

## KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

# Know your English – Which is correct: 'drunk driving' or 'drunken driving'?

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**Which is correct: 'drunk driving' or 'drunken driving'?***(Vivek Sharma, New Delhi)*

From the point of view of grammar, the noun 'driving' has to be preceded by an adjective. In this case, 'drunken' is the right word.

\*A drunken student created quite a commotion in the dining hall.

\*The police have arrested Teja for drunken driving.

The word 'driving', however, can be preceded by either 'drunken' or 'drunk'.

According to the American Heritage Dictionary, 'drunk driving' has become a fixed expression in **English**, and is therefore an exception to the rule.

Some people maintain there is a subtle distinction between a 'drunk driver' and a 'drunken driver'. The former is someone whose alcohol level is a little over the legal limit. A 'drunken driver', on the other hand, is someone who is 'sozzled' or intoxicated. In everyday contexts, this distinction is seldom maintained.

**What is the meaning and origin of 'tall order'?***(S Narayanan, Chennai)*

When you say that the task assigned to you is a 'tall order', you mean it is a formidable one; something that is going to be difficult to complete in the time given to you.

\*Completing the project on time is going to be a tall order.

\*You want us to do all this in a day? That's a pretty tall order!

We know that people can be tall and buildings can be tall. But how can an 'order' be tall?

The word 'tall' has been part of the English language for several centuries; it is not surprising, therefore, that its meaning has changed several times during this period of time. One of the meanings of 'tall' was 'lofty, grand'. Americans took this meaning of the word and created slang expressions like 'tall tales' (grand or exaggerated stories which are hard to believe) and 'tall order' (exaggerated demands which will be difficult to fulfil).

## **Why don't dictionaries define 'chit' as something used to copy in examinations?**

*(Mala, Kochi)*

The word 'chit' comes from the Hindi 'chitti', meaning 'letter'. In schools and colleges in India, 'chit' is used to refer to a small piece of paper containing notes that students use to cheat on an exam or a test. Examinees note down important information on the chits, and they think of innovative ways of keeping them concealed from the ever-alert 'invigilator'. Native speakers of English do not call these hidden pieces of paper, 'chits'. They refer to them as 'crib notes', 'crib sheet' and 'cheat sheet' – mostly in informal contexts. In open book exams, students are allowed to use their 'crib notes' or 'cheat sheet'.

## **What is the difference between 'aside from' and 'apart from'?**

*(K. Kamini, Mysore)*

In terms of meaning, there is no difference; the two can be used interchangeably in most contexts. Both expressions can be used to mean 'except for' and 'as well as'. 'Aside from' is much more frequent in American English.

\*Aside/Apart from a few stray dogs howling, the street was strangely quiet.

\*Apart/Aside from the money he makes as a player, he also makes a hefty sum through endorsements.

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