

# Words of Clarity

A guide to usage in media writing

Believe  
or think?  
Lay  
or lie?

Euphemisms  
Like  
or as?

If or  
whether?  
Bad or  
badly?

Lead  
or led?  
Who or  
whom?

Tightening  
Jargon

Parallelism  
Clichés

Attribution  
Titles

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## Introduction

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You will find many good books on grammar and usage. I've used some of them in my classes from time to time. Some have gone out of print, others have grown overly expensive and some, despite their strengths, just never seemed quite right. Besides, creating my own guide to usage seemed natural. For years, editing professors at the University of Kansas have favored their own handouts over textbooks, their own experience and collective wisdom over self-proclaimed experts.

In creating this guide, I have drawn on my years of experience as an editor – at The New York Times and at smaller newspapers like The Hutchinson News – as a teacher, as a cultural historian and as a reader. You'll find elements of all of those personas in here, mixed with a good dose of humor. Language is fascinating, and I

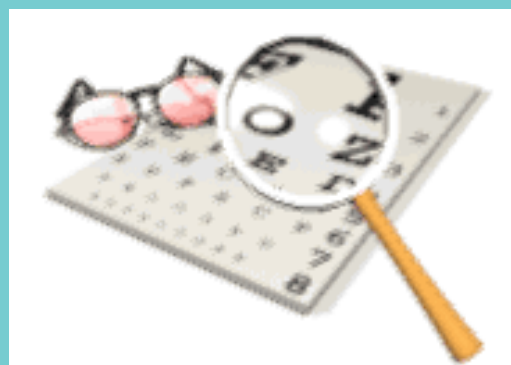
think learning about language should be fun. So you'll find silly illustrations, poems, goofy examples, sarcastic comments and – I hate to give everything away.

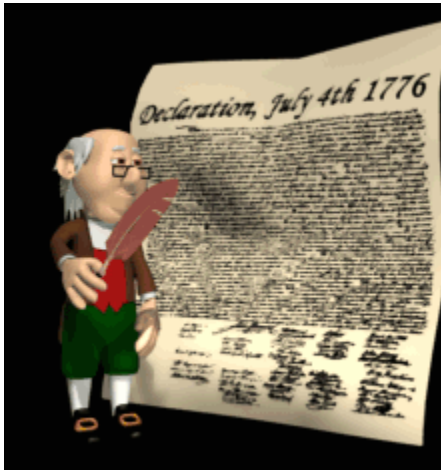
I have also tried to use real examples of the problems I point out so that you can see that these are not abstractions. Writers and editors struggle with these issues every day. You will find many similar examples on my website, <http://obiter.ku.edu>.

I do think I should explain my philosophy a bit, though. Many of the problems I highlight don't have clear-cut, universally accepted solutions. I have based my entries on widely accepted standards of grammar and usage, and my own experience as an editor. Much of my philosophy boils down to this:

### **1. Clarity comes first.**

As journalists, we must be able to convey information in clear, accessible language that non-experts can understand but that experts will still appreciate. Ambiguity has no place in high-quality journalistic writing.





## 2. Tradition guides us.

Language changes, and we should change with it, but not at the expense of clarity. Many long-established rules of grammar, usage and punctuation allow us to write authoritatively and cohesively. Without those rules, we have little to distinguish ourselves from hacks, spammers and writers of toilet-stall drivel.

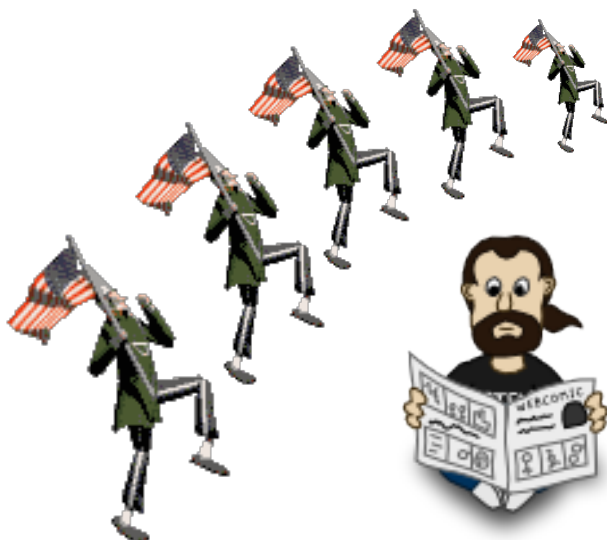
**LOOK**

**IT**

**UP**

## 3. Words speak, so listen.

Slice away the tangled phrases and wordy expressions in prose, but don't eliminate the beauty of rhythm and cadence. The shortest way to phrase a thought is usually the best way, but not always. Give writers flexibility. Along the same lines, writing should have authority, but it shouldn't sound like one of King George's proclamations to the plebes on the town green. Our phrasing and sentences need to sound natural and knowledgeable.



## 4. Audiences lead us.

Readers, listeners and viewers bring different expectations to each medium and to each publication, website or station. What works for one medium may not always work for another. That is not license for sloppiness, though. Our goal, no matter the medium, is to deliver a comprehensible message to a defined audience.



# Introduction

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I've called this a guide to usage in *media* writing because my background is in journalism, but this is really a guide for anyone who wants to write with clarity and who cares about language. You may not agree with everything, and I respect that. Language evolves, and part of that evolution comes from disagreement and discussion. We have to start somewhere, though. We need tools to help us hack through the thicket of tangled writing that threatens to trip us up every day.

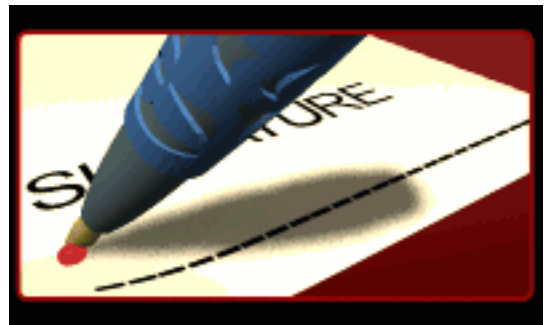
Among the sources I've drawn from in putting this guide together are *Words on Words*, by John B. Bremner; *When Words Collide*, by Lauren Kessler and Duncan McDonald; The Associated Press Stylebook; The American Heritage College Dictionary, fourth edition; and "Fifty Common Errors in Newspaper Writing," most of which was prepared by the Associated Press Writing and Editing Committee and written mostly by Dick Reid when he was assistant managing editor of the Minneapolis Tribune. He was the Gannett professional in residence at KU in the 1978-79 academic year.

I have also drawn on the many handouts I received from Paul Jess, who taught editing at KU for many years, and from material from my colleague Malcolm Gibson, the general manager of The University Daily Kansan.

I owe much thanks to two former student assistants, Lauren Keith and Mindy Ricketts. Lauren prepared an early version of this document and tutored me in InDesign. Her willingness to take risks with design and alternative story forms inspired me to make this handout more visual. Mindy helped me as I developed a publication called *Obiter Dicta*, from which many of these entries are drawn. She was the editor's editor, pushing me to provide more thorough explanations of my thoughts on grammar and usage.

Any guide to writing is inherently imperfect and should never be considered a "rule book." We often break "rules" to improve clarity or flow. Never approach writing and editing mindlessly. Think first; then act.

-- Doug Ward



## ***A note on the illustrations***

*Much of the artwork in this booklet comes from online public domain sites, primarily [clicker.com](http://clicker.com) and [Open Clip Art Library \(http://openclipart.org\)](http://openclipart.org). The dialogue box icons on the cover and on page numbers are from the Watercolor icon pack at [Tutorial9 \(www.tutorial9.net/resources/watercolor-free-icon-pack/\)](http://www.tutorial9.net/resources/watercolor-free-icon-pack/).*

# Words of Clarity

## Abbreviations and Acronyms

Always think about members of your audience before you use an abbreviation or acronym. Will use of the abbreviation or acronym make things clearer for them? Will they see the abbreviation or acronym again? That is, is this a rare term that could be stated in another – perhaps clearer – way?

Always look for substitutes. Rather than concocting a monstrosity like CACAb (the Committee on Acronyms and Abbreviations), try using *the committee*, *the organization* or some other generic term.

I made up CACAb, but you don't have to look far to find organizations whose abbreviated forms fall flat. Take the National Automobile Dealers Association, whose abbreviated form, NADA, spells out the Spanish word for *nothing*.

That takes on a whole new meaning when you see “About NADA” on the organization's website. (Wait, wasn't there an entire television show about that?)

And then there's the poor Wisconsin Tourism Federation, which was forced to change its name

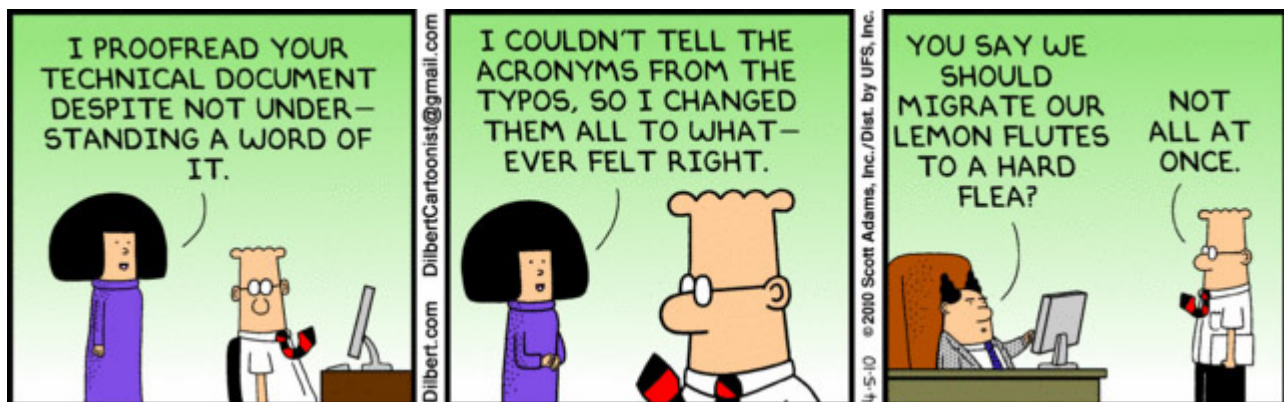
### What's the difference between abbreviations and acronyms?

Abbreviations and acronyms serve similar purposes, but they aren't the same thing. An **abbreviation condenses a word** in some form: acct. for account; CIA for Central Intelligence Agency; or U.S. for United States.

An **acronym** is formed from the first letters of the main words **and pronounced as if it were its own word**. For instance, NATO is an acronym formed from *North Atlantic Treaty Association*. Then there's *snafu*, the classic World War II-era word that was formed from *situation normal all fudged up* (or something like that; I'm trying to keep down the blush factor, so if you want to see the real origin, look it up).

to the Tourism Federation of Wisconsin because of the popularization of *WTF*. Alas, most people who used *WTF* weren't thinking about Wisconsin tourism.

The lesson: Use abbreviations and acronyms sparingly and with caution.



## Abbreviations within parentheses

**One more thing about abbreviations and acronyms:** Avoid putting the abbreviated form in parentheses the first time you use it. As with so many things in language, it's not wrong to put terms in parentheses. Rather, it's clunky, it stops the flow of the sentence and it doesn't really explain what you mean.

AP says that if an abbreviation or acronym isn't well known then you should avoid it. I agree in principle, but I'm not willing to go that far. I think there are legitimate uses for abbreviations and acronyms as long as they are used consciously and sparingly.

For instance, the business school frequently refers to the master of accounting degree as *MAcc*. Rather than saying *master of accounting (MAcc)*, here are two ways to introduce the term:

*Students who pursue a Master of Accounting, which is commonly called MAcc, must complete ...*

*Students who pursue a Master of Accounting, or MAcc, must complete ...*

Beware, though: *MAcc* is a perfectly acceptable term in the business school. I wouldn't use the term for a general audience, though.

## according to

*Said* should be your default verb choice for attribution. *According to* has a place, though,

as long as it isn't overused. It can be useful in making a transition from one thought to another. And in most cases, it's as neutral as *said*, though in some circumstances it can imply that speakers or information have more credibility than they really do.

Then again, does it really? Is *According to Ward, everyone should drive cars with stone wheels* really any different from *Ward said everyone should drive cars with stone wheels*?

The *according to* passage above is clunkier, so I'd definitely use the *said* version. I don't hear a difference in credibility, though.



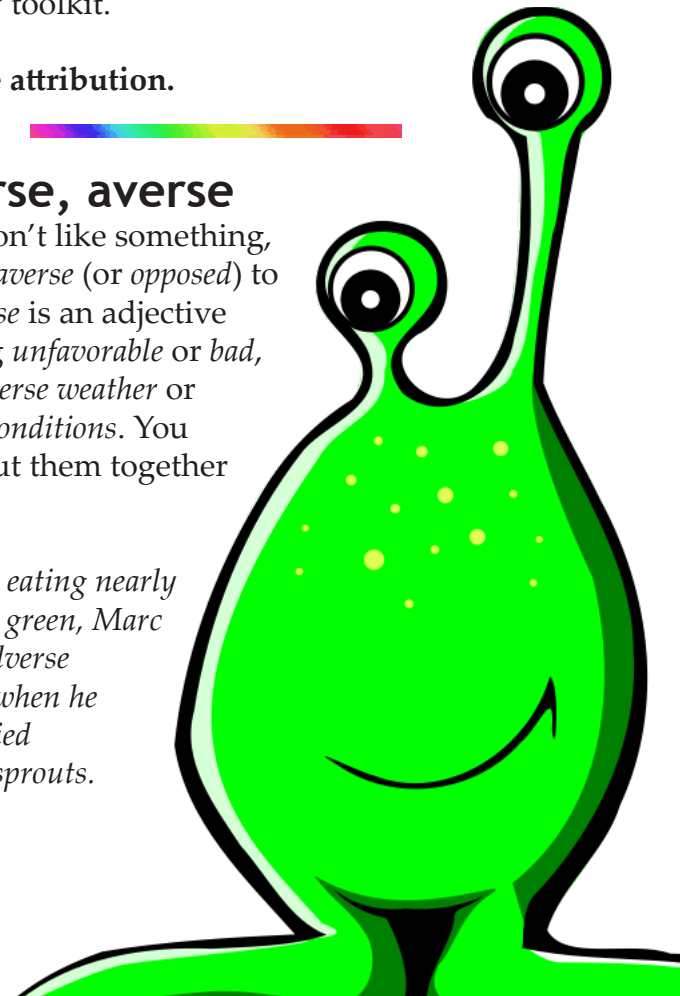
As in most cases, I think you have to use your ear. I certainly wouldn't eliminate *according to* from my toolkit.

**Also see attribution.**

## adverse, averse

If you don't like something, you are *averse* (or *opposed*) to it. *Adverse* is an adjective meaning *unfavorable* or *bad*, as in *adverse weather* or *adverse conditions*. You might put them together like this:

*Averse to eating nearly anything green, Marc had an adverse reaction when he finally tried brussels sprouts.*



## affect, effect

Much of the time, *affect* is the verb, *effect* the noun.

*A chasm that opened on the rink did not **affect** the outcome of the curling match.*

*A chasm that opened on the rink had little **effect** on the curling match.*

The examples above are particularly tricky. Sentences that need an article (*a, an, the*) are easier because the correct word is always the noun *effect*. (Articles work as adjectives, so they need a noun to modify.)

(article) (noun)  
↓ ↓

*The searing heat had **a** grave **effect** on the crowd.*

**A word of caution:** *Affect* and *effect* often cloud the precise meaning of sentences. In the example above, saying *grave effect* is better than saying *effect* because it indicates that something bad happened. It's still abstract, though. So when you see *affect* or *effect*, ask whether they are truly the best words to use. Consider how specific details could have improved the sentence above:



*More than a dozen spectators collapsed in the searing heat, and an ambulance crew rushed three of them to Lawrence Memorial Hospital for treatment.*

*Effect* is also a verb meaning *to bring about*.

Thus: *It is almost impossible to effect change among avid hikers when you have a cheese sandwich stuck to the bottom of your Crocs.*

## afterward

In American English, we tend to prefer *afterward*, except in a quote. Use *toward* in the same way.

One might ask why the words have evolved that way, to which I'd have to give you a shrug of uncertainty. *Afterward* is actually the older word, with the Oxford English Dictionary tracing it back to about 1000 A.D. *Afterwards* came along 300 years later. I can only guess that it was created by a miscreant scribe who was being paid by the letter. Shakespeare used the word in *Julius Caesar*, and ever since, editors everywhere have stood atop their desks and shouted,

*Like wrath in death and envy afterwards*

That usually meant it was time for dinner.



## agreement

Agreement from some people's brains. Then again, maybe it's just deadline. Or journalists' desire for conversational tone run amok. Or perhaps in this case the editors were so excited about working the phrase *screwing you* into a business headline that they forgot to check anything else.

Whatever the case, no one seemed to realize that the headline reads, "Here Is 10 Ways ..."

This, of course, is just one way that subject/verb agreement can run amok. Remember this and you'll have fewer troubles: Nouns and verbs can be either singular or plural. A singular noun

needs a singular verb; a plural noun needs a plural verb. That's easy enough in most cases. Watch for constructions like these, though:

*The committee made their decision last night (their should be its).*

*Each of the women want to make their own decision. (Make it wants and her).*  
*Each of the women **wants** to make **her** own decision.*

Also see **Collective nouns**.

*State **Aide Gets Hammered** Again*

*Aide May Be On Block Again*

## aid/aide

A single "e" can make a big difference. In the case of *aid*, an "e" personifies, turning *assistance* into *assistant*.

Consider: The point of the stories that accompanied these headlines is that state financing for schools is being cut. So if school *aid* (financial assistance) is cut, no doubt many districts will be forced to cut *aides* (classroom or administrative assistants).

What the headline suggests is that some poor assistant's neck is on the line, sort of like a Thanksgiving turkey. The real turkey is the headline.



*Aide* always means a person. *Aid*, by the dictionary definition, can mean either a person or help of some kind. Most stylebooks, including AP, make clear distinctions between the two words to avoid confusion.

So unless you are writing about a person, leave the "e" on the chopping block. Doing that will *aid* reader comprehension but will also keep you from looking like a turkey.

## all right

This headline in The New York Times shocked me awake one Monday morning.

It wasn't what Paul Krugman had to say that bothered me (it did, of course, but in a different way); it was the use of *alright* in the headline.



You see, among those who know better, there is no such word. And the editors at The Times know better. Or should.

It's a small thing, of course. As American Heritage points out, Langston Hughes and James Joyce used *alright* in their writing. Singers have accumulated a long list of songs and albums with *alright* in the titles ("The Kids Are Alright"; "I'm Alright"; "It's Alright (I See Rainbows)"; "Everything's Alright"). On the East Coast, where I lived for many years, Alright Parking runs more grammatically challenged lots than I could ever count.

And yet, it's symbolic all the same. The Times prides itself on precision, and *alright* has an aura of sloppiness. The Times stylebook warns against its use, as does the AP Stylebook. American Heritage says that "one who uses *alright*, especially in formal writing, runs the risk that readers may view it as an error or as the willful breaking of convention."

Or sloppiness.





## allude, elude

You *allude to* (or *mention*) a person, place or thing. You *elude* (or *escape*) someone who is chasing you -- like, say, an evil one-eyed robot.

## altar, alter

*Alter* is a verb meaning *to change*. *Altar*, a noun, is the place at the front of a church and is the correct word in the phrase *left at the altar*, meaning *abandoned at the time of commitment*.

**Memory trick:** When you see that “e” in *alter*, think of the “e” in *change*. That might help prevent the need for later alterations.

## alternate, alternative

These two words are *not synonyms*, despite the best attempt of ignorant writers to use them that way. Consider this headline from the *Kansan*:

*Craigslist offers alternate method of advertising apartments, roommates*

*Alternate* means to shift back and forth between two or more options or *alternatives*. *Alternative* can also be an adjective, which is how the headline writer should have used it in the example above.



## annual

*Annual* means that something occurs every year. So if something is taking place for the first time, it isn't *annual* yet. That's why we never use the phrase *first annual*. Instead, describe an event as, for example, the *first* Flintstone Reunion and say that organizers plan to make it an *annual* event.

Cutcliff said some of the patrons were **anxious** to leave because they were underage and feared the police citations.

## anxious, eager

*Anxious* and *eager* aren't synonyms, although you will sometimes see them used that way (usually by sloppy writers). The distinction between them is worth keeping for clarity's sake.

Bremner describes the difference this way:

*Anxious* means *apprehensive* or *worried* (from the Latin *angere*, meaning *to cause pain, to choke*). *Eager* means *enthusiastic* or *with desire* or *ready to take action* (from *acer*, meaning *sharp* or *keen*).

An easy way to remember the distinction is to pay attention to the prepositions: *Anxious* generally takes *about*; *eager* takes *to* or *for*.

In the example above, the students in the bar were certainly *anxious about* the police, but they were *eager to* leave.

## as, like

 See like, as

## attribution

*Said* and *say* are a journalist's verbs of choice in attribution, neutral and almost invisible. Words like *opined*, *blurted*, *declared* and *admitted* add the writer's judgment and can focus the reader's attention on the attribution instead of the meaning of a sentence. Sometimes you may want to make that judgment, but use it carefully and consciously.

Another thing to keep in mind: People cannot *grin*, *frown*, *smile* or *giggle* words. If a sentence calls for those types of descriptions, do it this way: "... *Smith said with a smile.*"

In most cases, keep attribution in noun-verb order, placing "said" after the speaker's name: *Milton said* in print or *Milton says* in broadcast. That's mostly a matter of journalistic tradition, but it also follows logical sentence structure.

*"I am not a crook," Nixon said.*

**rather than**

*"I am not a crook," said Nixon.*

We turn that around, though, when we want to add information about the speaker after the attribution, or when the speaker has a long title.

*"I am not a crook," said Nixon, who is the only president to have resigned the presidency.*

**rather than**

*"I am not a crook," Nixon, the only president to have resigned the presidency, said.*

Follow the same noun-verb format when using pronouns with attribution. For most people, that's easy to remember. Saying *said he* or *said she* sounds as if the writer learned English at the knee of King Arthur or some other monarch who



wore his crown in the bathtub:

*"My kingdom for a bar of soap!" said he.*

Of course, if that were the quote, you'd probably want to add:

*... drawing perplexed looks from all who heard him.*

Also see **according to**.

## Motorcycle ax near lake

Full story: [The Topeka Capital-Journal](#)

Shawnee County sheriff's officers responded to an injury accident Thursday night near Lake Shawnee.

## AX, ax

**N**ever underestimate the ability of headline writers to create linguistic abominations.

Tight headline counts have given us such ugly permutations as *solons* (for *legislators*), *hikes* and *ups* (for *increases*), *eyes* (for *considers*), *nips* (for *narrowly defeats*), *nabs* (for *arrests*) and – you get the idea.

No matter how many times you drive a stake through the heart of these beasts, they keep rising from the dead and gurgling in mouthfuls of telegraphic nonsense:

*Solons mull tax hikes,  
nix biz probe after flap  
in p.m. exec. confab*

Here's one more "word" to add to the vocabulary of the undead: AX as an abbreviation for *accident*.

My wife passed along the example above from the Topeka Capital-Journal.





It certainly fits in with the abbreviation culture that permeates the digital world. I found references to *AX* or *ax* back to 2002 on chat sites, but where its use originated, I don't know.

It seems to have spread like a pox among TV websites in the last couple of years (post-Twitter, of

course).

## bad, badly

*Bad* and *badly* tend to stroll around, *B* hands in pockets, whistling their separate tunes except when a writer needs to get touchy-feely. That's when both words converge and send off a mysterious signal that turns some people tone deaf. Let's try to filter out that signal.

*Bad* is an adjective. *Badly* is an adverb.

Understanding that helps most of the time. With simple verbs like *play*, you'd use an adverb; linking verbs like *is*, *are*, *was* and *were* take adjectives. So you wouldn't say, *He was badly about remembering anniversaries*. Or when someone asked how the concert was, you'd say, *It was bad*, not *It was badly*.

On the other hand, many people struggle when *feel* or *smell* are part of a sentence because either *bad* or *badly* could be correct.

*Bremner says to think about it this way:*

If you *smell bad*, you need a bath.

If you *smell badly*, your nose is clogged.

If you *feel bad*, you are ill.

The strangest part of its use is that these sites aren't restricted by space, other than the 60 counts most aim for as part of a search engine optimization strategy. Rather, they seem to have embraced *ax* as an ugly emblem of the Internet age.

Personally, I'm waiting for some gem like this:

*Solon eyes end as ax probe runs its course*

**Science now tells you what causes**  
**NERVOUS B.O.** (NERVOUS BODY ODOR)

—and no one is free from the workings of his nerves

**YOU** have over 2,000,000 busy sweat glands in your body. Nervousness, strong feelings... cause sensitive nerves to signal to the sweat glands, and out comes nervous perspiration. Unless proper precautions are taken, this soon becomes "nervous B.O." This perspiration has nothing to do with heat or exercise or season. You may not see it. You may not feel it. But it comes any time to anybody. Guard against this common fault of "nervous B.O." Just change to the tangey Lifebuoy daily bath. You'll revel in Lifebuoy Health Soap... its mild, grand lather... that feeling of "glow," like an expensive massage. The crisp Lifebuoy odor's gone in a jiffy, but you have lasting protection from B.O., whether due to tight-strung nerves or to heat, exercise, or hard work.

**UNDERNEATH THE VENEER OF CIVILIZED MAN**

There are about 1000 sweat glands per square inch under each arm. Any confined areas are prime "danger spots." Any little nervous upset brings out nervous perspiration here.

There are about 1600 sweat glands per square inch on each palm. Ever had a moist, clammy palm when you entered a room full of people? Ever rub off your palm before you shook hands? Then you know what nervous perspiring is.

There are about 1575 sweat glands per square inch on the side of each foot. Nervous perspiration here has caused trouble for millions. There are other places, too, that cry out for the daily Lifebuoy bath that makes you protected - poised - pleasant to others - guarded against "nervous B.O." for hours and hours.

**WHEN YOU'RE TENSE**—Ever make a speech and feel yourself perspiring? Are you shy, easily embarrassed? Interesting people... people with personality... respond to their feelings with nervous perspiration. Your daily Lifebuoy bath with its lasting effect keeps you safe from "nervous B.O."

**WHEN YOU'RE THRILLED**—You're excited and you perspire "Nervous B.O." is sure to follow at a time when you're most anxious to please. You go to the movies with an interesting "somebody," get excited. Out comes nervous perspiration. Take care—face life with a confident smile, protected by your Lifebuoy bath!

**WHEN YOU'RE SCARED**—Driving in traffic is a familiar example of the nervous speed-up, when excited glands cause you to throw off perspiration. For your own sake don't offend—use Lifebuoy to protect against embarrassing "nervous B.O."

**HOW TO GET FULL BENEFITS FROM YOUR DAILY LIFEBOUY BATH**

**HAVE** water warm. Massage with Lifebuoy's mild, creamy lather. How good it feels. Lifebuoy contains a deodorizing, hygienic ingredient not in any other popular toilet or bath soap. You sense a new cleanliness—refreshed, toned up! The crisp, healthy scent rinses right away... but you are guarded for hours longer from the offending B.O. that comes from nervous excitement or heat or exercise. Lifebuoy has so many advantages: Keep it handy wherever you wash your hands. Children love to use it. The big cake lasts a long time. More folks like Lifebuoy than any other bath soap. You'll "take to" Lifebuoy, too.

**BUOY HEALTH SOAP** — ITS CRISP ODOR GOES IN A JIFFY — ITS PROTECTION LASTS AND LASTS

If you *feel badly*, something is wrong with your sense of touch.

## believe, feel, think

Does anyone *think* anymore?

That could be a lament about many things, but in this case it's about the use, or misuse, of *believe*, *think* and *feel*.

For the most part, you *think* with your brain, *believe* with your soul and *feel* with your senses. So:

*The police **think** they have the right person in custody," not believe.*

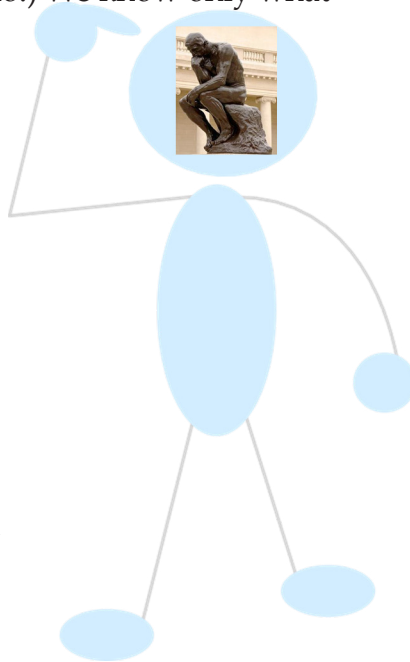
Other times, this isn't so clear-cut, as in *He believes he saw aliens at the Missouri game* or *She felt her husband needed more compassion*. (Both of those are correct.) So always *think* about the proper use of these words. See Bremner.

**A word of caution:** We never truly know what other people believe, feel or think. We can't read their minds or see into their souls. (If you can, don't waste your time in journalism. Head straight to the casino.) We know only what they say. That's why we usually need attribution when we say that someone *believes*, *feels* or *thinks* something, as in:

*The police said they thought they had the right person in custody.*

*She believes in aliens, sea monsters and the wisdom of editing professors, she said.*

*Her classmates said they felt queasy whenever they saw her.*



Don't overdo it, though. If we insist on attributing every such word or sentence, we risk looking silly.

### More headlines

### More

- Spooner Hall to receive a facelift (Feb. 09)
- **New helmet law targets motorcycle owners** (Feb. 09)
- Used Toyota vehicles lo
- February 9th, 2010 (Feb. 09)
- Student recipes wanted
- February 4th, 2010 (Feb. 09)
- Kan: 5k r
- A new helmet law proposed in the Kansas Senate could put blame on motorcycle owners rather than riders.

## bills/laws

This is basic civics:

Legislators introduce **bills**, debate bills and vote on bills. If passed, those bills go to a chief executive – in state government, that is the governor – who either vetoes them or signs them.

If the governor signs a bill, it becomes a law. If he vetoes it, the legislature has a chance to override the veto and still turn the bill into a law.

Until then, a bill is just a bill. Or it is legislation. It is not law.

Using a headline that says, *New helmet law targets motorcycle owners* not only misleads readers and viewers, but it tarnishes our credibility. If we don't understand how the legislative process works, how can anyone trust us to write stories about it? If we don't understand the language well enough to convey basic information, how can we expect anyone to understand us?

Those are rhetorical questions, of course, but they are well worth thinking about. I'd suggest thinking about them during a three-minute civics review session.

## bring, take

This is subtle and sometimes tricky. *Bring* means to *carry toward*, especially toward a writer or a publication. *Take* means to *carry away from*. For example:


*Janiece brought her favorite dictionary with her to Lawrence.*

*The professor told students to bring their assignments to class.*

### but

*Jeremiah took his iPod along on his trip to Florida.*

*The chancellor asked recruiters to take extra Jayhawk stickers with them on their trips around Kansas.*



That was a shock. Before the game, the hype **centered** around superb freshman Beasley.

## center on, center around

Use of *center around* has been moving into accepted usage, but many experts still consider it nonstandard. Consider me among them. If you think about it, *center* indicates the middle of something while *around* indicates a perimeter. That would make *centering around* something contradictory, if not impossible.

So, one thing can *center on* another. Or it can *revolve around* the other. But please don't try to *center around* or you'll send us all into a vortex.



**GSP could be coed**

## coed

*Coed* certainly has a place in the journalistic lexicon, at least as an adjective. In that sense, it means that both men and women may attend, join or participate in something, as in *coed softball* or a *coed dorm*.

Random House dates the term to the late 19th

century, and that makes sense. That's when universities were expanding and many opened their doors to women for the first time.

The headline above uses *coed* as an adjective correctly. The problem was in the verb choice: *be*, meaning *to exist* or *to consist of*. *GSP could be coed* indicates that that men may already be living there. I'm sure that raised a few eyebrows at Gertrude Sellards Pearson. *Become*, meaning *to change into*, would have been a better word to use: *GSP could become coed*



**GSP could house coeds in future**

We come now to the other use of *coed*. As a noun, it means *college women*. In its simplest, most innocent form, that would be harmless enough, though certainly now the problem in this second headline becomes apparent: GSP is an all-female dorm, so saying it could house college women in the future is silly.

Both the Kansan and AP stylebooks warn against use of *coed* as a noun, though, and for good reason: There is no simple, innocent form of *coed* as a noun anymore, if there ever was. In today's vernacular, *coed* means *babe*, *vixen*, *sexpot* and (fill in your own lascivious synonym here). Google *coed*, and you'll quickly find such sites as Coed Magazine, whose home page contains offerings like "World's Sexiest Beer Pong Babes" and "Twins Who Put the 'O' in Olympics."

Now we've really raised some eyebrows at GSP. And when journalists use *coed* as a noun, they put themselves in the same neighborhood as Coed Magazine. That's not a neighborhood where we want to hang out. So here's my advice: Next time, ask the stylebook for directions.

## clichés

Now and then, a cliché works fine. Most of the time, though, work toward fresh, vivid language, avoiding the hundreds of tired phrases that might best be described as turkeys. (Wait a minute: Is that a cliché?) I've included just a few of them below. You'll find many lists on the Web. Look them over. You want your writing to sing, not gobble.

### Some stale turkeys to avoid

- seal the deal
- sight for sore eyes
- 'tis the season
- ground to a halt
- breathless anticipation
- gave the green light to
- dodged a bullet
- to the bitter end
- irons in the fire
- moment of truth
- one fell swoop
- hope springs eternal
- etched in stone
- the almighty dollar
- lit it up from downtown
- stepped to the dish
- win the battle, lose the war



## collective nouns

In American English, we consider an entity like a company, a team or a class to be singular. That's why we call them *collective nouns*: Yes, they are made up of people, but for consistency, we consider each a single entity. Most writers have no trouble remembering that when they use a verb with a collective noun. Saying something like *The company are planning a new office* grates on American ears. That's standard usage in Britain, though.

Logically, if we use a singular verb we'd use a singular pronoun, as well. So on second reference, *company, team, class* and similar

collective nouns take the pronoun *it*, not *they*.

**Correct:** *The company released **its** earnings report yesterday.*

**Incorrect:** *The company released **their** earnings report yesterday.*

If using *it* or *its* sounds odd in a sentence, you can always use a plural noun instead. For instance, rather than saying *company*, you could say *company executives* (if that's true), *team members* instead of *team*, *students in the class* rather than *class*. Doing so changes *company, team* and *class* into modifiers for plural nouns. So we'd get something like this:

**Correct:** *Team members made their way to the bus.*

**Incorrect:** *The team made their way to the bus.*

Also see **Agreement**.

## capitalization

For the most part, capitalize only proper nouns, titles and the first word of a sentence. On second reference and in most other instances, lowercase words that would be capitalized in formal personal titles. For example:

*She gave the report to **President Barack Obama**.*

**but**

*She gave the report to the **president**.*

*Hundreds of students listened to **Chancellor Bernadette Gray-Little**.*

**but**

*He missed the **chancellor's** speech.*

Watch for unnecessary capitalization or other characters in names, places or organizations, as in *The Ohio State University, Ke\$sha* or *THE BIG BAND*. Those are marketing ploys that do

nothing to aid meaning. Make them *Ohio State University*, *Kesha* and *the Big Band*.

Similarly, follow standard capitalization for celebrities or organizations that use all lowercase letters in their public life, such as e.e. cummings and k.d. lang. Make them E.E. Cummings and K.D. Lang. The reasoning is the same: These are simply marketing tools.



## comma splices

(Or, how to keep your clauses from crashing)

**B**eware the run-on sentence. Many writers seem to forget that they can actually end a sentence with a period. You can't join two complete sentences with a comma, though. The result is a **comma splice**.

To help you spot comma splices, think of the British term for a period: full stop. If a sentence needs a full stop, use a period. Occasionally, a semicolon works when joining independent clauses, but don't overdo semicolons. They can easily lead to overly long, stuffy sentences.

**Incorrect:** *I've never been on an airplane before, I'm*

*afraid of flying.*

**Correct:** *I've never been on an airplane before. I'm afraid of flying.*

**Correct:** *I've never been on an airplane before; I'm afraid of flying.*

**Incorrect:** *You only have your skin once, why not do as much as you can with it?*

**Correct:** *You only have your skin once. Why not do as much as you can with it?*

**Correct:** *You only have your skin once; why not do as much as you can with it?*

## community

**U**sing *community* to describe a loose collection of individuals or organizations has become a journalistic cliché. Many are downright silly. So ask yourself whether something is truly a community. In most cases, there's a better way to describe it:

*chess players, not the chess-playing community*

*businesses, not the business community*

*students, faculty and staff, not the university community*

*developers, not the development community*

When you find yourself starting to write *community*, think about the following headline from The Onion. Parody has a way of zeroing in on life's absurdities:

***Series of Serial-Killer Killings  
Rocks Serial-Killer Community***

## compare with, compare to

Much of the time, writers use *compare to* when they mean *compare with*. *Compare to* sets up a metaphor. It means putting something in the same category as something else, as in:



*Never lacking in self-confidence, she compared herself to Shakespeare.*

*The coach compared the new recruit to Danny Manning.*

We generally use *compare with* to point out differences:

*How do salaries in journalism compare with those in engineering?*

*The Dow Jones industrial average fell 2.3 percent, compared with 2.8 percent for the S&P 500.*

*She grew angry as she compared her grades with her classmates'.*

## compose, comprise

Remember that the *parts compose the whole* and the *whole comprises its parts*. You *compose* things by putting them together. Once the parts are put together, the object *comprises* the parts.

Most language experts frown on the use of *is comprised of*. The reason is that *comprise* means *contain* or *include*, so saying *is comprised of* is akin to saying *is contained of* or *is included of*. It simply makes no sense.

Better: *is made up of* or *consists of*.

## couple of, couple

Use the *of*, as in *a couple of tomatoes*, **not** *a couple tomatoes*. Why? Idiom and standard usage for

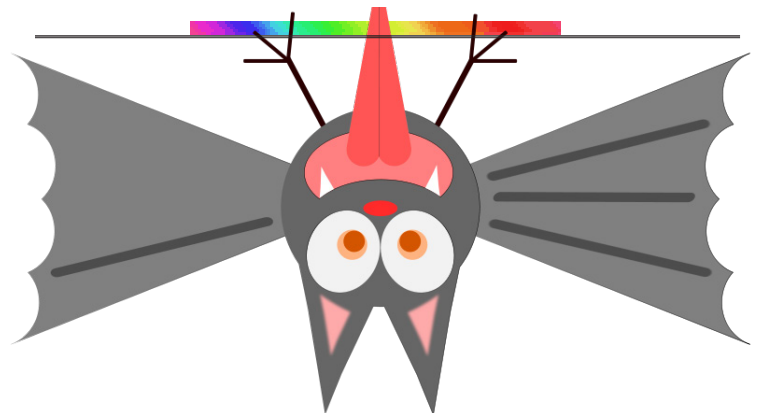
one reason. Beyond that, *couple* is a noun (or a verb), not an adjective, so you need to create a prepositional phrase if you use it before a noun.

A quick word about *couple*, the noun meaning *two people*. It can be either singular or plural but not both in the same sentence.

## damage, damages

A person who files a civil lawsuit might seek *damages* (money or other compensation).

In stories about dents on a car or a smashed window in a building, the correct word is *damage*.



## dangling modifiers

These most often occur with participles or other introductory phrases or clauses, as in:

*After debating the amendment, a vote was taken.*

Or this:

Entering the Tour Championship, an argument can be made that the three players with the best chance of winning are the best three players this year — Tiger Woods, Steve Stricker and Phil Mickelson.

In the second example, the argument didn't enter the Tour Championship; the players did.

In the first example, the vote didn't debate the amendment.



In both cases, the introductory phrase acts as an adjective and needs to attach itself to the word or words it modifies, as in:

*Entering the Tour Championship, the three players with the best chance of winning seem to be the three best players on the PGA Tour this year: ...*

*After debating the amendment, the senators voted on it.*

Danglers are also common in sentences in which a writer uses *it* when trying to give a sense of place but trying not to inject herself into a story, as in:

*Standing on the Kansas River levee last week, it wasn't hard for Carey Maynard-Moody to start ticking off a list of Lawrence's natural resources.*

*It wasn't standing on the levee; the reporter and Carey Maynard-Moody were.*

Another common misuse occurs when the writer leaves out the subject of the sentence, as in:

*Wading into the surf, his swimsuit fell off.*  
(The swimsuit wasn't wading into the surf; *he* was.)

Watch for danglers within or at the ends of sentences, as well. They can produce equally comical results:

*He has had the wristband since his freshman season, which the Lawrence junior says he never washes.*

*Perkins said he once thought he would stay at UConn for the rest of his career, where he worked for 13 years before coming to Kansas.*

### demolish, destroy

They mean *to do away with completely*. You can't *partially demolish* or *somewhat destroy* something; nor is there any need to say *totally destroyed*. If something is destroyed, it's destroyed. No modifiers required.

### different from

In most cases, write that things and people are *different from* each other, not *different than*. Strict adherence to that guideline can create some obnoxious constructions, though, as in: *American magazines today are different from what they were 100 years ago*. Better to say, *American magazines today are different than they were 100 years ago*.

### dilemma

It means a choice between two equally bad options. Many times, though, writers use it as a synonym for *problem*. It's not. Here's an example that illustrates the problem well:

*One of the Athletics Department's suggestions to help solve the parking dilemma is to move the track and throwing fields, which makes total sense.*

If one option makes sense, we don't have a *dilemma*; we have a *problem*.



### disperse, disburse

*Disperse* means *scatter*; *disburse* means *pay* or *spend*. So when money is involved, think *disburse*. Of course, if someone is truly *dispersing* money, don't think – run after it.

The University called off classes yesterday for the first time in six years **due to** snow.

## due to, because of

Writers often use *due to* when they should use *because of*. Keep this in mind:

*Due to* works as an adjective, so it needs a noun to modify. *Because of* works as an adverb, so it generally modifies a verb.

Another way to distinguish between them is to stop the sentence after the verb and ask, "Why?" If what follows provides a logical answer, the phrase you want is *because of*. For instance:

*The University called off class for the first time in six years (why?) because of snow.*

Try it with a sentence that needs *due to*:

*The University's closing was (why?) ...*

That makes no sense. So the phrase we're after is *due to*:

*The University's closing was due to snow.*

And though that sentence is correct grammatically, it has all the euphony of a bell with a broken clapper. To my ear, *the result of* works far better than *due to*, as in *The University's closing was the result of a snowstorm*. It's hard to imagine using either of those sentences, though. They both sound unnatural.

So write:

*The game was canceled because of rain.*

**OR**

*The game's cancellation was due to rain.*

**OR**

*The game's cancellation was the result of a rainstorm.*

**BUT NOT**

*The game was canceled due to rain.*

## either, each

Strictly speaking, *either* means one or the other, not both. *Each* is more specific. The distinction has diminished, though, and I see little reason for knee-jerk changes if the meaning is clear. If *either* seems vague, change it to *each*.

**Best:** *He planted trees on each side of the house.*

**Often acceptable:** *He planted trees on either side of the house.*

Beware of sloppiness in use of both words, as in this sentence from a comic book:

*With Lois and Luthor under each arm, Superman races thru a corridor ...*

The same two people under each arm? Now that's a superhero!



## everyday, every day

*Everyday* is an adjective meaning *ordinary*, as in *Everyday shoes*. *Every day* is a noun. Use it in sentences like this:

*Francine arrives for work early every day.*

Mix the two terms up and you'll find yourself drinking \$1.99 sake bombs *every day* and wondering how Bud Light shrank into a single word along with *every day*.

have eight children, although, like much else associated with this strange post-Cold War spying case, the true facts are hazy.

## Just the facts, please. Not the ‘true facts’

This is Webb, Jack Webb.

He wasn't a detective, but he played one on TV. He was a good detective, too – a darn good one. He would have been a damn good detective, but when his show, *Dragnet*, was on the air in the 1950s and then again in the 1960s, words like *damn* were frowned upon.



So he had to settle for being a darn good one.

As Sgt. Joe Friday, he worked in Los Angeles. He didn't take any guff. He just wanted the facts. In fact, if people started blabbering, he got them back on track by intoning, "Just the facts" or the "Just the facts, ma'am."

Notice that Joe Friday didn't ask for the "true facts." He asked for "just the facts."

Writers have mindlessly tacked on *true to facts* for years, but the need to eliminate the redundancy has never been greater. If we give in to the idea of "true facts" or "real facts" and other "facts," we have no facts at all. Without facts, we have no ability to work through the problems of politics, the economy, society, education, journalism, business, family or even the playground. Without facts, without something real and true and provable, we can't go anywhere. Unfortunately, we seem stuck in that mire, as Leonard Pitts Jr. pointed out a while back.

Interestingly, American Heritage says that *fact* can sometimes mean *allegation of fact*, as when we say that someone *got the facts wrong*. It gives that justification for allowing the phrases *true facts* and *real facts*. I see the point, but I disagree. If you get the facts wrong, you don't really have facts. You have errors.

As Joe Friday, Jack Webb didn't ask for the *true facts* anymore than he asked whether someone was giving him *false facts*. Just the facts. That's all we need.

## false purpose

This is most common in sports and business writing, but it pops up everywhere. It occurs when a writer uses an infinitive (*to give*, *to hurt*, etc.) after another verb, giving the false impression that an action was predetermined or purposeful. For example:

*Jones scored 21 points to give the Jayhawks an 83-72 victory.*

*The Dow Jones industrial average fell 23 points to close at 11,183.*

Jones didn't plan to score 21 points or *to give* KU an 83-72 victory. No one planned for the stock market *to close* at a specific level, and certainly the stock market didn't decide for itself. But that's how it sounds.

Fixing false purpose is easy. All you need to do is change the infinitive to a participle or to change it to past tense and use *and*. Either way provides the same information without implying a false intention.

*Jones scored 21 points, giving the Jayhawks an 83-72 victory.*

*The Dow Jones industrial average fell 23 points and closed at 11,183.*



These are words that sound the same but are spelled differently. For example, *cite*, *sight* and *site*; *peek* and *peak*; *no* and *know*. Computer spell-checkers won't catch incorrect homophones, and writers who overlook them can produce comical results. For instance:

*People searched endlessly down isles full of office supplies.*

*Make sure to use extension chords properly.*

My advice: Whenever you run across a homophone in writing or editing, stop, think and look it up. You are always better off taking a little extra time and looking something up than in looking like a fool by publishing something you *thought* was right.

The list of vocabulary words that I use in Multimedia Editing contains an extensive collection of homophones. I've included an abbreviated list here, and I've made separate entries for some of the most troublesome ones. You will find others in the AP Stylebook.

#### A

- aid (help); aide (assistant)
- allusion (indirect reference); illusion (misperception)
- ascent (upward slope); assent (agreement)

#### B

- bail (money; to empty); bale (bundle)
- breach (violation); breech (buttocks)
- bazaar (marketplace); bizarre (weird)

#### C

- cannon (gun); canon (law)
- cite (to quote); site (location); sight (see, view, spectacle)
- cue (signal); queue (line)

#### E

- elicit (draw out); illicit (illegal)
- elude (to avoid); allude (indirectly refer to)

#### F-G

- faint (dim, dizzy, weak); feint (pretense, false movement)
- faze (disconcert); phase (stage)
- feign (pretend); fain (gladly)
- flair (knack); flare (torch)
- floe (ice mass); flow (run freely)
- forward (in front, impudent, progressive); foreword (introductory note in a book)
- gild (cover with gold); guild (association)

**H-I-J-K**

- hanger (one who hangs); hangar (airplane shed)
- hew (to cut); hue (color)
- hoard (cache); horde (throng)
- hurdle (jump); hurtle (throw)
- inequity (lacks fairness); iniquity (sin)
- its (possessive); it's (it is)
- jam (fruit preserves, wedge tight); jamb (door post)



- knave (rogue); nave (part of a church)

**L**

- levy (tax); levee (embankment)
- lean (thin, incline); lien (claim)

**M**

- material (substance); materiel (equipment)
- metal (element); mettle (spirit); meddle (intrude in other people's affairs)
- mew (street, cat sounds); muse (ponder)

**P**

- pain (suffering); pane (glass)
- peak (summit); peek (look); pique (resentment; provoke; spur)
- pedal (foot lever); peddle (sell)
- pole (rod); poll (canvass)
- populace (the people); populous (thickly populated)
- pour (flow); pore (to study, skin opening)
- pray (implore); prey (victim, attack)
- prophecy (prediction); prophesy (to predict)

**R**

- raise (lift); raze (demolish)
- reek (smell); wreak (punish)
- review (re-examine); revue (musical show)
- rung (step); wrung (squeezed)
- rye (grain); wry (crooked)

**S**

- seaman (sailor); semen (sperm)
- sear (to dry up); sere (withered)
- shear (to clip); sheer (swerve, diaphanous, perpendicular)
- slight (small); sleight (dexterity)
- step (walk); steppe (plain)
- straight (direct); strait (narrow water, distress)

**T-U-V-W**

- team (group); teem (to swarm)
- throw (toss); throe (pang)
- tortuous (winding); torturous (painful)
- troop (soldiers); troupe (actors)
- undo (reverse); undue (excessive)
- vale (valley); veil (cloth)
- vain (futile, conceited); vane (wind indicator); vein (blood vessel)
- veracious (truthful); voracious (ravenous)
- waive (give up); wave (flutter)
- wear (have on); ware (articles)
- wet (damp, dampen); whet (sharpen)



## flabby writing

Tighten writing when you can, eliminating redundancies and other unnecessary words and phrases. Watch for these types of words and phrases, which add little or nothing to the meaning. Kessler and McDonald, and Bremner offer many examples. Here are some I see frequently:

- qualifiers like *very* and *somewhat*
- *a total of*                      • *currently*
- *down* or *up* tacked on to verbs, as in *start up*, *finish up*, *close down*
- *8 p.m. tonight* instead of *8 tonight* or just *8 p.m.*
- *in order to*                      • *new record*
- *in the process of*

A caveat: Don't eliminate words mindlessly just to shorten phrasing. For example, saying *a pass good for 10 one-way rides* is longer but far clearer than *a 10-one-way-ride pass*.

Also see **clichés**; **community**; **demolish**, **destroy**; **head, head up**; **in advance of**, **prior to**; **jargon**; **passive voice**; **pronouns**, **fear of**; **that** (after attribution); **unique**.

## flout, flaunt

*Flout* means to mock or scoff or to show disdain or contempt for. *Flaunt* means to display ostentatiously or defiantly.

*He flouted the dress code by flaunting his mismatched plaid trousers and jacket at the meeting.*

**gel** See jelled.

## head, head up

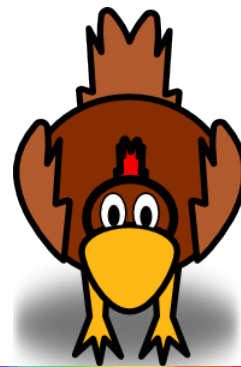
Unless you want to sound like the clueless pointy-haired boss in Dilbert, avoid constructions like this:

*She headed up the committee.* Even *head* (without the *up*) isn't as good as *lead*:

*She will lead the committee this year.*

While we're on the subject of *head*, beware of using it indiscriminately as a noun, as well, especially when chickens are involved. Let this headline serve as a warning;

**Ex-Boston Chicken head has sights on diners**





### hike

Don't use it as a verb to mean *raise* or as a noun to mean *increase*. We can *hike a football*, but *hiking prices* or *hiking wages* makes a writer sound like a hack, as does talking about a *tax hike*. If you find yourself writing such drivel, take a hike instead, clear your mind and then try again.



### hopefully

*Hopefully* seems to come out of people's mouths indiscriminately, much the way *you know* does, as in:

*Hopefully, it won't rain today.*

What they mean is *let's hope* or *we hope* or *I hope* but for some reason don't want to put an overt subject into a sentence. (Heaven forbid they have to commit to something.) This use (or misuse) has grown so common that some language authorities have begun to allow it as standard usage. I'm not there yet. I still think a careful writer makes a distinction and uses *hopefully* to describe the way someone feels:

*It won't rain today, they said hopefully.*

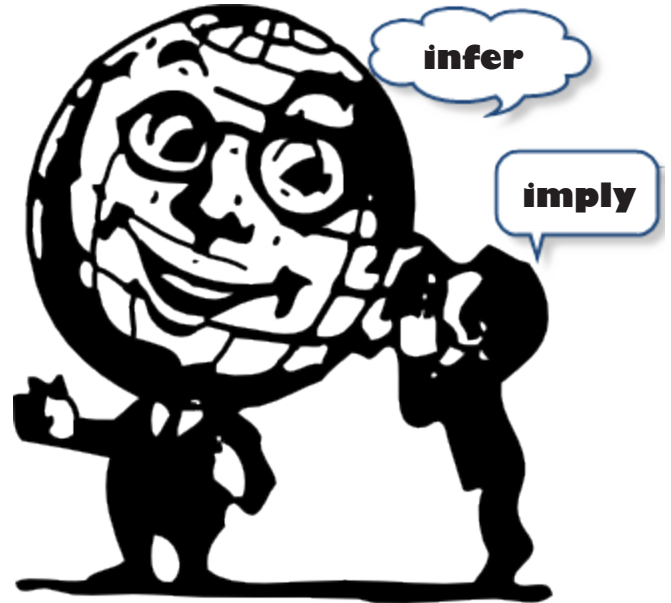
If someone misuses *hopefully* in a quote and you decide to use the quote, fine. Otherwise paraphrase:

*They said they hoped it wouldn't rain today.*



### imply, infer

The speaker or writer *implies*. The listener, reader or viewer *infers*.

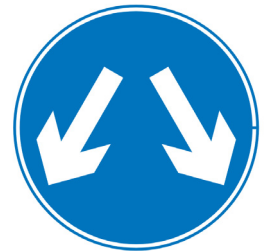


### indirection

This means slipping in facts as if the reader already knew them, as in:

*James Smith made history today. The 24-year-old ate 463 jelly doughnuts in two hours, 20 minutes. The Shawnee resident was taken to the hospital afterward.*

We make no connection between James Smith, the 24-year-old and the Shawnee resident, leaving readers to figure it out for themselves. It's like trying to connect A to C without going through B.



Here's a better way to handle the identification:

*James Smith made history today. Smith, a 24-year-old Shawnee resident, ate 463 jelly doughnuts in two hours, 20 minutes. He was taken to the hospital afterward.*



## if, whether

In the strictest sense, *if* means *in the event that, granting that or on the condition that*. For instance:

*If I study, I'll probably get good grades.*

*I'll study if you promise me I'll get good grades.*

*Whether*, on the other hand, introduces a choice or an alternative. That choice, as Bremner explains, is often between doing something and not doing something, as in:

*I'm going whether they want me to or not.*

Sometimes *if* can be used to mean *whether*. Bremner gives this example:

*I want to know if you'll help me.*

When a sentence indicates a clear choice, though, use *whether*:

*The baker asked whether I wanted wheat or rye bread.*

When should we use *or not* with *whether*? There's no clear-cut guideline, except to use your ear. In the "I'm going" example above, the sentence would make no sense without it. In a sentence like this, though, leaving it out makes sense:

*He didn't know whether he would go to the concert.*

## in advance of, prior to

These two phrases aren't wrong, but *before* is more conversational and usually the best choice in journalistic writing. *In advance of* and *prior to* both have a stuffy, bureaucratic tone.



## jargon

As communicators, we should write with clarity and authority. Jargon and euphemisms prevent us from speaking with a conversational tone that invites readers and viewers. So interpret; don't lapse into the language of sources. That means avoiding phrases like these:

- *green roof technology*
- *younger demographic*
- *undergraduate experience, college experience, first-year experience*
- *PMCs*
- *solar shade (meaning trees)*
- *the print disabled*
- *LEED platinum*
- *personal weapon*
- *benefit district*
- *concept learning solution*
- *cloud functionality*
- *HPMP, QIOs, ERP, DMERCs and thousands of other obscure acronyms and abbreviations*
- *man-blocks*
- *big (centers and forwards in basketball)*
- *emphatic flush (a dunk in basketball)*

Also see **clichés; community; flabby writing; head, head up; nouns as verbs; use, utilize.**



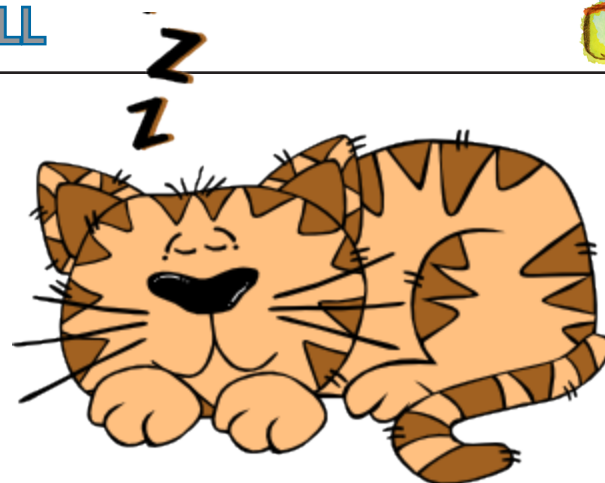
## jell, gel

Use *jell* as a verb meaning *come together, mesh* or *take shape*.

*Under his direction, the team jelled into a strong offensive force.*

*The two leaders never jelled, and the truce fell apart.*

Using *gel* in this way isn't necessarily wrong, but *jell* is a verb in all its forms. *Gel* is primarily a noun, as in *hair gel*.



## lie, lay, has (or have) lain

*Lie*, on the other hand, tends to create all sorts of trouble. It has fallen out of use in common speech, so it sounds unnatural to many people. It isn't, though, and as a journalist, you need to use it correctly.

People get confused because the past tense of *lie* is the same as the present tense of *lay*. (Hey, it's English, which Bremner called "that beautiful bastard language.") *Lie*, in all its forms, means a state of recline or state of being. It often takes an adverb or is followed by a prepositional phrase, but it never needs a direct object. It's an intransitive verb.

*The cat **lies** on the floor.*

*The cat **lay** on the floor all morning.*

*The cat **has lain** there since I came into the room.*

**Incorrect:** *The body laid in state ...*

**Correct:** *The body lay in state from Tuesday until Wednesday.*

**Incorrect:** *The body will lay in state until Wednesday.*

**Correct:** *The body will lie in state ...*

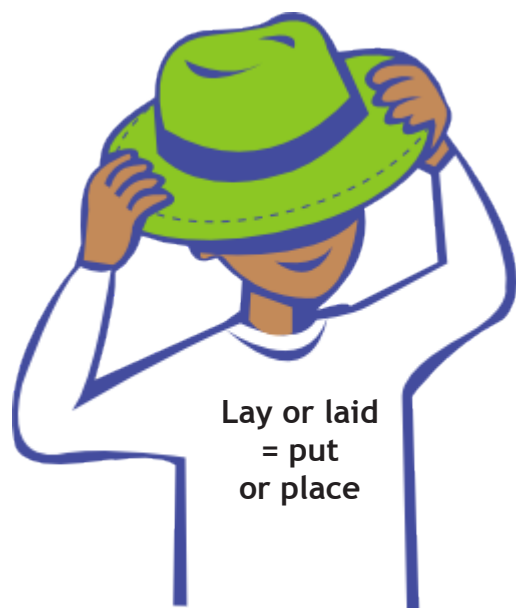
**Correct:** *The prosecutor tried to lay the blame on him.*

If substituting *put* doesn't help you decide which word you need, Malcolm Gibson suggests writing out the forms of the two verbs and juxtaposing them. It's a great idea.

## lay, lie

*Lay*, in all its forms, means *put* or *place*. As a transitive verb, it always needs a direct object. That makes sense, and few people have trouble with the forms of *lay*:

*lay, laid, have (or had) laid.*



*Jose is about **to lay (put)** the hat on his head.*

*He **laid (placed)** the hat on the table when he got to work.*

*He **has laid (put)** it on the same table every day this week.*

They lead most of the first half, but late in the game, Mizzou pulled within three as guard Daniel Horton made some clutch shots.

Actually, they *led* most of the first half.

## lead, led

This pair causes nearly as much confusion as *lay* and *lie*. *Lead* (as a present tense verb) can mean *to guide* or *to show the way*. As a noun, it can also mean an element that used to be in gasoline and still weighs down some people's butts. The problem arises when writers mean *led*, the past tense of *lead*, but instead write *lead*, which sounds the same as *led*. Think of it this way:

*No one with lead in his butt has ever led the way to victory.*

## less, fewer

Generally, if you refer to individuals or things that you count individually, use *fewer*. If not, use *less*.

**Incorrect:** *The Rams are inferior to the Vikings because they have less good linemen.*

**Correct:** *The Rams are inferior to the Vikings because they have fewer good linemen.*

**Correct:** *The Rams are inferior to the Vikings because they have less experience.*

### BUT:

*She lost the race by less than two feet.*

In the last sentence, we count the feet individually (as we do inches, meters, etc.) but consider them a collective amount in this sense. The same applies with amounts of rainfall and similar numbers. See AP.



## like, as

For the most part, use *like* when a noun, pronoun or noun phrase alone follows. Don't use *like* to introduce a clause, though. In that case, use *as*, *as if* or *as though*. *Like* is the right word if you could substitute *similar to* or *similarly to* and not change the meaning of the sentence. (See Kessler and McDonald.)

A caveat: Frequent misuse has pushed *like* as a conjunction deep into the vernacular. Much of the fiction I've read lately seems to follow this trend. I have a hard time blaming ignorance in those cases. Rather, I'm inclined to think that more writers are finding *as if* and *as though* archaic or stilted alternatives to *like*. I've felt that way in my own writing sometimes.

My advice is this: Make sure you understand the difference between *like* and *as*. That way you can evaluate the usage thoughtfully. At times you may want to use *like* as a conjunction rather than create a convoluted sentence. That should be rare, though.

**Correct:** *He swims like a fish.*

**Incorrect:** *Bush won the election just like the Republicans had predicted.*

**Correct:** *Bush won the election just as the Republicans had predicted.*

**Incorrect:** *She studied for the test like her life depended on it.*

**Correct:** *She studied for the test as if her life depended on it.*

Some journalists insist on using *such as* instead of *like* when providing examples. For instance, *He prefers board games such as Monopoly and Sorry.* To my ear, *like* sounds more conversational: *He prefers board games like Monopoly and Sorry.* That's what The New York Times prefers, as well.

## literally

In the strictest sense, it means *actually* or *word for word* and is often used to indicate awe in some feat. For instance:

*He spun after taking a hit and literally ran the length of the field – into the wrong end zone.*

Watch for comical misuses, though, as in:

*As she dieted, the weight literally fell off.*

If that ever happens, please call an ambulance.



## non sequiturs

Each thought or piece of information in a sentence needs to flow logically into the next. When they don't, you have a non sequitur. These often occur in obituaries, but they can slip in anywhere, as in:

*Born in Kansas City, Mo., Peabody studied electronics in college.*

His being born in Kansas City had nothing to do with studying electronics in college. In the following sentence, though, there is a connection between the place of birth and the college:

*Born in Kansas City, Mo., Peabody attended Rockhurst University.*

*The same with these sentences:*

**Illogical:** *Now 45, he recalled growing up in rural Nebraska.*

**Logical:** *Now 45, he has had three decades to reflect on his teenage years in rural Nebraska.*



## nouns as verbs

Resist them. Politicians, academics, overpaid executives and others seem to think that using words like *headquartered*, *authored*, *impacted* and *incented* as verbs makes them sound important. It doesn't.

The National Weather Service may write that *heavy rain may pond on roads*, a local Hallmark shop may ask which ornaments you plan to *keepsake*, and a company executive may say that *the stock market negatively impacted her newly headquartered company*, but we journalists don't. Our job is to communicate as clearly as possible. Verbed nouns don't help us do that.



## only

As much as I see *only* abused, I have no choice but to resort to poetry:

*A poor professor who pulled out his hair  
Said if only I could get them to care  
To put only right next  
To the word it affects  
Fewer sentences would need a repair.*

Here's the prose explanation: Most of the time, place *only* as close as possible to the word you want to modify, as in: *The fares are available only on the Internet*, NOT ... *only available on the Internet*. Listen to your ear, though. Some common phrases sound flat-out wrong if you put *only* in what we might consider the "proper" place. Consider:

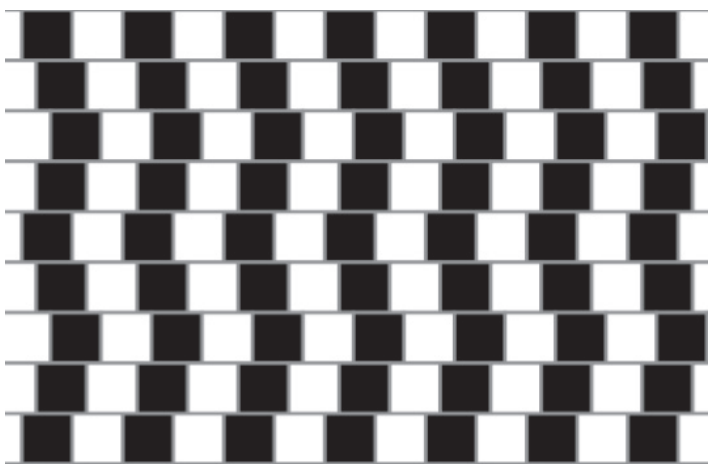
*It can only be considered foolish.  
It can only get worse.*

You wouldn't want to say, *It can be considered only foolish* or *It can get only worse*. You'd sound like a fuddy-duddy. One more thing: *Only* can convey an unwanted judgment, as in *She raised only \$10,000*. Be careful. Apply the same guidelines to *nearly*, *hardly*, *scarcely*, *even*, *almost*, *merely* and *just*.



## over, more than

Generally, use *over* to refer to spatial relationships: *The plane flew over the city.* Use *more than* with figures: *More than 1,000 fans stormed the stage.* Use your ear, though. Phrases like *over 18* have become part of the vernacular. Mindlessly changing that to *more than 18* makes us sound pedantic and out of touch. *Over* certainly has a place in many numerical phrases.



## parallelism

When we use descriptive phrases in a series, each phrase must contain the same type of grammatical element. If the first element is a noun, the rest of the elements must be nouns, as well. If the first element is an adjective, the rest must be adjectives. Parallel elements smooth

the flow of a sentence and aid in clarity. If you struggle to keep the elements in a sentence parallel, try using two sentences instead. Here are some examples:

**Sloppy:** *Since Arlene started practicing Sun-Do, she has slept better, deeper, required fewer hours of sleep and feels more rested.*

**Better:** *Since Arlene started practicing Sun-Do, she has slept better and has felt more rested. She also requires fewer hours of sleep.*

**Sloppy:** *At each stop I'm swept by agents, sniffed by dogs and grab myself a seat in the press pen.*

**Better:** *At each stop I'm swept by agents and sniffed by dogs before I grab myself a seat in the press pen.*

**Sloppy:** *Conner is a campus leader, a Jayhawk fan and taller than the average American man.*

**Better:** *Conner is a campus leader and a Jayhawk fan. He is also taller than the average American man.*

## passive voice, active voice

When the object of an action becomes the subject of a sentence, you get passive voice. Passive voice is not inherently wrong, but it often creates weak sentences.

So work toward active voice (noun-verb construction) and strong verbs.

**Active:** *The students took the exam.*

**Passive:** *The exam was taken by the students.*

Sometimes, passive voice is better, though, especially when you want to emphasize something that was done, not the doer, or when you don't know who did something:

*My wallet was stolen.*

*As a writer, you will be edited.*

I don't know who stole my wallet, and I don't know who will edit your writing in the future.

Passive voice helps get those ideas across. Watch, especially, for awkward passive voice, which is often a result of a writer trying to avoid use of *I*:

*The photos at the top of the site were taken by me on a spring day during my freshman year at KU.*

History department sites in its sty cutting-edge user-friendly function

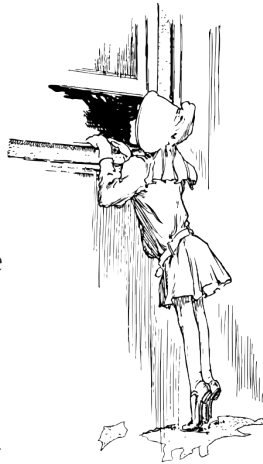
Take a peak now:

[www.notevenpast.org](http://www.notevenpast.org)

## peak, peek, pique

An e-mail message that arrived a while back, asking me to *take a peak* at a website.

Now, if I were to *take a peak*, I'd probably take the one at Mount Hood in Oregon or perhaps Pike's in Colorado or Mont Blanc in the Alps. If I wanted to look at a website, I'd *take a peek*, of course. And if the site *piqued* my interest, I might bookmark it.



We all stumble occasionally over homophones, those pesky words that sound alike but that have different spellings and meanings. When writers and editors get in a hurry, they let people *take the reigns*, let buildings *compliment* one another or talk about *state aide* being cut.

See those entries, along with my list of frequently misused **homophones**.

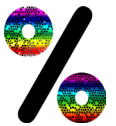
## peddle, pedal

You *pedal* a bicycle. You *peddle* (sell) wares.



## percentage, percentage point

A *percentage* is a representation of a fraction; a *percentage point* is the difference between two percentages. For instance if 6 of every 100 people are unemployed, the unemployment rate is 6 percent (6/100). If the rate rises to 9 percent, that is an increase of 3 percentage points, *not* 3 percent. A 3 percent increase would result in a rate of 6.18 percent ( $.03 \times 6 = .18$ ). If the rate moves from 6 percent to 9 percent, that's an increase of 50 percent (3/6).



It can be confusing, even when you are sure you understand. So always look it up and do the math.



*The esteemed Mr. Lectern.*

## podium, lectern

**A** *podium* is a platform or a stage. A *lectern* is a vertical stand for holding notes and microphones. (That's a lectern above.) So if you say a speaker *placed her notes on the podium* or *pounded the podium as she spoke*, you've brought her to her knees, pleading for proper usage.

## precaution, caution

The difference between these two nouns is subtle but important. Consider the definitions American Heritage offers:

**Caution:** *careful forethought to avoid danger or harm.*

**Precaution:** *an action taken to protect against possible danger or failure.*

The writer of this headline needed to use more caution with word choice:

*KU Public Safety Office urges students to use precaution while drinking*

Listen to how the headline sounds when we substitute the definitions:

*... urges students to use careful forethought vs. ... urges students to use an action taken to protect.*

You can hear the difference. The headline needed *caution*, not *precaution*. You *take precautions*; you *use caution*.

## principal, principle

**A** guiding rule or basic truth is a *principle*. The first, dominant or leading thing is *principal*. *Principle* is a noun; *principal* may be a noun or an adjective. For example:

*She is the school principal.*  
*He is the principal violinist.*

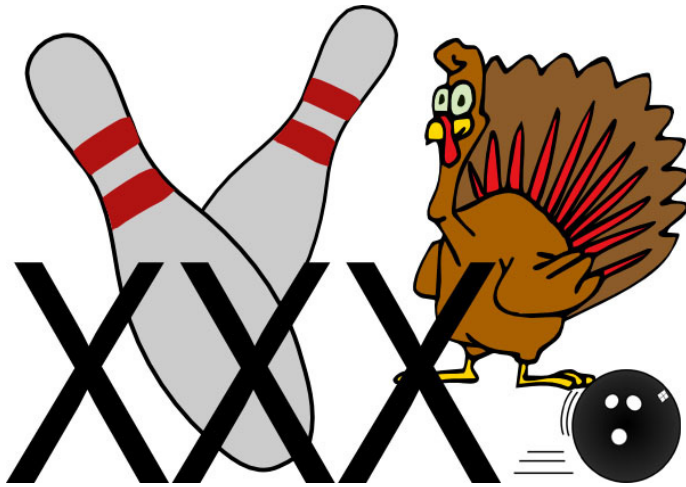
## prior to

**B**efore is usually the better word. It's less pretentious and more conversational. Consider:

*She stopped by the Underground for a snack prior to class.*

*She stopped by the Underground for a snack before class.*

The sentence with *prior to* isn't wrong; it just sounds as if it needs the hot air let out of it. You don't need that in your writing.



The Thanksgiving fowl with the diminished brain capacity refuses to remove itself from the path of the top-heavy, pear-shaped wooden game objects.

**Translated:** The stupid turkey won't step out of the way of the flying pins.

## pronouns, fear of (and other afflictions that lead to strained synonyms)

Remner uses the term *synonymomania*, attributing it to Theodore Bernstein, for that ghastly disease that makes writers afraid to repeat a word or, heaven forbid, use a pronoun.

You know those people: the TV weatherman who gabs on about *the white stuff* falling outside, or the sportswriter who calls a pitcher a *hurler*, or a quarterback, successively, *the redshirt freshman from Cincinnati*, *the speedy left-handed scrambler*, *the preseason consensus All-American*, *the former high school running back* and *the team's unwavering inspirational leader*. (See **Indirection** and **Say, said**.)

The result is writing that distracts from the storytelling. A feature story once referred to bowling balls as *shiny orbs*. (Sad but true.) Upon seeing the reference, I lapsed into an altered state of reality in which pronouns hid beneath the covers and allowed *synonymomania* to take over my brain. It looked something like this:

He tosses the shiny orb onto the polished forest-product slats and watches expectantly as the 12-pound sphere hurtles toward the 10 pear-shaped stumps. He tugs on the lobe of his natural hearing apparatus, trying to edge the revolving lump of hard plastic toward the center of the tan planks. The shadowy moon-shaped hunk falters, though, dropping into the shallow, dark trough alongside the slick wooden flooring.

Thunk! Gutter orb!

Take my advice: Writing that way will make you look like a turkey.



## raise, rise

Misuse of these words is rising, a development so baffling that I've decided to invoke the supernatural to explain them. Let's start with the verbs.

*Rise* is intransitive, so it needs nothing but a noun to go with it. *Raise*, on the other hand, is transitive, so it needs a direct object.

You can say *Dracula rises*, and send a tingle through your readers. If you try to say *Dracula raises*, though, you'll leave them stupefied. The sentence is incomplete without a direct object. Here's how a complete sentence might go:

*Dracula rises from his crypt and raises the Mummy from the dead.*

Chances are, you won't be writing about Dracula or the Mummy (although I've known some politicians who fit that description), but you can think about them when you see *raise* and *rise*.

Curiously, I also see *raise* and *rise* misused as nouns, often when taxes are involved. Legislators might *raise taxes*, or you might say that taxes will *rise* on July 1. You wouldn't refer to a *tax raise*,

though. That's a stilted phrase that belongs in the Mummy's tomb. A *raise* generally indicates a reward for good work; it just doesn't fit with *tax*.

Similarly, avoid the stilted phrase *tax rise*. You might say a *rise in taxes* or a *tax increase*. But please don't say *hike*, which has been abused so often that it has earned its own entry. I just wish it would slink away into a tomb somewhere before it sucks the life out of a perfectly good sentence yet again.

## refute, rebut

**R***efute* indicates success or truth and often carries an editorial judgment. *Rebut* is more neutral but can sound stuffy, depending on the context. It means *respond*, which is often a better word to use.

**UNLIKELY:** *Berry refuted the arguments of the abortion-rights parishioners.*

**BETTER:** *Berry rebutted the arguments of the abortion-rights parishioners.*

**BETTER:** *Berry responded to the arguments of the parishioners.*

## rein, reign

Remembering the equine connection will help keep you out of trouble with *rein*. Think about idioms like *handed him the reins*, *rein in*, *give her free rein*, *draw in the reins* and *keep a tight rein on*. All originally referred to the handling of horses before they worked their way into common usage over the centuries.

Here's one way to think about it: Keep the "g" in *reign* when referring to *kings* and the like.

Of course, we haven't even talked about *rain*, which can easily muddy the picture even more: The *rain* in Spain may stay mainly on the plain,

but the king of Spain *reigns* over the state even as the elected government holds the *reins* of power.

If such **homophones** give you a headache, you are in good company. Just remember to watch for them and *always* look them up.



*During her parents' reign, the princess kept her horse, Pegasus, on a tight rein.*

... impatient and entitled but the reality is that they need patience. In my day, I learned patience and got it through simple **rights of passage** like researching a book using the card catalog at the library. Ugh. Imagine the

## right, rite

**S**ome writers are so used to hearing about *rights* that they forget about *rites*.

Consider: The Declaration of Independence enshrined the idea of inalienable rights. The U.S. Constitution has a Bill of Rights that gives citizens such rights as freedom of speech, freedom of religion and the right to a jury trial. Those are a *birthright* (a word that emerged in the 1500s) for anyone born in the United States. The Fourteenth Amendment clarified that birthright, although conservatives are challenging it in the debate over illegal immigration.

In all these cases, *right* means a *guarantee* or a *claim*. *Right* also means *correct* or *proper* or *suitable*, as in the *right answer* or the *right person for the job*. It has other meanings, of course – the opposite of *left*; to *correct* a wrong; *immediately* (as in *right now*) – and that's the point: *Right* overshadows *rite*.



We can't forget *rite*, though.

*Rite* means a *ceremony* or *practice*. You'll often hear it in a religious context: *last rites*, *rites of baptism*.

And don't forget *rites of passage*, a relatively new term (1950s) and the one the writer of the article above was after. Next time you see it, you'll be sure to take your time and do it right.



Clean, priced and organized. Red metal glider with cushions (for summer evening cloud watching), dark green rot-iron patio table and 4 chairs. Small wooden quilting frame, large lined blond wicker storage baskets, papasan chair w/ dark brown pillow, small color



*A wrought iron gate.*

*Wrought* has another meaning besides the one associated with embellished metal. It can also be used as a verb meaning *created*, as in the way I used it in the first sentence of this post.

## rot, wrought

What have garage sales wrought?

Actually, I shouldn't blame garage sales. Garage sale ads simply offer a window into people's minds. Apparently those minds hold visions of rotting iron furniture sitting around on patios, as the ad above suggests.

The correct term is *wrought iron*, meaning iron that has been shaped or embellished, usually by being beaten with a hammer. True wrought iron is extremely hard to find today, as U.S. plants stopped making it in the 1960s, according to the National Ornamental and Miscellaneous Metals Association. The term *wrought iron* now generally refers to a particular look.

Even the idea of "rot iron" has problems. Technically, iron oxidizes, or rusts. More commonly, we think of wood rotting. Both are forms of deterioration, though, so it isn't wrong to refer to *rotting iron* if that iron is really rotting. But rotting iron is not *wrought iron*.

Perhaps the most famous use of the word in that way is "What hath God wrought?" That was the first message that Samuel Morse transmitted over the telegraph in 1844.

No need for divine questioning of garage sale ads. Rather, it looks as if some people have been sitting too long in the sun, enjoying their *wrought iron* furniture and letting their minds wither with *dry rot*.



## sat, set

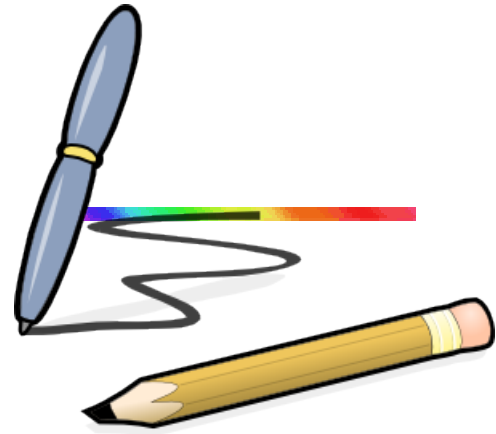
This pair of words has much the same trouble as *lay* and *lie*. *Sit* (the present tense of *sat*) means *to rest*. It is intransitive, so it doesn't require a direct object. *Set* means *to put*. It is transitive, so it requires a direct object. Once you *set* something on a table, it *sits* there.

**Incorrect:** *He set down at the table and had lunch.*

**Correct:** *He set his lunch on the table before he sat down.*

**say, said** See **attribution**.

Yet last season Quigley slipped a **slight of hand** when, before Kansas' Senior Night against Nebraska, he told members of the media that he wasn't sure if he'd pursue a sixth year of eligibility.



## sleight of hand

This term is rare enough that writers forget the correct spelling, as you can see above. It's *sleight of hand*, meaning able to perform deft maneuvers with the hands or perform trickery.

Here's my advice: **To remember the difference**, think of *stationary* meaning *staying*. With *stationery*, think *pens*.

## stationary, stationery

*Stationery* is a type of writing paper. More broadly, it means office supplies, as when a business calls itself a *stationery store*.

Several years ago when I lived in Philadelphia, a business put up an awning declaring itself *The Stationary Store*. That store definitely wasn't going anywhere –



it was *stationary*, or not moving – but what it wanted people to know was that it sold office supplies, that it was *The Stationery Store*. I can only hope the store got a big discount on the awning.

Alas, you will find announcements for *stationary stores* around the Internet. You can even buy buttons if you are so inclined. I'd suggest declining, unless want to attract snickers.

BP tries new tactics to **staunch** oil leak



## stanch, staunch

*Staunch* can mean several things, none of which apply in this headline: *steadfast, strong, faithful, substantial*. It can also mean *watertight*.

All of those meanings are adjectives.

The word the headline writer wanted was *stanch*, a verb meaning *to stop the flow of*.

As the headline shows, the distinction between the two words has been fading, no doubt because of misuse. American Heritage lists *staunch* and *stanch* as alternative spellings of each other. The AP Stylebook and the New York Times stylebook,

among others, maintain the distinction.

Interestingly, *stanch* is the older word, but *staunch* is by far the more common word today. It is also misused far more often than its sibling.

As with so many homophones, there's no easy way to remember the difference between the two words. (At least that I know of.) My advice: Be aware. When you use one or the other, look it up.

### that (after attribution)

Using *that* after attribution is often a judgment call, though much of the time we don't need it. In the following example, you could use it (or not) without changing the meaning of the sentence:

*He said (that) business at Riverfront had been better than expected.*

However, when a sentence has a time element, we must use *that* or risk the type of confusion that this sentence creates:

*The coach said Tuesday she would post her final roster.*

Does that mean that she made an announcement on Tuesday or that she would post the roster on Tuesday? Inserting a *that* after Tuesday eliminates the confusion. Of course, the logical question to ask then is when will she post the roster.

*The coach said Tuesday that she would post her final roster next week.*

We must also use *that* when attribution applies to two independent clauses, as it does in this sentence:

*The coach said she would post her final roster next week and that she would cut six players.*

We wouldn't need a *that* after *said* if the sentence stopped after *roster*. Because the conjunction links the second clause back to the attribution,

we must use *that* after *said* to keep the sentence parallel:

*The coach said that she would post her final roster and that she would cut six players."*

### that, which, who

*That* restricts the reader's thought and directs it toward information that is essential to the meaning of a sentence. *Which* provides supplemental information. Think of it as a "by the way." For instance:

*The lawnmower that is in the garage needs sharpening.*

In this case, we're saying we have more than one lawnmower and the one in the garage needs attention.

**BUT:** *The lawnmower, which is in the garage, needs sharpening.*

This says we have only one mower, it is in the garage and it needs sharpening.

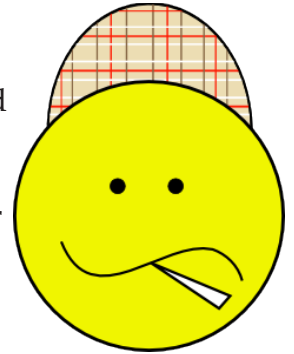
*Who* can be either essential or nonessential, depending on the meaning of the sentence. For instance:

*He talked with the visiting students who were sick with the flu.*

Not all the visiting students were sick with the flu. He talked with those who were.

**BUT:** *He talked with the visiting students, who were sick with the flu. (All the students had the flu.)*

**A note on punctuation:** *That* never takes a comma; *which* almost always does. See AP's entries on essential and nonessential phrases and clauses.



## titles

Watch for commas inserted incorrectly between titles and the proper names they modify. A title alone before a name does not need a comma to set it off. Descriptive phrases starting with *a*, *the*, *an* and other articles used before a name generally do, as does a title after a name.

**Incorrect:** *Committee chairwoman, Barbara Smith, opened the meeting.*

**Correct:** *Committee chairwoman Barbara Smith opened the meeting.*

**Correct:** *The committee chairwoman, Barbara Smith, opened the meeting.*

**Correct:** *Barbara Smith, the committee chairwoman, opened the meeting.*

In print and on the Web, we generally prefer to use titles after the name unless the title is short, as with *President Abraham Lincoln*, *Gov. Mark Parkinson*, *Chancellor Bernadette Gray-Little*. In broadcast, we almost always use the title before the name, even if it's fairly long, as in *Dillions regional vice president Joyce Laskowski*. Don't go overboard, though. If a person has two titles, pick the most appropriate. Don't create a title that becomes the equivalent of a crowded cafeteria line:

*Leader of the investigative committee and head of a state crime force task force Captain Willard Wilmott.*

In that case, you've overloaded the sentence before you've even made it to the subject.

## toward

Not *towards*, except in quotes. I explained why in the **afterward** entry, which I'm sure you read. If not, return to the A's and do not collect \$200.

## under way, underway

Use *under way* (two words) in expressions like *U*got *under way* or *is under way*. Use *underway* (one word, adjective before a noun) only in nautical expressions like an *underway flotilla*.

Most American dictionaries and stylebooks follow these guidelines, although changes are under way. American Heritage has started to accept *underway* in some uses, and the Oxford English Dictionary makes little distinction between the two. So look for *underway* to become standard for all meanings sometime in the future. For now, make the distinction, or just use something like *started* or *began*.

## unique

It means *one of a kind*. Something can't be *very unique* or *quite unique* or *rather unique*. Use it cautiously, though. Few things are truly unique.

for the National Guard for three years, which has **upped** her repertoire as a player and allowed her to play with a varied group of musi-

## up

**U**nless you want to sound like a hack (as in the example above), don't use *up* as a verb. The manager will *raise*, not *up*, the price. (An exception: *up the ante*.) Also, don't tack *up* onto verbs like *head*, unless you aspire to become a hack *and* a pointy-haired boss. See **head up**.

## More students utilizing free scanners

Scanners have increased in popularity as a free, eco-friendly alternative to photocopying

## use, utilize

*Utilize* rarely adds anything but bluster to a sentence. And in a headline, that bluster multiplies with the point size.

Yes, *utilize* has its use (not its *utilization*), as American Heritage points out, though I don't remember ever needing to call upon it.

You will find it peppered liberally in annual reports ("The Household Survey was utilized in crafting mitigation actions for communities"), press releases ("We look forward to utilizing our well intervention assets") and the proclamations of organizations that CAPITALIZE ALL THE LETTERS OF THEIR NAMES AND DANGLE TRADEMARKS BESIDE THEM LIKE THIS® ("The Miss Universe Organization, producers of the MISS UNIVERSE®, MISS USA® and MISS TEEN USA® Pageants, is a joint venture between Donald J. Trump and NBC Universal. Utilizing its nationwide grass roots infrastructure, the Miss Universe Organization is committed to increasing awareness of breast and ovarian cancers.")

(After extensive research, I've concluded that the "R" in the circle means *Ridiculous*, though some sources suggest it means either *Relentless* or *Rustbucket*.)

So that's my argument for using *use*. So if you find yourself writing *utilize*, stop and think. Won't *use* work just as well?

## wave, waive

*Wave*, as in a movement, a flutter or a swell, is the more common word, so naturally *waive* (to give up) is misused more often. Watch for *waive* in court stories, as when a suspect *waives* various rights in the judicial process. For instance, a suspect might *waive* his right to a preliminary hearing or to a jury trial.

## Web, website

Note that, according to the AP Stylebook, *Web* is uppercase and *website* is lowercase and one word. AP's switch to *website* in 2010 caused both consternation and celebration. Many of us saw the move as logical and inevitable, the natural evolution of a culture that, over time, tends to draw tightly connected phrases together into single words.

The consternation came from those who disliked the inconsistency in capitalization (a valid point), who resisted change and seemed to want to hold sway over the obscure (inevitable, alas), and those who applauded the change but wondered why, if AP was going to make changes to Web style, the hyphen from *e-mail* wasn't removed. To that, I say, one revolution at a time.



**whether** See *If, whether*.

## who, whom

Use *who* as a subject, *whom* as a direct object. Much of the time, you can find the right form by considering whether you could substitute *he* or *him* in a sentence.

*The owner called in a mediator, whom he asked to resolve the stadium dispute.*

He asked *him* to resolve the dispute.

*The owner, who couldn't resolve the dispute himself, called in a mediator.*

He couldn't resolve the dispute.

But beware of sentences in which an entire clause is a direct object, as in this one:

*He has respect for whoever is in charge.*

In that sentence, the object of the preposition is a clause (*whoever is in charge*), not just a pronoun. The *he* and *him* substitution still works, but in a different way. A pronoun takes its case (subject vs. object) from the clause it works with. You wouldn't say *him is in charge*. So you'd write, *He has respect for whoever is in charge*.

## who's, whose

*Who's* means *who is*. *Whose* is a possessive.

*I don't know whose coat it is.*

*Find out who's there.*



## who, that

As Grammar Girl points out, using *that* to refer to people is not wrong. The AP Stylebook has a different take, though.

AP says to use *that* for inanimate objects and animals without names (*the chair that sat next to the door; the dog that pooped in my yard*), and *who* and *whom* for people and for animals we name.



*That* is a perfectly fine pronoun. Buildings are *thats*, and bats are *thats* and even *thats* are *that*. But, please, for the sake of humanity, let's make people *who* or *whom*.

I offer a poem to help you think about the proper use of *who* and *that*, à la Theodor Geisel. It's on the next page



**Who That?**

Now imagine a world, one that comes all too soon

When all the *Whos* have been *Thatted*, and the *Thats* turned to *Whom*.

Poor editors! How dreadful! In Thatville they'll find

That their usage, in English, has fallen behind.

The That will be singing, "That are you? That, That."

For The Who will be hiding like a Thing in a hat.

And Abbott and Costello, can you imagine them say

"That's on first? I don't know. Third base? Now let's play?"

People are *whos* and sometimes they're *whoms*.

A *who* is a sweeper. A *that* is a broom.

A *that* is a hallway, a bug, a cocoon.

A *who* is whoever walks into a room.

So please stop the *Thatting*, return to the *Whos*

Stop rendering inanimate those poor people who

Like Horton, live to hear that mellifluous ring

Of "Who me?" Exactly. Now do the right thing.

# Buzzwords and Euphemisms

Many words and phrases may seem all right on the surface, especially when you see them frequently. Underneath, though, they can be ambiguous or downright misleading. Here are some to watch for. This is by no means an exhaustive list. Rather, these are a few I've been seeing frequently. You will find others throughout this guide.

## affordable housing

A euphemism for low-cost housing. After all, affordability depends on income levels. A \$750,000 house may be easily affordable for someone with a big salary but would be far out of reach for someone making minimum wage.



## controversy

A fine word when it is used correctly (it means a dispute) and when we explain what is involved in the controversy. All too often, the word is thrown in willy-nilly, as in *the controversy over Bill Self's occupational future*. That sort of nonsensical use makes us sound sensational.



## experience

*Experience* has permeated American society. Not the "been there, done that" type of experience that employers look for, but the *experience* formerly known as a cup of coffee, a shopping trip, an education, a newspaper or a glob of toothpaste. Living life is passé. We must *experience* it. We no longer breathe. We *experience the environment*. We don't fly. We *experience air travel*. We don't watch television. We *experience reality programming*. So beware. What's the real word you are after?



## faith-based

A euphemism for *religious*, usually intended to downplay the religious component involved.



## green, going green

(See next page)



## sustainability

A buzzword for projects, products or actions that reduce energy use, use fewer natural resources, encourage recycling, reduce pollution or reduce consumption in some way. If you think about it, though, *sustainability* simply means that something can continue, and any charlatan can use it to mislead. Don't be afraid to use the term, but always define it. And, as with *green*, ask how we know something is truly sustainable.



## The Benefits of Going Green in the Bathroom

Learn how to use eco-friendly bathroom design to save energy and water, lower your ut beautiful doing it.



More people are getting hands-on with green building.

By Rob Fanjoy

Bathrooms are among the easier room green. Changing out fixtures manufact water conservation mandates of 1994 ease your bathroom's impact on the e your wallet). As consumer demand for has grown, manufacturers today are o recycled and sustainable options.

In a recent survey of remodelers condi National Association of Home Builders

### green

Often used to mean ecologically friendly. In many cases, that's fine, as in referring to wind and solar power as *green energy*, or in conservation efforts to make the campus *greener*. Like *sustainability*, though, it is easily co-opted by those looking to make a buck or to make questionable projects politically palatable. If we label something *green*, make sure it truly is.

### going green

I know of only two ways to go green in the bathroom. And if I find myself going green in either of those ways, I'll probably call a doctor. Then again, maybe I'm not creative enough in the bathroom.

#### GREEN BATHROOMS

From investment remodels to inexpensive changes there are many ways to go green in the bathroom.

For instance, with a quick Google search, I found "6 Ways to Go Green in Your Bathroom" (I wouldn't want to try that in someone else's bathroom either), the "Top Ten Ways to Go Green in the Bathroom in 2009" (you, too, can go yearly!) and "11 Ways to Go Green in Your Kitchen and Bathroom" (personally, I prefer the bathroom for such matters, but apparently people are branching out).

I discovered a site promising that said I could "Go Green in the Bathroom Without Spending

Money." Good. I never liked pay toilets anyway. There were also several sites with headlines like this: "How to Go 'Green' in the Bathroom." As if somehow, the quotation marks (wink, wink) made going green in the bathroom less objectionable.

The one above is perhaps my favorite. I'm not sure whether the leaf is a result of going green or whether it's an offering to someone who has gone green. Or, it could be covering something up after ... Wait! Stop right there. I don't want to know. I do not want to know.

Amid all the clichés, I actually did find a site that said going green might not be a reason to panic. It could just be a sign of ingesting lots of green food. (Burp!) After all, babies go green all the time.

My advice is to use balance in choosing foods and in choosing words.

In the word category, *going green* has moved into the realm of clichés. Given what I've found, that realm is probably in the bathroom, and I'm sure that someone has written about 12 ways to extract it. I say shut the door and leave it alone, though.

And no, I'm still not going to think about what might be under that leaf.