

## KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

# Know your English - Biting remark

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## Why do people say 'biting remark'?

(Pradeep Kumar, Ranchi)

This is an expression which is mostly used to show disapproval. When you make a 'biting remark', you usually say something which is intended to wound or hurt the feelings of the person at whom the words are directed. You are deliberately being harsh and unkind; the language you use may seem clever, but the intention is to cause pain. It is also possible to talk about 'biting criticism' and 'biting wit'.

\*Renu's biting remarks about the bride left everyone stunned.

According to some scholars, the expression owes its origin to the Greek philosopher Zeno. The story goes that Zeno and a few of his friends attempted to overthrow the tyrant Nearchos, but failed. The philosopher was captured and sentenced to die. The tyrant ordered his men to place Zeno in a large bowl, and then proceed to pound him to death using sticks. After suffering this torture for some time, the dying Zeno whispered that he was willing to reveal the names of his co-conspirators. When Nearchos came close to Zeno, the dying philosopher bit off the tyrant's ear. This act gave rise to the proverb 'A remark more biting than Zeno's', and it is from this we get 'biting remark'.

## What is the difference between 'incomparable' and 'uncomparable'?

(S.V. Mukesh, Hyderabad)

The word 'uncomparable', though not listed in most dictionaries, is a legitimate word. Dictionaries that do include it state it is old fashioned. When you say that two things are 'incomparable' or 'uncomparable', you are implying that the two cannot be compared; they are so very different that comparison of any kind is impossible.

\*You are wasting your time; the two are incomparable or uncomparable.

'Incomparable' has an additional meaning as well. When you say that something or someone is 'incomparable', you are suggesting the thing/person is unique.

\*The incomparable Sachin Tendulkar was present at the meeting.

## How is the word 'rendezvous' pronounced?

(R. Seetha, Trichy)

The 'e' in the first syllable sounds like the 'o' in 'hot,' and 'pot,' while the 'e' in the second is pronounced like the 'ay' in 'day,' and 'bay.' The final 'ous' sounds like the 'oo' in 'cool,' and 'pool.' The word is pronounced 'RON-day-voov' with the stress on the first syllable. It comes from the French 'rendez' meaning 'present' and 'vous' meaning 'you.' The word, originally meant 'present yourselves,' nowadays is mostly used to refer to the place where a particular group of people usually present themselves or meet.

\*The coffee shop is a popular rendezvous for the students.

The word can also be used to refer to a secret meeting at a particular place or time.

\*Don't be late for our rendezvous.

### **Why is luck always associated with 'Lady'?**

(V. Yagneswaran, Guntakal)

Well, I guess we have to thank the Romans and the Greeks for that. They believed that the god of fortune was a woman. Since then, luck has always been associated with a woman. The Romans called her Fortuna, and she was capable of bringing good and bad luck to someone.

\*We lost the first two matches quite badly. Looks like Lady Luck has deserted us.

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“The way my luck is running, if I was a politician I would be honest.” – Rodney Dangerfield  
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