

## KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

## Know your English - 2.12.2014

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**What is the meaning and origin of 'watershed moment'?***(K Kavya, Hyderabad)*

We know what 'water' is; the word 'shed' was used in the past to mean 'partition' or 'separation'. Do you know that the parting in your hair can be called a 'shed'? A 'watershed' is the point where a flowing body of water – river, stream, etc. – separated or parted. Originally, the word was used to refer to the ridge that separated a body of water, causing it to flow in different directions. In everyday contexts, the word 'watershed' is used to mean 'important changes' or the 'turning point' in a situation or event. One usually talks about a watershed moment/year/event. The word comes from the German 'wasserscheide' meaning 'water divide' or 'water parting'.

\*For most cricket enthusiasts, 1983 is a watershed year.

\*A watershed moment came in her life when she was admitted to Harvard.

**How is the word 'vigilante' pronounced?***(S Khan, Guwahati)*

The 'i' in the first and second syllables, and the final 'e' are pronounced like the 'i' in 'hit', 'it' and 'sit'. The 'g' sounds like the 'j' in 'juice', 'joke' and 'just', and the following 'a' is like the 'a' in 'pants', 'ants' and 'apples'. The word is pronounced 'vi-ji-LAN-ti' with the stress on the third syllable. It comes from the Latin 'vigilantem' meaning 'watchful' or 'careful'. Today, the word 'vigilante' has a negative connotation; it is mostly used to refer to someone who takes the law into his own hands and punishes those who have committed crimes. He does this because he believes that the police and the other official organisations have failed in their duty to maintain law and order. Many consider the comic book hero, Batman, to be a vigilante. One frequently talks about 'vigilante groups' and 'vigilante justice'.

\*The vigilante is believed to have killed the Don's right hand man.

\*A vigilante group shut down the gambling den next to the school.

## What is the difference between 'laudable' and 'laudatory'?

*(T Devika, Bangalore)*

First, let us deal with the pronunciation of the two words. The first syllable of 'laudable' sounds like the word 'lord' and the following 'a' is like the 'a' in 'china'. The final 'ble' is like the 'ble' in 'trouble' and 'bubble'. The word is pronounced 'LORD-e-bel' with the stress on the first syllable. It means worthy of praise or commendable.

\*Trying to teach **English** to street children is a laudable aim.

The word 'laudatory' is usually reduced to three syllables; it can be pronounced 'LORD-e-tri' with the stress on the first syllable. When you say that someone's speech or piece of writing was 'laudatory', you mean that it was full of praise.

\*As expected, Jai's novel received laudatory reviews.

## Is it okay to say 'in the meanwhile'?

*(K Rajendran, Coimbatore)*

There was time when it was considered wrong to do so. People believed that it was okay to say 'meanwhile', but not 'in the meanwhile'. Nowadays, 'in the meanwhile' finds a place in a few dictionaries; the expression is used interchangeably with 'in the meantime' to mean 'intervening period of time'. Careful users of the language object to the use of 'in the meanwhile'.

\*The Chief Guest is not expected for another hour. In the meanwhile/meantime, let's keep the audience entertained.

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*"Good advice is something a man gives when he is too old to set a bad example."*

— **Francois VI**

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