

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know Your English: February 15

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FEBRUARY 27, 2016 15:23 IST

UPDATED: FEBRUARY 27, 2016 15:23 IST

“Heard you had a great time watching three movies with Sujatha yesterday.”

“I had a good time talking to Sujatha. There was a lot of catching up to do. As for the movies... well, I didn’t really care for them because none of them were interesting.”

“Were interesting? Shouldn’t it be none of the movies was interesting?”

“Nowadays, even among native speakers, you’ll find that a lot of people use a plural verb after ‘none of’. This is particularly true in informal contexts. People who love grammar, however, insist that ‘none of’ should be followed by a singular verb. For example, none of the students was willing to help the teacher.”

“So, you’re saying it’s okay to say none of the students were willing to help the teacher?”

“That’s right! Especially, in informal contexts.”

“None of the bands that I really like are participating in this weekend’s festival.”

“At the meeting, my boss said that none of my ideas was any good.”

“That must have hurt. Your boss plays in a band, doesn’t he?”

“That’s right! I’m attending this weekend’s event just to score some brownie points with him.”

“Brownie points? What are you talking about?”

“When you do something because you want to score or earn brownie points, you do it because you think people will praise you for it.”

“In other words, you’re not really interested in doing it. You’re doing it for selfish reasons. You just want to please someone.”

“That’s right! You want to get the approval of someone influential. For example, some students want to score brownie points by helping their teachers.”

“What about you? In your case, you try to earn brownie points by giving your boss’ wife roses on her birthday.”

“That’s so very true. Mala tried to earn brownie points with her brother-in-law by offering to proofread his two hundred page manuscript.”

“Really? I’m sure that he’s excessively grateful to Mala for...”

“Excessively grateful? You mean exceedingly grateful, don’t you?”

“What’s the difference between ‘exceedingly’ and ‘excessively’?”

“When you say that someone is ‘exceedingly grateful’, you mean that he’s very or extremely grateful. I’m told that some of Bala’s cousins are exceedingly rich.”

“I didn’t know that. How about this example, then? We deserved to win the championship. Our team played exceedingly well in the final.”

“That’s a good example. The dropout rate in some universities is exceedingly high.”

“That’s true. In schools, the dropout rate among girls is exceedingly high. Now tell me, what does ‘excessively’ mean?”

“When you say that someone is excessively polite, you mean he’s being way too polite.”

“In other words, he’s going way beyond the normal limit of politeness. He may be embarrassing the person that he’s talking to.”

“Very good. Can we go outside and talk? The music is excessively loud.”

“How about this example? Not many people want to live in the U.K. because they have to pay excessively high taxes.”

“That’s one thing you don’t have to worry about right now! Paying taxes.”

“I’m a school principal. What’s your superpower?” – Bumper sticker

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