

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know your English - Pronunciation of 'pescetarian'

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How is the word 'pescetarian' pronounced?

(B. L. Jaya Raju, Visakhapatnam)

The first syllable 'pes' rhymes with 'mess', 'bless', and 'chess', while the 'e' in the second syllable sounds like the 'a' in 'china'. The last three syllables are pronounced like the 'tarian' in 'vegetarian'. The word is pronounced 'pes-ke-TAY-ri-en' with the stress on the third syllable. A 'pescetarian' is someone who eats fish, but does not eat meat. The word can also be spelt 'pescatarian'. It comes from the Italian 'pesce' meaning 'fish'.

*According to this article, Steve Jobs was a pescetarian.

What is the meaning and origin of 'in the swim'?

(S. Venugopal, Chennai)

When you say that someone is in the swim of things, you are implying that the individual is actively participating in the things happening around him. He is in the 'thick of things'. The expression can also be used to mean 'to be up-to-date'; someone who is well informed. The opposite of this expression is 'out of the swim of things'.

*It took Sachi only one day to get in the swim of things.

*If you want more information, talk to Ratna. She is in the swim.

The 'swim' in the expression has nothing to do with the activity of swimming. The word, in fact, comes from the world of fishing. Fishermen, or anglers, as they are sometimes called, use the word 'swim' to refer to the section of the lake/river where fish can be found in plenty. So, if you are a fisherman and wish to catch a lot fish, where would you be? You would be where the action is, you would be 'in the swim'!

What is the difference between 'valuable' and 'invaluable'?

(Sagar Jaju, Hyderabad)

The two words are not the opposite of each other; both can be used with people and things. A 'valuable' object is one that is worth a lot of money.

An 'invaluable' object, on the other hand, is priceless. It is worth a lot more than a 'valuable' object; its worth, however, is often difficult to determine.

*The painting that Rajee donated to the museum was invaluable.

*Ganesh has a few valuable paintings at home

A 'valuable member' of a team is someone who contributes to the team's success. If you refer to someone as being an 'invaluable member,' you are implying that he is indispensable. If the team were to lose him, it would suffer. A valuable member can be replaced, an invaluable member cannot be.

*It was one of the valuable suggestions made at the meeting today.

*What I am today is all thanks to my father's invaluable advice.

What is the meaning of 'bumf'?

(S. Rakesh, Lucknow)

This word is mostly used in informal contexts in British English. 'Bumf,' also spelt 'bumph,' is the combination of two words: 'bum fodder.' It was originally the slang term for toilet paper. Nowadays, the word is used to refer to any printed material that is unwanted or uninteresting to read. The flyers that we get when we visit a supermarket, the various promotional materials from companies, and the literature that accompanies most products can all be called 'bumf.' Boring official documents can be called 'bumf' as well.

*Padmaja went to the industrial exhibition and came home with a lot of bumf.

"Gentlemen, you can't fight in here. This is the war room." – **Stanley Kubrick**

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