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The English Language

Radical, Biblical, Apostolic, Christianity



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The English Language

Introduction

Language spoken and written, is mankind's most valuable asset. How language first arose has long been a matter of debate, but it is certain that it was originally much simpler than at present, and that it developed from a group of bodily movements and from sounds with which certain meanings were arbitrarily associated. As men's experience became more varied and complex, such gestures and sounds were elaborated and multiplied until there arose what might be called spoken language. Written language followed, when an ingenious man thought of making marks to represent spoken words. By writing a symbol for each sound, an alphabet was devised, and written speech was simplified. Thus, communications could be sent long distances, and thoughts could be recorded and preserved for the use of later times. Each generation was thereby enabled to instruct the next generation, and rapid progress in knowledge, and in skill, became possible.

Our English Tongue. To no people has there fallen a richer inheritance of language or a more splendid opportunity to further enrich and perfect that heritage than belongs to the English-speaking nations. The English language has grown to its present excellence through the development of one of the world's great literatures. This fact means that the work of scholars, poets, story-tellers, orators, and scientists has been contributing, through a thousand years, to enlarge, strengthen, and refine the English vocabulary and grammar. Moreover, the many nations that speak this tongue have been modern pioneers in free, democratic government, with all that this implies in popular education, in free discussion of political questions, and in wide circulation of books, magazines, and newspapers, as well as the Holy Bible.

The English and the Americans have been adventurous, trading, and colonizing people, sailing all the seas, exploring every continent, trading with, civilizing, and governing, peoples of every race. Whenever, for unaccustomed things, strange ways,

or novel ideas, new words have been needed, these men of English speech have unhesitatingly adopted foreign words that met the need, and have assimilated them to the forms of the English language. Thus, English has gained an unparalleled variety of synonyms and turns of speech, and it is better fitted than any other to be the language of a nation derived, as are the Americans, from people of many races.

In the European theatre of world War II, men from America, England, Canada, Australia, and South Africa, met upon the ground of a common language. Allowing for minor differences of dialect, colloquialisms, and slang, they understood and misunderstood one another in the English tongue, and they read the same newspapers and books, whether published in London, New York, Melbourne, Montreal, or Cape Town. In the post-war period, through its use in international trade, and in the Proceedings of the United Nations, English has become universally recognized as a world language.

The Study of English. Language grows by adding new words, and by giving new meanings to old words, and by developing the figurative or poetic senses of many words. All these processes depend upon increase of knowledge, upon invention and discovery, and upon the cultivation of art and poetry.

Words are, after all, only means to right understanding and true feeling; but many accurate, fine words are necessary to much good thinking. There is always a best word to express thought accurately and clearly. The students who would better their command of language will first direct their attention

to those things which can be felt and seen, so that they may have something definite and concrete about which to talk and write. The student will next consult the dictionary for the meanings and the history of words; they will examine closely synonyms and antonyms for their accurate distinctions in meaning; nor will the student fail to attend to the poetic suggestiveness of those words which give especial beauty both to the spoken and to the written phrase. The student will, in a word, be always on their guard to avoid

and to correct the errors and improprieties of usage which are likely to creep into their conversation.

Good Usage of English Words

A person's language reflects their social background, their geographic origin, and, especially, the extent of their education. By its form, it makes a good impression or an unfavorable one. That is why the question of correctness arises even before one's language is tested for the important qualities of clearness and accuracy. Mispronounced words, colloquialisms, malapropisms, incorrect idioms, and grammatical errors are noted at once and can place a speaker or writer at a serious disadvantage. How they say a thing will attract more attention than what they say. On the other hand, if one's language is easy, confident, and fluent because correct, their listeners or readers will accept the form without question, and will think only about the subject matter.

Whether it is gained through formal instruction or through self-education, the ability to use language well comes only by observation, study, and practice. Because English is a living language and is therefore subject to change, the question of good usage is one that calls for constant attention. Whether certain words or forms of expression are acceptable or not is determined, not by an edict of some individual or group or authority, but by the consensus of the best writers and speakers who are using the language at any particular time.

The average person's first problem is to rid their speech of certain forms of expression that attract undue or unfavorable attention. Many expressions condemned by standard usage have resulted from someone's lazy habit of taking over ready-made phrases without regard to their repute or their real meaning. An effort to vary the phrasing is likely to uncover a fresh, interesting expression that will say the thing more effectively as well as more correctly.

Slang is an inclusive term for words and phrases that come into the language on trial, sometimes with very questionable associations, sometimes on a more respectable basis. At the outset it should be noted that not all new words should be classed as “slang.” As the language grows, new meanings call for special words, which may be either coined or imported. The word “camouflage,” for example, is a French importation that was accepted readily as a part of everyday English speech.

Certain words which began as slang abbreviations for longer expressions were challenged at first, but later, gained a place for themselves. Examples are “cab,” short for “cabriolet,” “mob,” for *mobile vulgus*, and “hoax,” for “hocus pocus,” itself a slang contradiction for a Latin phrase used by imposters. Current abbreviations such as “gym,” for “gymnasium,” “exam,” for “examination,” and “mike,” for “microphone,” will readily suggest themselves. Whether any of these newer contractions will be accepted as standard usage is still open to question.

Slang from various questionable sources may be made almost respectable by the fashion of the moment. From the all-too-numerous examples, a few typical cases may be cited. Who hasn’t heard, and perhaps used, such expressions as “so what?,” “screwball,” “sourpuss,” “behind the eight ball,” “cock-eyed,” and “ritzy? It may be argued that many such phrases are expressive. So is profanity, for that matter, but that doesn’t qualify it as an example of good usage. But in addition to being undignified, slang is short-lived. Expressions like “twenty-three,” and “skiddoo,” are as outmoded today as the old bathing suits of the roaring twenties. So, a language that was artificial and synthetic to begin with has the added disadvantage of rapid obsolescence. If the habit of depending upon slang has not dulled their perception, the average person will turn with satisfaction to the dignity, accuracy, and perennial timeliness of standard English.

Correct Use Of Some Common Words and Phrases

A. General usage in America approves the use of the article *a* before consonants,

before initial *h* when sounded, before long *u*, and before, the words *one* and *once*; a *house, a hospital, a historical society, a university; such a one.*

Colloquially, when two objects are thought of as belonging together or as used together, a need not be repeated: *a coat and hat; a cup and saucer; a sword and belt.* But, “*She brought a coat and a hat,*” meaning two purchases, is correct.

The expression “*a black and white dress*” means but one, while “*a black and a white dress*” means two dresses--one black and one white. This second expression is awkward, and the form “*a black dress and a white one*” or “*a black dress and a white*” may be substituted. “*They elected a secretary and a treasurer*” implies two persons; but “*a secretary and treasurer*” implies one person.

Absolutely. This word, so frequently used instead of *indeed, assuredly, of course,* or *certainly,* should be discarded in favor of the accurate and appropriate word: “*Certainly (not absolutely), I shall go.*” However, “It is *absolutely* certain that he will come” is correct when one intends to express positive assurance.

Accept, Except. *Accept* means “take when offered;” *except* means “leave out,” “exclude;” “I *accept* the gift.” “We will *except* him from our requirements.” Do not say “*accept of.*”

Acquire. This word should be distinguished from *obtain* and *procure.* We *acquire* that which we retain more or less permanently, but we will *obtain* or *procure* anything which we enjoy temporarily. Thus, we *acquire* wealth, *obtain* a loan, *procure* supplies.

Across. “To get something *across,*” “to put a thing *across,*” “to come *across,*” are slang phrases. The first means usually “to make something understood,” as an actor is said “to get it *across* (or *over*) to the audience.” The second phrase implies *succeeding;* the third, *acceding,* as to request or demand.

Adage. As this word describes a proverb, or old saying, one should never speak of an *old adage*.

Addict. This word, formed from the adjective *addicted*, has come into wide newspaper use. It means “one who has the habit of using” something generally harmful; as “a drug *addict*.” It is widely used in medical works but has not yet come into general use. The term is a useful addition to our vocabulary. *Addicted* usually implies evil.

Addition. Number of verb. We say correctly, “Two and three *are* five,” not “Two and three *is* five.”

Administer. Do not say, “The man died from blows *administered* by the policeman.” Oaths, medicine, affairs of state, are *administered*. Blows are *dealt*.

Admittance, Admission. In some uses these words are likely to be confused. *Admittance* refers to entrance to a place. “No *admittance*” means “entrance forbidden:” “No *admittance* before 8 o’clock.” *Admission* refers entrance into a society or an audience, or into certain privileges: “*Admission* to the club depended upon scholarship.” *Admission* may mean also the price or fee of entertainment: “*Admission* One Dollar.”

Adore. This word means “worship,” “venerate,” or “hold in high respect or admiration.” It is not appropriate to express a liking for chocolates.

Advert, Allude, Refer. The meanings of these words may be confused. We *advert* to that to which we turn the attention; we *allude* to a matter that we touch upon incidentally; we *refer* to a subject that we wish to bring back to notice.

Advise. In the jargon of business correspondence, “advise” is frequently misused to express some shading of “inform.” Note the differences in the following example: “Our

representative has informed (not “advised”) us of your application for additional credit. He *advises* us to grant the extension.”

Advocate. Unlike propose, recommended, or urge, *advocate*, when used as a verb, is followed by a noun instead of a that-clause. We *recommend* that a measure be adopted; we *advocate* its adoption.

Aesthetic. This adjective preferably refers to abstract ideas, not to persons or objects. Do not speak of “an *aesthetic* person” or “an *aesthetic* decoration,” but of “*aesthetic* standards” or “*aesthetic* considerations.”

Affectation. Whether intentional or not, the use of “stylish” language arouses resentment in many people, who regard it as an assumption of superiority. The so-called “uppity” words may be clear and logically appropriate, but, because they are more bookish than conversational, they may produce an unfavorable reaction. Below are some typical pairs of what H.W. Fowler calls “working words” and “stylish words.” Everyone can make up a similar list from their own experience.

WORKING WORDS

buy

class

drink

think

wish

STYLISH WORDS

purchase

category

beverage

deem

desire

Agendum, Agenda. The first (singular) indicates an item, as of business, to be considered; the second (plural), the list of all items for consideration or a program of business to be done.

Aggravate. Often inaccurately used when the speaker means *provoke*, *irritable*, or *anger*. The word means “increase” or “intensify.” The following are correct uses: “His

misery was *aggravated*.” “He is *irritated* by continually dealing with small matters.” “She is easily *provoked* to jealousy.”

Ago, Since. We say correctly “a long time *ago*” and “some time *since*.” *Ago* means before a certain time. If no point of time is specified, the word means before the present: “a year *ago* last Tuesday;” or, if we count back from the present, “a year *ago*.” *Since* means after a certain time and up to the present; “We have not met *since* 1950.”

Agree. Do not use *agree* for *admit*. We *admit* a fact but *agree* in doing or thinking something. We may *admit* that a wall is not attractive but we *agree* in refusing to spend any more money to improve its appearance.

Agriculturist. Prefer this form to *agriculturalist*.

Aim. The not infrequent colloquial use of this word as a verb instead of *intend* or *plan* as, “I *aim* to treat all customers fairly,” is not approved by careful speakers, though formerly it was good English. As a noun, meaning “purpose,” it is an excellent figurative word: “Young man, have an *aim* in life.”

Ain’t. Formally classified by high authority as belonging to “illiterate speech,” the contraction “*ain’t*” for “*am not*” is not in good standing, despite recent efforts by publicists to make it respectable. Use it at your own risk, if at all, and hope your listeners will credit you knowing better.

Alibi. (Latin *elsewhere*). This standard legal term signifying absence from the scene of a crime, is also a familiar sports slang expression used loosely as an equivalent for “*excuse*,” “*explanation*” or even “*apology*.”

Alike. This word should not be preceded by *both*, nor by “*both just alike*.” Say, “These hats are *both alike* (or *both just alike*).” Say, “These hats are *alike* (or *just alike*).” *Both* is superfluous in these phrases.

All, All of. In spite of critics, popular usage has sanctified the employment of *all of it*, and *all of them*, like *some of them*. The idioms may be regarded as established. One may be either, “I have *all of it*” or “I have *it all*.” From the viewpoint of economy, *it all* is preferable.

Similarly, the phrase *all over* has established itself as in the sentence, “We have searched *all over* the place.”

Do not say, “This is *all the farther* I have read.” The use is vulgar. Say, “This is as far as I have read” or “I have read no farther.”

Allege. Do not use this word as a synonym for *say* or *tell*, as in “He *alleges* that the engine ran sixty miles an hour.” Instead, “He *says* or *tells* us that, etc.” The word has a legal sense, and with this meaning it is used in news writing. To say “The reasons *alleged* for the nomination are, etc,” is to imply doubt as to the truth of what is *alleged* or to disclaim responsibility for the statement.

All-not, Not-all. A common mistake among usually careful speakers is the failure to distinguish between these two logically different negatives. To say, “All people are not allergic to dust” is really equivalent to saying that none are allergic. On the other hand, by saying, “Not all people are allergic to dust,” we convey the intended meaning that some are and some are not.

All right. The phrase should never be written *alright*, though formerly this usage was correct.

All together, Altogether. *All together* means “all in the same place at the same time” or “all acting at once:” “We are *all together* in the business” or “Let us pull *all together*” or “Now *all together*, boys.” *Altogether* means “entirely;” as, “The time was *altogether* too short.”

Almost, Nearly. These two adverbs should not be used indiscriminately. *Almost*

suggests the ending of an act; *nearly*, its beginning. A man who receives an injury so severe that he barely comes off with his life *almost* loses it; a man who just escapes what would have killed him is *nearly* killed.” These words are correctly used in “I have *almost* finished my work and “I *nearly* ran over the child.”

Alone, Only. To avoid ambiguity, observe the following distinction between these words: That is *alone* which is unaccompanied; that is *only* of which there is no other. “*Only* virtue makes us happy” means that nothing else can do it. “Virtue *alone* makes us happy” means that virtue unaided makes us happy. “This means of locomotion is used by man *only*.”

Already, All ready. Discriminate carefully between these two terms. *Already* means “beforehand” or “so soon;” *all ready*, “everything prepared” or “prepared in every way.”

Also. Like *only*, this particle is often misplaced, as in “If he is satisfied, I am satisfied *also*.” Write instead, “If he is satisfied, I *also* am satisfied.” Place the word as close as possible to and usually following the word to which it applies.

Alternative. Do not use this word when more than two things are referred to. You may have the choice of three courses, not of three *alternatives*.

Alumni, Alumnae. An *alumnus* is a graduate of a college, a university, or a school. *Alumni* is the masculine plural, but is used of men or women graduates. The feminine is *alumna*; plural, *alumnae*. “Association of Collegiate *Alumnae*.”

Amateur, Novice. *Amateur* means properly “one who pursues an art or plays a game for *the love of it*.” The *amateur* may be highly skilled. The *novice* is a beginner; therefore, presumably unskilled.

Ambiguous. This word indicates uncertainty of meaning arising usually from lack of skill in the use of language. It is sometimes confused with “equivocal,” which refers to

intentional “double talk,” in which more than one interpretation may best serve the speaker’s purpose.

Ameliorated. This word means “bettered,” “improved.” “Her troubles are greatly *lessened* (not *ameliorated*). We say correctly, “Conditions in the famine district have been *ameliorated*.”

Amiable, Amicable. These two words of common origin appear so similar that important differences between them are sometimes overlooked. “*Amiable*” is a personal word, indicating a likeable or loveable disposition. “*Amicable*” is a more abstract term meaning friendly or agreeable, as in “an amicable settlement of a dispute.”

Among. “He was there *among* the rest” should read “with the rest,” because *rest* contradicts the idea of “mingling or including in a group” which is implied in *among*. “He was *there among* the first” is correct. *With* denotes simply accomplishment. Similarly, avoid such expressions as “*among one another, each other*.” “*One another*” and “*each other*” imply individuals by themselves so that when they are used with *among* the resulting expressions self-contradictory. Say, “*among themselves*,” “*with each other*,” as “They exchanged hats *with each other*.”

Amount. Used only of substances or material; “Only a small *amount* of grain could be purchased.” Do not say, “a large *amount* of perfection” or “a large *amount* of people.” *Degree of perfection* and *number of people* are correct.

Ample. This word should not be used, as it frequently is, to mean simply “sufficient.” *Sufficient* means “enough to supply a need.” *Ample* is a larger word and carries the sense of enough, as of space, time, supplies, with a wide margin for comfort or unforeseen demands.

An. Use this from of the article before words beginning with a vowel or a silent *h*; as, *an inkpot, an oil well, an heir, an honor, an hour, an honest man*.

Answer, Reply. We *answer* a question, but we *reply* to a statement. *Reply* implies a more definitely planned expression than *answer*.

Ante-, Anti-. These prefixes are frequently confused. *Ante-* means “before;” *anti-* means “against” or “contrary to:” “In *ante*-suffrage days the *anti*-suffragists were active.”

Antecedents. The use of this word to mean the ancestry and the past life of a person has good authority, though the use is of recent origin and the need for it infrequent. We may say of a person whose life history we wish to know, “What can you tell me of his *antecedents*?”

Anticipate. A stronger word than *expect* or *foresee*, and in some senses not synonymous with either. It means “take beforehand” (from Latin *ante*, “before,” and *capere*, “to take”), “forestall,” “get ahead of:” “The committee was *anticipated* by the senator in introducing the water power bill.” The second meaning of the word is “look forward to,” usually implying approval or enjoyment: “Only a few politicians *anticipated* his election” or “We *anticipated* a delightful vacation.” One should say, “His death is daily *expected* (not *anticipated*).”

Antiquated, Ancient, Antique, Old. These words are frequently confused. *Old* is the opposite of *new*, *young*, *fresh*; *ancient* applies to what existed long ago, as *ancient states*; *antiquated* is a disparaging term for that which is old and in disuse or out of date, as “*antiquated* methods of business;” *antique* may be applied to something that has come down from olden times, as a vase or a piece of furniture, or to an imitation of the “real *antique*.”

Anxious. This word is often used loosely as a substitute for “eager” or some equally carefree expression. Note that in its original and correct sense, “anxious” conveys a suggestion of worry or concern.

Any. Sometimes used erroneously as an adverb to modify a verb; as, “Did you fish *any*?” Say rather, “Did you do *any* fishing?” *Any* should not be used for *all* in comparisons. Not, “That is the most beautiful car of *any* in the show,” but “most beautiful car in the show.” *Any* may modify adjectives; as, “*any* longer.”

Anyhow, Anyway. Although sometimes disapproved as unscholarly, these are idiomatic expressions, meaning “in any event,” “at any rate,” or “be that as it may.” Avoid *anyways* as vulgar.

Any place, Some place. These phrases should not be used for *anywhere* and *somewhere*. One should say, “I cannot find my umbrella *anywhere*,” not “*any place*.” One says properly, “I want to go *somewhere*,” but the expression “I want to go *some place*” is vulgar. The fault lies in needlessly using a noun in place of an adverb which accurately expresses the idea.

Anywheres. A vulgarism for *anywhere*. Similar vulgarisms are *somewheres* and *nowheres*.

A one. In such a sentence as “All who promised to come arrived, but not *a one* was on time,” *a* is superfluous.

Apparently. This word stands midway between “seemingly,” with its suggestion of deceptive outward appearances, and “evidently,” with its convincing positiveness. “*Apparently*” can be inflected in such a way as to indicate various shades of meaning, but its rightful use is to describe what is clear to the eye or the understanding, but is not necessarily untrue.

Appear, Seem. *Appear* refers usually to what is evident to the senses: “The *fruit appears* to be well ripened.” Every object may *appear*, but nothing *seems* except that which the mind admits to *appear* in a given form. Thus, *seems* is used to imply a result

of thought or reflection: “He *seems* to be an honorable man.”

Appreciate. Along with its suggestion of enjoyment as in reference to works of art, “*appreciate*” is a serviceable word in some other common meanings. To say “We *appreciate* the difficulty of your situation” means that we understand sympathetically, not that we relish or enjoy the other person’s difficulty. In a very different sort of context, “*appreciate*” means to grow in value, as in the case of property or investments.

Apt. Often misused for *likely*, and sometimes for *liable*. The following are examples of correct usage: “What is he *likely* to be doing?” “Where shall I be *likely* to find him?” *Liable* properly introduces some unhappy or disagreeable possibility: “If you go there, you are *liable* to incur his displeasure.” *Apt* implies natural *fitness* or *tendency*: “Experienced men are *apt* to give good advise.”

Arise, Arouse. The first form belongs to archaic, literary contexts: “I will *arise* and go to my father.” In everyday use, *rise* is preferred: “We *rise* at six in the morning.” *Arouse* refers to feelings: “This act *aroused* our anger.” *Rouse* is used, transitively, in a literal sense: “We *roused* him from his slumbers.”

As-as, So-as. Either combination may be used in negative statements involving comparison, but care should be taken to apply them appropriately. “James is not *as* tall *as* Tom” is a direct statement concerning the height of the two *without* implication that the speaker considers either of the persons spoken of as *tall*. But, if *so* be used instead of the first *as*, then it is understood that the second person referred to is notably tall in comparison with the first. Likewise, when age is spoken of, if one says, “My daughter is not *as* young *as* yours,” the idea conveyed is that they may be nearly of the same age; but, by substituting *so* for the first *as*, one changes the sense and emphasizes the youth of the younger child and a marked difference between the two ages: “My daughter is not *so* young *as* yours.”

As-as, only, may be used in affirmative declarative statements; *as*, “he is *as* good a man *as* anyone can find.” *So-as*, however, is appropriate in some affirmative

interrogative sentences when comparison is involved: “Is his estate so large as that?” Here an estate of great size is implied.

As for *that* is a vulgarism in such a sentence as: “I do not know as I like him.” Say, “*that* I like him.” In such an erroneous expression as “Not as I am aware of,” substitute *that* for *as*.

As a matter of fact. Trite phrase, overused by many speakers and writers. If emphasis is wanted, use a phrase specifically suited, such as: “Scientists agree that...” or “It is universally understood that...”

Aspiration, Ambition. *Aspiration* is exalted desire and properly implies striving for something high and ennobling; as, “To the *aspiration* of the poet we owe Milton’s *Paradise Regained*.” *Ambition* may imply worthy eagerness to achieve some great purpose, but it also connotes persistent, often overweening or inordinate, desire for personal advancement: “An *ambitious* man may *aspire* to greatness;” but it is used in the bad sense by Shakespeare in “*Ambition* should be made of sterner stuff.” It is not properly used for *energy* or *fitness* for work, as in “He shows no *ambition* since his illness;” but it is correctly employed in “Repeated reverses curbed his *ambition*.”

Assert, Allege. Two words often erroneously applied. Properly, one *asserts* that which one is ready to prove if called upon to do so, as a claim to property; one *alleges* that which is open to doubt or to question, as the existence of a will or the commission of a crime.

As though. Often used for *as if*. This use has been condemned; but it is accepted as idiomatic English, notwithstanding the claim that it expresses a condition of remoteness approaching to impossibility; “We were received as *though* (or *as if*) there had been no war between our countries.” *As if* is generally followed by a clause containing (1) a past subjunctive or (2) an infinitive expressing purpose or destination: (1) “Treating history *as if* it were a panorama intended to please the eye.” “*As if* the dead the living should exceed.” (2) “Buying agate and aluminum ware *as if* to set up

housekeeping.”

At. Redundant in the expressions “Where are we *at*?” “Where does he live *at*?”

At, In. *At* is a less definite word than *in*. Distinctions between them are not clearly drawn. The following examples, however, represent authoritative usage. We may say, “*in* the South,” “*in* Chicago,” also “The meeting was held *at* (or *in*) Baltimore.” Of small towns or villages we say correctly, “They live *at* Walden;” but of larger cities, “His home is *in* Boston.” To distinguish between points in a journey and the final destination, it is correct to say, “The ship calls *at* Halifax but docks *in* New York.” A similar distinction is appropriate with the verb *arrive*. Either “We arrived *at* Denver,” in which case the city is considered as one of the points to be reached in the journey, or “We arrived *in* Denver,” which then is considered as the final stopping place. But, if the final destination is a small place, *at* is the correct word.

At all. An intensive colloquial phrase condemned by some critics, but entitled to standing as emphatic idiomatic English. There is a difference of emphasis between “I do not know him” and “I do not know him *at all*,” for, while the former denies acquaintance, it does not dispose of the possibility of acquaintance as emphatically as does the latter and more decided statement.

At best, At worst, At last. These are well-established idioms and are preferable to *at the best*, etc. They arose from an early joining of the preposition and the article into the form *atte*, whence *at*.

At fault, In fault. Both phrases are correctly used for *in the wrong*, *in error*, *blameworthy*. *At fault* is the more common American usage.

Athletics. The word, when restricted to mean a system of physical exercises and training, should take a verb in the singular. But when it is understood to mean the games and sports of a school, a verb in the plural is frequently used and is not incorrect.

Similar use is current for *gymnastics* and *tactics*. Avoid the common error of saying *athletics*, for the word is one of three syllables, *ath-let'ics*.

At one fell swoop. A trite expression, unpleasant to those hearers who appreciate its literary power in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

At that. This colloquialism used as an intensified ending is usually redundant and as such is better omitted: "The new car has arrived, and is a beauty *at that*." This construction has been traced to the use of the phrase in matters in which the cost of an article is considered; as, "Here is a good umbrella for \$8.00 and cheap *at that* (price, understood).

Audience. Often inaccurately used in place of spectators: The *audience* hears; the *spectators* see. Say: "The *spectators* at the ball game," not "The *audience*;" "The *audience* at the concert," not "The *spectators*."

Aught, Naught, Ought. *Aught* means "anything;" *naught* means "not anything," "nothing," or "cipher, 0." *Ought* is a verb, implying duty: "I *ought* to go." *Aught* or *ought* should never be used in the sense of *nothing* or a *cipher*.

Auspicious, Propitious. The word *auspicious* is applied to an occasion, the beginning of an important undertaking, or the like, and indicates that such occasions are favored by the conditions and by the circumstances. *Propitious* is applied to the conditions themselves and indicates that they are favorable. The word was originally applicable to a person or to a god and was later transferred to the signs which showed favor. A picnic has an *auspicious* beginning when the weather is *propitious*.

Avenge, Revenge. To *avenge* is to punish on behalf of another; to *revenge* is to punish on one's own behalf. We *avenge* a wrong to satisfy justice; but we may take *revenge* merely to satisfy our own angry resentment.

Averse, Aversion. *Averse to* is the accepted usage instead of *averse from*; “He was not *averse to* discussing his failure.” Also *aversion to*: “His *aversion to* hard work is well known.

Avoid. This word means “to free oneself from” or “keep away from,” but is often inaccurately used for *prevent* or *hinder*, as, “Nothing shall be lost if I can *avoid* it.” Here *prevent* is the correct word to use: “if I can *prevent* it.” But, “I shall not go if I can *avoid* it” is correct, for *avoid* here means “to free oneself from.”

Awful, Awfully. Too frequently used as intensives. Avoid such phrases as “an *awful* shame,” “*awfully* glad to see you.” *Awful* is correctly used of that which fills with dread or inspires fear: “an *awful* catastrophe.” Both of these words are colloquialisms that border on vulgarity when they are used in the sense of *extraordinary*, *highly remarkable*, or *excessively*.

Bad. Such phrases as *bad* cold, *bad* break, *bad* case are in wide colloquial use. Careful speakers try to use a more accurate and appropriate word, such as *serious*, *severe*, *troublesome*.

Badly, Bad. Discriminating people will try to avoid too general use of these words. When *feel* is used intransitively, like *seem*, the adjective *bad* (a predicate adjective) is grammatically correct: “She feels *bad* about the failure.” In such a sentence as “I shall miss you *badly*,” *very much* is to be preferred.

Balance. In bookkeeping, the sum to be added to the less or to be deducted from the greater of two amounts, as receipts and expenditures, so that the two “*balance*.” It is incorrect to speak of the *balance* of a meal, the *balance* of an edition, etc. One may speak of the *balance* of an account.

Be back, Been to. Such expressions as “I will *be back* soon” and “I have *been to* town” are widely current. The first is approved, if *be back* signifies state or condition,

not movement. For “I have *been to town*,” one would better substitute “I have *been in town*.” *In*, not *to*, is appropriate to the state or condition implied in *have been*.

Because. The word is a contraction of *by cause* and means “for the reason that.” Therefore it is redundant in such constructions as “The reason we go is *because* we have been summoned.” The correct form is “The *reason* we go is that we have been summoned” or, preferably, “We go *because* we have been summoned.” The use of *why* after *because*, in “*because why*,” is a vulgarism in which *why* is redundant.

Begin, Commence. Although, historically, these words are precisely alike in meaning *begin*, the Anglo-Saxon word, is preferred by careful speakers for general use. *Commence* has more formal associations and implies a beginning which involves a certain procedure and completion: One *begins* the practice of law, but one *commences* a lawsuit. We *begin* a day’s work, but we *commence* a ceremony.

Behalf (on, in). A distinction worth noting is that *on behalf of* means “in the name of,” while *in behalf of* means “in the interest of:” “*On behalf of* the school, we thank you.” “I make this appeal *in behalf of* the prisoner.”

Beside, Besides. *Beside*, in present day usage, is a preposition and means “by the side of,” as in “She stood *beside* the chair.” *Besides* is either adverb or preposition and means “moreover,” “beyond what has been said,” or “in addition to:” “*Besides*, they knew the road better;” “*Besides* wealth, he desired culture.”

Better. This word is correctly used in the idiomatic form, *had better*, as in “We *had better* go.”

Between. In its literal sense, this word applies to only two objects: “The candy was to be divided *between* the two boys, or *among* the four children.” When used of more than two objects, it brings them severally and individually into the relation expressed: “The steamers ply *between* San Francisco, Honolulu, and Yokohama.”

“*Between* each desk there is a wide space.” This is a frequent error. Say, “There is a wide space *between* each two desks” or “Wide spaces are left *between* desks.”

Between may express contrast: “The two boys are brothers, but there is a great difference *between* them.”

Biscuit. *Biscuits* is the correct plural. Although “Please pass *the biscuit*” is frequently heard, no one says, “Please pass the *cracker*.” There is a tendency to use *biscuit* as a collective singular by analogy with *bread*, but no one would say “Please pass the *roll*” of a number of rolls served at a table.

Blame it on. A vulgarism used in place of *accuse* or *suspect*: “He *blames it on* his brother” should be “He *suspects* or *accuses* his brother” or “He *blames* his brother for it.” In such an idiomatic phrase as “She is to *blame*” the passive meaning, “She is to be *blamed*,” is intended.

Both. Regarded as superfluous in the sentence “They are *both* alike.” In “They *both* ran away from school,” *both* has an intensive force. *Both*, as adjective or pronoun, may be applied to two objects or personality. In “*Both* women spoke,” *both* is an adjective; in “The general invited the colonel and the major and *both* went,” *both* is a pronoun.

In the sentence, “They *both* met at the station,” *both* is superfluous. “*Both* were alike good,” meaning “*Both* were equally good,” while approved usage, is not to be preferred to the latter sentence which is rhythmically perfect and linguistically sound.

As a conjunction *both* may be used in connection with more than two things: “They lost all their property *both* houses, barns, and crops.”

Both of. Frequently condemned as colloquial; but the phrase has the support of literary usage, as in “*Both* of these arguments are sound.”

Bother. Critics condemn this word when used as an imprecation or expression of impatience: as, “Oh, *bother* it all!” It is excellent English if used in the sense of *take trouble*, as in the sentence “You need not *bother* to return the paper.”

Bound. In colloquial use to mean “determined” or “resolved,” but challenged by the critics. *Bound* implies *compulsion* or *legal obligation*; as, “He is *bound* to pay it.” “He is *bound* to do it” is correct if the person referred to is under obligation or promise, but not when the act depends on the resolution of the individual, then say, “He is *certain*, *resolved*, or *determined* to do it.” “He is *bound* to fail” should be “He is *sure* to fail.” But we may say, “He is *bound* for destruction,” meaning “He is *on the way* to destruction.”

Brainy. A colloquialism meaning “mentally alert,” “of quick understanding,” or “of vigorous intellect;” as, a *brainy* man.

Broadcast. The past tense of this word is usually given as *broadcast*. In its new sense, however, of transmitting speech of programs by radio, the form *broadcasted* is so widely employed as to be regarded by many as standard usage.

Bunch. A word useful in describing bananas or grapes, but very objectionable slang when applied to people.

Bursted. A vulgarism sometimes rendered *busted*. Both are forms that cannot be too severely condemned, for the past participle and the past tense of the verb are the same as the infinitive, *burst*.

But. Frequently redundant before *that*, although sometimes required to make sense. When *but* is a preposition and *that* is a pronoun, there is no danger of error, for the meaning is “except that,” as in “Nothing would please him *but that*.” It is when both words are used as conjunctions that care must be exercised. In such a construction as “You need have no fear *that* she will go,” the sense is clear that “she *will not* go;” but, in “You need have no fear *but that* she will go,” the intention is clearly to express the feeling that “she is *sure* to go.”

Best usage would eliminate *but* from “I have no doubt *but that* he will go” when the intention is to convey the feeling of certainty of his going. The form *but that* preceded by a negative becomes a positive -- but it is more emphatic and less involved to say “I have no doubt *that* he will go.”

I cannot think (believe) *that* they will come” means that I believe strongly that they *will not* come; “I cannot think (believe) *but that* they will come” means that I must believe that they *will come*. “I can *but* believe him” means that notwithstanding my own doubts, there is no other course open to me than to believe him; I cannot *but* believe him” means that I am compelled to believe him -- even against my will I am convinced. But *what* when used for *but that* is regarded as a vulgarism. These examples of the use of *but* illustrate what is meant by “English idiom.”

By, With. *By* generally introduces the agent or doer; *with*, the instrument of means: “The window was broken *by* a boy *with* a ball.” “The electricity is generated *by* water power.” “The manager filled the theater *with* children.” But, “The theater was crowded *by* the patrons of the opera.”

By the name of. This phrase should not be confused with *of the name of*. “The business is owned by a man *of the name of* Brown.” *Of the name* implies the real name; *by the name* suggests an assumed name; as, “Charles Farrar Browne was better known *by the name of* Artemus Ward than by his own name.” It is well to substitute “a man *named* Brown” for “a man *of the name of* Brown.”

By the way of. We say correctly, “*by way of* illustration,” meaning “as an illustration,” or “*by way of* Cleveland” for “*through* Cleveland.” In “He was *by way of* learning the country,” *by way of* is an English colloquialism meaning “making progress in” or “occupied in.”

Calamity. The word means, in an abstract sense, “source of misery or of loss,” rather than the “loss” itself, for which it is often misused. *Calamities* are causes, of

which *losses* may be the results. Any disaster produced by natural causes, as a hurricane, a cyclone, or a volcanic eruption, and attended by widespread destruction, is a *calamity* whether or not it be attended by loss of life.

Calculate. In the sense of *surmise, think, guess, or judge at random*, this word is a provincialism and is to be avoided: “I *think (not calculate)* tomorrow will be a fine day” but “His next move was *calculated* (that is, *designed*) to discourage his opponents.”

Caliber. Often misused for *order*, as in “His work is of a higher *caliber* than hers.” *Caliber* in its figurative sense applies to mental endowments. Thus, we may speak of a woman possessing great intellectual ability as being a person of high *caliber*, and of her work as being of high order, or excellent.

Can, May. Frequently confused. *Can* expresses power or ability; in most cases *may* expresses permission. Avoid “*Can* I speak to you for a moment?” When you know that you *can speak* but wish merely for permission to do so, then substitute *may* for *can*. But, “*Can* you go?” is correct when the inquirer senses the possibility of obstacles that might prevent going: “*May* you go?” is also correct if permission to do so is involved.

Can not. Commonly and correctly written *cannot*. The origin of this form is in the shortened colloquial pronunciation of the two words.

Can't hardly. As *hardly* means “*not easily*” or “*not quite*,” it must never be used with another negative as in this phrase. Substitute *can hardly*: “I *can hardly* believe the story.”

Can't seem. Such an expression as “I *can't seem* to understand this problem” is to be avoided. Say, “I *seem unable* to understand.” The inability is not in the *seeming* but in the *understanding*.

Capable, Susceptible. *Capable* is said of one's ability to do things and in general it

applies to the individual as having the capacity or intelligence to do; *susceptible* connotes action upon or sensitiveness to. Plans are *susceptible* of alteration; we all are *susceptible* to pain, that is, *capable* of being acted upon by it. One may be *capable* of judging the fulness of another to fill a vacancy, yet he may not be *susceptible* to the blandishments of the applicant.

Capacity, Ability. These words are frequently confused. *Capacity* is the power of receiving or containing, and it is used of the ability of the mind to accept ideas; it is the receptive mental faculty. *Ability* is power, either bodily or mental, and the word is sometimes used to describe mental endowments, or talents, of a superior kind. Some men possess the *ability* to help others although they have not the *capacity* to better their own conditions.

Carry. Provincial in the sense of *take, bring*, as in a carriage; as, "Father *carried* us all home with him." The word is archaic in the sense of *escort*: "He *carried* us to the party." Prefer "He *escorted (accompanied)* us."

Carry on. The phrase is in rather common colloquial use to mean "playing or behaving boisterously or indiscreetly." World War I gave us an intensified form of an old colloquial meaning, "maintain spirit and courage" or "keep work going in spite of difficulties."

Category. This formal word, preferably restricted to logical classification, should not be substituted indiscriminately for "class," "group," "rank," "species," and other more or less remotely associated synonyms.

Chairman. Correct usage sanctions *Mr. Chairman* and *Madam Chairman* as forms in which to address a presiding officer.

Cite, Quote. "Cite" means to refer definitely, as in footnotes listing sources and authorities. "Quote" is used only when the exact language of the source is given.

Claim. This word, as a verb, means “ask for” or “demand” by virtue of some authority or right, as in “We *claim* our share of the estate.” It should not be used loosely for *say*, *assert*, *declare*, or *maintain*, as in “They *claim* that the water of the lake is warm.”

Clever. As used in the sense of *good-natured* or kindly, this word is dialectal: “She is a *clever* woman.” The commonly accepted sense today is *skillful*, *dexterous*, or *quick*. The word is used of mental alertness or mechanical ability.

Clichés. The language is so full of ready-made phrases that it is easier to use them than to avoid them. Considered effective at first, these expressions have been worn threadbare by constant repetition. In the interest of freshness and originality, a different way of saying the thing should be attempted, at whatever cost in effort and initiative. It is really unnecessary to depend upon such stock phrases as “all nature seemed,” “a bolt from the blue,” “his better half,” “the grim reaper,” “the irony of fate,” “wended our way,” and “last but not least.”

Clipped Endings. The practice of “*clipping*” the ending *-ing* is a vulgar error, as in *talkin*, *walkin*, *comin*.

Coke Fiend. This is a vulgarism for an unfortunate individual addicted to cocaine or morphine. The term *addict* is the correct word to use. *Coke fiend* is in the same class as *rum hound* or *booze fighter*.

Commandeer. This word originated in South Africa during the Boer war. Its military meaning is “to compel to perform military service or to take for military purposes.” As meaning “to take arbitrarily” it is in colloquial use only, the word *levy* or *requisition* being preferred by some as the literary term.

Company. The word is disapproved when used to mean “guests.” Some writers

look upon it as less formal, and therefore preferable, but no better word than *friends* need be used to express the intimacy of informal occasions. “The *company* has come” is decidedly provincial. “Our *friends* are here” and “The *guests* have arrived” serve to mark different degrees of formality.

Company, Corporation, Firm. With *company* or *firm*, either a singular or a plural verb is permissible; the word *corporation* takes a singular verb. A *corporation* is considered only as a unity, while one may think of a *company* or a *firm* either as a unit or as a number of partners.

Compared to, with. We may *compare* one thing *with* another in discussing the relative merits of both, but *we compare* one thing *to* another to point out some likeness: “*Compare* dead happiness *with* living woe.” “*Compare* my life *with* his.” “Life is *compared to* a voyage.”

Comparison. In the *superlative degree*, comparison implies the inclusion of the things compared in a single group; in the *comparative degree* the things compared are thought of as in separate groups: *best of all*; *better than others*.

Complected. This is a dialectal word to be avoided. Say, “She is *dark* (or *fair*) *complexioned* (not *complected*).” Better still is the form, “She is of a *dark* (or *fair*) *complexion*.” Frequently the simple “She is *fair* (or *dark*)” will serve.

Compliment, Complement. These words, so nearly alike and of the same origin, should not be confused. We say correctly, “They paid me the *compliment* of close attention” and “The ship had her *complement* (full number) of officers.”

Comprised, Composed. These words are frequently confused. *Comprised* means “included;” *composed* means “made up” or “put together.” We say correctly, “The ship’s company *comprised* men of many nationalities,” but “The bricks are *composed of* sand and clay.”

Conclude, Decide. “Conclude” refers to the result of a reasoning process by which one reaches a point of mental certainty. “Decide” has to do with will and purpose. To decide is to resolve an issue or perhaps to settle upon a course of action.

Condone. The word should not be used for *compensate* or *atone*: “The abolition of the income tax would more than *compensate* (not *condone*) for the turmoil of an election.” *Condone* means “forgive tacitly” or “overlook:” “For the sake of tranquility we *condone* many public faults.”

Consequence. Etymologically, “a following together” and, from its original sense, “that which follows as a result of something that has preceded it.” By an inversion, it has come to be used to signify importance or prominence acquired, as through the exercise of an office or through the ownership of land. Though some critics condemn this use of the word, it is authoritatively recognized and is logically sound: “He was a man of some *consequence* in his district.”

Consider. The correct meaning of this word is “meditate,” “deliberate,” “reflect,” “revolve in the mind.” It should not be made to do service for *think*, *suppose*, and *believe*; as, “I *consider* that I have a bargain.” This use, though frequent, is inappropriate.

Considerable. Frequently misused. Its association is with abstract rather than with concrete terms. A rich man may be one of *considerable* wealth, but we should not describe him as having *considerable* money. “We have had *considerable* rain” should be avoided. Prefer “an *abundance* of rain” or, more succinctly, “*plentiful* rain.”

Contemptible, Contemptuous. Note the difference in point of view. A person who has done a wrong thing may be *contemptible*; that is, deserving of contempt. Their attitude toward other people might be *contemptuous*; that is, they would show no regard for their judgments and opinions.

Continual, Continuous. The first of these words suggests recurring action, with intervals between; the second, unbroken occurrence, either in time or space; “Her *continual* nagging,” “the *continuous* roar of the machinery.”

Convince. This word, frequently misused in the sense of “persuade,” means to gain mental assent, not to induce one to enter upon a course of action. “We persuaded (not convinced) him to go with us.”

Correspond to, Correspond with. Things or people *correspond to* one another by agreeing or being parallel in certain respects; people *correspond with* one another by means of written communication.

Couple. The use of *couple* to mean merely “two” or “several” is vulgar or dialectal. The word correctly means “two like things or two persons acting in concert or so joined as to act together or to be considered together,” as two mechanical parts or two partners in a dance.

Credible, Creditable. The latter word should not be used instead of *credible*, “believable.” Say, “two *credible* (not *creditable*) witnesses.” Say, “I am *credibly* (not *creditably*) informed.” Formerly, *creditable* meant “credible,” but this use is obsolete. It now means “commendable.”

Curious. This word does not always mean “inquisitive,” but frequently signifies “wrought with such care as to excite surprise” or “fashioned in such a way as to evoke surprise.” The use of *curious* to mean “interesting,” “unusual,” or “novel” is sometimes condemned, but it is in good taste: “The museum possesses a collection of *curious* ornaments.”

Data, Memoranda, Strata. These words are the plural forms of *datum*, *memorandum*, and *stratum*, but are sometimes construed erroneously as singulars:

“The *datum* (singular) is here;” “The *data* (plural) are all here;” “This *memorandum* is clear;” “These *memorandum* are correct.” To form the plural, an s has sometimes been added to the words *stratum*, *memorandum*, but never to *datum*. *Stratum*, being a technical word should be more carefully used and its plural be written *strata*.

Deceiving. This should not be used in place of *trying to deceive*. When we suspect deception but are not *deceived*, we should say, not “He *is deceiving* me,” but “He *is trying to deceive* me.”

Defective, Deficient. “Defective” is used correctly to describe faultiness. “Deficient” refers to incompleteness in numbers or amount.

Delusion, Illusion. A “*delusion*” is an unsound idea arising within one’s mind; an “*illusion*” is a false image from outside which deceives the senses, or sometimes an unreal concept that is more or less willingly accepted.

Demand. A transitive verb which always requires an object. *We demand* the payment of a debt. Do not say, “He *demanded* me to do it.” Say, He *demanded* that I should do it.” “It” stands for the thing or act required. “They *demanded* their pay” is correct. The direct object of *demand* must be other than the person *of, or upon*, whom the demand is made.

Deprecate, Depreciate. These words should not be confused. *Deprecate* means “regret,” “express disapproval of;” “His friends *deprecated* his hasty action.” *Depreciate* means to “undervalue” or “decrease in value:” “They *depreciated* the value of freedom;” “That stock has *depreciated* very greatly.”

Desperately. The word should not be used to mean merely “seriously.” It means “violently,” “recklessly,” “in a desperate manner.” “He was *desperately* wounded” means wounded so seriously that he was beyond apparent hope of recovery.

Despite. This word may be preceded by *in* and followed by *of*, although *despite* has good standing as a preposition. Say, “*despite* all our efforts” or “*in spite* of all our efforts.” *Notwithstanding* is a more dignified expression and has the same meaning.

Differ, Different. Persons or things *differ* from each other in appearance, size, etc. Persons may *differ* with each other in opinion. *Different from* is approved American usage, not *different to* or *different than*, both of which are accepted idioms in England, having substantial literary support, as of Goldsmith, John Henry Newman, and Thackeray, Shakespeare used *different from*.

Direct, Call. *To direct* someone’s attention to a thing is more accurate and specific than *to call* his or her attention to a thing. Direct is the more formal.

Directly, Immediately. The use of *directly* as a synonym for *immediately* is sanctioned by good usage, though some critics pronounce it colloquial. One may say, “We will proceed *immediately* the train arrives” or “*immediately* after the train arrives.” American usage prefers *immediately*. English usage favors *directly*.

Disapproval. Say, “He expressed *disapproval of* (not *with*) the dance.”

Disinterested. Not lack of interest, but absence of partiality is indicated by this word. In the case of a controversy, for example, a *disinterested* third party is an unprejudiced observer.

Dissent. This word should be followed by *from*; “They *dissent from* our judgment.” “They *dissent from* us.”

Do. Like other Anglo-Saxon verbs such as *make* or *put*, *do* has an almost unlimited variety of idiomatic uses. Examples are: “I *did* all the problems;” “She *did* up the package.” “We could see that he was *done* for.” Although many expressions containing *do* are informal, most of them are in good colloquial use and are popular because of

their forcefulness. The various uses of *do* should be studied with the aid of a dictionary. Careful speakers will note the difference between acceptable and unauthorized forms.

Dock, Wharf. A *wharf* is a landing stage or pier; a *dock* is a body of water beside a *wharf* or between *wharves*. In American practice, *dock* is misused for *wharf*. Originally, *wharf* meant “bank” or “shore,” and *dock* meant “ditch,” “pit,” or “pool.” The distinction is more clearly apparent when one prefers to the different forms of *dock* as *dry* or *graving dock*, floating and *wet dock*.

Don't, Doesn't. The first is colloquial contraction for *do not*, the second, for *does not*. They should be used with care. Avoid “He *don't* want it.” Say: “They *don't*,” or “he *doesn't* want it.”

Don't think. “I *don't think* it will rain” is an established idiom, as are other similar expressions in use.

Double Possessive. This construction is accepted as idiomatic English. Such phrases as “that house *of Brown's*” and “that car *of mine*” show the double possessive and may be used if required, but “*Brown's* house” and “*my* car” will usually express the thought more economically.

Doubtless. Because this word has become weakened through long use, it has given way in some cases to the stronger word “undoubtedly,” or even to the intensive phrase, “beyond the shadow of a doubt.” Other words denoting emphasis have fared similarly. Compare “soon” and “presently,” which once meant “immediately.”

Dozen, Dozens. After indications of price, *a dozen* or *the dozen* is correct. In American usage *a dozen* is preferred: “fifty cents *a dozen*.” The phrases, “a pair,” “a gross,” “a tale,” are used in like manner. Correctly we say, “several (or many) *dozens*,” but when linked with definite numbers or used with *pairs*, *dozen* is the approved form, as, “four *dozen* pairs.”

Due to. That which may be attributed to a cause is *due to* it, but to express cause or reason, *due to* is preferably used as a predicate complement: “His failure was *due to* unusual conditions.” A sentence may begin with *because of* or *owing to*, but should not begin with *due to*. Example “*Because of* unusual conditions, he was unable to complete the work.”

Each other. Properly applied to two only; *one another* must be used when the number referred to exceeds two. We say, “Great authors address themselves *to one another*,” unless we refer to only two authors.

Eat, Ate, Eaten. These are the correct parts of the verb. Say, “he *ate* rapidly;” “I have *eaten* my dinner.” It may be proper to also say, “Have you *ate* yet?” or “Have you *eaten*?”

Effect, Affect. *Effect* means “bring about;” *affect* means “influence;” “A man may *effect* a reform.” “His ideas will *affect* the character of the reform.” *Affect* may mean “pretend;” “They *affect* an interest in the matter.” *Effect* is sometimes used as a noun; *affect* is always a verb.

Effective. Associated with this word and related to it etymologically are several words that are usually differentiated from it in practice. Where “*effective*” means result-getting in a broad general sense, we speak of an “*effectual*” plea or prayer, an “*efficacious*” remedy, and an “*efficient*” machine or person.

Egoism, Egotism. One may be a *egoist*, that is, may habitually advocate the doctrine of *egoism*, or the pursuit of self-interest, as the supreme aim of human effort, and yet he may not be an *egotist*. *Egotism* is offensive conceit.

Either, Each, Both. Note the following correct expressions: “You may enter by *either* door (meaning *one* or the *other*).” “A bench is placed at *each* side of the doorway (that is, one on *one* side, one on the *other*).” There were windows on *both* sides (or

each side) of the doorway.” Formerly, *either* was widely used in the sense of *each*, but this use is rare today.

Elemental, Elementary. “*Elemental*” refers to the basic forces or units of nature; “*elementary*” reduces anything to its simplest component parts for clear understanding.

Else, Else’s. Such an expression as “Do not take *anyone else’s* place” is good form and to be preferred to “Do not take *anyone’s else* place,” which has some defenders but is not accepted as sterling.

Else, but. Avoid the use of *else* before *but* in the expression “I have no one *else but* you.”

Emigrant, Immigrant. *Emigrants* are persons *going out* of a country, and *immigrants* are persons *coming into* it. *Emigrate* is derived from the Latin *e*, “out,” and *migrare*, “to go from the land;” *immigrate*, from the Latin *im* for *in*, “into,” and *migrare*.

Eminent, Imminent. Two words of similar sound but of widely different meanings. *Eminent* signifies “distinguished” or “well known;” “He has become *eminent* in his profession.” *Imminent* means “about to happen” or “threatening;” “The defeat of the army was *imminent*.”

Empty, Vacant. Anything that is “*empty*” is simply without contents or occupants. “*Vacant*” conveys the idea that it may have been occupied, or may be filled in the future.

Enclose, Inclose. The history of these words as well as general English usage favors *enclose* rather than *inclose*. But most recent dictionaries give *inclose* the preference. Either is correct.

Endorse, Indorse. Either form is correct, but, while *endorse* is used in literature, *indorse* finds favor in law and commerce. Do not say, “I *endorse* the movement.” Say,

“I *approve* it.” Do not say, “*Indorse* the check *on the back*.” Omit the last three words. *Indorse* means to write one’s name *on the back* of commercial paper or documents.

Enjoyed the advantage. Trite phrase, elaborate and cumbersome substitute for “had.”

Enthuse. It is better to speak of being *enthusiastic*. Typical of a large group of barbarisms known as “back-formations,” *enthuse* is a coined verb suggested by the noun *enthusiasm*, but not derived from it by any proper linguistic procedure. Compare *burgle* (burglary), *laze* (lazy), and *orate*, (oration). Although an occasional “back-formation” gains acceptance - for example, *diagnose*, *sidle*, *drowse*, - it is better as a rule to avoid such eccentric forms and to look for established synonyms.

Equally as well. An incorrect phrase. *As well* and *equally well* are correct forms.

Euphemisms. From an understandable wish to avoid offending sensitive ears, people tend to substitute long or abstract words for short plain ones. Thus, “imbibe” for “drink,” “perspire” for “sweat,” and “prevaricate” for “lie” stand for a long list of consciously watered-down synonyms. Not all of these substitute expressions are as ridiculous as “lady dog” and “gentleman cow,” but euphemisms at best give an impression of linguistic timidity that is out of harmony with the times. People, especially moderns, are not so squeamish as these polite evasions would indicate. Within the bounds of decency, plain words are best.

Event, Eventually. The first of these words indicates a definite happening; the second, an occurrence considered as a possibility.

Ever so, Never so. *Ever so* is correctly used to mean “exceedingly.” Both phrases are used to mean “however” or “no matter how,” as in “were he *ever so* (or *never so*) rich.” Modern usage prefers *ever so* in all such cases.

Excuse, Pardon. While *pardon* is the more formal official word in respect to offences, and *excuse* the more familiar in respect to minor matters, a further distinction is to be noted. For instance, when interrupting a conversation, one says, “*Pardon* the interruption,” and, when leaving a guest, “*Excuse* me.”

Exemption, Immunity. One claims *exemption* from taxes or from duty; one acquires *immunity* from disease, as by inoculation, or is granted *immunity* from punishment.

Expect. As this word means “look forward to as a contingency,” it should never be used of any retrogression, for one cannot *expect* backwards. Not, “I *expect* you thought I would come yesterday,” but “I suppose, etc.” “I *expect* you to know all about it” should be “*imagine*,” “*think*,” or “*suspect* you know.” But, “We *expect* that they will come” or “We *expect* them” is correct.

Extempore, Impromptu. An *extempore* address is one delivered without manuscript and without memorization, though previous preparation may have been made by thought upon the subject treated. An *impromptu* speech is given on the moment, without previous preparation.

Farther, Further. Careful speakers and writers use *farther* for distances in space and *further* for continuity of other kinds: “We walked *farther* today than yesterday;” “The chairman said *further* (that is, *in addition*) that all dues must be paid promptly.” *Further*, then, is used for expressions of continuity, as of thought or action: “I had no *further* dealings with him;” “a *further* rise in temperature.”

Fascinating. As that which *fascinates* operates on its object as by some irresistible power, *fascinating* should not be used when *charming* or *attractive* is meant. Properly, that is *fascinating* or *bewitching* which possesses the art to please beyond the power of resistance; as, “Her *fascinating* manner and words disarmed suspicion.”

Faulty Comparisons. Avoid double comparatives and superlatives. Say, “*worse*,”

not “*worser*,” “*abler*,” not “*more abler*.” Avoid impossible comparisons. Say, “*more nearly perpendicular, more nearly universal*,” not “*more perpendicular, more universal*.” Use the comparative degree for two objects, the superlative for more than two.

Fearful. A much overworked word. The meaning of the nouns which such words as *dreadful*, *terrible*, and *fearful* are derived should always be borne in mind when the adjectives are used. The colloquial use of these words to express intense feeling or annoyance easily passes into extravagant hyperbole. Do not describe the falling off of a horse as a *terrible* but rather as a *serious* accident. “He was *fearful* for our safety,” that is, “He *feared* that we were in danger” is correct.

Female. In polite speech this word is restricted to sex or to animals. When applied to women, it is derogatory, and it should not be used in such expressions as “What is more delightful than the blush of a beautiful young female!” *Female* is opposite of a male. In the Garden of Eden, God made both male and *female*.

Feminine words. Although the suffix “*ess*” is available for converting masculine nouns to feminine ones, usage rejects or questions some words formed in this way, while accepting others. Examples of well-established feminine words are “*actress*,” “*governess*,” “*hostess*,” and “*stewardess*.” Doubtful ones include “*authoress*,” “*doctress*,” “*editress*,” “*manageress*,” and “*poetess*.” In such cases, the masculine word may be preferable for both men and women. It is the only one possible for words like “*clerk*,” “*lecturer*,” “*singer*,” “*teacher*,” and “*typist*.”

Fewer, Less. *Fewer* refers to number; *less*, to quantity. Instead of “There were not *less* than ten chapters in the book,” we should say, “There were not *fewer* than ten chapters in the book.” But say, “The box weighed not *less* than ten pounds.”

Fine. An adjective which should not be used as an adverb. Do not say, “She sang that *fine*,” when you mean “well.” “I like that *fine*” and “He is doing *fine*” are incorrect. Say, “I like that *very much*” and “He is doing *well* or *very well*.”

First-rate. Do not use this adjective as an adverb. “She plays *first-rate*” is a vulgarism. *First-rate* means “of the highest excellence or quality.” “He is a man of *first-rate* ability” is correct.

Fix. Often misused colloquially for *arrange* or *repair*. “I must *fix* the books.” “Who *fixed* the dishes on the shelves?” “He had the clock *fixed*.” It is vulgarly used thus: “I will *fix* him.” “The jury was *fixed*.” “You must *fix* up if you go.” “Your affairs are in a bad *fix*.” *Fix* means “fasten,” “make firm,” or “settle.” “The hooks are *fixed* in the wall.” “Their income is a *fixed* amount.”

Folk, Folks. Often incorrectly used interchangeably. Both words are construed as plurals, but the first refers to *people* or *peoples* generally, as “folk tales” or “fairy folk.” In colloquial usage, *folks* has displaced *folk*. In “My *folks* have gone South,” *folks* signifies “relatives.” In “the *folks* next door,” the word means “neighbors.”

Forceful, Forcible. We speak of a “*forceful* style” or a “*forcible* personality,” but of *forcible* ejection or *forcible* action of any kind. In usage, *forcible* is the more common word, and *forceful* the more special one.

Former-Latter. These words should be used only when they really economize space and save the reader’s time. By repeating the antecedents (nouns or phrases), one avoids sending the reader back to see which is *former* and which is *latter*. Sometimes, however, a disagreeable repetition is avoided by using “the *former*-the *latter*.”

Fortuitous, Fortunate. “*Fortuitous*” refers to a chance happening that may be either favorable or unfavorable. “*Fortunate*” is restricted to favorable chance.

Funny. A word too frequently used when humor or amusement is not meant. Of something usual, use *strange*, *odd*, *peculiar*, or a similar accurate word instead of *funny*:

“It was a *peculiar* situation,” not “*funny*” unless it is laughable.

Get, Got, Have. *Get*, like *do*, has many different meanings and is carelessly used. Avoid *get* for *be* and especially such expressions as “She will *get* laughed at for her pains.” Say rather, “She will *be* laughed at, etc.” If a man has inherited a fortune and has not dissipated it, we say correctly, “He *has* money;” if he obtains money through his own effort, we say correctly, “He *has gotten* money.”

“*Get a move on*” is a forcible but inelegant Americanism for “Be quick about it.”

Do not say, “*Get up a show*” when you mean plan or prepare. Colloquially, a *get-up* is an equipment consisting of dress and accessories and is very frequently correctly used, as in “a clever *get-up*” or “a stylish *get-up*.” Avoid “Do you *get me*?” as the height of vulgarity.

“He *has got to do it*” is a common colloquialism. “He *has got it to do*,” shows the wasteful character of the phrase. “He *has it to do*,” “He *must do it*,” or “He *has to do it*” is correct. We may, however, say correctly, “The cat *has got* the mouse,” but “*caught* the mouse” is preferable.

Both *got* and *gotten* are correct forms of *get*, but careful writers tend to avoid *gotten*. As William Lyon Phelps said, “*Gotten* has got to go.”

Get, meaning “become,” is colloquial: “He will *get well*;” “as we *get older*.”

Goes. In the phrase “anything *goes*” we have slang; in “the machine *goes*” we have idiomatic English. “That *goes without saying*” is a literal translation of a French idiom, in colloquial use.

Good. The use of the adjective *good* for the adverb *well* is vulgar. Avoid “I feel *good*” and “He is working *good*.” Say rather: “I feel *well*;” “He is working *well*.”

Grand. That which is *grand* is “magnificent,” “noble,” or “splendid,” yet there is strong tendency to misapply the word. Today anything from a bit of chewing gum to Mt. Shasta is described as *grand*. The word should be used only of that which possesses grandeur.

Great. The indiscriminate use of this word is evidence of a poverty-stricken vocabulary: “I like it *great*” is a vulgarism.

Had. “*Had* I thought of that, I should have come.” This sentence is correct; but the common practice of inserting *have* after the pronoun is reprehensible. Shun “*Had* I have known,” “*Had* I’ve known,” “If I *had’ve*,” “If I *had of*,” if you wish to avoid being classed as illiterate. *Had better*, as in “He *had better* look out,” is excellent English idiom. *Had ought* is a solecism for *should have*. Ought is not a participle. Say, “We *should have* or we *ought*,” not “We *had ought*.”

Hanged, Hung. Criminals are *hanged*, clothes are *hung*. This is an old distinction still in force.

Hard, Hardly. The idiomatic adverb *hard* is in good use in such expressions as “He worked *hard*,” “Hit the line *hard*.” *Hardly* cannot be used interchangeably with *hard*, because the two words differ in meaning. To say, “The battle was *hardly* won” may convey an idea opposite to the one intended. At best, the sentence is ambiguous. When a synonym for *scarcely* is needed, *hardly* is correctly used, as in the sentence “They will *hardly* succeed.” In such cases the word is a useful negative of understatement. The adverb *hardly* is correctly followed by *when*, not *than*, as in “We had *hardly* taken our seats *when* the boat began to leak.” The use of *hardly* with a negative added is a solecism, as in “I *can’t hardly* tell.” The correct form is “I can *hardly* tell.”

Hate. A word that signifies “having a great aversion for,” but used colloquially for *dislike*. “I *hate* to do that kind of work.” *Hate* is too strong a word for such use. Say, “I *dislike* to do that kind of work” or “I *detest* that kind of work.”

Have to have. Avoid this useless repetition. Not, “I *have to have* my work done by noon,” but “I *must have* my work, etc” Do not say, “I have *got to get*” when “I *have to*

get” is what you should say.

Healthful, Healthy. Note the distinction in meaning between these words. *Healthful* is applied to conditions or environments: “Children should be reared in *healthful* surroundings.” *Healthy* describes a good physical condition, without disease, “A *healthy* mind in a *healthy* body is desirable.”

Hear to It. We “*hear of*” an accident or “will not *hear of*” a course being pursued, but *hear to it* is archaic. *Hear* signifies “listen to;” formerly, “He will not *hear to* reason” was accepted as idiomatic, but it is now rendered “He will not *listen to* reason.”

Hearty. “He ate a *hearty* breakfast” is good English idiom. *Hearty* means “strengthening” and “satisfying.”

Hectic. A word which specifically means “habitual,” “constitutional,” being derived from the Greek *hexis*, “habit of body;” but it has come to mean “flushed” as with fever, or affected with such fever as accompanies tuberculosis. It is often misapplied, as in “*hectic* haste,” in the sense of *feverish* or *excited*.

Hence, Thence, Whence. These words connote *removal from*; therefore, they should not be used with *from*. *Hence* is superfluous in such a sentence as “It will be many years *hence*, we apprehend, before he returns.”

Historic, Historical. “*Historic*,” a specialized word, means memorable; “*Historical*,” a more general term, means pertaining to history.

How. “I have heard *how*, in Italy, one is beset on all sides by beggars” should read “I have heard *that*, in Italy, etc.” But, “He told me *how* he worked his passage” is correct, since the reference is not to the fact, as in the first sentence, but to the manner of action.

How that and *as how*, as in “He told *how that* he would never return” or “He said as

how he would go,” are most objectionable colloquialisms.

However. Frequently misused for *how*, in such a sentence as “*However* could you tell such a story!” One should say, “*How* could you ever tell such a story!” *However* means “no matter what the extent of.” “*However* careful you may be, you will make mistakes” is correct.

Hustle. Properly this word means “shove,” “push,” or “jostle roughly.” Although frequently used colloquially for *hurry*, as in “*Hustle* that order along.” It is not properly a synonym for *hurry*.

I, Me. These forms of the personal pronoun of the first person are frequently confused. *Me* is the form to use with a preposition. Say “between you and *me*,” not “between you and *I*.” Similarly, “with her (him) and *me*,” not “with she (he) and *I*.”

Idioms. Like every other living language, English is constantly forming idioms, that is, special combinations of words that do not follow the rules of either grammar or logic. Baffling to outsiders, these expressions are clear to the initiated and, despite their irregularity, are in good standing as language. Phrases like “by and large,” “hold out,” “make good,” “pull through” and many others illustrate this phase of English expression.

If. *Whether* in place of *if* is preferred by most authorities in sentences like these: “I do not know *if* (*whether*) the book will suit you;” “I wonder *if* (*whether*) he has come.” The use of *if* for *whether* is colloquial or poetic. *Whether* is preferable to *if* especially where the additional idea of *or not* is implied. Compare “Let me know *if* you can go,” and “Let me know *whether* you can go.”

Ill, Sick. English usage confines the word *sick* chiefly to the meaning “nausea,” as a *sick headache*; but in America *ill* and *sick* are generally synonymous. However, we say: “He is a *sick* man,” never “He is an *ill* man;” but, either “He is *ill*” or “He is *sick*.”

In, Into. *In* is sometimes an adverb and sometimes a preposition, but its employment as an adverb is really an elliptical use of the preposition. As an adverb, *in* is correctly used in these sentences: “Come *in*,” for here *in* means “into the house, room, etc;” and likewise, “Go *in*,” meaning “Go into the room, house, etc.” As a preposition, *in* may be used with verbs of rest or of motion and *into* with verbs of motion only: “He sat *in* his chair;” “The child runs *in* the yard;” “He walked *into* the house.”

In back of. The expression “They sat *in back of* us” meaning “behind,” though analogous to “They sat *in front of* us,” is disapproved. *Behind* accurately express the thought. As to *in front of*, we have no corresponding preposition, since *before* may convey the idea of *facing* and thus may produce ambiguity.

Individual. The word is loosely or contemptuously used for *person*. It is used correctly in “Changes both in *individuals* and in communities are often produced by trifles;” contemptuously in “That *individual* left here several hours ago.”

Indulge. This word means “give oneself up to (something);” “yield to one’s longings or passions unrestrainedly;” “give free course to one’s habits;” “humor to excess, as children.” Thus, one *indulges* in idleness, or one *indulges* children’s whims or wishes. While one may *indulge* a thirst for fame, one should avoid “I never *indulge*” as objectionable in declining an offer of refreshment.

Infer, Imply. These words are frequently confused. One *infers* or *reasons* or *draws a conclusion* from something heard or read. One may *imply* (*suggest*) in what one writes or says, for example “One *infers* from what Jefferson wrote that the Declaration of Independence *implies* belief in democracy.”

Inferior to. Note that the correct form is *inferior to*, not *inferior than*. Example: “The substitute is nearly always *inferior to* the original product.” *Superior to* is of course the corresponding idiom.

Ingenious, Ingenuous. *Ingenious* means “skillful,” “inventive;” “The boy is *ingenious* and loves machinery.” *Ingenuous* means “candid,” “frank,” “open,” “innocent,” “guileless;” “He made an *ingenuous* reply.”

In our midst. Condemned by most critics as a substitute for *in the midst of (us)*. The purist prefers *among us*.

In so far as. A phrase formed on the analogy of *in as much as*, but *so far as* expresses the thought and *far* is itself an adverb; therefore *in* is superfluous. “*In so far as I know*” should be “*so far as I know*.” In “*in as much as*,” *much* is a noun and requires a preposition to give the phrase adverbial force.

In or Under the circumstances. Both phrases are in good use. *Circumstances* may imply merely attendant conditions not thought of as seriously modifying action. *In* is then the proper preposition; as, “*In the circumstances* he hesitated.” But when *action* is thought of as determined by the circumstances, as, “*Under the circumstances* prosecution of the case could not be avoided,” *under* is the approved word.

Irrelevant. The word means “unconnected with” or “not related to;” “His remarks were *irrelevant* to the discussion.” Do not pronounce it *irrevelant*.

Is that so? Courtesy will prompt a thoughtful person to be careful *how* and *when* he uses this and the similar phrase, “You don’t say so,” for they imply doubt or disbelief as well as express surprise. As subject to equivocal interpretation they should be avoided. “I want to know,” used in a similar sense, is vulgar.

Its, It’s. Sheer carelessness causes many people to confuse the spelling of the possessive pronoun “its” (“A tree is known by its fruit”) with contraction of “it is” (“It’s going to rain”).

Junk. Colloquial or slang when used as a verb for *discard*, or “throw away as

useless.”

Just. This adverb is correctly used for *precisely, only, merely, or by a slight margin*; it is colloquial when the meaning is “quite,” “very,” “altogether,” or “simply.” Say, “I *just* missed the car,” but not “The hostess was *just* lovely, but the food was *just* awful.” Such a statement is ambiguous.

Kind. The word is singular. One should say, “this *kind*,” not “these *kind*.” But “those *kinds*,” not “those *kind*,” is correct.

Kind of. Avoid the use of *a* as a modifier before a noun when preceded by *kind of*. “What *kind of* man is he?” is correct. “What *kind of a* man is he?” is incorrect.

Kind of tired, amusing, etc., are slovenly speech. *Somewhat tired, rather amusing*, are preferred.

Lady. Address a woman who is a stranger to you as *Madam*, and not as *lady*. Persons of culture do not say, “She is a fine *lady*,” “a clever *lady*,” they use *woman* instead. Ladies say, “The *women* of America,” “*women’s* interests.” In like manner use *man* or *men* instead of *gentleman* or *gentlemen*.

Last, Latest. We speak of an author’s *latest* book, but hardly of his *last* book until he is dead. But we say properly, “Have you read the *last* number of this magazine?” Here *last* means “latest in a series.”

Last two. This phrase is preferred by most authorities to *two last*. “They bought the *last two* copies of the book.”

Laundered. The clothes were *laundered*, not *laundried*.

Lay, Lie (verbs). *Lay* is transitive and denotes an *action* on an object; *lie* is

intransitive and designates a *state* or a *condition*: “I *lay* the rug on the floor, and it *lies* there.” “They *laid* him with his fathers.” “He *lies* with his fathers.” The following expressions are idiomatic: “A thing *lies* by us until we bring it into use;” “We *lay* it by for some future purpose.”

The confusion arises probably from the fact that *lay* appears in both verbs. The words are correctly used in the following sentences:

I *lay* the book on the table today.

I *laid* it there yesterday.

I have *laid* it there everyday.

I am *laying* it there now.

I *lie* on my bed today.

I *lay* there yesterday.

I have *lain* there everyday.

I am *lying* there now.

Lay, Lie. (nouns). Both of these words are in good use to signify the manner in which land *lies* in its relation to the surrounding country. “The *lay* of the land” is in popular favor; “the *lie* of the land” has the support of the scientists. The latter is the older English usage.

Learn, Teach. Formerly *learn* and *teach* were used interchangeably, but now to confuse them is a mark of illiteracy. We *learn* things for ourselves; we try to *teach* others.

Leave, Let. One takes one’s *leave* after a call or visit. We ask *leave* or *permission*. One is on *leave*, that is, enjoying permitted absence from his usual place of duty. Do not say “*Leave* him do it,” but “*Let* him do it.” Properly, one *leaves* (goes away from) a place, but he *lets* a person or thing alone, that is, does not meddle or interfere. Still, one correctly asks to be “*left* to himself,” that is, asks others to “*leave*” or “go away from” him.

Legible, Readable. A “*legible*” piece of writing is clear to the eye, that is, easily deciphered. A “*readable*” book is one that invites reading because of its interesting style and content.

Lend, Loan. The verb *lend* is the general word to use when we supply something to another with the understanding that it is to be returned. Say, “*Lend* (not loan) me the books or money.” The use of *loan* as a synonym for lend, although of English origin, has been condemned as an Americanism; but it has fallen into disuse except in financial circles. One says correctly, “He tried to get a *loan* from the bank,” where *loan* is used as a noun. “The company *loans* money on good security;” here the word is used as a verb.

Let alone. A vulgarism when used to mean “excluding,” “not to mention.” Avoid such expressions as “The inconvenience was bad enough, *let alone* the expense.”

Like, As. *Like* is not used for *as* in the New England States; the use is common in the South and the West. The phrase *like of that* should be avoided in “We spend our days fishing, canoeing, and the *like of that* (or *like that*),” for it is a vulgarism. Do not say “Do *like* I do;” “I felt *like* I would faint;” “My feet were heavy *like*;” or “He had *liked* to have been killed,” meaning “came near to being killed.” Say, “Do *as* I do;” “I felt *as if*,” “My feet *seemed* heavy.” But one may say, “She walks *like* a queen,” meaning “in the manner of.” To use the tautological phrase *like as if* is to display one’s ignorance.

Like, Likely. The first is frequently erroneously used in conversation instead of the second. *Like* means “similar,” “corresponding,” “equal,” and “resembling.” *Likely*, as an adjective, means “probable,” “suitable,” “adaptable,” or adverbially “to be reasonably expected.” Avoid “He is *like* to call today” as illiterate. The following is correct: “In *like* circumstances, a repetition of the occurrence is *likely*.”

Literally. This word is often used for emphasis as a synonym for “actually,” “positively,” or some other intensive adverb. Its real meaning “according to the letter,”

places it in direct opposition to “figuratively.”

Locate. Colloquial for *settle* or *establish*. Prefer “He *settled* in Colorado;” “They *established* their business in London.”

Lot, Lots. These words are in colloquial use for *much*, *many*, as “a *lot* of money,” “*lots* of people.” Prefer “a *great deal* of money,” “*much* money,” “*many* people.”

Love, Like. *Love* is a much abused English word. In modern practice *like* is used where taste is concerned and where no strong emotion is involved. One who delights in sweets is appropriately said to *like* candy. Of course, one may *like* a person without *loving* him - that is, enjoy his companionship. We *love* sweethearts, wives, husbands, children, friends, truth, country.

Lunch, Luncheon. The second of these words is the more formal, or perhaps we should say, the more pretentious. Its use borders on verbal elegance. We have *lunch* around 12:00 A.M. We may go to a *luncheon* at our company.

Luxurious, Luxuriant. Do not confuse these words. The first describes that which is “gratifying to the senses;” the second means “growing in abundance.” Correctly we speak of *luxurious* furnishings and of *luxuriant* foliage or vegetation.

-ly, adverbial suffix. Although “*ly*” is usually added to adjectives to form adverbs, only a misinformed purist would insist on using it in all cases. “Slow,” for example is a good adverb, with or without the “*ly*,” and “fast” cannot use it. “*Illy*” and “*Thusly*” are conspicuous examples of its mistaken application. Persons familiar with historical grammar will recall that adjectives ending in “*ly*” were once common. A few of them still persist, as “a comely lass,” “goodly number.”

Mad. When used to signify “very angry,” this word is a careless colloquialism. *Mad* properly means, “crazy.”

Manner, Manor. The correct phrase is *to the manner born*, not *to the manor born*. The phrase means “familiar with from birth.”

Materialize. When used to mean “take shape” or “happen,” the word is colloquial. Improperly used in the general sense of *appear*.

Mathematics. When considered as embracing the science of mathematics in its entirety as a concrete term, this word is construed with a verb in the singular; as, “*Mathematics* is the science that treats of quantities, their properties and relations, especially by the use of symbols;” “*Mathematics* is a subject in the course of study.” But, when used distributive, to convey the idea of its different branches or divisions, the word is construed with a verb in the plural: as, “*Mathematics* are mere evolutions of necessary ideas.” It should be borne in mind that mathematics are classified as *pure* or *abstract*, *applied* or *mixed*, and *quantities*, as projective geometry.

Mean. Do not use *mean* as an adjective for *sick*, *unpleasant*, or *ashamed*. Say, “He felt *ashamed* of it,” not “He felt *mean* about it.”

Mean, Intend, Purpose. Best usage may be illustrated as follows: “By this statement I *mean*, etc;” “We *intend* to go;” “He *purposes* a thorough test of the machine.” *Purpose* is a stronger word than *intend* and implies more careful thought.

Meanwhile. “*Meanwhile*” is an adverb of time equivalent to the phrase, “In the meantime.” It is grammatically wrong, therefore, to say “In the *meanwhile*.”

Meet. To say, “*Meet* Mr. Jones,” when introducing a friend, is bad form. But we say correctly, “Have you ever *met* Mrs. White?” meaning “being introduced to.” Prefer “I want you to *meet* Mrs. White” or “May I introduce you to Mr. Jones?”

Middling. This word is an adjective, meaning “moderate,” and should not be used as an adverb; therefore, we should not say that a thing is *middling* good, or that a thing is

middling well done. “He resided in a town of *middling* size” is correct, but “of *moderate* size” is preferable.

Mighty. When used instead of *exceedingly*, *very*, or *extremely*, this word is a colloquial intensive. Correctly used, *mighty* is a strong word indicating power of unusual force or quality; as, a *mighty* flood, a *mighty* monarch. It may connote uncommon size, as, *mighty* mountains.

Mistaken. The expression “If I am not *mistaken*,” though sometimes condemned as incorrect, is idiomatic and has been in use for several centuries with the sense “If I am not making a *mistake*.” “If I *mistake* not” is more formal, but it is thought by some to be stilted.

More than. Although its form implies plurality, this phrase is correctly construed as a singular; “*More than* one is there” or “There *is more than* one there.”

Most. As a contraction of *almost*, this word is a provincialism: “The dress is *almost* (not *most*) finished.” The use of *most* in the phrases *most perfect*, *most complete*, is sanctioned by good usage, on the ground that things are at best but relatively perfect or complete. Avoid the misuse of *most* in such colloquial forms as *most anybody* or *most anything*.

Mutual, Common. Recent writers do not insist so strongly upon the distinction between these two words. “We have *common* friends” or “We have *mutual* friends.” *Mutual*, strictly, means “reciprocal,” “existing, between two parties;” but, because the meaning “ordinary” may be implied by the word *common*, many people prefer to say, “*mutual* friends,” in spite of critics. There is, however, a clear and worthwhile distinction between the two words. *Common* means “belonging to all” as well as “ordinary.” When we speak of a *mutual* friend we mean “One who reciprocates our friendship,” and when we refer to a *common* friend, we mean “one whose friendship we share in common with other friends of his.” The sentence “We have many friends *in common*”

illustrates the point clearly, and is a good substitute for “We have many *common* friends.” Persons interested in the same things have *common* interests. When they are interested in each other, their interest is *mutual*.

Myself. This pronoun is an emphatic or reflexive form for the first person and should be used only where emphasis is required as in “Who did it? I *myself*,” that is, “I alone did it.” It is incorrect to say, “Mary and *myself* were satisfied” or “Two friends and *myself* went.” Say, “Two friends and I went” or “I went with two friends.” Do not say, “*Myself*, I do not like it.”

Neither, Neither nor. Because *neither*, like *either*, properly refers to one of two, it calls for a singular verb. Example: “Of the two leading candidates, *neither* was considered capable of filling the office.” The singular is also used with *neither nor*, since the two persons or things mentioned are taken separately, and not together, as in “*Neither* John *nor* William is qualified.”

New. Distinguish between *new* and *novel*. That which is *new* may be *novel*, but that which is *novel* need not be *new*. Anything striking or *different* from things with which we are familiar may be called *novel*. To say “*new* beginner” seems to argue utter indifference to the sense of words. To be a beginner is quite sufficient.

News. Notwithstanding its plural appearance, “news” is singular. Thus, we say “The news is good.” Compare “acoustics,” “politics” and other singular nouns ending in “s.”

Nice. This word means “exact” or “discriminating,” not “pleasant” or “good.” A *nice* distinction is one resulting from discriminating reasoning; one who is *nice* in regard to matters of food is fastidious and hard to please; *nice* food is inviting, dainty food. Anything that is done or made with scrupulous exactness, precision, or accuracy is termed nice; as, a *nice* balance, that is, an exact balance; *nice* workmanship, that is, the result of skilled labor.

Nicely. This word is frequently misused in the attempt to make it do service for *well*, in this wise; “How will this pen do?” “*Nicely.*” “How are you?” “*Nicely.*” Use *well* or *very well*, for *nicely* means “accurately,” “becomingly,” “exactly.”

None. A word that may be used with a verb in either the singular or the plural, depending on the intention of the person who uses it; as, “*None of these things move me;*” “*None but the brave deserves the fair.*”

Nor, Not. Use *nor* and *not or* after *no* when the definite exclusion of two distinct persons or things is intended; as, “He has *no* father *nor* mother.” But we use *or* when the following word merely explains the preceding: “The boy has *no* father *or* guardian.” After *not*, when the single negation applies to both objects, use *or*: “They do *not* see *or* hear.” But say, “They do *not* come, *nor* do they intend to come,” where two separate negations are implied. Here *nor* is, logically, the equivalent of *and not*. For logic, watch the position of *not*. Do not say, for example, “All Democrats are *not* Free Traders,” but “*Not* all Democrats are free Traders.”

No use. “It is *no use* to do that” should be “It is *of no use* to do that” or, preferably, “It is *useless* to do that.”

Nowhere. Do not say, “*nowhere* (or *nowheres*) near so much,” because *nowhere* means “not in any place or anywhere” or by extension, “at no time.” “Not nearly so much” is correct.

Number. A word that can be correctly construed with a verb in the singular or the plural, depending on the idea to be expressed or the word on which emphasis is placed. We say correctly, when thinking of the individuals of a group, “A large *number* were (not *was*) there.” Similarly, “There are a large *number* of people” or “There are many.” But, if we contend to convey the idea of a unit, we say “The *number* of women present was small.” When any phrase that has qualifying force seems to contradict in number the noun or verb with which it is used, an adjective should be substituted, so that the

sentence shall correspond in form with the idea it is intended to convey. For example, “A *number* of changes *was* made,” or “A *number* of changer *were* made.” Better, “*Numerous changes were made.*”

Observance, Observation. *Observe* the following distinction: “Close *observation* of our customers shows too little *observance* of Sunday and of patriotic anniversaries.” *Observation* means “the act of looking at or examining,” or the result of such action. *Observance* implies recognition, as with service or ceremony.

Of, Off. The two words are from the same source and are subject to confusion in common speech. When *of* follows a superlative, the thing referred to as best, largest, etc., is to be thought of as included in a whole group; hence the rule requiring *of all* in the following: “She was the loveliest *of all* (not *any*).” “He was the least observed *of all* (not *all others*).” *Any* and *others* imply separation of groups for comparison, and are used appropriately only with the comparative degree: “He was less observed than *any of the others* (who were observed - understood).” *Any* requires *other(s)* or one else or a similar expression to follow it.

Off of, Off from. *Of* or *from*, in these phrases, should be omitted from such a sentence as the following: “The pears fell *off (of) (from)* the tree.” *Off* expresses the idea of separation. *Of* and *from* are superfluous.

O.K. This commercial expression is used as noun, adjective, and verb: “Give this your *O.K.* (approval).” “His work is *O.K.* (all right, correct).” “He refused to *O.K.* (approve) The order.” Since *O.K.* as an adjective means “all right,” do not say “all *O.K.*” “The requisition is *O.K.* (not *all O.K.*).”

One - One’s. While purists insist that *one*, as in the sentence “*One* meets *one’s* friends in the city,” should be followed by *one’s* and never by *her* or *his*, usage sanctions either form where no ambiguity would result. But after *anyone*, *every one*, *no one*, etc., use *he (his)* or *she (hers)* “*No one* knows where *he* will meet an acquaintance.” Never

use *they* (*their*) with *one* in such a sentence as “*Every one* makes *his* own choice,” for *one* is singular. Do not say, “When *one* travels, you want pleasant companions,” for *one* is a pronoun of the third person, and any following pronoun used in its place should be of the same person. Generally, avoid the use of *one* when a repetition of the word would be required.

Ones. Instead of saying, “I do not like the other *ones*,” say, “I do not like the *others*.” *Ones* is in good usage only in such phrases as “big *ones*” and “little *ones*.” “Here are big stones and little *ones*.”

One time, Then. Such expressions as her *one time* guardian and the *then* bishop of New York are convenient, clear, and economical, and they are approved by good authority.

Only. This word is probably more often misplaced than any other word in the language. “He *only* sang for us.” “He sang *only* for us.” The first sentence means that he *sang*, but did not *play* for us; the second means that he sang for *us* and not for *anyone else*. *Only* is regularly placed before the word it modifies: “*Only* he (or *only* John) sang for us.” That is, no one else sang.

Onto, On to. The use of *onto* in such expressions as “He got *onto* the platform with difficulty” is justified by good authority. The use follows the analogy of *upon*, *into*, and others implying motion. Some authorities do not yet allow *onto*, although they approve *on to*, but the two forms have quite distinct uses. One should not say, “He walked *onto* the next town,” but “He walked *on to* the next town.”

Oral, Verbal. *Verbal* means “in words,” either spoken or written; *oral* means “uttered by the mouth,” “spoken.”

Other. This word should not be omitted from sentences like the following: “He said that his wife was dressed better than any *other* woman there.” The omission of *other*

makes the statement include the person spoken of in the group with which she is compared. In stating a comparison avoid comparing a thing with itself.

Ought, Should. *Ought* is the stronger term. What we *ought* to do, we are morally bound to do: We *ought* to be truthful and honest, and we *should* be respectful to our elders.

Over, Across. There is a nice distinction between these words: A dog walks *across* the street, but he leaps over an obstruction. *Across* suggests merely passage from one limit to another; *over* also implies elevation.

Overlook, Oversee. *Overlook* means, usually “miss seeing,” “not notice.” “He *overlooked* the important point.” *Oversee* means “supervise.” *Look over* may mean “examine.”

Own. The use of *own* to mean “admit to be true” or “concede” is supported by good usage; as, “He *owned* to his fault.” Colloquially, *own* has come to mean “confess” or “clear one’s mind of a matter,” as in the sentence “He was accused and finally *owned* up.”

Pair. With numbers, as “three *pairs*,” best usage favors the plural, the use of the singular, as “three *pair*,” being confined to trade cant.

Parcel post. This form is correct, not *parcels post*.

Partake. The word means literally, “take part,” “share.” In this sense, several persons may *partake*, or one may *partake* with others. But the word is also in good use to mean “take” or “appropriate,” without reference to sharing; as, “He *partook* of the food.”

Party. The word should not be used generally for *person*. Not “the *party* that I saw,”

but “the *person* that I saw.” We speak correctly, however, of the *parties* to a contract or an agreement.

Passive Progressive. Modern practice prefers “The church *is being built*” or “Cattle *are being sold* at fifty dollars a head” to the former usage “The church *is building*” or “Cattle *are selling*, etc.” Say, “The boy *is being taught*,” not “The boy *is teaching*,” when the intention is to express the idea that the lad is receiving instruction.

Pep. Expressive slang for *energy*, *vigor*, but as yet it seems usually to need an apology.

Per. This preposition, originally taken from Latin phrases like *per diem* (by the day) and *per annum* (by the year), is often found in hybrid expressions such as “Ten dollars *per day*” or worse still, in the clipped form, “Ten dollars *per*.” It is much better to use consistent English as in “Ten dollars a day.”

Perform. Say, “She *plays* the piano beautifully,” not “She *performs* beautifully on the piano.” This sentence would be improved by using *well* or *admirably* in place of *beautifully*.

Place. (verb). *Place* means “lay in position.” Some authorities think one should say, “*place* a thing *into* a box;” but there is hardly enough of the idea of motion in the word *place* to justify *into*. *Place in* is more appropriate.

Plan on. “Do you *plan on* going?” A provincialism better expressed by “Do you *plan* going?”

Plebiscite. A word introduced into English from the French many years ago. Its recent revival is one of the results of World War I. The word means “a referendum, or vote of the people, in a district or state.”

Plenty, Plentiful. One may say, “There will be *plenty* of fruit this fall;” but good usage calls for “Fruit will be *plentiful* (not *plenty*).” Used as an adverb, “plenty” has a colloquial crudity that is especially objectionable; for example, “plenty good” instead of “very good.”

Plurality, Majority. “The president received a *plurality* of the votes cast for all candidates throughout the country” means that he received more than any other candidate. “The election of an officer requires a *majority*” means that election requires one vote or more in excess of half the total number of votes.

Point of view. Frequently expressed by *standpoint* or *viewpoint* in common usage. Most authorities frown upon *viewpoint* and prefer *point of view*. *Standpoint* is well established. Some would even use *angle* as a synonym. This last word is still colloquial, but there is a tendency to accept it.

Ponderous phraseology. Either through deliberate affectation or through unconscious imitation of “fine” writing, people may fall into the habit of using showy or pedantic phraseology. For example, instead of being “thanked,” a person may be “made the recipient of grateful acknowledgements.” Charles Dickens depicted several characters whose linguistic finery emphasized the shabbiness of their personalities. Thus, instead of quoting the simple Anglo-Saxon saying that “a cat can look at a king,” Mr. George, in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, translates: “I have heard it said that a cat is free to contemplate a monarch.” On this subject, a word to the wise should be sufficient.

Possessive with Verbal Noun. “We did not know of *his* going.” “The idea of *our* doing such a thing.” “The fact of the *team’s* playing at home interested him.” These sentences represent approved usage. Occasionally, in the use of nouns, the possessive seems awkward or sounds harsh, and is omitted as unnecessary.

Post, Mail. The distinction in the use of these words is merely national. *We mail* letters in the United States and *post* them in Great Britain.

Posted. The use of this word for *informed*, in such expressions as “The man *posted* me” and “If I had been better posted,” should be discouraged in favor of *informed*.

Practical, Practicable. *Practical* means “not theoretical” or “concerned with doing rather than with reasoning.” *Practicable* means “capable of being done under given conditions:” “A *practical* man will suggest *practicable* plans.”

Practically, Virtually. These words are both used to mean “essentially” or “in reality:” “The battle was *practically* over:” “He is *virtually* bankrupt.” *Virtually* is preferred as expressing actuality in referring to conditions that exist but are not self-evident; for example, “Fighting continued *practically* all night, but the issue of the battle had already been *virtually* decided.”

Prefer. “For making bread, do you *prefer* wheaten flour or corn flour?” “I *prefer* wheat to corn.” Do not say, “I *prefer* wheat *rather than* corn.” The *pre-* in *prefer* supplies the sense of *rather* or *before*.

Prejudice. This word connotes a bias or unfavorable attitude toward a person or thing and should not be used to indicate approbation, as in “The man is *prejudiced* in his favor.” We should say, “He is predisposed (or *prepossessed*) in his favor.”

Prepositions at Ends of Sentences. Sentences that end with prepositions are frequently more terse, always quite as idiomatic, and invariably simpler than they might be if differently constructed: “the man I gave it *to*” or “the man *to* whom I gave it;” “the verb it belongs *to*” or “the verb *to* which it belongs.”

Pressure. This word in the sense of *influence* frequently carries a sinister meaning, but when it signifies *urgency* it is in good use; as, “the *pressure* of affairs or of business.”

Pretty. Correctly used as an adverb, in such expressions as *pretty soon* or *pretty*

well, meaning “rather,” “somewhat.” However, its repeated use tends to restrict one’s vocabulary, to the exclusion of more appropriate words.

Preventive. Among careful speakers this word has never had any completion from the awkward and undesirable form *preventative*. Unless the long and the short form represent two different meanings, as in *visit* and *visitation*, the shorter one is always preferable. Compare the verbs *experiment* and *experimentalize*.

Previous, Principle. Both are in good use, but *previously* is necessary when the idea is adverbial: “*Previously* to our coming the affair had been settled.” But we say correctly, “That event was *previous* to our coming.” The same principle applies to *subsequent*, *relative*, etc.

Principal, Principle. *Principal*, usually an adjective (“The *principal* advantage”), is also used as a noun: “The *principal* of a school,” “*principal* and interest.” *Principle* is always a noun: “Both machines operate on this *principle*.”

Proceeds. Use the plural verb with this word: “The *proceeds* were (not *was*) applied.”

Procure. Usually, Anglo-Saxon *get* is preferable to Latin *procure*; e.g., “Where did you *get* it,” not “Where did you *procure* it?” *Procure* suggests provision for the future, as in the *procurement* of military supplies.

Promise. Often misused for *assure*, as in “I *promise* you I was agreeably surprised,” which should be “I *assure* you, etc.” The word *promise* refers the future: “We *promise* to do our best.”

Propose, Purpose. These words are not exact synonyms as the following sentence shows: “I *propose* to build a house and *purpose* to live in it when it is ready.” *Propose*

implies a definite, specific plan; *purpose*, a more general intention.

Proposition. Commercial cant for *proposal*, *task*, or *undertaking*, all of which are preferable.

“Proud” words. At some time or other nearly everyone increases their working vocabulary by the addition of words that seem to lend distinction to their style. Through succeeding decades various words have served in this capacity. Once the favorite was “intriguing,” then “devastating,” then “priceless.” As one man said when his attention was called to this matter, “Now that you have made me self-conscious, I believe that “currently” is currently my favorite.” Caution regarding these “vogue” words is advisable for two reasons. First, they are likely to be overused; secondly, they soon become vague and general in meaning.

Prove. In the past tense and the past participle, *proved*, not *proven*, is correct, except in legal papers.

Providing. This should not be used for *provided*: “He offered to furnish a car, *provided* (not *providing*) the company would pay for gasoline and repairs.”

Put. Like *do*, *put* has many meanings that are not in good literary use: *put*, meaning “go” or “get out;” *put up with* (*endure*); *put out* (*displease*); *put past*, as in “I should not *put it past* him,” meaning “I suspect him to be capable of it;” *put up*, as in “He *put up* at the hotel (*stayed at*).” A forceful idiomatic phrase is *stay put*.

Quite. The word means “entirely,” “completely,” “altogether;” “The building is *quite* complete.”

It means in addition, “to a considerable extent or degree,” “noticeably;” as, “The water is *quite* cold;” “The day was *quite* warm.” The word is not properly used to mean “very” or “rather,” as in “The book is *quite* interesting” or “She is *quite* ill.” Such a colloquial phrase as *quite a bit* is questionable. *Quite some* is vulgar.

Raise. This word is applied in America to the bringing up of children, although formerly its use was common in this sense in England also. Modern usage applies the word to the breeding and rearing of animals and to the propagation and nurture of plants. Thus, one may *raise* children, animals, and plants. Children and animals may be *reared*.

Re, In re. A piece of old law Latin transferred to business letters and not an abbreviation of *regarding*, as it is frequently taken to be. It means “matter,” “in the matter of,” or “on the subject of.” The English phrase *referring to* is preferable and is, in fact, very generally used.

Real. Avoid the misuse of this word as an adverb in the sense of *very*. Say, “The house is *very* (not real) pleasant.” The adverb *really* means “actually,” as in “The story is *really* true.”

Recipe, Receipt. The confusion of these two words is very old. Both words formerly meant a “medical formula,” for which today we use the word prescription. While both are still applied to *cooking directions* there is a strong tendency in the best modern usage to reserve this sense for the word *recipe*, *receipt* being employed for commercial and other use in the sense of *receiving* or in *acknowledgement of receiving*. Say, “He paid the bill and was given a *receipt*.” “She has an excellent *recipe* for making clam chowder.”

Recollect, Remember. *Recollect* refers to the recalling of events or facts, while *remember* refers to what may be in the mind continually: “He *remembers* very well his early youth.” “I *recollect* now my first visit to the circus.”

Regard. The plural of this word is sometimes erroneously used in the phrase *in regards to*, meaning “relating to,” “concerning,” or “about.” It is correctly used in “He spoke *in regard to* bonuses.”

Regrettable, Regretful. Strange to say, these words are often confused, even by otherwise careful speakers. An act may be “*regrettable*,” that is, something to be *regretted*. A person’s attitude may be “*regretful*” as they contemplate the act and its consequences.

Relations, Relatives. The following sentence illustrates the preferred use of these words: “One’s *relations* with one’s *relatives* may be pleasant or unpleasant.” *Kin* nor *kinsfolk* implies blood relationship.

Respectively, Respectfully. Do not confuse these words: “They were called *respectively* (that is, *in the order named*) Jim, Sam, and Al;” but “They were *respectfully* called (that is, *in a respectful manner*) James, Samuel, and Albert.”

Risque. Sometimes written *risky*. The words are not properly used as synonyms. That which is *risqué* is broadly suggestive to the point of obscenity; it borders on the obscene or questionable in art or writing: “a *risqué* story.” In English usage, *risky* means “bold,” “audacious,” “daring,” but lacks the equivocal force of the French word.

Same. Disapproved as a substitute for *it*, *they*, etc.: “We have sent the goods by express, and we hope you will receive *them* (not *same*) promptly.” Legal usage allows *the same* for it: “If said tenant defaces *the same*, etc.”

“**Says I.**” A vulgarism.

Scared. Do not use *sacred of* when you mean *scared by*. Many people use this phrase carelessly. Prefer *afraid of* or *fearful of*.

Scrap. This is commercial cant, meaning, as a verb, “discard” as out-of-date or unprofitable; “The ships and the plant will be *scrapped*.”

Secondhand. Say, “We bought the car *secondhand*, not *secondhanded*.”

See. The frequent interrogatory “*See!*” with which some persons sprinkle their conversation in their anxiety to secure attention, is most objectionable from the point of view either of manners or of language.

Seen. Not to be used for *saw*, which is the correct past tense of *see*. Avoid “I *seen* him last week” or “He *seen* that,” as the height of vulgarity.

Sell. Formerly, “to *sell* a person” meant “to play a joke upon him.” Now the same phrase is commercial cant, meaning “to *sell* something to him.” Colloquially, *sell* may mean to convince.

Sequel. *Sequel* means “something that follows,” as a continuation or consequence. It is used frequently of events or stories related in books: “The *Gay-Dombey*s may be called a sequel to *Dombey and Son*;” “The *sequel* of their marriage was a divorce.”

Set, Sit. These verbs, like *lay* and *lie*, have long been subject to confusion. In modern usage, *set* is transitive; *sit* is intransitive. I *set* the hen, but she *sits* on her eggs. Incorrectly we speak of a *setting* hen, instead of a *sitting* hen. In Matthew, it was prophesied that Christ should come “*sitting* upon an ass,” and His disciples took a colt and “*sat* Him thereon.” The verbs are correctly used in these sentences: “My coat *sits* well;” “We will *sit* up,” that is, “will not go to bed;” “Congress *sits*,” “We *set* down figures,” but “We *sit* down on the ground.” But a very old intransitive use of *set* persists in the expressions, “the sun *sets*,” “*sunset*,” “*setting sun*,” which are accepted as correct.

Sat. - This is both past tense and past participle of *sit*. I *have sat* is correct.

Sewage, Sewerage. *Sewerage* is the system of pipes and tunnels for carrying away the *sewage*, or waste matter from buildings.

Shall, Will. These are auxiliary (helping) verbs, used to determine various modes and tenses of the action involved in a principal verb. In respect to these words, there

are four important groups of idiomatic uses: (1) in declarative statements; (2) in questions; (3) in subordinate clauses; (4) in expressions of future requirement (veiled command).

1. *Declarative Statements.* - The following are the correct uses of *shall* and *will* with the personal pronouns, to express simple future action, declaratively and interrogatively:

DECLARATIVE

I shall

You will

He will

We shall

You will

They will

INTERROGATIVE

Shall I?

Shall you?

Will he?

Shall we?

Shall you?

Will they?

For the expression of the speaker's determination or command, *shall* and *will* exchange places in the foregoing table. For example: "I *shall*" becomes "I *will*," "He *will*" becomes "He *shall*."

In the sense of *willing*, *determining*, *commanding*, or *requiring*, neither *shall* nor *will* has anything to do with "time," except as any command must be executed "after" it is given. This is clear in certain cases, where expression and action may well come together: "*Will* you sit here?" "Yes; I *will*," where the action is suited to the word, or, "*Wilt* thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife?" "I *will*."

2. *Questions.* - In questions, one uses the word expected in the answer: "*Shall* you speak?" expecting "I *shall* speak;" but "*Will* you speak?" expecting "I *will* speak."

But notice that "*Shall* you be glad to go?" is appropriate, while "*Will* you be glad to go?" is not, since gladness is not a matter of will. Only rarely may *will* be used interrogatively in the first person, because, as long as there is question in the mind,

there is no will. Such a formal sentence as “We *will* ratify this treaty, *will* we not?” is approved; and we not frequently exclaim, somewhat ironically, “*Will* I?” as if to say, “I *will* not” or “I certainly *will*.”

3. *Subordinate Clauses.* - In subordinate clauses introduced by *that*, after such expressions as “It is said” or “Someone has said” or “It has been commanded,” use the auxiliary that would be used in the original principle statement. For example; when the original statement or command was “He (or You) *shall* do the work,” the clause of indirect quotation becomes “He has said that he (or you or I) *shall* do the work;” similarly, “he (or You) *will* do the work” becomes: “He has said that he (or You or I) *will* do the work.” In the former case *shall* retains its ancient force of obligation; in the latter, *will* retains its essential meaning of willingness or readiness. The following sentence further illustrates the use of *shall* to express determination: “We have decided that the contract *shall* be let to you, and that you *shall* follow specifications.” If the subordinate clause follows such a verb as *suppose, think, believe, or know*, then the usage for *shall* and *will* in the subordinate clause is the same as for an independent declarative statement. Example: “I think that I *shall* never see a poem lovely as a tree.”

In subordinate clauses introduced by such conjunctions as *if, when, whether, or although*, *shall* expresses simple future action in every person, while *will*, in every person, expresses willingness or determination. Examples: “If you *will* remember the rule, I *shall* be greatly obliged.” “Although I *shall* see him, I *will* not speak.” “If he *will* not meet me, I *will* not seek him.”

Such use of *shall* is usually avoided by some other expression. Examples: “If I see him, I *will* speak;” “If he *does not meet* me, I *shall* not need to speak.”

4. *Requirements and Commands.* - *Will* has a peculiar use to express a verbal command or a courteous request: “You *will* report back to headquarters on Sunday morning,” that is, “You are required to report;” “You *will* please say no more about the matter” means that it is my wish, entreaty,

or pleasure that you say no more about it.

Shape, Condition. A crude but common use of “*shape*” is to say that a person is “in bad *shape*” (ill), or that their affairs are “in good *shape*” (financially). The word “*condition*” is waiting to be used in such cases.

Should, Would. Although, in origin, these are past tenses of *shall* and *will*, they are now properly to be thought of as independent of the latter verbs. Their uses are highly idiomatic.

In affirmative principle clauses, *should* may express obligation in all persons: “I (You or He) should (*ought to*) attend the lecture.” *Would*, in affirmative principal clauses and in all persons, may express willingness or determination dependent upon circumstances: “We (You, They) *would* come, if an invitation were given.”

1. In the first person, *should*, and in other persons, *would* may express simply action dependent upon circumstances: “I should (They *would*) come, were it convenient.”

2. In simple questions, the word expected in the answer is used: “*Should* he go?” “He *should*,” “*Would* you consider it?” “I *would*.”

3. In *if* clauses, *should* expresses a condition involving action merely, *would* expresses a condition involving will: “If I *should* correct the error, the work would be approved;” “If you *would* permit me, I *would* correct the error.”

4. *Would* may express intense desire: “I *would* that we might see them again.” It expresses also, in reference to past time, habitual action: “He *would* walk up and down.”

5. It should be observed that *would* is rarely used interrogatively in the first person except in such a half-ironical expression as “*Would* I?” implying “I certainly *would*” or “I

certainly *would* not.”

6. Many of the shades of meaning attached to *should* and *would* can be expressed only by changes in the tone of the voice. A fair-sized volume might be written about them.

Should seem, Would seem. These are useless locutions when plain *seem* or *seems* would express the meaning. They are appropriate, however, to suggest doubt, hesitation, or modesty in expressing a judgment.

Show me. Slang for *prove to me*.

Since when. This phrase, in which *when* is employed as a substantive, is used correctly in a relative clause: “We moved out West, *since when* (or *since which time*) we have not moved again.” However, it is not approved in interrogative constructions: as, “*Since when* have you known that?” “How long have you known that?” is correct.

Sit up. We say to a child, “*Sit up*,” meaning “sit erectly.” We *sit up*, that is, remain out of bed until a late hour. Compare the expressive slang, “Make one *sit up* and take notice.” These phrase are not in good literary use.

Size up. Slang for *estimate, judge, classify*. *Up* is very frequent in careless colloquial speech and slang; as, *eat up, all up (with), stay up*, etc.

Slow, Slowly. Many adjectives in English need no change of form for adverbial use. *Fast* and *slow* are examples of this. Space economy on signs probably helps to maintain this form *slow* in such expressions as “Go *slow*,” though it has long history in the language.

Smart. One should carefully observe the various meanings of this word. It is in good use for *bright, intelligent, brisk, and lively*. But in “He is a *smart* boy,” the word may

have the sense commonly, attributed to it formerly, “sharp and impertinent,” or that implied by bright and intelligent. After the English manner, one hears of *smart* clothes. The phrase *right smart*, meaning “much,” “a good deal of,” is provincial.

Smell of. We *smell* the rose, not *smell of* it. But we say properly, “The jar *smells of* rose leaves.” The verb is transitive and intransitive.

So. Avoid using *so* as a bridge between the parts of a loose sentence. Example: “We couldn’t find the house, *so* we started to go home, but it began to rain, *so* we waited,” et cetera. Colloquial use of the adverb *so* without a *that*-clause is undesirable. Example: “The game was *so* exciting.” But it proper to say, “The book is *so* interesting that you will want to finish it at one sitting.”

Some, Somewhat. *Some*, probably an indefinite adjective denoting number or quantity, is often used erroneously for *somewhat*, an adverb of degree, even by educated men and women. Such use appears frequently in the newspapers; but it is condemned as dialectal or provincial by all authorities, and it has no support in literary usage. Say, “I am *somewhat* tired,” never “I am *some* tired;” “His estimate is *somewhat* greater,” not “*some* greater.” The colloquial use of *some*, to suggest exceptional quality or importance as in “He is *some* manager,” is equally to be disapproved.

Somewhere. “I have seen him someplace” is not an acceptable substitute for the correct form, “I have seen him *somewhere*.” The same distinction should be observed in “any place” and “anywhere.”

Split Infinitive. Since an infinitive consists of a verb plus the particle “to,” the insertion of an adverbial modifier between them creates a “*split infinitive*,” for example: “Be careful to thoroughly mix the ingredients.” Unsplitting the infinitive may be done either (1) by placing the adverb after the verb (“Be careful to mix the ingredients thoroughly”) or (2) by placing it just before the verb (“Be careful thoroughly to mix the ingredients”). The first of these two constructions is simple and natural, and is usually

preferable. Although, the second arrangement is technically correct, it is formal and rather consciously precise. Sometimes it is also obscure. In the example cited above, there is a suggestion that “thoroughly” applies to “be careful” instead of to “mix.” Anyway, the normal order is for the adverb to follow the verb.

Stand. Colloquial for *endure* in such an expression as “They can’t *stand* it.”

Stand a chance. Colloquial for *be likely*. “Does he *stand a chance* of election?” means “*Is he likely* to be elected.”

Stand for. Colloquial for *endure* or *allow*; as, “We will not *stand for* such conduct.”

State. We may say, “He *stated* his reasons in writing.” *State* is a formal word and should not be used, as it frequently is in newspapers, to mean simply “say” or “tell.”

Station, Depot. A *depot* is properly a place where goods or stores of any kind are kept; the places at which the trains of a railroad stop for passengers and the points they start from or arrive at are properly the *stations*. But, as a *depot* is a place of storage, so a *terminal* of a railroad line, where the rolling stock is kept to make up trains, may be spoken of correctly as a *depot*.

Stimulant, Stimulus. A *stimulant* is an agent that produces a temporary increase of energy. More abstractly, a *stimulus* is an exciting motive or impulse.

Stop, Stay. The colloquial phrases *stop off*, *stop in*, *stop over*, are frowned on by critics. The first means to “step off” or “alight and stay at” some place; the second means “step in and call” or merely “call;” the last has gained position in railway can’t, as in “*stop-over* privileges.”

To *stop* is to arrest motion; to *stay* is to remain where motion is arrested. We may *stop* at a hotel; but how long we *stay* depends upon circumstances.

Storm. A violent commotion of the atmosphere is a *storm*. Avoid the word when referring to *rains* or *snows*, unless *rainstorms* or *snowstorms* are involved.

Street. Many careful speakers regard the expression “They live *in* John *street*” as better and more accurate than “They live *on* John *street*.” General American usage seems to approve *on the street*. Colloquially, we say, “play *in the street*,” one’s house being thought of as bordering *on* the real *street*. “He has offices in Wall *street*” is a form of speech frequently heard. This implies the idea of the *street* as a financial center, including the buildings on it. The whole question turns upon our idea of what the word *street* includes.

Stricken. This form of the past participle of *strike* is used when misfortune or disability is implied: “He was *stricken* with fever;” “They were panic-*stricken*.” *Struck* is the usual form of other meanings: “He was *struck* by a stone.”

Such. “I have never seen *such a small* man” should be “I have never seen *so small* a man,” as may be seen by transposing the words of the first sentence, which then becomes “I have never seen a man *such small*.” Similarly, *such a pretty, lovely, etc.*, should be *so pretty a, lovely a*. However, in the sentence “It was *such a large* package as could not be carried in the car,” *such a* is regarded as correct, meaning “*a large package* like this one.”

Suffixes. See *Word Building*. Several suffixes are sources of common error, because of indiscriminate use:

-*ette*. This syllable is a French feminine diminutive, the masculine being -*et*. A *kitchenette*, then is a little kitchen, feminine because of associations, probably. But *leatherette* is imitation leather. So we pass to the half-humorous, half-contemptuous *farmerette* and *suffragette*.

-*let*. This is another French ending, meaning “little.” One should not say, “Little *booklet*,” the *little* being superfluous.

Sure. “He will *surely* be here,” not “He will be here *sure*.” “*Sure*, I’ll do it” is slang. *Surely* is the adverb; *sure*, the adjective.

Suspicion. *Suspicion* is not in good use as a verb; prefer *suspect*.

Take. A verb, either transitive or intransitive. Combined with various prepositions and adverbs, it forms many idiomatic phrases and also many colloquial and slang phrases: “One *takes* leave,” that is, assumes or receives permission to leave a place or a company; “One *takes to* a person,” that is, *likes* him. Some uses, however, are to be avoided as vulgarisms: “She *took on* (*scolded, raged, cried*) dreadfully;” “School *takes up* at 8:00.” Compare “*lets out* at 4:00,” which is school cant.

Tasty. This word is an objectionable colloquialism for *tasteful*, when applied to persons, dress, furniture, etc. It is allowable in application to food. The following distinction is correct: Pie may be *tasty*, but the decorations of a room should be *tasteful*.

Tautology. Through carelessness, repetitive or overlapping expressions find their way into the speech of many people. Note such common examples as “*old* veteran,” “*ancient* adage,” “widow *woman*,” and, somewhat more subtly, “consensus of *opinion*.” A different case is provided by intentional repetition for emphasis, as in “the same identical person,” and the purposeful repetition in legal phrasing, as in “I hereby give, devise and bequeath,” etc.

Tenses, Sequence of. The general rule to be observed regarding tenses is that the verb in a dependent clause takes its tense from the verb in the main clause. Thus: “I think (present) that he is (present) honest” becomes “I thought (past) that he was (past) honest” when the tense of the main verb is changed. Usually, we can depend upon our “feeling for language” to save us from such mixed forms as “Give that others *might* live” instead of the correct sequence “Give that others *may* live.”

Terminal prepositions. Puristic people insist on following a rigid rule that a sentence

should never end with a preposition. For a vigorous, if slightly colloquial, statement like, “This is something worth thinking about,” they would substitute the formal phrasing, “This is something about which it is worth while to think.” What they overlook is the close relationship that often exists between verb and preposition, making the two practically one word. “He is a man you can count on” is good idiomatic English. It is natural and conversational as contrasted with the bookish style that results from transposing the preposition. Of course, terminal prepositions that are used unnecessarily and carelessly are properly condemned. For example, to say, “what we end up with” instead of “what we have left” is inexcusable. At the same time, no one should hesitate to use a prepositional ending that is natural and forcible.

Terrible, Frightful. These belong to the class of extravagant adjectives. *Terribly* and *frightfully* are similarly misused for very or very much or extraordinary, when “*terror*” and “*fright*” are not involved. Save strong words for occasions that demand them.

That, So. *That* is not in good use as an adverb in such phrases as the following: “*that* good,” “*that* worthy.” “She was *so* worthy that they could not turn her away” is correct. Do not say, “She was *that* worthy, etc.” *That*, however, is approved as a demonstrative adverb with expressions of measure or degree: “We could not stay *that* long;” “You will be *that* much farther on your way.”

The. As in the case of the indefinable article, the repetition of the definite article *the* in such a series as “*the* bear, *the* deer, and *the* panther” serves to emphasize the individual separateness of the things named. Such repetition is necessary in expressions like the following, to avoid ambiguity: “*the* secretary and *the* treasurer (two persons),” *the* finished and *the* unfinished manuscript (two manuscripts).” “*The* secretary and treasurer” means one person only.

If used before the first adjective, *the* should be used before each of a series of adjectives applied to one substantive, but the distinguishing different objects; as, “*the* expensive, *the* cheap, and *the* medium-priced goods.”

Them, Those. Do not confuse these words. *Them* is the objective case of the plural third personal pronoun; *those* is the plural demonstrative adjective. Say, “*those* facts,” never “*them* facts.”

Then. Used in such a phrase as “the *then* Chief Justice,” this word is approved. The use has a long and honorable history. The phrase *then some* for *some more* is slang.

Thence. The preposition *from* with *thence* is superfluous. “He came *thence*” is correct.

Therefor, Therefore. These two look-alike words may seem to be alternative spellings for the same word, but they have quite different meanings. “*Therefor*,” accented on the second syllable, is equivalent to the phrase, “for that.” “*Therefore*,” an adverb, introduces a conclusion based on a reasoning process that has already been indicated. It is accented on the first syllable.

Think for. Such a word as *suppose* or *suspect* should be substituted for the phrase *think for* in a barbarous sentence like “He hears than you *think for*.”

Those kind. “*That kind* of shoe is good,” not “*those kind*.” *Those* is plural; *kind* is singular. Care should be taken to preserve the number in the sentence.

Through. *To be through* is an American colloquialism, meaning “to have finished,” “to have done:” “How soon will you *be through* with the work?” The phrase is frequently used and may be classed among our idioms.

To. Never say, “She was *to* my house yesterday.” Use *at* in place of *to*. We say, colloquially, “I have been *to* town,” and some critics allow the phrase as idiomatic.

Together. In *meet together* or *converse together*, *together* is superfluous.

Tomorrow. One may say, “*Tomorrow is or will be Monday.*” But one should say, “*Tomorrow will be a memorable day.*”

Transparent, Translucent. *Transparent* means “clear,” allowing light to pass so that objects may be seen through the substance. *Translucent* means “partially transparent,” allowing light to pass but not permitting vision.

Transpire. Do not use this word to mean *happen*. We may say, “No information or news has transpired,” meaning “None has become public.”

Treat. A book *treats of* (not *treats on*) the subject of its contents.

Try. We *make* experiments, not *try* them, say some critics. Others point out that *try* experiments is laboratory usage; but *perform* is the more generally approved verb in this sense. “*Do experiments*” is school cant.

Try and. It is better to avoid the use of the phrase *try and do*. Use *try to do* instead. The use of this phrase is not quite like that of the phrase *come and see*, which is in good use.

Unique. Since this word denotes one of a kind, it should not be used in the watered-down sense of unusual. Neither should it be accompanied by an adverb of degree, as in “very unique.”

Universally, All. Do not say, “He was *universally* praised by *all* who heard him.” The two words are so similar in meaning that the use of both is redundant. Say, “He was *universally* praised” or “He was praised by *all* who heard him.”

Unkempt. Literally, the word means “uncombed,” or figuratively, “rough,” “unpolished.” It is not to be used generally to mean “disordered,” as in *unkempt* rooms. A person may be *unkempt*, a room never.

Up. Superfluously added to many verbs, as in *add up*, *open up*, etc. *Up* should be used with verbs only when it contributes definitely to the meaning or is in good colloquial use.

Use of Infinitive. The present infinitive is used after tenses unless it refers to action occurring before the time implied in the assertion of the principal verb. Say, “He intended *to do* it,” never “he intended *to have done* it.” But “He is said to have been present” is correct, since his “being present” preceded the saying. *Ought*, being a defective verb, is followed by the present infinitive to express present or future duty, and by the perfect infinitive to express duty in past time: “They ought *to speak*,” “They ought *to have spoken*.”

Verbs, Agreement of. The verb in a sentence must agree with the substantive of the subject in person and number. But there are several puzzling cases which give rise to frequent error.

(1) The subject includes substantives of different numbers: Either the master or his servants are at fault. Usage approves a verb agreeing with the nearest substantive. Usually it is better to recast such a sentence and avoid this construction: “The fault lies either with the master or his servants.”

(2) Subject collective or distributive: “There *are (is)* six dollars in the drawer.” If the thought is of the total amount of money, use the singular verb; if the idea of several pieces of money is uppermost, use the plural verb.

Verdict. A word loosely used for opinion. *Verdict* should be reserved for official decisions, as of a jury, or for opinion publicly and formally expresses: “That he is unreliable is the *opinion* (not the *verdict*) of all who know him.”

Very. Most critics insist that *very* should not immediately precede a past participle

used as an adjective. Not, "He was *very* pleased," but "He was *very much* pleased." *Very* may directly precede an adjective: "That is a *very* good article." Where the participle has chiefly an adjective sense, *very* is authoritatively used: "She is a *very* charming person."

View of, to. "He worked with the *view to* the establishment of a business." "We talked with a *view of* discovering each other's opinions." These sentences represent approved usage.

Viewpoint. *Point of view* is preferable. It has more character when used in a sentence in written English and in spoken English.

Vocation, Avocation. A person's *vocation* is his profession, his calling, his business: his *avocations* are the things that occupy him incidentally: "Mr. Wharton's *vocation* is banking; his *avocation* is photography."

Want, Need. *Need* refers to the actual fact of lack; *want* implies a personal sense or view of the situation. A man may *want* an automobile, when he does not *need* it for his business. Avoid using *want* and *need* loosely in the sense of *lack*.

Was, Is. When, in a subordinate clause, an unchanging truth or a present fact is to be stated, use *is*, not *was*, no matter what the tense of the principle verb: "He knew that ice *is* formed at 32 degrees." The same rule applies to the use of the present tense of any verb: "They should have realized that war *settles* no disputes."

Ways. Wrongly used for *way*. "The house is a long *ways* off" should be "The house is a long *way* off."

Well, Why. The use of these words as exclamations of surprise or dismay may be defended, but too frequently they are simply drawling noises at the beginning of a sentence.

Went, Gone. These forms of the verb *go* are frequently confused. *Went* is the past tense; *gone* is the past participle. Say, “They *have gone* (not *have went*).”

What. “He would not believe *but what* I said it” should be “He would not believe *but that* I said it.”

Whence. “Whence came ye?” not “*From whence* came ye?” *Whence* means “from what place, source, or cause.”

Whereabouts. In “His *whereabouts* is unknown,” observe the correct singular verb.

Who, Whom. Avoid the common error of misusing *who* for *whom*. Say, “*Whom* are you thinking of?” not “*Who* are you thinking of?” “*Whom* did they mention?” not “*Who* did they mention?” *Whom* is the form to use as the object of a verb or preposition.

Whoever. One should write, “I will give it to *whoever* can use it,” but, “I will give it to *whomever* you designate.” The syntax of the pronoun in the subordinate clause determines the case.

Whole lot. As a substitute for *much* or a *great deal*, *whole lot* is only in vulgar use; as, “I don’t care a *whole lot* for the movie.”

Whose, Of which. Some critics object to the use of *whose* in referring to things, but there is precedent for the usage. Sometimes *of which* would bring in an awkward manner of speech. In such cases *whose* should be used. “This is the latest of those political changes *whose* causes we can easily find.”

Widow woman. The word *woman* is superfluous here.

Without. This word is a preposition and should not take the place of the conjunction

unless: “I shall not go *without* my father consents” should read “unless my father consents,” or the expression might be changed to “*without* my father’s consent,” where *without* is a preposition.

Worst kind. A vulgarism frequently used in the sense of *very much*; as, “I want to go the *worst kind*.”

Would have. Avoid the incorrect use of *would have* in conditional sentences. Not “If he *would have* come,” but “If *he had* come.” “*Would of*” is completely illiterate.

Yes. Avoid the various vulgar and provincial varieties of this important little word: *yeh, ya, yep, eh-uh*.

You-all. When used to mean simply “you,” and applied to more than one person, this is a provincialism of the southern United States. It is not properly used to mean one person only.

Yours truly. This phrase used as a substitute for “I” or “me” is awkward and self-conscious. It arises from the same exaggerated modesty that prevents people from beginning a business letter with “I” and that causes essayists to introduce such circumlocutions as “from the standpoint of the present writer the conclusion seems evident” instead of saying “I think” or something equally natural and direct.

Z. The letter is *zee* or *zed*, the former being the common American name, the latter the British.

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