

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know your English – What is the difference between 'sneer' and 'jeer'?

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What is the difference between 'sneer' and 'jeer'?

(V.S. Niranjana, Chennai)

When you 'sneer' or 'jeer' at an individual, you are being very rude to him. A 'sneer' is the contemptuous look on your face that clearly shows that you have no respect for the person you are talking to – your expression says it all! This look is usually accompanied by a wounding remark. You say something in a manner that hurts the individual.

*My uncle sneered when I told him my marks.

*“How much does your useless husband make in a year?” she sneered.

Jeering is what usually happens to people who are on stage – a politician giving a speech, an actor performing, a cricketer arguing with the umpire, etc. In all these cases, the spectators/members of the audience show their contempt for the person by loudly booing him/her. Mocking a person, shouting abuses at him, and laughing at him are all examples of 'jeering'.

*Sandeep became nervous when the audience started to jeer at us.

*The spectators began to jeer the home team.

What is the meaning of 'joker in the pack'?

(J. Mukherjee, Kolkata)

The joker in the expression does not refer to someone who entertains people by telling them jokes or by doing funny things. In this context, it refers to the joker that is usually found in a pack of cards. In certain card games, the joker can be assigned any value – it can be used as an Ace, a Jack, a King, etc. – it can be anything that the player wants it to be. The value that the card will be given is unpredictable. Similarly, when you say that someone is the joker in the pack, you mean that s/he is an unknown entity. He or she is someone who is going to have a big impact on the events that follow. The results of the person's influence, however, will be hard to predict – they may be most unexpected. The expression can be used with things as well.

*The young voter was the joker in the pack in the last election.

*Don't say anything about abortion. It may be the joker in the pack that might help you win this election.

How is the word 'cabal' pronounced?

(Meena Nair, Kochi)

There are different ways of pronouncing this word. Some people pronounce the first vowel like the 'a' in 'china' and the second like the 'a' in 'ant', 'pants' and 'apple'. They pronounce the word 'ke-BAL' with the stress on the second syllable. Others pronounce the second vowel like the 'ar' in 'park', 'dark' and 'shark'. They pronounce the word 'ke-BAAL'.

The word is mostly used in the context of politics to refer to a small group of people who work secretly to usurp power – either by overthrowing the existing government or by installing a puppet regime.

*The cabal of dissidents within our party ensured we lost the election.

Is it okay to say, "Rahul is doing this with a view to make more money"?

(M. Vijay, Chennai)

The expression, 'with a view to' meaning 'with the intent/aim to' is usually followed by the 'ing' form of the verb. In this case, it should be 'making' and not 'make'.

*Hemant went to Nagpur with a view to starting his own business.

"A new idea is delicate. It can be killed by a sneer or a yawn." – **Ovid**

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