

## EDUCATION

# Don't turn a Nelson's eye to jingoism

**S. Upendran**

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**What is the difference between 'The Principal spoke with the student' and 'The Principal spoke to the student'? (B Panchanathan, Bengaluru)**

In terms of grammar, both 'speak to' and 'speak with' are acceptable. Careful users of the language, however, maintain there is a subtle distinction in meaning between the two. When you 'speak with' or 'talk with' someone, it suggests you are having a conversation with the individual – the two of you contribute and keep the conversation going. When you 'speak to' or 'talk to' someone, you are doing most of the talking. It suggests that it is more of a monologue than a dialogue. Your partner mostly listens; he says little. Not all native speakers of English, however, maintain this subtle distinction between the two. In fact, there is a tendency, nowadays, to use 'speak to' and 'speak with' interchangeably.

Sridhar is never on time for class. It's time the principal spoke to him about it.

I spoke with Sonba for a long time about the problem.

**What is the meaning and origin of 'Nelson's eye'? (Mathan Kumar, Erode)**

The relatively old idiom 'turn a Nelson's/Nelson eye' has more or less the same meaning as 'turn a blind eye' to something or someone. When you turn a Nelson's eye to a problem, you deliberately choose to ignore it; you may even attempt to convince yourself that the problem does not really exist.

The Government has turned a Nelson's eye to the growing problem of beggars on the streets.

The teacher chose to turn a Nelson eye when she saw her son cheating.

Horatio Nelson, a brilliant but arrogant officer in the British Navy, was blind in one eye. He was fighting the Dutch in Copenhagen in 1801, when he was ordered by his commanding officer, Admiral Parker, to withdraw. When the sailors on Nelson's ship saw the signal, they immediately informed him of it. Nelson, instead of following orders, placed his telescope on his blind eye and shouted, "I really do not see the signal". He then ordered his men to continue fighting; a few hours later, he emerged victorious.

**What is the meaning of 'jingoism'? (Uday Rao, Hosur)**

Most dictionaries define it as 'extreme patriotism'. Jingoism is the belief that your country is the best and that it can never do any wrong; it is the other country that is to be blamed for all the existing problems. A 'jingoist' is blindly patriotic and tends to promote his beliefs in a very aggressive manner. He is willing to go to war with his neighbouring countries just to prove that his country is better. The word is normally used to show disapproval.

Our leaders are promoting mindless jingoism and not patriotism.

**Which is correct: 'You really ought to help her' or 'You ought really to help her'? (Lakshmi Kumar, Kochi)**

Both are acceptable. Books on grammar suggest that in constructions with the modal 'ought to', words like 'really', 'always' and 'never' can either precede or follow 'ought'. 'You ought really to help her' would be considered the formal of the two.

\* \* \*

*A real patriot is someone who gets a parking ticket and rejoices that the system works. — Bill Vaughan*

**The author teaches at the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad.**  
[upendrankye@gmail.com](mailto:upendrankye@gmail.com)

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