

## KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

# Know Your English – What is the difference between ‘ill’ and ‘sick’?

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## What is the difference between ‘ill’ and ‘sick’?

*(V.Sakunthala, Hyderabad)*

There is a tendency to use the two words interchangeably nowadays. Americans seem to prefer ‘sick’, while the British seem partial to ‘ill’. Books on **English** usage suggest that of the two, ‘ill’ is considered to be formal, and the malady associated with it is of a serious nature. ‘Sick’, on the other hand, is mostly used to refer to minor ailments like cold, cough, fever, sore throat, etc. These subtle distinctions are not always maintained in everyday speech.

Native speakers of English frequently use the word ‘sick’ to mean nauseous. When someone says, “I feel sick” or “I think I’m going to be sick”, he is saying that he is going to vomit or throw up. When someone who has been ill/sick applies for leave, he applies for ‘sick leave’ and not ‘ill leave’.

\*Ramakanth has been ill/sick for nearly two weeks now.

## What is the meaning and origin of ‘without rhyme or reason’?

*(B. Krishnakanth, Tiruchi)*

This is a relatively old idiom that is frequently used in everyday conversation to mean ‘without any purpose or reason’. When you do something without rhyme or reason, you do it without really thinking things through; there is an absence of common sense.

\*Meera quit her well-paid job without any rhyme or reason.

Sir Thomas More, the author of Utopia, is believed to have made this idiom popular. A young writer apparently went to More with a manuscript, and asked him for feedback. After reading it, the Chancellor of Henry VIII suggested that the young man convert it to rhyme. The budding writer did as he was told, and showed it to Sir Thomas. After reading it, More apparently told the writer, “Now it is somewhat better, for it is rhyme; whereas before, it was neither rhyme nor reason.” Not everyone believes this story.

## Can a house be labelled ‘handsome’ as well?

*(George Mathew, Kochi)*

The word 'handsome' can be used to describe a good-looking man or a woman with attractive features. A 'handsome woman' is usually big built. Houses and buildings can be described as being handsome as well. When you say that a house is handsome, you are implying that it is large, impressive and attractive to look at. The word can be used with other things as well: animals, clothes, trees, etc.

\*Rani bought a handsome house very close to the library.

### **How is the expression 'rara avis' pronounced?**

*(G. Nanda Kumar, Chennai)*

There seem to be different ways of pronouncing this Latin expression. The first syllable of 'rara' sounds like the word 'rare', and the second 'a' like the 'a' in 'china'. The second word rhymes with the name 'Davis'. The expression is pronounced 'rare-e A-vis' with the main stress on the first syllable of 'avis'. In Latin 'rara' means 'rare' and 'avis' means 'bird'; the expression literally means 'rare bird'. In everyday context, the expression is mostly used to refer to a unique person or thing.

\*You are lucky to have found someone like Vikram. He's quite the rara avis if you ask me.

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*"He had occasional flashes of silence that made his conversation perfectly delightful."* – **Sydney Smith of Thomas Macaulay**

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