

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know your English - Meaning of 'Pancake People'?

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What is the meaning of 'pancake people'?

(Kiran Gandhi, Kerala)

This is a term coined by the playwright Richard Foreman to refer to the present Internet-dependent-generation. In 2003, he wrote, "I think we are producing a race of people who are paper thin – almost pancake people – who cover a lot of territory." A pancake, like the Indian dosa, is fried on both sides; it is thin and flat and is usually eaten for breakfast. Freeman suggests that thanks to the Internet, the present generation has unlimited access to information, and they read up on a broad range of subjects as they surf the information highway. Like the pancake, however, these individuals spread themselves really thin, and in the process fail to acquire any intellectual depth. They acquire bits of information about various subjects, but do not delve into any one area. They often fail to retain the information they have acquired as it is available on the Net. Like the pancake, these people are flat, spread thin with small bits of information, and have little or no depth.

*Getting the pancake people to write something without access to the internet is next to impossible.

What is the difference between 'edible' and 'eatable'?

(V. Gangaram, Mumbai)

Anything that can be safely consumed by a human being can be termed 'edible'; the eating of this substance will not kill or harm the person. An edible substance may not necessarily taste good, but it will not harm anyone. 'Eatable', on the other hand, has more to do with the taste of the dish. What is considered 'eatable' may vary from one person to another. A curry with too much salt is edible, but it may not be considered eatable by some people. Chicken, for example, is 'edible', but vegetarians would not consider it 'eatable'. Not everything that is 'edible' is 'eatable'.

*Shruthi, throw those mushrooms away. They are not edible.

*Yukthi had made a number of dishes. Not all of them were eatable.

What is the meaning of 'fag end'?

(B. Ramanathan, Chennai)

The expression is mostly used in informal contexts in British **English** to refer to the last part of something; very often, the most boring or the least important/interesting part of something.

*Irfan began to bowl well only towards the fag end of the season.

*The Chairman walked in at the fag end of my presentation.

The word 'fag' in the expression refers to the frayed end of a rope or a piece of cloth – i.e. a rope or cloth which is worn out along the edges. In England, the word 'fag' is used to refer to 'cigarettes'. Initially, it was used to refer to 'cheap cigarettes', later on, to cigarettes in general.

What is the meaning and origin of 'hightail it'?

(Rajesh Shukla, Delhi)

This expression is frequently used in informal contexts in American English. When you 'hightail it out of some place', you flee or leave the place quickly. You take to your heels.

*When I heard that Promod was coming, I hightailed it out of there.

*Naveen hightailed it out of the house as soon as he got the call from his father.

Many animals run when they sense they are in danger. Some animals, like rabbits, deer and horses raise their tail high when they flee.

"I love being a writer. What I can't stand is the paperwork." – **Peter De Vries**

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