

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know your English – Meaning of 'Packed to the rafters'

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What is the meaning of 'packed to the rafters'?

(Kiran Gandhi, Thiruvananthapuram)

You must be a fan of the new television serial being shown on Star World. The beams that usually support the roof are called rafters. So, when you say that a place is 'packed to the rafters', you mean it is completely full; it is overflowing with people/things. There are so many people packed in, the height of the roof has to be raised. Another expression that has the same meaning is 'up the rafters'. According to some scholars, the expression was first used in the world of theatre.

***During the celebrity's trial, the courtroom was packed to the rafters.**

If you are a fan of the Aussie tennis player Patrick Rafter, you may be interested to know that some people tend to replace 'packed to the rafters' with the expression 'pat raftered' – since the two expressions sound similar. The auditorium was pat raftered today because the students thought that Tendulkar was coming!

What is the difference between 'crook' and 'history sheeter'?

(Shreya, Vellore)

The term 'history sheeter' is used only in India; it is not listed in most of the standard dictionaries. In our country, the term is used to refer to someone who has a 'rap sheet' – in other words, a 'history sheeter' is usually someone who has a case or several cases registered against him. He is a criminal. The word 'crook', on the other hand, can be used to refer to a criminal and also to someone who is dishonest. He needn't be someone against whom charges have been filed. Many people in our country believe that the average politician is dishonest, that he is a 'crook'; not all our 'netas', however, are 'history sheeters'.

How is the word 'staccato' pronounced?

(B.M. Bharath, Hyderabad)

The 'a' in the first syllable is like the 'a' in 'china' and the following 'cca' is pronounced like the word 'car'. The final syllable sounds like the word 'toe'. The word is pronounced 'ste-KAA-toe' with the stress on the second syllable. In the world of music, 'staccato' refers to a short note; a note which is played quickly and sharply. In everyday contexts, the word is

used to talk about the sudden and short burst of something – sound, speech, movement, etc.

*Harish's staccato replies failed to impress the committee members.

Why don't I find the term 'white money' in dictionaries?

(Tara Ganesh, Nagpur)

Some dictionaries do list the word. The term 'white money' is frequently used in our country to refer to money that has been made by legal or honest means. The opposite of this kind of money is, of course, 'black money'. Although the term 'white money' exists in native varieties of **English**, it is not used in the sense that we do. It looks like we Indians have given the term an entirely new meaning. The few dictionaries that list 'white money' define it as 'silver money' – in other words, coins made of silver. The Urban Dictionary lists the term 'white boy money'. It defines it as "the funds obtained through legitimate, legal means, i.e. a job."

"Money is not the most important thing in the world. Love is! Fortunately, I love money." – **Jackie Mason**

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