

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know your English - What is the correct pronunciation of 'the'?

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(Dinesh Kumar, Mumbai)

'The' can be pronounced in three different ways. When 'the' is followed by a word that begins with a vowel sound, then the 'e' is pronounced like the 'I' in 'bit' and 'kit': 'thi' ocean, 'thi' egg, 'thi' hour, etc. When the word following 'the' begins with a consonant sound, then the 'e' is pronounced like the 'a' in 'china': the pig, the man, and the university. Please remember, it is the sound and not the spelling of the word that follows. If you wish to emphasise something, then the 'e' is pronounced like the 'ee' in 'feel' and 'peel'. For example, I saw 'thee' Sachin at the airport.

What is the difference between 'envious' and 'enviable'?

(C. Sujatha, Chennai)

When you are 'envious' of someone, you are very jealous of the person. You want something the person has – it could be anything, a new car he has bought or the dimples that appear on his cheeks when he smiles. You are rather unhappy that the other person has the car and the dimples, and you don't. You wish you had them too. 'Enviably', on the other hand, means 'highly desirable'. If someone is in 'an enviable situation', he is in a situation that is worthy of envy or likely to cause envy. Most people would wish to be in the same situation. Unlike 'envious', 'enviable' does not always have a negative connotation.

*Mala has always been envious of her neighbour's success.

*You should hire Naveen. He has an enviable track record.

What is the meaning and origin of 'tar and feather someone'?

(Abhishek, Bangalore)

This is a relatively old expression that is seldom heard nowadays. It is mostly used to mean to punish or criticise someone rather harshly.

*The Chairman said he would tar and feather anyone who spoke to the media.

*Considering what he has done, he should be tarred and feathered.

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considered inappropriate, justice was meted out by the mob. People caught hold of the culprit, stripped him to the waist and then poured hot tar on him. While the victim was screaming in agony, he was made to roll on a bed of feathers. When enough feathers had stuck to the tar, the mob paraded the individual around town. The punishment and humiliation resulted in one of two things: the person either changed his ways, or he left town for good.

Is it okay to say, 'Raj gave it to him left and right'?

(K. Natarajan, Chennai)

This is an idiom mostly used by Indians; it is not found in native varieties of **English**. 'To give someone left and right' is mostly used to mean to scold or criticise someone severely. Some of the expressions that have the same meaning in native varieties of English are: 'tick someone off', 'give someone a dressing down' and 'chew someone out'.

What is the meaning of 'carbon soldiers'?

(Jyothi Rao, Hyderabad)

'Carbon soldiers' are your children. The term is considered slang and therefore mostly used in informal contexts. Another expression that is sometimes used to refer to one's children is 'biological footprint'.

*She has enough carbon soldiers to start her own cricket team."

"Envy is the art of counting the other person's blessings instead of your own." – **Harold Coffin**

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