

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know your English – How is the word 'precocious' pronounced?

S. UPENDRAN

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What is the meaning and origin of 'on the rocks'?

(Praveen Reddy, Guntakal)

The expression is mostly used to talk about the shaky relationship between people, or the precarious financial position of an organisation. When you say Madhu's marriage is on the rocks, it implies that it is in serious trouble; chances are, it may end in divorce. An organisation that is 'on the rocks' has very serious financial problems. It is on the verge of bankruptcy, and is likely to fold up soon.

*It was obvious at the party that their marriage was on the rocks.

*Neelam foolishly invested in a company that was on the rocks.

In informal contexts, 'rocks' is used to refer to ice cubes. When you ask for 'scotch on the rocks', you would like to have your drink with ice. The expression 'on the rocks' was first used by sailors to refer to the fate of a ship that had crashed into rocks. When this happened, the ship was doomed; it was going to sink.

How is the word 'precocious' pronounced?

(Jayashree Rao, Bangalore)

The 'e' sounds like the 'i' in 'bit', 'kit' and 'pit', while the following 'o' rhymes with the 'o' in 'no', 'so' and 'go'. The 'c' in the final syllable is pronounced like the 'sh' in 'ship' and 'sheet', and the final 'iou' is like the 'a' in 'china'. The word is pronounced 'pri-KO-shes' with the stress on the second syllable. It comes from the Latin 'praecocis' meaning to 'mature or ripen early'. Today, 'precocious' is mostly used to refer to children who exhibit adult like maturity. They are far more intelligent and skilled than children of their age. The word can be used as a compliment and to show disapproval as well. Children who behave or attempt to behave as if they are much older than what they actually are, can be labelled 'precocious'.

*The precocious Leya was admitted to the Ph.D programme at the age of 15.

*Why have you invited that precocious brat to our son's party?

What is the difference between 'avenge' and 'revenge'?

(Sudhir Kumar, Nagpur)

Though some people use the two words interchangeably nowadays, careful users of the language maintain that there is a subtle distinction between the two. When you take 'revenge' on someone, you retaliate against a person because you believe that he has done you some harm. In this case, you wish to hurt the person; you want to get even with him. The harm done may be real or imaginary, but you strongly believe you have been wronged. When you 'avenge' someone, you are seeking justice for someone who has been wronged. It is a much more honourable act than 'revenge'; for in this case, you are taking vengeance on behalf of someone else.

*Dhoni and his boys are busy plotting their revenge.

*In our movies, the son always avenges his father's death.

Is it okay to say 'take a rest'?

(G. Hamsa, Tiruchi)

Yes, it is. According to the Longman dictionary, the expressions 'take a rest' and 'have a rest' mean 'a period of time when you are not doing anything tiring and you can relax and sleep'. You've been working all morning. Why don't you take a rest? It is much more common to hear people say, 'take a break' and 'get some rest'.

"Never drive faster than your guardian angel can fly." – **Unknown**

> upendrankye@gmail.com

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