

## KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

# Know your English - What is the meaning of 'make a good fist of something'?

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## What is the meaning of 'make a good fist of something'?

(V. Kamath, Mysore)

This is a relatively old expression used in informal contexts in British and Australian English. It is seldom heard in the land of its origin – the United States. When you make a good fist of something, you succeed in doing it. You do a good job and achieve a certain degree of success. According to some scholars, the word 'fist' in the expression is used in the sense of 'hand' – someone who does physical work. The opposite of this expression is 'to make a poor fist of something' – meaning to fail or be unsuccessful in your attempt to do something.

\*This was Runa's first series as captain. I think she made a good fist of it.

\*Anil has a bad temper. He made a poor fist of being a trouble-shooter.

## Why do we say 'sleep tight'?

(Shalini, Chennai)

The complete saying is "Good night. Sleep tight. Wake up bright in the morning light, and do what's right with all your might." Some people say, "Good night, sleep tight. Don't let the bed bugs bite." When you tell someone to 'sleep tight', you are not asking him to keep his body stiff. The 'tight' in the expression refers to the tightness of the strings that run from one end of the bed frame to the other. In the old days, only the frame of the bed was made of wood. The middle portion, the portion on which a person actually lay down, consisted of strings. If these strings were not tightly strung around the frame, the bed sagged. Since there was no support for the back, the person got little or no sleep. When the strings were tightly strung, the bed remained firm and the person lying on it got a good night's sleep. So when you say sleep tight, what you are actually saying is, I hope your cot is tightly strung.

## How is the word 'canard' pronounced?

(R. Kamala, Vellore)

The 'a' in the first syllable of this rather formal word can be pronounced like the 'a' in 'china' or like the 'a' in 'cat' and 'bat'. The 'ar' in the second syllable sounds like the 'ar' in 'park', 'dark'

and 'mark'. The word is pronounced 'ke-NAAD' or 'ka-NAAD' with the stress on the second syllable. A 'canard' is a false piece of information deliberately spread by someone. For example, during the time of elections, political parties often fabricate stories about the opposition in order to deceive or confuse people.

\*In India, there is a widespread canard that all politicians are dirty.

\*The Prime Minister has accused the media of spreading canards.

### **What are the 50th, 60th, 70th and 80th wedding anniversaries called?**

(N K Raghavendran, Bangalore)

The 50th wedding anniversary is the 'Golden Jubilee', and the 60th, 'Diamond Jubilee'. On these occasions, couples are expected to give each other a gift made of gold/diamond. When a couple celebrates their 70th wedding anniversary, you wish them a 'Happy Platinum Anniversary'. The 80th is called 'Oak'. I guess you need to be like an oak tree to stay married that long! There are a few anniversaries in between. The 55th is the 'Emerald Anniversary', the 65th, the 'Blue Sapphire', and the 75th, 'Diamond Wedding Anniversary'.

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*"I don't like to commit myself about heaven and hell – you see, I have friends in both places." –*

**Mark Twain**

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