

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know your English – What is the meaning and origin of 'lay someone out in lavender'?

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What is the meaning and origin of 'lay someone out in lavender'?

(N. Akilesh, Trichy)

The expression, mostly used in informal contexts, means to criticise someone severely; to give him/her a dressing down.

*The CEO was angry with the Manager. She laid him out in lavender.

The lavender flower is well-known for its aroma. At funerals, this flower was placed close to the coffin in order to hide the smell of the body. In the past, in order to transfer the wonderful smell of the flower onto their clothes, ladies would beat their freshly washed laundry with the branches of the plant. The original meaning of 'lay someone out in lavender' was to beat a person till he became unconscious. With the passage of time, the beating became more verbal than physical.

What is the difference between 'restless' and 'restive'?

(S. Ashwini, Pune)

A 'restless' individual is someone who is unable to keep still or relax. A person unable to sleep because of a toothache spends a 'restless night' tossing and turning. An anxious worker who has been summoned by his boss may feel restless and choose to walk in the corridor while waiting. In this case, he is free to walk around. Inside the boss' room, he may still feel anxious, but he is not free to do what he wants to. He has to sit or stand in one place; as a result, feels constrained. A 'restive' person is someone who feels irritated or impatient for he is compelled to do what he doesn't want to. He is often disobedient and therefore difficult to control.

How is the word 'la di da' pronounced?

(R. Satish, Chennai)

The 'a' in the first and third words is pronounced like the 'a' in 'bath' and 'ask', while the 'i' in 'di' is like the 'i' in 'sit' and 'it'. This expression, which is mostly used in informal contexts to show disapproval, is pronounced 'laa di DAA' with the main stress on the third word.

When used with people, it means pretentious. A 'la di da' person is usually a woman who pretends to belong to the upper class and behaves and speaks in a rather irritating manner.

Is it okay to say 'vexed up with life'?

(V. Roshni, Thiruvananthapuram)

No, it is not. People are usually 'vexed with' something and not 'vexed up' with it. When you say that Hari was vexed with life, you are suggesting that he was frustrated with it. The word can also be used to mean 'annoyed' or 'worried'. A 'vexed question', on the other hand, is one that has to be discussed at length because it is something that causes a lot of disagreement among people.

*The Minister has to deal with the vexed question of increasing taxes.

Is it all right to say 'married with two children'?

(J. Manohar Singh, Chennai)

Yes, it is. It is common for a native speaker of English to use such a sentence in informal contexts. When someone says that he's married with two children, he means that he is married and is the father of two children. In formal contexts, the person would say 'I'm married and have two children'. In the mid-1990s, 'Married with children' was the name of a popular comedy show in the U.S.

"A bore is a person who opens his mouth and puts his feet in it." — **Henry Ford**

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