Dear Friends,

I present here a collection of the Article- “Know Your English” published in the New Paper- THE HINDU- every Tuesday .This Article definitely improves the vocabulary, phrases and usage of English .The presentation is very lucid with the history of the word, phrase in context wherever possible. You find some interesting and amusing quotes too . I have collected these articles available in the public domain and did some homework of mine to put it in a more presentable form. I wish this collection will be of some use for those who want to improve and enhance their command over English.

Please send your comments for improvement to [saneevpeeka@gmail.com](mailto:saneevpeeka@gmail.com) for me to come out with the next KYE series

Warm Regards and Best Wishes

Sanjeev Peeka

1. **What is the meaning of the word "CAVEAT" ?**

"Caveat" is a word which is mostly used in formal contexts and it means WARNING or CAUTION .

When two people make a deal, they usually stipulate that certain conditions have to be met. If they are not met, then the deal is off. A "caveat" is a proviso. Here are a few examples.

\*She agreed to the divorce with one caveat — that he would never see the children again.

I'll agree to the deal with one caveat — that you will not enter into a deal with any other company.

The expression "caveat emptor" means, "buyers beware". In other words, when you buy something, it is your responsibility to ensure that everything is fine.

1. **What is the plural of "formula"?**

The Latin plural "formulae" is the preferred word in scientific contexts, while "formulas" is used elsewhere.

For example, one talks about "mathematical formulae" and "political and diplomatic formulas".

**3. What is the difference between "convicted" and "sentenced"?**

These are words frequently used in law. Once the lawyers have presented their case, the judge/jury then makes a decision as to whether the defendant (the individual who is on trial) is guilty or not. If he is found guilty, he is convicted of the crime that he has been accused of. A convicted individual is one who has been found "guilty" in a court of law.

Once the defendant has been found guilty, the judge then decides what his punishment should be. Should the person be sent to prison for life or should he be hanged? Maybe the person should be made to pay a fine of some sort and then set free. These are the decisions that a judge has to make once he convicts a person.

The punishment that the judge gives the individual on trail is the "sentence".

**4. What is the meaning of "shimmy"?**

Some people when they walk, shake their hips and shoulders side to side. This is what we mean by "shimmy"; it is a word that is normally associated with dancing.

\*As the singer shimmied across the stage, the audience went wild. In American English, the word is also used in informal contexts to mean, "vibrate or shake".

\*The front wheel of Velu's scooter shimmied

**5. How is the meaning of the word "scourge" ?**

A "scourge" is a whip normally used to flog people. The word can also be used to refer to a person or a thing. When you refer to an individual as a "scourge", what you mean is that he is someone who causes a lot of suffering for others — just like the whip!

\*The President wants to put an end to the scourge of terrorism.

**6. What is the meaning of "on the qui vive" ?**

I understand that soldiers in France who were on duty during the night used this expression. Whenever they saw a figure approaching or heard some noise, they used to shout "qui vive", meaning, "Who goes there?" or "Long live who?" The person approaching was expected to respond by saying, "vive le roi", meaning, "Long live the king". Since the sentinel on duty had to be alert, the expression "on the qui vive" is used to mean, "watchful" or "alert".

\*With the elections around the corner, the police have been asked to be on the qui vive.

**7. What is the difference between "sob" and "weep"?**

In both cases, tears flow from the eyes. "Weep" is mostly used in writing, and is considered a literary word. When you say that someone is weeping, you are focussing on the tears, and not on the sounds that accompany it.

Weeping is usually done silently, which is why you never talk about a baby weeping. Babies cry — a lot of noise accompanies the tears that flow from their eyes. One can weep for various reasons; we can weep with sorrow, and we can weep with joy.

Sobbing is always done loudly; it is accompanied by a lot of noise. The heroines in our films sob a lot. Sobbing involves gasping for breath and this results in a lot of chest heaving. The word is usually associated with misery; unlike "weep", one cannot "sob" with joy.

**8. What is the meaning and origin of "ringside view"?**

When you have a "ringside view" of an event, you have an excellent view of it. It is also possible to say "ringside seat".

\*Sheela was sitting on the terrace and had a ringside view of the accident.

There are many idioms that come from the sport of boxing, and "ringside view" is one of them. The "ring" refers to a "boxing ring". If during a boxing bout you are lucky enough to have a seat close to the ring, you can see all the action very clearly.

**9. What is the past tense of "quit"?**

Depending on the context, the word has two possible past tense forms — quit and quitted. When used to mean, "to leave" you can use both. For example, "Venu quit/quitted his job and moved to Chennai." The word "quit" can also be used to mean, "to stop". We can, for example say, "Venu has quit gambling". In this context, it is incorrect to use "quitted".

The word "quitted" is going out of fashion; it is mostly used in formal contexts.

**10. What is the meaning of "watchdog agency"?**

Most people keep a watchdog in order to protect their house. When you refer to a group of people as being a "watchdog" committee or agency, what you are implying is that they are ensuring that your rights are being protected. They make sure that the companies, governments, etc, follow the letter of the law, and do not cheat the public. A watchdog agency looks after the interests of the public.

\*We are hoping to set up an anti-drug watchdog agency soon.

**11. What is the origin of "yellow journalism"?**

When someone accuses a newspaper of "yellow journalism" what they mean is that it presents the news in a biased manner.

It distorts the facts and sensationalises the news in order to get the public to buy the paper.

It attempts to increase its circulation, not by providing accurate news, but by appealing to the public's curiosity. The term "yellow journalism" is no longer restricted to newspapers alone, it includes all other forms of media — television and radio.

\*Some of the local newspapers are classic examples of yellow journalism.

The expression was popularised in the late 19th Century in the U.S. Two newspapers, "New York World", owned by Joseph Pulitzer, and "New York Journal", owned by William Randolph Hearst, were trying to become very popular among the public by printing sensational stories. Both newspapers specialised in muckraking. The "World" had a popular comic strip called "Hogan's Alley" in which the character "Yellow Kid" appeared.

Hearst played dirty and got "Hogan's" creator, R. F. Outcault, to join his paper.

The angry Pulitzer hired another artist and asked him to continue with the "Yellow Kid". The competition between the two yellow kids led to an all out war between the two papers.

There was a court battle over the copyright, and very often, street fights broke out between the delivery boys of the rival newspapers.

The fight between Hearst and Pulitzer over the "Yellow Kid" began to symbolise everything that was wrong with American journalism.

**12.What is the difference between "impassive" and "impassioned"?**

When something bad happens and you remain "impassive" what you are doing is keeping a wooden face. You are not displaying an emotion of any kind. It could be you do not feel any emotion, or you have chosen to hide it. The heroes in many of our movies remain impassive in all situations. They are the strong silent men who remain unmoved.

\*After killing the man with his knife, the hero looked on impassively at the sea.

"Impassioned", on the other hand, means someone who is "full of passion", an individual who displays intense feeling about something or someone.

\*The impassioned speech by the Vice-Chancellor brought the audience to its feet.

**13. What is a "brochure" ?**

A "brochure" is a booklet containing information about something.

\*We want to bring out a brochure for the upcoming seminar.

**14. What is the meaning of "once bitten twice shy"?**

If you fall in love with a girl and the girl ditches you, what would your reaction be? You would probably be really angry, but at the same time you would be scared to fall in love again. Having had a bad experience previously, you would be reluctant to put yourself in the same situation again. That's what the idiom, "once bitten twice shy", means.

\*The caterer arrived three hours late last time, so Rama is not hiring him again. I guess it's a case of once bitten twice shy.

\*The last time he ate fish, he almost choked. He's stopped eating fish altogether — once bitten twice shy.

**15. What is the meaning of "modus vivendi"?**

In Latin, it means a "manner of living", or a "way of life". In English, however, the expression is not used to mean this. It is used to refer to a compromise, usually temporary, between two parties that are fighting each other. One often hears this expression used by foreign ministers. If someone in the foreign ministry were to say, "If India and Pakistan want to avoid a nuclear holocaust, a modus vivendi must be attained," what he means is that despite the many differences, the two countries must find a way of coexisting peacefully.

\*The two rival gangs managed to achieve a sort of modus vivendi.

**16. What is the difference between "intuitively" and "instinctively"?**

If someone were to shine a bright light on your face, you would automatically close or shield your eyes. You would do these things without even thinking. They are responses you are born with; they are "innate". This is what we mean by "instinctively". We respond to things without really understanding why we react that way. Our responses are automatic; whatever happens, happens unconsciously. Both animals and human beings are born with instincts.

\*When Raju heard gunfire, he instinctively dived/dove for cover.

When you do something intuitively, you do react automatically, but in this case there is a suggestion that you understand what it is you are doing. You are able to figure out a solution to your problem in a fraction of a second without really thinking about it. The story goes that the structure of Benzene came to the chemist Kekule in a sudden moment of insight. This is a case of intuition, not instinct. The word "intuition" is mostly used with human beings, and not with animals.

\*Hari intuitively began to attack his opponent's backhand.

17. What is the difference between "blue collar worker" and

"pink collar worker"?

A "blue collar worker" works in an industry and is always involved in manual labour. You will find this individual in factories sweating it out on the shop floor. You won't find him sitting behind a huge desk in an office. Nowadays, the term can be applied to both men and women. "Pink collar workers", on the other hand, are always women. Low paid jobs available in offices and restaurants are usually referred to "pink collar jobs".

**18. What is the difference between "disposed of" and "disposed**

**off"?**

When you get rid of someone or something, you normally say "disposed of", not "disposed off". "Disposed off" is unacceptable.

\* I want to know how the murderer disposed of the bodies. In informal contexts, when you say that you disposed of someone, what you mean is that you killed him. Perhaps you hired someone to do the killing.

\* The don asked his hit man to dispose of his former accountant.

**19. Is it OK to say, "Wish you a Happy New Year 2005"?**

No, it is not. When you want to greet someone on the New Year, you say, "Happy New Year" or "Wish you a Happy New Year". Do not include the actual year — in this case 2005 — along with the greeting. If you want to give importance to the year, then say, "Happy 2005" or "Wish you a Happy 2005".

**20. What is the meaning of "too close to call"?**

This is an expression we hear very often from reporters during elections and from commentators during one-day matches. When you say that a game is too close to call, what you mean is that it is evenly poised, it is almost impossible to predict which team will emerge the winner. When used during elections, what it implies is that the two candidates are running neck and neck and therefore predicting the ultimate winner is not possible right now.

\*The counting is going on. The result is too close to call.

**21. What is the difference between "choose" and "pick"?**

Although many people tend to use the words synonymously these days, careful users of the language maintain a distinction between the two. Do you "choose" your life partner, or do you "pick" one? Normally people "choose" their significant other.

Choose suggests that you have opted for the individual after giving the matter some serious thought. You have weighed the pros and cons of an issue — in this case, marrying a person — and have arrived at a considered decision. It is voluntary.

Pick also means "selection", but in this case, there may not be any serious thinking involved. The word suggests that you have opted for something in a very casual manner — there may not be any decision making or discrimination involved.

For example, when you go to the supermarket and see several cans of the same product, you normally don't take too much time thinking about which can to buy. Since the same company has made them, you "pick" the can that is nearest you.

Most of us do not select our life partner in this casual manner. Similarly, we "choose" a present for someone we really like and care about — we buy the present keeping in mind the person's likes and dislikes.

If we "pick" a present, what we are doing is buying something in a casual manner. We don't keep in mind the individual's likes and dislike

**22. What is the meaning of "in one's good books"?**

When you say that you are "in someone's good books" what you mean is that the person likes you; he approves of you. Here are a few examples.

\*I have been in Ashwin's good books ever since I helped him change his flat tyre.

**23. What is the meaning of "Generation X"?**

In North America, people born between the mid-1940s and the mid-1960s are referred to as being part of the "Baby Boomer" generation.

Their children belong to "Generation X". The term is normally used to refer to people born between the mid-1960s and the early 1980s.

There is no agreement among scholars about the exact years. Generation X has certain negative connotations associated with it. The people belonging to this generation are supposed to be "materialistic", "apathetic", and "irresponsible". They lack a sense of direction.

All this is reflected in the other terms used to refer to this generation, "Baby Busters", "Slackers", and "Grunge Kids." The term, "Generation X" was first used by Paul Fussel in one of his articles. But it wasn't until 1991 when Douglas Coupland used "Generation X" as the title of his novel that the term caught on.

It became a household word thanks to advertisers.

**24. What does "leisure" means ?**

\*In her leisure time, Vandana goes sailing.

If you refer to a man as a "gentleman of leisure" what you mean is that he is in a position where he doesn't have to work. He has enough money to live on. A woman who is in a similar position is called "lady of leisure."

**25. What is the difference between "prevaricate" and**

**"procrastinate"?**

The words have very different meanings. When you "prevaricate" you avoid telling the truth; you are evasive. As kids, when we failed to do our homework and our teacher asked us why, we never gave her the real reason. Most of the time we made no attempt to answer her question directly — we prevaricated.

The word comes from the Latin "praevaricari" meaning, "Go crookedly." Politicians and lawyers are very good at evading the truth, aren't they?

\*Rani, give me a straight answer. Do not prevaricate.

"Procrastinate", on the other hand, has nothing to do with the truth. When we "procrastinate", we delay doing something. Indians are born procrastinators; things never get done on time in our country. Whenever we are given something to do, we keep putting it off to another day.

\*No more procrastination. I want this to be done by tomorrow.

Both words are used in formal contexts.

**26. What is the difference between "another" and "other"?**

"Another" is normally used to mean "one more". For example, you can ask your mother for another bowl of ice cream, or another plate of puris. The word can be used with both singular and plural nouns; when used with the plural noun , it is followed by "few". The Registrar will be retiring in another few days.

The use of the word "another" also suggests that you have more than two choices available. If you are in a showroom and you ask a salesperson to show you "another car", you are telling the individual that you want to see some other car — you are not interested in the ones that have been shown to you so far.

"Other", on the other hand, suggests that you have only two choices available. For example, if you were to say, "I am not interested in this car, but am interested in the other", what you mean is that you like the second car. A car that you have already seen. The choice here is between two cars.

**27. What is the meaning of "the worm has turned"?**

If you keep bullying someone all the time, at some point he will turn on you. Even the most mild-mannered person will put up with only so much. Normally, when you refer to an individual as a "worm", what you mean is that he is an unpleasant character. But in this idiom, it is gentleness or the harmlessness of the creature that you are referring to. You are saying that the person is a weak individual.

\*I wouldn't mess with Rajeev now if I were you. He has changed. The worm has turned.

**28. During funerals, people, especially women, cry or wail in a**

**funny sort of way. Is there a word for this?**

Yes, there is. I think the word you have in mind is "ululate".

"Ululate" is mostly used in formal contexts and means to howl or wail. This ritualistic wailing can be performed at times of mourning or celebration.

\*From a distance we could hear the ululation of the mourning women.

\*When he heard the news, Anand raised his hands and ululated.

**29. What is the meaning and origin of "cut and dry"?**

First of all, it is not "cut and dry", but "cut and dried". When you refer to a decision as being cut and dried what you mean is that it is final; it cannot be changed.

\*Bala's plans are cut and dried. You cannot make any changes now.

When you refer to a talk as being "cut and dried" what you mean is that it was uninteresting.

\*Hema's talk was cut and dried. She must brush up on her presentation skills.

According to some scholars the cut and dried material refers to timber. Wood that has been dried after cutting is ready for use. One can use it to light a fire. Some others believe that the idiom refers to the cut and dried herbs available in shops, which can be readily used in one's cooking.

**30. KNOW YOUR ENGLISH**

"Did you read the review of your favourite author's latest book in today's paper?"

"Not yet. But I heard that whoever wrote it did a HATCHET JOB on the... ."

"... a hatchet job? Don't think I have heard that expression before."

"Americans usually refer to an axe as a hatchet. When you say that some reporter did a hatchet job on you, what you mean is that he criticisd you severely in the media."

"Is it fair or unfair criticism?"

"Usually, unfair. It's criticism that ruins your reputation. For example, the reporter did a hatchet job on the new school. The editor called it investigative journalism."

"How about this example? The news channels did a hatchet job on the Chief Minister's visit to the drought hit areas."

"Sounds good."

"How would you react if someone were to do a hatchet job on something you had written?"

"I would be surprised if they didn't! Any news about your father's transfer?"

"Nothing so far. By the way, did Sujatha ask your boss for a transfer?"

"Yes, she did. Believe it or not, HE SAILED INTO HER for making such a request."

"How did he manage to do that sitting in his office? Don't tell me his office is on a boat!"

"Don't be silly. One of the meanings of `sail into someone' is to attack or scold someone. It's an expression usually used in informal contexts."

"I see. So can I say, when the team failed to enter the final, the coach sailed into the players?"

"You certainly can. Here's another example. The young bride sailed into her husband for bringing guests unannounced."

"Over the years, a lot of teachers have sailed into me for not doing my homework. Anyway, does this mean that you are not going to ask your boss for a raise?"

"In the mood that he is in right now, most definitely not. I suspect that he would think twice about giving a raise. If he does, he will be opening a new CAN OF WORMS ."

"Your boss sounds pretty strange. He `sails into' people and he keeps opening cans of worms. Tell me, does he sail into people with his can of worms?"

"Very funny. When someone says that he is going to do something, and you tell him not to open a can of worms, you are warning him not to do anything. You are suggesting that the situation is so complicated that if he starts dealing with the problem, he will only succeed in creating more problems for himself."

"In other words, by trying to solve the problem he will be creating more problems?"

"Exactly! Here's an example. Introducing my best friend's sister to my parents has opened up one big can of worms."

"I bet it did. By appointing someone who doesn't have the basic qualifications for the job, the Minister has opened a new can of worms for himself and the ruling party. Does that sound OK?"

"Sounds fine. I don't think you should write about corruption in the police force. You will be opening a can of worms."

"Don't worry about me, I am a vegetarian. I won't go anywhere near the worms."

"Aren't worms vegetarian?"

**31. What is the meaning of "blonde moment"?**

This is an expression of recent origin. In the United States, for several decades now, the word blonde has become synonymous with stupidity. Women with blonde hair have always been perceived as being beautiful but without an iota of intelligence — beauty without brains.

A very common expression associated with them is "dumb blonde". When you say that you had a "blonde moment" what you are implying is that you behaved like a typical blonde — you became scatterbrained and did something silly.

\*I don't know why I said what I did. I must have had a blond moment.

**32. What is the difference between "award" and**

**"reward"?**

An "award" is a prize that you receive for having done something noteworthy. It is always associated with something positive; you have done something which people approve of. It is a sign of appreciation. You could be awarded a medal, a prize, or a certificate by an organisation for an outstanding achievement. When judges bestow an award on you, they are honouring you.

\*The only award that Neelam ever won was the Pulitzer Prize.

A "reward", on the other hand, is usually associated with something valuable — money, for instance. You may get a reward for finding and returning someone's dog/cat. The police may offer a reward for information about an escaped convict. It is seen as something that you get as just compensation for the good that you have done or the hard work that you have put in.

For example, if you have worked really hard to write a novel, and later you receive an award for it, you may feel that it is a recompense for all the work you put in, that it is a reward for your effort.

While the word "award" is associated with only positive things,

"reward", on the other hand, can be associated with both good and bad. One can be rewarded for the evil one does as well.

**33. How is the word "bonhomie" pronounced?**

The "o" in the first syllable is like the "o" in "on", the following "h" is silent. The "o" in the second syllable is like the "a" in "china" and the final "ie" is like the "i" in "pit", "kit", and "bit". The main stress is on the first syllable. The word comes from the French "bon" meaning "good", and "homme" meaning "man". The word is used to refer to an individual's good nature, his easy and pleasant manner.

**34.What is the meaning of "fall on stony ground"?**

When someone gives you a piece of advice and you choose to ignore it, then you can say that the advice fell on stony ground.

In other words, the ground is so hard that nothing penetrates it. The expression, I understand, comes from the Bible and it has more or less the same meaning as "fall on deaf ears".

\*The Management's repeated requests to call off the strike have fallen on stony ground.

Bonhomie won the hearts of all those who came into contact with him.

**35. Is it okay to say, "The teacher was angry on the**

**students"?**

There is a tendency among Indians to use the word "on" with "angry", but it is wrong to do so. You cannot be "angry on" or "pleased on" a person. Both these words are usually followed by "with".

\*The new principal was pleased with the children's performance.

**36. KNOW YOUR ENGLISH**

"Looks like our team snatched another draw from the jaws of victory."

"Yes, Ganguly and his men seem to specialise in that. I am sure your cousin, Prasad, the dyed-in- the-wool cricket fan had a lot to say about the first test."

"My cousin is very much alive. He did not die in any wool. What are... ."

"I did not mean d..i..e..d, but d..y..e..d. When you refer to someone as being "dyed-in-the-wool" what you mean is that he or she has very strong opinions about something. Opinions that are not easily changed."

"In other words, the person is very stubborn. His beliefs cannot be changed."

"I guess you could say that."

"My cousin Vindya is a dyed-in-the-wool traditionalist. She believes that a woman's place is in the kitchen."

"Good grief! Where did she get such an old fashioned idea? I understand that my grandfather was a dyed-in-the-wool conservative."

"My neighbour claims to be a dyed-in-the-wool communist. But he lives in a huge house and drives a Benz."

"Some communists in our country do that! Tell me, what is the origin of `dyed-in-the-wool'?"

"I understand that wool that is dyed before it is spun into yarn retains its colour. The colour becomes permanently fixed. Anyway, tell me what did Prasad have to say about the match?"

"He said that someone should have told Tendulkar to score quickly."

"No one could get in touch with Sachin. Since he was performing at the crease, he had his cell switched off!"

"Very funny! What was your reaction to the draw?"

"Well, after the first drinks interval, I kind of sensed that our overpaid underachievers weren't going to win. So I started channel hopping."

"Channel hopping? Does it mean the same thing as channel surfing?"

"Yes, that's right! When you channel surf or hop, you keep switching from one channel to another using the remote control."

"Mohan constantly channel surfs. You can't watch any programme with him."

"My constant channel hopping drives my mother up the wall."

"I can imagine. Your mother wants everything just right. She... ."

"... .she is a bit of a control freak, isn't she?"

"You are calling your mother a freak? How can you do that?"

"All I am saying is that she is a control freak. In other words, she likes to be in total command of a situation. She feels this... .."

"... she has an obsessive need to have control over herself and others around her?"

"Exactly! Control freaks need to feel they have control over everything around them. Including the people. They must be in total command of the situation. I am told that Anand's wife Sonia is a control freak."

"Oh that she is. How about this example? My father's new boss is a control freak and he has made life miserable for everyone."

"Sounds good. I don't think I would like to work for a control freak."

"I don't think I would either. To tell you the truth, I just don't want to work!"

"That sounds like you."

**37. What is the meaning of "on a wing and a prayer"?**

If you say that you are writing an entrance exam "on a wing and a prayer", what you mean is that you are not confident that you will pass. You are hopeful, but chances are you are unlikely to succeed. You are relying more on luck, rather than your ability.

\*Anju was playing the game on a wing and a prayer. She had no idea what she should do to win.

\*Raju is taking the interview on a wing and a prayer.

The expression became popular during World War I.

The story goes that a pilot managed to land his plane successfully even though one of his wings had been badly damaged.

When his friends asked him how he had managed to land his crippled plane, the pilot replied that it was his prayers that kept the aircraft aloft. To which one of his fellow pilots quipped, "A wing and a prayer brought you back!"

**38. What does "Rx" stand for in a doctor's prescription?**

Many words commonly used in medicine come from Latin. The Rx is the abbreviation of "recipo" meaning, "take". The doctor is giving you a recipe for your cure and he wants you to take it!

If you look at a doctor's prescription carefully, you will find that a line runs across the foot of the letter R. This, I understand, is actually the symbol of the Roman god of medicine, Jupiter.

All medicines come under his protection. That's understandable, I guess. Given the illegible manner in which some doctors write their prescriptions, we need all the protection we can get!

**39. What does "peccadilloes" means ?**

The main stress is on the third syllable. A "peccadillo" is a minor sin or fault.

\*The star's latest extra marital peccadillo didn't go down well with his fans.

**40. What is the difference between "acquittal" and**

**"exoneration"?**

Very often an innocent man is accused of a crime and dragged to court. After the judge has heard both sides of the case, he usually finds him not guilty; the judge acquits the man of the crime.

This formal declaration made by the judge in a court of law is called an acquittal. The "a" in the first and final syllable is pronounced like the "a" in "china". The second syllable, which has the main stress, is pronounced like the word "quit". \*The trial resulted in an acquittal for the three men charged with first-degree murder.

The word "exoneration" has more or less the same meaning as "acquittal". When a judge exonerates someone of something, he is pronouncing the person not guilty. He doesn't find any evidence that the accused has done anything wrong. Unlike the word "acquittal", someone other than a judge can exonerate a person. For example, in government offices whenever something goes wrong, a committee is formed to determine the causes. The chairperson is also asked to find out if any particular individual is to be blamed for the failure.

If the committee finds that no one is to be blame, then everyone is exonerated. The official report that the person in authority writes exonerates everyone.

\*The long awaited report exonerated the teachers.

**41. What is the difference between "beautiful" and**

**"pretty"?**

Both words are normally used to refer to the pleasing appearance of the face — usually that of women.

Beautiful is the stronger word of the two. When you say that something is "beautiful" what you mean is that it is very close to perfection — at least according to the person looking at the object.

Remember, beauty lies in the eye of the beholder. Beauty is subjective, what is considered beautiful in one culture may not be considered beautiful in another.

One can use the word "beautiful" to talk about things that can be seen. For example, you can refer a woman's face as being beautiful, a house as being beautiful, and a scene as being beautiful.

In fact, you can even use the word with things that cannot be seen. For example, you can talk about a "beautiful plan" or a "beautiful smell".

he word "pretty", on the other hand, is not as complimentary as beautiful. When you refer to a woman as being "pretty" what you mean is that she is attractive; she is graceful and full of life, but lacks the perfection.

She doesn't have the qualities to make her beautiful. Pretty is seldom used with people or objects that are big; the word is usually restricted to objects that are small.

You cannot refer a 30-storey building as being a "pretty building". You can talk about a "pretty house" or "pretty shoes", but not a pretty building.

Similarly, a woman who is big built can be "beautiful", but not "pretty". The word "pretty" suggests that the person or object is pleasant to look at, but not necessarily impressive.

**42. What is the meaning of "set the cat among the**

**pigeons"?**

What would happen if you were to set a cat loose among the pigeons? How do you think the birds would react? They would be pretty worried, wouldn't they? The presence of the cat would create a great deal of disturbance. When you set a cat among the pigeons, you say or do something suddenly or unexpectedly. This often leaves the people worried or angry. It is also possible to say, "put the cat among the pigeons."

\*The principal set the cat among the pigeons when he informed the students that the annual day was likely to be cancelled.

**43. What is the meaning of "desk jockey"?**

Anyone whose job involves sitting behind a desk most of the time can be called a "desk jockey." The individual remains glued to his desk most of the time. Bank officers, accountants and most government officials can be called "desk jockeys."

These people are either constantly shuffling papers or on the phone most of the time. If you are a "desk jockey", maybe you should consider calling yourself a "D.J". Who knows, people may start looking at you differently!

\*Zaheer's father is a desk jockey in the new pharmaceutical company.

**44. What is the meaning of "underwriter"?**

This is a term frequently used by organisations that provide insurance. When an organisation "underwrites" an activity, it signs a contract which guarantees payment for any loss or damage to the goods.

A company that invests money to help an individual start a new project is called an underwriter. An individual can be an underwriter as well; his primary job is to study the risks involved in an activity and decide how much to charge as insurance. He determines the creditworthiness of a client. He is called an underwriter because he writes his name under the policy.

\* Do you think that your company would be willing to underwrite our new hospital?

**45. What does "inexorably" means ?**

"Inexorably" is mostly used in formal contexts. It refers to a process which cannot be changed or stopped; it is something which continues relentlessly.

\* Many feel that the crisis in Iran is moving inexorably towards war.

**46. What is the difference between "anoint" and**

**"appoint"?**

People who are "appointed" for a job are chosen by others for a particular position. An appointment is something official.

\* The members of the Board appointed Dravid captain.

"Anoint" has a religious connotation which "appoint" doesn't. When a priest anoints someone, he applies oil or water on some part of the individual; this is usually done as part of a religious ceremony.

\* The young priest anointed the old man's forehead with sandalwood paste.

It is also possible to "anoint" oneself with something. In this case, we are merely smearing ourselves with some sort of liquid.

For example, an individual can anoint herself with suntan lotion. When a person in authority, such as a priest, "anoints" someone, he chooses this individual for an important job.

\* The Archbishop anointed her queen.

In this example, the Archbishop is making the individual holy by anointing. In other words, he is consecrating the individual to office.

\* The former Prime Minister did not anoint anyone as his successor.

**47. What is the meaning and origin of "writing is on the**

**wall"?**

When Shahid Afridi blazed away to a century in 40-odd balls in the fifth one-day international, most of us knew who was going to win the match.

By the end of the 10th over, the writing was on the wall for India. When you say that the handwriting or writing is on the wall, what you mean is that something disastrous or bad is going to happen.

\* When the team lost in the first round of the playoffs, the writing was on the wall for the coach.

\* Prabhakar saw the handwriting on the wall when the company fired two more people.

The expression "handwriting on the wall" comes from the Bible.

The King of Babylon, Belshazzar, sees a hand mysteriously appear and write a message on a wall. Being unable to decipher the message, he summons Daniel. The wise man tells Belshazzar that the message is a warning from God that he will soon be overthrown and his kingdom destroyed.

***QUOTE:***

***"A diplomat is a man who remembers a woman's birthday, but never remembers her age."***

**48. What is the difference between "fight with" and**

**"fight against"?**

In some contexts, both phrasal verbs have more or less the same meaning. When you "fight against" or "fight with" someone, you do battle against the individual.

\*I refuse to fight against someone who is twenty years younger than me.

In the examples given, one could easily replace one phrasal verb with the other. It is also possible to "fight against" something as well. For example, one can fight against a disease, or one can fight against poverty.

In these two cases, you are doing battle against a disease and poverty. "Fight with" has an additional meaning. When you fight with something, you use a weapon as an instrument in your fight. For example, in the old days people fought with spears and swords.

Nowadays people fight with guns. Also, when you "fight with" someone, it could mean that you are joining hands with the individual to fight someone or something. In other words, you and the other individual are joining forces and fighting a common enemy. "Fight against" does not have this meaning.

\*I fought with him in Kashmir against the terrorists.

**49. Who is an "entrepreneur" ?**

An "entrepreneur", as you probably know, refers to someone who sets up a business; he usually starts something new.

when you refer to "entrepreneurship" you are talking about the activities associated with an entrepreneur.

The word is of French origin. By the way, the word "entrepreneur" has given rise to a new word, "intrapreneur".

Like an entrepreneur, this individual starts something new as well. But unlike the entrepreneur, an "intrapreneur" doesn't set up a business of his own. He works within an organisation and comes up with new inventions.

**50. KNOW YOUR ENGLISH**

"Hey, did your uncle ask for seed money?"

"No, I think he was too embarrassed to. But I hinted at the fact that I would be willing to help him out. Give this letter the once-over, will you?"

"The once-over? What does it mean?"

"When you give someone or something the once-over what you are doing is taking a quick look at the person or the object. You want to see what they are like."

"I see. How about this example? The student gave the paper the once-over before handing it to the teacher."

"Sounds good. After checking the handbag, the security guard gave me the once-over before he allowed me to enter the building."

"The principal gave the students the once-over and then began his speech."

"Now that you know the meaning, please give the letter the once-over!"

"O.K. I am done. It looks fine. Tell me, why do ...."

"....why were you smiling when you read the letter? Was it funny?"

"It had nothing to do with your letter. I remembered something strange that Sujatha said this morning. She said that I had a really cute smile."

"She's been saying such things to everyone I know. She's moving to a new flat, and I think she is looking for people to help her move. That's why she is laying it on thick."

"Laying what on thick? Talk English, will you?"

"When you say that someone is laying it on thick what you mean is that they are trying to flatter you. There's too much of praise, in fact. Yesterday, Sujatha called me handsome."

"Handsome! That's laying it on thick."

"I know. Of late, Sujatha has learnt how to lay it on really thick."

"But why would she need anyone to help her move? She has her cousin, Arvind. Haven't seen him in a while, though. Any idea where he is?"

"Hey, this is April. He must be busy cramming for his exams."

"Cramming? Does it mean the same thing as mugging?"

"Well, when you cram for a test, you study very hard for it. Usually at the very last minute. For example, Narender spent the entire weekend cramming for the chemistry test."

"How about this example? My father says that if I put in an hour's work every day, then I wouldn't have to cram."

"He has a point there. But I am sure when he was a student, your father spent many sleepless nights pounding the books."

"Pounding the books? Why would he do that? There's no need to...."

"....pounding the books is an informal expression meaning to study hard. Another expression which has more or less the same meaning is `hit the books'."

"As soon as I return home from school, I hit the books. How does it sound?"

"You hitting the books soon after your return home! Please stop, it's cracking me up."

"Cracking you up? What does it mean? Are you going mad?"

"When something cracks you up, it makes you laugh. When I saw the kitten slip on a banana peel, it just cracked me up."

"The principal's new wig cracked me up."

"Did you tell him he looked ridiculous?"

"No, we told him he looked great in it. We really laid it on thick."

***"Americans always do the right thing — after they have tried everything else."*—**

***Winston Churchill***

**51. Know Your English**

"Hey, where are you off to so early in the morning?"

"To the station. Have to pick up my uncle Balu."

"I remember your uncle Balu! Isn't he extremely tall and good looking?"

"He is tall, but the rest of him has gone to seed, I am afraid."

"You make your uncle sound like a plant. What does `gone to seed' mean?"

"When you say that someone has gone to seed, what you mean is that they are not as good looking or as healthy as they once were. For example, most actors go to seed once they quit the film industry."

"That's true. I ran into my former physics teacher the other day. He seems to have gone to seed."

"Sounds good. It is also possible to say, `run to seed'. My neighbour is running to seed."

"It is OK to use this expression with things as well?"

"Yes, it is. According to some of my friends, the economy has gone to seed."

"My friend has a farmhouse. When he bought it, it was great. But now it's gone to seed."

"Unfortunately my uncle's old farmhouse is running to seed as well."

"That's too bad. Tell me, why is your uncle coming to see you?"

"He's planning to start a new business, and he's looking for some seed money."

"Why would a man running to seed ask for seed money?"

"That's a good one! Seed money is money that you give someone to help them start a business or a project. My friend was willing to give me 20 lakhs as seed money."

"I don't believe you. No one in his right mind would give you seed money. You are incapable of starting your own business."

"That's true. Even if I did start one, it would probably run to seed pretty quickly."

"I am sorry to hear that your uncle isn't doing well. The man is so energetic and so full... ."

"... .yes, he is a real go-getter all right. At least he was."

"Haven't a clue what you are talking about."

"When you refer to someone as a `go-getter' what you mean is that the individual is very energetic. He is full of confidence and has the will to succeed.

For example, my cousin Kunthala is a real go-getter. I wouldn't be too surprised if she becomes a General Manager very soon."

"The only way to turn this company around is to replace the dead wood with some young go-getters."

"If my uncle heard you say that, he would go ballistic."

"When you `go ballistic' you become very angry, don't you?"

"That's right! When you go ballistic, you lose your cool easily. You become extremely angry about something.

For example, when Raju heard that Ganesh was not ready with the report, he went ballistic."

"There are times when Amrit goes ballistic for no reason at all."

"Everyone was shocked when Saurabh went ballistic during the meeting."

"Saurabh went ballistic! That must have been a sight to behold. But tell me, why would your uncle go ballistic if I said that we must replace the dead wood with go-getters?"

"It's simple. According to him, it was the go-getters who ran the company to seed."

"I see. So, are you going to give your uncle seed money?"

"I don't think so. If I did, my parents would go ballistic!"

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| [[Printer Friendly Page](http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/thscrip/print.pl?file=2005053000521600.htm&date=2005/05/30/&prd=edu&)](http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/thscrip/print.pl?file=2005053000521600.htm&date=2005/05/30/&prd=edu&)[[Send this Article to a Friend](http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/thscrip/pgemail.pl?date=2005/05/30/&prd=edu&)](http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/thscrip/pgemail.pl?date=2005/05/30/&prd=edu&)  **52. What is the difference between "sentimental" and**  **"emotional"?**  Both words have more to do with "feelings" than "reason".  In both cases, the individual's heart rules his head.  When you respond to a situation "emotionally", you do what your feelings tell you to do.  You don't really think things through. In most cases, it is a knee-jerk reaction. When someone advises you and you react emotionally, you can either shout at the individual or you can begin to cry.  \*The chairman became emotional and accused the accountant of fraud.  A sentimental person is easily affected by emotions like sadness, love, etc. Unlike an emotional individual, a sentimental one does not express himself loudly or strongly.  The feelings that he expresses are much more tender and somewhat exaggerated. Sentimental often carries with it the sense that the feelings expressed are not genuine.  Unlike "emotional", "sentimental" has a negative connotation.  \*Latha is very sentimental. She cried when she heard that the school dog was missing. | |

**53. What is the origin of, "Murder someone in cold**

**blood"?**

When you do something in "cold blood" you do it without being emotionally involved; in other words, you are detached.

The murder is thought of in advance and the plans are executed in a ruthless manner, without the display of any emotion. You act like a cold-blooded animal.

\*The child was killed in cold blood in front of his house.

Does the temperature of the blood in our body increase and decrease depending on our mood?

Not really, but people who lived some three hundred years ago believed that our frame of mind determined the temperature of the blood.

The common belief was that when an individual became excited or angry, the blood within the body began to boil.

When he remained calm, the blood became cool. These beliefs are reflected in everyday expressions like "hot-blooded" and "in cold blood".

I understand in the 17th Century, the expression "in hot blood" was used to refer to murders committed with passion.

For some strange reason "in hot blood" went out of use. Scholars believe that the expression "in cold blood" is a translation of the French "sang-froid". The expression "in cold blood" first appeared in print in 1711 in Joseph Addison's "The Spectator".

**54. Know Your English**

"Hi, come on in. Would you like something to drink? You look bushed."

"What are you talking about? I don't look anything like Bush."

"That's funny. I didn't say you looked like Bush. I said that you are looking bushed. In other words, you are looking exhausted."

"Exhausted! Is that what 'bushed' means? I thought you were making fun of my looks."

"Why would I do that? I've got better things to do. Sujatha was bushed after jogging a mile."

"That's understandable. Sujatha is out of shape. After playing two sets of tennis, I felt bushed."

"Good example. Is that the reason you look so tired now?"

"The reason I feel bushed right now is because thanks to the bus strike, I had to walk back from school."

"In this terrible weather! Have a glass of cold water, then. By the way, I understand congratulations are in order."

"Thank you. I didn't expect to do so well in the exam."

"My next door neighbour was crowing over how well his daughter had done, but...."

"....crowing over? What does it mean?"

"....when someone 'crows over' his achievements, he brags(boasts) about them. Here's an example. I hate talking to Jai. The only thing he does is crow over his achievements."

"The members of the opposition were crowing over their victory."

"That's a good example. It is also possible to say, `crow about'. It means the same thing as `crow over'. The producer was crowing about the success of his new film."

"Sheetal was crowing about how well her daughter had performed in the interview."

"In India a lot of people crow about Sachin's achievements."

"I can tell you that I haven't been bragging about my marks. In fact, I haven't told anyone."

"It's good to know that you are grounded."

"Grounded? What are you talking about?"

"Well, when you say that someone is 'grounded' what you mean is that he is very sensible. Though the individual has everything, and has achieved many things, he behaves in a sensible fashion. This is one of the meanings of the word."

"In other words, you are saying that the individual has his feet on the ground."

"I guess you could say that. The kid's father is a business tycoon and his mother is a famous actress. You certainly can't expect him to be grounded."

"Suresh has everything that one can ask for, but he seems fairly grounded."

"The billionaire's wife makes sure that her children stay grounded. But tell me, if Suresh is grounded, then why do the others hate him so much?"

"I guess it's because they are jealous about his achievements"

"You are not 'jealous about' something, you are usually 'jealous of' something. For example, everyone is jealous of Hema's achievements."

"There are many people who are jealous of Dravid's wealth."

"That's understandable, I guess. Some of our players are..."

".... similarly, you are 'jealous of' someone and not 'jealous about' someone, I suppose?"

"Exactly! The two year old boy is jealous of his baby brother."

"Many of the tenants are jealous of the landlord."

"I believe he has written a book which is selling really well. Have you read it?"

"Just the first couple of pages. It was full of jargons, so I ...."

"....jargons! How many times have I told you...."

"....sorry, sorry. The word 'jargons' doesn't exist. The plural of jargon is jargon. See, I remember."

"You don't need to crow over something like that. Go home. You look bushed."

**55. What is the meaning of "Argus eyed"?**

It means to be watchful or vigilant.

\*The police were watching the proceedings, Argus-eyed.

\*The students found it difficult to get past the Argus-eyed watchman.

Argus was a giant who had fifty pairs of eyes. Juno, wife of Zeus, asked him to keep an eye on her heifer (young cow) Io.

The vigilant Argus stood guard, and when he felt drowsy, he allowed only two of his eyes to fall asleep. The remaining forty-nine pairs of eyes were focussed on Io. Unfortunately for the giant, the messenger of the gods, Mercury, became interested in the heifer and decided to steal it.

In order to achieve this, he began playing his lyre. The music was so soothing that Argus fell asleep - all one hundred eyes closed.

Mercury drew his sword and promptly chopped off the giant's head. When Juno saw what had happened, she removed the eyes from the head of the giant and placed them all on the tail of a peacock. I guess this explains why we talk about the eye of a peacock's feather.

**56. How is "imbroglio" pronounced?**

A complicated or confusing situation is usually referred to as an imbroglio. The word is normally used in formal contexts.

\*The world is trying to find a solution to the Iraq imbroglio.

**57. Which is correct? "I gave to nanny the keys" or "I**

**gave the keys to nanny"?**

The second sentence is correct. One usually gives something to someone.

\*The new student gave a rose to John.

It is also possible to give someone something. In this case, "to" is not used. You do not "give to someone".

\*Please give the architect these diagrams.

**58. What is the meaning of "co-son-in-law"?**

This is a word that most native speakers of English do not understand. "Co-son-in-law" is a term that we Indians have contributed to the English language. It is not found in many dictionaries. When you refer to a man as a "co-son-in-law" what you mean is that the two of you have the same in-laws.

In other words, this other individual is married to your wife's sister. Native speakers of English would refer to the other individual as a "brother in law".

Most Indian languages have a term for such a relationship, and I guess that's the reason why we felt compelled to come up with "co-son-in-law".

**59. What is the difference between "as scheduled" and**

**"on schedule"?**

When you say that the meeting took place "as scheduled", what you mean is that the meeting took place as planned. Arrangements had been made, in advance, for the meeting to be held and things went according to plan.

\*The Opposition called for a bandh, but we managed to meet the minister as scheduled.

The expression "on schedule" is normally used to refer to time. When a project is completed on schedule, it is completed on time.

\*For a change all flights left on schedule.

***"One man in a thousand is a leader of men - the other 999 follow women."*— Groucho Marx**

**60. Know Your English**

"Nice to see someone smiling in this weather. What are you so happy about?"

"Oh, I'm just returning from Madhavan's factory. He was telling me that if we were to invest in his company, we'd become millionaires real soon. Apparently, he has a new product which ..."

"... .yes, he told me about the product too. He's very gung-ho about it."

"Gung-ho! I have come across that word before. It means enthusiastic, doesn't it?"

"That's right, it's an expression mostly used in informal contexts. Some of the people I know are gung-ho about everything."

"I find such people very irritating. Indians are gung-ho about cricket."

"That's the only thing we are gung-ho about, unfortunately."

"Hey, I almost forgot. Your first play was staged yesterday, wasn't it? How did the audience react? Were they gung-ho about it?"

"The response was underwhelming."

"Underwhelming? I don't think there is such a word."

"Yes, there is. When you say that the response to something was underwhelming, what you mean is that the people were not impressed by it."

"In other words, `underwhelming' is the opposite of `overwhelming'."

"I wouldn't really... ."

"... how about this example? The actor's new movie met with an underwhelming response."

"Sounds good. The response to the minister's speech was distinctly underwhelming."

"It usually is. Anyway, what did the press have to say about your play?"

"That my talent as a writer simply underwhelmed them."

"I am sorry to hear that. Why do you think the people didn't appreciate the play?"

"That's simple. Those who came were mostly fuddy-duddies. You see, ... ."

"... .they were what?"

When you call someone a "fuddy-duddy", what you mean is that he is old fashioned — not only in his attitude, but also in his appearance."

"I've stopped going to my father's office parties because I don't like being surrounded by fuddy-duddies."

"That's a good example. My next door neighbour is a fuddy-duddy."

"Tell me, what was your hero's reaction to the underwhelming response of the press? Did ... ."

"... .the hero had a conniption fit. He almost... ."

"... .a conniption? Does it mean... ."

"... .conniption is a word that is mostly used in informal contexts. It means... ."

"... .I can guess what it means. When you have a conniption, you probably throw a fit. In other words, you burst into anger."

"Very good. That's exactly what it means. The word is sometimes followed by `fit'. Here is an example. When Shalini told her father that she was marrying Teja, he had a conniption fit."

"So the next time someone gets angry about something, can I say, `Take it easy. Don't have a conniption?"

"I guess you could say that. Every time I try to sport a beard my mother has conniptions... ."

"... most mothers aren't very gung-ho about their son growing a beard. I wonder why."

"Haven't a clue myself. Do you think I am a gung-ho sort of guy?"

"Only your mother would think so!"

**61. What is the meaning and origin of "to leave no stone**

**unturned"?**

When someone says that he will leave no stone unturned what he means is that he will do everything he can in order to achieve something. In other words, he will try every possible means to get the desired results.

\*The Chief Minister has said that he would leave no stone unturned to find the culprit.

\*Both countries claimed that they would leave no stone unturned to find peace.

In 477 B. C, General Polycrates defeated General Mardonius in a battle. According to rumours, the Persian general, Mardonius had a lot of treasure hidden under his tent. But when Polycrates and his men searched the tent, they found nothing.

The disappointed General went to an oracle in Delphi and told him his problem. The oracle instructed him to return to the place where the battle had been fought and to look under every stone for the treasure; he asked him to leave no stone unturned.

Polycrates went back and searched under the stones, and sure enough he found the treasure.

**62. Where did the word "hijack" come from?**

Nowadays, this word is usually associated with airplanes. When you hijack a plane what you are doing is taking control of it and forcing it to go to a destination of your choice.

In the process you make the passengers aboard the aircraft your hostage.

It is not only planes that you can hijack, but also other vehicles — cars, trucks, boats and ships. "Hijack" has another meaning as well.

It also means to steal goods from vehicles, especially from trucks. Did you know that the original hijacker was someone who stole from other criminals?

He specialised in robbing bootleggers — people who sold illicit liquor. According to some scholars, the "hijacker" got his name from the command he gave the people he was about to rob.

Apparently, he used to point his gun at his victim and say, "Stick them up high, Jack." In other words, he wanted his victim to raise his hands above his head.

Since "Jack" is a very common name in the U.S., he called all his victims "Jack". From "high" and "Jack" we get "hijack".

**63. What is the difference between "life assurance" and**

**"life insurance"?**

There is no difference; some companies call themselves "life insurance" companies, while others call themselves "life assurance" companies. They both do the same job.

I understand that the term "Assurance Company" is mostly used in countries where English is not spoken as the first language — for example, in countries like Germany, Egypt, and the Philippines.

There is, however, a difference in meaning between "assurance" and "insurance". One normally "assures" against something that will definitely happen — for example death. No matter how important we are, none of us can escape death.

It is inevitable. You usually "insure" yourself against something that may or may not happen — for example, fire, burglary and flood.

Not all of us will have our house destroyed in a fire accident. But some of us do buy "fire insurance" and "flood insurance".

**64. What is the meaning of "monobrow"?**

The next time you look at yourself in the mirror, take a good look at the eyebrows. If the two join just above your nose, then you can say that you have a "monobrow".

The word is mostly used in informal contexts, and is not found in many dictionaries.

***"Age is a question of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter."-****—***Satchel Paige**

**65. What is the meaning of ‘final nail in the coffin’?**

A coffin as you know is something that people are buried in. In the old days, the lid had to be nailed in. The act of hammering in the final nail, signified that the body inside the coffin was ready to be buried.

Therefore, when you say that something was the final nail in the coffin, what you mean is that it is the end of something.

It could be an event that causes harm or helps bring about the downfall of something or someone.

\*The report in the new

**66. What is the plural of ‘aircraft’?**

‘Aircraft’ is an uncountable noun; the plural therefore is ‘aircraft’, not ‘aircrafts’. The plural of aeroplane, on the other hand, is ‘aeroplanes’. In American English, this word is spelt ‘airplane’.

\*The Minister said that the government was planning to buy three more aircraft.

\*The company was planning to buy two more aeroplanes by the end of the week.

**67. What’s the difference between ‘nonetheless’ and**

**‘nevertheless’?**

This is a question that is frequently asked. In terms of meaning, there is no difference between the two; both are generally used in formal contexts to mean ‘in spite of’.

\*The children had been up all night. Nonetheless, they continued to work on the project.

**68. What is the meaning of ‘back answer’?**

I think the expression you have in mind is ‘answer back’ and not ‘back answer’. When you answer back someone in authority, you reply rather rudely to them.

\*The teacher was shocked when the student started answering him back.

\*The father became extremely angry when his daughter answered him back.

We Indians tend to say ‘back answer’ instead of ‘answer back’; similarly, we say ‘timepass’ rather than ‘pass time’.

**69. How is the word ‘severed’ pronounced?**

When you sever something, you cut it off completely. The word is mostly used in formal contexts.

\*The impact of the collision was such that the driver’s head was severed.

When you say that you have severed your relationship with someone, what you mean is that you have ended your relationship with that individual.

The ending is usually sudden. It is also possible to sever relations with things as well.

\*I think we should sever diplomatic relations with China.

**70. Some people are scared of the number 13. Is there a**

**word for it?**

The word that you have in mind is ‘triskaidekaphobia’. In Greek, ‘tris’ means ‘three’, ‘kai’ means ‘and’, and ‘deka’, as you have probably guessed, means ‘ten’.

**“Public speaking is the art of diluting a two-minute idea with a two-hour vocabulary.”— Evan Esar**

**71. Know your English**

“Why didn’t you tell me you were going to play a practical joke on Sujatha?

“If I had told you, Sujatha would have figured out we were up to something. We all know you can’t keep a straight face.”

“You mean to say that I have a crooked face?”

“No, that’s not what I mean. When you keep a straight face, you don’t allow your emotions to show. You try your best not to laugh. Even though…”

“Even though the situation you are in may be funny.”

“That’s right! When my boss fell off his chair, I found it difficult to keep a straight face.”

“It was hard to keep a straight face when I was talking to Sujatha today.”

“That’s the reason we didn’t tell you about the practical joke.”

“I guess I understand. Did you manage to see your favourite hero’s latest movie yesterday?”

“I certainly did. It was like watching grass grow.”

“Watching grass grow! What are you talking about?”

“Have you ever taken time off to watch grass grow?”

“You think I’m crazy? Why would I waste my time watching grass grow? It’ll be so boring.”

“Exactly! When you say that some activity was like watching grass grow, what you mean is that it was very boring.

According to Sujatha, watching people play golf is like watching grass grow.”

“I don’t agree with that. If you ask me, watching people fishing is like watching grass grow.”

“It’s supposed to be relaxing. O.K, so you didn’t like the movie. But I understand it’s a big hit.”

“It certainly is. All the theatres are just packing them in. I understand it…”

“Packing them in? Don’t think I’ve heard that expression before. What does it mean?”

“When you say that a theatre or a restaurant is packing them in, what you mean is that the place is attracting a lot of people. For example…”

“Let me give it a try. The old Udipi restaurant still manages to pack them in.”

“Any restaurant that serves good food at a reasonable price is likely to pack them in.”

“I know. There was a time when the zoo used to pack them in. Nowadays, you hardly find anyone there.”

“I think people prefer to watch animals on TV nowadays.”

“You have a point there. I see that you have managed to do some cleaning here.”

“Yes, I did do some cleaning. Gave the bookshelves a lick and a promise.”

“A lick and a promise? What are you talking about?”

“When you say that you gave something a lick and a promise, what you mean is that you did the job very hurriedly. You didn’t….”

“Since you didn’t spend too much time on it, you probably didn’t do a good job of it.”

“Exactly! And what little you did, you did it without enthusiasm. You are hoping to come back to it later, and complete it.”

“That’s what most people do, I guess.”

“That’s true.”

“How about this example? Every morning I put on my uniform, give my shoes a lick and a promise and rush to school.”

“Sounds good! I’ll give the car a lick and a promise before going to the station.”

“Good luck!”

**72. What is the difference between ‘damage’ and**

**‘damages’?**

You are driving your friend’s new car and as luck would have it, you end up having an accident. You get out of the car and notice that the headlights are broken and the fender has more or less come off.

You have damaged your friend’s car; in this case, you have spoilt the looks of the vehicle. The word ‘damage’ is mostly used with things. You can harm, break or spoil something.

\*During the recent earthquake, thousands of buildings were badly damaged.

While cars, houses, and roads can be damaged, a person, on the other hand, cannot be. You cannot say, ‘Roshni was damaged in the blast.’

The word, however, can be used with things that are seen to be a part of the individual: organs, reputation, etc.

\*This will certainly damage the reputation of the Chief Minister.

If your friend is angry with you and drags you to court, then ‘damages’ is what the judge will order you to pay for having ruined the new car.

In other words, it’s the money you will pay your friend as compensation. This word is mostly used in legal contexts.

**73. How is the word ‘tawdry’ pronounced?**

When you refer to someone’s clothes as being tawdry, what you mean is that they look rather cheap and gaudy; in other words, they are rather ‘tacky’. It suggests that the individual has little or no taste.

You can’t expect me to go around wearing this tawdry piece of jewellery.

The word can also be used with stories and events as well. When you say that something was ‘tawdry’ what you mean is that it contained rather unpleasant details.

The lawyer wasn’t keen on listening to his client’s tawdry motives.

Tawdry actually comes from the name of St. Audrey, a queen who ran away from her mean husband and started her own monastery.

Although she had renounced everything, she had one great weakness: she loved wearing beautiful scarves and necklaces.

When the queen died and was later canonised, the local villagers decided to have a festival in her honour. Beautiful scarves were among the items sold during this festival. These scarves were called ‘St Audrey’s lace’.

With the passage of time, the name was reduced to ‘tawdry’s lace’. This was further shortened to ‘tawdry’. Later, the meaning of the word changed as well; it no longer referred to something beautiful, but something ‘cheap’.

**74. What is the meaning and origin of ‘lock horns with’?**

When you lock horns with someone, you argue or fight with that particular individual in a very determined way. Deer, when they fight, invariably lock horns.

The two parties locked horns over the recent price hike in petrol.

**75. Is it OK to say, ‘Hardly had we entered the room,**

**than the .....’?**

No, it isn’t. In such sentences, the word ‘hardly’ is invariably followed by ‘when’ and not ‘than’.

The children had hardly started playing when the power went off.

**76. How is the word ‘vignette’ pronounced?**

The ‘g’ and the final ‘e’ are silent. VINYET

Originally the term was used to refer to the drawings of vines that one found at the beginning of every chapter of a printed book.

Nowadays, the word is used to refer to anything: it can be a short piece of writing, a photograph or a drawing which captures the typical characteristics of a person or thing.

\*You certainly don’t expect a city-bred girl to write a vignette of small-town life.

**77. What is the meaning and origin of ‘sledging’?**

This is a word that is mostly used in the context of cricket. Nowadays, it is common practice for fielders to try and disturb the concentration of batsmen.

They achieve this by constantly talking to them or by abusing them. This practice of talking to the batsmen in order to undermine their confidence or disturb their concentration is called sledging.

There are many people who believe that sledging should be banned.

Ian Chappell believes that the term ‘sledge’, a shortened form of ‘sledgehammer’, began to be used in Australia in the early 1960s. (A sledgehammer is a heavy, long-handed instrument which is mostly used to break stones and drive in wedges and stakes)

In those days, a player using foul language in the presence of a lady was said to have been as ‘subtle as a sledgehammer’ – in other words, not subtle at all.

Such a person was often nicknamed ‘Sledge’ because Percy Sledge’s song, ‘When a man loves a woman’ was popular at that time!

**78. What is the meaning of ‘touché’?**

The word is pronounced ‘too-shay’ with the stress on the second syllable. This is one way of pronouncing the word.

‘Touché’ is a word of French origin, and it is mainly used in the sport of fencing. It comes from the Old French ‘touchier’ meaning ‘to hit’. When two people are fencing (fighting with swords), and one of them scores a hit, he immediately shouts ‘touché’, meaning that he has scored a point.

Nowadays, the exclamation is used in everyday contexts as well. When you are arguing with someone and the individual makes a good point against you, you can say ‘touché’; by doing so, you are acknowledging that he has scored a point against you.

\*You are saying that if he really loved me, he wouldn’t be asking for dowry. Touché!

**79. Is it okay to say, ‘He should avail of this opportunity**

**to learn English’?**

No, it isn’t. An individual doesn’t ‘avail of something’; he/she ‘avails himself/herself of something’. The sentence should read ‘He should avail himself of this opportunity to learn English.’

*“The key to being a good manager is keeping the people who hate me away from those who are still undecided.”* — **Casey Stengel**

**80. What is the meaning and origin of "beyond the**

**pale"?**

When someone behaves in an unacceptable or an uncivilised manner, you can say that his behaviour was "beyond the pale". The idiom can also be used to refer to people's actions.

\*Rajagopal's behaviour at the meeting was beyond the pale.

\*Sushmita is never invited to parties because her behaviour is considered beyond the pale.

The word "pale" in the idiom has nothing to do with colour. The word in this case comes from the Latin "palus", meaning, "stake".

In the old days "stakes" or wooden poles were used to mark one's territory. Everything that was within the "pale" or the wooden fence belonged to you, and the land that was outside it, belonged to someone else.

The expression "beyond the pale" began to be used in the 14th century when parts of Ireland came under the English rule.

Territories that were "within the pale" belonged to the English; those that were outside it, belonged to the Irish.

The English, as you may expect, didn't have a very good opinion of their neighbours. They thought that the Irish were crude; people who didn't know how to behave in a civilised manner. So when someone says your behaviour is beyond the pale, what he means is that you are behaving like an Irishman!

**81. What does the word "obdurate" mean ?**

When you say that someone is obdurate, you are implying that he/she is very stubborn. The word is mostly used in formal contexts.

The minister found it difficult to implement changes because his department heads were obdurate defenders of the old policies.

\*Raju's obdurate refusal to speak in his mother tongue worried his parents.

**82. What is the difference between "odour" and "smell"?**

Tell your significant other that you like his/her "odour" and see how he/she reacts!

Chances are the person will never speak to you again. The word "odour" has a negative connotation; it means foul smell. An odour can never smell good; it's always bad.

\*The odour of rotting fish almost made me vomit.

\*The odour from his dirty socks was disgusting.

A smell, on the other hand, can be either good or bad. You can talk about the smell of rotten eggs and the smell of perfume.

**83. Is the following sentence grammatically correct?**

**"What I wish to know is that whether the government**

**is aware of the problem."**

No, it is not. In this case, you do not need "that". Avoid using "that" and "whether" together.

\*What I want to know is whether you can come to the party.

\*Ayesha wanted to know whether she had been admitted to the programme.

**84. What is the meaning of "blogging"?**

One of the meanings of "log" is to write an official account of an event. In ships for example, captains keep an official written account of what happens each day — this is called the captain's log.

In the old days, logs were maintained in ledgers; nowadays, they are saved on computers. "Blogging" is actually the short form of "web logging".

Like a diary, a blog may include anything — personal opinion, comments and experiences. Unlike a diary, however, a blog is written for others to read and comment on.

You upload whatever material you have written onto the web, and you keep updating it on a regular basis.

A person who writes blogs is called a "blogger".

***"There are well-dressed foolish ideas just as there are well-dressed fools."*—Nicholas Chamfort**

**85. What is the difference between "drop out" and**

**"dropout"?**

Parents nowadays want their kids to learn a lot of things. They want them to excel not only in their studies, but also in sports.

Very often they sign up their kids for tennis lessons, karate lessons, etc. After some time, the poor child finds it difficult to cope with both his studies and his extracurricular activities.

What does he do? He stops attending the karate and tennis classes. That's what the expression "drop out" means - to discontinue.

When a person who has been attending college decides to "drop out", he takes the decision to stop going to college. This person does not graduate.

In villages, parents often force their children to drop out of school.

An individual who has dropped out of school or college is called a "dropout".

We have many high school dropouts in our family.

**86. What is the meaning of "dickens" in "Who the**

**dickens are you?"**

If you are a great fan of the Victorian novelist Charles Dickens, let me put your mind at rest by saying that the "dickens" that you find in the expression has nothing to do with the author.

"What the dickens" has been around for over five centuries.

In the old days, people refrained from using words like "hell", "devil", and "Satan" in their speech.

They felt that if these words were uttered, their souls would immediately go to hell; as a result, they coined euphemisms for these words. "Dickens" was one of the words they came up with.

The expression "what the dickens" has the same meaning as "what the hell?" and "what the devil?" So when someone says, "Who the dickens are you?" what he is saying is, "Who the hell/devil are you?"

According to some scholars "dickens" refers to Satan. One of the terms used to refer to the devil is "Old Nick".

Since "dick" rhymes with "Nick", the word began to be used to refer to the devil. There are a number of expressions in the English language with the word "dickens". Some are, "go to the dickens", "raise the dickens", "play the dickens" and "the dickens take you".

**87. What does the word "alumnae" mean ?**

"Alumnae" is the plural of "alumna". A former student of a school/college/university is referred to as an "alumna".

**88. What is the meaning of "Page 3"?**

"Page 3" became famous when Rupert Murdoch bought over the Sun in 1969. The following year, every edition of the paper carried a picture of a topless woman on page 3; and as you may expect, the circulation went up dramatically.

The bare breasted women began to be called "page 3 girls" and many of them became famous. So the original page 3 contained pictures of naked women.

Nowadays, the meaning of the expression has changed somewhat. In addition to including some pictures of questionable taste, the page also informs the reader as to what is happening on the social scene — it tells you who is going out with whom and who is throwing the next big party. It provides the local gossip.

**89. Which is correct? "Grandson of the late" or**

**"grandson of late"?**

We usually find this in wedding invitations. Karthick, grandson of the late Jayaraman, etc. When you want to refer to someone who is no more, you generally use "the" before "late".

\*Padma, the daughter of the late Ganesh, is building a house.

\*The late President was known for his sense of humour.

***"A man who has never made a woman angry is a failure in life."*—Christopher Morley**

**90. What is the difference between "sometime",**

**"sometimes" and "some time"?**

The word "sometimes" means "occasionally" or "once in a while".

\*The boys sometimes go to their favourite restaurant for masala dosas.

\*Sometimes, the students sit in the canteen and do their homework.

In the case of "some time", both words are stressed. It means "a lot of time".

\*I am afraid it will take us some time to find a replacement for this part.

Like the word "sometimes", "sometime" has the stress on the first syllable, and is often used to mean "one day".

It refers to an unspecified period of time in the future or the past.

\*I told Sadanand that I would meet him sometime next week.

The word can also be used with people. When you refer to someone as a "sometime CEO", what you mean is that the individual held the position of a CEO in the past. He is not a CEO now.

\*Divya, the sometime Director of Cultural Academy visited me last week.

**91. Is there a substitute for "him/her" which is**

**commonly used in formal texts?**

Yes, there is. There is a tendency nowadays among native speakers to replace "him/her" with the plural pronouns "they", "their", and `them".

\*If anyone is interested in going, they can get in touch with Bala.

\*If anyone calls, tell them I am not in town.

Grammar pundits would argue that both these sentences are wrong because "anyone" is singular and therefore should be followed by "him/her" — it should not be followed by the plural "they" or "them".

Native speakers of English feel that the use of "him/her" makes the construction look clumsy and therefore should be avoided.

**92. What is the meaning of "Billingsgate"?**

Billingsgate was the name of a fish market in London. I believe it was very close to London Bridge. During its time, the place was well known for two things - the smell of fish and the abusive language used by the people doing business there.

Believe it or not, the people using the filthy language were mostly women! The fishwives who conducted business in Billingsgate were famous not only for their salted fish, but also their salty language! It is for this reason that Billingsgate means "abusive or foul language".

\*The workers hurled more billingsgate at their boss after his speech.

**93. What is the meaning of "dumbsize"?**

This word was coined in the 1990s. We all know what "downsize" means. When a company downsizes, it reduces the number of workers.

When too many people have been let go and the remaining staff finds it difficult to carry out the work, it is called "dumbsizing".

In other words, the management was "dumb" to get rid of too many people!

**94. What is the meaning of the expression "to see which**

**way the cat jumps"?**

Some people refuse to take risks. They wait to see what is going to happen before they pass an opinion or take a decision about something.

This refusal to commit oneself to a course of action until one is sure of what is going to happen is called "to see which way the cat jumps".

Another expression which has more or less the same meaning is "to see which way the wind blows".

\*The couple waited to see which way the cat jumped before they started investing in the company.

**95. How is the word "pigeon" pronounced?**

The "g" is like the "j" in "jam", "juice" and "jeep", and the following "eo" is like the "i" in "sit", "pit", and "hit". The main stress is on the first syllable.

***"Raising kids is part joy and part guerrilla warfare."***

— **Ed Asner**

**96. What is the difference between "I just love that**

**movie" and "I love that movie"?**

In terms of meaning, the first sentence is much stronger than the second. The word "just" is used to emphasise the fact that you "love" the movie very much.

It's another way of saying, "I simply/really love that movie". "Just" is often used in speech to mean "there is no other word for it".

\*The young heroine in the new movie was just beautiful.

**97. What is the meaning of "numero uno"?**

This is an expression that comes from Spanish, and it means "number one" or "the best".

\*If you ask me, the coffee that my mother makes is numero uno.

The term can also be used to refer to oneself.

\*Sure, I will help you. But tell me, what's in it for numero uno?

**98. Why are the hottest days of the year called "dog**

**days"?**

The hottest days in Europe mostly occur in the month of July. According to an old superstition, this was also the period when dogs had a tendency to go mad.

The expression "dog days" is a translation of the Latin "caniculares dies" and it has been around since the times of the ancient Romans.

But contrary to popular belief, "dog days" has nothing to do with dogs on earth; it has more to do with the dog in the sky!

In this case, it refers to Sirius, the Dog Star. During the height of summer, the Dog Star, Sirius, rises along with the Sun. The ancient Romans believed that this star added to the heat of the Sun, and in the process caused the weather to become unbearably hot.

**What is the difference between "adhesive" and "cohesive"?**

An adhesive is any substance that is used to stick two objects together. Glue, for example, is an adhesive.

When you say that something is cohesive, what you mean is that it consists of numerous parts which fit together perfectly.

\*After several months of training, the team finally became a cohesive unit.

**99. What does "chutzpah" mean ?**

The main stress is on the first syllable "chutz".

This word comes from Yiddish, and is normally used to suggest admiration.

When you say that someone has "chutzpah" what you mean is that you admire the individual because he is arrogantly self confident;

he is not afraid to do or say what he wants to. It is also possible to spell the word "chutzpah".

\*Keshav had the chutzpah to tell his boss to stop interfering in his work.

**100. Is it OK to say, "staffs"?**

If you are using the word to refer to people who work in the same organisation, then, you generally use "staff" and not "staffs". The word "staff" can be followed by a singular or a plural verb.

\*The staff have decided not to accept the offer made by the government.

\*I understand that the staff is terribly worried about the on-going strike.

An individual who works for an organisation is referred to as "member of staff".

\*Atul expects every member of staff to be present at the meeting.

The word "staffs" is being used both in British and American English to refer to more than one group of people — individuals working for different organisations.

\*The minister and his staff were present at the meeting.

\*The two ministers and their staffs were present at the meeting.

***"The pistol of a flower is its only protection against insects."*— A student**

**101. "How was your trip to Hyderabad?"**

"Hyderabad! They should rename the city `Manholebad'. They leave the manholes open during the monsoon season."

"Yes, I read about that. Tell me, is something bothering you? Why is it you look so angry?

"I don't know if I should talk about it. You will probably think... ."

"Come on! Spit it out!"

"Spit it out? There's nothing to spit out. I have nothing in my mouth."

"You know that's not what I meant. When you tell someone, `spit it out', what you want the person to do is talk. You want the person to tell you what is on his mind."

"I see. It's another way of saying, `tell me' or `say it'."

"Exactly! The expression is mostly used in informal contexts."

"How does this sound? What's your problem? Don't just stand there looking angry. Spit it out."

"Sounds great! Here's another example. Come on Satish, you don't need to be shy. Spit it out."

"Why is it that you don't want to marry me? Tell me the truth. Spit it out."

"What kind of an example is that? Anyway, tell me what is bothering you. Don't just sit there looking sad. It's driving me bonkers."

"Driving me bonkers! Does it mean the same thing as `driving me crazy'?"

"Yes, it does. Someone who is `bonkers' acts in a silly or crazy fashion. The new rule that has been introduced in the club is driving everyone bonkers."

"Sulochana's kids are hyperactive. Whenever they visit us, they drive my mom bonkers."

"Venu was bonkers to ask for such a big raise."

"How about this example? The children went bonkers when they saw the cake and the ice cream."

"That's a good example. It is also possible to say, `nuts'. It has the same meaning as `bonkers'."

"The way people drive in our city. It drives me nuts."

"Hey, this city is full of nuts. It's not surprising they drive you bonkers!"

"I wish they'd... ."

"Is that the reason you are in a blue funk? Because this city... .."

"Blue funk? What are you talking about?"

"When you say that someone is in a blue funk, what you mean is that he or she is looking sad or depressed."

"I see. Does it mean the same thing as `feeling blue'?"

"I guess you could say that. Here's an example.

Listen to me Suman, you'd better start working on your project. Don't be in a blue funk. I assure you, things will get better."

"When India lost in the World Cup final, I was in a blue funk for nearly two months."

"That's a good example. Why are you in a blue funk now? Is it because the Sri Lankans tanked us again? Or is it... ."

"Tanked us again? Does `tanked' mean `defeated'?"

"Yes, that's right. In informal contexts `tanked' is used to mean `defeated'. It's one of the meanings of the word. When a team tanks you, they score more than you.

For example, the moment I walked onto the field, I knew that our team would get tanked today."

"Did you think that Sri Lanka would tank India in the final?"

"Listen, the West Indies, without their star players, almost tanked us. So, it didn't really surprise me that ... ."

"That we lost to Sri Lanka in the final. I thought under a new coach, we would do much better."

"You were nuts to think that. But hey, cheer up. We play Zimbabwe next. I am sure our overpaid underachievers will tank them."

"If they don't, the entire nation will be in a blue funk."

***"I haven't committed a crime. What I did was fail to comply with the law."*—David Dinkins**

**102. What is the difference between "chew at" and**

**"chew out"?**

What do puppies do when they get hold of an old shoe or slipper? They keep chewing at it. Babies, when they are teething, keep chewing at things. When you chew at something, you gnaw at it. In other words, you keep biting the object for a long period of time.

\*The little animal kept chewing at the leather jeans all night.

\*While the parents were busy watching TV, the baby was chewing at the belt.

"Chew out", unlike "chew at" is mostly used in informal contexts because it is considered slang. When you "chew someone out" what you are doing is scolding him.

\*I told Usha that I'd be late, and as expected she chewed me out.

\*Vinita gave the new students a good chewing-out.

**103. What is the meaning and origin of "Catch 22"?**

Sometimes it so happens that the two candidates contesting for the same parliamentary seat are both crooks. No matter whom you vote for, it isn't going to matter; either way, you are going to elect an individual of questionable integrity.

Though it seems that you have a choice, you really don't have one. A Catch 22 situation is a no win situation. No matter what you do, you end up on the losing side.

\*The companies didn't want to hire Velu because he didn't have any experience. But he wasn't going to get any experience unless someone hired him. It was a real Catch 22 situation.

The expression comes from the title of a novel written by Joseph Heller in 1961. Many people consider this work of fiction set during the Second World War a classic.

In the story, the only way that air force pilots could get out of doing combat duty was by pleading insanity.

In order to be discharged these individuals had to claim that they were insane. But the catch was that only a sane person would know that going on bombing missions was dangerous.

Therefore when an individual pleaded insanity, he was doing what any sane person would! Asking to be certified was the act of a perfectly sane man! Since he was acting rationally, he wasn't insane. Result? No discharge.

**103. When a serial ends, can we say, "to be concluded"?**

When the words "to be concluded" appear at the end of your favourite show, what it implies is that there is more to come — this is not the end of the series. There is one or more than one episode to follow.

**104. Is it OK to say, "We must invest money on**

**industry"?**

No, it isn't. One usually "invests in" something, not "on". For example,

\*The government should invest a lot more money in education.

\*We would like you to invest in our hotel.

**105. What is the meaning of "graveyard shift"?**

This is an expression mainly used in American English. When you say that you are working the graveyard shift in a factory,

what you mean is that you are working the late night shift — you usually work from midnight to eight in the morning.

\*We have to cancel our plans. I am working the graveyard shift next week.

This expression became popular in the U.S. during World War II. It was a time when many factories worked 24 hours a day.

The people who worked the graveyard shift worked at a time when everyone else was fast asleep; when everything in town was very quiet and as still as a graveyard!

***"My doctor gave me six months to live, but when I couldn't pay the bill, he gave me six months more."*— Walter Matthau**

**106. Know Your English**

"I keep telling Anand that he shouldn't be doing those things, but he just won't listen... ."

"Given his circumstances, it's understandable. Ever since he lost his job, the poor guy hasn't been playing with a full deck."

"Playing with a full deck? I don't believe this. Here I am trying to tell you that Anand is going slightly crazy, and you are talking about playing cards!"

"Relax, we are talking about the same thing! When you say that someone is not playing with a full deck, what you mean is that he is not mentally sound."

"Really? I haven't come across the expression before."

"It's considered slang, and is mostly used in informal contexts.

Here's an example. After talking to Kunthala, I was fairly convinced that she wasn't playing with a full deck."

"Are you playing with a full deck? Sometimes, I wonder."

"I do too! Anyway, what makes you think Anand is going crazy?"

"He is constantly creating problems wherever he goes. He gets people fighting. He tells one person one thing and the exact opposite to someone else."

"He is playing both ends against the middle, is he?"

"What are you talking about?"

"When you play both ends against the middle, you do or say something which causes two individuals or parties to quarrel.

In other words, you are doing the same thing that Anand is. Atul is the consummate politician. He will tell you one thing and the exact opposite to someone else. He plays both ends against the middle."

"If Anand continues to play both ends against the middle the way he has, he is not going to have any friends left."

"He doesn't have too many friends, does he?"

"No, he doesn't. I think people feel sorry for him and... ."

"That's the problem. People feel sorry for him. Instead of playing hardball with him, we... ."

"Play hardball? I have come across that expression before, but I don't know what it means."

"When you play hardball with an individual, you get tough with him. You become aggressive and no longer handle him with kid gloves."

"I see. How about this example? When things became a little tough, the Prime Minister decided to play hardball with the Opposition."

"That's a wonderful example. Bush tried to play hardball with Sadaam and got himself into a terrible mess in Iraq. You have to remember though that this expression is mostly used in informal contexts."

"I think you should think twice before playing hardball with Anand. He might decide to play hardball himself."

"Then he will be playing right into my hands, won't he?"

"Oh, I know what that means. When you `play into someone's hands' you do what the person has planned for you to do.

In other words, you react the way he expects you to. By sneaking the information to her colleagues, Maya played right into the principal's hands."

"Excellent example! By playing defensive on the last day of the test match, India played into the opposition's hands."

"That's what happened in the test against Pakistan, didn't it? Tell me, what is the difference between `play hardball' and `play ball'?"

"When you play ball with someone you are cooperating with the individual. The members of the Opposition decided to play ball with the Prime Minister on the issue."

"The students decided not to play ball with the Principal."

"If you want to get your promotion, you'd better play ball with me."

"Why would I play ball with someone who doesn't play with a full deck!"

**"Don't steal! The government hates competition." — Bumper sticker**

**107. Know your English**

`Hi! Haven't seen you in a while. Were you out of town?'

`No, I have been here all along.'

`Really? Oh, I remember now. You said something about a new project. How is it coming along?' `Spinning its wheels.'

`Wheels? What are you talking about? I asked you about the project. Not about your car.'

`I was talking about the project. You know that I don't have a car. When you say something has been spinning its wheels, what you mean is that it has remained in the same position. Neither moving forward nor back.'

`In other words, it's stationary. I guess it's like pedalling a bicycle while it is on its stand. The wheel keeps turning, but you go nowhere. You remain where you are.'

`Exactly! Here's an example. You know that the main roads are being widened. But since it's a government project, you can expect it to spin its wheels for six months at least.'

`It'll probably be spinning its wheels till the end of winter at least.'

`The expression can be used with people as well. When you say that someone has been spinning his wheels, what you mean is that he has been wasting his time.'

`How about this example? Some of our employees have been spinning their wheels all morning.'

`That's what government employees do all the time. My friend and I had a lot of things planned for the weekend. But we ended up spinning our wheels.'

`Pradeep thinks that it's good to... .'

`Pradeep? Are you referring to the eye candy that Sujatha likes so much?'

`Eye candy? Is the expression used to refer to a handsome man?'

`The expression is used to talk about anything that is pleasing to the eye. It could be a beautiful woman, a handsome man, or a beautiful object.

For example, many people think that Madhuri is just eye candy. What they don't realise is that she is one smart cookie.'

`I agree with you there. If I were you, I would buy the basic model. I don't think it's worth paying five thousand rupees extra for eye candy.'

`That's a very good example. Now, here's another... .'

`We have eye candy, do we have `ear candy' as well?'

`Yes, we do. You can use it to refer to anything you enjoy listening to. It could be your favourite kind of music. It can also be used to refer to a voice or an accent.'

`I see. My father thinks that Richard Burton's voice is ear candy.'

`I agree with him completely. How about this example? The songs by the Beatles are ear candy.'

`Sounds good. Of late, I have fallen in love with Jamaican English. It's ear candy.'

`Really? I enjoy listening to Michael Holding.'

`Oh yeah, he is a crackerjack commentator.'

`Crackerjack commentator! Does crackerjack mean `excellent' by any chance?'

`Exactly! When you say that someone is `crackerjack' what you mean is that he is very industrious and very good at what he does.

The word is considered slang. Here's an example. His students say that Sanjay is a crackerjack teacher. But I heard that he is looking for a job that will pay him a better salary.'

`I understand that Medini is a crackerjack batswoman. Her parents, however, don't want her to take up cricket as a profession.'

`I think Prem will make a crackerjack accountant.'

`He'll probably do a better job than the guy you have right now. Your present accountant is not only rude, but an eye sore. Prem, on the other hand, is eye candy.'

`And unlike the present one, he wont be spinning his wheels.'

`I am not so sure about that.'

***`I have trouble reconciling my net income with my gross habits.'*- Errol Flynn**

**108. What is the meaning and origin of**

**"wool-gathering"?**

When someone says that you have been wool-gathering, what he means is that you haven't been concentrating on your work; you have been daydreaming.

\*The professor's talk was really boring. I found myself wool-gathering.

\*Divya, your exams start the day after tomorrow. Stop wool-gathering.

This is an expression that has been around for several centuries. As for its origin, it comes from the world of sheep farming.

In the old days, when farmers allowed their sheep to graze, they always sent a couple of women or children along with the animals. When sheep grazed, sometimes tufts of wool got caught in the bushes and on the branches of trees.

It was the job of the women/children to gather the wool and hand it over to the farmer. The original `wool gatherers' were actually gathering wool!

Since the job of wool gathering didn't require much concentration, it was possible for the individual to let his mind wander — in other words, he could afford to daydream! Hence, the activity of `wool-gathering' became associated with daydreaming!

**109. What is the difference between "impel" and**

**"compel"?**

When you compel someone to do something, you force him to do it. The individual has no choice about the matter. Whether he likes it or not, he has to do it.

\*Ravindran's parents compelled him to take English literature.

\*The children were compelled to return by five o'clock.

When you are "impelled" to do something, you feel that you have to do it. In this case, the desire to take action comes from within. No one is forcing you to do it.

\*The detective felt impelled to investigate further.

\*Looking at him, I felt impelled to offer him more money.

**110. What is the meaning of "reminisce"?**

When you reminisce you dwell on your past; your focus is on the good times you had. You talk or write about them with great pleasure. The word is generally used in formal contexts.

\*When the two friends met, they reminisced about their college days.

\*Sarita says that she doesn't like to reminisce because it makes her feel old

**111. What is the meaning of "himbo"?**

The word "himbo" was coined in the 1980s; it is a combination of two words — "him" and "bimbo". The word "bimbo" has been around for a long time and it is normally used to refer to a beautiful woman who has little or no intelligence. A "himbo" is the opposite of a "bimbo". It refers to a good-looking guy who has little or nothing upstairs. Other than his looks, this individual has no quality worth mentioning. By the way, did you know that the word "bimbo" was originally used to refer to men?

\*How could Savitri leave Bala for a himbo like Kapil?

\*They are the ideal couple. He's a himbo and she's a bimbo.

**112. Is it okay to say, "The words she uses are**

**unintelligible for me?"**

No, it isn't. Something is intelligible or unintelligible "to" and not "for" someone. When you say that something is unintelligible, what you mean is that it is incomprehensible; it is difficult to understand. The word has nothing to do with intelligence.

\*The teacher used a lot of jargon which was unintelligible to the students.

\*What Chandu said was intelligible to the audience.

***"Coffee in England always tastes like a chemistry experiment."*— Agatha Christie**

**113. How is the word "carte blanche" pronounced?**

CART BLONSH

When you give someone "carte blanche" you are giving the individual the authority or unrestricted freedom to do whatever he thinks is right. It has the same meaning as "blank check".

\*Lavanya was given carte blanche with the remodelling of the house.

\*The captain was not given carte blanche to choose the players he wanted.

"Carte blanche" comes from French and it literally means, "white card". The term was first used in the military. When two armies fought and one of them surrendered unconditionally, the commander of the losing army was made to sign on a blank sheet of paper.

The commander of the victorious army would then proceed to write whatever he wanted;

he dictated his own terms. By signing the blank paper, the losing commander was giving the victorious army the freedom to dictate the terms of surrender.

**114. Should "lest" be followed by "would" or "should"?**

"Lest" is a considered a formal word and is normally used with "should". When you do something lest something bad should happen, you do it to prevent the bad thing from happening. The word means "for fear that" or "in order that". Here are a few examples.

\*Hamsa was afraid to say anything lest her boss should scream at her.

\*Uma refused to run away lest the police should think that she had committed the crime.

**115. What is the difference between "graceful" and**

**"gracious"?**

The word "graceful" is normally used to refer to a person's movement; the individual moves in a way that is attractive to watch.

\*The young dancer moved gracefully across the stage.

\*For someone who was terribly overweight, Eshwar was surprisingly graceful.

The word can also be used to talk about an object which is pleasing to looking at.

\*He had a graceful little cottage in the countryside.

"Gracious", on the other hand, refers to people who are pleasant and polite. It is considered formal.

\*Janaki is the gracious lady you met last week.

**116. What is the meaning of the word "doozy"?**

The word can also be spelt "doosie"; the pronunciation is the same as "doozy". When you refer to something as being a "doozy" what you mean is that it is extraordinarily good or bad.

\*The annual day programme was a real doozy this year.

\*You should see Vikram's black eye. It's a real doozy.

**117. What is the difference between "wedding" and**

**"marriage"?**

Both words are used to refer to acts — religious or civil — by which a man and a woman become husband and wife.

Of the two, "marriage" is more common. It can be used to refer to the actual ceremony that takes place or the spiritual union entered upon by the two individuals.

\*The two have had a long and happy marriage.

\*I am sorry to say that I can't be present at your marriage.

"Wedding" is used to refer to the ceremony and the festivities which follow it. Unlike "marriage", it cannot be used to talk about the relationship between the married couple. A "wedding" may last only an hour, but you can remain married for 40 years.

\*Vinita's wedding is today. Unfortunately, I won't be able to make it.

\*Please don't invite too many people to the wedding.

**118. What is the meaning and origin of "jaywalking"?**

Jaywalking is something that we Indians specialise in. We cross the road wherever we like; it's a tricky business, but most of the time we manage to negotiate the traffic.

The word "jay" is a slang term coined in the U.S. in the early 20th Century to refer to rustics — people living in the country.

When "jays" visited cities, they had a tough time crossing streets because of the presence of automobiles. These cars which could run at an incredible speed of 15 miles an hour scared the living daylights out of the "jays".

Hence, whenever these individuals crossed the street, they did so very erratically, seldom bothering to look at the traffic signals.

**119. How is the word "puerile" pronounced?**

The first syllable is pronounced like the word "pure" and the second rhymes with the words "file", "pile" and "mile". The main stress is on the first syllable. The word has a negative connotation. If you refer to someone as being "puerile", you mean that the individual is being silly or childish. The word can also be used to talk about an individual's action.

\*The newspapers said that the plot of the new movie was puerile.

\*The participants didn't laugh at my joke. They said it was puerile

**120. What is the meaning of "Big Apple"?**

The term "Big Apple" has been used to refer to the city of New York since the 1920s.

There are many theories as to how the city got this name. Here is one. It is believed that African American stable boys working in the racetracks of New Orleans were the first to refer to New York as "Big Apple".

Many of the important horse races were held in New York and it was the dream of most jockeys and boys working in stables to get there.

If you managed to make it to New York city, you had arrived; you had made it "big". A sports reporter, John Fitzgerald, liked the term so much that he called his popular racing column, "Around the Big Apple".

In his introduction to the column on 18 February, 1924, he wrote, "The Big Apple. The dream of every lad that ever threw a leg over a thoroughbred and the goal of all horsemen. There's only one Big Apple. That's New York."

**121. Is it okay to say, "Sandhya always prefers to pay by**

**cash"?**

Whenever you buy something, you usually pay "in cash" and not "by cash". For example,

\*Since Mala paid in cash, she got a big discount.

\*Sorry, we don't accept cheques. You need to pay in cash.

It is also possible to say, "to pay cash".

\*Since Mala paid cash, she got a big discount.

The expression "pay by" is normally used with credit cards and cheques.

\*If you don't mind, I'd prefer that you pay by credit card.

\*Sorry, you can't pay by cheque. You'll have to pay cash.

***"I don't worry about terrorism. I was married for two years."*— Sam Kinison**

**122. What is the difference between `among' and**

**`amongst'?**

As far as the meaning is concerned, there is no difference between the two words, and very often the two are used interchangeably.

When you are among/amongst a group of people, you are surrounded by them. Some people argue that `amongst' is rather old fashioned and should not be used.

Careful users of the language maintain that `amongst', when used, should come at the beginning of sentences. When it occurs in the middle, it should be used before words beginning with vowels.

**123. What is the difference between `too' and `very'?**

If someone were to say to you, `You are very short', he is merely stating a fact. He is telling you that you are rather short.

Perhaps you are only five feet tall. He is not comparing you with anyone or anything. If he says, `You are too short', it suggests that you are shorter than necessary for something.

Perhaps what the person is trying to tell you is that you are too short to play basketball.

You may be five feet ten inches, but you are not tall enough to play basketball. You do not have the adequate height to play the game.

The word `too' carries with it the meaning `more than enough', `more than wanted' and `more than necessary'. After an interview, if you were to say, `The questions were very difficult', what you mean is that the questions were extremely hard, but perhaps you did manage to answer them.

On the other hand, if you were to say, `The questions were too difficult', what you mean is that the questions were so difficult that you couldn't answer them.

\*Though it was very hot, the kids played cricket all day long.

\*It was too hot to play cricket. The kids stayed home and watched TV.

\*Your daughter is very intelligent. She will do well in the exam.

\*Your son is too intelligent for this class. I think he needs to be moved up.

**124. What are the Siamese twins of the English**

**language?**

Expressions like `to and fro', `safe and sound', `take it or leave it', and `rhyme or reason' are some of the Siamese twins of the English language.

They are usually expressions joined together by `and' or `or'. Like the twins, the two words in these expressions are inseparable; their order is fixed and they have only one meaning. You cannot say, `sound and safe' or `leave it or take it'.

**125. What is the origin of the word `duffer'?**

We use the word `duffer' nowadays to refer to someone who is stupid or someone who is very bad at doing something. The word is considered to be rather old fashioned.

\*Reema told me that Ganesh was a duffer at football.

\*Please, not Sita! I don't want that duffer in my team.

When the word was first used, it had nothing to do with people who had little or no intelligence.

In fact, the original duffer was someone who sold spurious goods. He was a cheat, a no good peddler of very low morals. With the passage of time, however, the meaning `no good' shifted from the seller to the naïve buyer. He was `no good' because he was stupid enough to be easily tricked into buying something questionable. In the late 19th Century, the word began to be used to refer to someone who was really bad at

**126. What does `soliloquy' mean?**

The tragedies of Shakespeare are famous for their soliloquies. A soliloquy is when a character in a play talks to himself or herself and in the process talks directly to the audience. In this case, the lines are meant for the audience and not for any of the other characters in the play.

**127. What is `niche' ?**

Pronunciation- Neesh

The word has many different meanings, and one of them is finding a job or activity that is perfect for you.

\*Ganeshan is extremely unhappy because he has been unable to find a niche for himself.

**128. What is the meaning of `heartsink patient'?**

This is not a patient with a heart problem; in fact, he is one who creates problems for the poor doctor. We have all met individuals who constantly complain about their health. They may not have any problem at all, but every time they see us, they buttonhole us and give us a long lecture about their imaginary ailments.

These individuals not only bore us, but also their unfortunate doctors; they visit the poor man repeatedly and complain persistently about their unidentifiable ailments.

Whenever the doctor sees one such patient walking into his office, how do you think he feels? Pretty depressed, right? His heart sinks on seeing him. Hence the expression, `heartsink patient'.

**129. What is the meaning and origin of `like a cat on a**

**hot tin roof'?**

How do you think a cat is likely to react when it lands on a tin roof that is pretty hot? It's going to be pretty jumpy, right? The poor animal will probably jump from one spot to another, trying to find a cool place to stand.

When you say that an individual is like a cat on a hot tin roof, what you mean is that he looks very nervous; he is unable to sit or stand still in one place.

\*You should have seen Surendran before the interview. He was like a cat on a hot tin roof.

\*What's wrong with Hema? She is like a cat on a hot tin roof.

**130. Is it OK to say, `None of them have... '?**

People who love their grammar would argue that the sentence is wrong. They would want `none' to be followed by the singular verb `has'. In informal contexts, however, there is a tendency, even among native speakers of English, to use the plural `have'. In American English, it is very common for people to say, `None of the movies were a hit' and `None of the guys were good looking'.

**131. What is the difference between `avocation' and**

**`vocation'?**

Some people refer to their job as their `vocation'. What they mean by this is that they have found the job that they are particularly suited for. They believe it is their calling, and they take it up because they wish to help other people.

\*I am told that his vocation is banking.

An `avocation' is a hobby. It is an activity that you enjoy doing, but it's not the thing that puts bread on the table. The word is considered formal.

\*Shailaja told me that her avocation is painting.

\*You'd better decide whether you want to make golf your vocation or avocation.

**132. What is the meaning of `pink press'?**

When Hitler came to power in Germany, he set up a special division in the dreaded Gestapo; its job was to investigate suspected gays.

If you were thought to be gay, your name was put on the infamous `pink list', and then you were sent off to a concentration camp.

In most western countries, the colour pink is associated with people who are gay. So the `pink press' refers to newspapers and magazines which deal with themes and stories that gay people would be interested in.

**133. Is it OK to say, `Boarding and lodging'?**

In India it is because most hotels inform us that they have both `boarding and lodging'. Native speakers of English talk about `board and lodging'.

***`When I was born, I was so surprised I couldn't talk for a year and a half.'*— Gracie Allen**

**134. What is the meaning and origin of `keep your**

**powder dry'?**

The powder in the idiom refers to gunpowder and not talcum powder — not the `gunpowder' that we eat with our idlis either! This is the real thing.

In the old days, gunpowder and a steel ball had to be pushed down the barrel of a gun, before it could be fired.

The powder had to remain dry for the gun to fire. If it got wet, the gun couldn't be fired. People carrying guns took precautions to keep the powder dry.

When you tell someone to keep his powder dry, you are asking him to remain calm and be ready for action. Sir Oliver Cromwell is believed to have coined this expression. Before crossing a river to attack his enemy, he told his troops: "Put your trust in God, but be sure to keep your powder dry."

\*The soldiers were asked to keep their powder dry and await orders.

\*Don't panic, you understand? All I am asking you to do is to keep your powder dry.

**135. What is the difference between `traveller' and**

**`passenger'?**

A traveller is someone who goes from one place to another. This could be from one city to another or from one country to another. An individual moving about the city in which he lives cannot be called a traveller.

A traveller can get from one place to another by different means — an aeroplane, a ship, a car, a bullock cart, a horse, etc.

The traveller may even choose to walk from one place to another all alone; after all, that's how a lot of people travelled in the old days.

A passenger, on the other hand, is someone who is never alone; he always travels in the company of others. Furthermore, a passenger never walks; he is always in something that is manmade — car, plane, train, ship, cart, etc.

Two people sitting on a horse cannot be called passengers; they are both riders. But two people sitting in a coach being pulled by horses can be called `passengers'. When you say that someone is the passenger, what it implies is that the individual is not the driver. You can be a passenger in your hometown.

**136. An unmarried man is called a `bachelor'. What is an**

**unmarried woman called?**

A woman who is young and still single is called a `bachelorette'. In fact, there was a reality show in the United States by that name.

You will not find this word in most dictionaries. The word `spinster' is used to refer to a middle aged or an old woman who has never married. Unlike `spinster', `bachelorette' does not have a negative connotation.

**137. How is the word `pizza' pronounced?**

PEET ZA

**138. Does one `propose to' or `propose' a girl?**

You usually `propose' something. For example, I propose that we cancel tomorrow's meeting. Dravid proposed that the fees be hiked.

When you ask a girl to marry you, you propose `to' her. It's about time you proposed to Shyamala. Poor Vimal, he proposed to three girls last semester, and all of them turned him down.

**139. What is the difference between `wake up at 7' and `wake up by 7'?**

When you wake up `at' seven, you get out of bed at exactly seven o'clock. Not before or after seven, but exactly at seven.

When you wake up `by' seven o'clock, you get out of bed at seven or a few minutes before seven.

\*I told my mother that I would be home by 6:00 o'clock.

\*Ganesh said he'd be back home by 7: 00 o'clock. He returned at 10: 00 o'clock

**140. Know Your English**

"Hi! Come on in. You look a mess. What happened?"

"It's my scooter. I was... ."

"The poor thing finally gave out, eh?"

"Gave out? It didn't give anything out! What are you ... ."

"When you say that something `gave out', what you mean is that it has become old and has stopped working."

"I see. In other words, you are saying it has worn out."

"Correct. That's one of the meanings, anyway. For example, my neighbour's car finally gave out when he was taking his wife to the hospital."

"I am sure the wife wasn't very happy about it. Can I say, your sandals look as though they are ready to give out?"

"That's a good one! My motorcycle will probably give out in another six months."

"You've had that bike for nearly twenty years. It's about time you got yourself a new one."

"I am planning on getting a preloved one."

"A preloved motorcycle? What does it mean?"

"Nowadays the word `preloved' is being used instead of `second hand'."

"Really? Revathi said that she would never buy a preloved car."

"Good example! I bought some preloved books last week."

" I think you should get yourself a new bike. Not a preloved one."

"We'll talk about it later. You wash up first. You look a mess."

"I am a mess? Just look at your house. What have you been up to?"

"I combed for a document all morning. But unfortunately, I couldn't... ."

"What are you talking about? How can anyone comb a document?"

"I didn't comb a document. I combed for one. When you say that you combed for something, it means that you searched everywhere hoping to find it."

"I see. How about this example? The film star combed the entire house for the missing diamond necklace that her husband had given her."

"That's an excellent example. It is also possible to comb for an individual. The police combed the neighbourhood for the escaped convicts."

"Everyone combed the temple for the missing children."

"Why would anyone do that?"

"That was just an example. What is this document that you were looking for?"

"It's something that the queer fish Ravindran gave me."

"Queer fish? Does it mean someone strange?"

"Very good! That's exactly what it means. When you refer to someone as being a queer fish, what you mean is that he/she is strange. The person tends to be aloof."

"In other words, a queer fish is a bit of a loner?"

"That's right. If I were you, I would stay away from Prema. She is a queer fish."

"A lot of people say that your friend Jai is a queer fish. What do you think?"

"No way! Jai is not a queer fish. He is shy, that's all."

"Remember the speech he made on Independence Day? It was ... ."

"Who can forget that? The poor guy was laughed down by everyone in the audience."

"Laughed down? What does it mean?"

"When you laugh someone down, you cause someone to quit something he is doing. You force him to give up ... ."

"You do it by laughing at the individual. In other words, you ridicule the poor guy."

"Yes, that's right. Hari gave up the idea of becoming a singer after his audience laughed him down."

"How about this example? The little children laughed down the magician's act."

"The performance was that bad, eh? Teja gave up the idea of becoming an actor when her performance was laughed down by her own family members."

"Ouch! That must have hurt."

**141. What is the difference between "He died" and "He**

**was killed"?**

Both refer to the fact that the individual has stopped living. It's the manner in which this event happened that differentiates the meaning of the two words.

`Killed' suggests that the death was not due to natural causes. For example, when you say, `The minister was killed in her sleep', it suggests the person was murdered while she was asleep. Someone did something that resulted in the minister's death - maybe the person stabbed/shot/smothered the minister while she was sleeping. `Kill' suggests that the death was caused by some external agency — it was not natural.

When you say that someone `died', what you are implying is that the individual's death was due to natural causes - there was no hanky-panky involved. No one was the cause of his/her death. `Died' is not as strong as `killed'.

**142. What does `nincompoop' mean ?**

The word is mostly used in informal contexts to refer to a foolish person. Some scholars think that the word comes from the Latin `non compos mentis' meaning `not of sound mind'.

\*Who is the nincompoop who forgot to put the butter back in the fridge?

\*Tell that nincompoop that I want three and not two plates of dosas.

**143. What is the meaning of the word `schmuck'?**

This slang word is of Yiddish rigin and is used to refer to a man who arouses disgust in you; you find this individual repulsive. This is just one of the meanings of the word.

It's a rude term of address, and therefore you should use this word with caution.

\*I can't believe that she is going to marry a schmuck like him.

\*Who is the schmuck standing there in pink pants?

**144. How does one address a divorced woman?**

How you address her is going to depend on the woman. If she chooses to retain her married name, then you address her `Mrs.' so and so. If on the other hand, she chooses to go back to her maiden name, then you call her `Ms.' so and so.

If you are unsure, use one of the titles and she will correct you if you are in the wrong.

**145. What is the meaning and origin of `chimera'?**

This is a formal word and it is used to refer to a crazy or a wild idea; something that is extremely unlikely to come true.

\*The idea that cricket is a gentleman's game is just a chimera.

\*Expecting honesty from our politicians continues to be as much a chimera as ever.

The original `chimera' was a fire-breathing monster with a lion's head, a goat's body, and a snake's tail. Now do you understand why the word means a fanciful or crazy idea?

**146. Is it okay to say, `You can contact him in 25435439**

No, it isn't. You usually contact someone `at' a number. "If it's an emergency, you can contact me at 22009988". "I tried to contact him at 22009988, but the line was busy."

**147. What is the difference between `fatal' and**

**`fateful'?**

Sometimes it is reported in newspapers that a man involved in a fatal accident was admitted to the local hospital. You wonder why because anything that is fatal always results in the death of an individual.

\*Dilip's decision to walk across the frozen lake proved fatal.

The sentence suggests that Dilip drowned in the lake. `Fatal' can be used with abstract things as well.

For example, one can say, "The sloppy manner in which Akshay did the project proved fatal to his career." "

The article in the tabloids about the star's wild parties proved fatal to his marriage." In both these sentences, the word is used to mean disastrous or destructive.

Fateful is related to fate. When you talk about a fateful day,

you mean that it was a day that changed your future or your destiny — the outcome is usually bad.

\*Ganguly will always remember the fateful day he went to the press to complain about his new coach.

**148. What is the meaning of `face in the crowd'?**

When there are a lot of people around you and there is nothing about you which makes you stand out, then you say that you are just a face in the crowd. You go unnoticed by most individuals. It is what happens to most of us when we go to the stadium to watch a one-day international; we become a face in the crowd.

|  |
| --- |
| \*Narender hates attending big parties. He doesn't like being a face in the crowd. |
|  | |

**149. What is the meaning of `sine qua non'?**

If you say that something is `sine qua non' what you mean is that it is absolutely necessary. The expression like most Latin expressions is mainly used in formal contexts.

\*Perseverance is the sine qua non for all aspiring actors.

\*Thick woollen jackets are a sine qua non for the trek.

**150. Is it OK to say, `On the lights, please!'**

This is an expression which is commonly heard in India. We ask people to `on the lights', `on the TV', `on the tap' and `on the heater'. Native speakers of English will not ask you to `on' any of these things. Instead they will ask you to `switch' or `turn something on'. For example:

\*Could you turn on the TV, please!

\*Would you like me to turn on/switch on the fan?

By the way, you do not say, `switch on/turn on the tap'. It's always `open/close the tap'.

**151. How is the word `beau' pronounced?**

It's pronounced like the word `bow' — the weapon you use to shoot arrows with. When a woman refers to a man as her `beau', what she means is that the man is her boyfriend or her lover. The word is considered old fashioned.

\*The fashion model made a grand entrance hand-in-hand with her latest beau.

**152. What is the difference between `anyway' and `anyways'?**

As far as the meaning is concerned, there is no difference between the two words. `Anyways' is mostly used in American English and is considered non-standard.

If you use it in informal contexts in your speech, you could probably get away with it. The word will not be accepted in writing. The word `anyhow' has the same meaning as `anyway'.

\*Ashwini says that she doesn't want to get married. Not now, anyway/anyhow.

**153. What does `ennui' mean ?**

The word is considered literary, and is mostly used in formal contexts to mean `feeling of boredom'.

\*Since returning home, Ram has experienced a profound sense of ennui

**154. What is the meaning and origin of `wearing one's**

**heart on one's sleeve'?**

This is an idiom that has been around for several centuries. When you wear your heart on your sleeve, you make your feelings clear to everyone; in other words, you don't hide your emotions. If you are in love with someone, you make it known to everyone that you are crazy about this person.

\*It's difficult to know what Asha is thinking. She doesn't wear her heart on her sleeve.

**155. What is the difference between `speak English' and**

**`speak in English'?**

When you ask someone to `speak in English', what you want him to do is to use the English language. Perhaps he is speaking in a language that you don't understand, and therefore you want him to talk to you in English.

This is the language that you want him to use on this particular occasion. When you say that he `speaks English', what you mean is that the individual knows and has the ability to use the language.

In India, for example, many of us can speak two or more languages, and depending on the context we choose to speak in a particular language.

\*The CEO speaks five languages. At the press conference, he spoke in English.

**156. What does `pari passu' mean?**

This is a Latin expression which literally means `with equal footing'. When you say that two things are `pari passu', you mean that they are travelling at the same pace, and hence are side by side. The expression is also used to mean, `without partiality'.

\*According to this report, inflation and interest rates increased pari passu last year.

**157. Which is correct? `He's a teacher of English' or**

**`He's an English teacher'?**

Grammatically both are correct, but their meanings are somewhat different. When you say that someone is a teacher of English what you mean is that the subject the individual teaches is English. The sentence, `He is an English teacher' is rather ambiguous.

It could mean that the man teaches English. It could also mean that the teacher is English — in other words, the teacher is an Englishman.

**158. What does `pari passu' mean?**

This is a Latin expression which literally means `with equal footing'. When you say that two things are `pari passu', you mean that they are travelling at the same pace, and hence are side by side. The expression is also used to mean, `without partiality'.

\*According to this report, inflation and interest rates increased pari passu last year.

**159. When somebody says `Sorry', we usually respond**

**by saying `Never mind'. Are there any other**

**alternatives?**

Yes, there are. It's very common to hear people say, `It's all right', `It's OK', `No problem', `No big deal', and `Don't worry about it'. These are just a few of the alternatives.

**160. What is the difference between `extempore' and**

**`impromptu'?**

Most people use the two words interchangeably to mean `spontaneously'. Careful users of the language, however, maintain a distinction between the two. The word `extempore' is normally associated with public speaking.

When you give a speech extempore, you give it with no notes. There is no memorisation involved either. You stand before the audience and talk, but this doesn't mean that you haven't given the subject matter any thought.

You may have been given your topic a month in advance, and you come so well prepared that you choose to speak without notes.

The word `impromptu' is normally used with musical performances. In this case, the performer does not play a piece that he has rehearsed; instead, he creates the music as he goes along.

When the word is used in relation to public speaking, it suggests that there is no planning or premeditation involved.

An impromptu speech is one when you are asked to speak all of a sudden, without any prior warning. In this case, you have little or no time to prepare; you make up your speech as you go along. Many people do not maintain this subtle distinction between the two words nowadays.

**161. What is the meaning of `sexing up a document'?**

Though this expression has been around for some time, it became popular when Dr. Kelly accused the Blair Government of having "sexed up" its report on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction. When you `sex up' a document you make changes in it so that the content is much more interesting or exciting to read. In other words, things are hyped up or spiced up. The expression has a negative connotation.

\* My boss wants me to sex up the document for the media.

**162. Whats the meaning of `disparage' ?**

When you `disparage' someone, you ridicule him; you speak of the individual in a manner that makes it plain to the listener that you don't think very highly of him. The word is mostly used in formal contexts.

\* I would like to submit my resignation now. I have no wish to be disparaged by the Board.

Please refrain from making disparaging comments about my favourite teacher.

**163. Some men grow their hair long in order to cover**

**their bald spots. Is there a word for this?**

Yes, there is — `combover'. It's called a combover because what these men usually do is to allow the hair on one side of their head to grow long and then they proceed to comb it over the top of their head to hide their baldness. The billionaire Donald Trump, the man you see in the series "The Apprentice", has a combover.

**164. What is the meaning of `stay the course'?**

When President Bush talks about the situation in Iraq, one of the sentences that he repeats very often is, "We must stay the course". When you stay the course, you continue to do what you have been doing all along. No matter how difficult or time consuming the task may be, you keep at it till you complete it.

You stand firm in pursuing your goal. So what the American President is saying that the U.S. must stay in Iraq till there is some semblance of peace in the country.

\*Listen Rajesh! Giving up smoking is not going to be easy. You must stay the course.

\*The diet my wife has put me on is killing me. But I need to lose weight. So I have decided to stay the course.

According to some scholars, the `course' refers to the racetrack. In this case, it's the horse that stands firm to reach the finish line — hopefully in a winning position!

**165. What is the difference between `learned' and**

**`learnt'?**

There are many verbs like this: dreamed, dreamt; spoiled, spoilt; kneeled, knelt, etc. When used as a verb, both `learnt' and `learned' have the same meaning. You can say:

\* I have learned/learnt a lot from Ganesh this semester.

\* Our new bowler has learned/learnt to bowl the `doosra'.

According to some scholars, `learned' is more common in American English, while `learnt' is used frequently in British English. When `learned' is used as a verb, it is monosyllabic.

When the word `learned' is used as an adjective to mean `scholarly', it is pronounced as a word with two syllables. The final `ed' is pronounced like the `ed' in `wanted', `grounded', and `hated'.

\* As expected, the learned professor bored the poor students to death

**166. Which is correct `Petrol station' or `petrol bunk'?**

The term `petrol bunk' is mostly used by Indians. Native speakers of English do not use it. An Englishman would take his car to the `petrol pump' or the `petrol station' to get it filled. An American, on the other hand, would take his vehicle to the `gas station' in order to `fill her up'.

**167. What is the meaning of `inter alia'?**

Inter alia' is a Latin expression which is mostly used in formal contexts to mean `among other things'. Like most Latin expressions, it is considered pedantic, and therefore is best avoided.

\* Raju is a collector who has, inter alia, 2000 rare stamps, 500 cricket cards and 5000 rare coins.

It is advisable not to use this expression when you are talking about people. For example, do not say, `At the party, there were, inter alia, Shalini, Geetha, and Sampath.' In such a sentence, use `among other people' instead.

**168. Is it okay to say, `Heartfelt congratulations!'?**

But according to the Oxford Collocations Dictionary, it is all right to say, `heartfelt congratulations'. You should remember, however, the word `heartfelt' meaning `sincere' is used when we are deeply stirred or moved by something.

It is usually associated with emotions linked with sadness. One can talk about `heartfelt sympathies', `heartfelt condolences', etc. But it is also possible to say, `heartfelt thanks' and `heartfelt joy'. `Hearty', on the other hand, suggests high spiritedness, vigour and energy. You can talk about `hearty laughter', `hearty appetite', etc. You cannot say `hearty condolences'.

**169. What is the meaning of `eating someone's lunch'?**

This is an expression which is used in management. When a company `eats the lunch' of another company, it aggressively markets its products and succeeds in making inroads into the other company's market share.

**170. What is the meaning and origin of `taking the wind**

**out of one's sails'?**

When you take the wind out of someone's sails, you succeed in denting his confidence. You achieve this by doing or saying something that the individual does not expect.

\* Usha was really angry with her husband. But when he came home with flowers and a saree, it took the wind out of her sails.

You have to remember that in the old days, ships depended on the wind to get from one place to another. If you were to rob a ship that is sailing next to you of the wind, what would happen? The wind would be taken out of its sails and as a result, the ship would stall.

**171. What is the meaning of `catch as catch can'?**

Sometimes in order to achieve something or complete a task, you resort to any method available to you. You are not too worried about whether what you are doing is ethical or not; you are intent on achieving your goal.

As a result, you end up doing things in an unplanned and an unsystematic manner. This is what `catch as catch can' means. The idiom has more or less the same meaning as `no holds barred'.

\*When his former partner complained that he was taking away his clients, Rahul told him that in business it was a case of catch as catch can.

Are you a fan of WWF wrestling? If you are, then you will understand what the word `catch' refers to. In freestyle wrestling, there are no restrictions on how you can hold your opponent. You can `catch' or hold him/her in any way you can.

**172. Why is 26 December called `Boxing Day'?**

The word `boxing' has nothing to do with the sport; it has to do with boxes in which you put things. During the Christmas season a lot of people attend church and while they are there, they donate money and other goodies to the poor.

The money and gifts are put in a box, and this is called a Christmas box. The boxes are opened by a priest the day after Christmas, and he in turn distributes the contents to the needy.

This is why 26 December is called Boxing Day. For most cricket fans in India, `Boxing Day' is always associated with the first day of a test match in Australia.

**173. What is the meaning of `period' in the following**

**sentence? `He is an intelligent man. Period.'**

Very often people use the word `period' after they have made a statement or stated an opinion. What they mean by this is that they are very sure about what they have said, and do not wish to discuss the matter.

Your sentence suggests that the speaker is very certain that the person is very intelligent, and the matter needn't be discussed any further.

\*There is no way that I am going to help Shashi. Period.

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**175. What it the difference between `curriculum vitae'**

**and `resume'?**

Curriculum Vitae comes from Latin, and it means `course of life'; a CV therefore provides a concise autobiography of an individual. Since it is meant to provide a detailed account of an individual's achievements, a C.V. tends to be lengthier (2-8 pages) than the normally crisp resume (usually, not more than two pages).

According to some people, the term CV should be used only in the context of academics;

in all other cases, resume should be used. This distinction is seldom maintained, and there is a tendency to use the two words interchangeably nowadays. The main aim of writing a CV or a resume is to get the person reading it to call you for an interview.

**176. Outside marriage halls, we see signs that say, `Bride marries Bridegroom'. Some read, `Bridegroom marries Bride'. Which is correct?**

How does it matter? Either way it leads to unhappiness! Here's my question. Why do you need this sign? Who else is the bride going to marry? She has to marry the groom; she can't possibly marry the `best man'!

**177. What is the meaning and origin of `above board'?**

When you say that a particular deal was above board, what you are implying is that there was no hanky panky involved. In other words, it was honest and legal. The kind of deal that you don't generally associate with our politicians.

If a politician is involved in a deal, you can be pretty sure that it is not above board.

Raju is straight as they come. All his dealings are above board.

There are several explanations for the origin of this idiom. According to one, the `board' refers to a table. Therefore when you say that a deal was `above board', what you mean is that it was done in an open manner —

the hands of the participants involved in the deal were out in the open. There was no underhand dealing involved.

Another explanation has to do with the smuggling of goods on ships. In the old days, people who smuggled things always kept them hidden below deck.

The legal cargo would be placed in plain sight on the deck. In other words, anything that was placed on the deck was considered `above board'!

**178. What is the meaning of `parochial'?**

Did you watch the one-day match between India and South Africa played in Kolkata? People in the crowd were booing the Indian players because the so-called `Prince of Kolkata' had been left out of the Indian team. The crowd was parochial in its outlook.

When you say that someone is parochial, what you mean is that he is very narrow minded. In the one-day match, the spectators gave the impression that they were more interested in the fortunes of their `dada', rather than that of the Indian team. The word has a negative connotation.

Kim has a very parochial attitude. I don't want him as a team member.

Many of the political parties are very parochial in their outlook.

**179. Is it OK to say, `The President Abdul Kalam visited**

**Chennai last week'?**

If you want to include an individual's name with titles like `Queen', `King', `Prime Minister' and `President', then you normally don't use the definite article `the'. For example, we do not say, `The Queen Elizabeth drank coffee'. We can either say, `The Queen drank coffee' or `Queen Elizabeth drank coffee'. Your sentence is therefore wrong. You can either say,

`The President visited Chennai last week' or `President Abdul Kalam visited Chennai last week.'

**180.Why do we call the place where the police work a**

**`station'?**

A `station' is a place where some service is organised and provided. This is one of the meanings of the word. Since policemen and firemen provide service for the common man, the place where they work is called a `station

**181. What is the meaning of `fragile' ?**

Means Delicate like Glass

**182. What is the meaning and origin of `to eat out of**

**one's hand'?**

When you have someone `eating out of your hand', you succeed in getting him to do whatever you want. The individual becomes very submissive.

\*Within no time, the former film star had all the office employees eating out of her hand.

\*As a young man, he dreamed that he would have his wife eating out of his hand.

The expression comes from the world of animal training. You know that a wild animal has been tamed when you succeed in getting it to eat something off your hands, without getting bitten.

**183. What is the difference between `eat like a horse'**

**and `eat like a pig'?**

Horses and pigs are known to have good appetites. Therefore when you say that someone eats like a horse or a pig, what you are implying is that the individual consumes a lot of food.

Careful users of the language maintain a subtle distinction between the two expressions. When you say that someone eats like a pig, it has a negative connotation. Pigs are supposed to be rather noisy eaters. They slurp, grunt, and drool when they eat. I am sure other animals do the same thing, but unfortunately for the pig, it is always associated with these things. Therefore when you say, `He eats like a pig', what you mean is that he eats a lot, and has very bad table manners.

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| [[Printer Friendly Page](http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/thscrip/print.pl?file=2005121200741602.htm&date=2005/12/12/&prd=edu&)](http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/thscrip/print.pl?file=2005121200741602.htm&date=2005/12/12/&prd=edu&)[[Send this Article to a Friend](http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/thscrip/pgemail.pl?date=2005/12/12/&prd=edu&)](http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/thscrip/pgemail.pl?date=2005/12/12/&prd=edu&)**184. What is the meaning of `tryst'?**  The meeting of two lovers at an appointed time is called a `tryst'; the word is considered literary. There is a tendency nowadays to use the word to mean `appointment'.  \*Rahul, if you don't hurry you'll be late for the tryst. Never keep a girl waiting.  \*"Ladies and gentleman, we have a tryst with destiny", said the speaker.  S. Upendran | |

**185. What does the word `idiosyncrasy' means ?**

The word can be spelt `idiosyncracy' or `idiosyncrasy' and it is normally used to refer to an individual's peculiarities or habits. The word can be used with objects as well.

\*One of his idiosyncrasies was to smell his socks before putting them on

**186.What is the difference between `defence' and**

**`defense'?**

We know that when it comes to spelling, there is some difference between American and British English. This pair is another example.

The British spell it `defence' and the Americans spell it `defense'. Donald Rumsfeld, for example, is the `Secretary of Defense'. There are many pairs of words in English which are spelt both with a `c' and an `s'. For example, advice, advise and practice, practise. In the two examples, the noun form of the word is spelt with a `c' and the verb form is spelt with an `s'.

**187. Don't find `bitter gourd' in the dictionary. Does**

**the vegetable have another name?**

I understand that the vegetable is also called `balsam apple' and `balsam pear'.

**188. What is the meaning of `da bomb'?**

This is a slang expression of recent origin and is normally used to talk about a person or a thing. When you refer to an individual as being `da bomb' or `the bomb' what you mean is that he/she is outstanding. The expression is mostly used in American English.

\*You should see the movie. I tell you, it is da bomb.

\*You are taking a course with Jai? I am told when it comes to teaching, he is da bomb.

***"There are three ways to get something done: 1) Do it yourself; 2) Hire someone to do it for you; 3) Forbid your kids to do it."*— Unknown**

**189. What is the meaning of `go the whole hog'?**

This is an expression mostly used in informal contexts. When you `go the whole hog', you do something thoroughly; you do not compromise in any way. It has the same meaning as `go all the way'. Americans tend to say `go whole hog'.

\*When the mechanic told me how much it would cost to repair the old car, I decided to go whole hog and buy a new one instead.

\*Gayathri went the whole hog and bought matching slippers and earrings to go with her new dress.

According to one theory, the `hog' in the idiom doesn't refer to a pig, but to money.

In the 18th Century, the word `hog' was a slang term for `shilling'. So when you went the whole hog, you spent the entire shilling at once.

The expression became popular in the United States when Andrew Jackson ran for President in 1828. This gave rise to the expression `whole hogger' to mean someone who would see a matter through, come what may!

**190. `obsequious'**

The word has a negative connotation. When you are `obsequious' to someone, you do whatever he tells you to do in the hope that you will be suitably rewarded for doing all the work. In other words, you suck up to the person.

\*I think it's about time that you stopped being so obsequious to your boss.

\*The obsequious mechanic walked in wearing a fake smile on his face.

The word comes from the Latin root `sequi' meaning `to follow'. Other words which are derived from this root are `consequence' (something which follows), `sequel', and `non sequitur'.

**191. What is the difference between `ambience' and `ambiance'?**

The French spell it `ambiance', while most people in the U.S. spell it `ambience'. As far as the meaning is concerned, there is no difference between the two words.

`Ambience/ambiance' is normally used to refer to the atmosphere of a place.

\*The ambiance/ambience in the new restaurant was fantastic.

\*The ambience of their new apartment is anything but cosy.

**192. What is the origin of `nit picking'?**

Monkeys and gorillas do this all the time. Among human beings, mothers perform this duty once in a while. Any idea what a nit is? Most of us have come home with this unwanted visitor on a few occasions.

Nits are the eggs of lice or any other parasitic insects. When our head becomes infested with lice, what is it that our mothers do? They run a special comb through our hair and then peer intently at the comb.

Whenever they spot a louse, they proceed to squash the insect; they pick them off one by one. Getting rid of these small, but irritating insects from one's head can be an overwhelming task.

Every inch of the head has to be carefully examined and you spend a lot of time looking for them. The original meaning of nitpicking was therefore looking for lice and their eggs.

With the passage of time, however, the expression acquired another meaning. It began to be used to refer to someone who looks at the trivial details and finds faults with them.

\*There was a lot of nitpicking going on as to what type of bouquet should be given to the chief guest.

\*Let's stop with the nitpicking. Tell me what you think of the plan.

*`****There's a way of transferring funds that is even faster than electronic banking. It's called marriage.'*— James Holt McGavran**