

Some fascinating facts and quirks about a language that has been evolving dramatically for over 1,500 years.



Old, yet evolving every day

The English language is said to be over 1,500 years old. It originated from Western Germanic dialects, when Germanic tribes made Britain their home around 449 AD. Gradually, a liberal dose of Latin (almost 60% claim language researchers), Celtic and French got into the language. Over the centuries, it evolved into what we call Modern English. Today, English is the most widely spoken language across the globe.

The Bard's lexicon

Shakespeare is said to have invented over 1,700 words. He came up with new words by changing verbs into adjectives, changing nouns into verbs and adding prefixes or suffixes to words. With time, some words became common usages and made it to the dictionary. Examples: Bedroom (A Midsummer Night's Dream), Fashionable (Troilus and Cressida), Gossip (The Comedy of Errors) and Traditional (Richard III)

A new word every two hours?

Really! The Oxford English Dictionary estimates that over 4,000 new words are added to the dictionary every year. Wow! That's a new word every two hours!

Influence of printing

Books were written in English as early as the 9th Century. But it was only after the introduction of the printing press by Thomas Caxton in 1476 that publishing picked up. The advent of publishing reiterated the need for a more standard way of writing English.

A to Z in one sentence?

"The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog". Does that make sense? Well, yes! If you are discussing a pangram in English language. A pangram is a sentence that uses every letter in the alphabet. A pangram is used to display typefaces, fine-tune handwriting or calligraphy skills or test equipment. The above mentioned pangram was used in the late 19th Century by America's Western Union Company to test Telex/TWX data communication equipment.

The 'Ghost Word'

Yes, 'Dord' was a 'ghost word' in the English dictionary in the 1930s. It crept in due to a printing error by G. and C. Merriam Company, (now part of Merriam-Webster) in its New International Dictionary in 1934. In 1939, an Editor realised that the word did not have an etymology and the error came to light.

Long words, short takes

According to Wikipedia, the longest word in any of the major English dictionaries is pneumoconiosis (45 letters) It refers to a lung disease. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the 45-letter-long word was coined simply as a job at the extremely complicated medical terms. Hah! So the longest word is actually a joke! Most dictionary companies list the 28-letter-long antidisestablishmentarianism as the longest, non-technical word. It refers to a 19th Century political party opposed to the disestablishment of the Church of England.

Quick facts

- 'E' is the most commonly used letter in English (almost 11% of the entire language!)
- The two most commonly used words are "I" and "you"
- "Good" is the most commonly used adjective.
- The most commonly used noun is "time"
- Ironically, pronunciation is one of the most mispronounced words!
- The sentence "He believed Caesar could see people seizing the seas" has seven different spellings of the sound "ee". Such is the versatility of the language.
- The verdict is still not out on the shortest complete and grammatically sound sentence in English. "Go" and "I am" are the most common contenders.
- The word "set" has over 430 definitions in some dictionaries. But "run" is all set to over "set".

ACTIVITY

Find out three interesting facts each about Hindi and any regional language of India.

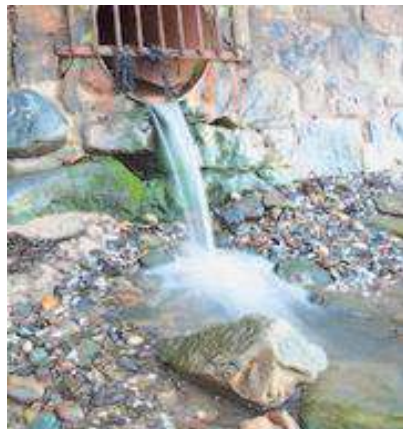
QUEST

Keep pace with the world of Science

Learn the difference between black and greywater and then move on to read about a fascinating condition called 'fainting goats'

How is blackwater different from greywater?

Blackwater is a term used to describe wastewater released from toilets and kitchen drains that contain body or biological wastes. It is also called brown water, foul water or sewage. On the other hand, wastewater generated from domestic activities like bathing, dishwashing and laundry is called greywater or sullage.



The body wastes present in blackwater contain harmful bacteria and disease causing pathogens, which take a long time to decompose. Blackwater must be disposed of only after it is treated in a sewage treatment plant and it cannot be reused.

Greywater contains fewer bacteria. It also decomposes quickly and can be safely reused for watering plants and flushing toilets.

Today, growing environmental concerns and the pressing need for water recycling has prompted many to adopt greywater recycling techniques.

What are fainting goats?

There is a breed of goat in the US that is prone to 'fainting' fits. The goat suffers from a genetic condition called Thomsen's disease. Its leg muscles tense up when the animal is startled or frightened and don't relax. This causes it to fall on its back or side with the legs stretched out stiffly. However, the goat does not lose consciousness or feel pain. After 20 seconds, it stands up and trots off nonchalantly!



These goats have various other names, such as Tennessee wooden legs, 'nervous goats' and 'fall-down goats'. They were first bred in the early 1880s in Marshall County, Tennessee. A farmer named John Tinsley is said to have brought a number of goats with these symptoms from Canada. They were raised for this particular trait by a local medic. The condition doesn't affect the entire herd uniformly. Some stiffen up every time they are startled. Other goats adapt and will faint only occasionally. Baby goats are more likely to fall over at even the slightest shock, but it wears off as they grow older. Mature goats manage to avoid tumbling down altogether and merely run away on stiffened legs.

Most farmers raise fainting goats for meat but often, they are kept purely to raise a laugh.

(Content provided by Amrita Bharati)

TECH BYTES

How does a search engine work?

A search engine is a software system or service designed to search information available on the World Wide Web. To search for information online using a search engine, all that a user needs to do is to key in his query in the search engine's search bar. Once he hits enter, he will be presented with a list of relevant links.

These search results can be in the form of webpages, images, videos, documents or any other type of content available online. The page that presents the search results is called a search engine result page (SERP).

A search engine uses a program called a web crawler which automatically crawls the web and stores information about websites it visits. The search engine can determine how often the web crawler should crawl the web. Once the pages are stored, the search engine indexes all these pages into a database. This process is called indexing. Every time you raise a query, the search engine pulls out the links from this database and presents it in the SERP. The results you see are displayed based on a set of rules followed in problem-solving operations called algorithms. Search engines follow different algorithms, the most common being PageRank. This is like a popularity contest where the website that is most popular appears higher in the results.

Sometimes, the results you see are based on the trustworthiness of a website.

Tomorrow, we give you tips to use search engines effectively.

When Djokovic captured elusive French Open title

Here, we will sharpen our sports quotient by taking a look at one iconic moment from sporting history. This week, we revisit the 2016 French Open, a tournament won by Novak Djokovic..

At the 12th time of trying, Novak Djokovic finally tasted success at the French Open. This after a string of near misses at the event. But when the agonising wait finally ended, it was much sweeter for Djokovic as he found himself holding all four major singles titles at the same time.

Entering the 2016 French Open as the top seed, Djokovic had it easy in his first three matches as he won them all without dropping a single set. He dropped the first set in his fourth round clash against Spain's Bautista Agut, but claimed the next three to progress to the quarter-finals. The quarters against Czech



PHOTO: CLIVE BRUNSKILL FOR ADIDAS/GETTY IMAGES

DID YOU KNOW?

While Djokovic had it easy at the other major Grand Slam tournaments, he had to struggle at the French Open. The 2016 triumph was the first – and so far only – time he won at the event. He had made it to the finals and lost on three occasions before 2016, twice to Rafael Nadal and once to Stan Wawrinka.

By winning the French Open in 2016, Djokovic held all four Grand Slam titles at the same time, having already won the Wimbledon and US Open in 2015 and the 2016 Australian Open.

Djokovic thus became just the third man after Don Budge in 1938 and Rod Laver in 1962 and 1969 to hold all four of the major singles titles at the same time.

REMEMBER THIS?

Republic's Tomas Berdych and the semis against Austria's Dominic Thiem proved to be straightforward affairs, as he got rid of both players in three sets.

He played second seeded Andy

Murray in the final. The Brit, playing his first final at the event, was able to take the first set off Djokovic, but nothing more. Djokovic won the match 3-6, 6-1, 6-2, 6-4 to claim his first French Open title.