

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know your English – What is the difference between 'puke' and 'retch'?

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What is the difference between 'puke' and 'retch'?

(Sasirekha, Vishakapatnam)

'Puke' rhymes with 'duke' and 'retch' rhymes with 'fetch'. The former word is mostly used in informal contexts to mean 'to vomit'. 'Retch', on the other hand, suggests that you feel like throwing up, but you don't really end up doing it. Sometimes, when we see or smell something really horrible, we can feel the contents of our stomach rushing to the mouth; we also begin to heave as if we were going to throw up. But nothing happens; we don't end up 'pukeing'.

*The baby puked on Meena's new saree.

*Seeing the mutilated body made the detective retch.

How is the word 'agelast' pronounced?

(L. Kamath, Bangalore)

There seem to be different ways of pronouncing this word. One way is to pronounce the 'a' in the first and third syllables like the 'a' in 'cat', 'bat' and 'rat'. The 'e' is like the 'i' in 'bit' and 'kit', while the 'g' is like the 'j' in 'juice' and 'jar'. The word is pronounced 'A-ji-last' with the stress on the first syllable. The few dictionaries that list this rather formal word, define it as someone who doesn't laugh. It comes from the Greek 'agelastos' meaning 'not laughing'.

*There are a few agelasts in our family.

What is the meaning of 'acting pricey'?

(K. S. Jyothi, Chennai)

This expression is heard only in India, and it is used to mean 'to play hard to get'. When you begin to act pricey, you become a kind of snob; you refuse to make time for your friends.

You seem less interested in the people you were close to earlier – at least, that is the impression you give. No matter how many times someone calls, you refuse to respond.

THE HINDU

*If Mahesh tries to act pricey, tell him to go jump in a lake.

Is it okay to say 'It is high time you start cleaning your room'?

(Debashish, Cuttack)

When you say that it is 'high time for something', you are suggesting that you should start doing something that you should have actually started a long time ago. In other words, the commencement of the activity is long overdue. Careful users of the language would argue that when the expression 'high time' is used, it is to be followed by the past tense form the verb. 'High time' has more or less the same meaning as 'about time'.

*I think it's high time that we all started cleaning the room.

*Turn off the TV, please. It's high time you children went to bed.

Is it okay to say, 'Could you drop me off at my residence?'

(R. Krishnan, Chennai)

We Indians tend to use the words 'residence' and 'home' interchangeably. For most native speakers of **English**, 'residence' implies a palatial or an imposing structure – something like the Raj Bhavan. Ordinary houses and apartments would not be labelled 'residence'. They would be called a 'home'.

*Will you be at home this evening?

*The event is being held at the Governor's residence.

"I couldn't repair your brakes, so I made the horn louder." – **Steven Wright**

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