

## KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

# Know your English — How is the word 'cicerone' pronounced?

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**What is the meaning and origin of 'dead in the water'?**

(J Mallikarjun, Bangalore)

The expression is frequently used in American English in informal contexts. When you tell someone that a project is dead in the water, what you are suggesting is that it is a failure. No matter what you do, things will not turn around.

\*The economy of the country has been dead in the water for some years.

According to some scholars, the 'dead' object in the water refers to a ship. In the past, a ship that remained stationary or immobile because of insufficient wind was said to be 'dead'. Like any dead individual, the ship showed no signs of life – no movement. Others believe that the dead object in the water is a fish.

## How is the word 'cicerone' pronounced?

(Rahul Raj, Ranchi)

Most people pronounce the 'c' in the first and second syllables like the 'ch' in 'chips', 'chat' and 'cheese'. The vowel in the first syllable sounds like the 'i' in 'bit', 'kit' and 'hit', and the following 'e' is like the 'a' in 'china'. The final 'rone' rhymes with the words 'pony', 'tony' and 'bony'. This Italian word is pronounced 'chi-che-**RON**-y' with the stress on the third syllable. It is used to refer to a guide — a tour guide, to be precise; a person who gives interesting bits of information about a place. This rather old fashioned word can also be used to mean 'mentor'.

\*We have hired the services of Yadhiah, a well-known cicerone.

Many of the common words that we use in English come from the names of people — boycott, sandwich, sideburns, etc. Cicerone is another such example. Marcus Tullius Cicero was a well-known orator during Roman times. Since tour guides are expected to be eloquent and knowledgeable, Italians began to refer to them as 'cicerones'.

## What is the difference between 'Who/Who ever told you that?'

(K Aarthi, Chennai)

'Who told you that?' is a question; it's normally what you ask someone when you want information. The word 'ever' is frequently included in questions to indicate surprise, anger, confusion, admiration, etc. According to books on usage, it is used to make a question more emphatic. In this case, it has more or less the same meaning as the informal expression 'who on earth?' The 'ever' can be used with other question words as well — where ever, what ever, how ever, etc. There is a tendency nowadays to write 'who ever' as one word — whoever.

\*What ever/What made you do something so silly?

## Which is correct: Is the bank open/opened?

(R Shravanthi, Hyderabad)

The word 'open' can be used as a verb and an adjective; 'opened' is the past tense form of 'open'. In the sentence that you have given, the word is functioning as an adjective — therefore it should be 'open'.

\*Is the bank open? The bank opened nearly an hour ago.

\*Our studio will remain open during the holidays.

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*"If you look like your passport photo, you are too ill to travel."* — **Willkommen**

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