



No, its not “Fracking”

This morning I was asked my thoughts about whether the correct spelling of the shorthand for “hydraulic fracturing” is “fracing” or “fracking”, and I was a bit surprised at my almost visceral reaction to the question.

As someone who has spent a not insignificant portion of my youth in the oilfields of the mid-continent region, I take a measure of pride in having learned the lingo that is part and parcel of the industry. To the uninitiated, the words and phrases used around a rig can be confusing, but it is a language that reflects the history, culture and the unique nature of the industry.

“Frac” and its current verb tense “fracing” are words that are unique and have specific meaning to the oil and gas industry. As far as I know, the word and its derivations are not used in any other industry, so to be told by journalists (most whom only recently became aware of the term) that the people who originated the word are spelling it wrong is more than a bit irritating. The AP Stylebook, the bible of all things related to words and language for press writers, says that “Fracking” is the correct shorthand though they prefer that the phrase “hydraulic fracturing” be used instead.

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I absolutely understand the linguistic arguments about the spelling and how “fracing” looks like it should be pronounced like “racing” with an “f”. Too bad. The English language is littered with linguistic exceptions...knife, colonel, knead, corpsman. As there is no other meaning to “fracing”, there is no reason to tell those that originated the word decades ago that they have been spelling it wrong. And another thing...while “hydraulic fracturing” is now almost the exclusive method of fracing, I’m pretty sure that somewhere in the world, someone is doing it the old school way – lowering a bottle of nitro glycerin down to the bottom of the well and then dropping a detonator bar on top of it – a process known as “explosive fracturing”. So, yeah, you can do fracing without the hydraulics.

While I’m strolling down memory lane, here’s a few other words and phrases that have very unique and specific meanings to the industry, and that you just won't get unless you’ve been around a rig or two in your life.

- Tour – pronounced like tower, not like hour, and it doesn’t mean the same thing as derrick
- Rope socket – something that you can’t make-up without heating your babbit first
- Sand Pump – a pump without a motor
- Drill collar – you need a wedding band to pick it up
- Cathead – not to be confused with horse’s head
- Dogs – keeps the telescoping derrick from telescoping when you don't want it to
- Rod Transfer – used to position your rods into the rod fingers
- Rod Box – I promise you, you’re going to guess this one wrong
- Elevators – you can ride them, but OSHA frowns on it
- Spider – they don’t sting or bite, but they can tear your fingers off
- Slips – these are not worn under a dress
- Jars – no lids and they don’t hold anything
- Tongs – always referred to in the plural; both manual and hydraulic and neither picks up ice
- Kelly – usually square, like most Kellys that I’ve known in my life, but some can be hexagonal

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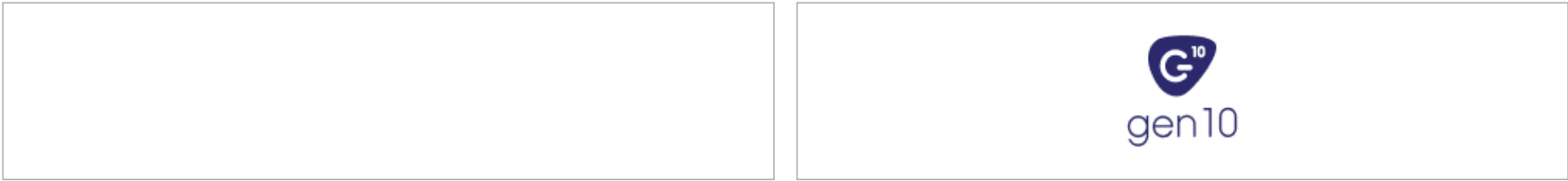
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