

## **Fly by the seats of your pants"**

Meaning: To do something without a clear plan, to improvise

Origin: Used in a 1938 headline to describe Douglas Corrigan's 29 hour flight from Brooklyn to Dublin, which was meant to be to California. Corrigan had filed for a transatlantic flight two days earlier but it was rejected because his plane was not considered fit for the job. Upon landing in Dublin he claimed his compass had packed up...

## **"Mad as a hatter"**

Meaning: To be completely insane

Origin: In the 18th and 19th century mercury was used in felting – and hat making; the madness of hat makers was the result of mercury poisoning

## **"Kick the bucket"**

Meaning: To die

Origin: Popular understanding is that in a lynching someone would kick the bucket away from under the person about to be hanged. However, a 1570 English dictionary records the word 'bucket' as a synonym for 'beam' - animals for slaughter would be hung upside down from such a beam and would kick the bucket (or beam) in their struggle during slaughter

## **"It's raining cats and dogs"**

Meaning: Raining very hard indeed

Origin: An instance of rhyming slang after frogs were whipped into the air during a storm and came back down again with the rain (as testified to in historical accounts)

## **"Win hands down"**

Meaning: To do something without a great effort

Origin: In horse racing, a jockey winning comfortably does not need to use a whip and can ride to the finishing lines with his 'hands down'

## **"Skeleton in the cupboard"**

Meaning: Something embarrassing to hide

Origin: Until the 1830s it was illegal to dissect human bodies, so grave-robbers and murderers supplied medical schools and doctors with bodies. These had to be hidden in case of raids. William Thackeray, satirical writer of Vanity Fair, used this phrase for the first time in print in 1845.

**Butter Up:** Meaning: To flatter someone with the aim of getting them to be of assistance  
Origin: A figurative saying to illustrate that someone is smothered in pleasantries

### "Taking the Mickey"

Meaning: To make fun of someone

Origin: As so often in rhyming slang, the actual rhyming word, Mickey 'Bliss' is left out. Some sources claim he was a 1950s BBC radio personality, but Mr Bliss remains elusive

### "Red herring"

Meaning: Something misleading

Origin: To train young hunting dogs to follow a scent, the carcass of a cat or fox or, at a pinch, a smoked and salted herring (of a reddish colour) would be dragged along the ground. There is also the suggestion that it would have been used to see if the dogs would be put off the scent they were meant to follow

### "Haven't seen you in donkey's years"

Meaning: In a long time

Origin: The longevity of donkeys and the length of their ears

### "Storm in a teacup/tempest in a teapot"

Meaning: A lot of trouble or argument over nothing of importance

Origin: The 'tempest' in a teacup or teapot is an image used in Roman philosopher Cicero's De Legibus in approximately 100 BC. 'Billows in a spoon'

### "Sweet Fanny Adams"

Meaning: Emphatically nothing at all

Origin: This can be seen as a euphemism with Fanny Adams standing for F. A. Fanny Adams (8) was the victim in a 1867 murder case, cut into pieces and thrown into the River Wey. A broadside ballad about the murder referred to her as 'sweet'; a term British Naval slang later adopted to refer to tinned stew, apparently not very popular with the sailors

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"Kick the bucket"	"It's raining cats and dogs"
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"Red herring"	"Haven't seen you in donkey's years"
"Storm in a teacup/tempest in a teapot"	"Sweet Fanny Adams"