



Cut the Mustard



As with many slang and idiomatic phrases, its origin is muddy. The first recorded use of this phrase was by American writer **O. Henry** in **1907**, in a short story entitled ***The Heart of the West***: “I looked around and found a proposition that exactly cut the mustard”. The modern sense of the idiom is **‘to succeed’** or **‘to have the ability to do something’**, but the phrase is most often used in the **negative form** with the meaning of ‘not being able to handle the job’. The cut probably refers to harvesting the plant, so if one cannot cut the mustard, one cannot supply what is best. A harbinger to this expression was ***to be the mustard*** (c. 1903) meaning **‘to be special’** or **‘to be exactly what is needed’**. A further related idiom is ***keen as mustard***, meaning **‘very enthusiastic.’**