

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

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How is the word 'albeit' pronounced? (J Sunitha, Hyderabad)

The first syllable sounds like the word 'all' and the third like the word 'it'. The 'be' in the second is pronounced like the word 'bee'. The word is pronounced 'all-BEE-it' with the stress on the second syllable. This rather formal word has the same meaning as 'even though' and 'although'. In the early twentieth century, experts on usage believed that this old fashioned word would die a natural death, but it continues to be used fairly frequently in writing even today. Albeit, in Robert Burchfield's opinion, is "one of the persistent archaic sounding words in the language."

Rahul tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to give up eating sweets.

The teacher paid me a compliment, albeit grudgingly.

What is the meaning of 'the devil is in the detail'? (A Myilsami, Coimbatore)

The earlier expression was 'God is in the detail'. Sometimes, we may fail to perform what appears to be a simple task because we have not paid sufficient attention to the minor details. The expression 'the devil is in the detail(s)' is frequently used to sound a note of caution to someone. You are telling or warning the individual that if he chooses to overlook the minor details, his attempt to do something will result in failure. The expression is also used to suggest that something that looks simple may not necessarily be so – the steps required to accomplish the task may be complicated.

Meera thought she could write the instructions in an hour. It took her all day. The devil was in the details.

It's not as easy as it looks. The devil is in the detail.

What is the difference between 'conceited' and 'proud'? (R Ganesh, Vellore)

The word 'conceited' always has a negative connotation. A conceited person thinks very highly of himself and may refuse to mingle with those around him. When he does talk, it will always be about himself – his achievements, his hobbies, his abilities, etc. He tends to be an 'I' specialist! Unlike 'conceited', the word 'proud' can be used to show both approval and disapproval. It has both a positive and a negative meaning. A person who is pleased with his achievement can say that he is 'proud' of it. Unlike an individual who is conceited, a person can be proud of someone else's achievements as well. 'Proud', like 'conceited', can

also be used to refer to someone who thinks no end of himself. There is, however, a difference in degree. Some dictionaries define conceited as being ‘excessively proud’.

I refuse to team up with that conceited man.

Damini is a proud and arrogant woman.

I'm proud to win this championship for the sixth time.

What is the meaning of ‘all but’? (Mohit Somani, Bhilwara)

The expression seems to have two different meanings. It can be used to mean ‘almost nearly/completely’ and ‘all except’. Here are a few examples.

He was a star once upon a time. But now, his name is all but forgotten.

We managed to rescue all but one of the miners.

* * *

Those who like me, raise your hands. Those who don't, raise your standards. – Unknown

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