

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know your English – Is it okay to say ‘take a listen’?

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Is it okay to say ‘take a listen’?

(R Ravindran, Chennai)

The expressions ‘take a listen’ and ‘have a listen’ are frequently used in American **English** nowadays – they seem to be very popular among radio and television news reporters. Anderson Cooper, a well-known anchor for CNN, uses ‘take a listen’ quite frequently. Both ‘take’ and ‘have a listen’ have the same meaning as ‘listen’.

Your favourite group’s latest song is terrible. Have a listen.

Careful users of the language condemn the use of these expressions. Writing about the frequent use of ‘take/have a listen’, RH Fiske said: “Journalists and media personalities who use this offensive phrase ought to be silenced; business people, dismissed, public officials, pilloried.” Scholars, however, point out that ‘listen’ has been used as a noun for several centuries now. Expressions like ‘to have a proper listen’ and ‘to be on the listen’ have been part of the English language for several hundred years.

Why does every scam have the word ‘gate’?

(Sanjay Srivastava, Rae Barelli)

Every country has its share of scams. Currently, India is hooked on IPLgate. Earlier scams include ‘Coalgate’, ‘2G Spectrumgate’, ‘Telgigate’, and ‘Radiagate’. The word ‘gate’ has been added to most scandals since 1972. On June 16, of that year, the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee was broken into – sensitive documents were photographed and the office phones bugged. The headquarters was located on the sixth floor of the ‘Watergate Hotel and Office Building’ in Washington DC. After a lengthy investigation, it was found that senior officials in President Nixon’s Republican administration had ordered the break in, and later tried to cover up. The media called the scandal ‘Watergate’. Within a year, the word ‘gate’ began to be added to scandals all over the world. ‘Watergate’ resulted in many of Nixon’s aides going to prison; the President himself was forced to resign.

What is the difference between ‘meet’ and ‘meet with’?

(N. Gopala Krishnan, Vishakapatnam)

There was a time when 'meet with' was limited to American English; but today, it is being used on the other side of the Atlantic as well. When you 'meet' someone, the meeting could be a pre-arranged or it could be accidental. Also, what you do can vary considerably – you could talk about something important or you could just gossip. 'Meet with', on the other hand, is used nowadays to suggest that the meeting is going to be a formal one. It is pre-arranged; the two individuals have decided beforehand where and when the meeting is going to take place. 'Meet with' also suggests that there is an agenda; as a result of which the meeting is likely to be a lengthy one.

*Dr. Manmohan Singh met with President Obama to discuss insurgency.

Although careful users of the language condemn the use of 'meet with', standard dictionaries have started including the expression.

"Love and scandal are the best sweeteners of tea." – **Henry Fielding**

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