

## KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

# Know your English – What is the difference between 'protégé' and 'prodigy'?

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What is the difference between 'protégé' and 'prodigy'?

**(S. Narender, Secunderabad)**

First, let's deal with the pronunciation of the two words. The 'o' in both words sounds like the 'o' in 'got' and 'not', while the following vowel is like 'i' in 'sit' and 'bit'. The 'g' in protégé is like the 's' in 'measure' and 'pleasure', and the final 'e' sounds like the 'ay' in 'bay' and 'day'. The 'g' in 'prodigy', on the other hand, is like the 'j' in 'jam' and 'juice', while the following 'y' is like the 'i' in 'hit' and 'bit'. One of the ways of pronouncing the two words is 'PRO-ti-zay' and 'PRO-di-ji'. It is also possible to pronounce the first syllable of protégé like the word 'pro'. A child who excels at something – tennis, singing, mathematics, etc. – is usually referred to as a prodigy. These individuals are usually born with this talent; it is not something that is learnt. Sachin Tendulkar, Mozart and Tiger Woods are examples of prodigies who shot into prominence at a very young age.

A protégé, on the other hand, is someone who is supported by an influential person.

In French, the word literally means 'protected'. A 'protégé', therefore, is a person who is under the protection of someone much older. This individual takes the younger person under his wings and promotes his/her career. Unlike a prodigy, a protégé does not necessarily have to be highly talented.

\*Don't say anything against Mythili. She is the Minister's protégé.

\*The teacher did not want the prodigy in her class.

What is the meaning and origin of 'pin money'?

**(M. Vivek, New Delhi)**

The term 'pin money' is mostly used nowadays to refer to a very small sum of money that a person earns or is given so that he can spend it on things he wants – but may not necessarily need.

\*Teaching children **English** in the evenings gave Usha some pin money.

When the ordinary pin was introduced in England, it was very expensive and always in short supply. I understand that in the old days pins were sold on one or two days in a year.

The original 'pin money' was the regular allowance that a husband gave his wife so that she could buy pins when they became available. With the passage of time, when pins became plentiful, the term 'pin money' began to be used to refer to a small amount of money that one spent on oneself.

How is the word 'foible' pronounced?

**(Anuradha, Chennai)**

The 'foi' in the first syllable rhymes with 'toy' and 'boy', while the 'ble' sounds like the 'ble' in 'double' and 'trouble'. The word is pronounced 'FOY-bl' with the stress on the first syllable, and it was originally used to refer to the weakest part of a sword – the portion from the tip to the middle. The strongest part was called 'forte'. With the passage of time, 'foible' acquired an additional meaning. It began to be used to refer to a weakness or a minor fault in the character of an individual. It can also be used to refer to a strange habit that someone has that may or may not be annoying.

\*Nobody is perfect. Even your new girlfriend has her foibles.

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