

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know your English — How is the word 'gravitas' pronounced?

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What is the meaning of 'monger' in 'scaremonger'?

(K. Vikram, Madurai)

'Monger', a rather old-fashioned word, is seldom used on its own nowadays. It was originally used to refer to someone who sold goods. In England, people talk about 'fishmongers', 'cheesemongers' and 'ironmongers'. A 'fishmonger', for example, is someone who sells fish. Nowadays, 'monger' is usually associated with words that have a negative connotation — scaremonger, rumourmonger, warmonger, etc. In all three cases, the word 'monger' is used to refer to someone who participates in activities which cause trouble. A 'scaremonger', for example, is someone who spreads rumours or stories that cause panic among the public. The word can be used as a verb to mean 'to sell'.

*According to the rumourmongers on campus, the death was no accident.

*The media were accused of rumour mongering.

How is the word 'gravitas' pronounced?

(K. Joseph, Kanyakumari)

The 'a' in the first and third syllables can be pronounced like the 'a' in 'cat', 'bat' and 'sat'. The 'i' in the second sounds like the 'i' in 'bit', 'sit' and 'hit'. One way of pronouncing the word is 'GRA-vi-tas' with the stress on the first syllable. It comes from the Latin 'gravitas' meaning 'weight, heaviness'. Nowadays, the word is usually used to refer to an individual's demeanour; his serious appearance and the way he behaves with others compel them to treat him with respect.

*The new Vice Chancellor has an air of gravitas about her.

*Vani lacks the gravitas required to become a CEO.

Which is correct: He was pressured/pressurized into doing it?

(C. Mala, Nellore)

It depends on which side of the Atlantic you are from. Americans would argue that the correct word is 'pressured'; they believe that 'pressurized/pressurised' should be used when one is talking about air pressure – 'pressurized cabin', 'pressurised can', etc. The British, on the other hand, would argue that it is possible to use both 'pressured' and 'pressurized' in the sentence. When you are pressured or pressurized into doing something, you are forced or compelled to do it.

*She was pressured/pressurized into signing the contract.

*Rita was pressured/pressurised into getting married.

What is the meaning of 'He's a man of his words'?

(Manoj Kumar, Hyderabad)

First of all, it's not 'a man of his words' but 'a man of his word'. When you say that someone is a 'man of his word', you mean that he is a person who keeps his promise. The individual can be trusted or depended on because he always does what he promised to. He is someone who does not go back on his word.

*He is an unusual politician, for he is a man of his word.

*I will return this amount next week. Don't worry, I'm a man of my word.

Is it okay to say, 'She is in the family way'?

(L. Senthil, Chennai)

This is an expression frequently used in India to mean that someone is pregnant. Native speakers would consider it to be rather old fashioned. Other polite ways of saying that someone is pregnant are: 'She is expecting/carrying' and 'She is eating for two'. In very informal contexts, one could say, 'She has a bun in the oven' and 'She is in the pudding club'.

"You know what they say when a supermodel gets pregnant? Now, she's eating for one." – **Jay Leno**

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