

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know your English – meaning and origin of ‘make the grade’

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Is it okay to say, ‘The children are well versed with the rules of English’?

(T. Sushma, Kurnool)

People are usually ‘well-versed in’ something and not ‘with’. When you say that someone is well versed in something, it means that the individual is very knowledgeable about it; it could be a particular subject or an area. This knowledge has been gained through experience, and not necessarily by reading books. In your example, you are saying that the children know the rules of grammar thoroughly.

**Surprisingly, the American was well-versed in Tamil literature.*

**The professor was well-versed in Carnatic music.*

What is the meaning and origin of ‘make the grade’?

(S. Ranjit, Tiruchi)

This is an expression mostly used in American **English** in informal contexts. When something that you have done makes the grade, it means that you have done it satisfactorily; the required standard has been met. This expression is mostly used in the negative, and can be used with people as well. ‘Measure up’, ‘pass muster’ and ‘make the cut’ are other expressions that have more or less the same meaning.

**Sarvesh wanted to get into IIT, but he failed to make the grade.*

**Sujatha’s chocolate cake didn’t quite make the grade.*

There are several theories regarding the origin of the expression. According to one, ‘grade’ has nothing to do with school – the class a student is in or the marks he has got on a test.

In American English, ‘grade’ is also used to refer to a gradient or a slope. In the context of the idiom, it refers to the steep incline a train has to climb. A train that makes the grade is one that is successful in climbing a steep incline or slope.

What is the difference between ‘talking terms’ and ‘speaking terms’?

THE HINDU

The expression 'on talking terms' is an Indianism. Native speakers of English would say 'speaking terms'. When two people are not on speaking terms, they are not on friendly terms; they do not talk to each other.

**I'm on speaking terms with everyone in my office.*

**I'm told the Vice Chancellor and the Registrar are not on speaking terms.*

Is it okay to say, 'Radha's daughter is in the family way'?

(L. Nagalakshmi, Chennai)

The expressions 'in the family way' and 'in a family way' are frequently used in India in everyday contexts to mean that a girl/woman is pregnant or is expecting.

Native speakers would consider them to be rather old fashioned and may use them in order to sound humorous. In everyday contexts, native speakers would say: 'She is expecting/with child/pregnant/going to have a baby'.

How is the word 'cuisine' pronounced?

(N. Malavika, Mangalore)

The first syllable of this French word sounds like the 'qui' in 'quick' and 'quit'. The following 's' is like the 'z' in 'zip' and 'zoo', and the final 'ine' like the 'een' in 'teen', 'keen' and 'seen'.

The word is pronounced 'kwi-ZEEN' with the stress on the second syllable. Dictionaries define it as 'style of cooking'.

**The restaurant is well known for its vegetarian cuisine.*

"I don't eat snails. I prefer fast food." – Strange de Jim

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