

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know your English – meaning of 'get the monkey off the back'

S. UPENDRAN

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What is the difference between 'trip' and 'journey'?

(S Das, Chennai)

In both cases, you are going from one place to another. The word 'journey' suggests that you will be travelling a great distance. The time taken is likely to be considerable for you are likely to visit a number of places.

In the case of a journey, not everything is planned – as a result, a few unexpected things may happen along the way. This perhaps explains why people talk about life being a journey – it is impossible to predict what is likely to happen.

The distance covered during a 'trip' can be short or long. For example, one can take a trip to the U.S. or one can make a trip to the local supermarket. Usually, in the case of a 'trip', you return to the place you started from. This, however, is not always true in the case of a journey.

What is the meaning of 'get the monkey off the back'?

(Kushal Garg, Lucknow)

The expression is mostly used in informal contexts to mean to get rid of a major problem or source of irritation. By winning the World Cup in Bangladesh, Mahela Jayawardene and Kumara Sangakkara finally got the monkey off their back. After having lost in four World Cup finals, it must have felt good to finally win one.

Another expression that is frequently used is 'have a monkey on your back'; it means that you are carrying a burden or a problem that you find difficult to get rid of.

*Prabhu is an alcoholic. He needs to get the monkey off his back.

*Tina's property dispute with her mother is a monkey on her back.

Nobody is really sure about the origin of the idiom. Some scholars believe that the original expression was 'have a monkey on the roof'; it was mostly used in the late 19th century to refer to the mortgage that had to be paid – a burden that most middle class house owners face even

today. During the 1940s, 'monkey on the back' acquired a new meaning — someone who had a monkey on his back was addicted to drugs.

How is the word 'quasi' pronounced?

(Aditya Jaiswal, Kolkata)

There are different ways of pronouncing this word. The 'qu' sounds like the 'qu' in 'quit', 'quick' and 'quiz', and the following 'a' like the 'ay' in 'day', 'say' and 'bay'. The 's' is pronounced like the 'z' in 'zip', 'zero' and 'zoo'; the final 'i' rhymes with the 'y' in 'my' and 'by'. Some people pronounce the 'a' like the 'ar' in 'park', 'bark' and 'dark'. The word can be pronounced 'KWAY-zai' or 'KWAA-zai'; in either case, the stress is on the first syllable. It comes from the Latin 'quasi' meaning 'as it were' or 'almost'.

In **English**, the word is mostly used to mean 'seemingly' or 'partly'. When you say that someone's theory is 'quasi-scientific', it means that at first glance it looks like a scientific theory, but it actually isn't. It does not include or contain all the features of such a theory. Some experts on usage claim quasi is a great alternative for 'kind of'.

*I was rather disappointed. We were served quasi-Rajasthani food.

"Money is like manure. You have to spread it around or it smells." — **J Paul Getty**

upendrankye@gmail.com

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