

LESSON-43

Mechanics of Writing: Words

Dictionary and THESAURUS USAGE

Looking for the meaning of a word, usage or its spelling in a dictionary starts by a search for the word in the alphabetical order. The dictionary proceeds on one of the basic lexicographic facts that the definition is always written in a - simpler manner than the words they describe. The coverage comprises words used in different national varieties of English, specifically British and American. A dictionary provides guidance along the following lines:

1. The words that are accompanied by either *BrE* (British English) or *AmE* (American English) indicate English as used in that country.- However, there are certain words that are not labeled at all. This indicates that their usage is universal or they are acceptable throughout the world. Let us consider an example: Au-tumn *AmE* also *fall-n* the season between summer and winter when leaves turn gold and fruits become ripe. In this example, a different word is also provided, namely, fall that means the same as autumn, but is used in American English.

2. The part of speech which the word represents is also mentioned. In the example cited above, “n” stands for a noun.

3. Information about the use of a grammatical word is given either before the meaning or instead of a meaning. e.g., if (not usu. followed by the future tense) supposing that; on condition that

4. There is further explanation on how words are formed by adding a prefix or a suffix, e.g. unending (prefix, un) or stupidity (suffix, ity). Verbs that are used with prepositions such as “go on”, are always shown as a separate entry. Opposites are also indicated in the dictionary. e.g. for the word “aft” the opposite “fore” is also mentioned.

5. Irregular plural words and their pronunciations are also provided, e.g., cranium -niums or -nia

6. A different spelling that is not so common, e.g., lakh, lac

7. Information about possible other forms of the word, e.g., fault 1. A mistake or imperfection. 2. a bad point, but not of a serious moral kind, in someone’s character

8. List of related compound words e.g., rain. See *also* Rain down, Rain off, Rain on, Rain out.

9. Places at which the word should be broken, as at the end of a line, e.g., ree- fer?

Many dictionaries, e.g., Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, provide the usage of the word together with its meaning.

Using a thesaurus is slightly different from using a dictionary. In the former we begin with the idea and find the synonym closest to it. The numbered section is provided at the end of the text with synonyms and closely associated words. For instance, if we were looking for a word meaning for “to protect from sunlight”, we need to look for a synonym for the verb “protect”. The two synonyms provided in the thesaurus are “shield” and “defend”. The former meaning clearly expresses the idea in the phrase. Next begins the search for the appropriate word under the category of “shield”. A number of synonyms would be provided in the noun, verb and the adjective forms. The choice is then with the writer to select the right word to convey the meaning.

DELETING REDUNDANCIES/USING SIMPLE WORDS

Written communication, re-read after a short break, reveals errors of numerous kinds. Primary among them is the use of extra or unnecessary words that more or less mean the same. If these “redundancies” can be deleted, the text gains in terms of brevity and communicates more effectively. Let us take a look at the following examples where redundancies have been deleted.

Cross out unnecessary words in the following phrases:

Original consensus of opinion exact replicanew innovationsmost unique true factssurrounded on all sides the month of May visible to the eye maximum possible eight in number important essential red in colorthe state of California my personal opinion entirely completejust recentlyrefer backwhether or notcontinue onpast experience long period of timeat a distance of 100 feet at a price of Rs. 20 remember the fact thatI would like to recommend remember that I recommend

Corrected

Further, a message can also be communicated effectively by making phrases brief and pithy. The following phrases have been restructured to bring about brevity in the written statement.

OriginalIn the near futureIn the event thatIn order thatFor the purpose ofWith regard toI am of the opinion thatPlease do not hesitate to let me know I wish to take this occasion to express my thanksIn the early part of next weekYour cheque for the amount ofIt is quite probable thatIt may be thatAt an early dateIn very few casesWith reference toA large numberAt the present timeThere is no doubt thatMost of the timeIn the same way **Corrected** shortly In case so that forRegardingI thinkPlease let me know I thankearly next week Your cheque for Rs. ProbablyPossiblyEarlyRarelyAs perManyCurrently Undoubtedly Frequently Similarly

Brevity in writing, if coupled with the right choice of words, adds much to the effectiveness of a written message. Short, simple words should form part of the business vocabulary that is used. Some examples of simple words are provided below.

Original terminate utilize anticipate assistance endeavor ascertain procure consummate
advise alteration fabricate **Changed** enduse expect help effort
confirm get complete suggest change make

VOCABULARY

Using the right word in the right place is a crucial skill in business communication. However, many pitfalls await the unwary.

4.1 Frequently Confused Words

Because the following sets of words sound similar, be careful not to use one when you mean to use the other:

4. Correctness. At the time of encoding the sender should ensure that his knowledge of the receiver is comprehensive. The level of knowledge educational background and status of the decoder help the encoder in formulating his message. In case there is any discrepancy between the usage and comprehension of terms. Miscommunication can arise. If the sender decides to back up his communication with facts and figures, there should be accuracy in stating the same. A situation in which the listener is forced to check the presented facts and figures should not arise. Finally, the usage of terms should be nondiscriminatory, e.g. the general concept is that women should be addressed for their physical appearance whereas men for their mental abilities. This, however, is a stereotype and at the time of addressing or praising members of both the sexes, the attributes assigned should be the same. Similarly for occupational references. In the business world almost all professions are treated with respect. Addressing one individual for competence in his profession but neglecting the other on this score because of a so-called 'inferior' profession alienates the listener from the sender.

Consistency. The approach to communication should, as far as possible, be consistent. There should not be too many ups and downs that might lead to confusion in the mind of the receiver. If a certain stand has been taken, it should be observed without there being situations in which the sender is left groping for the actual content or meaning. If the sender desires to bring about a change in his understanding of the situation, he should ensure that the shift is gradual and not hard for the receiver to comprehend.

Concreteness. Concrete and specific expressions are to be preferred in favor of vague and abstract expressions. In continuation at the point on correctness, the

facts and figures presented should be specific. Abstractions or abstract statements can cloud the mind of the sender. Instead of stating: "There has been a tremendous escalation in the sales figure", suppose the sender made the following statement: "There has been an escalation in the sales figures by almost 50% as compared to last year." The receiver is more apt to listen and comprehend the factual details.

Conciseness. The message to be communicated should be as brief and concise as possible. Weightily language definitely sounds impressive but people would be suitably impressed into doing precisely nothing. As far as possible only simple and brief statements should be made. Excessive information can also sway the receiver into either a wrong direction or into inaction. Quantum of information should be just right, neither too much nor too little, e.g.

In most cases it has been seen that the date of the policy...

Usually the policy date...

In the first example, the statement is rather long and convoluted. However, the second example gives it the appearance of being crisp, concise and to the point.

Commonly Misused Words

The spoken word can be quite different from the written word. Many things that we allow to fly in speech simply look like glaring errors once they are written on a handout or an overhead. Below are several commonly misused words and their correct usage.

Ago vs. Since

Both words speak of the past, and they are often used interchangeably. However, these words have different meanings. Ago carries the mind from the present to the past. Since carries the mind from the past to the present.

Correct:

- It was almost 25 years ago that they were married.
- It is (or has been) almost 25 years since they got married.

Since vs. Because

Since is related to time. Because is related to cause.

Incorrect:

- Since the Dodgers are so far behind, we are leaving the game early.

Correct:

- Because the Dodgers are so far behind, we are leaving the game early.

Even Better:

- We are leaving the game early because the Dodgers are so far behind.

Compare to vs. Compare with

"Compare to" is used to liken two things or to put them in the same category.

- The economy can be compared to a stallion charging at the gate.

“Compare with” is used to place two things side by side for the purpose of examining their similarities or differences.

- The American economy can be compared with the European economy to note how military history impacts future economics.

Among vs. Between

Between is used correctly when there are two items involved. Among means in the midst of countable things. When the things are not countable, the correct word is “amid” or “amidst”.

Incorrect:

- She is standing among the boys.
- Masked firemen groped among the wreckage hours later. Note that “wreckage” is not countable.

Correct:

- She is standing between the boys.
- Masked firemen groped amidst the wreckage hours later.

Note about Between

A single noun that follows “between” becomes plural. Consider the following: The product is currently between first and second releases.

Comprise

Comprise means to contain, embrace, or include. So, the whole comprises the parts - not the reverse.

Incorrect:

- Parts A, B, and C comprise the product.

Correct:

- The product comprises Parts A, B, and C.

Disinterested vs. Uninterested

Disinterested means one is neutral and has no personal interest in the outcome of a situation. Uninterested means one is lacking interest. The key to using these words correctly is asking “does the party have a selfish interest in the outcome, where or not he is interested?” If he does, “uninterested” is the correct word to use.

Correct:

- Up to now, the Sales team has been uninterested in the revenue figures because the Accounting group has been reworking the compensation packages.

In Order To

Generally this prepositional phrase can be eliminated. Consider the following sentences:

- She wants to go to college in order to become a teacher.
- She wants to go to college to become a teacher.

Quote vs. Quotation

Quote is a verb. Quotation is a noun. Nevertheless, it is now quite commonplace to use the word “quote” as both a noun and a verb.

Incorrect:

- The VP of Sales and Marketing gave a quote to the press . . .

Correct:

- The reporter quoted the VP of Sales and Marketing . . .

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Using Abbreviations Correctly

People use abbreviations everyday. In general, no one gives them a second thought. That is, no one gives them a second thought - until these abbreviations appear 4" tall on a projection screen. At that point, you may second-guess your grammatical confidence. Follow these guidelines to be sure to use the correct abbreviations in your next presentation.

Titles and Ranks

- Mr., Mrs., Ms., and Dr. are abbreviated when used before a name. Note that Miss is not an abbreviation. Examples: Mr. John Smith, Ms. Joan Jennings.
- Civil and military titles are abbreviated only when used before a full name. If only the last name is used, it must be preceded by the full title.
 - Correct
 - Incorrect
 - Lt. Gov. Cheryl Mason
 - Lt. Gov. Mason
 - Adm. Mark Hall
 - Adm. Hall
 - Sgt. Jim Pickard
 - Sgt. Pickard
- Reverend and Honorable can be abbreviated only when they do not follow "the" and when they precede a full name.

Correct

Incorrect

Rev. Brian Wetering the Reverend Brian Wetering

Rev. Wetering

Hon. Susan Fletcher the Honorable Susan Fletcher

Hon. Fletcher

- When used after full names, Jr. and Sr. are abbreviated. Example: Steven Russell, Jr., and Mac X. Golding, Sr.

Titles and Certifications

- Scholarly degrees are abbreviated. Note that title, name, and degree cannot be combined.

Correct

Incorrect

Aaron Watson, Ph.D.

Dr. Aaron Watson, Ph.D.

Hon. Susan Fletcher the Honorable Susan Fletcher

Hon. Fletcher

Time Designations

- Such designations as A.M., P.M., EST, and PST are always abbreviated. Note that A.M. and P.M. require the period, but EST and PST do not.

Acronyms and Familiar Initials

The full forms of initials pronounced as words are rarely written as words (WWW, ZIP, COBOL). Additionally, those entities known better by their familiar initials (IRS, FBI, CBS, NFL) are best abbreviated.

After the Draft: Editing Your Content

Those Pesky Grammar Things: 9 Commonly Misused Words [Legal](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Help](#)

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