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Commonly mispronounced names

For most of my life, my name has been mispronounced or misspelled by seemingly everyone unfamiliar with its cultural relevance. Often they'll replace it with something more common (Alicia) or something spelled similarly (Asia) without realizing their mistake. But constant mispronunciations (or the assignment of a nickname because your name is "tricky" to say or remember) are examples of name-based micro-aggressions that can result in anxiety when introducing yourself, and perhaps even evidence of an indifference to your feelings that amounts to a form of bullying. It can leave you feeling utterly demoralized, and ignoring the behavior only allows for the mistreatment to persist. Rita Kholi, an assistant professor of education, society, and culture at the University of California studying the effects of micro-aggressions on individuals, told NPR, "[t]he changing of people's names has a racialized history ... grounded the renaming [that occurred] during slavery. There is a lot of history that's tied to this practice that is directly tied to racism." When these actions are perpetuated, mispronunciations become the accepted norm, continuing the cycle. Here's what you can do to combat it if it's happening to you.Be straightforward If someone says your name wrong, don't let it slide. Feel free to interrupt them with a correction or to let them know how to pronounce it properly. Bring attention to the importance of getting your name right. Podcaster Keya Roy, who co-hosts RadioActive Youth Media, said, "interrupting someone to say, 'It's Keya, not Keeya,' isn't me being irritating, it's me putting my foot down against a vehicle of racism, and then in turn, creating an environment in which owning your name is the norm, not the exception." The act of correction signals to that person that the pronunciation of your name is important, and that it is their responsibility to learn it. If you are on the receiving end of such a correction, be attentive. If you aren't sure how to say someone's name, ask. Don't make a guess, and certainly don't simply give the person a nickname that's easier for you to remember. Within minutes of any first date, Uber ride, or really any social gathering that requires meeting...Read moreAnticipate common mispronunciations Having to repeatedly correct someone in a work or formal social setting is frustrating, and as a result, it can become difficult to maintain your professionalism. It is possible to be assertive but not rude in these situations. (Outside of a professional setting, the reaction is at your discretion). Fast Company suggests preemptively addressing any issues individuals might have with your name. For instance, introduce yourself with the proper phonetic pronunciation. A friend of mine always introduces herself as "Lacretta with an E." This prompts people to say "La-cree-ta" instead of "La-Kret-a." Stav Ziv, who has written about workplace discrimination for The Muse, noted that this type of repetition helps people register the proper pronunciation and remember it effectively moving forward.Have a memorable conversation about your nameGo a step further and have a deeper conversation about your name. Telling the story of your name gives power to its cultural importance. It doesn't have to be about teaching the other person a lesson (as it is not your job to be an ambassador for your culture—unless you want to be one). Rather, it's about heading off potential issues by having a memorable conversation about your name and the right way to say it. If the person you're talking to shares the story of their own name in turn, even better—yours will be that much more cemented in their memory. We should all feel empowered by our names and able to be assertive with those who mispronounce them—whether through a thoughtless slip up or a persistent disregard for our feelings. Image: shutterstock In Medieval times, before the printing press came along and literacy became cool for non-clerics and aristocrats, standardized spelling and vocabulary weren't really a problem. There was no right way to handle these sorts of things – and that meant there was no right or wrong way to say many words. We can see from the rhyme schemes of older poems that there were differences of opinion, to say the least. These days, the English language is the most commonly-spoken across the world, and includes in its many dialects a variety of correct options for pronouncing certain words. Much of the idea that there is only one right option in such instances comes from snobbery rooted in class or cultural discrimination. However, even if you put linguistic pomposity aside, there are some words that do have a right or wrong pronunciation. Some of these are words that entered the lexicon from a foreign language, many of them are food items. Others are older Latin, Norse, Greek, or Germanic words whose meaning would be altered were they to be said differently. Still, others are simply words that everyone pretty much agrees on only have the one correct emphasis or vowel. So let's run through a few of them and see whether or not you are a linguistic expert! PERSONALITY Tell Us How You Learned This Skill and We'll Guess What Generation You Are 5 Minute Quiz 5 Min TRIVIA EASY Can You Pick The Word That Rhymes? 6 Minute Quiz 6 Min TRIVIA Our Most Difficult Common Phrases Test 7 Minute Quiz 7 Min PERSONALITY Build a Taco Bell Order and We'll Guess What High School Stereotype You Are 6 Minute Quiz 6 Min PERSONALITY Can We Guess What Language You Studied in School? 6 Minute Quiz 6 Min TRIVIA Can You Define All of These Words That Start With Z? 6 Minute Quiz 6 Min TRIVIA Can You Guess the Roots of These Common English Words? 6 Minute Quiz 6 Min PERSONALITY Your Vocabulary Says a Lot About Your Personality 5 Minute Quiz 5 Min TRIVIA Can You Pass This Challenging Skills Test? 7 Minute Quiz 7 Min PERSONALITY Can We Guess Your Level of Education Based on Your Emotional IQ? 6 Minute Quiz 6 Min How much do you know about dinosaurs? What is an octane rating? And how do you use a proper noun? Lucky for you, HowStuffWorks Play is here to help. Our award-winning website offers reliable, easy-to-understand explanations about how the world works. From fun quizzes that bring joy to your day, to compelling photography and fascinating lists, HowStuffWorks Play offers something for everyone. Sometimes we explain how stuff works, other times, we ask you, but we're always exploring in the name of fun! Because learning is fun, so stick with us! Playing quizzes is free! We send trivia questions and personality tests every week to your inbox. By clicking "Sign Up" you are agreeing to our privacy policy and confirming that you are 13 years old or over. Copyright © 2021 InfoSpace Holdings, LLC, a System1 Company Will changing the name of the town really improve its lot? Or is it akin to slapping paint on a rotting wall? What other brands, or towns, have been turned around by a name change? I can remember having anxiety about the first day of school as early as the second grade. This wasn't anxiety about late-night bedtimes coming to an end, or about my mom delivering me at the school and driving off, or over who would sit with me at lunch.The fluttering in my tummy and sweaty palms all had to do with my name.On that very first day, parents and kids would cram into the gym for class assignments. The principal would welcome everyone, and teachers would come up and announce who was in their classes.And I waited and waited for that terrible moment.“Maa . . . Ma? Di? Ma-hoo?” my teacher would stammer out.A short pause, followed by one last attempt: “Ma-hoo?”After witnessing such a frustrated display, I would run up to the front waving frantically.“That’s okay, that’s okay—just call me Mita!”I felt the need to make sure that they were comfortable with me and with my name. I didn’t even bother to teach them how to pronounce it; I just chopped it.Many people don’t know this, but my full name is Madhumita Mallick. I have spent much of my life trying to hide it. While my name was a source of pride, part of my identity, and represented my heritage, it was also a source of anxiety, embarrassment, and shame.In the third grade, my teacher couldn’t pronounce Mita, never mind the full name. She thought it would be fun to call me Pita (“Like pita pockets,” she said). In college, my closest friends gave me the nickname Mahu after our calculus professor called me Mahu Mallick. He didn’t want to be corrected.“Honestly, go by Mita Mallick,” the career counselor coached me, striking through my name in red on my resumé. “No one can pronounce this, you won’t get callbacks.” But it was my full name. I wanted to reclaim and embrace my name, which was what my expensive liberal arts education taught me.At my first corporate job, I found myself back in those first days of school. My full name was simply too confusing for people. “I thought your name is Mita? I can’t find you in the distribution list.” “I walked around looking for you and didn’t see Mita on any of the cubes.” “Why don’t you just go by Mita?”Then there was my manager who thought he had the best suggestion—“Mohammed.” From that moment on, he called me by this left-field title, simply because he could.“Mohammed, did you pull that Nielsen data the team asked for?” “Mohammed, can you join us for the 4 p.m. call?” “Mohammed, make sure the agency knows to dial in for the kickoff.”I responded to a name that wasn’t mine for close to six months before I left. And before I did, I wish I had just said one thing, “Call me by my name.”One of the biggest microaggressions that can take place is the repeated mispronunciation of someone’s name. Or in my case, completely changing someone’s name. When my boss created this new nickname for me, that served as a form of bullying and harassment.Here are five ways in which we can all ensure we are honoring people’s names.Even if it’s the second or third time you are meeting them, you can say, “It’s important for me to pronounce your name correctly, and I know I asked you last time as well. But can you spell your name and say it for me phonetically please?” This not only shows that you want to be able to pronounce someone’s name correctly, but also signals to them that you care deeply and want to build a mutually respectful relationship.Ask others how to pronounce your colleague’s nameSometimes, we may feel uncomfortable or embarrassed to ask the person directly or too much time has passed. In these cases, don’t feel sheepish to ask another colleague or a friend how to pronounce the person’s name correctly.Correct others when you hear someone’s name mispronounced! Someone has mispronounced a colleague or a friend’s name, please be an advocate and stand up for them. “I am not sure if you realize this, I have heard you on a few occasions mispronounce Mita’s name. The correct pronunciation is ‘mee-ta.” “One of the best innovations this year is LinkedIn’s name pronunciation feature. By using the tool, you can listen to the recording on the person’s profile to hear how they say their name. So you don’t mispronounce or try to figure out how you avoid saying their name in a conversation completely.Don’t assign nicknames without their permission!If someone is called Jennifer, don’t call them Jen without asking. Don’t assume Matthew is Matt, especially if the individual hasn’t given you permission to refer to them by a nickname. And please don’t create a separate, unrelated nickname for them (in my case, “Mohammed”). Moreover, if you see someone creating an unwanted nickname for someone else, please intervene. Prevent the nickname from being used further and step up as an advocate. When you see something, say something.Since the moment I had been “renamed” by my former manager, I have moved forward and gone by Mita in email, within organizational charts, and at any work function/place where names mattered. For all “the areas of opportunity” I worked on to have a successful career in corporate America, I am reminded of my name in many other areas of my life: my passport, my wedding album, and my driver’s license.After so many years of being known as Mita, I don’t think I will ever reclaim my full name. At times, I have moments of nostalgia, but I don’t mind them since I love who Mita has become and the name she uses. While I won’t go back to Madhumita, I will do these things.I’ll tell you I am bilingual. I’ll eat egg curry during (now virtual) lunches. I’ll tell you that I am off for Diwali. I’ll wear mehndi on my hands and Indian bangles on my wrists. I’ll tell you I’m American.I’ll tell you if you mispronounce my name, and I’ll also tell you if you mispronounce anyone else’s name too.And in case you are wondering my full name, well, it’s pronounced “ma-doo-me-tha.”Mita Mallick is a diversity and inclusion leader. Right now she is the head of diversity and cross-cultural marketing at Unilever. Part of a pharmacist’s job description is to remain professional and composed. This usually is not a problem—until someone completely butchers a drug name.It’s true that some drug names are hard to pronounce, but that doesn’t necessarily make it any easier to keep a straight face. Here’s a sampling from my personal collection of brand-name drug phonetic flubs, with mispronunciations in parentheses:1. Abilify (A-Billy-fy, Ability)2. Butrans (But-runs)3. Cialis (See-all-this)4. Dilaudid (Dilude)5. Entex LA (Entex Louisiana)6. Glucophage (Glu-pan-age)7. Humalog kwikpen (Humalog Kiwi-Pen)8. Keflex (Kol-flex, Kee-flex)9. KY Jelly (Kentucky Jelly)10. Lyrica (Ljie-reek-ka)11. MS Contin (Mississippi Contin)12. Norco (Noco)13. Nulytely (Nelly-telly)14. Plavix (Pavlix)15. Procardia (Procardiac)16. Qvar (Kwee-var)17. Soma (Sonomas, Zomas)18. Tylenol (Ty-nol)19. Victoza (Victoria)20. Vivelle-Dot (Vel-vee-ta, Vivelle dot com)21. Wellbutrin SR (Wellbutrin senior, Well-but-in)22. Xanax (X and X)23. Zyrtec (Zortex)I’m sure you’ve already heard a few of these mispronunciations in your day-to-day. But don’t worry, there’s more where these came from. The Social Security Administration (SSA) compiles a list of the most popular baby names over the past 100 years. This represents perhaps the most complete picture of the most common names in the United States. The following list includes both male and female names — ranked from 10 to 1 — as well as the most common last names based on the 2010 census. In 2010, 1,060,159 people in the US had the last name Martinez. This was the tenth most common last name in the country. Meanwhile, the tenth most common first names over the last 100 years have been Charles (2,144,937 or 1.23 percent of 173,916,919 male births) and Margaret (993,136 or 0.59 percent of 169,671,039 female births). The ninth most common last name was also Hispanic. There were 1,094,924 Rodriguezes in 2010. And of all the baby boys born between 1918 and 2017, 2,174,023 have been Thomases. A total of 996,554 baby girls were named Sarah. Two common 'J' names are the eighth most popular in America: the biblical Joseph and Jessica. These aCCounted for 2,384,205 and 1,043,436 baby names, respectively. Meanwhile, in 2010, 1,116,357 people had the last name Davis. A sum of 2,487,983 Richards amount to 1.43 percent of all baby boys born between 1918 and 2017. The 1,106,071 Susans represent 0.65 percent of the total baby girl births. As for Millers, there were 1,161,437 of these recorded in 2010. Another Hispanic last name comes in at number six. There were 1,166,120 Garcias in the 2010 census. But over the past century, there have been more than 3,557,293 Davids and over 1,410,059 Barbaras. Love them or loathe them, the British royal family have long been the inspiration for baby names. There were 3,662,399 Williams born between 1918 and 2017 and 1,443,415 Elizabeths. Good luck keeping up with the Joneses, though; there were 1,425,470 of these in 2010. The fourth most common last name in 2010 was Brown, with 1,437,026 occurrences. Michael and Linda were the fourth most common baby names in the century before 2018. There were 4,315,462 and 1,448,097 of these, respectively. Robert and Jennifer are both pretty versatile names. Diminutives include Rob, Bob, Robbie, Bobby, and Jen. Jenna, Jenny and Jennie. That might be why they're so popular. Of all baby boys born 1918-2017, 4,571,203 (2.63 percent) were called Robert, while 1,465,928 (0.86 percent) of all girls were called Jennifer. 1,625,252 people had the last name Williams in 2010. OK, so you might not find many John Johnsons; but they both take the number two spot. A total 2.64 percent of baby boys (4,594,023 born in the last century) were given the name John, and the last census recorded 1,932,812 last names as Johnson. The 1,564,163 Patricias (Pat, Patty, Trisha, Trixie) represent 0.92 percent of all female births between 1918 and 2017. No surprises here: Smith is by far the most common name in the USA. In the 2010 census, 2,442,977 of them were counted. James and Mary are the most common first names. But while there were just 198,931 more Jameses than Johns born 1918-2017, there were 1,829,293 more Marys than Patricias. The 3,393,456 females called Mary aCCounted for 2 percent of all girl births.

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