

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

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What is the meaning of ‘siege mentality’?

(J Aravind, Chennai)

The term was first used in psychology; nowadays, it is used in everyday contexts to refer to someone who thinks the world is against him. He believes that the people around him are his enemies who are plotting to harm him. Since those around him are not to be trusted, he takes every precaution possible to protect himself. The expression can also be used with groups of people.

*When he was young, everyone close to him cheated him. It is not surprising that Mayank has developed a siege mentality.

*Do you think our cricket team has a siege mentality?

How is the word ‘whinge’ pronounced?

(K Sashi Nair, Kochi)

One simple way of pronouncing ‘whinge’ is to pronounce the ‘whin’ like the word ‘win’, and the final ‘ge’ like the ‘j’ in ‘jam’, ‘juice’ and ‘jump’ – ‘WINJ’. When MS Dhoni complained about the practice pitches in Brisbane, the Australian media accused him of ‘whinging’. This rather informal word has more or less the same meaning as ‘whine’. When you ‘whinge’, you keep complaining about something trivial in a manner that irritates everyone.

*he coach told the players to stop whinging, and get on with the game.

*Rahul is a real pain to be with. He’s always whinging about something.

Where does the expression ‘full tilt’ come from?

(RV Mukund, Pune)

When you say that someone is running ‘full tilt’, what you mean is that he is running as fast as he can. The expression suggests that the individual is using up a lot of energy to attain top speed. ‘Full tilt’ can be used with things to suggest maximum capacity, force or strength.

*We've been running the factory at full tilt for the past three months.

*James was running full tilt when he tripped over his own foot.

I understand the expression has been around for several hundred years, and it comes from the kind of ritualistic combat that knights participated in. The fight itself was called jousting, and in it, two knights on horseback rode at full gallop straight at each other with a lance in their hand. The weapon was held at an angle and the aim was to knock the opponent off his horse. The word 'tilt' comes from the Old English 'tealt' meaning 'to totter' – the force of the impact sometimes made the rider 'totter' before he fell off the horse. It is interesting to note that another name for 'jousting' was 'tilting'.

What is the difference between 'bruise' and 'wound'?

(BS Brahme, Noida)

'Bruise' is usually used to refer to a minor injury. It usually results when you bump into an object or when someone hits you. In this case, the skin doesn't break; you may not actually end up bleeding. But the place where you were hit or hurt becomes discoloured – the skin turns black and blue. This probably explains why people talk about a 'bruised apple' or a 'bruised banana'. 'Wound', on the other hand, is a serious injury; bleeding is usually involved – people usually talk about a knife wound or a gunshot wound. It is usually used with animate objects – humans and animals can be wounded. One doesn't talk about a wounded fruit or plant.

*"The best angle from which to approach any problem is the 'try-angle.'" – **Unknown***

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