

## KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

## Know Your English: July 25, 2016

S. Upendran

JULY 24, 2016 20:34 IST

UPDATED: JULY 26, 2016 12:03 IST

**What is the meaning and origin of the expression ‘happy as a clam’? (T Indira, Tiruchi)**

This is the shorter form of the expression ‘happy as a clam at high tide’. A clam is a sea creature that buries itself in the sand to escape predators. It has a shell that it uses to protect itself; when threatened, the two halves of the shell quickly snap shut. It is from this that we get the expression ‘to clam up’ to mean ‘to stop talking’ or ‘refuse to talk’. Some varieties of clams are found very close to the seashore, and the best time to dig for them is when the tide – water level – is low. A clam becomes vulnerable during low tide. When the tide is high, it feels less threatened, and therefore much happier. When you say that a person is as happy as a clam at high tide, you mean that he is extremely happy.

*Jai was happy as a clam at high tide when he got the promotion.*

*Raj clams up whenever he is in the company of girls.*

**What is the difference between ‘purposely’ and ‘purposive’? (Bhavana, Delhi)**

In both cases, the stress is on the first syllable. When you do something ‘purposely’, you do it deliberately or intentionally. You make up your mind to do something, and you do it.

*Many students purposely come late to class.*

*Hema purposely pushed Jai into the pool.*

While ‘purposely’ is used in both formal and informal contexts, the use of ‘purposive’ is mostly limited to formal ones. It means ‘serving a purpose, useful’. Anything that serves a purpose can be said to be ‘purposive’.

*Do you seriously believe that meditation is a purposive activity?*

**Is it okay to say, ‘Could you possibly help me with this?’ (SV Nagesh, Nellore)**

Yes, it is. In terms of meaning, there is no difference between ‘Could you help/possibly help me with this?’ In both cases, you are enquiring very politely if the individual would help you with something. The difference between the two is in the degree of politeness. Native speakers would suggest that the use of ‘possibly’ makes the request even more polite.

*Could I (possibly) borrow your car this weekend?*

*Could you (possibly) give me a ride home?*

### **What is the meaning of 'droolworthy'? (Rakesh Kumar, Pune)**

When you 'drool', saliva flows out of your mouth. Babies drool quite a bit. Some adults drool when they are sleeping. The expression 'drool over someone/something' is frequently used in English to mean to take extreme delight or pleasure in looking at someone or something. The person that you are looking at is so gorgeous that you salivate/drool looking at him/her. It is from this that we get the relatively new word 'droolworthy'. An object that is droolworthy is exciting to look at; just looking at it makes your mouth water.

*The cakes that were on display were droolworthy.*

*Many of my friends find the new hero droolworthy.*

\* \* \*

*Happiness: an agreeable sensation arising from contemplating the misery of another. – Ambrose Bierce*

*Email: upendrankye@gmail.com*

Printable version | Apr 20, 2018 7:11:31 PM | <http://www.thehindu.com/books/know-your-english/Know-Your-English-July-25-2016/article14509592.ece>

© The Hindu