

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH EDUCATION

## How erudite are you?

S. Upendran

JULY 23, 2017 17:00 IST

UPDATED: JULY 22, 2017 15:13 IST

### What is the meaning and origin of 'to eat crow'? (Krishna Kumar, Thiruvananthapuram)

This American expression is mostly used in informal contexts to mean 'to be humiliated'. When you are made to eat crow, you are forced to admit that you are in the wrong, and are compelled to take back the comments you had made. It has the same meaning as 'to eat humble pie'.

*The experts were made to eat crow when the home team lost on the third day.*

*Ranjit knows that if his plan fails, he will be made to eat crow.*

Scholars believe that the expression is based on a true incident. A British officer captured an American hunter who had just shot a crow. In order to humiliate him, the Englishman ordered the American to eat a small portion of the bird. The officer then returned the gun and the bird to the hunter and told him to be on his way. The American humiliated the officer by turning the gun on him and making him eat the rest of the crow.

### How is the word 'erudite' pronounced? (Nandini Das, Cuttack)

The first vowel is like the 'e' in 'set' and 'bet', and the following 'u' like the 'a' in 'china'. The final syllable rhymes with 'right', 'kite' and 'might'. One simple way of pronouncing this formal word is 'E-re-dite' with the stress on the first syllable. It comes from the Latin 'eruditus' meaning 'learned' or 'well informed'. Nowadays, the word is used to mean 'scholar', someone who is very knowledgeable.

*As expected, the professor's talk was erudite.*

*Shilpa's erudite friends talk about things that I have no interest in.*

### Why is the movie industry referred to as the 'silver screen'? (Sai, Chennai)

For over a century now, the expression 'silver screen' has been used to refer to the film industry. The reason for this is during the early decades of the twentieth century, the screens in theatres were coated with metallic paint that had some silver content. This screen was called the 'silver lenticular screen' – it was later reduced to 'silver screen'. With the passage of time, the expression began to be used to refer to the film world, in general. Although theatres have stopped using the 'silver lenticular screen', the term 'silver screen' continues to be used to refer to the film world.

*Several stars of the silver screen joined the student protestors.*

### **Is it okay to say 'It is a reputed school'? (L Smrithi, Pune)**

Yes, it is. In this case, what you are suggesting is that people in general say that it is a good school. You yourself, however, have no knowledge whether it is a good school or not. 'Reputed' carries with it an element of doubt. If, on the other hand, you are certain that the school is a good one – either because you are a product of the school or know someone who has studied there - you should say it is a 'reputable school'. Indians, in general, tend to say 'reputed' when they mean 'reputable'.

*Mohan works for a reputable law firm in Hyderabad.*

*It is reputed to be good company. But I'm not really sure.*

\*\*\*\*\*

*Hollywood is a cross between a health farm, a recreation centre and an insane asylum. –  
Michael Caine*

***The author teaches at the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad.  
upendrankye@gmail.com***

---

Printable version | Apr 20, 2018 6:27:52 PM | <http://www.thehindu.com/education/how-erudite-are-you/article19331001.ece>

© The Hindu