

## KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

# Know Your English - Is 'common sense' one word or two?

**S. UPENDRAN**

JULY 23, 2012 21:30 IST

UPDATED: JULY 23, 2012 21:30 IST

**What is the meaning and origin of 'leave someone high and dry'?**

(Nirmala Mishra, Dehradun)

This idiom, mostly used in informal contexts, means to leave someone stranded. When your friends 'leave you high and dry', they desert you in your time of need; you are left to fend for yourself. You feel totally helpless, and are unable to think of ways to get out of your difficult situation. Another expression that has more or less the same meaning is 'leave someone in the lurch'.

\*When they sensed trouble, Tarun's partners resigned and left him high and dry.

The expression was originally used to refer to ships that had run aground – in other words, had come too close to shore and got stuck in the sandy bottom. When this happened, the ship was said to be 'high' – since most of the vessel was out of water, there was a lot more of the ship to see. It looked a lot 'taller' than when it was floating. The 'dry' in the expression refers to the bottom of the ship; a portion that was usually wet was now dry. A ship that was left high and dry was in a vulnerable position. There was nothing that the captain could do except wait for the high tide to come in.

**What is the difference between 'homesick' and 'nostalgia'?**

(S. Aparna, Chennai)

When the news channels announced the death of the former superstar Rajesh Khanna last week, a wave of nostalgia swept over people who were 35 and above. In the interviews shown on TV, some talked about the songs from Rajesh Khanna's films and how integral they were in making their childhood a happy one. Most referred to the 70s as the 'good old times'. 'Nostalgia' is a longing for the past; you recall the happy events that took place, and wish you could experience them all over again. You would like to go back in time.

'Homesickness', on the other hand, has more to do with the present. When you feel 'homesick', you long for home – it could be your country or your actual home. In this case, you miss the people and the place you are from, and the thought 'I wish I were home' runs through your mind constantly.

\*During her first two months in Seoul, Hema felt terribly homesick.

\*Seeing pictures of his old school made Jai feel very nostalgic.

### **Is 'common sense' one word or two?**

(Vrinda, Kochi)

It can be spelt as one word or two – it depends on how the word is used. When 'common sense' is used as a noun, it is spelt as two words. As an adjective, it becomes one word. Some people choose to use a hyphen, instead – 'common-sense'. Not everyone maintains this distinction.

\*Gayathri is very intelligent, but has no common sense.

\*Laxman's commonsense approach to the problem was refreshing.

### **How is the word 'droll' pronounced?**

(Vijay Kumar, Chennai)

The word rhymes with 'role', 'pole' and 'coal'. When you refer to someone as being 'droll', you mean he is funny or humorous in an odd sort of way. The things the person says may not necessarily have you in splits, but they will keep you amused.

\*The new teacher kept the children entertained with droll stories.

\*\*\*\*\*

*"Home is a place you grow up wanting to leave, and grow old wanting to get back to."* – **John Ed Pearce**

*upendrankye@gmail.com*

Printable version | Apr 23, 2018 7:02:40 AM | <http://www.thehindu.com/books/know-your-english/know-your-english-is-common-sense-one-word-or-two/article3675226.ece>

© The Hindu