

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know Your English – What is the difference between ‘illicit’ and ‘illegal’?

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What is the difference between ‘illicit’ and ‘illegal’?

(C. Selvamanni, Bangalore)

Both words can be used to mean ‘against the law’; anything that is forbidden by law would be ‘illegal’. For example, in most countries, it is illegal to drive without a licence. If you are caught doing something illegal, you will be punished for it. ‘Illicit’ can also mean ‘illegal’; it suggests that the activity that you are involved in is rather secretive. In many states in India, it is not illegal to sell alcohol. But if you were to brew the liquid at home, and sell it without the knowledge of the authorities, it would be considered ‘illicit’. Similarly, there is no law that states that a married individual needs to be faithful to his/her partner. If such a person does have an affair, it would be considered ‘illicit’ and not ‘illegal’. Things or acts that would be disapproved of by members of society would be considered ‘illicit’.

According to this article, the star had several illicit affairs.

Pirated DVDs are sold illicitly/illegally on the streets.

What is the meaning and origin of ‘a sop to Cerberus’?

(Krithika Goyal, Sirsa)

First, let us deal with the pronunciation of ‘Cerberus’. The first syllable ‘Cerb’ is pronounced like the word ‘Serb’; the following ‘e’ and ‘u’ are pronounced like the ‘a’ in ‘China’. The word is pronounced ‘SERB-e-res’ with the stress on the first syllable. The idiom means to bribe someone who is proving to be troublesome or annoying.

Unless you throw a sop to Cerberus, which in this case is the peon, you are unlikely to get an appointment with the officer concerned.

In Greek mythology, Cerberus was the three-headed dog that guarded the entrance to Hades – the place that the spirits of the dead went to. If a living individual tried to enter the underworld, Cerberus stopped them. Sometimes, people gained entrance to Hades by

throwing a sop or a bribe to the dog. Very often, the sop was nothing more than a bag of honey cakes.

How is the word 'prorogue' pronounced?

(N. Jayanthi, Chennai)

This is a word that is sometimes used when our Parliament or the State Assembly is in session. The 'o' in the first syllable is like the 'a' in 'china, and the following 'rogue' is pronounced like the word 'rogue'. In other words, the 'o' is like the 'oa' in 'road' and 'boat', and the final 'ue' is silent. The word is pronounced 'pre-ROAG' with the stress on the second syllable. It comes from the Latin *prorogare* meaning to 'stretch out'. Nowadays, the word is used to mean to 'put off' or 'defer'. When Parliament is prorogued, its activities or business stop for a period of time – the Parliament, however, is not dissolved.

The winter session is likely to be prorogued till January.

Is it okay to say, 'Return this book for me, could you?'

(J. Bhalla, Delhi)

In terms of grammar, there is nothing wrong with the sentence. The question tag (could you) is added at the end to make the statement sound like a request. It has the same meaning as 'Return this book for me, please.'

"It is even more damaging for a Minister to say foolish things than do them." – Cardinal De Retz

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