

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know Your English - Difference between 'neophyte', 'beginner', and 'new beginner'

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What is the difference between 'neophyte', 'beginner', and 'new beginner'?

(Jasbir Singh, Patiala)

The first word is pronounced 'KNEE-o-fight' with the stress on the first syllable, and it is frequently used to refer to a beginner or someone who is learning about an activity he has recently become involved in. Since the word sounds fancier than 'beginner', it is now common for many people to use the two words interchangeably in most contexts. Careful users of the language, however, object to this. They contend that 'neophyte' should be used only in the context of religion. The word comes from the Latin 'neo' meaning 'new' and 'phytos' meaning 'planted'. It was originally used to refer to a newly ordained priest or someone who had been recently converted. As for the expression 'new beginner', it is a tautology. Someone who is a 'beginner' is 'new'; the word 'new' is redundant.

*You need experienced people for the job. Vimal is a neophyte/beginner.

*The way Malar plays the guitar, it's obvious she's no neophyte/beginner.

In cricket, why is the word 'duck' used to refer to 'zero'?

(S. Manishankar, Namakkal)

The original expression used was 'duck's egg'. This term was used to refer to 'zero' because of the similarity in shape between a duck's egg and the number. With the passage of time, 'duck's egg' was reduced to 'duck'.

What is the meaning and origin of 'cackling geese'?

(C.V. Ashwin, Bangalore)

'Cackle' rhymes with the word 'tackle' and it is usually used to refer to the high pitched and rather annoying sound made by hens, geese, etc. When used with people, it refers to the loud, shrill laughter or their loud chatter.

*The girls started cackling when they saw Sharukh at the airport.

The expression 'cackling geese' is mostly used to mean 'saviour' or 'protector'. The full form of this expression is 'the cackling geese saved Rome'. Those of us brought up on 'Asterix'

comics know that the Romans had problems subduing the Gauls. Around 390 BC, the Gauls invaded Rome and attempted to plunder the Temple of Juno (Jupiter) on Capitoline Hill; this temple was well known for the riches it contained. The Gauls tried to trick the Romans by climbing the hill during the night. A few of the Gauls managed to climb over the high wall and slip in. Unfortunately for them, one of the geese in the temple heard the intruders and began to cackle. This alerted the Roman soldiers, and they managed to toss their enemies over the wall. I understand that geese make very good watchdogs – some say they are even better than dogs!

What is the meaning of 'game changer'?

(M.N. Anuvarudhan, Palakkad)

The word is normally used to refer to people or their ideas. When you call someone a 'game changer', you mean that the person has thought out of the box, and has come up with an idea that will change the way things have been done till now. The Internet, for example, is a game changer as far as gathering information is concerned. Before it became an integral part of our life, most people went to the library or discussed matters with other people to be in the know. Nowadays, you can sit at home and write a PhD dissertation surfing the Net – all you need to do is copy and paste!

"I feel so miserable without you, it's almost like having you here." – **Stephen Bishop**

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