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1. wag the dog 74 up, 2 down

When something of secondary importance improperly takes on the role of something of primary importance. The expression pre-dates the movie by the same name, and was NOT coined by said movie. Concentrate on the dog wagging his tail, not on that the tail might wag the dog.

[idiom expression of speech](#) [figurative language](#) [wag the dog movie](#) [logical fallacy](#)

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2. wag the dog 9 up, 15 down

To cause a desired result by means other than the obvious or rational method. Imagine you want a dog to wag it's tail. You should make the dog happy, and the tail will wag. If you can't or won't make the dog happy, you can get the tail to wag by "wagging the dog".

When the college saw that black students were failing Calculus at a disproportionately high rate to their enrollment, they decided to wag the dog by making the tests less difficult.

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3. wag the dog 23 up, 51 down

To start a war or military operation to divert negative political attention away from yourself. Based on the movie of the same name, where the President fabricates a fake war to take political pressure away from a scandal.

When Carter ordered Operation Eagle Claw he was playing wag the dog, because he was a very unpopular and weak President and wanted to seem like he handled it strongly.

It is suggested that Clinton wagged the dog by helping NATO bomb Kosovo at the same time as the Lewinski scandal. This theory came about because the film had just been released.

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