Listener: I'll see you right at a boardin' place until you get jacked up. (1971)

To organize one's affairs efficiently

get one's shit together (1969) US • Times: We need to get our act together. . . . Users have been divided so far and are being picked off by the publishers one by one. (1984)

get it together (1975) • New Society: Tez thinks he'll be a rock star . . . tomorrow. Meanwhile he's having trouble getting it together and lives off the SS. (1975)

Disorganization

couldn't organize (run, etc.) a piss-up in a brewery (1984) British; denoting incompetence at organization or administration; from the notion of the easy availability of beer for a piss-up (= bout of heavy drinking) in a brewery

too many chiefs and not enough Indians (1988) Denoting (disorganization due to) an excess of managerial staff and not enough ordinary workers • National Trust Magazine: The way the National Trust has grown, I can't help feeling that there are too many Chiefs and not enough Indians. (1992)

Disorganized

shambolic (1958) British; from shambles scene of complete disorder + -olic • Times: The average listener is in the position of anybody who encounters an organization at work for the first time. It may appear shambolic but how much is that because he hasn't yet made sense of it. (1975)
18. Subservience

hen-pecked (a1680) Applied to a man dominated by a woman, typically his wife; from the notion of the plucking of some of the feathers of the domestic cock by his hens. ■ George Bernard Shaw: He may be henpecked: what married man is not? (1938) Hence hen-peck (1688). ■ W. M. Thackeray: That my lady was jealous and henpecked my lord. (1852)

play second fiddle (1809)

eat crow (1877) US; used to denote that someone is forced to do something extremely disagreeable and humiliating; formerly also eat boiled crow, from the notion of swallowing something unpalatable. ■ New Yorker: I was going to apologize, eat crow, offer to kiss and make up. (1970)

take a back seat (1881) Orig US. ■ Times: Those who think that the trade union movement should take a back seat in the Labour movement should think again. (1959)

under the cosh (1958). ■ Observer. As for the Criminal Justice Act, it could be very useful to have all the villains under the cosh, as they expressed it. It made it much easier to get information. (1960)

pussy-whipped (1963) Orig and mainly US; applied to a man dominated by a woman; from either pussy woman or female genitals. ■ Judith Krantz: Some men are pussy whipped from the day they are born, some have it happen to them later in life, some never. (1978)

A subservient person

squidge (1907) US; applied to someone who does troublesome duties for another; origin unknown

■ George Ade: When Mr. and Mrs. Al Lafi and I traveled in distant countries, we always hired a 'squidge' the moment we arrived in a new town. His job was to stay with us and accept all the hardships and worries. (1942)

monkey-man (1924) US; applied to a weak and servile husband

stooge (1937) From earlier sense, stage assistant. ■ Detroit Free Press: Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe... branded the moderate African leaders as 'sworn stooges of Premier Ian Smith'. (1978)

See also A subservient black person at Ethnic & National Groups (pp. 41–2)

To submit

knuckle under (1882). ■ Times. He replied that there was no power on earth to make a local party accept a candidate. He was rather sorry they knuckled under to Transport House in this division. (1955)

To put in a subservient position

have someone on toast (1886) From the notion of food prepared and ready to be eaten, served on toast. ■ E. F. Benson: To think that half an hour ago that little squirt thought he had us on toast. (1916)

get (or have) someone by the short and curleys (1948) From the subservient condition of someone seized by the pubic hair. ■ Peter Hill: There's no need for the kid gloves now, we've got him by the short and curleys. (1976)

19. Genuineness & Spuriousness

(See also Honesty pp. 277–8)

Genuine

ryebuck, ribuck, etc. (1859) Mainly Australian, dated; of uncertain origin; compare German Reibach profit. ■ R. H. Knyvett: They even knew our slang, Riebach, rieback, riebuck, ribuck, etc., with Jewish law; ultimately from Hebrew kâshër with Jewish law; ultimately from Hebrew kasher, kosher. From earlier sense, in accordance with Jewish law; ultimately from Hebrew kasher. ■ Colin MacInnes: It's all very well sneering at 'scare tactic', it is for real. (1973)

kosher (1896) From earlier sense, stage assistant. ■ Colin MacInnes: It's all very well sneering at 'scare tactic', it is for real. (1973)

dinkum (1900) Australian & New Zealand; especially in the phrase fair dinkum; from the noun dinkum (hard) work, of unknown origin. ■ S. Gore: 'Well, stone the crows!' say the crew. 'His God musta been dinkum after all.' (1968)

dinky-die(e), dinkii-die(e) (1915) Australian & New Zealand. ■ The Australian: Sinister karate chopping, Japanese battling with true-blue dinki-di locals. (1969)

ridge (1938) Australian; from an obsolete word for 'gold'. ■ D. Ireland: I convinced her the whole thing was ridge! (1971)

ridgy-didge (1953) Australian; from assumed ridgy genuine, from ridge genuine + -y. ■ Sydney Morning Herald: The old-timers insist that Kalgoorlie two-up is 'the real game' and that ridgy-didge players will skirt the casino ring. (1986)

for real (1956) Orig US. ■ Black Panther. This is no 'scare tactic', it is for real. (1973)

actual (1966) British: in the phrase your actual. ■ Times. There won't be any room for your actual horn-handed sons of toil in the TUC; there'll be too many sharp-suited managers. (1976)

Something or someone genuine

McCoy (1883) In the phrase the real McCoy (or Mackay, McKie); origin uncertain; amongst the suggested derivations are that in its original form, the real Mackay, it refers to the true chieftain of the clan Mackay, a much disputed position, and that the variant the real McCoy (first
recorded in 1922) refers to Kid McCoy, the professional name of US boxer Norman Selby (1873–1940), who was nicknamed 'the real McCoy' to distinguish him from other boxers who tried to use his name. □ Guardian: Sadler's Wells is playing host to the regal offspring Royal Ballet, and not, please note, a second eleven but the real Macoy [sic]. (1972)

**the goods** (1904) □ Angus Wilson: He was the most awful old fraud himself, you know. Oh, not as an historian, you always said he was the goods. (1956)

### Spurious

**snide** (1859) Dated; origin unknown

**duff** (1889) British; from the noun duff something spurious □ G. Netherwood: It was said by the erks that he once sold rock on Blackpool sands. This was just 'duff gen'. (1944)

**phony, phony** (1900) Origin unknown □ Daily Telegraph: Like his singing, he is gentlemanly: no long hair, exaggerated clothes, or phony emotionalism. (1970)

**bodger** (1945) Australian; from the verb bodge patch or mend clumsily □ F. J. Hardy: This entailed the addition of as many more 'bodger' votes as possible. (1950)

**moody** (1958) Criminals’ □ N. J. Crisp: 'I don't have to tell you,' Kenyon went on, 'how easy it is to plant moody the addition of as many more 'bodger' votes as possible. (1950)

**Something or someone spurious**

**quack** (1659) Orig applied to an unqualified person claiming to be a doctor, and hence to any charlatan; abbreviation of quack'salver, from early modern Dutch (now kwaksalver): first element probably from the stem of kwakken prattle, second element from zelf salve

**duff** (1781) British; perhaps from duff dough

**not (quite) the clean potato** (1822) Dated □ M. Franklin: She was the only great-granddaughter of old Larry Healey of Little River, none so clean a potato, if rumour was correct. (1931)

**gold brick** (1889) Orig US; applied to something with only a surface appearance of value; especially in the phrase sell someone a gold brick swindle someone, especially by passing off a sham as valuable; from the practice of passing off an ingot of base metal as gold □ Chicago Daily News: It used to be the city slicker who sold gold bricks to the hick from the country. (1947)

**phony, phony** (1902) From the adjective phoney □ New Yorker. This simple test—a way of telling the phonies from the truly committed. (1977)

**shuck** (1958) From earlier sense, something of little value (original sense, husk, pod) □ Alvin Toffler: The recently graduated son... proclaims the nine-to-five job a degrading sham and a shuck. (1980)

### 20. Triviality, Insignificance

Trivial, insignificant

**piddling** (1559) From piddle urinate □ Maclean’s Magazine: In plain words, I found out what my job was. No piddling assignment either. What it amounted to was saving the country. (1971)

**fiddling** (1652) □ Douglas Adams: The Galactic banks refuse to deal in fiddling small change. (1979)

**twopenny-halfpenny, tuppeny-ha’penny** (1809) British; from the notion of twopence-halfpenny as a trivial sum □ Guardian: Braving over a promised crackdown on tuppeny ha’penny social security scroungers. (1992)

**one-horse** (1853) Mainly US & Australian; applied to something, especially a town, small and unimportant; from the notion of a carriage small enough to be pulled by one horse □ Zigzag: I’ve a new song... about a girl of sixteen trying to get out of a one horse town. (1977)

**jerkwater** (1897) US; from earlier application to a train operating on a branch line, from the notion of a locomotive with a small boiler that had to be replenished with water ‘jerked’ (i.e. pulled up) from track-side streams in a bucket □ R. Lockridge: It won’t be easy for him to get another job if he’s fired. . . . Maybe at some jerkwater college at half what he’s getting now. (1970)

**Something or someone trivial or insignificant**

**two-bit** (1932) US; from two bits twenty-five cents or two eighths of a dollar □ T. Willis: Some other two-bit General will try shooting us up. (1978)

**pissing** (1937) Compare piddling □ Nicolas Freeling: ‘Fuck it,’ said Metcalfe angrily. ‘I’m only a pissing sergeant.’ (1975)

**small-time** (1938) Orig US; from earlier application to the minor vaudeville circuit □ Irwin Shaw: Do you intend to be a small-time tennis pro... all your life? (1977)

**small beer** (1777) From earlier sense, weak beer, probably in allusion to the metaphor in Shakespeare’s Othello 2.i.161: To suckle fools, and chronicle small beer (1604) □ Daily Mail: Delivery of each card costs about £1.30—small beer compared with frauds which can run to £6,000 a card. (1991)

**small fry** (1873) Applied collectively to insignificant people or things; from earlier sense, young animals □ Observer: The consensus is that Kearns and Madigan are small fry; they are no gangsters. (1981)

**small potatoes** (1846) Orig US □ Gramophone: Serosus is small potatoes by CBS or RCA standards but its albums are tastefully produced and carefully annotated. (1976)
putty medal (1898) Applied to an appropriately
tworthless reward for insignificant service
Mary Kelly: 'You know what you'll be given for all this?...'
'A putty medal. Sooner have a cheque.' (1956)

pipsqueak (1910) Applied to a small and
insignificant person (or thing); from
high-pitched sound + squeak
G. Macmunn: It does not pay in the East to let pipsqueaks beard the mighty. (1930)
pie-eater, pie-biter (1911) Australian; applied
to an insignificant person, especially a petty
criminal
Kylie Tennant: He's one of those big he-men
that go sneaking around the park waiting to snatch some
chrono's handbag. Just a pie-eater. (1953)
cog in a (or the) machine (1934) Orig US;
applied to someone with a necessary but
insignificant role in a large organization or
group
Erich Fromm: We have all become cogs in the
bureaucratic machine. (1976)
small-timer (1935) Applied to an insignificant
person; from small-time + -er
Roger Simons: She was a small timer when I met 'er.... Then she got so 'igh and
mighty she wouldn't speak to me. (1959)

21. Similarity
the like(s) of (1637) Used to denote other
similar people or things
Guardian: Naturally the likes of Time magazine wanted to find out about the gentle
giant's past. (1991)

spit (1885) Used in the phrase be the (dead) spit of
be an exact likeness or counterpart of; from
earlier phrase the very spit of, perhaps from the
notion of the likeness having been 'spat' out
Arthur Upfield: The son's the dead spit of the old man. (1953)
ringer (1891) Orig US; used in the phrase be a
(dead) ringer for (or of), be an exact likeness or
counterpart of; from earlier sense, one
fraudulently substituted for another
Sun: I didn't notice the fella at the time, but he really is a dead ringer
for Cap'n Bob. (1992)

ring (1899) Australian & New Zealand; used in
the phrase be the dead ring for (or of) be the exact
likeness or counterpart of; abbreviation of ringer
E. Hill: Now you're the dead ring o' that girl, and you speak
the same. (1951)
chip off the old block (1929) Used to denote
similarity in character to a parent or other older
relative; from earlier phrases chip of the same
block, chip of the old block
Somerset Maugham: His heir was a nephew... not a bad boy, but not a chip off the old
block, no, sir, far from it. (1947)

Boringly similar

samey (1929) British; from same + -y
Sunday Times: Many of his pictures of expensive men and women on
expensive horses seem samey. (1959)

22. Suitability
Suitable, in accordance with what one wants or
likes
up one's alley (1924) Orig US
Dale Carnegie:
Bridge will be in a cinch for you. It is right up your alley. (1936)
up (or down) one's street (1929) Compare
earlier obsolete in one's street in same sense
It: If you like Miles Davis's 'In a Silent Way' then Don Cherry has a
new release which is just up your street. (1977)
See also That which is wanted or needed at Wanting &
Getting (p. 210)

To be suitable
suit someone's book (1851) Orig bookmakers' slang; from the notion of being an acceptable
bet
Economist: An early election could suit Mr Mulroney's
suit someone down to the ground (1867)
R. N. Carey: It is tipping, Chriss, and suits you down to
the ground. (1903)

To be suited to (something); have the necessary
qualities for (something)
be cut out (1645) Followed by for or to and an
infinitive
M. Cost: 'I'm so sorry, Fanchon: 'N'importe!
You and Albert Augustus were cut out for tight-rope walking
from birth.' (1952)
D. H. Lawrence: My mother was... cut out to play a superior rôle in the
god-damn bourgeoisie. (1929)

have (got) what it takes (1929) Orig US
Billie Holiday: Sometimes I wonder how we survived. But
we did. If we didn't have what it took at the beginning, we
picked it up along the way. (1956)
23. Strangeness

Strange, odd, eccentric

rum (1774) An application of obsolete rum fine, splendid, as in rum cove fine fellow. ■ George Bernard Shaw: He must have been a rum old bird. . . . Not rum enough to be noticed. (1930)

freaky (1824) From freak odd thing or person + -y ■ Guardian: The orgasmic concerto . . . is typical of the best moments of this extraordinarily freaky film. . . . As an anarchic comedies go, it travels a good deal further than most. (1962)

zany (1918) Applied to something or someone amusingly or ridiculously strange; from earlier sense, buffoon-like ■ House & Garden: Luncheon-mats of the subtlest as well as the zaniest designs. (1959)

off-beat (1938) Orig US; from earlier musical sense, on an unaccented beat ■ Observer: It is the off-beat things, the eccentricities, that help give salerooms their perpetual appeal and surprise. (1959)

way-out (1959) From way far + out ■ Judson Philips: Vardon thought up a way-out scheme to commit a murder. (1972)

zonky, zonkey (1972) From zonked intoxicated + -y ■ Times: His book is really a study in ideas—or to coin an appropriately zonkey term—‘weirdology’ (1980)

24. Severity, Oppressiveness

Severe, hard, uncompromising

hard-nosed (1927) Orig US; from earlier sense, (of a hunting dog) having little or no sense of smell ■ Times: Dolly’s hard-nosed business approach to publishers probably did not have universal support. (1973)

heavy (1970) From earlier jazz slang sense, serious, profound ■ It: The Bournemouth drug squad (reputed to be one of the heaviest squads in the country). (1971)


To deal with severely, harshly, or oppressively

give someone beans (1835) Orig US ■ P. G. Wodehouse: He wanted to give me beans, but Florence wouldn’t let him. She said ‘Father you are not to touch him. It was a pure misunderstanding.’ (1946)

give someone hell (1851) ■ Ngaio Marsh: Gabriel would give me hell and we would both get rather angry with each other. (1940)

put someone through it (1872) Orig US ■ Agatha Christie: Mad as a hatter . . . My goodness, he must have put you through it now and again! (1976)

give someone the works (1920) Orig US ■ Detroit Free Press: The township socked the company with a building permit violation. (1978)

put someone through the wringer (1942) Orig US; often applied specifically to uncompromising interrogation; from the notion of wringing out wet clothes ■ Times: Not since the controversial Bishop of Durham . . . has an episcopal appointee been put through the wringer in this fashion. (1984)

shaft (1959) Orig & mainly US; often also implying unfair treatment; from the shaft harsh treatment ■ Debates of the Senate of Canada: As I have told my constituents in Hamilton, Ontario, which seems to have been continually shafted by this government. (1970)

clobber (1969) From earlier sense, hit ■ Daily Telegraph: Butlin’s is heavily clobbered by the increase in Selective Employment Tax. (1969)

Harsh treatment

the gaff (1896) US; in the phrase stand (or take, give, etc.) the gaff: probably from gaff steel spur for a fighting cock ■ W. M. Raine: Just because he shuts his mouth and stands the gaff. (1924)

stick (1942) Usually in the phrase get (or give) some stick; often implying harsh criticism; from the notion of striking with a stick ■ Daily Telegraph: I told him that he could expect trouble from the branches . . . He will come in for some stick over this. (1980)

the shaft (1959) Orig & mainly US; usually in the phrase get (or give) the shaft; from the notion...
of inserting a rod, etc. up someone's rectum - Modern Photography: I would give more of my business to Minolta but for the company's uncooperative, anti-consumer thinking. Doubtless there are many such as myself who have gotten the shaft. (1979)

A severe, hard, or uncompromising person

ball-breaker (1942), ball-buster (1944) Orig US: applied to a hard or demanding person, especially a person who sets difficult work or problems or a dominating woman who destroys the self-confidence of a man; from earlier sense, difficult problem - Neil Armstrong et al.: The quality control inspector is a sort of nitpicker. We're the ball breakers, in plain English. We're the most unwanted people. (1970)

ball-buster (1942) With the adjutant to reconnoitre training areas. (1945) - J. Welch: It would have been funny, Hartpence the hardass snitching, if Jack hadn't got stabbed. (1990)

25. Searching

To search a person or place

shake down (1915) Orig and mainly US; applied especially to the police; compare earlier sense, pressurize - Desmond Bagley: Once Mayberry had been shaken down the guards were taken from Penny and Gillian. (1977). Hence the noun shake down a search of a person or place (1914) - Landfall: But about nine o'clock, without any warning, there was a shake-down [of prisoners]. (1958)

toss (1939) US, police slang - Ed McBain: We ought to try for an order to toss his apartment. (1980). Hence the noun toss such a search (1970) - James Mills: You wanna give her a toss, give her a toss, but let's not stand here to try for an order to toss his apartment. (1980). Hence the noun toss such a search (1970) • James Mills: You wanna give her a toss, give her a toss, but let's not stand here to try for an order to toss his apartment. (1980)

spin (1972) British, police slang; often in the phrase spin the drum search the place - J. Barnett: We iron him to the banisters while we spin the drum from top to bottom. (1982)

To search a person

frisk (1789) From earlier sense, move in a lively way; from the notion of searching rapidly - New Statesman: Showing his teeth in a vicious snarl as they frisk him and open his jacket to feel under his arm. (1970)

go through (1961) - G. F. Newman: Thought I'd have a punt around, see who's about. (1974)

To search for in order to harm

gun for (1888) From the notion of going in search of someone with a gun - New York Times: Others talked of mysterious influences that had been 'gunning' for financiers of prominence. (1903)

To search an area or place

scout around (or about, round) (1866) - G. V. Higgins: We're even bigger suckers for a planted story . . . if we really had to scout around for it. (1977)

recco, reccey (1943) Orig military slang; short for reconnaissance - Evelyn Waugh: I'm going out myself with the adjutant to recce training areas. (1945)

recon (1966) US military slang; abbreviation of reconnaissance - Ian Kemp: Our orders are to recon only, and avoid all contact with the enemy whatsoever. (1969)

punt around (1970) British, police slang; applied to patrolling an area; probably from punt place a bet

ball-breaker (1942), ball-buster (1944) Orig US: applied to a hard or demanding person, especially a person who sets difficult work or problems or a dominating woman who destroys the self-confidence of a man; from earlier sense, difficult problem - Neil Armstrong et al.: The quality control inspector is a sort of nitpicker. We’re the ball breakers, in plain English. We’re the most unwanted people. (1970)

recco, recce (1941) Orig military slang; short for reconnaissance - Arthur Hailey: I sometimes think about two guys in Korea, close buddies of mine. We were on a recce patrol near the Yalu river. (1979)

punt (1974) British, police slang; used in the phrase have a punt around patrol an area; from the verb punt - G. F. Newman: Thought I'd have a punt around, see who's about. (1974)
To search inquisitively

**ferret (1580)** From the earlier sense, hunt with ferrets; from the notion of the ferret as a restless and assiduous searcher. **Sunday Times**: The referee is supposed to make an instant decision but M Dume decided to wait and ferret around underneath the bodies. (1993)

**nose (1648)** ■ P. G. Wodehouse: He began to nose about. He pulled out drawer after drawer. (1925) ■ Rosamond Lehmann: I thought of her nosing in my room for signs. (1936)

**poke (1715)** From the notion of poking one’s nose into things ■ James Payn: Having a lawyer to poke and pry into his accounts. (1888)

To investigate or assess a person, situation, etc.

**suss, sus (1969)** Usually followed by out; from earlier sense, grasp, realize ■ Daily Mirror: It took me about half a day to suss out the industry and realise how easy it would be to move in. (1977)

**scope out (1977)** US ■ R. B. Parker: I leaned against the front wall... and scoped things out. (1986)

To search for different possibilities

**shop around (1922)** From the notion of comparing the quality and price of a particular item in various shops ■ J. I. M. Stewart: It’s usual to shop around a little. To send in a list of three or four colleges. (1976)

To search for information

**pump (1656)** Applied to persistent questioning to elicit information

**pick someone’s brains (1838)** Denoting eliciting information from someone; from the notion of picking (= stealing from) someone’s pocket ■ Laurence Maynell: The old fool is thinking of writing a book about collecting furniture and she means to pick everybody’s brains. (1962)

**grill (1894)** Applied to persistent questioning to elicit information; from earlier sense, cook on a grill ■ Radio Times: Listeners will be able to ‘grill’ leading public figures over the air when It’s Your Line, a new-style ‘live’ current affairs programme begins. (1970)

To find by searching

**ferret something out (1577)** ■ Joseph Conrad: My friend took the trouble to ferret out the complete record of that man for me. (1907)

**nose something out (a1630)** ■ Doris Lessing: What people were trying to do, in their continual moving about and around, nosing out news, taking in information, was to isolate residues of truth in rumour. (1974)

**dig something up (1861), dig something out (1864)** ■ O. Henry: Ogden digs up a deck of cards, and we play casino. (1909) ■ P. Williams: It was Carolyn who... dug out two old volumes of eighteenth century pictures lying forgotten in a cupboard. (1929)

**sniff something out (1946)** ■ J. Barnett: You should concentrate more on sniffing out the sex fiends than speculating on spies. (1979)

An ability to find things

**a nose for (1875)** ■ J. Cassells: He was a damned good reporter... and he had a nose for a story. (1972)

### 26. Intrusion

**poke (stick, shove, etc.) one’s nose in (1611)** ■ Mark Pattison: A flourishing Evangelical, who poked his nose into everything. (1883)

**stick (shove, get, etc.) one’s oar in (1630)** ■ J. R. Ackerly: One who preferred to stand outside of life and observe it, not (as he would have phrased it) to ‘put one’s oar in’. (1968)

**butt in (1899)** Orig US; from butt shove with the head ■ E. Eager: ’I’m sorry,’ he said, ’butting in like this, but I’ve got to tell you something.’ (1957)

**horn in (1912)** Orig US; often followed by on; from the notion of an ox pushing in with its horns ■ P. G. Wodehouse: I suppose she felt she owed you something, after horning in on your big scene like that and trying to steal your publicity the way she did. (1936)

**mess with (1913)** Orig and mainly US; used to denote interfering, especially with someone or something one cannot handle ■ Guardian: Then, as if to say ’don’t mess with me’, Seles let fly. In another 19 minutes it was all over. (1991)

**crash (1921)** Orig US; used to denote entering without permission ■ Roy Fuller: I hope you’ll forgive me crashing your excellent party. (1953)

**muscle in (1929)** Often followed by on ■ John Wainwright: ’The Pondrosa’ was his spread, and no cheap, jumped-up, fiddle-foot was gonna muscle in. (1973)

**stickybeak (1933)** Australian & New Zealand; from the noun stickybeak inquisitive person ■ Lawson Glassop: You deny me the right to think as I like... You must prod, and pry, and sticky-beak. (1945)

**get into the act, get (or be) in on the act (1947)** Orig US; used to denote involving oneself in an activity ■ Spectator: President Chamoun got back into the act by announcing that they would not be asked to withdraw from the Lebanon. (1958)

**prodnose (1958)** From the noun prodnose inquisitive person ■ Daily Telegraph: It is perhaps high time that the industrial psychologists who are encouraged to prodnose into most things got to work on the Press. (1969)

**hack into (1985)** Used to denote gaining unauthorized access to a computer system; probably from earlier sense, cut roughly ■ Times: The cost of restoring a computer system which is hacked into can run into hundreds and thousands of pounds for investigating and rebuilding the system. (1989)
27. Involvement

Involved (in)

mixed up (1822) ■ M. Hebden: I'll throw this into Pinnow's lap. It's German and high-level, and I don't want to be mixed up in it. (1970)

in on (1923) ■ Michael Innes: Don't imagine I have the slightest wish to be in on your muckraking. (1973)

in on the act (1951) Orig US ■ Listener: No one for a moment supposes that Friendly will not be in on the act. (1967)

into (1969) ■ It. He was basically into being a hustler, which he was very, very good at. (1969)

Involvement

a piece (share, etc.) of the action (1957) Orig US; applied to involvement in a (potentially) profitable activity ■ Maclean's Magazine: And last year mink breeders from Scandinavia to California were falling over themselves to buy a piece of the action. (1966)

To be involved

have a finger in the pie (1659) ■ Recruiters' Bulletin: Even though us 'gobs' were on the

To become involved

get (climb, hop, jump, etc.) on the bandwagon (1899) Orig US; denoting joining what seems likely to be a successful enterprise; from band-wagon large wagon capable of carrying the band in a procession, hence one earring a band of successful (political) leaders ■ Hansard Commons: The Tory party are now trying to climb on to the band wagon. (1950)

get into (or in on) the act (1947) Orig US ■ Spectator. President Chamoun got back into the act by announcing that they would not be asked to withdraw from the Lebanon. (1958)

To cause to become involved

let in for (1837) Usually denoting involvement in an unwelcome responsibility; often used reflexively ■ James Curtis: I don't want to say 'O.K.' and then find out that I've let myself in for... doing a blag on the crown jewels. (1936)

28. Sharing, Distribution

A sharing out

carve-up (1935) Applied to a sharing out of spoils, often dishonestly gained ■ News Chronicle: In practice it is a carve-up among the Big Four. (1959)

A share given or received

slice (1550) ■ Sunday Times: Aided by a slice of luck and their own courage, Waterloo held out. (1993)

A busybody

yenta, yente (1923) US; Yiddish, originally a personal name

An imposter

ringer (1896) US; from earlier sense, one substituted for another ■ Malcolm Bradbury: This is quite a party. I'm going to feel a real ringer. (1965)

Inquisitive

nosey, nosy (1882) From nose + -y; from the notion of sticking one's nose into something ■ Daily Express: Marylebone man: Being nosey, I goes to 'ave a look. Magistrate: Being what? Clerk: Nosey; meaning curious. (1928)

Non-intrusion

leave someone or something be (1825) A colloquial substitution of leave for let ■ Eugene O'Neill: Leave Hugo be! . . . He's earned his dream! (1946)

A sharing out

carve-up (1935) Applied to a sharing out of spoils, often dishonestly gained ■ News Chronicle: In practice it is a carve-up among the Big Four. (1959)

A share given or received

slice (1550) ■ Sunday Times: Aided by a slice of luck and their own courage, Waterloo held out. (1993)
job, and now I'm also lined up with a can-house, and get my split on anybody I bring there. (1934)

cut (1818) Orig US. • New York. The net proceeds of a $2 million stock offering after the underwriter had taken his cut. (1970)

chop (1819) Australian & New Zealand; especially in the phrase be in for one's chop. • D. H. Crick: Tell him his quid today'll be worth ten bob tomorrow, so he better get in for his chop. (1966)

To contribute a share to something

chip in (1861) Orig US; from the notion of putting in or chipping stakes in a gambling game • Commentary: The help of the Ford Foundation (which chipped in more than $100,000). (1960)

muck in (1952) Denoting equal participation; from earlier sense, share arrangements or living accommodation. • Times: The company... all muck in, take small or big parts. (1970)

29. Avoidance

To avoid or evade something

dodge (1880) From earlier sense, move around, change one's position. • New Scientist: While research strives to remove the limit, products which dodge the issue are appearing. (1983)

cut (1791) Dated. • W. S. Maugham: She was prepared to cut an engagement in London. (1930)

wriggle out (1848) • Economist: Attempts by Saudi Arabia to wriggle out of its role as OPEC's 'swing' producer... look like succeeding. (1987)

duck (1896) Orig US; followed when intransitive by out of • M. M. Kaye: I should like to duck the whole situation by getting roaring drunk. (1959) • Sunday Times: He even tried to duck out of asking for the resignation of his own oldest friend, William Rogers, his first secretary of state. (1993)

give something a miss (1919) • Joanna Cannan: I'm afraid I've given church a miss this morning. (1950)

skive (1896) British, orig military slang; applied to avoiding one's work or duty; often followed by off; perhaps from French esquiver, dodge, slink away, or from earlier skew split or cut (leather, rubber, etc.), from Old Norse skifa. • J. Mann: The rubber, etc.), from Old Norse skifa, from earlier sense, pass over and split on anybody. (1822)

Dated • J. Ditton: He thought the sentry was on the skive. Thought he'd come down... for a cup of coffee. (1980)

A contribution solicited from a number of people

whip-round (1874) From earlier obsolete whip in same sense. • Centurian (Office Cleaning Services): It appears a whip-round for the drinks was suggested. (1977)

Equally or fairly shared

even Stephen, even Steven (1866) Rhyming phrase based on the male personal forename Stephen, Steven • Ray Bradbury: It's a fifty-fifty fight. Even Stephen. (1955)

fifty-fifty (1913) Orig US • Howard Wadman: It will take much of the sting out of the opposition if the ownership is fifty-fifty. (1949)

Per item

a throw (1898) Orig US • Author: The cost of research... The BBC Archives charge £2 a throw. (1975)

odds (1958) • G. F. Newman: I can't odds being mixed up in crime. (1970)

skip (1961) From earlier sense, pass over and move to the next. • K. H. Cooper: Women suffering from cramps find exercise extremely uncomfortable. Common sense alone tells them to skip exercise during those days. (1970)

weasel out (1962) Applied to avoiding an obligation, especially dishonourably; also used with one's way • Mario Puzo: A real fucking claim agent weaseling out of his obligations. (1978) • Spectator: Jilly Cooper was too kind-hearted to name those who weaseled out of the exercise. (1981)

To avoid at all costs

not touch something with (the end of) a barge-pole (1893) • Mrs Humphrey Ward: If he tries to leave me this funny old place... there are two can play at that game. I wouldn't touch it with a barge-pole. (1918)

not touch something with a forty-foot pole (1906), with a ten-foot pole (1909) • E. O. Schlunke: Attracting a lot of business of the more or less shady sort that our reputable men wouldn't touch with a forty-foot pole. (1958) • Paul Erdman: No respectable bank would touch our business with a ten-foot pole. (1974)

avoid like the plague (1835) • Ellis Peters: I will avoid him like the plague. (1979)

A narrow avoidance of danger

touch and go (1815) • Fraser's Magazine: Which... would have been a near go for his neck. (1841)

squeak (1822) Dated; also used in the phrases near squeak and tight squeak; see also narrow squeak • Arthur Ransome: You oughtn't to have waited. It's going to be a squeak getting home across the Wade. (1939)

near go (1827) Dated • Fraser's Magazine: Which...
30. Abandonment

To discard, get rid of

chuck (1879), chuck up (1864), chuck it (1888), chuck in (1944) From the notion of throwing down a towel, sponge, etc. into the boxing ring as an admission of defeat (see at Defeat p. 421) • G. K. Chesterton: But the souls of Christian peoples. . . Chuck it, Smith! (1915) • Freya Stark: This is my last on official paper, as I chuck this job on Friday week. (1933) • J. Tickell: Damn politics. Listen, I'll chuck it up and we'll go and live in Kerry. (1938) • Independent: The 24-year-old waitress chucked her job in to join the fight for independence. (1991)

sling (1902) Often followed by in or up • Kylie Tennant: We both slung in our jobs . . . and went off after him. (1953)

dump (1919) From earlier sense. deposit on a dump • Dal Stivens: Dumping me like this for a couple of dull sailors. (1946)

ditch (1921) From earlier sense, throw into a ditch • Peter Kemp: Davis . . . was struggling to carry the heavy wireless set; I shouted to him to ditch it and save himself. (1958)

kiss goodbye to (1935) Usually implying an involuntary or unwelcome separation from something • Val Gielgud: If she chooses one of the Eltham team for a partner, poor George can kiss the trophy goodbye. (1970)

pack up (1942), pack in (1943) • News of the World: He has been ordered to pack in his job and return for the final four weeks of term. (1976)

dice (1943) Australian; from earlier sense, gamble away by playing dice • F. Hardy: No bastard puts my daughter in the family way then dices her . . . and gets away with it. (1963)

To abandon, leave

leave in the lurch (1596) Denoting abandoning someone in adverse circumstances

A person who avoids things

ostrich (1898) Applied to someone who avoids facing up to the reality of a situation; from the myth that ostriches bury their head in the sand when pursued because they cannot tell the difference between seeing and being seen • Economist: A characteristic of these American manufacturers of more modest means is that they are neither ‘visionaries’ nor ‘ostriches’. (1987)

skiver (1941) Applied to someone who avoids work or duty; from skive + -er • Daily Telegraph: A Labour-controlled council is to crack down on ‘skivers’ following a report which alleges large scale absenteeism and sick leave among its manual workers. (1977)

dodger (1948) From dodge + -er • Morning Star: Heavier fines for TV and radio licence dodgers have been called for by the Postmaster General. (1969)
real rulers of this country now . . . Best thing we can do is to shut up shop and let 'em stew in their own juice. (1934)

Richard Gordon: His love for his old hospital, like one's affection for the youthful homestead, increased steadily with the length of time he had been shot of it. (1952) Daily Telegraph: Advising its members to make haste to get shot of unsuitable employees. (1976)

obsolete Scottish shoot avoid, escape Richard Gordon: His love for his old hospital, like one's affection for the youthful homestead, increased steadily with the length of time he had been shot of it. (1952) Daily Telegraph: Advising its members to make haste to get shot of unsuitable employees. (1976)
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