Examples

1. Don’t count your chickens before they hatch – just because your horse is in the lead now, doesn’t mean he will be by the end of the race.

2. Wait until you’ve signed the contract. You shouldn’t count your chickens before they hatch, the company might pull out at the last moment.
Do you know the idiom ‘don’t count your chickens before they’ve hatched’?
Do you know what ‘don’t count your chickens before they’ve hatched’ means?

When we say ‘don’t count your chickens before they’ve hatched’, we mean that you should not assume you will have something/something will happen before it actually does.

The message of this phrase is that we should not make plans that rely on something that has not happened yet/that we do not have yet.

Other phrases that mean a similar thing are:
- ‘don’t jump the gun’
- ‘cross that bridge when you come to it’.
Origins: the story

Although a chicken lays eggs, not every egg will lead to a hatched chick. So we shouldn’t count our chickens before they’ve hatched.

There are several folktales that link to this idea of not counting on what hasn’t happened yet. For example ‘The Milkmaid and Her Pail’, a milkmaid carries a pail (a bucket) of milk on her head and dreams of selling the milk, purchasing chickens with her earnings and then becoming rich from selling the eggs. Unfortunately, she is so focused on this wonderful dream that the pail of milk falls from her head.

The tale ends with: ‘Do not count your chickens before they are hatched.’ Her dream is destroyed before it could even begin.
Consider

• When have you counted your chickens before they’ve hatched?
• Can you think of a time when you were right as well as a time when you were wrong?

• How did your prior counting of the chickens affect how you felt during and after the situations you’ve identified?

• When might it be useful to plan ahead?
• Are there any times that we shouldn’t count our chickens before they’ve hatched?