FPED WORKING PAPER

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

Ronald L. Mighell

May 1973

FARM PRODUCTION
ECONOMICS DIVISION

ECONOMIC RESEARCH SERVICE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE


United States
Department of
Agriculture
National Agricultural Library

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

Ronald L. Mighell

May 1973

Farm Production Economics Division
Economic Research Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture

PREFACE

"Words and Where to Put Them" was first prepared as a series of notes on problems of writing faced by economists in the Economic Research Service. They were written between September 1970 and May 1973 and circulated mainly in the Farm Production Economics Division. The purpose was to help improve writing by noting common errors and learning how to avoid them.

The separate notes are now brought together to form a more convenient working handbook. The order of appearance follows the original chronology. An index provides a way of finding particular headings. The notes are just about as they were first written, except for omitting repetitive headings.

The handbook is still an open notebook that does not pretend to be complete. Suggestions for further topics or amendments in those given are always welcome.

I am indebted to many members of the Division for suggestions and criticisms along the way. I hope they will find this effort as useful for them as it has been for me.

I am also grateful for the special interest and assistance of Jeanette K. Fowler, Jewell L. Tolliver, Bernadine C. Holland, Janet U. Register, and others in typing the manuscript at various stages and getting it in shape. Jewell helped especially with the original format, Jenny prepared the index, Bernadine contributed an unusual word, and Janet typed the final draft. The effort would have been hopelessly stranded or "focusioned" without their help.

Ronald L. Mighell
May, 1973

CONTENTS

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 1 -- In the Beginning (September 1, 1970)

We all have something to do with preparing written reports. This means that we choose words and need to know where to put them to convey the proper meaning most effectively and efficiently.

Our writing will be improved if we note common errors and learn to avoid them.

For this purpose, I propose to keep an open notebook called "Words and Where to Put Them". This will be in the form of questions and answers. Pages from this notebook will be distributed from time to time as questions arise in reviewing manuscripts and other writing.

A few initial samples are attached to this memo for illustration.

Solecism

What is a solecism?

A solecism is any error, impropriety, or inconsistency in grammatical usage. The word is derived from the name of an ancient Greek city, SOLOIKOS, in Cilicia where incorrect Greek was spoken. Hence, one who spoke as the inhabitants of that city did was using solecisms.

Examples:

Who done it?
This data are misleading.
Due to rain, the roads were bad.
The corn in Mississippi is different than in Iowa.

Due to

What is wrong with the statement: "Totals may not agree with detail due to rounding"?

Witherspoon says: "Due to is one of the most commonly misused expressions in the language. Due, an adjective here, is used properly only when it modifies some noun. Some form of the verb to be should always be expressed or understood before it. Due to should never be used as a preposition in the sense of because of, on account of, as the result of, owing to, through."

The above sentence would be properly worded as follows:

"The fact that the totals may not agree with detail is due to rounding."

A useful rule of thumb is to never begin a sentence with due to.

Data

Is data plural or singular?

Data, strata, criteria, media, phenomena, and some other nouns of Latin origin are the plural forms of datum, stratum, criterion, medium, phenomenon, etc. Although there is a tendency to use the plural form as a singular, this is not considered appropriate style in ERS.

Economists should be especially careful to respect the individual identity of each datum. If the urge to use massed data is too great, it is probably better to use information, intelligence, or some other synonym.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 2 -- Right Words in Right Places (September 9, 1970)

The purpose of writing, as of speaking, is to convey thoughts from one mind to another as clearly as possible. It is not what you think you have written that counts, but what the reader thinks you have written. That is why using the right words in the right places is so important.

A few additional notes are attached.

Dictionary

What is a dictionary?

A dictionary may be more things that you think. It is a collection of selected words, usually arranged alphabetically, which gives the spelling, pronunciation, meaning, derivation, and other information about each word.

Most of us consult a dictionary for spelling and meanings. Sometimes we want guidance on correct usage. In recent years, the makers of dictionaries have been engaged in a long argument about whether they should report the usage that the majority of people are following, or indicate several levels of usage.

One of the most recent desk dictionaries meets this problem by reporting what a panel of 105 writers and linguists regard as good usage. The attached copy of one of Bill Gold's columns may be of interest.

Predominate and predominant

How does one keep these two words under control?

Predominate is the verb, predominant the adjective. The use of these words and their derivatives seems to entangle many writers. Perhaps it is better to avoid them entirely. They usually represent elegant variations from simpler forms.

An example is this sentence from the VPI graduate school catalog:

"Economists engaged in such activities (academic, business, and government) predominately hold advanced degrees in economics."

The writer meant predominantly, but he might have better settled for "Most economists in such activities hold advanced degrees in economics."

Effect and affect

Is there an easy way to keep effect and affect from adversely affecting our writing?

Yes. Effect and affect are almost look alikes but they have different Latin roots.

Effect is from e(x)facere, make out, or literally the outcome, or result.

Affect comes from afficere, which means to influence or touch. A close relative is affection, meaning a feeling for.

The key to memory is that the e(x) in effect means out. We have many words of Latin origin with the prefix ex, some of which have lost the x and keep only the e. Examples of both are:

erase, rub out	exit, goes out
effete, worn out	express, press out
efface, wipe out	exhale, breathe out
edict, speak out	expand, spread out

The following sentences show effect and affect in correct use:

A regression line does not in itself show a cause and effect relationship.

Fish are sometimes affected by pesticides applied on nearby farms.

Usage, use

What is the use of usage?

Usage and use do not have the same meaning. Usage means either the way in which something is used, or the habitual or customary way in which it is used.

Examples:

The domestic shortage of certain herbicides in 1966 was due to the use (not usage) of large quantities in Vietnam.

Machinery is subject to hard usage on large farms.

Informal usage differs from formal.

D12 *Monday, Sept. 7, 1970* THE WASHINGTON POST

THE DISTRICT LINER® . . . . . By Bill Gold

Bill Gold

Does the Dictionary Serve as Arbiter or Reporter?

REFERENCE HERE to politicians reluctant to reveal "their ages" had moved Herbert King to suggest that everything that follows "their" doesn't have to be plural. He would have preferred "their age."

Some readers have shared his view, but the vote is going about 2-to-1 against him. However, on the matter of this newspaper's use of "persons" where common usage would employ "people," the vote is entirely in Herb's favor. In ordinary conversation, one would ask, "Was anybody hurt in the accident?" and the answer would come back, "Yes, two people were taken to the hospital."

With obvious reference to the preamble to the Constitution, Herb had asked whether anybody could possibly write, "We the persons of the United States." Perhaps not, Walter Golman of 25 E. Wayne Ave., Silver Spring, agreed, "but I'll bet you'd have no trouble finding administrative people who would write it 'We the personnel of the United States.' "

The most interesting aspect of the mail relating to Herb's letter is the continuing debate regarding a dictionary's proper function.

Syd Kasper of 9622 Evergreen St., Silver Spring, espouses the view that a dictionary merely reports how people (persons?) are using a language at a given time. As he puts it:

"Once upon a time, dictionaries took it upon themselves to be definitive, to tell you exactly what words meant for all time. Today they are descriptive, merely telling you how most people use a word."

In support of this position, he cites some of the many words that have changed drastically in meaning over the years. He writes: "Once 'sinister' meant left-handed, 'silly' meant innocent, 'fond' meant foolish. Originally, 'between' meant by twain, or by two, and thus was supposed to be used when speaking of two, as in 'between you and me.' But today most people use 'between' instead of 'among' when they are speaking of more than two—and what has been lost?"

I wish he hadn't added the last five words in that sentence.

Syd concludes with: "As for me, I hate 'finalize' and 'escapee' and 'contacting people,' but if that is the way the language goes, so go I."

Opposed to the view that a dictionary should do no more than report on current usage is the traditional position that a dictionary is an arbiter, an authority to which disputants can turn for scholarly pronouncements.

William R. Osgood of 2756 Macomb St. NW is one of the many who take this position. In his opinion, Webster's Third International has "done incalculable harm to American English." In "merely reporting" all sorts of current usage it becomes worse than useless for all its users except professional linguists, he says.

Why? Because it tells the man in the street, in effect, that "any sloppy spelling or use of a word he can find in the book is fine. And half-baked linguists cry, 'Go ahead and use it, and enrich the language!'—like manure enriching the soil."

We needed an up-to-date version of the Second International, Osgood says, but instead we got a dictionary that abounds in spellings and definitions that are unacceptable to careful users of English.

Fortunately, he writes, The American Heritage Dictionary came along in 1969, and although it is "a relatively modest undertaking, it is in the tradition of Webster's Second. It is for you and me and all the men on the street who want to learn something from a dictionary.

"In particular, it distinguishes between good and bad usage or, one might say, degrees of good and bad usage. The American Heritage Dictionary turned out to be a best seller."

I have heard so many good comments about the American Heritage (and no bad ones, incidentally) that I suppose one of these days I'll have to buy one and then try to placate a wife who can get more expression into the two words "Another dictionary?" than John Barrymore could wring from the soliloquy from Hamlet.

Yes, another dictionary. I buy them for the same reason that District Liner Osgood does: I want to learn something from them.

Most of the things one finds in a dictionary are universally accepted as facts; there's no dispute about them. "Seize" is e-i and "siege" is i-e, regardless of whose dictionary you consult. Never mind why words spelled differently are pronounced the same, or words spelled the same are pronounced differently. On most of them, all dictionaries are in agreement; and when we're not sure, we can consult any of them and find out what is correct and what is not.

So it appears to me that, to the layman who uses it, every dictionary remains an arbiter—whether or not its compilers think of themselves as mere reporters.

We look to a dictionary for more than a report. We expect it to give us an authoritative evaluation of its reports. After all, if we don't get this guidance from our dictionaries, where will we get it—from the telephone book?

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 3 -- Doing More with Fewer (September 23, 1970)

William of Occam (about 1295-1349) was one of the more famous scholastic philosophers of the Middle Ages. He is perhaps best known for a maxim, called Occam's razor and attributed to him which says: "Entities are not to be multiplied without necessity." Or as he himself is supposed to have stated it: "It is vain to do with more what can be done with fewer."

This principle of economy in logic is obviously an early version of a least cost concept. Writing is a form of expression in which the principle is worth practicing.

Humans

Are humans people?

In the world of Pogo, humans is a good name for people. In the real world, to refer to people as humans seems to bother many readers. The dictionaries give much space to human as an adjective, very little to it as a noun.

If the urge to use human or humans as a noun is irresistible, think of Pogo. Then move on to people, or speak of the human race.

Indexes, indices

What is the difference between indexes and indices?

Indexes and indices are two plural forms of index. Indexes is the preferred form for statistical index series and ordered lists such as indexes of books. Indices is more likely to be used when the indicator is an informal and nonstatistical measure. Usage differs but consistency is desirable.

Certain signs are indices of weather changes.

Indexes of consumer prices are published.

Compare with, compare to

Is there any real difference between compare with and compare to?

There is. We compare like things with one another, we compare unlike things to one another, noting points of similarity. This may seem a small thing but it makes for smoother writing and reading. Consider the following sentences:

If you compare the Secretary's prepared paper with his delivered speech you will see that he has added something.

One may compare the spread of the corn blight to the advance of a marching army.

Farm and agriculture

Should we say agricultural products or farm products?

Either is correct, but the preference is ERS is to use farm for everything that takes place on the farm and agricultural to include in addition the closely related products, services, and relationships that are found beyond the farm boundaries.

Thus it is preferable to use farm products, farm production, farm labor, farm machinery, and so on if the reference is to what happens on the farm.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 4 -- Matters of Choice (October 5, 1970)

Some usages are matters of individual choice. More than one way may come to the same end. But good writers usually have a reason for their preference. Three examples of ERS style that fall in this class are these:

This	Rather than this
probably, is likely to	likely
profitableness	profitability
last	past

Some of the reasons are attached.

Probably will or likely will

Are probably will and likely will interchangeable?

No, they are not. Here we are dealing with idiomatic, or customary, usage rather than strict logic. Likely will is frequently seen but is considered a colloquialism by many writers. There are three ways to correct the following sentence:

The supply of lettuce likely will be reduced by the strike.

(1) The supply of lettuce probably will be reduced by the strike.

(2) The supply of lettuce is likely to be reduced by the strike.

(3) The supply of lettuce very likely will be reduced by the strike.

For some unknown reason, the insertion of a modifying adverb in front of likely makes the expression idiomatic.

Last or past

Should one say in the last year, or in the past year?

Either may be correct, but the sense is slightly different and the careful writer may wish to discriminate. Last is more precisely the latest. Past is in the past but not necessarily the very latest.

The sense may drift apart more if longer time periods are at issue. For example:

Fertilizer consumption has increased 30 percent in the last decade. This is probably more precise than saying in the past decade. One could say in the decade just past and this would be equivalent to in the last decade.

Profitableness or profitability

Which suffix is preferable?

Either profitability or profitableness is acceptable. They mean the same thing. Both are in the dictionary. The choice becomes a matter of personal preference. My own vote goes to profitableness for two main reasons--euphony and basic meaning.

You may test euphony by noting how the spoken words ending in -ability or -ibility jump up and down in some sentences.

The basic sense of -ness is that of possessing the quality indicated by the main part of the word. Examples are goodness, wholesomeness, and redness.

The sense of -ability is that of the power of doing something. Such words sometimes carry an element of personification. Consider irritability, capability, and culpability.

Some words take only one ending; others like profitable will take either. In such instances, my choice lies with -ness.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 5 -- Clarity and Ambiguity (October 12, 1970)

One requirement for good writing, but not the only one, is to be clear. Ambiguity arises when words are capable of being read in more than one way. Three rather different examples are attached.

Requirements, in a technical sense, sometimes is interpreted in too inflexible an engineering sense, for economic problems.

Comparative multiples like 3 times larger illustrate another type of ambiguity.

Comparative multiples

Does the phrase 3 times larger mean the same as 3 times as large?

To some people both mean the same, to others they do not. Literally, 3 times larger means 3 times again as large or 4 times as large as the base of comparison. For example, 4 gallons of water is a quantity 3 times larger than 1 gallon of water. It is also a quantity 4 times as large.

Consider the following sentence in a recent report:

"Conceivably, it may be necessary to test a product 2 to 5 times longer than is now practiced to establish such safeguards".

This statement is ambiguous. If the grammar is correct, it means 3 to 6 times as long. The difficulty can be avoided by saying 3 to 6 times as long, or 2 to 5 times as long, whichever is intended.

Only

How do you tell where to place only?

Only is a word to be placed carefully by the writer. Only he knows what he wants to convey.

The following sentences will show what is meant:

(1) Only he went to the fair.
(2) He only went to the fair.
(3) He went only to the fair.
(4) He went to the fair only.
(5) He went to the only fair.

Numbers (3) and (4) may mean about the same, the others tell something else. This shows how important position is in the English language. Only is not alone, it is only more obvious.

Requirements

What terms are preferable to requirements in reference to resources used in farm production and why?

Requirements, as a term denoting inputs of feed, fertilizer, labor, and the like, has a long history of use in farm management as well as elsewhere. Usually other terms are preferable for economic problems. Inputs, quantities used, and terms that imply less rigidity are preferred.

The input-output relationships that concern the economist are variable functions. The term requirements suggests a fixed relationship that is contrary to fact.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 6 -- Sometime Principles (October 16, 1970)

This is a working notebook. Its only purpose is to help with our common writing problems. Suggestions and reactions are always welcome.

Several comments have been received. Two of them suggest that statements were not clear. Let me add a little now.

Last and past. An objection was made that last means the final one in a series and that that means the end. Therefore, you should not say: "In the last 3 weeks, such and such happened".

Last has two related but different meanings. One means the end of a series in a final sense, as the last page of a book, or the last year of his life. The other means the last up to now, as the last page that I read last night, or last summer I went to Missouri.

If the context is not sufficient to keep things clear, I would agree that something more needs to be done. The objection has some point then.

The comparative multiple problem may not have been fully clear last week, especially as it contained an error. For those who still have doubts it might help to examine a table in which the final column shows percentage increases above a base. No trouble comes unless a number of the increases rise above 100 percent. Then you may lose some of your readers.

Sometime and some time

When should the one-word form be used and when the two-word?

The two-word form is used when a more particular time is specified. The rule is definite but borderline cases arise because the sense is not always definite. Sometimes it helps to consider where the stress is placed. In sometime, the stress is on some, in some time it on time.

Examples:

(1) Comes some time soon.
(2) Choose some time when the rush is past.
(3) It was some time last week.

(4) Come and see us sometime.
(5) We should interview him sometime.

As an informal adjective, use the one-word form as in a sometime secretary, a sometime student.

The same remarks apply to someone and some one.

Principle and principal.

How do we keep principle and principal in the right places?

Sometimes the most careful writers slip on these two words. They come from the same Latin source and were once spelled indifferently either way to mean the same thing. In time, the meanings diverged and the spellings also. Now they are homonyms, or words that sound alike, but mean different things.

Last week a project statement came to me in which the proposed project leader was referred to as the "principle investigator". The project had to do with the "Conceptualization of the Economic Theory of Pollution".

On the same day, I read the following on page 3 of Kenneth Boulding's new book on "Economics as a Science".

> "It is the principle business of the social sciences, indeed, to develop those abstractions which are most useful and which give us the most significant information".

In each instance, the writer meant to use principal. But either one might fit in the context.

No easy principle can be laid down, the principal way out is to remember the difference.

Syntax

What is syntax?

Syntax has to do with the arrangement of words to make phrases and sentences that convey thought accurately.

The English language is one in which position and preposition (pre-position) have much to do with meaning. Most other European languages are more highly inflected (person, number, case, tense, etc.) and depend

less on position. English has gradually dispensed with most of the inflections that characterized Anglo-Saxon and the result is a much more flexible and precise instrument of communication.

However, the remaining inflections sometimes cause problems. Number is one of these. Keeping nouns and verbs in agreement is often troublesome.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 7 -- Hickory, Dickory, Dock (October 23, 1970)

Found in an 8th Grade girl's notebook:

> "Hickory, dickory, dock
> The mice ran up the clock
> The clock struck one
> The others escaped with minor injuries."

This one was intentional fun, but a double meaning and a sudden switch in thought is a problem that often bothers readers. This is one reason we have reviewers. They may spot something that has escaped the writer, intent on his subject.

Nationwide and national

What is the difference?

Nationwide is a good word that is a little tired from overwork. The advertisers have pushed it for their purposes. Look in any phone directory and see how many firm names have claimed it.

But there is nothing wrong with it that a little rest and discretion cannot cure. Where national conveys the meaning wanted use national in preference to nationwide. If the extra emphasis of nationwide is helpful, use it.

Consider whether nationwide would add anything in the following examples:

(1) The Interstate highway system forms a national network.

(2) We took a probability sample of all farms in the United States.

(3) The Bureau of the Census takes a national farm census every 5 years.

A good question to ask each time you see nationwide in your text is the wartime one: "Is this trip necessary?" If the answer is yes, go ahead and use it.

Hifalutin words

How should they be used?

Sparingly. These are more pretentious out-of-the-ordinary words substituted for the ordinary ones that first come to mind. H. W. Fowler in his Modern English Usage calls them genteelisms. Examples are:

hand-fashioned	for hand-made
acquired	for bought

Hand-fashioned is interesting because it means literally and exactly hand-made. Fashioned is derived directly from the Latin word facere, to make.

Acquired is a term used by dealers and collectors of paintings and art objects. Art lies above the sordid marketplace.

Economists are often guilty of writing in technical language for a popular audience. This is a form of genteelism that gains few converts.

Short words and long words

Should short words always be preferred to long words?

The answer is certainly no, but do not stop there. We are all likely to use too many long words. Short words carry force. Consider the letter that Queen Elizabeth wrote a bishop who was balking about returning a formal garden she had given him, but now wished to give to another favorite.

> "Proud Prelate: You know what you were before I made you what you are now. If you do not immediately comply with my request, I will unfrock you. By God.
>
> Elizabeth"

Here are 28 words, 23 of one syllable, that go right to the point. Note also how the 5-syllable word, immediately, changes the pace and adds some contrast.

A good guide may be to choose the short word rather than the long one, unless some special reason is present. For example, instead of saying: "The house is approximately 2 miles from the main highway," let us make it "The house is about 2 miles..."

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 8 -- To The, or Not to The (November 2, 1970)

The two words, the and overall, have one thing in common. They help make editors gray.

The has many problems, but one general rule is to remember that it is a pointing word. It specifies.

Overall is a wrap-up word. Its sin is overuse--use when not needed, or when better synonyms are available.

The

When to the or not to the, that is the question.

To some writers the world of editors seems divided between those who want the and those who want the not. The the-advocates insert the at every possible place, the the-nots strike them out.

The true course (to which most editors subscribe) is to use the according to the sense of the text. The is a pointing word. It points to something specific. If specificity is wanted, use the; if generality is wanted, do not use the.

Examples:

(1) "The outlook for farm income is improving." The is desirable.

(2) "The corn blight hurt the 1970 crop. Correct because the blight is a specific one.

(3) "Rust often reduced yields of small grains. Correct because rust is general.

Overall

Do economists use overall too much?

When the New York Times mentions parity price, it usually inserts a parenthetic definition to the effect that this is the price that a farmer would have to get for a bushel of corn for it to buy as many pairs of overalls as in 1910-14.

The overalls that economists write so frequently, are overalls of a different color. Many automatically write such things as "The overall picture", "the overall employment situation." They are so programmed that they no longer recall the good old-fashioned words general and total.

Overall has its place, but be sure it is the right medicine for your ailing sentence.

Examples:

(1) "The overall length of the growing season is 90 days." Correct if the full length needs stress, otherwise omit overall.

(2) "The overall sales from this farm are $10,000 a year." Strike out overall, and if emphasis is needed insert total.

(3) "The overall outlook for tobacco farmers is not promising." Here general might be better than overall, or perhaps just the outlook.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 9 -- Never Guess, Estimate (November 9, 1970)

Last week two papers reminded me of some old and good advice about estimate and about the first person.

Estimate and guess

Should one guess or estimate?

In graduate school at Minnesota, I once wrote a class paper in which the term "rough guess" appeared. The instructor, Professor Andrew Boss, was a Scot who wasted few words. He hit this one hard. "Never guess, always estimate!"

He went on to explain that guess suggested carelessness, and that estimate indicated that careful calculation, appraisal, and judgment had been exercised. Furthermore, it should not even be a rough estimate, unless one wished to convey that impression.

I have not forgotten.

I and We.

Should formal writing avoid the use of the first person?

No, but do not overdo it. In moderation, the use of the first person adds interest and life to your manuscript. It makes the text more direct and forceful.

But the first person must not become too intrusive, or it will suggest that the writer has an uncommonly high opinion of himself. Word order is significant here. If you say: "We, in ERS, have studied this problem", you may not win as many friends as you will if you say: "In ERS, we have studied this problem". The first order is a little pompous, the second is matter-of-fact.

Some writers use we, when only one is involved. This is a privilege reserved for queens, kings, pontiffs, and editors. For the rest of us, the reader is likely to think we are talking down to him and he may resent it.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 10 -- Counting Time (November 17, 1970)

Economists like other people are much concerned with time. We study trends, make projections, and do many things that include references to time.

As economists we have a special obligation to count time properly and to keep our beginnings and endings straight.

Counting time

May we refer to the 1960's as the sixth decade of this century?

No, because the 1960's were mainly in the seventh decade. The reasoning is the same as that which puts the 1900's in the 20th century. The word mainly must be used because the year 1960 was in the sixth and not the seventh decade. It takes 1970 to complete the seventh decade, just as it took 1910 to complete the first decade of the century. Similarly, the year 1900 was the last year of the 19th century and the year 2000 will be the last year of the 20th century.

The following statements are correct:

(1) The decade of the 1960's includes the years 1960-69.

(2) The seventh decade of this century includes the years 1961-70.

(3) The 20th century began January 1, 1901.

(4) The 20th century will end December 31, 2000.

(5) The 1960's ended December 31, 1969.

(6) The seventh decade will end December 31, 1970.

(7) The eighth decade will begin January 1, 1971.

Year ending or year ended

Which of the above forms is correct?

Either may be correct in particular situations and the choice may be a matter of convention or convenience. Just as the right hand rule of the road probably has no great intrinsic merit, once having made the choice, it becomes important to conform to it.

In some statistical time series, we have years that do not coincide with calendar years. These are referred to by a beginning date, or an ending date. This may be designated at the head of the item column in a table as Feeding year beginning Oct. 1, or Fiscal year ending June 30, to cite two examples.

Sometimes the years designated by an ending date, use the form Year ended June 30. This style has merit for certain purposes, for example in legal documents where it may be required. But for statistical use in ERS, we prefer the -ing form. In addition to uniformity there are other reasons:

1. Year beginning is invariably used for the beginning date and consistency therefore suggests year ending. A consistent alternative would be to say year began and year ended, but this seems less acceptable.

2. Continuing statistical series frequently are used with projections to years that have not yet ended. If ended were used, it would be necessary to use an additional term for future years and say something like year ended June 30 and to end June 30. This might be awkward.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 11 -- And/or, Short Circuit (November 24, 1970)

Two troublesome solecisms, different than and and/or, keep turning up in manuscripts. The first is even more frequent in oral statements, the second is largely confined to writing. A little thought can prevent both.

Different than or different from

Should you say: Beet-sugar growers in Michigan use different farming practices than those growers use in California?

Better not say it that way. Instead try: Beet-sugar growers in Michigan use different farming practices from those growers use in California.

To understand the desirability of the different from style, it will help to look at differ. Consider the following sentences:

1. Right--Dairy cows differ from beef cows.
2. Wrong--Dairy cows differ than beef cows.
3. Right--Dairy cows are different from beef cows.
4. Wrong--Dairy cows are different than beef cows.

In this kind of construction, than is used only with a comparative, indicating more or less...larger than, less expensive than, better than, etc. Differ and different do not indicate degree, only difference in characteristics.

And/or

Will you and/or I go to St. Louis?

Echo answers: Make up your mind Buster, or you won't go anywhere!

And/or is legal shorthand best left with the lawyers where it doubtless serves faithfully. For the rest of us plain English says, "Will you or I, or both of us, go to St. Louis?" The expense of three additional words is a small price to pay to keep our mental computers from jamming.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 12 -- Mismatching Singulars and Plurals (November 30, 1970)

"The time has come,
The walrus said,
To talk of many things:
Of DDT--and Mercury--
And what pollution brings."

This transformation from Lewis Carroll appeared as a caption under a recent cartoon, perhaps to suggest that not all news is new.

So we turn to singulars and plurals and industry.

Singular and plural number

No problem in writing occurs more frequently than mismatching of singulars and plurals. Are there any useful guidelines?

A singular subject should also be accompanied by a singular verb, and a plural subject by a plural verb. It sounds simple. But mistakes happen because the form is not always in agreement with the sense.

Consider such nouns as economics, statistics, news, and means. These are all plural in form but in the sense of subject matter fields are usually treated as singulars. Each has its own peculiar characteristics. Economics no longer has a singular form. Statistics can be either singular or plural, depending on the sense and it retains a singular form with a specific meaning.

Horace Greeley and a reporter had a famous telegraphic exchange about news in which the reply "Not a single new!" shows clearly the disappearance of the singular new in the sense of news. Means in the sense of a way to an end, takes either a singular or plural verb to agree with the modifying word. A means, one means, any means, and the like are all followed by singular verbs. All means, several means, such means are followed by plural verbs.

A speaker on the "Down to Earth" TV program recently said:

(1) "A variety of methods are available."

He might have said:

(2) "A number of methods are available", or
(3) "Several methods are available".

The first will be questioned by some, the second will be accepted by most, and the third is entirely in the clear.

The one general rule is to be guided by the sense of the statement, but this is not infallible.

Industry

One of our reports, ERS-357, is entitled "Structure of Six Farm Input Industries". Farm credit was included as one of the six. Although not in the report, farm labor and farm real estate might have been covered. Would it be correct to consider them under the rubric of industry?

The dictionaries give several meanings for the word industry. The Random House Dictionary, for example, provides seven definitions, the first two of which are pertinent here.

(1) The aggregate of manufacturing or technically productive enterprises in a particular field, often named after its principal product, as the automobile industry.

(2) Any general business activity: the Italian tourist industry.

The Washington Post for Nov. 22, 1970 in one column referred to a speech by Senator Muskie in which he spoke of the health industry, and in the next column to a report about crime at the JFK Airport that affected the air-freight industry and the insurance industry.

One might conclude that it would be all right to speak of the farm credit industry, and the farm real estate industry, each of which produces services not unlike the insurance industry. Somewhat more difficulty is encountered in referring to the labor industry. There is an understandable reluctance to treat the human factor as something that can be moved about like inanimate things.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 13 -- Titles to Remember (December 8, 1970)

A rose by any other name might smell as sweet, but would it be the same? Titles of books, reports, articles, and other writings are names that should be carefully chosen to provide the best first impression and the most lasting usefulness.

Titles for publications

What makes a good title?

This is a question that should be asked more often. A good title helps any report. It is the first thing the reader sees and it may be the last thing to stay in his memory. It is the reference point to which he returns and by which he retrieves it from the card catalog or library index.

A good title should be appropriate, descriptive, easy to recall, and free from pitfalls. Two contrasting examples come to mind that may help explain.

The first is a report prepared by the staff of this Division about 10 years ago on the state of agriculture and farm programs. It was called "Farm Production---Trends, Prospects, and Programs", U.S. Dept. Agr. Inf. Bul. 239, May 1961. In manuscript, it was an impressive pile of paper, and because no one could remember the title, someone christened it "The Monster". When at long last it was in print, it appeared with a green cover and was immediately tagged "The Green Monster".

Not long before, there was another report entitled "Gas Beyond the City Mains". This dealt with rural consumption of bottled gas. It was an adequate statistical report on a limited subject. The imaginative title probably increased its circulation appreciably.

"The Green Monster" nickname helped call attention to the first report inside the Division but was of no other use except to demonstrate to those of us responsible that we had handicapped an excellent report with a cumbersome title.

Three good current titles worth noting are "Contours of Change" for the 1970 Yearbook, and "Down to Earth" and "Across the Fence" for the USDA television programs.

Some of the titles of reports in this Branch, especially the recurring ones, probably need reexamination.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 14 -- Ironing out Difficulties (December 14, 1970)

A word may have many meanings and different ones in different places. Let us look for a moment at metaphors. Metaphors are more useful figures of speech than we may think, perhaps because many of them pass without conscious recognition. For example, take the three equivalent words--adios, adieu, and goodbye. They all mean farewell, but you may not realize that the original literal meanings were very close. The first two are Spanish and French that literally mean: "Go with God." Goodbye is simply a contraction of the English words: "God be with you."

Merry Christmas and a Happy Holiday Season!

Metaphors

What are they? What do they sometimes do?

A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phase is applied to something which it does not literally represent in order to suggest comparison with the literal something for which it stands. The language is full of metaphors, some live, many dead, others sleeping. When you iron out difficulties, smooth a path, lighten a burden, fight political brushfires, fire a cabinet officer, plow through opposition, and so on, you are using metaphorical language.

Metaphors help your style. They give life and vigor to what might otherwise be dull. But they can also trap you. One type of problem to guard against is that of suggesting other meanings. A few examples may illustrate.

Examples:

(1) The farm buildings are broken down into a few sizes.

(2) The data available do not permit a breakdown of machines by States.

(3) New nitrogen plants with designed capacity sufficient to increase output about 2.5 percent are expected to come on stream in the coming year. Farmers will probably use more nitrogen fertilizers, but it is not believed that this will lead to increased stream pollution.

(4) Feedstocks now available to petrochemical companies are expected to be sufficient to supply the chemicals used in livestock feeds in the next year.

(5) In determining the extent of floor space to be covered by rugs a percentage ceiling was imposed. It is hoped that this ceiling will eventually be lifted.

Comments:

Metaphorical breakdowns should not suggest real breakdowns, nor should the production stream be confused with an actual stream of water. Similarly, feedstocks of chemicals too close to livestock feeds might raise some eyebrows. And getting rugs on the floor when the ceiling is lifted may suggest some kind of Herculean effort not intended.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 15 -- Forward and Foreword (January 4, 1971)

Welcome to the New Year. New Year's resolutions form what might be called a foreword to the book of the months ahead. May we each put forward our best efforts to make our resolutions come true.

Forward and foreword

Which comes to the front?

This is a good question but needs explanation. These two near look-alike and sound-alike words are among the most commonly misspelled and interchanged words in the language. They need not be.

The key is an easy one to remember. First of all, the prefix, fore-, is an old English prefix meaning before, as in forehead, forecast, foreman, and similar words. In the case of forward, the "e" in fore- has been dropped. Second, consider -ward and -word. These have entirely different meanings, -ward means "in the direction of", and -word means simply "word".

Therefore, forward means in the direction of before, or to the front. Foreword means the word that comes before, or in front.

A forward march is one to the front.

A foreword is a preliminary statement at the front of a book, "a before word".

If you think of the meaning of each word and how it is used you will never misspell or confuse them. If the missing "e" bothers you, remember that this was simply lost in the haste to push forward.

Foreword and preface

Do these words mean the same?

Not exactly, although they come close. Foreword has Old English roots and preface comes from Latin, "the face before". Although they literally mean about the same, convention has given each a special function, at least in books.

A foreword is usually written and signed by someone who is not the author. A preface is the author's, or editor's, own place to tell the reader what he has done. For example, Clifford M. Hardin, Secretary of Agriculture, wrote the foreword for "Contours of Change" and Jack Hayes, the Yearbook Editor, wrote the preface.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 16 -- One-letter Choices (January 8, 1971)

Small differences sometimes have large effects. Effluent and affluent differ by one letter. So too do macroeconomics and microeconomics. A small shift in accent in the instance of effluent and affluent may also make an important distinction clear.

Effluent and affluent

How do you keep these terms straight?

In these environmentally-conscious days, we should work on this. Each term comes from nearly the same Latin roots. "Effluent" means literally to flow out and "affluent" means to flow toward. "Effluent" has taken on the further meaning of a flowing out of polluted materials. "Affluent", on the other hand, has come to mean a copious flow of income.

A special caution should be noted for the oral use of these words. They are best accented on the first syllable. Accent on either syllable is correct, but embarrassing results may come from accenting the latter syllable. The reason is that with the final accent it is nearly impossible for the ear to distinguish between them. Accent on the first syllable gives a clear distinction. I can then say that effluent from an affluent society is a greater problem than that from an underprivileged society, and be understood. Or an effluent tax would bear most heavily on the more affluent taxpayers.

Macroeconomics and microeconomics

Which is which?

Distinguishing between these two is not difficult for an economist, but others are sometimes baffled. Therefore, keep your audience in mind. As with stalactites and stalagmites, some noneconomists become confused as to which is up and which is down.

Sometimes a further problem arises in oral communications. The vowel quality of certain forms of local speech in the United States is such that it is extremely difficult to distinguish between macro- and micro-. Printers sometimes shift the "a" and the "i" and this adds confusion to written text.

In the absence of better terms, the solution may be to be on guard with a parenthetic statement that will make entirely clear what you are talking or writing about.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 17 -- Census and Consensus (January 19, 1971)

A consensus among economists on any one course of action is a rare event. The next Census of Agriculture may bring them together on some questions.

A little hokum may sometimes help in persuading analysts to reconsider their preliminary conclusions.

Census and consensus

Why are these words spelled as they are?

Census usually causes no difficulty, but consensus sometimes goes wrong. Census comes from the Latin Censere, to value or tax, and originally meant a numbering of the people and the valuation of their property for taxation. It came in time to mean any numbering or counting of people and any official enumeration.

Consensus is derived from the Latin consentire (con, with, + sentire to feel or sense). Consensus now means agreement within a group on matters of opinion, testimony, and the like.

You will always be able to spell consensus correctly, if you simply remember that it means the "sense of the group" and good sense is spelled with s's.

Hokum

Does hokum have a place in economics?

Before trying to answer this question we should ask another. What is hokum? Hokum, so far as it plays a place in economics, is irrelevant material introduced into a written or oral report to create interest, draw attention, or provide amusement. If it enhances a good analysis that is otherwise well supported, it may serve a useful purpose. However, if the hokum is actually deceptive and misleading, it has no valid place in economics.

The derivation of the word "hokum" may have some interest. It was apparently formed by combining the first syllable of "hocus-pocus" with the last syllable of "bunkum".

Hocus-pocus is said to have been invented by jugglers in imitation of the Latin declension hic, haec, hoc (this). It means nonsense intended to cover deception, unnecessarily mysterious or elaborate activity to mislead the onlooker.

Bunkum, or buncombe, came from a speech in the 16th Congress (1819-21) by a Congressman, F. Walker, who said he was bound to say something for Buncombe, a county in North Carolina in his district. It has come to mean speech making to please constituents, anything said or done for appearance sake, and hence nonsense. Also bunk.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 18 -- Eternal Practice (January 26, 1971)

For most writers, the quality of the product is in direct proportion to the effort that goes into it. As someone has put it: "Eternal practice is the price of good writing."

Translated, this means: "Do not be satisfied with your first draft."

Most and almost

How much is most?

Most has two meanings that may concern us. First, most is the superlative form of much or many -- much, more, most or many, more, most. Thus, we may say:

(1) Maryland has many farms.
(2) Ohio has more farms.
(3) The Corn Belt has the most family-operated farms.

Second, most also means nearly all.

(1) Most commercial farmers own tractors.
(2) Most farmers work hard.

We may not say: Most farmland (55 percent) is owned by the farmers who operate it. But we may say: More than half of all farmland (55 percent) is owned by the farmers who operate it.

Most in the sense of nearly all is not a precise term, but does mean almost all.

Almost, as we have just said, is equivalent to nearly.

Examples are:

(1) Almost all of our ground forces will be home from Viet Nam in another year.

(2) Contractors supply almost all of the inputs used in broiler production.

A slightly shorter alternative in each of the last two sentences is to substitute most for almost all. It means the same.

Percentage and proportion

Are these terms interchangeable?

Not quite. A percentage is a proportion expressed in parts of 100. A proportion can also be expressed as a common fraction, or in other ways, as for example, in degrees of a circle. Proportion is the more inclusive term.

In economic reports, we use both terms. In tables, we usually prefer to use percentages, but it will depend on the subject matter. Sometimes the title of a table will contain the term proportion, but column headings will be in percentages. This may not be wrong, but it may be troublesome to the reader. Uniformity in table language represents an economy to the reader and his interests should have a high priority. If we hope several thousand people will read a given report prepared by one writer, the economy of the thousands should take precedence over the economy of the one.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 19 -- Discreet Economists, Discrete Data (February 1, 1971)

Much statistical analysis makes use of discrete data that represent separate items.

Writers need to be discreet in presenting research results that may be unpopular. Discretion is not only the better part of valor, but it is often more persuasive than the frontal attack.

Not until economists learned discretion did their numbers increase very much.

Discrete and discreet

Are these two ways of spelling the same word?

No, they are not. But unlike many homonyms (sound alike words), they are close relatives and have some things in common. One might call them fraternal twins because they are really the same word with a slight variation in spelling to indicate that they have taken on separate lives and meanings. Both come directly from the Latin word discretus, the past participle of discernere, to distinguish, to identify. Our word discern also comes from discernere.

Discrete means composed of distinct parts or discontinuous elements.

Discreet means showing good judgment in conduct, especially in speech; showing discernment and acting prudently.

Discern is to see quickly and accurately, to identify.

Examples:

1. The data formed a discrete series.
2. We were willing to talk with him because he was known to be discreet and would not reveal the source.

Number and numbers

Should one say "cattle numbers are increasing" or "the number of cattle is increasing?"

There is no single answer.

Either may be correct in different circumstances, and sometimes either may be correct in the same circumstances. When in doubt, it may be preferable to keep to the singular form, although in that event you may still have a problem in deciding whether to use a singular or plural verb. The dictionaries tell you that when number is used collectively it should be followed by a singular verb; as "an increasing number of employees on the project has forced me to ask for more space." And when number is used distributively it should be followed by a plural verb; as "a number of manuscripts always turn up just before the annual deadline."

Note that distributively means that the individuals are stressed and we think of them as plural. When this is the situation my own rule is to use numbers as in the following examples:

1. Not until 1920 did farm tractors appear in numbers.
2. Trends in numbers of farms by economic classes are upward.
3. Cattle numbers are increasing rapidly.

But:

1. In 1920 the number of tractors was small.
2. The number of farms in the US is at an all time low.
3. The number of beef cows has reached a new high.

In the last three examples the stress is more on the collective aspect, in the first three examples it is on the individuals.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 20 -- Boiled Eggs and Split Infinitives (February 16, 1971)

You must know your words before you put them anywhere. But where you put them depends on other things too. These notes have so far said somewhat less about where to put them than about the words themselves. But I hope to say more.

Phase and faze

Are phase and faze related words?

No, except in being homonyms, which only means they sound alike. An interesting example of the confusion sometimes caused by homonyms occurred in a news story about the recent Apollo 14 flight. Writing about Alan Shepard, the reporter said: "Even the last minute switch problem didn't phase him."

The reporter meant faze, but the unconscious association between electrical phases and the switch problem probably fazed him and he picked the wrong phase.

Faze is a colloquial term meaning disconcerted or daunted. It comes from Old English.

Phase is a stage in a process of change or development and derives from Greek. We pass through an adolescent phase, an under-30 phase, and so on.

Boiled eggs and split infinitives

What do boiled eggs and split infinitives have to do with each other?

They have one thing in common. There is no such things as a "boiled" egg. There is no such thing as a split infinitive.

An egg can be hard-cooked or soft-cooked, but if it is truly boiled, it ceases to be an egg in the edible sense.

An infinitive can be placed in various positions with respect to its modifiers, but if it is truly split it ceases to be a usable infinitive. What people commonly refer to as a split infinitive is the construction in which an adverbial modifier is placed between to and the infinitive. But this is a misnomer because to is not really a part of the infinitive. It is true that to frequently accompanies the infinitive. But there are

many infinitives that do not have or need to have to, as in "I made him go".

One leading grammarian put it this way: "To therefore is no more an essential part of the infinitive than the definite article is an essential part of a nominative, and no one would think of calling the good man a split nominative."

The name split infinitive and the rule about not doing it were apparently devised by some long-ago grammarian looking for a simple rule that would keep his pupils from misplacing adverbial modifiers of infinitives. In his experience the most serious misplacement was that of putting the adverb between to and the infinitive. No doubt the rule may have served as a palliative for a time. But the times have changed and the rule now does far more harm than good. It causes more misplacement than it prevents.

The only sensible rule to follow is to place your adverbial modifiers where they best convey the intended meaning. This may be before to, between to and the infinitive, or after the infinitive. If none of these positions does the job, it means that you should reconstruct the sentence entirely.

Examples:

(1) His gains in cattle futures completely failed to cover his losses.

(2) His gains in cattle futures failed to completely cover his losses.

(3) His gains in cattle futures failed to cover completely his losses.

(4) His gains in cattle futures failed to cover his losses completely.

These four alternative arrangements may help to show what position does to meaning. The third sentence is awkward, the other three sentences are acceptable but they do not have the same meaning. Note that in the first sentence completely modifies failed rather than the infinitive. The so-called split infinitive in the second sentence is fully acceptable if it carries the right message. It will not be acceptable if it does not.

(5) The EPA may decide to flatly forbid the use of certain pesticides.

(6) The EPA may decide to forbid flatly the use of certain pesticides.

There seems to be little question about the choice between to flatly forbid and to forbid flatly. The natural idiom of the language tends to reject constructions that do not flow freely.

Consider the phrase "To better equip the Ph. D. candidate". Shifting the word better either fore or aft will not improve matters.

A recent discussion of prospects for corn blight in 1971 stated: "Naturally it is difficult to evaluate correctly the effects of all factors." A more natural and smoother order would be to say: "It is difficult to correctly evaluate the effects of all factors." The recasting not only places the adverb in better position to modify its infinitive but also prevents it from "splitting" the infinitive from its object.

Finally, a classic example is the one with which Margaret Nicholson closes her discussion of this subject in "American-English Usage". "Do you want to sit and read awhile? No, I want to just sit." You or I might say "No, I just want to sit." But I am sure we would not say, "I want to sit just."

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 21 -- More Eggs to Hatch (February 22, 1971)

My comments on eggs and infinitives may not have been clear enough. Let me add to them. For more on eggs, look in any good cookbook. For the infinitives, consult a recent English grammar or handbook. Some further examples are set forth in the attached pages.

Infinitives

What is an infinitive?

An infinitive is a verbal which may be used as a noun, an adjective, or an adverb. The infinitive may usually be recognized by its sign to, which precedes it. But the sign is not a part of the infinitive and is sometimes not present.

Examples:

He wanted to stop inflation. (Used as a noun object.)
He had no cash to bank. (Used as an adjective to modify cash.)
She was delighted to join our staff. (Modifies an adjective, delighted.)
They did not dare forecast a recession. (To omitted.)

Infinitives and their Modifiers

How do you decide where to place infinitive modifiers?

The trouble with many rules is that they are put in negative terms. They tell you what not to do, and fail to guide you positively on what to do. The ancient rule about split infinitives aimed at a sometime wrong and made a greater wrong in another place. The positive rule about proper placement of infinitive modifiers is to put them where they convey the intended meaning most clearly and do so most gracefully.

Let us consider two situations, one in which the infinitive has no object and one in which it does.

Situation I--Infinitive without an object.

Jack and Jill wanted to go quickly.

In this sentence, placing quickly anywhere else would either change the meaning or be awkward.

Situation II--Infinitive with an object.

A. He pulled the cord suddenly to stop the bus.
B. He pulled the cord to suddenly stop the bus.
C. He pulled the cord to stop suddenly the bus.
D. He pulled the cord to stop the bus suddenly.

These represent the four possible positions in which the adverb could be considered to modify an infinitive with an object. Look at them closely.

The A position is ambiguous because suddenly is likely to be read as modifying pulled. The B position separates to from its infinitive, but is clear. The C position is clear, but awkward because it separates the infinitive from its object. The D position is clear and would usually be considered preferable. However, if greater emphasis is wanted, the B position might be better.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 22 -- Excess Baggage (March 1, 1971)

A friend in a large corporation once told me that the course of wisdom in his company was to express an opinion about every question that came up at a staff meeting. It did not matter whether it was a considered opinion. The opinion was what counted.

But it is possible to speak to little purpose too often as he found out at a later time. Thinking before speaking or writing can eliminate unnecessary wordiness and lead to a better focus on main issues.

Redundant

What is a test for redundancy?

Anything is redundant when it exceeds what is necessary. As in the maxim of Occam's razor: "It is vain to do with more what can be done with fewer".

Redundant is sometimes equated with repetitive, but this is not correct unless one says needlessly repetitive. Necessary repetition is not redundant.

Examples:

1. The reason for the late planting was because of the wet weather. Because of is redundant, so strike it.

2. The totality of it all was ..... Make it: The total was .....

3. The most likely result will be that they will sell more corn later on in the future. Here it is later than you think--time to back up and try again. Perhaps you should say: They will probably sell more corn later in the year.

Elision and ellipsis

Are these terms related?

Elision is the cutting out or omission of one or more letters or sounds of a word.

Ellipsis is the omission of one or more words in a sentence or longer passage.

Elision may not cause as much trouble as ellipsis, but it sometimes is a problem in spelling or pronunciation. For most of us, the main interest may be historical. American spelling of such words as honor, favor, labor differs from the older and still British usage of honour, favour, labour, because we have elided the u.

Words with gh as in might, sight, laugh, bought have elided the guttural sound, completely or partially.

Another type of elision is found in many proper names which have lost sounds and in some instances letters. Consider such examples as Worcester, Crowninshield, (pronounced Crunshel), and York. York is expecially interesting, for it is a direct descendant of the Roman, Eboracum. One might say it was elided from all sides.

Ellipsis is of several kinds. If a part of a quoted passage is omitted this may be termed ellipsis and the omitted part indicated by a break with three dots, known as ellipsis marks.

But ellipsis is more commonly used to indicate an omission where something is so obvious that it does not need to be repeated.

Examples:

1. Among the subjects I preferred was economic theory.
   Instead of "which I preferred".

2. Three assumptions were made and a fourth considered.
   Instead of "and a fourth assumption was considered".

Ellipsis runs into trouble if the arrangement is ambiguous or ungrammatical.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 23 -- Chaubunagungamaug (March 8, 1971)

In central Massachusetts, not far from the Connecticut line, there lies a small body of water called Webster Lake. The Indian name is chaubunagungamaug. Translated this is said to mean:

You fish on your side.
I fish on my side.
Nobody fish in middle.
So we bury hatchet.

Or in current language:

You do your thing.
I'll do my thing.
And, if we should meet,
Everything will be fine.

Even one word may say a lot, and you don't have to worry about modifiers.

Adjectives and Adverbs

How do you tell an adjective from an adverb?

By definition an adjective modifies a noun and an adverb a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. The real difference between adjectives and adverbs is in what they do, not in the dress they wear. Although many adverbs are formed by adding -ly to an adjective, there are numerous exceptions. Sometimes the same word can be either an adjective or adverb, depending on its use.

Examples of both are:

Adjectives	Adverbs
large	large
late	late
deep	deep
careful	carefully
early	early
real	really

(1) He has a large farm. (adjective)
(2) The farm grew large. (adverb)
(3) He was a late comer. (adjective)
(4) He came late to the profession. (adverb
(5) The coal mine had a deep sink. (adjective)
(6) The mine shaft went deep. (adverb)
(7) She is a careful analyst. (adjective)
(8) Her computing is carefully done. (adverb)
(9) Adam Smith was an early economist. (adjective)
(10) He left for the airport early. (adverb)
(11) The seminar considered a real issue. (adjective)
(12) The seminar considered a really live issue. (adverb)

Position of adverbs

Why worry about the position of an adverb?

Adverbs need special handling. Position is important, because like a proximity fuse, an adverb may go off or explode in the direction of the nearest adjective, adverb, or verb and blow up your sentence.

Consider the following passage (from a current newspaper story of the election in India) about Mrs. Gandhi's campaign promises:

"She has projected the image of caring for the poor masses in this vast undeveloped country and is planning to do something about it.

Just what she will do has carefully not been spelled out."

Suppose we were to shift the adverb, carefully, to the position shown in one of the following alternatives:

1. Just what she will do carefully has not been spelled out.
2. Just what she will do has not been spelled out carefully.

If you read each of the three versions slowly you will observe how the meaning has been changed. In the original, the sentence means that she has been careful to make no specific commitment. The next version means that she has not spelled out the part she will do carefully. The last version means she has spelled it out but not carefully.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 24 -- Nouns, Some Proper (March 15, 1971)

If one had to choose the most important part of speech, it might be the noun. Nouns are the movers and shakers, the moved and the shaken, the actors and the acted on. All else turns around them. Only verbs seem almost as essential.

So let us look at proper nouns and common nouns, nouns concrete and nouns abstract, count nouns and mass nouns.

Nouns and their classes

How are nouns classified and why?

Nouns are the names of things, or of anything. They are classified in a number of ways for a number of reasons, mostly good. For example, we have proper nouns and common nouns. The proper nouns wear initial capitals, the common nouns do not. The proper nouns are very much u or upper class.

Then there are nouns concrete and nouns abstract. Nouns concrete are the names of definite things that can be observed by one or more of the five senses. You can touch them, see them, feel them, taste them, or smell them. They are tangible. Nouns abstract are the intangibles--happiness, hope, peace, luck, and many more.

Notice that each of these two sets of classes is two-way and all-inclusive. All nouns can be classed as either proper or common. All can be classed as either concrete or abstract.

Still another two-way scheme is represented by count nouns and mass nouns. All nouns fall in one or the other class in this scheme, too. And this one is a very useful classification. It will help us in handling a common problem of deciding whether to use a singular or plural verb.

A count noun is one that fits a discrete object that can be counted. Examples are tree, farm, horse, tractor.

A mass noun is one that comes in hunks or masses of material in which the units are not discrete or separable. Examples are earth, air, water, sugar, fertilizer, and so on. In order to measure mass nouns we have to apply a measure of weight, space, or something else which constitutes a

count noun in itself. Thus, I have money. To measure it, I have to do so in dollars and cents.

Now in referring to count nouns, I may use terms like few or many, but in referring to mass nouns, I must say much or little.

Examples:

I have too much sugar. (right)
I have too many sugar. (wrong)

I took many farm records. (right)
I took much farm records. (wrong)

The data were too few to give statistical stability. (right)
The data were too little to give statistical stability. (wrong)

The information was too little to prove it. (right)
The information was too few to prove it. (wrong)

Note that mass nouns are often used with singular verbs in the collective sense. For example:

Sugar is sweet.
Soybeans is a leading crop.
Molasses is thick in January.

But count nouns in the collective sense take plural verbs.

The trees are tall.
The farm buildings are new.
The data are old.

The computer works on data by counting. It recognizes the distinction between mass nouns and count nouns, because it will not digest a mass of information until it is properly prepared and programmed for counting. Data is a plural count noun except in this sentence.

Federal and State

Proper or common, upper or lower case?

The interesting item from the National Underwriter quoted in the February issue of Division Activities stopped short in one important respect.

As was proper in the context in which it was written, it represents the editorial practice of many private publications, but it does not fully reflect Federal style as set forth in the GPO Style Manual and as practiced in USDA. The Federal rule is to capitalize State about as frequently as Federal, but neither all the time.

In general, the rule we follow is to capitalize Federal and State only if used to designate countries, national domains, and their principal administrative divisions or when used as a synonym for United States or other sovereign power.

Examples:

Federal
Federal District
Federal Government
Federal grand jury; the grand jury
Federal land bank (land bank would be capitalized only if part of the proper title of the bank)
Federal Personnel Council
Federal Reserve bank (same rule as above on Federal land bank)
Federal Reserve Board
federally, federal (in general sense)

State
State government
State legislature
State line
out-of-State
States rights
State's attorney
state's evidence
state and church
state of the Union
statehood, statehouse, statewide
downstate, tristate, upstate
state welfare

For more detailed information, refer to pages 26, 27, 35, 43, and 55 of the GPO Style Manual.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 25 -- Real Truth (March 23, 1971)

The misuse of real and really is probably more common in letters and memos than in manuscripts, but it keeps turning up. One of the attached notes attempts to point out the difference between use as an adjective and as an adverb. But another point should be made as well. More often than not, we might do better not to use either word.

Should one imply that truth can be less than true, by saying real truth? Does it help to write that the weather was really bad rather than just bad?

Real and really

Real good or really good?
Well, really!

Real and really get us in trouble too often. Consider the following sentence found in a discussion of some current economic analysis:

This data is real good.

Perhaps the one good thing in this short sentence is the word good. Something good may not be wholly bad, but it is a near miss.

For the moment, let us forget about the plurality of data and the rule that the associated pronouns and verbs should agree in number, and think only about the use of real. Real modifies good, an adjective. Hence, real serves as an adverb, and should therefore be written really.

The sentence should read in one of these ways:

(1) These data are really good.
(2) These data are very good.
(3) These data are good.

The dictionaries tell you that real as an adverb is colloquial or informal. For formal writing of the kind we want in ERS letters and reports, we should stay away from real unless it is an adjective. If you have a problem in deciding whether real is used as an adjective, consider some of these examples:

In real life, dreams do not always come true. (adjective)
The real truth was never known. (adjective)
Inflation is a real problem. (adjective)
Inflation really is a problem. (adverb)
It is really so. (adverb)
The regression line gave a really close fit. (adverb)

You may wonder about the real in real estate when real estate is used as a noun modifier. The answer is that the term real estate is used as a compound. The adjective real is fused with estate so that the expression behaves like one word.

One-word sentences

Is there such a thing as a one-word sentence?

Yes, Esmeralda. There is. Such a sentence may be the result of ellipsis, or the omission of what is understood.

Last Sunday in Rockville, I saw a sign near some new houses with the words: OPEN. KEY. In a very real sense, or at least in a real estate sense, these represent two one-word sentences. First, your attention is caught, and then you realize that the real estate agent is a man name Key. The house is open for inspection. See Key for details.

It you begin to make a list of one-word and two-word sentences you will soon have a notebook full of street and road signs, commands, alarms, and the like. Slow, Curve, Stop, Go, Fore, Duck, Run, Fire, Goodbye, etc. Look at any of our pesticide bulletins and you will see somewhere on the cover the Pesticide octagon with the word PROTECT.

We make a lot of use of these one-word sentence in daily life and they enter writing more than we usually think. They are often effective means of communication, but they also need watching. The man in the crowded theater who shouts fire may start a panic. Another problem of choosing the right words illustrated by a recent Beatle Bailey comic strip in which the "limited" private shouts "Goose! Goose!" at the Sergeant just before a shell lands. After the explosion the battered Sergeant says, "Did you by any chance mean "Duck"?

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 26 -- Overcast Skies Beneath (March 29, 1971)

On a recent cross-country flight, one member of the Branch reports that the pilot informed the passengers, "We have overcast skies beneath us." Should he have said undercast, or don't you feel upside down?

Perhaps the term overcast has lost its original meaning and has become a dead metaphor, meaning no more than a cloud cover.

However, it is desirable to watch your writing to be sure that the position of one observer is not confused with that of another.

Real in real estate

My friend "Fred" writes that real in real estate comes from royal estate. Is this really true?

This is a good guess but the authorities do not support it. The guess probably arose because there are two words real, or real words. Each has a separate origin and its own set of meanings.

One real derives from the Latin regis, regal. A former Spanish coin, the real (8 reals to the dollar, hence 2 reals or 2 bits equals a quarter) comes from this source. We find it also in El Camino Real, the King's Highway and in other places, where the meaning regal or royal is clear.

But the real in real estate, as in most other uses, comes from the Latin res, thing. Res in one way or another enters into a number of words, including rich. One who had many things was rich and for a long time the most important kind of riches was land. This was the real estate. Doing your thing was exploiting land.

Alternate and alternative

A recent newspaper report quoted an ecologist as saying that we must look for alternate ways of controlling pests. Should he have said alternative ways?

Alternate and alternative started out in life on an equal footing and with identical meanings. But they are now equipped with quite different special meanings.

Alternate retains more of the sense of occurring in successive turns or of passing from one state to another. For example:

(1) Some fruit trees bear more heavily in alternate years.

(2) In some tropical countries the rainy season alternates with the dry season.

Alternative is used in reference to a choice between two or more mutually exclusive possibilities. Some authorities prefer to restrict it to a choice between two, but in economics it has no such restriction. The economic man chooses the most profitable from several possible alternatives. Occasionally, a writer will refer to a choice between two as an alternate but this is not desirable. In commuting to work I can use either of two alternatives, and sometimes I choose to follow each on alternate days. This may show the difference.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 27 -- Scatter Diagram (April 5, 1971)

The term, scatter diagram, looks like a contradiction. The dictionary definition of the verb scatter is to hurl or drive apart, especially in confusion. A diagram that does that would seem to be an exercise in frustration.

But what the scatter diagram really does is to so organize your data as to bring some order out of the existing chaos. If a relationship is present, a line of best fit can then be drawn and the remaining scatter of the actual observations about the line can be measured. This scatter is due to other forces.

Everyone of us should at least recognize a scatter diagram when we meet one and most of us should know how to make and use one.

The scatter diagram

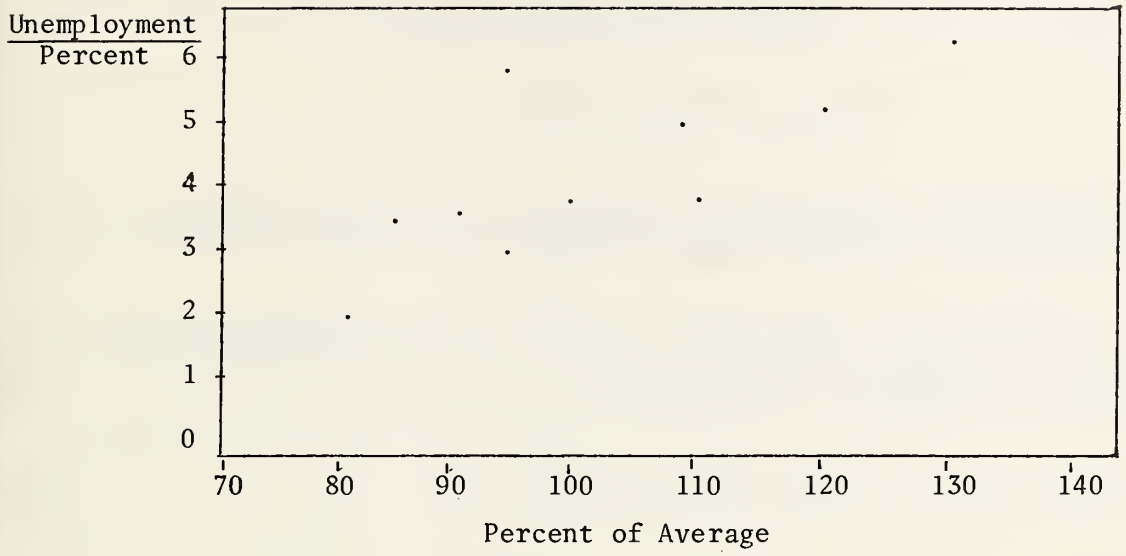
What is it? What does it do?

Every working economist should have in clear view a model of a scatter diagram with the caption: "Forget-me-not!"

The scatter diagram is an indispensable working tool. Its early and frequent use in testing hypotheses will help you avoid costly mistakes and speed your analysis. It is as old fashioned as the lead pencil and just as useful.

There is nothing complicated about a scatter diagram. It is simply a 2-dimensional way of showing the relationship between 2 variables by plotting paired data on graph paper.

For example, consider the positive relationship that outlook economists have long observed between unemployment and the length of women's dresses. The longer the dresses the greater the rate of unemployment. Although the data used here are for Erehwon and therefore fictional, there is no doubt about the reality of some such relationship. Or at least there was no doubt until the new technology of the pants suit upset previous calculations based on the mini-midi-maxi complex.



Length of Dresses

If the scatter comes out as in this illustration, it suggests that there is some relationship. Of course it does not tell you which way the relationship runs. Moverover, it is not a very close correlation. In 4 years, when unemployment in Erehwon was near 4 percent, the length of dresses varied from about 83 to 113 percent of average! This means that other factors were involved and suggests that you should look for them.

The scatter diagram is a good way to get acquainted with your data before moving into more sophisticated techniques. It is cheap and fast. A good rule is to never do a machine regression or correlation analysis until you have first done some scatter diagrams.

If you have not made a scatter diagram for some time, make one today on your favorite project.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 28 -- Focusion (April 12, 1971)

Most mutations are of little value and usually destroy themselves. This is as true of language as of genetics. But once in a while a mutant word takes hold and serves a useful purpose.

Last Thursday three word mutations crossed my desk--meritous, assertation, and focusion. The writers had apparently intended to write meritorious, assertion, and focusing.

Of the first two no more needs to be said, but focusion has intriguing possibilities. The attached note explores them.

Focusion

Will you please explain focusion?

"The Chairman was asked to respond explaining and expressing the developing philosophy of [X] with respect to these interests."

This sentence is a fair sample of the text that appeared in a report of a recent research committee meeting. For a long time I have been searching for just the right word for this kind of writing. Last week Bernadine Holland supplied the word. As she may not be aware of her contribution to serendipity, let me now commend her for it and for her special diligence in so well converting Austin Fox's script.

The word is focusion. It is not in my dictionary, but I now put it there with this meaning:

> Focusion, n., 1. the act or process of bringing confusion to such a focus that there is no mistaking its totality. 2. the state of being focusioned. 3. that which is focusioned, the result of focusion.

You can see at once how useful this word will be. In the future any explanation so confused as to be utterly useless can be simply marked focusioned. You can say that the writer was in a state of focusion, poor fellow, and was not fully responsible at the time.

To avoid any possible focusion about credit for this useful invention, I am directing that a double plus mark be placed in Bernadine's folder.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 29 -- Lucid Grace (April 19, 1971)

Economists write much about things that lie in the future. They often use such terms as probable and likely to suggest the coming economic weather.

Likely is both an adjective and an adverb. Its misuse in the adverbial form keeps many an economist writing with less than the lucid grace that would persuade his readers to his point of view.

Likely

What is the matter with likely?

Likely as an adverb is often used incorrectly.

Examples are:

(1) Corn yields will likely be higher this year.
(2) The party leadership will likely change the rules.
(3) The new program will likely cut the acreage.

The insertion of qualifiers before likely, quite likely, very likely--would make these statements grammatical. But without such qualifiers, examples of the preceding kind where unacceptable to more than 70 percent of a Usage Panel that worked with the Editors of the American Heritage Dictionary.

The Usage Panel consisted of about 100 members--novelists, essayists, poets, journalists, writers on science and sports, public officials, professors. The panelists represented a wide range of experience with only one thing in common, a recognized ability to speak and write good English.

Likely is both an adjective and an adverb. For use as an adjective, no qualifier is needed. Likely as an adjective, is parallel with probable, but with a slightly greater degree of certainty. To say that rain is likely tomorrow is a little stronger than to say that rain is probable tomorrow.

The adverbial form of probable is probably, but the adverbial form of likely is still likely. This is probably why idiom says that a qualifier is to be inserted before likely.

Conclusion. The expressions will likely, would likely, and the corresponding forms in other tenses, are colloquialisms that are not considered good English in formal writing. Their use makes it a little more difficult to communicate.

Because we write much about the future, we may use even the correct grammatical expressions too often. Consider this sign on a Customs hut at a little port in the Bahamas:

"If someone comes and no one is here, wait until someone comes here."

Would it have been any better had it read: "If no one is here when you arrive, wait and he will probably come?"

I like the positive assurance of the first statement better than the doubt that creeps into the second one.

If an indication of probability is needed, there are several acceptable forms. For example:

It will probably rain tomorrow.
It is likely to rain tomorrow.
It is very likely to rain tomorrow.
It will very likely rain tomorrow.
It will very probably rain tomorrow.

Or more simply, one may say:

Rain is probable.
Rain is likely.
Rain is very probable.
Rain is very likely.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 30 -- Blue Moon Data (April 26, 1971)

Once in a blue moon, an editor reads a manuscript in which the word data is used consistently and correctly. He then feels like writing a special note of commendation to the author.

Words like data, strata, agenda, memoranda, phenomena are the plural forms of Latin words that were originally taken into English without change in form. Some strange things have happened to them on the way from then to now and we should look at each one carefully.

Data

Data do or data does? Count noun or mass noun?

We find the word data used both as a plural and as a collective singular. But the plural form is more appropriate in formal writing and will keep you out of trouble even in informal writing and speaking.

The following quotations illustrate the dilemma that often faces the writer who tries to use data as a collective singular. In isolation, this might do as a short way of referring to a set or collection of data. But the next thought may demand a plural expression and the two are then in conflict.

"Although the data collected at the laboratory are vouched for by several scientists, much of it has to be restudied."

"Data enter the machine in a Read-In or Read operation and results come out as a Read-Out, Punch, or Print operation. As a preparation for the machine's Read operation, the original data is first expressed in coded form....."

It is clear that in some uses, the meaning requires data to be plural. If one is fitting a line to data, making a scatter diagram from data, computing an average or a standard deviation from data, or giving the dimensional data for a beauty queen, the sense is plural and is not conveyed by the collective singular.

Conclusion: By using data as a plural, you will avoid inconsistency, offend fewer readers, be more accurate, and incidently have more respect for the integrity of your data.

If you wish to refer to data in the mass it is preferable to do so by speaking of information, the set of data, the collection of data, or some similar term.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 31 -- Sesquipedalian (May 3, 1971)

Somewhere in the middle of Pennsylvania there is a roadside stand that sells sesquipedalian hot dogs.

Sesquipedalian means foot-and-a-half long. It is a first cousin of sesquicentennial, which means a century-and-a-half.

The word has two, and only two, excellent uses. One is to refer to this special variety of hot dogs and the other is to designate words that are longer than necessary.

Sesquipedalian words

Who uses sesquipedalian words?

Sesquipedalian, or overlong, words are used by some writers who seek to impress their readers. They do. But the impression they make is likely to be unfavorable.

Short words are usually easier to understand and convey their meaning with more force. Sometimes a longer word may be necessary to convey the exact shade of meaning or to provide a change in pace.

Those who have a real passion for extra syllables often add them unnecessarily. Consider the following pairs:

definitive	definite
preventative	preventive
creditability	credibility
mentality	mind
meticulous	careful
administrate	administer
estimation	estimate
advancement	advance

The words in the first column are all acceptable, but some have a different shade of meaning or are used when the shorter form would be better. If the meaning is the same, the shorter form is nearly always more effective.

Definitive and definite are sometimes confused. However, they are quite different in meaning. For example, a definitive judgment is one which is decisive and final, a definite judgment one which is clear and explicit.

The research proposal had a definite meaning but was lacking in its definitive approach.

A credible action is believable, a creditable one is praiseworthy.

It is perhaps better to keep things in mind than in your mentality.

One who is meticulous may forget how to be careful.

No good reason appears for preventative over preventive or administrate over administer; the shorter form is more desirable.

Estimation and advancement have different meanings from estimate and advance.

Observe that words like those above are only slightly sesquipedalian. You can probably add to the list with a little practice. For words of this kind a careful inspection of your early drafts will do wonders. Rewriting to eliminate unnecessary syllables will not only clarify but add vigor and force to your style.

When you feel competent to handle words of this calibre it is then time to move on to the ones of real length as in the following sentence:

Eutrophication might be essentially terminated if degradation of chemical pollutants could be effectuated in an earlier interface in the environmental concatenation.

Do not give way to despair. This only means that we might stop the algal growth in Lake Erie if we could lock up in some harmless form the nitrates and phosphates that fertilizers and detergents put in our streams.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 32 -- Becoming Modesty (May 13, 1971)

The research economist's equivalent of the agricultural ladder used to be some such progression as writer, author, authority. The aspiring member of the profession first wrote articles and reports, then a manual or a book, and eventually he became an authority on his chosen subject.

Now it seems to be easier to become an author but more difficult to arrive on the stage as an authority.

Author (noun), author (verb), writer, write

How should these words be used in referring to a manuscript or publication?

At one time not so long ago, a writer became an author only when he had published a book, and one with a hard cover at that. Perhaps the paperback had something to do with changing this. It is now considered proper to use author if one has published a paper or journal article.

However, writer is always correct for any kind of writing and is also more flexible. Strictly speaking, you are not an author until your opus is published. You are a writer from the moment you set pen to paper. Modesty also suggests that it is better to refer to yourself as a writer. Some readers react adversely to author, unless they already regard the work as one of substance. The high profile of author is likely to be less persuasive than the low profile of writer.

Author, as a verb, should not be used in formal writing or speaking. It is pretentious and less accurate than write. You write a manuscript, or you wrote the article. To say that you authored the article, may be interpreted by some to mean that it was ghost-written and your name was put on it afterwards.

A great many nouns have been converted to verbs. The ability to do this is part of the genius of the English language. But such conversions become acceptable only if they serve a good purpose.

Doctor, Ph. D, and other kinds

Those who have acquired a doctoral degree as well as those who have not are often uncertain about proper use. Are there some guide lines?

Yes, there are. First of all, doctors (other than honorary) are divisible into two classes: (1) those for whom the degree is a legal necessity for practicing their calling--the MD's, the DVM's, DDS's and the like.

(2) those for whom it is a record of a certain level of training but not a legal necessity--Ph.D's, DSc's, etc.

In the U.S. Department of Agriculture, we are mainly concerned with the second class. Displaying Dr. or Ph.D. on doors is frowned upon. Nor is the use of the degree in connection with your signature on a letter or memo according to the book.

On the other hand, your secretary may use the term in answering the phone if she wishes. But it is not good form for you to answer your own phone by saying, "Dr. Blank speaking", or to introduce yourself as Dr. Blank".

In writing to fellow staff members, you may address them as Dr., but unless the occasion is formal it may be just as well not to.

When you write a letter to someone on the staff of a university it is better to address him as Professor, if he is one, or by his title, if he has one. If he is a recent Ph.d without other status it may be desirable to write Dr.

It is never wrong to write or say Mr. A man without the degree may be sensitive on the subject and you may offend him.

All that is said above applies also to professional women on an equal basis except that care should be taken about the use of Miss and Mrs. No one has yet found a satisfactory term if you are uncertain, but Miss may create fewer problems.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 33 -- End Construction (May 17, 1971)

As you travel South on 13th St., N.W. over the bumps that mark work on the future subway, a sign on a tall pole at F St. suddenly reads: "End construction".

To announce that the street ahead is clear, when this is so visibly obvious, seems pointless. The sign must mean something else.

Does it mean that the subway architects have designed an end-piece to keep some future subway train from switching off into the fourth dimension, fail-safe security measure?

Or could it mean only that swift forward progress has ground to a halt for a lack of funds and that this is a recognition of the need to end construction?

Is end a noun or a verb?

Verbs from nouns

One of my colleagues speaks of researching a new subject. Is this a desirable way of expressing his thought?

The use of research as a verb is in a transitional state. Some will accept it, others will not. One would have to say that it is not fully acceptable in formal writing. The touch of Madison Ave. rests upon it.

This may seem curious, especially when we compare research with search. Search long ago made the journey to verbhood and no one would question the propriety of searching for the truth, for example.

One of the reasons for a delayed acceptance of research, as a verb, may be that there are several synonyms already in use. For example, we analyze, investigate, compare and so on in the process of doing a careful piece of research. Research, as a noun has acquired such high level status, that it may seem undignified to let it descend to competition with the working vocabulary already on the job.

Moreover, if you want to use a noun like research in a verbal sense, there is a way of doing it without impugning its prestige and without departing from customary formal usage. You may say something like this:

I am doing research on this subject.
I did research on this subject.

Research remains a noun in good standing, but the sense is the same as if you had said with less dignity:

I am researching this subject.
I researched this subject.

Other similar verbs

With a little effort you can make a list of nouns that are in the process of trying to become verbs, but have not quite made it. Some will eventually win out, and others will lose the battle.

Consider these examples:

host, to host a party
chair, to chair a committee
author, to author a book

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 34 -- The Turing Test (June 1, 1971)

Alan Mathison Turing, a British mathematician who died in 1954 at the age of 42, made a number of significant contributions to computer theory. Among them was what has become known as the Turing game or test.

Turing considered the question, "Can machines think?" and to test it developed a variation of a common conversation game. In this game, a computer and a man carry on a conversation. They are concealed from the observer who hears the conversation (or reads it), but does not know which is the machine and which is the man. His problem is to determine from the conversation which is which. If he cannot detect the difference who is to say that the machine is not thinking?

I have just reviewed a report in which I found myself thinking (?) "This reads more like a machine than a man writing". It passed my "Turing test" in an inverse fashion. The number of cliches, fad words, cumbersome phrases, and Delphic statements gave an impression that the programmer had stocked his memory bank with too many items that would merely seem to keep the conversation going.

Padding

Some reports are like some speakers, from beginning to ending is a far distance. What can be done to help them?

If you look closely at such reports, you may find them faulty in organization. But even if the organization is good, there may still be too much padding and too many tired words and phrases. The best way of making a more effective draft is to do a thinning job, to clear out the undergrowth, and permit the key words and phrases to see the sunlight.

Consider the following two sentences from a recent report:

1. "Restructuring the tenure situation which this study does in effect, does not particularly alleviate the income situation."

2. "The capital assets of many farm operators (in this area) are below the minimum level required to adjust in farming as herein construed."

These sentences probably mean something like:

1. "Changes in tenure arrangements as tested in this study would not improve incomes."

2. "Many farmers in this area do not have enough capital to shift to a new farming system."

The same manuscript was well sprinkled with expressions like the following:

Expression	Possible Translation
relevant	related to the issue
restructure	reorganize
involvement	commitment
requirements	quantities used
viable	continuing
land acquisition	land purchase or transfer
expertise	skills
meaningful cost reduction	substantial cost reduction
resource ownership strategies	alternative ways of attaining ownership
cost-price squeeze	adverse change in prices of inputs and outputs
poses a problem	presents a problem
necessary temporal farm adjustments	changes over time
in the absence of definitive studies	lacking studies

Most of the expressions in the first column are useful occasionally. It is the too frequent use or incorrect use that is to be watched. Some would probably see little excuse for the phrase "necessary temporal farm adjustments". In Churchillian terms, this so wraps a simple idea in mystery that it becomes an enigma to all but a few.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 35 -- Mark Twain's Cat (June 7, 1971)

The conclusions from any analysis may be significant, but they must be logical to be useful.

Some conclusions as they appear in manuscripts remind me of Mark Twain's story about the cat that tried to get more out of an experience than there was in it in the first place. He said, "The cat, having sat upon a hot stove lid, will not sit upon a hot stove lid again. Nor upon a cold lid."

This is a common form of guilt by association that should be guarded against.

Conclusion

What do we really mean by a conclusion? Is it always correct?

A conclusion is something at the end of a chain of reasoning. The word derives from the Latin roots con (with) and cludere (to close). It literally means to close with, and unfortunately carries no guarantee of certitude.

However, your professional standing will depend upon the kind of conclusion you reach. The importance of a correct conclusion was once summed up by the late James Thurber in this way:

> "Get it right or let it alone; the conclusion you jump to may be your own."

Mark Twain's cat would not have made a first-rate economist.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 36 -- Geometry of the Supersquare (June 15, 1971)

Most of us were exposed to some geometry in high school and learned about such things as parallelograms. Those who endured solid geometry also became acquainted with parallelepipedons. You may remember that this is a solid with 6 faces, each a parallelogram. A cube, for example, is one kind of parallelepipedon. One might call a cube a 3-dimensional square. Thus if you refer to someone as having parallelepipedonal qualities, it means that he may be a supersquare.

As explained in the attached note the suffix -al means pertaining to.

Optimum, optimal--minimum, minimal--maximum, maximal

Which form should be used as an adjective?

The first of each pair can be either a noun or an adjective, the second is an adjective only. Originally, the -al form was the correct adjective, but the use of the noun form as an adjective is now common outside of very technical discussions.

The meaning is the same according to the dictionaries. The -al is an adjectival suffix that means pertaining to. It occurs in loan words from Latin, for example is regal, pertaining to the king. But the model has been carried over into the formation of adjectives from many other sources. Examples are: typical, geometrical, regional, tropical, and so on. You may even coin your own on occasion.

The adjective optimal was made from the noun optimum, by dropping the -um and adding -al.

My own preference with the -um words above is to use the noun form as the adjective unless there is a positive reason for using the -al form. Optimal, minimal, and maximal carry an academic sound and your audience may get the impression that you are talking down to them. With optimal there is also a chance that it may be mistaken for optional or misprinted.

However, there are occasional situations in which the -al form may be desirable. For example, one might prefer to say "All the conditions necessary for a bumper crop were optimal".

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 37 -- Skoal (June 28, 1971)

One of the interesting things about words is the variety found in their beginnings. Who would now associate skoal, the Scandinavian toast in drinking to someone's health, with a weighing scale? Yet they have a common origin.

I have concluded after balancing "Words and Where to Put Them" on the scale of summer activities that they need a vacation.

So, skoal! May you all have a pleasant and profitable summer.

Scale and scales

Should one use the singular or plural form in referring to the instrument that weighs?

The answer is not clear cut. Both forms are used and the authorities do not agree completely. But usage seems to be moving toward the singular form. For example, the mail order catalogs (reflectors of good everyday use) make it singular. They describe a spring scale, a postal scale, a baby scale, and so on.

Yet we have such expressions as "weighed in the scales of Justice", and "tips the scales at 190 pounds".

The reasons for this double standard trace back to the origins of the word. There are at least two and perhaps three separate sources of the word scale, each associated with different modern meanings. Cross associations, both ancient and modern, are also probable.

The scale that weighs was first a balance with two pans or dishes. The old Norse word skaal (skoal), meaning cup, was applied to either dish of the balance and presently to the balance itself. As there were two, it was easy to say scales.

Later many scales had only one visible pan or dish and some worked on a principle other than the balance. Then it became natural to say scale.

One of the other origins of scale was from Latin scala, a staircase. This came to be applied to graduated measures. A ruler, for example, has a scale. So does a demand schedule, or a wage schedule. For that matter a weighing scale nowadays usually has a graduated scale on a visible dial. Thus the two separate origins came together in one instrument called a scale. So long as two balancing pans or scales were in sight, the plural seemed more appropriate. Now the singular seems fitting.

However, we must not forget the goddess of Justice who weighs things in her scales. Wherever the concept of balancing in this sense is involved, the plural form will be preferable.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 38 -- Parallel Construction (September 7, 1971)

We ended June with skoal, so it may be fitting to begin September with hello. Skoal is an ancient word, but hello is relatively new. It has yet to celebrate a centenary. The authorities say it first came into writing about 1880, although it may have descended from hollo or halloo. These were older forms used for shouting to distant people or for calling hounds.

Perhaps the invention of the telephone had something to do with the spread of hello. Anyway it is a very useful word...hello.

I have just reviewed last year's notes on Words and hope to improve on them with your assistance as we go along. Suggestions and comments are welcome at any time.

Parallel construction

What is meant by parallel construction?

Parallel construction so builds your sentences that similar elements have the same grammatical form and also the same logical form. Many famous examples come to mind: There is Caesar on his campaign in Gaul: "Veni, vidi, vici!" ("I came, I saw, I conquered"). There is Churchill's great peroration: "....we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender..."

Most of us may never have occasion to speak or write in the grand manner, but we can still make effective use of the principle of parallel construction in our everyday writing.

Parallelism can involve words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. At a higher level paragraphs and chapters may also be so constructed, but we shall not consider these here. The thing to remember is that words must be parallel with words, phrases with phrases, clauses with clauses, and so on. If they are mixed there is no parallel.

In the following examples the odd numbered are not parallel, the even numbered are:

(1) He selected seed corn with high yield, and because it had blight resistance, and his neighbor recommended it. (A phrase and 2 clauses)

(2) He selected seed corn on the basis of high yield, blight resistance, and his neighbor's recommendation. (Three nouns)

(3) John was invited to attend the seminar and learn how farmworkers in Hawaii live. (A noun and a clause)

(4) John was invited to attend the seminar and to learn about the living conditions of Hawaiian farmworkers. (Two nouns)

(5) The problems with the manuscript are its faulty organization and it takes too long to read. (A noun and a clause)

(6) The problems with the manuscript are its faulty organization and excessive length. (Two nouns)

One instance of what a good writer does with parallelism is this brief quotation from the book about "The Marauders" by Charlton Ogburn, Jr.

"Being unready, and ill equipped is what you have to expect in life. It is the universal predicament. It is your lot as a human being to lack what it takes."

The Marauders were three Army infantry battalions that operated behind enemy lines in Burma in World War II. They were all volunteers. They made do with what they had.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 39 -- Whiches like Witches (September 13, 1971)

The relative pronouns, that and which, cause a good many headaches for writers. They are partly interchangeable but not altogether so. For example, that is used for persons, animals, or things; which is used for animals, or things, but not for persons.

Another difference is that a which clause is set off by commas, a that clause is not. This punctuation goes along with the general rule that a which clause expands the meaning and a that clause limits it.

In the comments that are attached, the examples, which may suggest others, were selected to illustrate certain general rules.

That or which?

Whether to use that or which, or preferably when to use one or the other, is a continuing problem. What can be said about it?

Authorities differ and so do users, but there are three general rules that may help. These are:

(1) Use neither if the sense is correctly conveyed.

(2) Use that before defining or limiting clauses and which before nondefining or nonlimiting clauses.

(3) When in doubt use that rather than which and you will more often be right. This is because of a tendency to use too many whiches. Like witches, the whiches ride into our writing and become goblins.

Examples:

(1) The statistical methods we use today are more elaborate than those used formerly. (Neither which nor that is needed after methods.)

(2) The policies of this Administration differ from those the Johnson Administration followed. (Again neither is necessary.)

(3) The sweeping reform that the Senator had in mind would be difficult to achieve. (Defining limits the reform to a specific one.)

(4) The bus, which was now packed to capacity, drove steadily on through the storm. (Nondefining, just gives additional information.)

(5) The hogs, which were all thirsty, gathered near the water fountain. (Nondefining.)

(6) The trucks that had the most mileage were overhauled first. (Defining, that introduces a clause essential to the meaning.)

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 40 -- Misplaced Participles (September 20, 1971)

Some 200 years ago the young Benjamin Franklin arrived in Philadelphia one morning, spent his last pennies for two rolls of bread, and went off down the street with one "under one arm and eating the other".

This may not have been the first time that a misplaced participle suggested a wrong conclusion. But it shows how a participle always seeks the shelter of the nearest noun.

Participles

What is a participle?

The stock answer is that a participle is a verbal used as an adjective. This is correct but it does not help much. The trouble is that, like the names for the other parts of speech, participle is a Latin word and we define it in terms of two other Latin words. What we lack is translation.

The participle might better have been named participator. (Still Latin and from the same root but more commonly understood.) A participator is that which takes part in, or helps, but does not provide the whole show. That is exactly what a participle does. It does not stand alone. It must have a noun to help, assist, or modify. This is why we have problems with dangling, squinting and otherwise misplaced participles. A participle must participate with a noun, and it automatically attaches itself to the nearest noun.

Some examples are these:

(1) The young lady typing at that desk is my secretary.
(2) The year ending June 30 is the fiscal year.
(3) The closed door indicated that the conference was in session.

Some incorrect ones are:

(1) After writing our report, the secretary typed the draft. (Who wrote the report?)
(2) Moving rapidly and giving out a buzzing sound, we saw a swarm of angry bees. (Who moved and buzzed?)

(3) Using a new mathematical model, the economic problem was solved. (Who or what used the model?)

(4) Starting the calculator, the problem quickly found a solution. (What does starting modify?)

Participles and tense

Should one use the present participle in speaking of past events?

This question arises in the use of participles as adjectives, and frequently puzzles writers.

As stated in the unabridged Merriam Webster II, "the tense of a participle refers to the state of the action or occurrence rather than the time of the happening, which depends on the time of the verb of the clause it occurs in....". For example, consider the sentence:

"He drove away in his car, smiling to himself."

In this sentence, the participle smiling is in the present tense but refers to the same time as drove--the past.

A few other examples are these:

(1) "The bombs bursting in air, gave proof through the night..."
(2) The burning bush supplied a symbol.
(3) The growing boy went off to school.
(4) The year beginning July 1914 marked a time to remember.
(5) We combined the wheat crop early that year, beginning on June 25 and ending on July 3.

Perhaps this makes it easier to understand why the column heading in tables is proper when it says year beginning July 1 or year ending June 30.

Beginning and ending are present participles that refer to the state of the occurrence rather than to the time of its happening. The time will always depend on the time indicated by the main verb of the clause present or implied.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 41 -- Idioms are Good for Us (October 5, 1971)

Idiomatic expressions are found in both formal and informal writing. They often give life and action to what might otherwise be dull. Many of them involve figures of speech that may originally have had sharper edges.

For example, Americans run for office, Englishmen stand for office. We go to war, but we do not go to peace. He could not make out what it was all about.

We need to keep our idioms in good order.

Idiom

What is an idiom and what do we mean when we refer to an expression as being idiomatic?

By idiom, we mean any form of expression that has become established by long continued use. An idiom usually is grammatical and logical but many that attract attention may not be. Again some are so familiar that we hardly notice them. For example:

1. It is 6 o'clock.
2. It is October 10.

If we were to follow the logic of the first statement we might write:

It is 10 October o'calendar.

Some textbooks compare grammar, syntax, and idiom. It may help to do so. The three are overlapping but they do represent different points of emphasis in handling words.

Grammar deals with the logical rules of agreement in respect to such things as tense, number, case, and gender.

Syntax has to do with the orderly arrangement of sentence units (words, phrases, and clauses).

Idiom relates to customary usage.

Syntax is often said to be the most important, because it may determine clarity. But idiomatic writing may contribute the style and grace that make your writing more convincing and persuasive.

Here are a few illustrations:

1. The new statistical technique caught on quickly. (came into use)

2. The wage-price freeze puts ceilings on most prices. (puts an upper limit)

3. Please make sure you are not overdrawn. (be certain)

4. Most of the Nation's soft coal miners walked off the job yesterday. (stopped working)

5. IMF backs broad monetary reforms. (asks for)

6. The carpenter used several 2 X 4's. (pronounced 2 by 4's)

The idiomatic use of prepositions is something that is difficult even for some native Americans, and it often trips up those who come from abroad. Here are a few that economists need to watch:

agree to (a thing)
agree with (a person)
compare to (something of a different kind)
compare with (a similar thing)
concur in (an opinion)
concur with (a person)
differ from (things)
differ with (a person)
different from (not than)
profit by
reason with
substitute for
supply of (a commodity)
demand for

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 42 -- Cliché's are Not (October 12, 1971)

Cliches are close relatives to slang. One difference is that clichés have usually fallen from grace and slang expressions have never risen to it. Another is that the user knows when he is using slang, but not when he is being used by a cliché.

A test of a good writer is his ability to avoid clicheing about.

Cliches

How do you know a cliche when you meet one?

A cliché is a trite expression, one that has lost its original freshness through overuse. The life has gone out of it. To use a current cliché, it is no longer viable.

Consider these expressions:

1. the economic game plan
2. where the action is
3. get their kicks from
4. not your bag
5. the old inevitable bit
6. we blew it
7. a near miss
8. his economic model
9. a low profile
10. bit the dust
11. make this perfectly clear
12. take drastic action
13. cost-price squeeze
14. this fair city
15. in the last analysis
16. for all practical purposes

Not all of these are clichés all the time or to everyone. But the careful writer will avoid language that irritates many of his readers. Getting his message through is difficult enough without adding barriers.

As someone said: "Playing around is not the same as playing a round". If you want to play around with cliches that is one thing, but if you want to play a round to win someone to your point of view that is quite another.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 43 -- Short Words are Bedrock (October 19, 1971)

Words in one piece may do more deeds than words in sesquipedalian length. Long words have a place, but short words are the bed rock on which to build. Watch them work.

Short words

Why worry about word length?

Short words are like straight lines. Each is the shortest distance between two points. If you want to go from here to there, the short way may be the clear way. If you want to get a thought from one mind to another the short word may be the clear word.

To explain something to someone not familiar with it, putting the unknown in short plain words will usually do the job better.

Read the selection on the next page and then try writing one of your own paragraphs in words of one syllable.

WORDS OF ONE SYLLABLE

When you come right down to it, there is no law that says you HAVE to use big words when you write or talk.

There are lots of small words, and good ones, that can be made to say all the things you want to say, quite as well as the big ones. It may take a bit more time to find them at first. But it can be well worth it, for all of us know what they mean. Some small words, more than you might think, are rich with just the right feel, the right taste, as if made to help you say a thing the way it should be said.

Small words can be crisp, brief, terse--go to the point, like a knife. They have a charm all their own. They dance, twist, turn, sing. Like sparks in the night they light the way for the eyes of those who read. They are the grace notes of prose. You know what they say the way you know a day is bright and fair--at first sight. And you find, as you read, that you like the way they say it. Small words are gay. And they can catch large thoughts and hold them up for all to see, like rare stones in rings of gold, or joy in the eyes of a child. Some make you feel, as well as see: the cold deep dark of night, the hot salt sting of tears.

Small words move with ease where big words stand still--or worse, bog down and get in the way of what you want to say. There is not much, in all truth, that small words will not say--and say quite well.

Joseph A. Ecclesine
in "Printers' Ink"

To the reader: Please note that the author wrote this entire article with one syllable words. Simple words can indeed communicate!

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 44 -- Write Again and Again (October 27, 1971)

The number of times a manuscript needs to be rewritten is a function of many variables--the purpose in view, the particular audience, the skill of the writer, the nature of the subject, and so on.

A writer may plead lack of time. But if he will think for a moment, he must realize that the arithmetic will not support such a plea. Suppose his message is intended to be read by only 10 people. If it should take them each as much time to discover his meaning as it would take him to make it clear, they have lost 10 times as much time as he has saved. Furthermore, if not all of them untangle his meaning, and if some of them get irritated, the persuasive effect may be nil.

Rewriting

How many times should a manuscript be revised and rewritten?

More times than you think.

This must be qualified in terms of real limits of time and competition with other activities, but within this frame nearly all manuscripts would benefit from more attention than they get. I have been struck many times by the number of drafts made by good writers before they satisfy themselves.

Some years ago, the late Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson was selected to give the annual Godkin Lectures at Harvard University. The Godkin Lectures are directed to "The Essentials of Free Government and the Duties of the Citizen". Justice Jackson chose to lecture on "The Supreme Court in the American System of Government". His untimely death did not permit him to deliver the lectures but they were printed as a small book from his almost complete notes. The title of the book is "The Supreme Court".

Read with me his editors' foreword to that book:

FOREWORD

In March 1954 the Harvard Graduate School of Public Administration invited Mr. Justice Jackson to become the Godkin Lecturer for the academic year 1954-55. The Justice accepted and chose as his topic for the three lectures, "The Supreme Court in the American System of Government." February of 1955 was tentatively set as the date for delivery. The Justice began outlining his subject and formulating his ideas soon after he accepted the invitation, and by the end of summer, 1954, he had completed six drafts of the first lecture and two of the second and third. He then reorganized the whole and wrote one more draft of the first two lectures and two partial redrafts of the third.

Mr. Justice Jackson died suddenly on October 9, 1954. He had worked for several hours on the third Godkin lecture the day before his death, and notes indicating further revisions were found in his briefcase after he was stricken.

The Justice had intended to write several more drafts before February. Nevertheless, in view of the substantially completed form of the work, the decision was made to publish what he had already written. Except for technical corrections which the Justice himself would have made before delivery, the lectures remain in the form of the latest drafts to come from his hands. Revision has been limited to grammatical changes and in some places to changes in sentence structure for the sake of clarification. Such revision has been done by the undersigned—the Justice's law clerk, who worked closely with him on the lectures, and the Justice's son, with whom he had discussed his subject matter. Nothing has been added to or deleted from the thought content in any of the three lectures.

Though the Justice had indicated where footnotes were to be added, he had not written all of them himself. Therefore, scattered notes throughout the lectures are not his own. Those which are starred have been supplied. In most instances, the source material for such notes was obvious; in a few, however, a citation was added which seemed to fit most closely the Justice's thought.

This, therefore, is an unfinished, yet substantially completed, work. It is unfinished in the sense that had the Justice lived the final product would have been polished to the perfection which he demanded of himself. It is, however, substantially completed in the sense that it expresses his matured and deep convictions regarding the institution of which he had been so close and keen an observer, first from without and then from within, over the past two decades.

E. Barrett Prettyman, Jr.
William Eldred Jackson

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 45 -- A Single Pulse of Air (November 4, 1971)

Geometry may seem remote from the use of words. But it has more to do with it than we often realize. For example, a syllable is a unit for measuring length. As the dictionary puts it, a syllable is the segment of speech produced with a single pulse of air from the lungs.

Try saying a word like antidisestablishmentarianism if you have any doubts about this.

The Geometry of words

What does geometry have to do with words?

Geometry deals with the measurements and relationships of points, lines, angles, and figures in space. Similar measurements and relationships apply to words. For example, words have length. They are short and long, monosyllabic and polysyllabic.

Some words are sharp and pointed, others are blunt. Some carry a line or an angle, while others convey a point of view, or represent a standpoint. We have unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral agreements between Nations. Or we have one-sided, two-sided, and many-sided arrangements between ordinary mortals.

Various levels of word usage are found. You and I buy and sell things. Some professional groups make their services available and are suitably compensated by their clients. Art collectors would be appalled by mercenary words. They merely acquire or relinquish possession of art objects.

Then there are flat adverbs. These are the adverbs that do not have the regular -ly ending. They often carry more force because they are short and flat. Examples:

He dug deep.
Go slow on this road.
The weather looks bad.

Parallel construction frequently saves words and adds emphasis. The sign said to stop, look, and listen.

The geometer deals in regular and irregular shapes and forms. So does the user of verbs. Regular verbs are those whose principal parts are formed in a uniform or regular way. The past tense and the past participle are made by adding -ed to the present tense. The irregular verbs do not follow such a pattern.

In Anglo-Saxon times, most English verbs were irregular. Now things are about evenly divided. The irregular verbs are usually the strongest and most expressive. They are often called strong verbs.

Examples:

Regular	Irregular
project, projected, projected	break, broke, broken
call, called, called	see, saw, seen
mill, milled, milled	write, wrote, written
price, priced, priced	sell, sold, sold,
thaw, thawed, thawed	freeze, froze, frozen
supply, supplied, supplied	go, went, gone

Solid writing must have a firm foundation or basis. Its structure has many geometric qualities.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 46 -- Scrambled Verbs (November 9, 1971)

"He clumb into his old car and come, over to see me that day." If 4th grader Johnny wrote this in a theme, his teacher would give him less than full credit. But how many of us have not said or written something like it?

1. He just laid there quietly. What did he lay?
2. She set down and read the paper. What did she set down?

Strong verbs and baffling

How do you avoid mistakes with irregular verbs?

Irregular, or strong, verbs get you into trouble because they do not follow a uniform pattern. They are usually more effective than the regular verbs because they are shorter and more pointed. But about the only way to keep them in order is have a good memory for idiom. It may relieve your conscience to realize that many of the common departures from standard usage are not really bad English but merely less preferred dialect. Nearly every nonstandard form was or is sometime or somewhere in good standing in one or more dialects of English.

Consider the following verbs and their pricipal parts:

	Dialect
chew, chewed, chewed	chaw for chewed
come, came, come	come for came
lay, laid, laid	laid for lay
lie, lay, lain	laid for lay
set, set, set	sit for set
sit, sat, sat	set for sit
climb, climbed, climbed	clumb for climbed

Chaw was at one time acceptable and still persists in some regional dialects. Living evidence is the word jaw, which is merely a different spelling of chaw. The jawbone is the chaw or chew bone.

Come is the past tense of come in some dialects, but is not standard.

Lay and lie and their parts are often interchanged. There may be less excuse for this, because they are distinct words of different origin.

Set and sit cause problems. Some nonlogical uses have passed into idiom and cannot be dislodged. Examples are the setting sun and the setting hen. You might say they both sit and if they sit how can they set? There is also the matter of the sitting duck.

Clumb for climbed also has good antecedents, but doesn't live here anymore.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 47 -- A Surplus of Suffixes (November 15, 1971)

Suffixes like prefixes are placed at the ends of words, but not at the same ends. This may be one reason they lend themselves to misuse.

Of the three suffixes considered, it is probably fair to say that the -ize(s) have it worse, but they do not stand in the pillory alone.

Suffixitis

Current writing contains too many words ending in -ize, -wise, -age, and the like. Can anything be done to confine these ubiquities?

There is nothing really wrong with these suffixes in themselves. Many words in good standing have enjoyed their company for a long time. It is only excessive proliferation and displacement of more appropriate words that make the problem. The cure would seem to lie in keeping your vocabulary well stocked with appropriate terms, so that you need not manufacture artificial terms as you run.

Let us look at a few samples:

-ize	A	B
	optimize	finalize
	minimize	socialize
	colonize	botanize
	itemize	burglarize
	homogenize	generalize
	apologize	winterize

-age	A	B
	postage	usage
	shrinkage	marriage
	mileage	leafage
	breakage	plunderage
	passage	canalage
	pasturage	leakage

-wise	A	B
	likewise	timewise
	sidewise	costwise
	weatherwise	taxwise
	clockwise	outlookwise
	pennywise	readerwise
	trailwise	researchwise

Some of these words are more honored than others. More of those in the B column should be used with caution or not at all. Many of them have better substitutes. For example, instead of finalizing a job, it might be better to finish it. Instead of saying "Costwise, the research exceeded the budget", it would be possible to say: "The cost of the research was more than had been planned". "Leastwise", we might try harder.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 48 -- Proper Marks in Proper Places (November 23, 1971)

Punctuation marks are used to separate and to join together words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs. They are the road signs that direct the reader, focus his attention on the route, and clarify his passage.

Like highway markers, punctuation marks should be used with economy. Too many signs confuse the driver; too many punctuation marks confuse the reader. Proper signs in proper places get one there.

Punctuation

Why worry about punctuation?

Don't worry. Do something about it. Try to learn at least a few of the rules and if they fail, fall back on common sense.

It may help to look at the derivation of the word punctuation. It is one of the family of words that come from the Latin punctum, meaning mark, pierce, or point. Others in the family include pivot, puncture, pungent, expunge, pounce, pun, bung, punch, and compunction.

The main purpose of punctuation is to help make clear what you put in writing. This does not mean that using more punctuation will shore up a faulty structure, anymore than punching more nails into a house will cure bad architecture. The basic structure must be as well designed as possible. What it does mean is that punctuation can add the clarifying touch, just as the paint and trim on a house accent and clarify the whole.

You all know someone who is a nonstop talker. This is often a person who lacks oral punctuation as well as terminal facilities. Because he does not supply the essential stops and pauses needed to follow his discourse, his audience soon grows weary. They hear but they no longer listen. The message goes with the wind.

It is much the same with writing. But there is a further element. A captive audience may not be able to leave the unpunctuated speaker. But if the written message is dull and unclear, the reader closes the book or lays aside the paper and moves on to other things. You neither hear nor listen.

What are the common forms of punctuation and how often are they used? My favorite handbook of English devotes 45 pages to punctuation. Five of these pages are general discussion; the other 40 are divided as follows:

Mark	Pages
Comma	17
Quotation Marks	6
Semicolon	3
Apostrophe	3
Question Mark	3
Colon	2
Dash	2
Parentheses	2
Period	1
Exclamation Point	1
Brackets	1

This distribution indicates the frequency with which problems of use and abuse arise. The lowly comma clearly demands the most attention. If you use your commas properly, you have won nearly half the battle.

Although not usually called punctuation, there are some other marks and conventions that really belong in the same category. Capital letters, indention, underlining, italics, ampersands, and a number of other signs and symbols have their various uses.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 49 -- The Half Stop, or Comma (December 1, 1971)

Commas are the common people of the punctuation world. They do the major part of the work, take the punishment, and deserve more credit than they sometimes get.

Every writer should learn a few of the ground rules about the use of commas.

The comma, the Prince of Stops

Why should one fuss about a comma?

Let me tell you why. Theodore Bernstein in "Watch Your Language" says that some of the abuses of the comma seem to arise from a mistaken notion that a comma is a "mere flyspeck with a tail". But it might be better to consider that the comma is the most used and most necessary of all the marks of punctuation. If the full-stop, or period, may be called the King of Stops with the final authority to end a statement, then the comma, or half-stop, may be considered the Prince of Stops and the King's Executive Assistant. The comma is several times as busy as the period and sometimes too busy and officious.

The word comma comes from a Greek word that means to cut off or separate, and this is what a comma often does. But it also helps to bring together as well as to separate words, phrases, and clauses. It would take a book to cover the subject adequately, but let us look at a few examples of use and misuse that frequently are troublesome.

Commas with however and but:

The rule is simple. However takes a comma; but does not. The reason seems to be that however needs a half-stop because it is a leisurely, contemplative word. It needs a pause for reflection. But is a forceful, mind-made-up, and full-speed-ahead affair. Listen to how someone would say the words in the following examples.

1. I wanted to review the report, but an emergency arose.
2. I intended to review the report yesterday. However, other matters took my time.
3. The forecast was based on average yields, but drought came and yields were below average.
4. This was a good estimate. However, we now have more information.

Commas after adverbs and adverbial phrases at the beginning of a sentence:

However and but are special cases. There are many adverbs and adverbial phrases that begin sentences. Most of them take a comma to indicate that they are out of the usual order.

1. After Thanksgiving, consumer spending increases.
2. In 1971, EPA asked us to prepare a special report on pesticides.
3. If you wish to conduct a field survey, it is necessary to obtain OBM approval for your questionnaire and sampling plans.

Commas with words or phrases in series:

In our Department style, commas are put after each item in a series up to the last one. Some authorities omit the last one, but this occasionally leads to ambiguity.

1. Pesticides include fungicides, herbicides, insecticides, slimicides, and nematocides.
2. Other pesticides are miticides, rodenticides, and space and soil fumigants.
3. Formula feeds are sometimes classified as complete feeds, supplements, and premixes.

Commas with defining and commenting clauses:

Commas are used to set off commenting or nonrestrictive clauses. They are not used with defining or restrictive clauses. The reason for this difference is that a defining clause is an essential part of the message that cannot be omitted or separated without losing the thought. A commenting clause is parenthetic. It adds some additional information but is not essential. Observe the following examples:

1. The calculator serviceman who came in yesterday was new. (Defining or restrictive)
2. The calculator serviceman, who came in yesterday, said the machine was in perfect order. (Commenting or nonrestrictive)

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 50 -- The Cheshire Cat (December 7, 1971)

The Cheshire Cat was one of Lewis Carroll's ingenious inventions and one of the more literate of Alice's friends. He had the uncanny ability to appear and disappear by sections.

When he left, the tip of his tail went first and his grin last. His English was impeccable; his logic something else.

Logic and words

Can a logical statement be false?

Yes, and in more than one way.

A statement may conform with grammatical logic and convey a false meaning. Just as in statistics, it may be internally consistent but lead to false conclusions because the premises are wrong. The model may have all the beauty and symmetry of technical perfection but the results may be meaningless. Let me illustrate:

> "To begin with", said the Cat, "a dog's not mad. You grant that?"
> "I suppose so", said Alice.
> "Well then", the Cat went on, "you see a dog growls when it's angry, and wags its tail when it's pleased. Now I growl when I'm pleased, and wag my tail when I'm angry. Therefore, I'm mad".

This delightful absurdity cannot be faulted for its English. You can even feel the pull of its persuasion, but you are not likely to be convinced.

It is easy to see that the Cheshire Cat is illogical, but it is not so easy to see the same kind of reasoning in other situations. We are all prone to accept faulty generalizations if they fit in with our preconceived notions and are persuasively presented. Some of the recent discussions of the family farm and corporation farming fall in this class.

"To begin with", say the speaker, "a corporation is a bad thing. You realize that?" And your internal answering service says, "of course".
"Well then", the speaker goes on, "let me point out that corporate farming is increasing and that farms are rapidly becoming much fewer and larger. We must pass a law to protect the family farm".

All of this is persuasive because our sympathies lie with the little guy. But it may not be very convincing if we take the trouble to look up the facts and find that most of the farming corporations are family farms and that the percentage of all farms that are family farms has not changed much for 30 years or more. There is a problem but not the one that the speaker is talking about.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 51 -- Read Good Writing (December 29, 1971)

One of the ways to help your writing is to read. You may learn from others mistakes, but you will find it more fun and perhaps more useful to learn from good models.

The attached article by Bernard D. Nossiter is addressed to American economists especially. It is worth reading more than once for what it say and how it says it.

The writing is witty, mildly satirical, interesting, and it carries at least two major messages to economists and to newspaper reporters. Both praise and caution are given to both professions.

Not often is so much packed in so little space with such lucidity and grace.

THE WASHINGTON POST Sunday, Dec. 26, 1971 E 19

Continue to Inform the Public, American Economists Urged

By Bernard D. Nossiter
Washington Post Staff Writer

Fifteen or so years ago, a newspaper reporter called on a Treasury advisor who was fresh from a notable economic faculty. "Ah yes," the new adviser said in a frosty tone. "The Washington Post. My children enjoy the comic strips."

But a brief spell in or near office works wonders with many people. Moreover, at just about this time, the relationship between press and economics was undergoing a structural change. Before he left Washington, the adviser was contributing articles to the very journal he once suggested was unfit for anyone who could read without moving lips.

Today, of course, *haute vulgarisation* by economists is commonplace. Where once only Sumner Slichter, Alvin Hansen and Seymour Harris appeared in the periodical press—and then exclusively in the antiseptic pages of Lester Markel's Sunday Times Magazine—now Paul Samuelson, Milton Friedman, Henry Wallich and others write frequently and almost everywhere.

The economics craft has discovered that sowing ideas among non-specialist audiences can be useful as well as profitable. No discernible damage has been done to the profession's standards.

The new relationship is illustrated by another anecdote. Nearly ten years ago, a reporter at a gathering of economists in Berkeley made a modest suggestion.

It was too bad, he said, that the brothers tended to look down their collective notes at J. Kenneth Galbraith simply because he could write an English sentence. Indeed, the reporter contended, if others tried to communicate with a larger audience, it was unlikely that scientific chastity would be imperilled and the general level of economic literacy might be raised.

This paper is not arguing that Galbrath's presidency of the American Economic Association can be traced to that simple suggestion at Berkeley. But it does appear that literacy is no longer a bar to esteem.

The British monopoly of economic stylists, from Adam Smith to John Maynard Keynes and Dennis Robertson, has been broken. Robert Lekachman and Robert Heilbroner have not suffered because they write with distinction. Even theorists of standing like James Tobin and Robert Solow take pains to be intelligible, at least outside the learned journals. Walter Heller's ability to turn a phrase was not a handicap when he tried and sometimes succeeded in moving Capitol Hill.

This relatively recent willingness to broadcast, and without the protection of mandarin jargon, has had its effect on the periodical press. It is fair to say, I think, that the general reader can now find reasonably lucid and not unworthy accounts of economic affairs in at least five daily newspapers published at Boston, New York, Washington and Los Angeles.

For those elsewhere, our one national daily, the Wall Street Journal, is far from an inadequate substitute. Reporters and economists have discovered that they not only enjoy each others' company but may even serve a public interest, a loose form of adult education.

To be sure, we are not yet living in the best of all possible worlds. Financial sections of the famous newspapers are frequently comfort stations for tired businessmen, display cases for the handouts of the better staffed corporations.

But I persist in believing that the level of economic understanding has risen in the last generation and this peculiar fact owes something to the latter-day collaboration between economists and journalists.

Like all combinations, however, there is a danger of restraint in trade. The easy interchange between the best known economists and reporters has tended to increase the entry costs of fresh ideas. There are fashions in economic policy-making, and even the most sophisticated newspapers have tended to follow and applaud each new trend.

When counter-cyclical economics was riding high, a dutiful press corps taught its readers that budget deficits were less sinful than unemployed resources. As the fashion shifted and the monetarists enjoyed their brief moment in the sun, the advanced press plainfly followed. So general readers became aware that the Federal Reserve was not an idle spectator but an actor of some consequence on the economic stage.

But because the most fashionable economists paid scant heed, the press tended to slight a crucial fact of postwar life the power of large corporations to annul the edicts proclaimed at the national center.

Early in the Eisenhower administration. it became apparent that high levels of employment were not compatible with stable prices. In Western Europe, too, once postwar reconstruction and recovery were completed, the same experience was felt.

On both sides of the Atlantic, the simpler press and unfashionable, traditional economists blamed this state of affairs on trade unions. More advanced newspapers and vogue economists chose to pass over the whole disturbing business.

In part, this is because vogue economists and leading newspapers are essentially conservative and reluctant to question existing political and institutional arrangements. Any other stance risks loss of esteem. Oddly enough, there was ready a more or less less coherent doctrine that helped explain the price-employment dilemma. But it did not issue from a trendy economist and it contained disturbing implications for those in power.

I am talking, of course, about administered price theory. This deviant notion does occur from time to time in the technical literature—scattered assaults by George Stigler, sporadic counterfire from Gardiner Means and John Blair. But mainstream figures in the profession ostentatiously ignored the idea and so their new friends in the press paid little attention either.

Even more striking, at the very moment that the limitations of budgetary and monetary manipulation were making themselves apparent, a strong body of empirical evidence was developed to support Means' administered price theory. It emerged in the late fifties from the Kefauver inquiries into steel, autos, bread and other industries.

But this interesting material did not easily fit the maps of reality drawn by the profession's most prominent members and their press followers. So the hearings went largely unnoticed.

Even when public policy implicitly accepted the findings of Means and Estes Kefauver, and incomes policy came to Washington via guideposts, there was a concerted attempt to conceal what this meant and pretend that monetary and fiscal measures could still bring about the New Jerusalem.

There is a nice symmetry here. The Eisenhower economists were remarkably unfrank about their acceptance of counter-cyclical fiscal policies; the Kennedy-Johnson economists were equally reticent about their embrace of administered price. The press generally was just as discreet and public illumination was clouded.

It has been said that the mark of a good newspaper is its ability to spare readers from surprise. But I suspect that readers of almost every newspaper were notably surprised by the remarkable shifts in economic policy last summer and the bewildering array of new institutions created to execute them.

If the press, and particularly its leading sectors, had been more willing to explore the less fashionable modes in economic thinking, the shock would have been far less. Indeed, close attention to what Means had been saying and what Kefauver found might have led readers to regard as inevitable the new measures, or at least some form of them.

If the test of theory is ability to predict, administered prices now appears to have won high marks despite the tacit agreement to ignore it.

In much the same way, groupthink has ill prepared readers or policy makers for the demolition of foreign aid. Most economists argued, and respectable journalists agreed, that Third World development could only gain from aid by industrial countries.

The notion that aid might deter rather than promote economic advance, that Western-style development, particularly in Asia and Africa, was a function of many things outside economics, was not regarded as proper thought for right-minded economists and economic journalists.

Here, too, rude events have surprised economists and newspaper readers alike; this is not to our joint credit.

I am not urging a return to an earlier day when economists and journalists eyed each other with mingled suspicion and contempt. The citizenry need not lose when we talk together and in public. But I think there is danger in symbiosis. We may have embraced each other so warmly that we isolate and suppress the unfashionable and the uncomfortable.

Unfortunately, the unfashionable and the uncomfortable frequently say things which deserve attention. In sum, this is a plea for scepticism, a scepticism within our crafts and towards each other. particularly concerning. the current received wisdom. This cautionary note is probably most necessary when we are engaged in mutual self-congratulation.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 52 -- Missing Parts (January 10, 1972)

The late William Strunk, Jr. stressed brevity in writing. His Rule thirteen, "Omit needless words", read in part: "Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts."

The positive corollary, of course, is that a sentence should contain all the necessary words, just as a drawing should have all the necessary lines and a machine all the necessary parts to do its job properly.

Missing parts

What do you mean, "missing parts"?

By "missing parts", I mean excessive economy, or parsimony, in the use of words to the point of obscuring the meaning. Brevity is desirable if it comes from the elimination of unnecessary repetition. For example, economy can often be obtained by omitting parts of successive parallel elements. But one must be careful. Take the following sentence:

> The administrator understood the economic objectives and (he understood) the legal limitations of the Act.

The words in parentheses can be omitted with little harm and some gain in directness. This will be so in many instances. But notice what happens to clarity between alternative versions in some of the following sets:

> Harry will start on the project tomorrow if you are. Harry will start on the project tomorrow if you are starting.
>
> My supervisor approved of the fellow workers whom I associated.
> My supervisor approved of the fellow workers with whom I associated.
>
> Everyone knew that he had lost money in stocks.
> Everyone knew he had lost money in stocks.
>
> The trouble was the analyst had forgotten to check out his program.
>
> The trouble was that the analyst had forgotten to check out his program.

I liked Marshall better than Montgomery.
I liked Marshall better than Montgomery did.
I liked Marshall better than I liked Montgomery.

It was the best thesis.
It was the top-ranking thesis.
It was the best thesis presented in 1971.

Economics looks forward, statistics backward.
Economics looks forward, and statistics looks backward.

A general impression is the grade standards are too low.
A general impression is that the grade standards are too low.

The reports have no beginning and they have no end.
The reports have no beginning or end.

The programmer was so efficient.
The programer was efficient.
The programmer was very efficient.

The research assistant went in the library stacks.
The research assistant went into the library stacks.

The 61 firms operated 100 plants with capacity of 18.5 million tons ammonia.
The 61 firms operated 100 plants with a total capacity of 18.5 million tons of ammonia.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 53 -- The Lion's Share (January 17, 1972)

The quadrennial political strain on the language produces some unexpected results. A conservative columnist scowls at a liberal hopeful on the TV tube and turns out a short essay on rules of writing.

Is this the stuff of serendipity?

Rules for writing

What are rules for?

Rules serve many purposes. Rules codify what good writers do. Custom and common sense are the twin bases on which rules rest. Custom becomes idiom and common sense logic. Except for special purposes, word usage in English-speaking countries is not guided by any established authority. Each newspaper, each publishing house, each public or private agency is free to set its own style. Each grammarian puts down the rules that he thinks govern the best writing or speaking.

The rules, therefore, reflect what the rulemaker thinks will do the best job of conveying ideas between people. Those who use E. B. White's edition of William Strunk's "The Elements of Style" will recognize the parallel in the attached piece by James J. Kilpatrick. Kilpatrick is a conservative in his political views and in his approach to writing. We can all learn something from his uncompromising precision.

Let me comment briefly on his rules in the same order in which they appear:

Rule 1. Never? Well hardly ever. Usually kids should neither be seen nor heard.

Rule 2. Replica is no longer restricted entirely to the original meaning, but that meaning is worth retaining.

Rule 3. This is a good honest timber.

Rule 4. Diplomats could ill spare the expression "remains to be seen", but for most of us, it is redundant.

Rule 5. This is an excellent rule and can be expanded to cover a number of similar expressions. Examples are record-breaking, staggering, historic, all-time, and so on.

Rule 6. A very good rule, but some people have to be told twice.

Rule 7. Stop for a deep breath, if necessary, but do not supply and.

Rule 8. In Aesop's fable, the lion went hunting with the other animals and then ate everything. But "the lion's share" has long since come to mean a disproportionate share, the largest share, rather than all of it.

Kilpatrick's memory is long and accurate but does not allow for shifts in conventional use of this term.

Rule 9. The term pinch hitter means replacement, but in the special sense of an emergency replacement. The explanation is incomplete.

Rule 10. Between and among deserve more consideration than Kilpatrick gives them. He has oversimplified a complex problem. Things are sometimes divided between three or more, but this takes more explanation than a brisk rule permits.

JAMES J. KILPATRICK

A Few More Rules for E. B. White to Consider

SCRABBLE, Va.—Over the past 12 years, since E. B. White brought forth his revised edition of William Strunk's "The Elements of Style," the *little* book, as it was known to Strunk's students at Cornell, has gone into 20 printings and sold more than 3 million copies. Plainly, somebody out there is interested in the writing art.

Now word comes from Macmillan that White has prepared a newly revised version of the work for publication in May. If you happen to write for a living—or if you write merely for pleasure or as an incidental part of your job—you will find new reason in winter to fret for spring. White is our country's finest craftsman with words; and his rules of prose composition are indispensable tools.

White is the master, but some of us who labor at the trade, after a long apprenticeship, develop a few crotchets of our own. On an idle afternoon, having nothing better to do than to scowl at John Lindsay on the TV tube, I am minded to propose a few additional rules for White's consideration.

Rule 1. Never, under any circumstances, refer to children, or to young adults as "kids." The writer who falls into this puerile device is the same writer who announces that he wants to go to the little boys' room.

Rule 2. Remember that "replica" has a precise and useful meaning. It is a copy of an original work prepared by the original creator thereof. The word ought not to be abused. Try, instead, copy, model, reproduction, duplicate, or facsimile.

Rule 3. Do not, when it can be avoided, use "since" in a causal construction. The problem here is that "since," like "while," telegraphs an instant connotation of time passing. The reader launches into a sentence beginning, "Since it rained," and his inner ear tunes itself for a principal clause telling us what happened in the time span thereafter. His ear is thus affronted when the sentence concludes, "we called off the picnic." There is nothing wrong with "because." It is an honest timber, capable of bracing a sentence.

Rule 4. Never, as you hope for heaven hereafter, write that something "remains to be seen." This is the certain mark of the empty but portentous writer. He has run out of conclusions, if he had any to start with, and takes refuge in a cop-out. It has not occurred to him that beyond this particular split-second, *everything* remains to be seen.

Rule 5. When you are tempted to write that a forthcoming event or decision is "all-important," think twice. Then think twice again. Think three more times. Then strike it out.

Rule 6. Remember that A.M. means before noon, and P.M. means after noon, and do not write that "On Tuesday evening at 8 P.M., Major R. E. Joyce will give a lecture." That horrid example, alas, comes from White himself. Even our Homer nods. The Major will speak on Tuesday at 8 P.M., or on Tuesday evening at 8 o'clock, but we do not need to be told that the Major will speak on Tuesday evening at 8 in the evening.

Rule 7. If you find that you have stumbled into an "and which" construction, stop and start over. "The bad snap from center, which cost the Redskins the ballgame and which catapulted the 49ers into the playoffs, came with 3:42 remaining in the final period."

Rule 8. Do not suppose that the "lion's share" means the greater part; the lion's share is the whole works.

Rule 9. Do not use "pinch hitter" when you mean replacement.

Rule 10. Remember that things are divided between two persons; they are divided among three or more.

All this has nothing to do with politics, government, or law, but perhaps a writer can be forgiven if now and then he writes about writing. It beats writing about John Lindsay. After all, a man can take writing seriously.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 54 -- Painters and Percolators (January 27, 1972)

The spelling of agent, or action, nouns tells us something about the composite origin of the English language. The suffix -er is the regular English ending for agent nouns but many words of Latin origin use -or instead. This is especially likely for words with legal and power connotations. But the writer who becomes an author, the lender a creditor, the teacher a professor, or the player an actor also takes on additional luster by the shift from the Anglo-Saxon to the Roman form.

-er and -or in agent nouns

How can you tell whether to choose -er or -or as a suffix for an agent noun?

By agent noun, we mean a noun that designated the doer of some deed or action. The doer may be either a person or a thing. For example, painter and percolator are agent nouns. Each does something.

The answer to the question is that one cannot always be sure. Sometimes, either suffix is acceptable. An example that tripped several of us recently is adviser. Adviser may also be spelled advisor, and often is, but we discovered that in the name of the President's Council of Economic Advisers it is correctly spelled -ers. Our Department Telephone Directory wrongly has it Advisors. To complicate matters further, the word advisory is always spelled with an o.

A general guide that will sometimes help is related to the origin of the suffixes and the words they complete. The ending -or is the regular suffix for agent nouns of Latin origin. A problem is that often things are not regular. Many Latin derived words take the ending -er and some are spelled either way. A count of 100 action nouns frequently used by economists gave the following results:

Ending in:	Agent nouns derived from:		Total
	Anglo-Saxon	Latin	
-er	31	21	52
-or	0	43	43
Either	0	5	5
Total	31	69	100

This small sample is suggestive but not conclusive. In conjunction with the illustrative lists which follow, it suggests that when you see an agent noun that ends in -or it is likely to be of Latin origin. Also words of Anglo-Saxon origin are almost sure to end in -er. But if you have an agent noun of Latin origin and do not know how to spell it, the odds are only about 2 to 1 for -or. This is not good enough. You had better use your dictionary.

Note the differences in the following pairs of agent nouns. Those in the first column are derived from Anglo-Saxon and those in the second from Latin:

Anglo-Saxon	Latin
borrower	debtor
builder	constructor, -er
giver	grantor, -er
lawyer	solicitor
lender	creditor
listener	auditor
packer	processor
player	actor
seller	vendor
teacher	professor
winner	victor
writer	author

The agent nouns in the next list are all from Latin. Those in the first column have taken the regular ending -er and those in the second column retain a Latin -or. Relatively recent names like computer, programmer, and coder apparently have not felt the need to keep up with distributor, indicator, tabulator, and percolator. Some older names like

grocer, miller, and tailor have been thoroughly anglicized and do not feel the need for status that go with administrator, director, and governor.

Ending in -er	Ending in -or
coder	administrator
commander	assignor
contracter, -or	benefactor
demander	contributor
employer	creator
examiner	dictator
farmer	director
grocer	distributor
miller	emperor
minister	factor
mover	governor
multiplier	guarantor
planter	indicator
polluter	investigator
preacher	investor
producer	juror
programmer	participator
promoter	percolator
reviewer	survivor
supplier	tabulator

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 55 -- Rowen Crop (January 31, 1972)

This is a final note in one chapter, but there may be a later rowen crop. For those who do not come from New England, rowen is the aftermath of the hay crop, and by extension, of other things as well.

One task that I hope to do is to bring the pieces together into a reference handbook with an index.

Retirement, retiree, retirer

What is retirement?

I like the definition written by Jennie, Hilary, and their coworkers in the Open Book Cake at my retirement party:

> Retirement, n. the beginning of a new chapter.

This definition is brief, alive and forward looking. By contrast, most formal dictionary definitions are dull, lifeless, and backward looking. Just look at the following samples:

1. Act of retiring, or state of being retired.
2. A going into seclusion or retreat.
3. Withdrawal from society and the world.
4. Removal from circulation.
5. Retreat from battle or scene of action.

The word retiree has come to mean anyone who has retired from his former occupation. It was not always so. In fact, retiree seems to be of fairly recent origin. Merriam-Webster II, unabridged, does not have it. Only recent dictionaries list retiree.

Formerly, the proper word was retirer, one who retires. This was in accord with the normal formation of many agent nouns in which -er, or -or, is added to denote the doer of an action. The suffix -ee usually means the receiver. Consider the following pairs:

donor	donee
payer	payee
employer	employee
grantor	grantee
lessor	lessee
assignor	assignee

One may speculate about how the word retiree came into use. I can think of two reasons:

1. The more general adoption of Social Security and other retirement systems under which many individuals benefit. Each individual in such a system may seem to have given up some freedom of choice in return for the certainty of retirement protection. He has to retire at a date certain and in that sense he is a receiver of an action, a retiree.

2. The word retiree is easier to pronunce than retirer. But the real distinction that might be made is that one who retires voluntarily is a retirer and one who retires involuntarily is a retiree. Aside from being slightly invidious, this is probably too much of a distinction to expect idiom to make. So despite the fact that more people do retire voluntarily than wait for mandatory retirement, retiree has won the day and is standard usage.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 56 -- Data Singular? (September 1972)

Data

Is data singular?

The best short answer is No, but the subject deserves elaboration. Copperud in his "American Usage: The Consensus," 1970 says that three out of four desk dictionaries recognize data as singular and concludes that the consensus is heavily on that side. He ends, however, by saying: "Data, of course, is still also correct as a plural."

The case is taken a step further by Russell Langley, an Australian statistician, in his recent book, "Practical Statistics: Simply Explained." He has this note on the fly leaf:

"The word data is a Latin Plural noun, but nowadays it is commonly used in English as a group term in the singular, and will be used as such throughout this book."

We need to consider then whether data is singular, plural, or both. We can grant at the outset that it is actually used in all three ways, but the real question is which is preferable. Suppose we consider two criteria: common usage and accuracy in conveying meaning.

As an afternoon vacation project, I scanned 51 articles in current issues of the following six publications:

American Journal of Agricultural Economics
American Economic Review
Journal of the American Statistical Association
Bell Journal of Economics
Science News
Scientific American

The word data occurred 217 times in uses that could be identified as singular or plural, 13 times as a singular and 204 times as a plural. This represents a heavy majority preference so far as this sample of technical journals is concerned.

Casual reading of newspapers and popular magazines suggests that the singular use occurs more frequently there. My offhand guess is that it would be about 25 percent of the time.

Now let us look at accuracy in conveying meaning. Consider consistency. Many of the singular uses are inconsistently mingled with plural uses.

For example, a feature article in a leading Washington paper recently used these phrases in adjacent paragraphs:

"---adjusted data was available for 8 of the 12 series---"
"---from the many available series for which data are presently available---"

An article in a farm paper had it both ways and back again in a single paragraph:

"The research data indicate---The data shows a relatively high correlation---These data are based---"

A piece in the usually well edited Science News managed the acrobatic feat of shifting from plural to singular in the space of three words:

"The satellite data include that from orbiting geographical, solar and astronomical observations as well as from explorer type space platforms."

If this example is not immediately clear try substituting another noun for data and see what you get. Try horse or horses, for example. It is not possible to make grammatical sense from data include that.

Finally, consider the meaning of data if it is regarded as a singular collective noun. Can one find the arithmetic mean or compute the standard deviation of flour or sugar? Data as a collective singular becomes like them. What one can do is to compute the standard deviation of measurements or observations on granules of sugar. Russell Langley in his Practical Statistics gets around this problem by doing just that. He thus erases from the meaning of data everything except the general sense of information.

Bacteria is also a Latin plural of a corresponding singular, bacterium. Because a bacterium is seldom seen alone, popular usage is sometimes confused, but no scientist would say "this bacteria is." Neither should an economist say "this data is."

To sum up, data is preferably used in the plural.

1. Scientific usage is overwhelmingly plural.
2. Inconsistencies are avoided.
3. The meaning is clearer.
4. The word is more useful.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 57 -- Upper Case and Lower Case (November 1972)

Capitalization

What are some rules for capitalization?

"It is impossible to give rules that will cover every conceivable problem in capitalization." So runs the first sentence in the chapter on the subject in the GPO Style Manual. But the unknown rulemaker quickly restores confidence by adding: "But by considering the purpose to be served and the underlying principles, it is possible to attain a considerable degree of uniformity."

The chapter goes on to lay down 10 pages of principles and then follows a 27 page chapter entitled Guide to Capitalization. Every ERS economist who wishes to economize his future writing time should spend a few minutes in scanning these two chapters so that he knows where to look for capital help when he needs it.

We all learned in school to capitalize the initial letters of proper nouns. What we did not learn is how to recognize a proper noun without fail. This is where we sometimes want help.

For example, I recently edited a manuscript prepared for Federal publication in which the word state had to be changed to State about 77 times to conform with Federal style. Had it been for State publication, under a different rule it would not have been a mistake to make it state. In this instance, it may seem that the Federal Style Manual requires an excessive degree of formality. It may appear too much like the ancient toast to Boston:

> "Here's to old Boston,
> The home of the bean and the cod,
> Where the Cabots speak only to Lowells
> And the Lowells speak only to God."

Yet there is a reason for the Federal rule. Sovereigns speak to sovereigns with proper courtesy and so the Federal Government recognizes elements of sovereignty in referring to any of the 50 States of the Union or in speaking of foreign political subdivisions of the first rank.

In contrast, the words county, district, or those for other lesser political subdivisions are not capitalized, unless they are parts of a full proper name, as in George County, or Wellington School District.

Take 10 minutes today and scan Chapter 3. Capitalization and Chapter 4. Guide to Capitalization in the GPO Style Manual. Make them working tools as you do your desk dictionary. You will be well repaid in terms of future reference power.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 58 -- The Sound of Words (December 1972)

The Sound of Words

What do we mean by the sound of words and should the writer worry about it?

By the sound of words, we mean the actual sound of the spoken word, or the mental equivalent of the written word. We recognize some sounds as pleasing, others as displeasing. Nearly everyone feels this in poetry; many sense it in prose. What we frequently fail to recognize is the subliminal (below the level of consciousness) effect of sound or combinations of sounds.

The writer should have some appreciation of the sound of words because it may make his writing more or less effective both in conveying concrete meaning and in persuading.

Consider the hard "g" sound. This is a harsh guttural often associated with unpleasant things. Think of such words as angry, growl, grim, grunt, gut, gory, ugly, gruesome, grueling, grouch, grimace.

At an earlier period in the history of the English language, the hard "g" was used more freely. The fossil evidence is all about us in the spelling of many common words--laugh, sign, might, sight, blight, brought, plough, slaughter, and so on. The "g" in all these words was once pronounced, but evolution has rejected the sound in such words, or softened it to the more pleasing "f" sound.

We have not discarded hard "g" entirely, and it still has a useful function, but there are some hidden dangers to guard against. The word agriculture, for example, has a special place in this Department.

A few years ago, Professor J. H. Davis at Harvard coined the term "agribusiness" to mean all the business serving agriculture. The word has come into general use. But it conveys some subliminal meanings that make it an unfortunate choice. The word somehow suggests to many an image of large-scale ruthless business that is far more adverse than the reality. Just as corporate farming has been taken to mean giant farms, although most of the incorporated farms are relatively small, so all agribusinesses are assumed to be giants, although most of them are relatively small businesses. Some of this can be corrected by putting the culture back into the word and saying agricultural business firms once again. An extra syllable or two is a small price to pay for a more correct message.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 59 -- Trapped in a Cliché? (January 1973)

Cliche

What are cliches and what do you do about them?

A cliche is a trite or overused expression or idea. It may be a single word, a phrase, or a longer expression. A cliche is not necessarily bad in itself. It is something like a weed, which is sometimes defined as a plant out of place. Your cliche may be a perfectly good word that has wandered out of place or has worn out its original welcome. People have grown tired of it and their irritation may subtract from your message.

You can, with a little thought, make up your own list of cliches. Here are a few that have had some recent currency. As you look at them, notice that it is not a matter of age alone. Some words wilt more quickly than others.

viable
relevant
involved
life style
sector
in depth
based (in certain phrases)
I can't believe I ate the whole thing!

Viable was a fresh intriguing word not long ago, but its overuse had made it unpleasing to many. Its meaning, never very clear, has become more vague as it has spread. Can you tell me what a "viable farm" really is? Is it an optimum of some kind or a farm that is just surviving?

Relevant and involved are good enough if properly used. But be sure that you indicate relevant to what and involved in what. Too often they seem to exist in a vacuum and take you nowhere.

Lifestyle is rapidly losing its early vigor. You can help matters by substituting variations such as style of life, way of living, or similar phrases. Constant use of any phrase tends to put it in the class of slang.

Sector originated in a pie diagram and before that in military terminology in reference to a field of fire, which is also pieshaped as viewed from the center. Economists and Madison Avenue specialists have distorted the word so that it has lost most of its special identity. Everything becomes a sector or a subsector. If you are about to be

trapped in a subsector, take a close look to see whether you may not mean section, stage, step, part, group, division, or some more specific word. Sector is still a good word, but its use as an omnibus has left it so mangled that it may lose it viability (?) if we are not careful.

In-depth, as in the phrase "in-depth report" has taken on an air of revealing mysteries. But when every piece of research is called an in-depth study it becomes so much excess baggage to carry about and to irritate your readers.

Based, in such combinations as a "Washington-based firm", or "petroleum-based combine", has also spread widely. A base has a solid sound. But it may be counterproductive as a means of persuading others to your point of view. One grows tired of hearing small town-based enterprise, Texas-based conglomerate, and so on. I suppose everything is based on something but why remind your reader so often in sterotyped phrases?

"I can't believe I ate the whole thing!" began as a catchy advertising gimmick. It is still running the gamut of all sorts of interesting adaptations. When I look at what I have just written, I can't believe I wrote the whole thing in 5 minutes. That's right. I didn't!

Never use a cliché unless you can give it new life.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 60 -- Prepositional Pairs (April 1973)

Prepositional pairs--in and into, at and in, on and upon.

My friend from abroad said that the "game began in 3 o'clock at a Sunday afternoon on January." What he meant was "--- at 3 o'clock on a Sunday afternoon in January." How can I help him unscramble his future prepositions?

Part of the answer is learning what each preposition usually means; part is learning the exceptions. Let us consider the three above pairs. This may suggest how to approach others as well. In and into:

In expresses rest or limited motion within a given frame of reference. Examples are:

More rain came in October.
The President announced changes in the farm program.

Into expresses motion from one frame of reference to another. Examples are:

The committee came into the room.
The outlook changed as we moved into Phase III.

At and in:

At implies a point, or something small enough to be treated as a point; in implies something of larger dimensions.

Thus we may make either of the two following statements, but the meaning will be different:

We met the delegation at the airport.
We met the delegation in the airport.

At would mean generally at the airport but in would mean specifically inside the airport.

References to large geographic places usually take in and smaller ones at. Thus, we would say:

It happened in France, or in Maryland--but at Ames, at Lincoln.

Special custom and local idiom may sometimes determine. For instance, Harvard professors are officially known as professors in Harvard University, while professors elsewhere are usually professors at or of the specific college or university.

On and upon:

These two prepositions cause more trouble than some others. You will come out all right if you remember two rules:

(1) If the meaning is the same, use the shorter on; this is economy.
(2) If the meaning is not the same, use the one that through euphony, emphasis, or idiom best conveys your thought.

Remember that on, in general, stresses a position of rest and upon emphasizes movement and is more forceful:

The letter lay on his desk.
He wrote a paper on taxes.
Lettuce workers went on strike.
He ran on a one-plank platform.
They fell upon the enemy.
The recession was upon us.
Upon my word!
He swore upon his honor.

The ancient storyteller began with the phrase: "Once upon a time," and this is still a living idiom.

Note also that on is often an adverb, as in:

Turn the computer on.
Put more fertilizer on.

Up and on are sometimes two separate words with up an adverb and on a preposition as in:

The flag is up on each building.
The financial storm signals are flashing up on every economist's projection panel.

WORDS AND WHERE TO PUT THEM

NOTE 61 -- Interest Rates and Tipping Rates (May 1973)

Interest rates and tipping rates

Are interest rates the prices of credit?

Yes and no. Ordinarily, we treat the interest rate as the price of borrowed funds and this is all right for most purposes. But there is one important exception. Comparisons between changes in interest rates and changes in prices of other inputs may be invalid because interest rates do not reflect inflation or deflation as other prices do. They are prices for the use of dollars, not prices for a fixed quantity of a product or service as most other prices are. One might say that interest rates are prices that automatically deflate, while other prices do not.

Let me explain by beginning with a statement from one of the 1973 Agricultural Outlook papers:

"American farmers will be paying substantially higher prices for a number of inputs this year. But credit, we predict, won't be numbered among them."

The paper went on to say that interest rates for short term and intermediate credit may be about 1/2 a percentage point higher, or about 7 percent more. Long-term credit rates will probably rise less. The statements about the expected change in the interest rate are correctly made, but the comparison with changes in prices of other inputs is misleading because it neglects an inflationary element which is present in the prices of the other goods and services, but not in the interest rate. The interest rate does not reflect the fact that the same credit service on a larger dollar base requires a larger loan.

This may be clearer if we consider an entirely different type of service that is also expressed a percentage rate of a value--tipping. Suppose I customarily tip my barber 10 percent. Presently the price of haircuts rises from $2.50 to $3.00. If I continue tipping at 10 percent, the tip goes up from 25 to 30 cents. I have not changed the rate, but the price for the same quantity of service has gone up 20 percent. I may also say to myself: "Ten percent is not enough. I'll make it 15 percent." Then the tip goes to 45 cents, an 80 percent increase in the price of tipping.

Now return to the interest rate. Assume that short-term rates in 1973 do rise 7 percent. Perhaps the farmer needs to finance some new machinery, the price of which has risen 5 percent since a year earlier. Let us say that he usually counts on borrowing half the purchase price. This means that he will now have to pay 5 percent more than before for the same real quantity of credit service. The total price of a unit of credit service has now risen a little more than 12 percent.

To amend the earlier quotation we might say:

"American farmers will be paying substantially higher prices for a number of inputs this year and credit will be numbered among them."

An alternative would be to compare expenditures for credit and other inputs rather than prices. This might avoid misunderstanding.

INDEX

All numbers refer to pages.