

## KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

# Know your English – How is the word 'schadenfreude' pronounced?

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## How is the word 'schadenfreude' pronounced?

(V. Vishal, Delhi)

The 'scha' in this word of German origin is like the 'shar' in 'sharp' and 'shark,' while the 'e' in the second and final syllable sounds like the 'a' in 'china.' The 'eu' is like the 'oy' in 'boy,' 'toy,' and 'coy.' The word is pronounced 'SHAA-den-froy-de' with the stress on the first syllable. In German, 'Freude' means 'joy' and 'Shaden' means 'harm.' When a politician suffers a misfortune of some kind, most people feel happy. This feeling of delight or joy that we get when terrible things happen to other people is called 'schadenfreude.'

\*The leader of the opposition watched the in-fighting with schadenfreude.

## Is 'winningest' a real word?

(M. Rangaswami, Chennai)

Yes, it is. It is a word that is frequently used in American **English** in the context of sports. When you say that someone is the 'winningest Indian captain,' you mean that the individual has won more games as captain than anyone else. The word has been listed in several American dictionaries.

\*They tell me that Michael Phelps is the winningest Olympian.

Of late, the word seems to have acquired another meaning; it is being used to mean 'most charming!'

\*According to Ramesh, Sujatha has the winningest smile on campus.

## What is the origin of 'sent on a leather hunt'?

(K.P. Usha, Chennai)

This is an expression mostly used in the context of cricket. When the batting team is plundering runs by hitting the ball to various parts of the field, most commentators and sports writers say that the fielding team was 'sent on a leather hunt.' What they mean by this is that the poor fielders were kept busy chasing the 'leather' (cricket) ball. The expression is extremely popular in India. Native speakers of English seldom use it.

## Why is the American government called 'Uncle Sam'?

(M. Sudhir, Secunderabad)

No one is really sure about the origin of this expression. What most people agree on is that the name 'Sam' in the expression does not refer to any well-known American President or any famous General.

One story doing the rounds is that an ordinary meat inspector by the name of 'Sam Wilson' was responsible for the creation of the term 'Uncle Sam'. This venerable gentleman lived in the United States in the 19th century, and was hired by the U.S army to certify the meat that had been bought by them. Wilson's fellow workers, out of respect for him, made it a habit of calling him 'uncle Sam'. Whenever he inspected the meat and found it to be of good quality, he put his initials on the container. Instead of scribbling 'SW' (Sam Wilson), he used to write 'US'. When people asked whether the initials 'US' stood for the 'United States', Wilson replied that it stood for 'Uncle Sam'. There is however little evidence to support this story.

The U.S Army has been making use of Uncle Sam as its spokesperson for many years; most of the posters it uses in its recruiting drives carry a picture of this individual. He is generally shown as an elderly gentleman with a stern look on his face. He has a goatee, and wears a top hat with the stars and stripes of the American flag.

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*"All right everyone, line up alphabetically according to your height."* – **Casey Stengel**

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