

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know your English – What is the origin of 't-shirt'?

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How is the word 'buffet' pronounced?

(T.R. Balakrishna Rao, Rajahmundry)

If you are thinking about a meal where you serve yourself, there seem to be two different ways of pronouncing the word. The British prefer to pronounce the 'u' like the 'u' in 'put', and the 'et' like the 'ay' in 'bay' and 'day'. They pronounce the word 'BU-fay' with the stress on the first syllable. The Americans, on the other hand, pronounce the 'u' like the 'a' in 'china'. They pronounce the word 'be-FAY' with the stress on the second syllable.

What is the difference between 'exhausted' and 'exhaustive'?

(P.V. Jyotsna, Hyderabad)

Both are related to the word 'exhaust', but their meanings are very different. When you write a PhD dissertation and your advisor or guide compliments you on your exhaustive research, you must pat yourself on the back for he is saying that your work is very comprehensive – you have included everything that you possibly could have on the subject. 'Exhaustive' means 'complete' or 'thorough'. Something that is 'exhausting', on the other hand, is very tiring.

*We have to conduct an exhaustive study for the kind of data we need.

*Conducting 20 interviews in a day can be very exhausting.

In the case of both words, the stress is on the second syllable: ig-ZOS-tiv and ig-ZOS-ting.

Why is paper referred to as 'fullscape'?

(L. Sadhana, Chennai)

The word that you have in mind is not 'fullscape', but 'foolscap'; a word that is seldom heard nowadays. Before the introduction of the A4 size paper, the 'foolscap' or 'foolscape' was the standard paper size used in most countries across the globe. In terms of size, it was slightly narrower but a bit longer than the current A4. The 'foolscap' paper got its name from the watermark that was put on it – a fool's cap. Paper of this size became popular in the early 15th century, and for the next 500 years dominated the market.

(D. Gururani, Nainital)

Many people would say 'no'. Till about 20 years ago, the rule was fairly simple. 'Comprise' meaning 'contain' was not to be followed by 'of'. One could not say 'comprise of' or 'is comprised of'. You could talk about a house 'consisting of three bedrooms', but not 'comprising of three bedrooms'. But with native speakers of English using 'comprise of' even in formal contexts, some experts on usage feel that this rather traditional rule is likely to be done away with in the near future.

What is the origin of 't-shirt'?

(J. Bharath, Thanjavur)

When it was first introduced, the cotton t-shirt was available only in white, and it did not come with a collar. Men were seldom seen sporting one in public for it was meant as a form of innerwear. This apparel was given the name t-shirt because when it was spread out and laid flat on a table, it looked like the letter 'T'. With the passage of time, the design of the T-shirt underwent a transformation. It became available in different colours, and some contained a collar and a pocket. Soon, it became a man's favourite casual wear. When t-shirts became extremely popular in the 1950s, advertisers began to write slogans on them.

"I have always believed that writing advertisements is the second most profitable form of writing. The first, of course, is ransom notes." — **Philip Dusenberry**

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