

### **HOI POLLOI:**

Hoi polloi comes from the Greek and means literally, 'the many'. It is used, generally, to mean 'the majority, the masses', or (as one dictionary suggests) 'the rabble'. The earliest use (in this sense) is by Dryden in 1668. Old Dr Brewer, in his *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, also tells us that at English universities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century those men who failed to take an honours degree, and had to settle for a mere pass degree, were called the hoi polloi. Two issues arise from hoi polloi. One is the common misuse to mean 'the upper class', when in fact it means the very opposite. This is simply wrong: don't do it. The other is the usage question – to put or not to put the definite article in front of hoi polloi. The argument is that hoi already is the definite article, so by saying 'the hoi polloi' one is, in effect, saying: 'the the many'. Grammatically that's correct, but proper English usage requires the definite article. It would be odd in English to say, 'the common opinion of hoi polloi'; but it is fine to say, 'the common opinion of the hoi polloi'.

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