

Old expressions and meanings Used to practice

Why do we say these things? (All are related to outdated actions/ history.)

“hang up” and “pick up” for telephones

“turn on” and “turn off” the television

“get on/ off” (not “get in/ out of”) the bus

“baker’s dozen” for thirteen

“big wig” for someone important

“blue blooded” for posh/ aristocratic

“don’t look a gift horse in the mouth” for not thinking too much about a great opportunity

“hair of the dog” for drinking alcohol to take away your hangover

“get the sack” for losing your job

“CC (carbon copy)” for sending your email to other people

Choose one of the things above and take turns telling a story about its origins. The person with the most imaginative story wins.

Do you think the following language is out of date or still used?

- Walkman
- Record shop
- Video shop
- Bell boy
- Dear Sir
- Dear Mrs Smith
- Dear Mr and Mrs Smith
- Mr and Mrs Roger Smith
- Dearest James

Suggested answers

Why do we say these things? (All are related to outdated actions/ history)

- “hang up” and “pick up” for telephones – The earpiece of the oldest telephones (as seen in Mary Poppins etc) used to hang on the wall.
- “turn on” and “turn off” the television – Old on/ off buttons needed turning.
- “get on/ off” (not “get in/ out of”) the bus – Perhaps because buses didn’t used to have roofs?
- “baker’s dozen” for thirteen – Bakers used to bake an extra loaf each time
- “big wig” for someone important – The most important people used to wear the biggest wigs
- “blue blooded” for posh/ aristocratic – Rich people used to have very white skin due to not having to go outside and so you could see their veins
- “don’t look a gift horse in the mouth” for not thinking too much about a great opportunity – People used to check the health of horses by looking at their teeth and hooves, so the saying means that if something is a gift you shouldn’t do that but just take it
- “hair of the dog” for drinking alcohol to take away your hangover – Doctors used to recommend drinking a potion with a hair from the dog that bit you to avoid getting diseases such as rabies from it.
- “get the sack” for losing your job – Workmen were given a sack to take their tools away in when they lost their jobs.
- “CC (carbon copy)” for sending your email to other people – People used to make copies of letters for their boss etc by putting carbon paper between the sheets

Do you think the following language is out of date or still used?

- Walkman – Pretty much out of date. Some people used it for more recent technology too, but “mp3 (player)” and “iPod” are much more common
- Record shop – Still very common. Few people say “CD shop”, and “music shop” could have other meanings
- Video shop – Still very common (if such things still exist)
- Bell boy – Common in speech, but the official title is usually “porter”
- Dear Sir – Much less common than “Dear Sir or Madam”, but still seen
- Dear Mrs Smith – Okay in personal communication but only used in business if she refers to herself as “Mrs”
- Dear Mr and Mrs Smith – Still sometimes used, although people wonder why “Mr” comes first
- Mr and Mrs Roger Smith – A bit old fashioned but can still be seen
- Dearest James – Old fashioned and very rare