

## KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

# Know Your English - Meaning of 'blowing smoke'

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## What is the meaning of 'blowing smoke'?

(Guru, Chennai)

This expression is frequently used in American English in informal contexts. Sometimes, when we wish to impress others, we often resort to making up stories about ourselves. We tell tall tales so that those around us get the impression that we are much more important than we really are. When you 'blow smoke,' you attempt to deceive others. In the past, in order to hide the movements of its men from the enemy, armies made use of smoke screens.

\*Raju claimed he was a good friend of Mani Ratnam's. I think he was just blowing smoke.

## What is the difference between 'seasonable' and 'seasonal'?

(Manoj Kumar, New Delhi)

'Seasonable' suggests that something is normal for a particular time of year; it is appropriate for the season. For example, 'Heavy rains in the month of August is seasonable in Hyderabad!' This suggests that it usually rains heavily in August. The word has an additional meaning as well. It is also frequently used to mean 'timely'.

\*The seasonable advice given by my father helped me turn the company around.

'Seasonal,' on the other hand, means 'depending on the season'; things that change with the season. In most cold countries, going swimming and going on picnics are seasonal activities; not many people take part in them during winter.

\*The rise in the price of vegetables is seasonal.

## How is the word 'inchoate' pronounced?

(K. Janani, Bangalore)

The first syllable sounds like the word 'in,' and the second like the prefix 'co.' The final syllable is pronounced like the word 'ate.' The word is pronounced 'in-CO-ate' with the stress on the second syllable. It comes from the Latin 'inchoatus' meaning 'to begin.' Something that is 'inchoate' has just begun; it is in its early stages of development and therefore not fully formed.

\*As she listened to her father, an inchoate idea formed at the back of her mind.

### **What is the meaning and origin of the word 'pot luck'?**

(R. Somasundaram, Chennai)

When you invite people over for a 'pot luck dinner', you usually don't spend the whole day in the kitchen making a variety of dishes. In this case, each of the guests will also contribute towards the meal; each person will bring a dish and share it with others. To ensure that everyone doesn't bring the same dish, people decide beforehand who is going to bring what.

\*All our cousins are getting together this weekend. We are having a pot luck lunch.

This is a word that has been around since the 16th century, and it is a combination of 'pot' (cooking pot) and 'luck'. In the old days, when a guest dropped in unannounced during meal times, he was told 'to take pot luck'. In other words, to share with the hosts whatever was available in the cooking pot. By having come unannounced, the guest was chancing his luck as to the kind of meal he was going to get. With the passage of time, the expression 'to take pot luck' acquired a general meaning – 'to take one's chances' or 'to take what comes'.

\*I have no clue about the courses. I think I'm just going to take pot luck.

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*"I have often wanted to drown my troubles, but I can't get my wife to go swimming."* – **Jimmy Carter**

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