

## 11. Where is my favourite idiom?

Idioms – even the most vivid and memorable ones – are surprisingly rare in actual language use. In fact, that may be precisely what makes them so striking. You might wonder how often expressions like *cry over spilt milk*, *be like a bull in a China shop* or *honesty is the best policy* occur. The answer: less than 0.1 per million words. These particular idioms aren't included in the main dictionary due to their low frequency, but this thematic box highlights a selection of similarly notable idioms that do appear in the BNC2014, each with a frequency between four and 10 occurrences in the entire corpus.

<i>Idiom</i>	<i>Frequency in the BNC2014</i>	<i>Frequency per million</i>	<i>Idiom</i>	<i>Frequency in the BNC2014</i>	<i>Frequency per million</i>
long time no see	10	0.10	the scales fall from sb's eyes	6	0.06
be in the limelight	10	0.10	throw under the bus	6	0.06
have good innings	10	0.10	flog a dead horse	5	0.05
nail your colours to the mast	10	0.10	if you can't beat them, join them	5	0.05
a bird in the hand (is worth two in the bush)	9	0.09	the cherry on the cake	5	0.05
grist to the mill	9	0.09	apples and oranges	5	0.05
keep one's eye on the ball	9	0.09	honesty is the best policy	5	0.05
be a busy bee	9	0.09	a picture is worth a thousand words	5	0.05
straw that broke the camel's back	9	0.09	an apple a day keeps the doctor away	5	0.05
be like a bull in a china shop	9	0.09	all's fair in love and war	5	0.05
go off at/on a tangent	8	0.08	cry over spilt milk	4	0.04
keep your cards close to your chest	8	0.08	mad as a hatter	4	0.04
eat humble pie	6	0.06	rob Peter to pay Paul	4	0.04
castles in the air	6	0.06			
be in sb's bad/good books	6	0.06			