

## KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

# Know your English – What is the study of handwriting called

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## What is the meaning and origin of ‘have a field day’?

(H. Nilesh, Bangalore)

This is an expression that is mostly used in informal contexts to mean to have a really good time. When you ‘have a field day’, you really enjoy yourself doing things that you like to do – particularly, making fun of or criticising other people.

\*If the media come to know about this scandal, they will have a field day.

\*Most of the teachers were absent, so the students had a field day at school.

The expression comes from the world of the military. In the past, the term ‘field day’ was used to refer to the day when the army carried out manoeuvres or exercises on the field. Later, it began to be applied to the sports day celebrated in schools, where children took part in various competitions in order to have a good time. With the passage of time, the term began to be applied to any fun activity –when people got together and enjoyed themselves.

## What is the difference between ‘masticate’ and ‘chew’?

(SK Naintara, Nagpur)

According to most dictionaries, in terms of meaning, there is hardly any difference between the two. Both refer to the act of crushing food with our teeth. ‘Masticate’ is considered to be the formal of the two words, and is defined in dictionaries as ‘to chew food’.

\*For the flavour to come out, you need to masticate slowly.

\*You need to chew your food, before you swallow.

Certain books on English usage, however, maintain that there is a difference between the two words. Mastication suggests that the food that is being crushed between the teeth is also likely to be swallowed. In other words, the person generally swallows what he masticates. What is ‘chewed’, on the other hand, need not necessarily be swallowed. For example, many people

after ‘chewing tobacco’ for a long time, spit it out – they don’t swallow it. The same is the case with chewing gum.

### **What is the study of handwriting called?**

(Nidhi Verghese, Secunderabad)

It is called ‘graphology’. The first syllable sounds like the word ‘graph’ and the following ‘o’ is like the ‘o’ in ‘hot’, ‘lot’ and ‘pot’. The word is pronounced ‘gra-Fo-le-ji’ with the stress on the second syllable. The word comes from the Greek ‘grapho’ meaning ‘writing’ and ‘logos’ meaning ‘words’. Many people believe that an individual’s handwriting can tell a lot about a person. A ‘graphologist’ is someone who studies handwriting.

### **What is the correct pronunciation of ‘niche’?**

(N. Ratnam, Chennai)

There seems to be two different ways of pronouncing this word. One simple way is to make the word rhyme with ‘ditch’, ‘pitch’ and ‘rich’. The British pronounce the first syllable like the word ‘knee’ and the ‘che’ like the ‘sh’ in ‘ship’ and ‘shop’. They pronounce the word ‘KNEESH’. It comes from the French ‘niche’ meaning ‘recess’ or a ‘hollow space inside something’. The word was used to refer to a dog kennel! Today, the word has several different meanings. One of them is to find a suitable or comfortable position in life or employment.

\*Ram has tried his hand at different things. He is yet to find his niche.

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*“Flattery is like chewing gum. Enjoy it, but don’t swallow it.” – Hank Ketcham*

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