

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

What is the meaning of 'to badger someone'?

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What is the meaning of 'to badger someone'?*(V. Sashikanth, Mysore)*

It means to pester someone. When you 'badger someone into doing something', you keep annoying or bothering the person till he becomes frustrated and agrees to do what you want him to.

*The children badgered their father into taking them to a movie.

The idiom comes from the cruel sport of badger baiting. In this game, dogs were turned loose on a badger, a furry animal placed in an empty barrel or a hole. When the vicious dogs managed to drag the frightened animal out, the hounds and the badger were separated. The injured animal was put back in the barrel or hole, and the cruel process was repeated several times till the poor badger had been ripped to pieces.

What is the difference between 'mistrust' and 'distrust'?*(S. Kalamkar, Mumbai)*

'Distrust' is the stronger of the two words. When you are certain that a person is dishonest and therefore cannot be relied upon, you 'distrust' him. Perhaps this individual has let you down or cheated you in the past. Maybe someone reliable has told you he is not to be trusted. When you 'mistrust' someone, it is not based on fact or experience. You feel rather uneasy about the individual; something inside you warns you not to trust the person. It's a gut feeling that you have.

*After last year's fiasco, I have begun to distrust our leader's judgment.

*I can't put my finger on it, but I mistrust Abhay.

What is the meaning of 'doyen'?*(Harish Kumar, Chennai)*

The first syllable 'doy' rhymes with 'toy' and 'boy', while the 'e' sounds like the 'a' in 'china'. The word is pronounced 'DOY-en' with the stress on the first syllable. The eldest or the

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usually referred to as a doyen. Officials frequently use the word when someone senior who has worked in a particular field for a long time dies.

*Around these parts, Amar is seen as the doyen of sports journalism.

The French word 'doyen' originally meant 'commander of ten'. It is from this word that we get 'dean'. Derived from the Latin 'decanus', a 'dean' was the 'head of a group of ten monks in a monastery'.

How is the word 'pusillanimous' pronounced?

(Biju Kumar, Kollam)

The 'pu' rhymes with 'few', 'due' and 'cue'. The 'l' in the second and fourth syllables sounds like the 'l' in 'bit', 'hit' and 'kit', and the 'a' is like the 'a' in 'cat' and 'bat'. The word is pronounced 'pyuu-si-LAN-i-mes' with the stress on the third syllable. It comes from the Latin 'pusillus' meaning 'weak' and 'animus' meaning 'courage'. A pusillanimous individual is a 'scaredy cat'; he is a coward who gets pushed around by others, and is often too afraid to make his own decisions.

*The pusillanimous teacher did whatever the students told him to.

Is it okay to say, 'He's studying in overseas'?

(J.Harini, Thiruvananthapuram)

No, it is not. Words like 'overseas', 'abroad', 'upstairs' and 'downstairs' usually function as an adverb, and therefore are not preceded by 'in'. We cannot say 'in upstairs', 'in abroad' or 'in overseas'.

*My younger brother is studying upstairs/abroad/overseas.

"To succeed in life, you need three things: a wishbone, a backbone and a funny bone." — **Reba McEntire**

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