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# It's all nip and tuck at the moment

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## **If you are a student, can you use the word 'colleague' to refer to a fellow student? (C Sandhya, Chennai)**

First, let us deal with the pronunciation of this word. The vowel in the first syllable sounds like the 'o' in 'hot', 'pot' and 'got', and the second syllable is pronounced like the word 'league'. The word is pronounced 'KO-liig' with the stress on the first syllable. Many Indians tend to pronounce the 'o' like the 'a' in 'china' and put the stress on the second syllable. 'Colleague' comes from the Latin 'collega' meaning 'partner in office'. Native speakers of English use this word to refer to a co-worker; someone who works with you in an office. If you are in school/college, you refer to your fellow student as your classmate and not your 'colleague'.

*Bhanu informed her colleagues that she had handed in her resignation.*

*I met one of Kunthala's colleagues at the conference.*

## **What is the meaning of 'nip and tuck'? (J. Abraham, Kochi)**

The expression 'nip and tuck' is mostly limited to American English; it has more or less the same meaning as 'neck and neck'. When you say that a game is nip and tuck, what you are suggesting is that the two teams are evenly matched. It will therefore be difficult to predict which team will win; the game is too close to call.

*I can't say which political party will win. It's nip and tuck right now.*

*It was nip and tuck till the fifteenth over. After that, Maxwell exploded.*

The expression 'nip and tuck' is frequently used to refer to plastic or cosmetic surgery.

*Look at the lines on my forehead. Do you think I need a little nip and tuck?*

## **What is the difference between 'regret' and 'apology'? (Ajit Kelkar, Pune)**

Politicians seldom apologise for the wrongs they do. Some of our chappal/sandal wielding leaders, choose not to apologise even after they have beaten someone black and blue. When you 'apologise' for something you have done, you admit publicly that you are at fault.

You acknowledge that you are the person who is to blame. Like politicians, companies seldom apologise; if they do, it becomes easier for people to take them to court. When you

'regret something' you did, you feel bad or sorry about what happened – you wish that it hadn't happened. It is, however, not an apology. You are not saying that you are to blame.

*Pakistan refuses to apologise for the killing of civilians. It merely regrets the incident.*

*I deeply regret the statement I made. I'm certainly not going to apologise for it.*

### **Is it okay to say 'plan ahead'? (Vivek Rao, Trichy)**

We hear it all the time, don't we? Our parents keep telling us that if we want to succeed in life, we must plan ahead. In terms of grammar there is nothing wrong with the expression.

Some careful users of the language, however, argue that the word 'ahead' is redundant – 'plan' will do. One always plans for the future. We always 'plan ahead'; no one ever 'plans behind'!

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*If you think your boss is stupid, remember you wouldn't have a job if he was any smarter. – John Gotti*

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