

## KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

# Know your English: Difference between 'appraise' and 'apprise'

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## What is the difference between 'appraise' and 'apprise'?

(Mani Natarajan, Chennai)

The first vowel in both words is like the 'a' in 'china'. The second syllable in 'appraise' sounds like the word 'praise', while the 'prise' in 'apprise' sounds like the word 'prize'. In both cases, the stress is on the second syllable. When you 'appraise' something, you determine or assess the value of it. 'Apprise', on the other hand, means to inform or notify. Both are used in formal contexts.

\*Has the President been apprised of the facts?

\*I need to appraise the car before I make an offer.

## What is the meaning of 'straw poll'?

(Nandini Das, Hyderabad)

Before every important election, news channels go around asking people to identify issues that are likely to influence their choice of candidate. Based on what a few people say, the reporter arrives at these 'key issues'. This rather informal way of gathering information to understand which way the people are leaning is called 'straw vote'. It is also referred to as 'straw poll'. One dictionary defines it as 'an unofficial ballot conducted as a test of opinion'. The term can be used with regard to everyday matters as well, not necessarily elections. For example, in a university, one can have a straw poll as to whether the working hours of the library should be extended.

\*I took a straw poll of the immediate members of the family. Not many were interested in going to Goa during summer.

In the 19th century in the United States, when straw polls were conducted, a potential voter was given an actual piece of straw. He was then asked a question. If the individual returned the straw without bending it, it meant that his answer to the question was 'yes'. In order to signify a 'nay' vote, the voter returned the straw bent.

## How is the word 'uncouth' pronounced?

(Asmita, Bangalore)

The first syllable sounds like the 'un' in 'bun', 'fun' and 'sun', while the following 'couth' rhymes with the words 'youth' and 'tooth'. The word is pronounced 'un-KUUTH' with the stress on the second syllable. It comes from the Old **English** 'un' meaning 'not' and 'cunnan' meaning 'know'. 'Uncouth' originally meant 'not known'; later, it acquired the meaning 'strange'. With the passage of time, 'uncouth' began to mean 'uncultured'. An 'uncouth' individual is someone who is lacking in manners. This unsophisticated individual is often rude, and frequently says things that embarrass those around him. Some people use 'couth' as the opposite of 'uncouth'. Though most dictionaries list 'couth', it is not as frequently used as 'uncouth'.

\*There is no way I'll let you marry him. He is uncouth.

**Is it okay to say 'I was majorly impressed by the book'?**

(Vimal Kumar, Pune)

Yes, it is. When you say that you were 'majorly impressed' by something, it means you were 'very' or 'extremely' impressed by it. The word has another meaning as well; it is frequently used to mean 'primarily'. Though 'majorly' is considered slang, most standard dictionaries list it. The use of the word is mostly confined to the United States and Canada, and being slang is seldom used in formal contexts.

\*Sunita was majorly upset when Ganesh called off the wedding.

\*Nandita is majorly a painter. But she does a lot of social work as well.

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*"A straw vote only shows which way the hot air blows."* – **O'Henry**

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