

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know your English: What is the difference between a 'chef' and a 'cook'?

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What is the difference between a 'chef' and a 'cook'?

(Rithikaa, Coimbatore)

If you ask me, the only difference is that the chef wears a silly looking hat. Just kidding! The major difference is that the chef is a professional; the individual has a degree in culinary arts. He has spent two to four years learning his trade, and he usually works in a professional environment – a hotel, for example. A cook, on the other hand, need not have professional credentials; anyone who dabbles in the kitchen can be called a 'cook'. You and I can be called a 'cook'. The word 'chef' is the short form of the French 'chef de cuisine', meaning 'chief of the kitchen'. And as the chief, he has many people working under him – including several cooks. Usually in our homes, a 'cook' toils on his/her own! Perhaps much more important, a chef gets paid a lot more than a cook.

What is the meaning of 'hunky-dory'?

(Obli Rajesh, Coimbatore)

The first syllable of 'hunky' rhymes with 'skunk', 'bunk' and 'dunk'; the 'dor' in 'dory' is pronounced like the word 'door'. The word is pronounced 'hun-ki DOOR-I' with the main stress on the first syllable of 'dory'. The expression is considered to be rather old fashioned, and is mostly heard in informal contexts. When you say that everything is 'hunky dory', you are suggesting that things are just fine. It is usually used to talk about situations where everything is under control.

*They had a massive fight yesterday. So things are not really hunky dory.

Several explanations have been offered regarding the origin of this American expression. One theory is that the 'hunky' comes from the Dutch 'honk' meaning 'goal'. When someone has reached his goal, he is a very satisfied person. No one is really sure how 'dory' became part of the expression.

Which is correct? 'I wonder/wondered if you could lend me a lakh'?

(J Nithya, Bangalore)

In terms of grammar, both sentences are correct. The use of 'wondered' does not imply that you had thought of asking for a loan sometime in the past. Both 'wonder' and 'wondered' suggest that you wish to ask the person for the loan right now. The simple past is frequently used with a verb like 'wonder' to make polite inquiries or requests. Although the two sentences mean the same thing, 'I wondered' would be considered to be much more polite than 'I wonder'.

Is there a word for someone who is learning his ABC?

(G Vandana, Chennai)

The word that you have in mind is 'abecedarian'. The first three syllables sound like the letters 'A', 'B' and 'C' respectively. The 'dar' is pronounced like the word 'dare', and the final 'ian' sounds like the 'ian' in 'guardian' and 'custodian'. The word is pronounced 'a-b-c-DARE-ian' with the stress on the fourth syllable. The word has several different meanings. In addition to referring to someone who is learning the letters of the alphabet, it can also be used to refer to a novice – an individual who is learning the 'abc' of something. Anything that has been arranged alphabetically can also be called 'abecedarian'. The word comes from the Latin 'abecedarius' meaning 'alphabetical'.

"The worst food that you'll ever eat will probably be prepared by a 'cook' who calls himself a 'chef'." –

Alton Brown

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