

## KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

# Know Your English: difference between shiver and shake?

**S. UPENDRAN**

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## How is the word 'bludgeon' pronounced?

(Anjali James, Kottayam)

The first syllable rhymes with the words 'judge', 'grudge' and 'budge', and the final 'eo' sounds like the 'a' in 'china'. The word is pronounced 'BLUJ-en' with the stress on the first syllable. A bludgeon is a club or a heavy stick that can be used as a weapon. When used as a verb, the word means to repeatedly hit someone with a heavy object. It can also be used to mean to force someone into doing something.

\*Several young men were seen walking around with bicycle chains and bludgeons.

\*The young girl was bludgeoned to death in broad daylight.

\*The students bludgeoned the teacher into putting off the test.

## What is the meaning of 'He has too much headweight'?

(V.Sethuraman, Villupuram)

The word 'headweight' is used in certain parts of India to mean proud. A person with a lot of 'headweight' is someone who is arrogant and very conceited. It is common to hear people say, "Ranjit is difficult to work with. He has too much headweight". Native speakers do not use the word in this sense.

## What is the meaning and origin of 'on the house'?

(Dinesh Kumar, Pune)

If the owner of a restaurant offers you a basket of bread rolls 'on the house', it means you are getting it at the expense of the establishment. It is being given to you free of charge; in everyday contexts, we would call it a 'freebie'.

\*The restaurant owner gave us a bowl of soup on the house.

The 'house' in the expression refers to a pub or an inn. In the old days, when a customer bought three drinks, it was standard practice for an owner to provide the next one free of charge. The fourth drink was on the house, at the expense of the establishment. With the passage of time, the expression began to be used to refer to anything that was being given away free – not just drinks!

## Why do people in the audience say 'hear, hear'?

(Javed, Hyderabad)

When a speaker says something, and a member of the audience responds by shouting 'hear hear', what he means is that he strongly agrees with what the speaker has said. The expression is frequently heard in Parliament. I understand the original expression was 'hear, all ye good people, hear what this brilliant and eloquent speaker has to say'. In the 17th century, in the House of Commons, this long expression was reduced to 'hear him, hear him'. With the passage of time, 'hear him, hear him' was further reduced to 'hear, hear'.

## What is the difference between shiver and shake?

(Vrinda Patil, Bangalore)

'Shake' is the more common word. Animals and human beings 'shiver' when they are cold or afraid of something. The act of shivering is usually involuntary and suggests that the person/animal is in some sort of discomfort. Objects like trees, chairs and doors cannot and do not shiver, but they can be shaken. Unlike 'shiver', shaking can be either voluntary or involuntary. You can shake your head to show that you agree with what someone has said. You can shake someone for a few seconds in order to wake him up. When the wind blows, the branches 'shake', they do not 'shiver'.

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*"When my kids become wild and unruly, I use a nice, safe playpen. When they are finished, I climb out."* –

**Erma Bombeck**

[>upendrankye@gmail.com](mailto:upendrankye@gmail.com)

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