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Don't pull a fast one

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FEBRUARY 11, 2018 12:00 IST

UPDATED: FEBRUARY 10, 2018 12:59 IST

How is the word 'narcissist' pronounced? (J Vijaylakshmi, Warangal)

The first syllable rhymes with 'car', 'far', and 'par', and the vowel in the second and third syllable sounds like the 'i' in 'kit', 'bit' and 'pit'. One simple way of pronouncing the word is 'NAR-si-sist' with the stress on the first syllable. In everyday contexts, the word is used to show disapproval. When you refer to someone as being a 'narcissist', what you are suggesting is that he is an 'I' specialist; a self-centred individual who thinks no end of himself. The topic of conversation usually revolves around him and his so-called achievements. He believes that those around him admire him as well.

Most people in the media are of the opinion that Trump is a narcissist.

Unlike some of the Principals I know, Prof. Dev is not a narcissist.

According to Greek mythology, Narcissus was a very handsome hunter; he was so vain about his good looks that he seldom found time to be with or talk to others. The gods decided to punish the hunter by making him fall in love with his own reflection. Narcissus died staring at his handsome reflection in a pool of water.

What is the difference between 'grumble' and 'complain'? (D Ramanan, Chennai)

In both cases, you are finding fault with something or someone. Of the two, 'complain' is the more neutral. When you 'complain' to someone, it suggests that you are rather unhappy about something – this sense of dissatisfaction may be justified or unjustified. It can be about something serious or trivial. One can use different modes of communication to complain – writing and speaking. 'Grumble', on the other hand, suggests that you are unhappy or annoyed about something minor; a matter that is unlikely to be taken seriously. Unlike in the case of 'complain', one need not always grumble to another person. One can grumble to oneself or one can choose to grumble to the cat or dog that is in the house. The word also suggests that the person is usually ill-tempered.

The students have complained several times about the quality of food in the mess.

Ravi always grumbles about his mother-in-law's frequent visits.

What is the meaning of 'pull a fast one'? (Arjun Menon, Angamaly)

The expression is mostly used in informal contexts to mean to deceive or play a practical joke on someone. It is also possible to say 'put over a fast one'.

With the help of his friends, Ajay managed to pull a fast one on his parents.

The builder says the house will be ready in a month's time. I think he's trying to put over a fast one.

Is it okay to say, "Hema expected me to feel pity on the children"? (S Aparna, Nagpur)

No, it is not. One does not 'feel pity on' someone, one usually feels 'pity for' someone. You usually 'feel pity for' another person. If you wish to use 'on', then you should say 'take pity on'.

The teacher took pity on the students and decided to postpone the test.

Why does Sandhya expect me to feel pity for the students and help them?

Don't complain that you are not getting what you want, just be glad you are not getting what you deserve! – Unknown

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Printable version | Apr 20, 2018 5:40:32 PM | <http://www.thehindu.com/education/dont-pull-a-fast-one/article22713005.ece>

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