

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

How is the word 'sumptuous' pronounced?

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How is the word 'sumptuous' pronounced?*(G. Ramanathan, Chennai)*

There are several ways of pronouncing this word. The first syllable rhymes with the words 'pump', 'lump' and 'bump'. The following 't' sounds like 't' in 'tune', 'tumour', and 'Tuesday'. The 'u' is like the 'u' in 'put', and the final 'ou' is like the 'a' in 'china'. The word is pronounced 'SUMP-tyu-es' with the stress on the first syllable. Some people pronounce the 't' like the 'ch' in 'cheese', 'chew' and 'chips'. The word comes from the Latin 'sumptuosus' meaning 'costly, expensive'. In **English**, the word is mostly used to refer to expensive things that can be consumed or enjoyed. The word is not used with people.

*We went to the new restaurant and had a sumptuous meal.

What is the difference between 'ambivalent' and 'indifferent'?*(Malavika, Bangalore)*

People who get a scholarship to study in a foreign country are often plagued by doubts. On the one hand, they are happy they have been given an opportunity to study abroad; they look forward to the experience. At the same time, they feel sad that they have to leave their family members behind and live in a place they know nothing about. They have mixed feelings about going, and they don't really know what to do. The existence of two rather contradictory feelings in an individual at the same time is called 'ambivalence'. It comes from the German 'ambivalenzin', a word coined by the Swiss psychologist Eugen Bleuler. In Latin, 'ambi' means 'both' and 'valentia' means 'strength'. So, when you are ambivalent about something, you are being pulled by two strong, but often, contradictory things.

*Jai's attitude towards the cell phone is not ambivalent. He hates the gadget.

When you are 'indifferent' about something, you show no interest in it. You remain unconcerned, and do not waste your time thinking about it. There are no emotions tugging at you.

*There are a few people in India who are indifferent to cricket.

*People have become indifferent to the rampant corruption that is going on.

What is the meaning of 'social chameleon'?

(Uday Kumar, Madurai)

First, let's deal with the pronunciation of 'chameleon'. The 'ch' is like the 'k' in 'king' and 'kill', and the following 'mel' is pronounced like the word 'meal'. The second 'e' is like the 'i' in 'bit' and 'kit', and the final 'o' like the 'a' in 'china'. The word is pronounced 'ke-MEAL-i-en' with the stress on the second syllable. A chameleon is a lizard which has the ability to change the colour of its skin to match its surroundings. It has the ability to stay hidden. When you refer to a person as being a chameleon, you are implying that the individual like the lizard keeps changing – in this case, he keeps changing his opinions about things in order to keep other people happy. A 'social chameleon' is someone who has the ability to adapt himself to any given situation. He has the ability to talk to people from all walks of life. The expression can be used negatively to refer to someone who changes his behaviour depending on who he is with.

*We need a social chameleon like Nalini to do this survey.

*Harsha is a social chameleon. He's nice to his boss, but not to his juniors.

"Laugh and the world laughs with you. Snore and you sleep alone." – **Anthony Burgess**

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