

## KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

# Know Your English - What is the meaning of 'Chalk and cheese'

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FEBRUARY 27, 2012 21:29 IST

UPDATED: MARCH 02, 2012 14:54 IST

## What is the meaning of 'chalk and cheese'?

(M. Shafi Mohammed, Chennai)

This is an expression that has been part of the English language for a very long time. According to some scholars, John Gower was the first person to use it in his text 'Confessio Amantis' written in 1390. When you say that two people are like 'chalk and cheese', you are suggesting that the two are very different from each other; they have nothing in common. The expression, which has the same meaning as 'apples and oranges', can be used with things as well. No one is really sure about the origin of this idiom.

\*I can't believe that Suresh and Vijay are brothers. They're like chalk and cheese.

## What is the difference between 'varsity' and 'university'?

(K. Jagadish, Mysore)

'Varsity' is the shortened form of 'university', and the word is used in both American and British English. In England, New Zealand and South Africa, the word is mostly used in informal contexts to mean 'university'. In earlier times, it was specifically used to refer to Oxford and Cambridge. Some dictionaries label this use of the word as old fashioned. Nowadays, 'varsity' is mostly used in the context of sports. It refers to the main team of a university/school/college.

\*Their son Atul is on the varsity cricket team.

## What is the meaning of 'modus operandi'?

(R. Soundararajan, Chennai)

First, let us deal with the pronunciation of this expression. The first syllable 'mod' rhymes with the words 'code', 'load' and 'toad'. The 'op' in 'operandi' sounds like the 'op' in 'cop', 'hop' and 'top', while 'rand' rhymes with 'band', 'hand', and 'sand'. The final 'i' is like the 'ee' in 'deep', 'deem', and 'seem'. The vowel in the second syllable of both words is like the 'a' in 'china'. The word is pronounced 'mode-es op-e-RAND-ee' with the main stress on the third syllable of

## THE HINDU

Expression is mostly used to refer to one's usual method of doing something. It is frequently heard on television shows like 'Law and Order' and 'CSI'. Whenever the police discover a body, one of the first questions the detective asks is, 'What is the MO?' 'MO' is the abbreviated form of 'modus operandi'.

\*The Police Chief was unwilling to discuss the killer's modus operandi.

### What is the origin of 'bikini'?

(Rafi Mohammed L, Tirupur)

In 1946, the French designer, Louis Reard, invented the two-piece swimming costume for women. Around that time, the Americans were using some of the islands in the Pacific to test their Atomic and Hydrogen bombs. One of the islands where several tests had been carried out and which was on everyone's lips was 'Bikini Atoll'. The designer, Reard, decided to call his creation 'bikini' because like the bombs being exploded on that island, he wanted the swimwear to send shock waves – but of a different kind, of course!

### Which is correct: a European/an European?

(Raju Trivedi, Benaras)

The word 'European' begins with a vowel letter. But when the word is pronounced, the first sound that emerges is that of a consonant. Since the word begins with a 'y' sound, 'European' should be preceded by 'a' and not 'an'.

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*"No, I don't understand my husband's theory of relativity, but I know my husband and I know he can be trusted."* – **Elsa Einstein**

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Printable version | Apr 23, 2018 3:19:37 AM | <http://www.thehindu.com/books/know-your-english/know-your-english-what-is-the-meaning-of-chalk-and-cheese/article2939178.ece>

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