

## KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

## Know Your English - Is it okay to say, 'Don't take tension'?

S. UPENDRAN

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**What is the difference between 'peppy' and 'happy'?**

(Vinay Kumar, Coimbatore)

'Peppy' comes from the word 'pep' meaning 'lively' or 'energetic'. When you refer to a person as being 'peppy', you mean that he is bouncing around and is full of energy. The word can be used with things as well; a peppy car is one that moves fast, and a peppy song is one that is lively or fast paced.

The word is mostly used in informal contexts in American English. Some people regard it as being old fashioned. 'Happy', on the other hand, suggests contentment or pleasure. It could be a state of mind. Grandparents are usually happy to see their grandchildren – when they see them, they usually break into a smile, not necessarily a dance! A happy individual is not necessarily peppy.

**What is the meaning of 'He is a basket case'?**

(B.C. Koshy, Bangalore)

It means that the individual is an emotional wreck. When you say that someone is a 'basket case', you are suggesting that he is so nervous or so tired that he is incapable of thinking clearly. He has lost it mentally. When used with businesses, it means it is close to failure or ruin.

\* On the morning of the interview, Latha was a complete basket case.

\* Once his son took over, Sunder's business became a financial basket case.

The term was first used during World War I to refer to soldiers who had lost both their arms and legs. Since the amputees could not move on their own, they were carried around in baskets.

**Is it okay to say, 'Don't take tension'?**

(Yogesh Chitte, Pune)

Native speakers of English would not say this. They would probably say, 'don't let the tension get to you', 'don't get tense', etc.

The expression, 'don't take tension' is an Indianism; it is a translation of what we say in our mother tongue. When we use the English word 'tension' in an Indian language, the verb that we commonly use with it is 'take': for example, in Hindi, we say, 'tension muth le'.

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

(Rita Sharma, Kanpur)

The first syllable rhymes with 'pep', 'rep' and 'hep'. The vowel in the second syllable and the final 're' sound like the 'a' in 'china'. The 'ch' is like the 'k' in 'king' and 'kiss'. The word is pronounced 'SEP-el-ke' with the stress on the first syllable. It comes from the Latin 'sepulcrum' meaning 'burial place'. It is different from a graveyard and cemetery. A sepulchre is a burial chamber made of stone; the casket placed in the room is also usually made of stone. In American English, the word is spelt 'sepulcher'.

### **What is the meaning of 'have one's hand in the till'?**

(M.N. Anuvarudheen, Palakkad)

The 'till' in the expression refers to a moneybox or cash register. So, when you have your 'hand/fingers in the till', you have easy access to your employer's cash register. The idiom is mostly used to suggest that you are stealing from the person/organisation that has employed you. Americans tend to say 'cookie jar' instead of 'till'.

\* You couldn't have bought this house on your salary. You must have your hand in the till.

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*"That politician is nothing but a 'sneak' in the grass."* – **Clive Bishop**

> [upendrankye@gmail.com](mailto:upendrankye@gmail.com)

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