

Slips of Speech : a Helpful Book for Everyone Who Aspires to Correct the Everyday Errors of Speaking eBook

Slips of Speech : a Helpful Book for Everyone Who Aspires to Correct the Everyday Errors of Speaking

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CHAPTER II

Choice of Words

Our American writers evince much variety in their graces of diction, but in the accurate choice of words James Russell Lowell and William Cullen Bryant stand out conspicuous above the rest. So careful and persistent was the latter, that during the time that he was editor of *The Evening Post*, of New York City, he required the various writers upon that paper to avoid the use of a long list of words and expressions which he had prepared for them, and which were commonly employed by other papers. This list was not only used, but enlarged by his successors.

Strive to cultivate the habit of observing words; trace their delicate shades of meaning as employed by the most polished writers; note their suggestiveness; mark the accuracy with which they are chosen. In this way your mind will be kept on the alert to discover the beauties as well as the blemishes of all the thought pictures that are presented, and your vocabulary will be greatly enlarged and enriched.

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Bryant's list of objectionable expressions

Above, and over, use more than.

Artiste, use artist.

Aspirant.

Authoress

Beat, use defeat.

Bagging, use capturing.

Balance, use remainder.

Banquet, use dinner or supper.

Bogus.

Casket, use coffin.

Claimed, use asserted.

Collided.

Commence, use begin.

Compete.

Cortege, use procession.

Cotemporary, use contemporary.

Couple, use two.

Darkey, use negro.

Day before yesterday, use the day before yesterday.



Debut.
Decease, as a verb.
Democracy, applied to a political party.
Develop, use expose.
Devouring element, use fire.
Donate.
Employe.
Enacted, use acted.
Endorse, use approve.
En route.
Esq.
Graduate, use is graduated.
Gents, use gentlemen.
Hon.
House, use House of Representatives.
Humbug.
Inaugurate, use begin.
In our midst.
Item, use particle, extract, or paragraph.
Is being done, and all similar passive forms.
Jeopardize.
Jubilant, use rejoicing.

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Juvenile, use boy.
Lady, use wife.
Last, use latest.
Lengthy, use long.
Leniency, use lenity.
Loafer.
Loan, or loaned, use lend or lent.
Located.
Majority, use most.
Mrs. President.
Mrs. Governor.
Mrs. General.
Mutual, use common.
Official, use officer.
Ovation.
On yesterday.
Over his signature.
Pants, use pantaloons.
Parties, use persons.
Partially, use partly.



Past two weeks, use last two weeks.

Poetess.

Portion, use part.

Posted, use informed.

Progress, use advance.



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Quite, when prefixed to good, large, *etc.*
Raid, use attack.
Realized, use obtained.
Reliable, use trustworthy.
Rendition, use performance.
Repudiate, use reject or disown.
Retire, as an active verb.v Rev., use the Rev.
Role, use part.
Roughs.
Rowdies.
Secesh.
Sensation, use noteworthy event.
Standpoint, use point of view.
Start, in the sense of setting out.
State, use say.
Taboo.
Talent, use talents or ability.
Talented.
Tapis.
The deceased.
War, use dispute or disagreement.

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Stilts

Avoid bombastic language. Work for plain expressions rather than for the unusual. Use the simplest words that the subject will bear.

The following clipping, giving an account of the commencement exercises of a noted female college, strikingly illustrates what to avoid:

“Like some beacon-light upon a rock-bound coast against which the surges of the ocean unceasingly roll, and casting its beams far across the waters warning the mariner from the danger near, the college, like a Gibraltar, stands upon the high plains of learning, shedding its rays of knowledge, from the murmurings of the Atlantic to the whirlwinds of the Pacific, guiding womankind from the dark valley of ignorance, and wooing her with wisdom’s lore, leads creation’s fairest, purest, best into flowery dells where she can



pluck the richest food of knowledge, and crowns her brow with a coronet of gems whose brilliancy can never grow dim: for they glisten with the purest thought, that seems as a spark struck from the mind of Deity. There is no need for the daughters of this community to seek colleges of distant climes whereat to be educated, for right here in their own city, God's paradise on earth, is situated a noble college, the bright diadem of that paradise, that has done more for the higher education of woman than any institution in our land."

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Purity

An author's diction is pure when he uses such words only as belong to the idiom of the language. The only standard of purity is the practice of the best writers and speakers. A violation of purity is called a barbarism.

Unlike the Latin, Greek, or Hebrew, the English is a living language, and, like all living organisms, manifests its life by taking in new material and casting off old waste continually. Science, art, and philosophy give rise to new ideas which, in turn, demand new words for their expression. Of these, some gain a permanent foothold, while others float awhile upon the currents of conversation and newspaper literature and then disappear.

Good usage is the only real authority in the choice of reputable words; and to determine, in every case, what good usage dictates, is not an easy matter. Authors, like words, must be tested by time before their forms of expression may become a law for others. Pope, in his *Essay on Criticism*, laid down a rule which, for point and brevity, has never been excelled:



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“In words, as fashions, the same rule will hold;
Alike fantastic, if too new or old;
Be not the first by whom the new are tried,
Nor yet the last to lay the old aside.”

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Barbarisms

Campbell, in his *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, says that a word to be legitimate must have these three signs of authority: 1. It must be reputable, or that of educated people, as opposed to that of the ignorant or vulgar. 2. It must be national, as opposed to what is either local or technical. 3. It must be present, as opposed to what is obsolete.

Any word that does not have these three qualities may, in general, be styled a barbarism.

Anglicized words

Many foreign words, in process of time, become so thoroughly domesticated that their translation, or the use of an awkward equivalent, would be a greater mark of pedantry than the use of the foreign words. The proper use of such terms as *fiat*, *palladium*, *cabal*, *quorum*, *omnibus*, *antique*, *artiste*, *coquette*, *ennui*, *physique*, *regime*, *tableau*, *amateur*, cannot be censured on the ground of their foreign character.

Obsoletewords

Some writers affect an antiquated style by the introduction of such words as *peradventure*, *perchance*,

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anon, *behest*, *quoth*, *erewhile*. The use of such words gives a strange sound to the sentence, and generally indicates that the writer is not thoroughly in earnest. The expression is lowered in tone and is made to sound fantastic.

Newwords



A word should not be condemned because it is new. If it is really needed it will be welcomed, and soon find a permanent place. Shakespeare, Addison, and Johnson introduced many new words, to which their names afterward gave a sanction. Carlyle, Coleridge, Tennyson, and Browning have introduced or given currency to new words, and made strange ones familiar.

New words are objectionable when they are employed without proper authority. The chief sources of supply of the objectionable kind are the current slang of the street and the sensational newspaper. They are often the result of a desire to say things in such a manner as to reflect smartness upon the speaker, or to present things in a humorous or picturesque way. That they are frequently very effective cannot be gainsaid. Sometimes they are coined in the heat of political or social discussion, and, for a time, express what everybody is talking about; but it is impossible to tell whether they will live beyond

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the occasion that produced them. So long as their usage is doubtful it is safer not to employ them.

Slang

Slang is somewhat like chicken-pox or measles, very

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catching, and just as inevitable in its run; and very few of us escape it. It is severest, too, where the sanitary conditions are most favorable to its development. Where there is least thought and culture to counteract its influence slang words crowd out those of a more serious character, until, in time, the young and inexperienced speaker or writer is unable to distinguish between the counterfeit and the genuine.

While most persons condemn slang, there are very few who are entirely free from its use. It varies greatly in its degrees of coarseness or refinement, and adapts itself to all classes and conditions. Many know no other language, and we are unwillingly compelled to admit that while their speech is often ungrammatical and unrhetoical, it is generally clear, concise, and forcible.

Strive to acquire a vocabulary so large and to cultivate a taste so fine that when a slang expression rises to your mind you can use it if you think it best fits the occasion, or substitute something better in its place. Purity of diction is a garden of slow growth even under the most favorable conditions, and the

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unrestrained indulgence in slang is like scattering seeds of the vilest plants among the choicest flowers.

Societyslang

“This is an elegant day,” “that is an elegant view,” “Mary is awfully nice,” “Jennie is dreadfully sweet,” “Gertrude is delicious,” and “Tom is perfectly splendid.” The use of such extravagant phrases tends to weaken the significance of the words when legitimately employed.

Commercialslang

Commercial terms are employed in the common language of everyday life to such an extent as to constitute a form of commercial slang. The following will serve for illustration; “The balance of the journey” for remainder, “he was well posted.” for well informed, “I calculate he will come to-morrow” for believe or think, “I reckon he is your friend” for I suppose.

Commonslang

To materialize, to burglarize, to enthuse, to suicide, to wire, to jump upon, to sit upon, to take in, are a few of the many examples of slang that should be avoided.



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Provincialisms

A word that is used only in a limited part of the country is called a provincialism. It must be known and recognized for what it is worth, but not obtruded where it does not belong.

Whatever may be said of the faults of speech of the American people, it is doubtful if any other nation, whether it covers a large territory or is limited in area, speaks the language native to the country with the uniformity that we do. Yet, there are peculiarities that mark the expression of most of our people, even among the best informed. The words calculate, reckon, and guess are not the only



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words that betray the locality of the speaker. Any person who has been five hundred miles from home cannot fail to have observed words that were used differently from the way in which he had been accustomed to use them, and he probably heard terms of expression that seemed strange to him. In like manner, his own expressions sounded strange to those who heard him. That which distinguished his speech from theirs and theirs from his would, in large part, be covered by the word "provincialism."

Not only do we have local and sectional peculiarities of speech, but we may be said to have national mannerisms. Mr. Alexander Melville Bell, the eminent

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elocutionist, relates that some years ago when residing in Edinburgh, a stranger called to make some inquiries in regard to professional matters.

"I have called on you, sir, for the purpose of," etc.

"When did you cross the Atlantic?" I asked.

The stranger looked up with surprise amounting almost to consternation.

"How do you know that I have crossed the Atlantic?"

"Your manner of using the little word 'sir' is not heard in England or Scotland."

This gentleman, Mr. Bell says, was one of the most eminent teachers of elocution in America, and his speech was perfectly free from ordinary local coloring, in all but the one little element which had escaped observation.

Which?

Much diversity of usage exists and some difference of opinion prevails concerning the proper expression to use when you are addressed, and fail to understand just what has been said. Such interrogative rejoinders as "What?" "How?" "Which?" "Hey?" are plainly objectionable. "Sir?" and "Madam!" once common, are no longer tolerated in society. The English expression "Beg pardon" has found favor, but it is not wholly acceptable. "Excuse me"



is suggested by a writer on the subject. It has no more syllables than “Beg pardon,” and is nearly equivalent in signification, but it is also subject to the objection that it is often used to imply a difference of opinion, as when a person makes a statement to which you take exception, you begin your reply with the expression, “Excuse me.”

Whatever is adopted will doubtless be a convenient contraction, like “Beg pardon,” which is a short way of saying, “I beg your pardon for failing to understand what you said;” or “Excuse me,” which is a condensation of “Excuse me for not fully grasping your meaning.”

Wordsimproperly used

Commodious—Convenient

A word of caution in the use of the smaller dictionaries is necessary. The most elaborate definition often fails to give an adequate idea of the signification of a term unless it is accompanied with one or more quotations illustrating its use. The small dictionaries give only the briefest definitions, without illustration, and therefore should be interpreted with caution.



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Some years ago a young man of moderate attainments was very desirous of enlarging his vocabulary

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and of using words beyond the ordinary vernacular of his neighborhood. To this end, he made a small vest-pocket lexicon his constant companion.

Having consulted it in the course of a conversation with a friend, he remarked, as he was about to return it to his pocket, "What a commodious book this is." His friend suggested that he again consult the "commodious" volume. With a look of the utmost confidence he turned to the word, and exclaimed: "There! I knew I was right. Commodious means convenient, and that is just what this little book is."

It was useless to explain that smallness sometimes renders a thing inconvenient, and this young man, doubtless, still felicitates himself upon his intimate acquaintance with that commodious pocket dictionary.

Ability, Capacity

A fond mother was told by the principal of a boarding-school that her daughter would not be graduated, as she lacked capacity. "Get her a capacity. Her father don't stand on the matter of expense. Get her anything she wants. He'll foot the bill." But for once the indulgent mother was obliged to learn that there are some things money will not purchase. The father had the financial ability, but the daughter lacked the necessary intellectual capacity.

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But we may have literary as well as financial ability. Ability implies the power of doing; capacity the faculty of receiving.

About, Almost

"This work is about done." Use "almost done."

Acceptance, Acceptation

These words cannot be used interchangeably. "He wrote signifying his acceptance of the office." "According to the common acceptance of this term, he is a knave."



Access, Accession

“He gained access to the fort.” “The only accession, which the Roman empire received was the province of Britain.”

Accident, Injury

Accident is sometimes used incorrectly for injury. as “His accident was very painful.”

Mutual, Common

Some men seek to be great by copying great men’s faults. Dickens may say “Our Mutual Friend,” but Dickens’s strong point was not grammar. If you have a friend in common with Smith, in speaking of him to Smith, say our common friend. The word mutual should always convey a sense of reciprocity, as “Happy in our mutual help and mutual love.”

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Myself

This word is generally used for emphasis, as “I myself will do it,” “I wrote it myself.” It should not be used for the unemphatic pronouns I and me, as in “James and myself are going to town,” “He gave the books to James and myself.” It is properly used with a reflexive verb without emphasis, as “I will defend myself.”



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Negligence, Neglect

Negligence is the habit, neglect the act, of leaving things undone. The adjectives negligent and neglectful should, in like manner, be discriminated.

Never, Not

The word never is sometimes colloquially used for not, as "I never remember to have seen Lincoln." Say "I do not remember," *etc.* Never should not be used in reference to events that can take place but once, as "Warren never died at Lexington."

Love, Like

We may love our parents, our children, our country, the truth; and we may like roast turkey and cranberry sauce. "I love cherries," "I adore strawberries," are school-girl expressions that should be avoided. Love is an emotion of the heart, and not of the palate.

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Cheap, Low-priced

These words are often used synonymously. A picture purchased for ten thousand dollars may be cheap; another, for which ten dollars was paid, although low-priced, may be dear.

Mad, Angry

The frequent use of mad in the sense of angry should be avoided. A person who is insane is mad. A dog that has hydrophobia is mad. Figuratively we say mad, with rage, mad with terror, mad with pain; but to be vexed, or angry, or out of patience, does not justify the use of so strong a term as mad.

Most, Almost, Very

Sometimes incorrectly used for almost, as "He writes to me most every week."

It is often loosely used in the sense of very, as "This is a most interesting book." Aim to use most only as the superlative of much, or many. Do not use the indefinite article before it, as "This is a most beautiful picture." We may say "This is the most beautiful picture," for here comparison is implied.

Portion, Part



“Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.” “We traveled a part of the distance on foot.” Portion is applied to that which is set aside for a special

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purpose, often as the share or allotment of an individual, as the wife’s portion, the portion of the oldest son, *etc.* Part is a more general term.

Postal

Bryant would not have said, “I will send you a postal by to-morrow’s mail.” Postal card or post card would be better.

Practical, Practicable

These words are sometimes confounded. Practicable means “that may be done or accomplished,” and implies that the means or resources are available; as, a practicable road, a practicable aim. Practical means “capable of being turned to use or account;” as, “The practical man begins by doing; the theorist often ends by thinking.”

Predicate

This word is sometimes incorrectly used in the sense of form or base; as, “He predicated his statement on the information he had just received.” Neither should it be used in the sense of predict; as, “The sky is overcast, and I predicate a storm tomorrow.”



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Prefer—than

“I prefer to walk than to ride.” Say “I prefer walking to riding;” or, “I would rather walk than

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ride.” “To skate is preferable than to coast.” Say “Skating is preferable to coasting.”

Amount, Number

Amount applies to what is thought of in the mass or bulk, as money, wheat, coal.

Number is used when we think of the individuals composing the mass, as men, books, horses, vessels.

Answer, Reply

An answer implies a question. We may reply to a remark or assertion. A reply is more formal than an answer.

Antagonize, Alienate, Oppose

The word antagonize should not be used in the sense of alienate; as, “Your proposition will antagonize many supporters of the measure.” “The Senate opposed the bill which passed the House” is better than “antagonized the bill.”

Anticipate, Expect

“The arrival of the President was hourly anticipated” is pompous. Use expected.

Any, At all

“He was so far from the speaker’s platform that he could not hear any.” Better “that he could not hear,” or “hear at all,” or “hear what was said.”

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Apparent, Evident



These words are often used interchangeably. That which is apparent may be what it appears to be, or it may be very different; that which is evident admits of no doubt. The same is true of apparently and evidently.

Prejudice

“He is not the best person for the position, but his many kindnesses to me prejudice me in his favor.” We may be prejudiced against a person or thing, but cannot be prejudiced in favor. Use predispose.

Presume

This word is often employed when think, believe, or daresay would be better.

Pretend, Profess

“I do not pretend to be an orator.” Pretend means to feign, to sham; as, “He pretends to be asleep,” and should not be used when claim or profess would better suit the purpose.

Preventative

The correct form of the word is preventive, not preventative.

Previous, Previously

The adjective previous is often incorrectly used for the adverb previously; as, “Previous to his imprisonment he made a confession of his crime.”

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Promise, Assure

“I promise you we had a good time yesterday.” Promise relates to the future, hence “I assure you,” *etc.*, would be better.

Propose, Purpose

To propose is to set before the mind for consideration; to purpose is to intend. “I propose sending my son to college” should be “I purpose,” *etc.* “I propose that you go to college, my son.” “Thank you, father, I accept the proposal.”



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Sparrowgrass, Asparagus

The word sparrowgrass, which is a corruption of the word asparagus, illustrates how readily the uneducated mind associates an unusual term with another that is familiar, and as the mental impression is received through the ear, and lacks that definiteness which the printed form would give, the new idea, when repeated, often assumes a picturesque, if not a ludicrous, form. Many of Mrs. Partington's quaint sayings furnish further illustration.

The following incident, from a Western paper, shows the successive stages in the farmer's mental operations from the familiar terms skin, hide, oxhide, up to the unfamiliar chemical term oxide, through which he was obliged to pass before he succeeded in making known his wants:

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The man was in a brown study when he went into the drug store.

"What can we do for you?" inquired the clerk.

"I want black— something of something," he said; "have you got any?"

"Probably we have," replied the clerk, "but you'll have to be more definite than that to get it."

The farmer thought for a moment.

"Got any black sheepskin of something?" he asked.

"No; we don't keep sheepskins. We have chamois-skins, though."

"That ain't it, I know," said the customer. "Got any other kind of skins?"

"No."

"Skins— skins— skins!" slowly repeated the man, struggling with his slippery memory. "Calfskin seems to be something like it. Got any black calfskins of anything?"

"No, not one," and the clerk laughed.

The customer grew red in the face.

"Confound it!" he said, "if it ain't a skin, what in thunder is it?"



“Possibly it’s a hide?” suggested the clerk.

“That’s it! That’s it!” exclaimed the man.

“Have you got any black hides of something or anything?”

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The clerk shook his head sadly as the man tramped up and down the store.

“Got any black cowhide of anything?” he asked, after a moment’s thought.

The clerk’s face showed a gleam of intelligence, and then broke into a smile.

“Possibly it’s black oxide of manganese you want?” he said, quietly.

“Of course, that’s it!” he exclaimed, as he threw his arms around the clerk’s neck. “I knowed blamed well there was a skin or hide or something somewhere about the thing,” and he calmed down quietly and waited for what he wanted.

Accord, Give

“They accorded him due praise.” “They gave him the desired information.”

Act, Action

“The best portion of a good man’s life is his little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love.” “Suit the action to the word.” Action suggests the operation; act, the accomplished result.



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Adherence, Adhesion

These words were once interchangeable, but are now distinct. Adhesion relates to physical bodies; adherence to mental states.

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Adopt, Take

“What course will you take?” is better than “What course will you adopt?”

Affect, Effect

These words are sometimes confounded. “The climate affected their health.” “They sailed away without effecting their purpose.”

Aggravate, Exasperate

To aggravate means to intensify, to make worse; to exasperate means to provoke, to irritate. “To aggravate the horrors of the scene.” “His remarks exasperated me.” “His conduct aggravates me” should be “His conduct annoys (or displeases, or irritates, or exasperates) me.”

Alleviate, Relieve

These words differ chiefly in degree. The latter is the stronger word.

Proposal, Proposition

A proposition implies consideration or discussion; a proposal contemplates acceptance or rejection. “Your proposition to build our new warehouse has received favorable consideration, and we are ready to receive your proposals.”

Providing, Provided

“You may go to skate, providing you first finish your task.”
Incorrect. You should say provided.

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Proved, Proven



Proven is sometimes incorrectly used for proved. "The evidence was complete and his guilt was fully proved." Not proven is a legal term used in England to denote that the guilt of the accused is not made out, though not disproved.

Quantity, Number

Quantity refers to the how much; number to the how many. "He purchased a large quantity of wheat, corn, apples, lime, and sand, and a number of houses, stores, chairs, and books." It is, therefore, incorrect to say, "There was a large quantity of bicycles in the yard," "He sold a large quantity of books at auction."

Quite a few

In some parts of the country this expression is in common use in the sense of many, a large number, *etc.* "How many people were at church to-day?" "Quite a few," meaning a considerable number.

Commence, Begin

Some persons always commence, but never begin. The tendency toward pomp and parade in speech prompts many persons to avoid the use of our strong, rugged Anglo-Saxon words, and to substitute their high-sounding Latin equivalents, until, in time, the preferable native forms come to be regarded as

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commonplace and objectionable. American usage is more faulty than English in this regard. Use begin and beginning more, and commence and, commencement less.

Complete, Finished

There is a distinction in the use of these words that is not always observed. Complete signifies nothing lacking, every element and part being supplied. That which is finished has had all done to it that was intended. A vessel may be finished and yet be incomplete.



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Conclusion, End

The more pretentious word conclusion is often used where the simple Anglo-Saxon word end would be preferable.

Conscious, Aware

“He was aware of the enemy’s designs.” “Conscious of his fate, he boldly approached the furious beast.” Conscious relates to what is within our own mind; aware to what is without.

Continual, Continuous

Continuous implies uninterrupted, unbroken. Continual relates to acts that are frequently repeated. “The continuous ride is often finished in five hours, but owing to continual delays we were eight hours on the way.”

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Convict, Convince

The Irishman who brandished his club and, exclaimed that he was open to conviction, but he would like to see the man that could convince him, used a form of argument that was most convincing, but failed in his discrimination of language. Convict refers to the outer condition, and generally applies to something wrong; convince, which may be used of either right or wrong, refers to the judgment.

Custom, Habit

Habit is a tendency which leads us to do easily; custom grows out of the habitual doing or frequent repetition of the same act. Custom refers to the usages of society, or of the individual; habit refers more frequently to the individual acts. “Ill habits gather by unseen degrees.”

“Man yields to custom as he bows to fate,
In all things ruled— mind, body, and estate.”

Want, Need

These words are often used interchangeably, but should be discriminated. Need implies the lack; want also implies the lack, but couples with it the wish to supply the lack. “Some men need help, but will not ask for it; others want help (that is, they need help, or think they do, and ask for it) and get it, too.”



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Way, Away

“He is way down in Florida,” is incorrect. “He is away down in Florida” is better grammar. “He is in Florida” is still better. Down indicates the direction, and away magnifies the distance. As most persons know the direction, and as modern railway travel shortens long distances, the abbreviated sentence is sufficiently full.

Ways, Way

“He is a long ways from home” is a very common, but faulty expression. Say “Uncle Charles is now a long way on his journey.” “The boat is a good way off the shore.”

Whole, All

“The whole of the scholars went to the fair to-day.” “All of the school went to the fair to-day.” The sentences will be improved by transposing whole and all. “All of the scholars went to the fair to-day,” not half of them. “The whole school went to the fair to-day,” not a part of it. All refers to the individual scholars; whole to the school as a unit.

Without, Unless



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“He cannot miss the way without he forgets my instructions.” “I will not dig the potatoes without Tom comes to help.” Use unless instead of without.

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Worse, More

“He dislikes arithmetic worse than grammar.” Use more instead of worse.

Rarely, Rare

“It is rarely that you hear of a prodigal youth growing into an economical man.” Rarely should be rare to form the adjective attribute of the verb.

Real, Really

Real is often incorrectly used as an adverb, especially by schoolgirls; as, “I think he is real mean.” The grammar will be improved by substituting really for real, but the expression, as a whole, being applied to all kinds and degrees of offenses, has become meaningless.

Real is often carelessly used in the sense of very; as real pretty, real bright, real kind.

Recipe, Receipt

A recipe is a formula for making some mixture or preparation of materials; a receipt is an acknowledgment of that which has been received.

Region, Neighborhood

Region is a broader and more comprehensive term, and should not be applied to the narrow limits of a neighborhood.

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Remit, Send

The word remit is often used when send would be better. Remit means to send back, to forgive, to relax. In its commercial sense it means to transmit or send money in payment of a demand; as, “He remitted the amount by mail.”



Residence, House

This pretentious word is often used when house or home would be in better taste.

Deface, Disfigure

“The walls of many public buildings are defaced by persons who desire that their names shall remain when they are gone.” “They disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast.” Disfigure applies more generally to persons; deface, to things.

Demean, Degrade

The word demean is often incorrectly used in the sense of degrade, lower. It should be used in the sense of behave, conduct, deport, and not in the sense of degrade.

Depot, Station

For many years the word depot was largely employed in the sense of a railway station. Its primary meaning is a warehouse or storehouse or military station. As applied to a stopping place for railroad trains the

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English word station is greatly to be preferred to the French word depot, and is rapidly coming into general use in this country.

Description, Kind

“Flowers of every description were found in his garden.” In the above sense the word kind or variety would be more appropriate.

Bring, Fetch, Carry

Bring implies motion from the object toward the person who issues the command or makes the request. Fetch implies two motions, first, toward the object; second, toward the person who wishes it. The gardener, who is in the garden, calls to his servant, who is at the barn, “John, bring me the rake. You will find it in the barn.” And if John is with him in the garden, he would say, “John, fetch me the rake from the barn.”



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The use of fetch is more common among English writers than with us. In fact, many speakers and writers in America rarely use the word.

Carry is a more general term, and means to convey, without thought of the direction.

Character, Reputation

These words are often confounded. "Character," says Abbott, "is what a person is; reputation is what he is supposed to be. Character is in himself,

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reputation is in the minds of others. Character is injured by temptations and by wrongdoing; reputation by slanders and libels. Character endures throughout defamation in every form, but perishes where there is a voluntary transgression; reputation may last through numerous transgressions, but be destroyed by a single, and even an unfounded, accusation or aspersion."

Farther, Further

Although these words are often used interchangeably even by good writers, yet a finer taste and a keener power of discrimination is shown in the use of farther when referring to literal distance, and of further in reference to quantity or degree; as, "Each day's journey removes them farther from home," "He concluded his speech by remarking that he had nothing further to say." Farther is the comparative of far; further is the comparative of forth.

Fault, Defect

Speakers and writers often fail to discriminate in the use of these words. A defect implies a deficiency, a lack, a falling short, while a fault signifies that there is something wrong.

"Men still had faults, and men will have them still,
He that hath none, and lives as angels do
Must be an angel."

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"It is in general more profitable to reckon up our defects than to boast of our attainments."



Few, Little

These words and their comparatives, fewer, less, are often confounded. Few relates to number, or to what may be counted; little refers to quantity, or to what may be measured. A man may have few books and little money; he may have fewer friends and less influence than his neighbor. But do not say "The man has less friends than his neighbor."

Each other, One another

While some excellent authorities use these expressions interchangeably, most grammarians and authors employ each other in referring to two persons or things, and one another when more than two are considered; as, "Both contestants speak kindly of each other." "Gentlemen are always polite to one another."

Those who prefer to have wide latitude in speech will be glad to know that Murray, in one of the rules in his grammar, says, "Two negatives in English destroy one another."

Shakespeare says, "It is a good divine that follows his own instructions. I can easier teach twenty what were good to be done, than be one of



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the twenty to follow mine own teaching.” This is as true of expression as of morals.

Either, Neither

“Palms and beautiful flowers lined the hall on either side,” is a common but faulty form of expression. Either refers to one of two things. In the foregoing sentence the thought is that both sides of the hall were lined, hence the word both should have been used. If, however, each side of the hall is thought of separately, then each, would be the proper word to employ.

“Either of the two books will please you.” “Any of the three books will prove satisfactory.” “Any one of the five men would make a good candidate.” “Neither of the two men will serve.” “None of the ten men were present.” “Not one of all the houses was left standing.” These sentences represent the best usage with regard to either, neither, and also of any, none, any one, not one.

These kind

Adjectives implying number must agree with the nouns which they qualify. This and that qualify nouns in the singular; these and those belong to nouns in the plural.

“These kind of potatoes grow well in this soil.” Use this. “This twenty years have I known him.”

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Use these. “The beam was two foot above my head,” Use feet. “For this, among other reasons, I abandoned the profession.” Say “For this reason, among others, I abandoned the profession.” “He rides the bicycle daily, and by this means he preserves his health.” “The partners were all honest, courteous, and industrious, and by these means acquired wealth.” The word means being either singular or plural, the two preceding sentences are both correct.

Some means or another

“By some means or another he always gets the better part of the bargain.” This sentence may be corrected by saying “one means or another,” or “some means or other.”

Than



After other, otherwise, else, or an adjective in the comparative degree, than should be used, and not but or except.

“No other way but this was open to him.” Use than.

“History and philosophy cannot otherwise affect the mind but for its enlargement and benefit.” Use than.

“Flowers are often nothing else but cultivated weeds.” Use than.

“He no sooner entered the bridge but he met an infuriated bull coming toward him.” Use than.

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“He offered no other objection except the one already mentioned.” Use than.

“He read five other books on ‘Crime and Its Causes’ in addition to those you named.” Use than.

With equal propriety we may say, “He offered no objection except the one already mentioned,” or “He read five books on ‘Crime and Its Causes’ in addition to those you named.” It is the use of the word other, or otherwise, or else, that makes necessary the correlative term than.



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Besides

After else and other the preposition besides is sometimes employed.

“Other boys besides these are mischievous.”

“Other arts besides music are elevating and inspiring.”

“We must have recourse to something else besides punishment.”

It will be observed that the use of besides in this section differs from the use of than in the preceding discussion. “Other... than” is exclusive of those mentioned; whereas, “other... besides” includes those mentioned.

Other

“Iron is more useful than all the metals.” The faultiness of this sentence becomes apparent when

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we remember that iron itself is a metal and is included in the word metals, which forms one side of the comparison. In short, “Iron is more useful than iron together with all the other metals.” This statement is absurd. The sentence should, therefore, read, “Iron is more useful than all the other metals.”

“The Washington monument is higher than any monument in America.” Since it is in America, and as it cannot be higher than itself, the sentence is made correct by adding the word other; as, “The Washington monument is higher than any other monument in America.”

“This book, which I have just finished, is superior to any work on the subject that I have yet seen.” Say “to any other work.”

“Of all other creatures, man is the most highly endowed.” Say “of all creatures,” *etc.*

“No general was ever so beloved by his soldiers.” Say “No other general,” *etc.*

“Nothing delights him so much as a storm at sea.” “Nothing else delights him,” *etc.*

One’s, His



Whether we should say “One ought to know one’s own mind,” or “One ought to know his own mind,” is a question that the critics have earnestly discussed, but have never settled, except as each settles it for

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himself. The masculine pronoun is often used with an antecedent whose gender is not known. There can, therefore, be no objection to the use of his on the question of gender. As a matter of euphony, his is preferable to one’s. Both have the sanction of good usage.

None

Although literally signifying no one, the word none may be used with a plural verb, having the force of a collective noun.

“None but the brave deserves the fair.”— Dryden.

“None knew thee but to love thee,
None named thee but to praise.”— Halleck.

“I look for ghosts; but none will force
Their way to me.”— Wordsworth.

“Of all the girls that e’er were seen,
There’s none so fine as Nelly.”— Swift.

All, Whole

The word all is often incorrectly used for the whole.

“The river rose and spread over all the valley.” This should be “over the whole valley.”



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“The day being stormy, the members of Class A were all the children at school to-day.”
Correct by saying “were the only children at school to-day.”

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Perpetually, Continually

Perpetually is not synonymous with continually. Perpetually means never-ceasing. That which is done continually may be subject to interruptions.

Persuade, Advise

“Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.” Paul had advised many persons to become Christians, some of whom, like Agrippa, were almost persuaded.

Wharf, Dock

These words are sometimes confounded. The wharf is the pier, or landing, upon which the vessel unloads her cargo. The dock is the artificial waterway, or basin, formed by the wharves. “The vessel came into the dock and was made fast to the wharf.”

Contemptible, Contemptuous

Contemptible is sometimes incorrectly used for contemptuous. A story is told of Richard Parson, an English scholar and critic. A gentleman being in dispute with him, angrily exclaimed, “My opinion of you is most contemptible, sir,” upon which Parson quickly retorted, “I never knew an opinion of yours that was not contemptible.”

Healthy, Wholesome

These terms are not synonymous. Toadstools may be healthy, but they would not be regarded as wholesome.

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Plants and animals are healthy when the conditions of their growth are favorable. They are wholesome when, as food, they promote the health of those persons who eat them.

In a fix



Many persons instead of saying "He is in trouble," or "He is in an awkward position," or "He is perplexed," or embarrassed, employ the vulgarism, "He is in a fix." Although Shakespeare may say, "This was the most unkindest cut of all," and De Quincey may write, "Poor Aroar cannot live and cannot die— so that he is in an almighty fix," we lesser mortals are forbidden such expressions.

Fly, Flee

In a general sense fly is applied to winged creatures and flee to persons. "What exile from himself can flee?" "When the swallows homeward fly." The past tense forms are sometimes confused, as, "The inhabitants flew to the fort for safety," "The wild geese have all fled to the South." The principal parts of the verbs are:

Present.	Past.	Perf. part.
fly,	flew,	flown.
flee,	fled,	fled.

The verbs flew and fled in the foregoing sentences should be transposed. Fly implies motion either

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from or toward. Flee implies motion from. Fly may be used, in a figurative sense, of persons, to indicate great speed as of wings. "I flew to his rescue." "He flew to my rescue." "Resist the devil and he will flee from you."



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The word *flown* is sometimes used erroneously as the past tense or perfect participle of the verb *flow*. The parts of this verb are *flow*, *flowed*, *flowed*. "The river has overflowed (not overflowed) its banks."

Get, Got

Because a horse is willing is no reason why he should be ridden to death. The verb *get* and its past-tense form *got* admit of many meanings, as the following, from an old English publication, fully proves: "I got on horseback within ten minutes after I got your letter. When I got to Canterbury I got a chaise for town; but I got wet through before I got to Canterbury, and I have got such a cold as I shall not be able to get rid of in a hurry. I got to the Treasury about noon, but, first of all, I got shaved and dressed. I soon got into the secret of getting a memorial before the Board, but I could not get an answer then. However, I got intelligence from the messenger that I should most likely get an answer the next morning. As soon as I got back to my inn I got my supper and got to bed. It was not long before I got to sleep."

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When I got up in the morning I got myself dressed, and then got my breakfast, that I might get out in time to get an answer to my memorial. As soon as I got it I got into the chaise and got to Canterbury by three, and about teatime I got home. I have got nothing more to say."

Those who are disposed to overwork the words *get* and *got* will find it interesting and profitable to read the foregoing exercise, substituting other words for those in italics.

With *have* the word *got* is generally superfluous; as, "I have got a cold," "I have got to go to Boston this evening," "Have you got Hires's root-beer on draught?" For "I did not get to meet your cousin," say "I had no opportunity," or "I was prevented," *etc.*

Another very faulty use of *got* is heard in such expressions as "He got killed," "They got beaten," "She got cured," *etc.* *Was* or *were* would be more appropriate.

Since to *get* means to obtain, to procure, to gain, the use of the word is justified in such expressions as "I have got a larger farm than you have, because I have worked harder for it." "I have got a better knowledge of the Pacific coast than he has, because I traveled extensively through that region." And yet, when we have been overworked, the physician usually prescribes a period of absolute rest; so, in



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view of the multifarious uses to which get has been applied, would it not be well to permit it to retire for a time, in order that it may the more quickly be rejuvenated.

Guess, Reckon, Calculate, Allow

“I guess he is not going to vote to-day.” “I reckon we are going to have fair weather now.” “I calculate this ground would grow good potatoes.” “I allow she’s the prettiest girl that ever visited these parts.” The foregoing sentences may be improved by recasting them. “I think he is not going to (or will not) vote to-day.” “I believe we shall now have fair weather.” “I suppose this ground would yield fine potatoes.” “I regard her as the handsomest lady that has ever visited this place (or neighborhood, or locality).



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Gums, Overshoes

“Tom is outside, cleaning his gums on the mat.” While a mat will do very well for overshoes, a tooth-brush and sozodont would be better for the gums.

Funny

“Isn’t it funny that Smith, who resided in Chicago, should have died the same day that his father died in Boston?” “Isn’t it funny that the murderer who escaped hanging on a mere technicality of the law

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should have been killed the next day in a railroad accident?” “How funny that these maples should grow so tall on this mountain top!” “It is funny to think that James, who now pays his addresses to me, should once have been in love with my youngest sister.” The foregoing illustrations are not more incongruous than those we daily hear. Odd, strange, peculiar, unusual, represent some of the ideas intended to be conveyed by that much-abused word.

Good deal, Great deal

This idiom is defended by some authorities as being in perfectly good use, and by others it is denounced as being incorrect. Both good deal and greet deal are somewhat colloquial, and should be used sparingly in writing.

Had better, Would better

Like a good deal and some other idioms, this expression is denounced by some writers and defended by others. Grammatical construction supports more strongly the forms would better, would rather, *etc.* “I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.” “I would rather read than drive to-day.” “I would rather not go.” Omit rather and the superiority of would over had becomes apparent.

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If, Whether

“I do not know if he sold his farm or exchanged it for city property.” Use whether.



Illy, Ill

Do not use illy for ill. The former is becoming obsolete, and the latter, as an adverb, is taking its place. Say "An ill-ventilated room," not "an illy-ventilated room."

Implicit

This word means tacitly understood, resting on the word or authority of another. It should not be used in the sense of unbounded, unlimited.

Individual

This word should not be used broadly in the sense of a person, but should always convey some thought of a single thing or person, as opposed to many.

Journal

As this word is from the French, jour, day, it should not be applied to a monthly or quarterly magazine.

Know as

"I do not know as I can see you to-day." Say know that.

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Last, Latest

"Did you receive my last letter?"

"I hope not. I enjoy your letters very much, and I trust you may live to write many more."

Cunning



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This word is much used by young ladies in speaking of what is small, or dainty, or pleasing, as "A cunning little bonnet," "A cunning little watch," *etc.* While the word properly embodies the idea of skill or dexterity on the part of the workman, and while the appreciation of such skill, in speaking of the artist or artisan, might be expressed by cunning, it is better not to use the word in referring to the product of the workmanship.

Curious

Curious means inquisitive, rare. In the sense of strange or remarkable, its use should be guarded.

Cute

This word is often used colloquially in the sense of clever, sharp, shrewd, ingenious, cunning. It is doubtless an abbreviation of acute. It is not found in good literary usage.

Favor, Resemble

The use of the word favor in the sense of resemble is a provincialism that should be avoided. "The

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son favors the father" is correct if the meaning be that the son shows favor or kindness to the father; but if reference to their similarity of appearance is intended, the verb resemble should be employed.

Balance, Remainder

This word, like numerous others, has been borrowed from the commercial world, and has had such a wide use that its faultiness is not noticed even by many who regard themselves as careful speakers and writers. "I cut down part of the timber this year, and expect to cut the balance next spring." "My cousin will remain with us the balance of this week." "James ate half of the melon to-day, and will eat the balance to-morrow." In these and all similar cases the word remainder should be used. Balance is a term that applies to accounts, and signifies the amount necessary to be added to one side of the account in order to make it equal the other.

Behave

"Now, my children, you must behave while I am gone." The mother intended to ask her children to behave well, but as behave is a neutral word, and may be followed by well or ill, her form of expression permits the children to supply whichever adverb suits them



the better. Behave requires a qualifying word to make the meaning clear.

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Bound

“He was determined to study medicine,” not “He was bound,” *etc.* Bound implies that he was under a bond or obligation to another, rather than impelled by the action of his own mind.

Better, Best

While some good writers violate the rule, yet the best authorities restrict the use of the comparative degree to two objects.

“Mary is the better scholar of the two.”

“Although both are young, Susan is the younger.”

“Of two evils, choose the lesser,” not the least.

Former, First

Former and latter being adjectives of the comparative degree, should be used in speaking of two objects. When more than two objects are named, use first and last.



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“My sons, John and Luther, are both at college. The first expects to study law, and the last to study medicine.” Use former and latter.

“New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago are the most populous cities in the United States. The former has long been at the front; the latter has only recently entered the race.” Use first and last instead of former and latter.

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These, Those

When objects near and remote are referred to, this and its plural these are applied to the objects near at hand, that and its plural those to objects at a distance.

When reference is made to contrasted antecedent terms, this and these are applied to the latter; that and those to the former, as

“Farewell my friends! farewell my foes!
My peace with these, my love with those!”
— Burns.

Fictitious Writer

Do not say a fictitious writer when you mean a writer of fiction.

Firstly

First is an adverb as well as an adjective. We should, therefore, say first, secondly, thirdly, and not firstly, secondly, *etc.*

First-rate

An article may be rated in quality as first, or second, or third. If it rates first, it may be called a first-rate article. The word is properly used as an adjective, but should not be employed as an adverb, as in the sentence, “He sings first-rate.”

Fix, Mend, Repair

Fix means to make fast, but its incorrect use in the sense of mend, repair, arrange, is so common that the



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word when properly used sounds strange, if not strained. “To fix up the room,” “to fix up the accounts,” “to fix up matters with my creditors,” “to fix the rascals who betrayed me,” are examples illustrating the looseness with which the word is used.

Round, Square

When a thing is round or square it cannot be rounder or squarer. These adjectives do not admit of comparative and superlative forms. But we may say more nearly round or less nearly square.

States, Says

“He states he is going fishing to-morrow.” States is too formal a word, and should be used only of some important assertion. “He says he is going,” *etc.*

Stop, Stay

To stop is to cease moving. “At what hotel do you stop” should be “At what hotel do you stay.” “When you come to the city stay with me,” not stop with me.

Subtile, Subtle

Subtile means thin, fine, rare, delicate; subtle means sly, artful, cunning, elusive. “More subtile web Arachne cannot spin.” “He had to contend with a subtile foe.”

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Summons

He was summonsed to appear before the judge” should be “He was summoned to appear,” *etc.*



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Tasty

Often used in colloquial speech when tasteful would be better. Tastily for tastefully is still worse.

Team

Properly this word relates only to the horses, and does not include the carriage.

Those kind, These sort

“It is unpleasant to have to associate with those kind of people.” “These sort of sheep are the most profitable.” Kind and sort are nouns of the singular number; these and those are plural, and, according to the laws of grammar, the adjective and noun must agree in number. The corrected sentences will read: “It is unpleasant to have to associate with this kind of people.” “This sort of sheep is the most profitable.” The fault arises by associating in the mind the adjectives these and those with the nouns sheep and people, which nouns are more prominent in the mind than the nouns kind and sort. If the ear is not satisfied, the sentences may readily be recast; as, “It is unpleasant to have to associate with people of that kind.” “Sheep of this sort are the most profitable.”

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Transpire, Happen

This word, from trans, across, through, and spirare, to breathe, means, physiologically, to pass off in the form of vapor or insensible perspiration, or, botanically, to evaporate from living cells. Its general meaning is to become known, to escape from secrecy.

It is frequently employed in the sense of to occur, to come to pass, but this use is condemned by the best critics in England and America. “The proceedings of the secret session of the council soon transpired.” This sentence illustrates the true meaning of the word.

Make, Manufacture

These words may, in some cases, be used interchangeably, but make has much the wider range of meanings. The following story, related by Eli Perkins, will illustrate this fact:

I was talking one day with Mr. Depew, President of the New York Central Railroad, about demand and supply. I said the price of any commodity is always controlled by the demand and supply.



“Not always, Eli,” said Depew; “demand and supply don’t always govern prices. Business tact sometimes governs them.”

“When,” I asked, “did an instance ever occur when the price did not depend on demand and supply?”

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“Well,” said Mr. Depew, “the other day I stepped up to a German butcher, and, out of curiosity, asked:

“‘What’s the price of sausages?’

“‘Dwenty cends a bound,’ he said.

“‘You asked twenty-five this morning,’ I replied.

“‘Yah; dot vas ven I had some. Now I ain’t got none, I sell him for dwenty cents. Dot makes a repudation for selling cheab, und I don’t lose noddings.’

“You see,” said Mr. Depew, laughing, “I didn’t want any sausage and the man didn’t have any; no demand and no supply, and still the price of sausage went down five cents.”



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“Well, there are strange things in this world,” I said. “Now, take the words manufacture and make. I always thought that both words meant the same thing.”

“Why, they do, Eli,” said Mr. Depew.

“Not always,” I said.

“Now, when could they have a different meaning?”

“Why, this morning I came down from Albany on a Central car manufactured to carry fifty passengers, but it was made to carry seventy-two people.”

“Yes, I dare say; but we’ll now talk about the Behring Sea question.”

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Truth, Veracity

“The veracity of his statement is doubted.” The sentence should be, “The truth of his statement is doubted,” or “In making that statement his veracity is doubted.” Veracity is applied to the person; truth to the thing.

Try the experiment

“They are trying the experiment of running railroad trains by electricity.” This should be, “They are making the experiment,” *etc.* The word experiment contains the idea of trial, hence, to try the experiment is to try the trial.

Little piece

“I will go with you a little piece.” A short distance or a part of the way would be more appropriate.

Every confidence

“I have every confidence in his ability to succeed.” Confidence is a unit; every implies several units considered separately. “I have the greatest confidence in his ability to succeed” is correct.

Ugly



This word properly applies to the appearance of a person or thing, hence such expressions as “He has an ugly temper,” “This is an ugly customer,” “That was an ugly rumor,” *etc.*, although common in colloquial discourse, should be avoided in dignified address.

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Unbeknown

This is a provincialism that should be avoided. Use unknown.

Underhanded

Often incorrectly used for underhand; as “That was a contemptible and underhanded trick.”

Calligraphy

This word means not writing, simply, but beautiful writing; hence, to say, “His calligraphy is wretched” is equivalent to saying, “His excellent writing is poor,” which is a contradiction of terms.

Can but, Cannot but

These expressions are sometimes confounded. “If I perish, I can but perish,” means “I can only perish,” or “I can do no more than perish.” “I cannot but speak of the things I have heard” means that I am under a moral necessity to speak of these things. The past tense forms could but and could not but should be, in like manner, discriminated.

Casualty, Casuality

The latter word is sometimes used in place of the former. The first is legitimate; the second is without authority. The words specialty and speciality have a termination similar to the above. They may generally be used interchangeably and are both legitimate.



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Complected.

"The lady is light complected, has blue eyes, and auburn hair." Complected is a provincialism without sanction. "The lady is of light complexion, has blue eyes," *etc.*

Disremember

This word is obsolete. Use forget, or "I do not remember."

Lie, Lay

The verbs lie and lay are often confounded, even by intelligent persons. Lie does not take an object. We cannot lie a thing. It is therefore intransitive.

Lay, which means to place in position, requires an object. We lay a book on a table, or bricks on the wall. It is therefore transitive.

The principal parts of the first verb are lie, lay, lain; and of the second, lay, laid, laid. The word lay is found in both, and this is, in part, accountable for the confusion. The most frequent errors result from using laid, the past tense form of the transitive verb, when the word lay, the past tense form of the intransitive verb, should be used. The ear naturally expects the usual past tense ending of the d or t sound, and as that is absent in the past tense of lie, the past tense form of the other verb is substituted. For the same reason the participle form laid is often incorrectly used for lain.

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"He told me to lie down, and I lay down," not laid down. "I told him to lay the book down, and he laid it down." "The ship lay at anchor." "They lay by during the storm." "The book is lying on the shelf." "He lay on the ground and took cold." "They lay in ambush." "Lie low or he will discover you." "The goods are still lying on his hands." "Time lay heavily on their hands." "We must lie over at the next station." "A motion was made that the resolution lie on the table." "Now I lie down to sleep." "Now I lay me down to sleep."

The foregoing sentences illustrate the correct usage of these confusing verbs.

As, That

"Did your cousin go to town yesterday?" "Not as I know." Better, "Not that I know." Better still, "I do not know." "I do not know as I shall go." Use that for as.



Bad toothache

As it is a rare thing to have a good toothache, we scarcely need the adjective bad to distinguish between the two kinds of toothache. Say severe.

Beautifully, Beautiful

After verbs of seeing, feeling, tasting, and smelling, the adverb is often incorrectly used for the adjective.

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“The colonel looked handsomely in his military dress,” “I feel splendidly to-day,” “This peach tastes badly,” “The rose smells sweetly,” are incorrect. Use handsome for handsomely, very well or in good spirits for splendidly, tastes bad or has a disagreeable taste for badly, and sweet for sweetly.

Beg, Beg leave

“I beg to announce the sale of a collection of rare and costly rugs.” “I beg to acknowledge your kindness in sending me this handsome present.” In each case say “I beg leave to,” etc.



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Due, Owing

His success was due to his honesty and energy.” That is due which should be paid as a debt; that is owing which is referred to as a cause or source.

“The bill is now due and payable at the gas office.” “His success was owing to his honesty and energy.”

Each, Every

“I see him at his office each day of the week.” In this sentence the word every would be better. Each refers to single days particularized. Here reference is made to what occurs on all days without exception.

Both words refer to nouns in the singular, hence such expressions as the following are incorrect:

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“Every soldier and sailor stood at their post.” “The prisoners were discharged and went each their several ways.” Correct by saying, “The prisoners were discharged and went each his several way,” “Every soldier and sailor stood at his post.”

Each, Both

“Both parties maintained their original positions.” As the parties are thought of separately, the sentence should be: “Each party maintained its original position.” “Both parties strove to place their best candidates upon the ticket” is correct, because the parties are thought of collectively.

Both, Both of

Both is used alone before nouns and both of before pronouns. “Both men have studied the currency question.” “Both of them are well informed in matters relating to the currency.”

Ever, Never

“Let him be ever so rich,” says Emerson. “You spend ever so much money in entertaining your equals and betters,” says Thackeray. “Though he run ever so fast, he cannot win the race.” Writers and grammarians differ, some preferring ever, others never.



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Every once in a while

This is a cumbersome, awkward expression that should be avoided. Occasionally, frequently, at intervals, are among the expressions that may be used in its place.

Exceptionable, Exceptional

“He enjoyed exceptionable opportunities for acquiring the Greek language.” Say exceptional opportunities.

Female, Woman

The word female is often employed when woman would be better. Female applies to all of the feminine gender, including the brute creation.

Poet, Poetess

The tendency to increase the number of nouns with the feminine ending ess should be checked. Avoid poetess, authoress, doctress, and other newly-invented words of this kind.

Fewer, Less

Fewer refers to number, less to quantity. “He had less friends than I, and yet he was elected.” Say “He had fewer friends.” “There were no less than fifty cows in the field.” Use fewer.

Right smart

In some portions of the South the expression right smart is employed in colloquial discourse to convey



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the idea of a large quantity or in large measure; as, "We have right smart of peaches this summer," meaning "We have a large crop of peaches;" "He knows right smart of Latin" for "He knows considerable Latin" or "He is well versed in Latin."

Little bit

"Will you have some of this pudding?"

"If you please. Give me a little bit."

"Did you injure yourself when you fell?"

"No; but I soiled my clothing a little bit."

A small portion or piece, in the first sentence, and slightly, in the second, would serve as good equivalents for a little bit.

Sight

"There was a sight of people at the fair to-day." In the sense of a large number, this word, like the word lot, should be avoided.

Crowd

A dozen persons may constitute a crowd if they push and jostle one another by reason of insufficient space. A thousand men will not form a crowd if all have ample room to sit or stand or move about.

Chuck-full

This word is not authorized. Chock-full and choke-full may be used, but are not elegant.

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Contemplate, Propose

Contemplate is often incorrectly used for propose; as, "I contemplate going to the country."

Dispense, Dispense with



These expressions are not synonymous. To dispense is to give; to dispense with is to do without. The pharmacist dispenses medicines; we should be pleased if we could dispense with them.

Dry, Thirsty

Dry is often incorrectly used in the sense of thirsty; as, "I am dry; let me have a glass of water." To say, "I am dry; my waterproof and umbrella kept out the rain," is correct.

Dutch, German

Do not call a German a Dutchman. A Dutchman comes from Holland, a German from Germany.

Evacuate, Vacate

Evacuate means to make empty, and should not be used in the sense of to go away, to vacate.

Different than, Different to

"The school is conducted in a very different manner than it used to be." "This basket of roses is different to yours." The above and similar expressions are decided vulgarisms, and should be avoided.

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"The school is conducted in a very different manner from what it used to be." "This basket of roses is different from yours."

Drive, Ride

Some confusion exists in the use of the words drive and ride. In England the distinction is made of applying ride to going on horseback and drive to going in a carriage, whether you ride or drive. That usage is not closely followed in this country. He who guides the horse drives; the rest of the company ride. The noun and participial forms are more excusable than the verb. "Jones asked me to drive with him this afternoon." But as Jones expects to do the driving himself, the speaker should have said, "Jones asked me to take a ride," or "go driving," or "take a drive," *etc.*



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Couple, Several

The word couple is often incorrectly used in the sense of several; as, a couple of horses, mules, birds, trees, houses, *etc.* The use of the word couple is not only limited to two, but to two that may be coupled or yoked together. A man and wife are spoken of as a couple. We speak of a span of horses, a yoke of oxen, a brace of ducks, a pair of gloves.

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Directly, Immediately, As soon as

A faulty English use of the above words has found some favor in the United States. "Directly the whistle blew the workmen left the shop." Say "As soon as the whistle blew," *etc.* "Immediately he closed his speech his opponent rose to reply." Say "When" or "As soon as he closed his speech," *etc.*

Directly denotes without any delay; immediately implies without any interposition of other occupation.

Agreeably disappointed

When our hopes are blasted, our plans balked, our expectations defeated, our intentions thwarted, we are disappointed. We prefer the agreeable to the disagreeable, and plan and labor to secure it. When our plans fail we are disappointed, but not agreeably disappointed. If the new conditions, which are not of our seeking, prove agreeable, it is only after the sense of disappointment has vanished.

Allude to, Refer to, Mention

The word allude is often incorrectly used. Allusion is the by-play of language. It means to hint at by remote suggestions, to speak of figuratively or sportively.

Whatever is directly mentioned, or spoken of, or described, cannot be said to be alluded to. The terms

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differ in degree, the first being the weakest. An allusion is an indirect reference.

Among the rest



“Mary sat on the beach among the rest.” Say “with the rest.”

Peruse

This is one of those high-sounding terms too often employed when read would be much better.

Emigrants, Immigrants

These words are sometimes confounded. “Did you see the emigrants on the ‘Indiana,’ which arrived this morning?” “Did the immigrants go directly to Italy?” Exchange the italicized words in the two sentences and they will be correctly used.

Somewheres

The terminal s should be omitted in such words as anywheres, somewheres, nowheres, anyways, hereabouts, thereabouts, whereabouts. In such cases as “Whereabouts did you find him?” and “We knew his whereabouts,” the s is properly retained.

Apart, Aside

“May I see you apart from the others?” It should be, “May I see you privately” or “aside”?

Fire, Throw

We fire a gun, but throw a stone. To fire a stone, fire him out of the house, fire him out of our employ, may



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be graphic ways of presenting the thought, but good writers never use them and good speakers should avoid them.

The First, Single

“I have not found the first objection to his candidacy.” Say “a single objection,” or “no objection.”

First two

Such has been the strong desire to continue to use forms of expression that we have long used that not a little time and effort have been expended in the endeavor to make the wrong appear right. It is an accepted fact, however, that a large majority of the best speakers and writers now say the first two, the last five, *etc.*, rather than the two first, the five last.

Future, Subsequent

The word future is sometimes used instead of subsequent; as, “Until he was eighteen years old his conduct was marked by cruelty and malice, but his future life was characterized by kindness and generosity.” Future looks forward from the present, and not from some point of time in the past.

Gent’s pants

“Gent’s pants scoured and pressed.” Business signs and business advertisements are responsible for many vulgarisms. Never say gent’s nor pants. Even pantaloons is not so good a word as trousers.

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Sit, Set

Few words afford a more fertile field for grammatical blundering than the verbs sit and set. The important fact to remember in the use of the words is that sit, in modern usage, is an intransitive verb, and does not take an object, while set, which means to place in position, is transitive, and requires an object to complete its meaning. You cannot sit a thing, but you do set or place a thing.

The verb sit undergoes a slight change with the change of tense or time. “I sit at the window today.” “I sat at the window yesterday.” “I have sat at the window daily for



many years.” “Sitting at the window, I saw the storm arise.” “Having sat at his table, I can testify to his hospitality.”

The transitive verb set undergoes no tense changes. “See me set this vase on the table.” “He set his seal to the paper yesterday.” “Jones will not set the world on fire with his writings.” “Having set my affairs in order, I returned home.” “I sit down.” “I sat down.” “I set him down.”

There are many intransitive uses of the verb set; as, “The sun sets,” “The tide sets toward the south,” “The fruit has set,” “He set out for Boston.”

There is a difference of opinion as to whether we should say “The coat sets well” or “The coat sits well,” with the greater weight in favor of sits. “The

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hen sits on her eggs.” “She is a sitting hen.” When the verb is used reflexively use set and not sat; as, “I set me down beside her,” not “I sat me down beside her.”

Anyhow



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This word can scarcely be regarded as elegant, and should not be used except in colloquial style.

Awful

Few words among the many that go to make up the vocabulary of American slang have been in longer use and have a wider range than the word awful. From the loftiest and most awe-inspiring themes to the commonest trifle, this much-abused word has been employed. A correct speaker or writer almost fears to use the word lest he should suggest the idea of slang, and thus detract from the subject to which the word might most fitly be applied.

Even the grammatical form of the word is often violated in such expressions as "Isn't he awful nice?" "That hat of hers is awful pretty." To say awfully nice and awfully pretty would improve the grammar, but the gross vulgarism remains.

The word, when properly used, means "inspiring with awe or dread" often accompanied with reverence, as when Milton says:

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"The trumpet spake not to the armed throng;
And kings sat still with awful eye,
As if they surely knew their sovran Lord was by."

Back up

In the sense of support, this, and the shorter expression back, are doubtless borrowed from the commercial world. While they may be tolerated in conversation, they must be regarded as slang.

Bulk

This word is often incorrectly used for most or the greater part; as, "The bulk of the people opposed the measure." Bulk refers to size, not to numbers.

Burglarize

This word is often used by the more sensational reporters in their reports of crime. It should be avoided.

But what, But that



“I don’t know but what I shall have to punish him.” The sentence should read, “I don’t know but that I shall have to punish him.” It is equivalent to, “I think that I shall have to punish him.” The omission of but will convey the opposite meaning. “I don’t know that I shall have to punish him” is equivalent to “I think that I shall not have to punish him.”

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Calculate

A provincialism often used in the sense of think, deem, suppose, believe; as, “I calculate the train will be here in ten minutes.”

Calculated, Liable

This word is often incorrectly used in the sense of likely, liable, apt; as, “His utterances are calculated to injure his cause.” In the proper use of the word there is present the idea of purpose or intent.

Leave, Quit

Leave is often incorrectly used for quit; as, “That eminent actor expects soon to leave the stage.” It would be a misfortune if he should take the stage with him. Say “quit the stage.”

“Henry has quit smoking.” Here left off or stopped would be better.

“The President gave me lief to speak with him.” Say “gave me leave.”



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Let it alone and let me be are preferable to leave it alone and leave me be.

A 1

"I have just read an A 1 article on the currency, question in the last issue of the North American Review!" This is an expression from the vocabulary of business converted into the slang of the street.

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Luck

Luck, like behavior, may be either good or bad. "The carpenter has met with luck; he fell and broke his leg." "The manager has met with luck; his salary has been doubled." The adjective lucky and the adverb luckily are used only in a favorable sense.

Make way with

This expression is often incorrectly used for make away with; as, "The Judge gave the boot-blacks a Christmas dinner, and the begrimed urchins quickly made way with the turkey and cranberry sauce." Say "made away with," *etc.*

To make way is to make room, to provide a way, to dispatch.

In our midst

"The doctor settled in our midst." Say "among us," or "in our neighborhood."

Indorse, Endorse

From the Latin dorsum, the back, these words have come to mean the writing of one's name across the back of a check or draft or other commercial paper to signify its transfer to another or to secure its payment. To indorse a man's arguments or opinions is an incorrect use of the word.

While both forms of spelling the word are in good usage, indorse seems to be coming into more general favor.

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In, Into



In is often incorrectly used for into; as, “He hurried up the street and rushed in the store.” We walk in a room when the walking is wholly within the apartment; we walk into a room when we enter it from some other room or from the outside.

Just going to

“I was just going to write you a letter.” Say “I was just about to write you a letter.”

Kind of

“James swallowed the dose, and now feels kind of sick.” Use slightly or somewhat, or some other modifier, instead of kind of.

Knowing

Do not use knowing for skilful or intelligent. “He is a knowing artist.” “See him prick up his ears; he is a knowing cur.”

Clever, Smart

In England the word clever is applied to one who is bright, intelligent, ready, apt; in the United States it is often misapplied to one who is good-natured, kind, or accommodating.

“Do you believe in corporal punishment for stupid school-children?”

“Yes; a spanking always makes them smart.”

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To express cleverness, brightness, intelligence, aptness, the adjectives clever, bright, intelligent, apt, are better than the word smart.

Posted, Informed



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“He is well posted on all matters relating to cattle-breeding.” Say informed.

Perspire, Sweat

While all mankind belongs to the animal kingdom, and no person can feel offended at being called an animal, yet society observes certain distinctions in speaking of men and of beasts. To sweat and to feed are expressions that apply to the latter; to perspire and to eat to the former.

Empty

The Mississippi river flows, or discharges its water into the Gulf of Mexico, but it can not empty so long as any water remains in the river.

Enjoyed poor health

“Gold that buys health can never be ill spent,
Nor hours laid out in harmless merriment.”

The negative form of expression, “I have not enjoyed good health,” is not only correct, but is, at the same time, a polite way of modestly stating a fact. To say “I have enjoyed poor health for the past year” is to express a kind of enjoyment not generally appreciated. It is like being agreeably disappointed.

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Aberration of intellect

“He is afflicted with a slight aberration of intellect.” Simplicity would suggest, “He is slightly insane.”

Above, Foregoing

“Let me call your attention to the above passage.” The highest authority does not sanction the use of above as an adjective. Say “the foregoing passage.”

Allowed, Said

“He allowed this was the best speech he had heard.” This is a provincialism that should be avoided. Use said, or declared, or admitted, according to the meaning.

Alternation



This word is sometimes used in the sense of an unbroken series. It properly signifies a reciprocal succession, as "The alternation of summer and winter produces an ever-changing scene."

Alternative

Etymologically and by general use, this word refers to a choice between two; as, "If this demand is refused the alternative is war." But Gladstone is quoted as saying, "My decided preference is for the fourth and last of these alternatives."

Anniversary

From annus, a year, means recurring every year. Centennial means once in a hundred years. What then does centennial anniversary mean? Use centenary.

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Learn, Teach

"I taught him grammar," not "I learned him grammar." "He taught us history."

Lease, Let, Rent, Hire

We may lease to or from. "I leased the farm to my neighbor." "I leased this house from Brown." We let to another; as, "I let my house to my cousin." We may rent to or from another. We may hire from another; as, "I hired a servant;" "he hired a boat." With out and reflexively we may hire to another; as, "I hired out my horses;" "he hired himself to the miller."



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Like, As

Avoid the use of like in the sense of as. "He thinks just as (not like) his father does." That Anthony Trollope, Hugh Conway and other writers are chargeable with this offence does not justify the use of like for as, but rather proves the need of constant vigilance in order to avoid such errors.

Lit, Lighted, Alighted

"He lighted the candle." "The crow alighted on the top of the tree." Avoid the use of lit in such cases, and also that slang form, as, "I lit on a beautiful passage in Browning," in the sense of met with.

Lend, Loan

"Will you lend me your book," is better than "Will you loan me your book."

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Near, Nearly

"James is not near so good a scholar as his brother is." Use nearly.

Nasty, Nice

Nasty is a strong adjective, and should be used only in reference to what is offensively filthy, foul, or defiled. Such expressions as a nasty day, a nasty rain, mark a loose and careless use of the word.

The word nice once meant foolish, ignorant, weak, effeminate. It has now come to mean exact, fine, finished, exciting admiration on account of skill or exactness; as nice proportions, nice workmanship, a nice distinction in philosophy. It is loosely and colloquially used in application to what is pleasing, agreeable, delightful, good.

A bright young lady was once asked, "Don't you think nice is a nasty word?" She replied, "And do you think nasty is a nice word." The subject was abruptly changed.

Nicely

"How do you feel this morning?" "Nicely, thank you." The foregoing use of the word is as incorrect as it is common. Use very well instead.

No good, No use



“How does that new machine work?” “It’s no good.” “Shall I try again?” “No; it’s no use.” The answers should have been, “It is of no good, it is of no use.”

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O, Oh

While good usage is far from uniform, many excellent authors employ O only in cases of direct address and oh when strong and sudden emotion is to be expressed. O is always written with a capital letter, and should be followed by the name of the person or thing addressed, and the exclamation or interrogation point placed at the end of the sentence; as, “O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory?” “O the cold and cruel winter!”

Oh in the body of a sentence may begin with a small letter, and is immediately followed by the exclamation point; as, “Oh! how terrible was his fate!” “The sad intelligence was gently given, but oh! the shock was almost unbearable.”

Observe, Say

“He observed that the orphan pines while the oppressor feeds.” To observe is to notice carefully, to attend closely to what one sees. In the above sentence said or remarked should be used instead of observed.



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Of any, Of all

“This is the largest tree of any I have seen.” The meaning clearly is, that of all the trees I have seen this is the largest. Hence, of any should be changed to of all.

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Older, Elder

Elder and eldest are terms applied chiefly to persons, generally in speaking of members of the same family, while older and oldest are applied to persons of different families, and also to things.

“His elder brother died yesterday.” “His eldest sister has gone to Italy on her wedding trip.” “Our oldest neighbor was born in 1825.” “This oak is older than that pine.” The foregoing sentences illustrate the best usage as applied to the comparatives older and elder and the superlatives oldest and eldest.

When the direct comparison is made the word older is used, followed by the conjunction than; as, “My father is older than my mother.” But when the comparison is assumed the word elder should be employed; as, “My father is the elder of my parents.”

Only

Perhaps no other word in the language is so often misplaced as the word only. The only general rule is to place it as near as possible to the word which it modifies. “He only lent me a dollar” means that he did not make me a present of the dollar, but expects me to return it. “He lent me only a dollar” means that the sum lent was neither greater nor less than one dollar. The former expression is often used when the latter should be.

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“Only the man walked to the post-office to-day.” The woman did not walk with him.

“The man only walked to the post-office to-day.” He did not ride or drive.

“The man walked only to the post-office to-day.” He did not go so far as the store.

“The man walked to the post-office only to-day.” Yesterday he rode and the day before he drove. Today is the only day that he walked.



George Eliot, in *Middlemarch*, says: "I only know two gentlemen who sing at all well," and in another place, "I have only seen her once before." The word only should be placed before two in the first sentence, and before once in the second.

Onto

There is a growing tendency to write the words on and to as one word. "Although nearly drowned he yet had strength enough to climb onto the rock." The use of upon or on is generally better. When neither of these can be used write on and to as separate words.

Outstart

This word is sometimes used when outset should be employed.

Over and Above

"He earned twenty dollars over and above his expenses." Use more than or above.

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Party, Person

"Is she the party of whom you spoke?" "No; she is the person."



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One man may be a party to a contract or agreement. Several men may form a party. When no contract is implied, one man or woman must be spoken of as a person, not as a party.

Patron, Customer

Unless there is a sense of obligation or condescension, use the term customer and not patron. In like manner, use custom instead of patronage.

Per

Per is a Latin preposition and should be used only with Latin nouns. We should say per annum, but not per year; per diem, and not per day; per capita, and not per head. "He received a thousand dollars a year is shorter and better than "he received a thousand dollars per year."

Perchance, Peradventure

These are poetic and archaic forms that should be avoided in ordinary prose.

Performers

"The entertainment consisted of reading, recitations, and singing, and the performers acquitted themselves well." Readers, reciters, and singers are not

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performers. The term is applied to the stage, and to those who play on musical instruments. Even in the latter application, "he plays well on the piano," is better than "he performs well on the piano."

Period, Point

Do not use period for a point of time. Period implies extended time.

Nothing like

"James is nothing like so successful as his brother" illustrates a colloquialism that should be avoided. Use not nearly so, *etc.*

Notorious, Noted



“He was elected to Congress, then Governor, and we now think of sending him to the United States Senate. He is becoming quite notorious.” The word notorious implies some bad or doubtful quality or characteristic, and must not be used in the sense of noted or famous.

Nowhere near so

“He trapped nowhere near so many rabbits as his cousin.” This vulgarism should be avoided. Use not nearly.

Plead

The past tense of read is read, but the past tense of plead is pleaded, not plead. “The prisoner pleaded for mercy.”

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Plenty, Plentiful

“Money is plenty this summer.” Plenty is a noun and should not be used as an adjective. Therefore “money is plentiful this summer.” Shakespeare says, “If reasons were as plenty as blackberries,” *etc.*, but words have settled into more definite grooves since Shakespeare’s time. “This house is plenty large enough.” Neither is plenty an adverb. Say, “This house is quite large enough,” or, simply, large enough.

About, around

“She was pleased with the conversation about her.” Use “around her.”

“She was pained by the conversation about her.” Use “concerning her.”

Overlook, Oversee



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This word means to look down upon from a place that is over or above; as, "From the top of the Washington monument you can readily overlook the city." But it also means to look over and beyond an object in order to see a second object, thus missing the view of the first object; hence, to refrain from bestowing notice upon, to neglect. The confounding of these two ideas begets ambiguity, as "Brown's business was to overlook the workmen in the shop." His business was to oversee or superintend them, and not to neglect or overlook them.

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Revolting

To revolt is to rebel, to renounce allegiance, but the participial form revolting also means repugnant, loathsome. In the sentence, "A band of revolting Huns has just passed down the street," we should be in doubt whether the speaker referred to their acts against the government or to their appearance. The use of the word rebellious in the former sense, and of disagreeable or disgusting, or the stronger adjectives given above, for the latter meaning, would make the sentence clear.

Unexampled

Such adjectives as unexampled, unparalleled, unprecedented, do not admit of comparison, hence such expressions as the most unexampled bravery, the most unparalleled heroism, *etc.*, should be avoided.

Utter

This verb should be distinguished from express or say. Utter carries with it the idea of articulate expression, except in the sense of uttering false coins or forged notes.

As an adjective it is defined by complete, perfect, absolute, *etc.*, but it can be applied only to what is unpleasant or unfavorable. "I enjoyed utter happiness" would be an absurd expression, but "I was doomed to utter misery" illustrates a proper use of the word.

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Valuable, Valued

These words are not synonymous; valuable means precious, costly, having value; valued refers to our estimation of the worth. "He is one of our most valued contributors,"



not valuable, unless you are thinking of the value of his contributions and the smallness of the compensation.

Very pleased

A few participles used as adjectives may be directly modified by too or very; as, "I was very tired," "He was too fatigued to go farther."

We sometimes hear the expression, "I was very pleased," but the critics insist upon "I was very much pleased," or "greatly pleased," or "very greatly pleased."

Vicinity

Often too high-sounding a word for the thought; neighborhood is less pretentious.

The old man

The use of such words as dad, daddy, mam, mammy, the old man, the old woman, when applied to parents, not only indicates a lack of refinement, but shows positive disrespect. The words pap, pappy, governor, *etc.*, are also objectionable. After the first lispings of childhood the words papa and mamma, properly accented, should be insisted upon by parents, and at



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the age of twelve or fifteen the words father and mother should be substituted and ever after used, as showing a proper respect on the part of children.

Great big

“He gave me a great big apple.” This is a colloquialism that should be avoided. Use large.

Argue, Augur

“The hollow whistling of the wind among the trees argues an approaching storm.” Use augurs.

Barbaric, Barbarous

Barbaric refers to a people; barbarous to their low state of life and their habits of cruelty.

Cut in half

A colloquialism in very frequent use. “I will cut this melon in half and share it with you.” Say, cut in two, or cut in halves, or cut in two parts.

Hearty meal

“He ate a hearty meal before starting on his journey.” Hearty applies to the eater rather than to the meal. “He ate heartily,” *etc.*

Some better

“John has been right sick, but is now some better.” Somewhat, rather, or slightly may take the place of some. The sentence may be otherwise improved. “John has been quite ill, but is now somewhat better.”

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Through, Finished

Unless you have fallen through a trap door and finished your career, do not say, “I am through,” when you mean “I have finished.” The school-boy says, “I am through with that lesson,” when he should say, “I have finished that lesson.” The farmer asks the man in his employ, “Are you through with that field?” when he should have asked, “Have



you finished ploughing that field?" You ask your friend, "Are you through, with Trilby?" when you should ask, "Have you finished reading Trilby."

Winterish

Do not say summerish and winterish, but summery, or summerlike, and wintry.

Wish

The word hope should be employed instead of wish in such cases as, "I wish you may succeed in your undertaking."

Right

This little word has many meanings and is put to many uses. In the following senses it should be avoided:

"Stand right here." In most instances the briefer expression, "Stand here," is sufficient. If it is necessary to locate the place more definitely or to emphasize the position, "Stand just here," or "Stand on this very spot," may be better.

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"The train came to a standstill right here." Better, "The train stopped just here."

"Do it right away." This is a colloquialism that should be avoided. Immediately, instantly, at once, without delay, are expressions that may safely be substituted for right away.

"I heard of your misfortune, and came to you right away." "John, post this letter for me right off." Directly or immediately, in the place of right away and right off, is better English.



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“James is right sick, and the doctor comes to see him right often.” The use of right as an intensive with adjectives and adverbs is very common in many quarters. Quite ill or very ill is better than right sick, and often or frequently is better than right often.

“We have a right good crop of wheat this year.” Use very instead of right.

“You have as good a right to be punished as I have.” The person addressed would gladly relinquish his right. “You merit punishment as well as I,” or “You deserve to be punished,” *etc.*

Shall, Will, Should, Would

Few persons can claim to be entirely free from slips of speech in the use of these auxiliaries. Simply to express a future action or event, shall is used with the first person and will with the second and third; as,

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I shall read, We shall read,
 You will read, You will read,
 He will read, They will read.

But when I desire to show determination on my part to do a certain thing, or when I exercise my authority over another, or express promise, command, or threat, will is used in the first person and shall in the second and third; as,
 I will read, We will read,
 You shall read, You shall read,
 He shall read, They shall read.

Shall primarily implies obligation; will implies intention or purpose. Will and would should be used whenever the subject names the one whose will controls the action; shall and should must be employed whenever the one named by the subject is under the control of another.

The difference between should and would is, in general, about the same as that between shall and will.

The foregoing suggestions cover the ordinary uses of these auxiliaries, but there are some special cases deserving attention.

Will, in the first person, expresses assent or promise, as well as determination; as,



“I will read this poem for you since you have requested it.”

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“I will meet you to-morrow at the time appointed.”

Will, in the second person, may express a command; as,

“You will take the places assigned you.”

“You will report immediately at my office.”

Will is sometimes employed to express a general fact, without conveying the idea of futurity; as, “Accidents will happen.” “Differences will arise.”

Will is sometimes incorrectly used instead of shall; as, “Will I go?” for “Shall I go?” This fault is common in Scotland, and prevails to some extent in this country.

Will is also used where may would be more appropriate; as, “Be that as it will.”

Shall you? Will you?

The distinction between shall and will in the interrogative forms of the second person are not very clearly defined. Many writers and speakers use them interchangeably. The answer should have the same auxiliary as the question.



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“Shall you go to town to-morrow?” “I shall.”

“Will you attend to this matter promptly?” “I will.”

Should, Would, Ought

Should is often used in the sense of ought; as, “Mary should remain at home to-day and wait upon her sick mother.”

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Should and would are employed to express a conditional assertion; as, “I should go to college, if I could secure the necessary means.” “He would have gone fishing, if his father had been willing.”

Would is often used to express a custom, a determination, or a wish; as, “He would sit all day and moan.” “Would to God we had died in the land of Egypt.” “He would go, and his parents could not prevent him.”

Talented

Certain authors and critics, including Coleridge, have objected strongly to the use of talented. One writer argues that since there is no such verb as to talent, the formation of such a participle as talented cannot be defended, and he further declares that no good writer is known to use it, Webster (The International Dictionary) states that, as a formative, talented is just as analogical and legitimate as gifted, bigoted, moneyed, lauded, lilled, honeyed, and numerous other adjectives having a participial form, but derived directly from nouns and not from verbs.

We must therefore conclude that the use of talented as an adjective is entirely legitimate.

Climb down

The critics generally oppose the use of the expression climb down. When the verb is employed without

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its adverbial modifier, the upward direction is always understood. In figurative language, as “Black vapors climb aloft, and cloud the day,” “The general climbed the heights of fame,” the upward direction is also understood.

But in a specific sense climb is defined “to mount laboriously, especially by the use of hands and feet.” Here the manner seems to be as important as the direction. When the same manner must be employed in descending, as a tree, a mast, or a steep, rocky cliff, the general term descend fails to convey the meaning, and to use slip, slide, drop, tumble, fall, would be incorrect. We are then left to choose between the short and clear, but objectionable, expression climb down and some long and cumbersome equivalent.

Mighty

Never use mighty in the sense of very, or exceedingly. It is not only inappropriate but inelegant.

Of, From

“She had consumption and died from the disease.” Say, “died of the disease.”

On, Over, Upon

“Mary called upon her friend.” Say, “called on her friend.” “The Senator prevailed over his friends to support his bill.” Say, “prevailed upon his



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friends.” “The candidate prevailed over his enemies.”

Partake

This word means to take a part of, to share with another. It is often incorrectly used for ate, as “He partook sparingly of the food.”

Powerful sight

This is a Westernism to be avoided. It is used indiscriminately for a large number, a great quantity, a vast amount, *etc.*

Apprehend, Comprehend

To apprehend is to take into the mind; to comprehend is to understand fully what is already there. We may apprehend many truths which we do not comprehend.

Introduce, Present

Present implies more formality than introduce. We introduce one friend to another. An envoy is presented to the King. Foreign ministers are presented to the President of the United States.

Same as

“This is the same story as I read last week.” Use same that.

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Section

“We raise finer horses in our section.” This is an Americanism that should be avoided. Neighborhood, vicinity, region, part of the country or State, may be substituted for section.

Seldom or ever



This incorrect expression is sometimes used instead of seldom or never or seldom if ever. "I have seldom if ever heard so eloquent an oration." "I have seldom or never seen the man."

Sewage, Sewerage

These words have distinct meanings. Sewage refers to the contents of the sewer; sewerage to the system of sewers.

Sociable, Social

"He is one of the most sociable men I have met. He is fond of society, and is very ready in conversation." Sociable means companionable; social applies to the relations of men in society; as social duties, social pleasures, social interests.

Specialty, Speciality

These words are interchangeable, but the former is the better word.

Requirement, Requisition, Requisite

While these words have something in common, each has a meaning peculiar to itself.
Requirement

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means that which is required as an essential condition, or as something necessary; requisition, that which is required as of right, a demand or application made as by authority; requisite, that which is required by the nature of things, or by circumstances, that which cannot be dispensed with. "She understood the nature of the child and of its requirements." "The officer made a requisition for more troops." "This is as much a requisite as food and clothing."

Sick, Ill

There is a growing tendency to discriminate between sickness and illness, limiting the words sick and sickness to some slight disturbance of the physical system, as nausea, and applying the words ill and illness to protracted disease and disordered health.



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Scholar, Pupil

Although these words are often used synonymously and with good authority, it would be better to limit the former to learned persons and to apply the latter to persons under instruction.

Commenced to write

"I commenced to write at a very early age." After the verb commence the best writers use the verbal

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noun instead of the infinitive with to; as, "I commenced writing at a very early age."

Beside, Besides

These words were formerly used interchangeably, but the best writers of to-day make a distinction. Beside means by the side of. Besides means in addition to. Besides is sometimes incorrectly used for except; as, "No trees will grow here besides the pine."

Bountiful, Plentiful

Bountiful applies to the giver; plentiful to the things furnished. "The bountiful Giver of all good furnishes a plentiful supply of all things needful for our comfort and happiness." Do not say a bountiful repast, a bountiful harvest.

Attacked, Burst, Drowned

The incorrect past tense forms attackted, bursted, drowneded, are sometimes heard; as, "The cashier was attackted by three of the ruffians," "The cannon bursted and killed the gunners," "The fishermen were drowneded off the bar." Use attacked, burst, drowned.

All

This little word is used in a great many ways, some of which are quite colloquial, and in some cases provincial. When the grocer's clerk has taken your order he is prompted to say, "Is that all?" Or if

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he should say, "Is there anything else that you wish?" you are likely to reply, "No; that is all." Whether used in the question or in the reply, the word all should be avoided, or else the expression should be expanded so as to make a clear sentence.

A friend calls to see you, and, finding you alone when he expected to meet others with you, he says, "Good morning; I see you are all alone." All is not a good equivalent for quite or entirely, either of which words would be better than all. In truth, the sentence is as clear and as strong and more concise without the use of a modifier. "I see you are alone."

Inaugurate

To inaugurate means to induct into office or to set in motion with formality and serious ceremony. Pompous writers too often employ the word in referring to commonplace events. A new business is established. A new hall or library is opened. A new pastor is installed. A new order of procedure is adopted. In general, the word begin or commence would be more appropriate than inaugurate.

Came across, Met with

"I came across the passage quite unexpectedly." Better, "I chanced upon," or "happened upon," or "met with the passage quite unexpectedly."



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Expect

Few words are more frequently incorrectly used than expect. "I expect you went to town yesterday," "I expect you will hear from me to-morrow," "I expect the train has arrived," represent some of the uses to which this word is often put. Expect refers wholly to the future, and should not refer to present or past events; as, "I expect you to write me from Liverpool." "John expects to see his father to-morrow." Among the expressions that can most readily and appropriately be substituted for expect are suspect, suppose, think, believe, presume, daresay.

Over with

"After the supper was over with the guests departed." Omit with.

Overflown

"The lowlands along the river are overflown." Use overflowed. The perfect participle of overflow is overflowed, not overflown.

Good piece

"I have come a good piece to see you." Say "I have come a long distance to see you."

Stand a chance

"He does not stand any chance of an election." Say, "It is not probable that he will be elected."

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No more than I could help

"As I was not in sympathy with the cause, I gave no more than I could help." So accustomed are we to hearing this awkward, blundering expression that we readily understand the meaning it is intended to convey, and should be sorely puzzled to interpret the correct form. Let us analyze it. I gave five dollars. That much I could not help (giving). I gave no more. Hence, "I gave no more than I could not help." This last form appears to be correct. By changing the phraseology the sentence can be greatly improved. "I gave no more than I felt compelled to give." "I made my contribution as small as possible." "My gift was limited to the measure of my sense of obligation."



Above, More than, Preceding

“It is above a week since I heard from my brother.” We may say “above the earth,” “above the housetops,” but in the preceding sentence it is better to say, “It is more than a week since I heard from my brother.”

“In the above paragraph he quotes from Horace.” Say, “In the preceding or foregoing paragraph,” *etc.* The awkwardness of the use of the word above becomes very apparent when the line in which it occurs is found at the top of a page, and the passage

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to which reference is made appears at the bottom of the previous page.

Climax

The Greek word climax means literally a ladder, and implies ascent, upward movement. The best authors use it only in this sense, and not to denote the highest point.

Factor

This word, from the Latin factor, a doer, an agent, signifies working, doing, effecting. Its frequent use in the sense of source or part should be avoided.



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“All are but factors of one stupendous whole,
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul.”

Pope employs the better word parts.

Hung, Hanged

Pictures, signs, bells, and other inanimate objects are hung; men are hanged. While some writers ignore this distinction, the best authorities observe it.

Healthy, Healthful

A lady wrote to a paper asking, “Are plants in a sleeping-room unhealthy?” The answer came, “Not necessarily; we have seen some very healthy plants growing in sleeping-rooms.”

Persons are healthy or unhealthy. A plant or tree is

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healthy or unhealthy according as it possesses vigor. Food, surroundings and conditions are healthful or unhealthful according as they promote or destroy health.

Idea, Opinion

“Many persons think that the interior of the earth is a mass of fire; what is your idea?”
Say, “What is your opinion?”

Alone, Only

“An only child” is one that has neither brother nor sister. “A child alone” is one that is left to itself. “Virtue alone makes us happy” means that virtue unaccompanied by any other advantages is sufficient to make us happy. “Virtue only makes us happy” means that nothing else can do it.

Grow, Raise, Rear

“We grow wheat, corn, oats, and potatoes on our farm.” “We raise wheat,” *etc.*, would be better. With the same propriety we might use sleep for lodge, and eat for feed, or supply with food; as, “We can eat and sleep fifty persons at one time.”



The word raise is often incorrectly used in the sense of rear; as, “She raised a family of nine children.” It is sometimes employed in the sense of increase, as, “The landlord raised my rent.” Increased would be better.

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Has went

“He goes to school,” “He went to school yesterday,” “He has gone to the West.” Avoid such ungrammatical forms as “He has went,” “I have saw.”

Badly, Greatly

Badly is often incorrectly used for greatly or very much, as, “I need it badly,” “He was badly hurt.”

“That fence wants painting badly, I think I’ll do it myself,” said the economical husband.

“Yes,” said his wife, “you had better do it yourself if you think it wants to be done badly.”

At you

“If you don’t stop teasing me I will do something at you,” meaning “I will punish you.” That form of expression is very common in some localities, and it is even more inelegant than common. The use of the preposition to instead of at would be a slight improvement, but the sentence should be entirely recast.

Haply, Happily

In the reading of the Scriptures the word happily is sometimes used where the archaic word haply should be employed. In like manner the word thoroughly is substituted for the old form throughly. Both words should be pronounced as they are spelled.



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Thanks

To say "I thank you" requires but little more effort than to say "Thanks," and it will be received as a more sincere token of thankfulness.

Got to

This inelegant expression is often employed where must would serve the purpose better. "This work has got to be done." Say, "Must be done."

Hangs on

"The cold weather hangs on." Better, "The cold weather continues."

Under the Weather

"Are you well?" "No; I have been quite under the weather." Substitute sick or ill, for the colloquial expression under the weather.

Again, Against

Again is often erroneously used for against; as, "He leaned again the tree for support." Say, "He leaned against the tree for support."

Could, Can, Will

Could is often incorrectly employed where can or will would be more appropriate.

"Could you lend me a dollar this morning?" If the thought of the inquirer is, "Are you willing to lend," *etc.*, he should have used will instead of could;

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but if his thought was, "Are you able to lend," or "Do you have a dollar to spare this morning," he should have used can.

Bravery, Courage

Bravery is inborn; courage is the result of reason and determination. The brave are often reckless; the courageous are always cautious.

Hate



Avoid the use of hate for dislike, and all other intensive words when the thought is more correctly expressed by a milder word.

Pretty, Very

Pretty is often incorrectly used in the sense of very or moderately, as "He was pretty badly hurt," "He is a pretty good scholar," "She is pretty wealthy," "Thomas is pretty ugly." So common is this provincialism in some localities that the incongruity of such an expression as the last would pass undiscovered.

Lot, Number

The use of lot for number or many is a colloquialism that should be avoided. "He collected a lot (large number) of books on the subject." "A lot of policemen were gathered there" "I ate lots of oranges while I was in Florida."

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Lead a dance

"He led his companion a fine dance." This expression, as generally used, is ironical, and implies that the leader conducts those who are led through experiences unfamiliar to them and usually to their disadvantage. To lead astray, to deceive, to corrupt the morals of, may be substituted for the foregoing inelegant expression.

Try and

"Have you been to the country this summer?" "No; but I will try and go next week.". The second speaker intends to convey the idea that it is his purpose to go if nothing occurs to prevent, but his going is still a matter of uncertainty. His statement, however, when properly interpreted means that he not only will try, but that he positively will go.



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“Try and finish that work to-day.” Here the purpose is not to command that the work shall be finished, but that the trial shall be made. As the sentence stands two distinct commands are given, first, that the trial shall be made, and, second, that the work must be completed. The sentence should read, “Try to finish that work to-day.”

Use to instead of and in such expressions as “Try and make it convenient to come,” “Try and do your work properly,” “Try and think of your lessons,” “Try and go and see our sick neighbor.”

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CHAPTER III

Contractions

Whatever may be said against employing contractions in dignified discourse, their use in colloquial speech is too firmly established to justify our censure. But, in their use, as, indeed, in the use of all words, proper discrimination must be shown.

Just why haven't, hasn't, doesn't, isn't, wasn't, are regarded as being in good repute, and ain't, weren't, mightn't, oughtn't, are regarded with less favor, and why shalln't, willn't are absolutely excluded, it would be difficult to explain.

Use determines the law of language, whether for single words, grammatical forms, or grammatical constructions. Wherever a people, by common consent, employ a particular word to mean a certain thing, that word becomes an inherent part of the language of that people, whether it has any basis in etymology or not. We must not wrest this law to our own convenience, however, by assuming that such words and phrases as are introduced and employed by the illiterate, or even by the educated, within a circumscribed territory, are, therefore, to be regarded as

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reputable words. The sanction of all classes, the educated as well as the uneducated, throughout the entire country in which the language is spoken, is necessary and preliminary to the proper introduction of a new word into the language.

Ain't



This word is a contraction of am not or are not, and can, therefore, be used only with the singular pronouns I and you, and with the plural pronouns we, you, and they, and with nouns in the plural.

I am not pleased. I ain't pleased.

You are not kind. You ain't kind.

They are not gentlemen. They ain't gentlemen.

These sentences will serve to illustrate the proper use of ain't, if it is ever proper to use such an inelegant word as that. "James ain't a good student," "Mary ain't a skillful musician," or "This orange ain't sweet," are expressions frequently heard, yet those who use them would be shocked to hear the same expressions with the proper equivalent am not or are not substituted for the misleading ain't.

The expression ain't is compounded of the verb am or are and the adverb not, and by the contraction the three vocal impulses I-am-not, or you-are-not, or they-are-not, are reduced to two. By compounding the pronoun with the verb and preserving the full adverb,



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as in "I'm not," "You're not," "They're not," we also reduce the three vocal impulses to two, thus securing as short a contraction in sound and one that is as fully adapted to colloquial speech, and that is, at the same time, in much better taste.

The old form for ain't was an't, but this has now become obsolete. It will be a blessing to the English-speaking people when the descendant shall sleep with his father.

Are not is sometimes contracted into aren't, but this form has not found much favor.

Can't and Couldn't

As cannot and could not may be used with pronouns of the first, second, or third person, in either number, and with nouns in both numbers, no error is likely to follow the use of their contracted forms.

Why cannot is properly written as one word, and could not requires two, is not founded upon any principle of philosophy. The concurrent sanction of all classes in all parts of the English-speaking world establishes it as law.

Observe that the a in the verb can't is broader in sound than the short a in the noun cant.

Don't and Didn't

Don't is a contraction of do not. It is in very general use and in good repute. It may be employed

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wherever the expanded expression do not could be applied, and only there.

"One swallow don't make a spring" is equivalent to saying, "One swallow do not make a spring." We may say "I don't," "You don't," "We don't," "They don't," "The men (or birds, or trees) don't," but we must use doesn't with he, or she, or it, or the man, the grove, the cloud, *etc.*

Unlike the verb do, its past tense form did undergoes no change in conjugation, hence the contraction didn't is also uniform.

Haven't, Hasn't, and Hadn't



The verb have, like the verb do, has a distinct form for the third person singular. The same change affects the contraction. I haven't, you haven't, he hasn't. The construction hadn't undergoes no change.

Haint, Taint

Haint is used indiscriminately for haven't and hasn't. Taint is used for tisin't. Their use is indicative of an entire lack of culture.

Isn't

No one need hesitate to use this word. It is smooth in utterance and contributes much to the freedom and ease of social intercourse. Its equivalent is too stately for colloquial forms of speech, and is often

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suggestive of pedantry. Compare "Isn't he an eloquent speaker?" "Isn't this a beautiful flower?" with "Is not he an eloquent speaker?" "Is this not a beautiful flower?"

Wasn't

Although not so elegant as the present tense form isn't, yet the contraction wasn't is in excellent repute. It is properly used only in the first and third persons singular. No one who makes any pretension to culture would be guilty of saying "You was my neighbor, but you wasn't my friend," "We was engaged in trade, and they wasn't of any use to us." Say we were or were not, but never wasn't or wa'nt.



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Weren't

The forms aren't, and weren't do not have the sanction of the best speakers and writers, and should be used sparingly, if at all.

Shouldn't and Wouldn't

These are frequently used in speech, but are not so common in writing.

Mustn't, Mayn't, Mightn't, and Oughtn't

Mustn't may be used in light conversation, but not in writing. The others should be avoided in speech and writing.

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I'm, You're, He's, She's, It's, We're, They're

The contractions formed by compounding the pronoun with the verb are very common, and tend to preserve conversation from becoming stiff and formal. Nouns in the singular are sometimes compounded in like manner; as, "John's going by the early train," "Mary's caught a bird." Not many verbs beside is and has are thus compounded, and the practice should be discouraged.

Mayst, Mightst

Although mayst, canst, mightst, couldst, wouldst, and shouldst are contracted forms, the apostrophe is not employed to indicate the contraction.

Daren't, Dursent

Dare not is sometimes contracted to daren't and durst not to dursent, but the practice should not be encouraged.

Let's

While verbs are often contracted when compounded with pronouns, as it's, he's, I'm, you're, etc., the pronoun must not be contracted to form a combination with the verb. It may be a poor rule, but it will not work both ways. Let's should therefore be let us.

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CHAPTER IV

Possessive Case

Some time ago a shoe merchant called upon the writer to know how to arrange the points in the wording of a new sign that he was preparing to place over his door. He made a specialty of shoes for men and boys. He presented a paper containing the lines:

Men's and Boy's Shoes.
Mens' and Boys' Shoes.

He was politely informed that both were incorrect; that the two words form their plurals differently, and that the possessive case is, therefore, formed in a different manner. The plural of man is men,; the plural of boy is boys. The possessive of man is man's; of men is men's. The possessive of boy is boy's; of boys is boys'. In the latter case we are obliged to place the apostrophe after the s in order to distinguish the possessive plural from the possessive singular. All nouns that form their plurals by adding s to the singular, form their possessive case as the word boy does. The sign should therefore read:

Men's and Boys' Shoes.

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Singular Nouns

All nouns in the singular form their possessive case by adding the apostrophe and the letter s; as, child's, girl's, woman's, bird's, brother's, sister's, judge's, sailor's.



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When the noun ends in s, sh, ch, ce, se, or x, the additional s makes another syllable in pronouncing the word; as, James's, Charles's, witness's, duchess's, countess's, Rush's, March's, prince's, horse's, fox's. In poetry the terminal s is sometimes omitted for the sake of the meter.

While writers differ, the tendency in modern usage is toward the additional s in such expressions as Mrs. Hemans's Poems, Junius's Letters, Knowles's "Virginus," Knox's Sermons, Brooks's Arithmetics, Rogers's Essays.

By long-established usage such expressions as for conscience' sake, for righteousness' sake, for goodness' sake, for Jesus' sake, have become idioms. Some authorities justify the omission of the possessive s when the next word begins with s, as in Archimedes' screw, Achilles' sword.

Plural Nouns

Most nouns form their plurals by adding s or es to the singular. These plurals form their possessive by adding the apostrophe; as, horses', countesses', foxes', churches', princes'. Nouns whose plurals are formed otherwise than by adding s or es, form their possessive

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case by adding the apostrophe and s, just as nouns in the singular do; as, men's, women's, children's, seraphim's.

Pronouns

Sometimes the mistake is made of using the apostrophe with the possessive personal pronouns; as, her's, our's, it's. The personal and relative pronouns do not require the apostrophe, but the indefinite pronouns one and other form their possessives in the same manner as nouns; as, "each other's eyes," "a hundred others' woes."

Double Possessives

"John and Mary's sled," means one sled belonging jointly to John and Mary. "John's and Mary's sleds" means that one sled belongs to John, the other to Mary.

"Men, women, and children's shoes for sale here." When several possessives connected by and refer to the same noun, the sign of the possessive is applied to the last one only.



When a disjunctive word or words are used, the sign must be annexed to each word; as, "These are Charles's or James's books."

Possessive of Nouns in Apposition

When two nouns are in apposition, or constitute a title, the possessive sign is affixed to the last, as

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"For David my servant's sake," "Give me here John the Baptist's head in a charger," "The Prince of Wales's yacht," "Frederick the Great's kindness."

After "of"

By a peculiarity of idiom the possessive sign is used with a noun in the objective; as, "This is a story of Lincoln's," "That is a letter of the President's," "A patient of Dr. Butler's," "A pupil of Professor Ludlam's."

In ordinary prose the custom of the best writers is to limit the use of the possessive chiefly to persons and personified objects; to time expressions, as, an hour's delay, a moment's thought; and to such idioms as for brevity's sake.



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Avoid such expressions as, "America's champion baseball player," "Chicago's best five-cent cigar," "Lake Michigan's swiftest steamer."

Somebody else's

The question whether we should say "This is somebody's else pencil," or "This is somebody else's pencil," has been warmly argued by the grammarians, the newspapers, and the schools. If some leading journal or magazine were to write somebody else as one word, others would, doubtless, follow, and the question of the possessive would settle itself. The word notwithstanding is composed of three separate words,

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which are no more closely united in thought than are the three words some, body, and else. Two of the latter are already united, and the close mental union of the third with the first and second would justify the innovation.

But the words are at present disunited. A majority of the best writers still conform to the old custom of placing the possessive with else.

"People were so ridiculous with their illusions, carrying their fool's caps unawares, thinking their own lies opaque, while everybody else's were transparent."— George Eliot.

Some make a distinction by placing the possessive with else when the noun follows, and with somebody when the noun precedes; as, "This is somebody else's pencil," and "This pencil is somebody's else." This distinction is not generally followed.

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CHAPTER V

Pronouns

The correct use of the pronouns, personal and relative, involves a degree of skill which many speakers and writers fail to possess. The choice of the appropriate pronoun, the agreement with its antecedent, the proper case form, are matters that require careful consideration.



Case Forms

Following am, are, is, was, and other forms of the verb to be, the pronoun must be in the nominative case.

“Are you the person that called?” “Yes; I am him.” The answer should have been, “I am he.”

“I saw a man trespassing on my grounds, and I think you are him.” Say, “You are he.”

“It is only me; don’t be afraid.” “It is only I” is the correct form.

“It was him that struck you, not me.” Change him, to he, and me to I.

“It might have been him that sent you the present.” Use he, not him.

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“It is him whom you said it was.” The sentence should be, “It is he who you said it was.”

“That was but a picture of him and not him himself.” Say, “and not he himself.”

After Verbs and Prepositions

When a pronoun depends upon a verb or a preposition the pronoun must be in the objective case.



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“Between you and I, that picture is very faulty.” The pronouns you and I depend upon the preposition between. The pronoun I should therefore be in the objective case, and the sentence should be, “Between you and me, that picture is very faulty.”

“The president of the meeting appointed you and I upon the committee.” As both pronouns are objects of the transitive verb appointed, both should be in the objective case. You having the same form in the objective as in the nominative is, therefore, correct, but I should be changed to me.

“The teacher selected he and I to represent the class.” The pronouns are the objects of the verb selected, and should be changed to him and me. The infinitive to represent, like other infinitives, can have no subject, and, therefore, does not control the case of the pronouns.

Interrogatives

When a question is asked, the subject is usually placed after the verb, or between the auxiliary and

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the verb; as, “Did you go to town?” “Will he sail to-day?” “Has your uncle arrived?” “Hearest thou thy mother’s call?”

The object or attribute of the verb, when a pronoun, is often used to introduce the sentence. “Who should I see coming toward me but my old friend?” Who should be whom, for it is the object, and not the subject, of the verb should see.

“Whom do you think that tall gentleman is?” Whom should be who, as it is the attribute of the verb is.

“Who do you take me for?” Being the object of the preposition for, who should be whom.

After “To be”

“I knew it was him” is incorrect, because the word which forms the pronoun attribute of the verb was must be in the nominative case. But the infinitive of the neuter verb requires the objective case. Therefore we must say, “I knew it to be him,” not “I knew it to be he.” The latter faulty form is very frequently employed.

“Who did you suppose it to be?” Incorrect. Say, “whom.”



“Whom did you suppose it was?” Incorrect. Say, “who.”

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After the Imperative

The imperative mood requires the objective case after it. “Let you and I try it.” It should be, “Let you and me try it.”

“Let he who made thee answer that.”— Byron. He should have said, “Let him who made thee answer that.”

“Let him be whom, he may.” Him is the objective after the imperative let, and is correct. Whom should be who, as pronoun attribute of the verb may be. “Who he may be, I cannot tell,” is correct. “Who he may be, let him be,” is also correct. By transposing, and by omitting be, we have “Let him be who he may.”

“Let the sea roar, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.” When, as in this case, the verb is widely separated from its object, we need to give particular care to the case of the pronoun which constitutes the object. They should be them.



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Silent Predicate

“Who will go with us to the woods? Me.” The complete answer would be, “Me will go with you to the woods,” the faultiness of which is evident. The answer should be “I.”

After “Than” and “As”

The objective pronoun is often incorrectly used for the nominative after than or as.

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“He can swim better than me.” The complete sentence would be, “He can swim better than I can swim.” The omission of the verb can swim affords no reason for changing I to me.

“He is no better than me.” Say, “He is no better than I,” meaning, I am.

“They are common people, such as you and me.” Such people “as you and I are.” The pronoun should be I, not me.

Parenthetical Expressions

When a parenthetical expression comes between a pronoun in the nominative case and its verb, the objective is often incorrectly used instead of the nominative.

“She sang for the benefit of those whom she thought might be interested.” The explanatory parenthesis “she thought” comes between the pronominal subject and its verb might be interested. Omit the explanatory clause and the case of the pronoun becomes clear. “She sang for the benefit of those who might be interested.”

Agreement with Antecedent

A pronoun must agree with its antecedent in gender, person, and number. The gender and person usually take care of themselves, but the number of pronouns is a serious obstacle to correct speech.

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“One tells the quality of their minds when they try to talk well”— George Eliot, in Middlemarch. The pronouns their and they should be singular.



“Everybody has something to say which they think is worthy of being heard.” Everybody refers to persons singly, and not collectively. They think should be he thinks, he being the proper pronoun to employ when the gender is not indicated.

“Every nation has laws and customs of their own.” The use of the word every necessitates a pronoun in the singular, hence their should be its.

“Every one is accountable for their own acts.” Use his.

“She studied his countenance like an inscription, and deciphered each rapt expression that crossed it, and stored them in her memory.” Change them to it.

“Each of them, in their turn, received the reward to which they were entitled.” This should be “Each of them in his turn received the reward to which he was entitled.”

No and not, like each and every, when they qualify a plural antecedent, or one consisting of two or more nouns, require a pronoun in the singular.

“No policeman, no employee, no citizen dared to lift their hand” Say, his hand.



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Or, Nor

When the antecedent consists of two or more nouns separated by or, nor, as well as, or any other disjunctive, the pronoun must be singular.

“Neither spelling nor parsing receive the attention they once received.” Verb and pronoun should be singular, receives and it.

Collective Noun

When a noun of multitude or collective noun is the antecedent, the pronoun, like the verb, must be plural or singular according to the sense intended to be conveyed.

Ambiguity

Never leave the antecedent of your pronoun in doubt.

“John tried to see his father in the crowd, but could not, because he was so short.” If the father was short, repeat the noun and omit the pronoun, as “John tried to see his father in the crowd but could not because his father was so short.” If John was short, recast the sentence: “John, being short of stature, tried in vain to see his father in the crowd.”

“He said to his friend that, if he did not feel better soon, he thought he had better go home.” This sentence is susceptible of four interpretations. We shall omit the first part of the sentence in the last

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three interpretations, as it is the same in all. “He said to his friend: ‘If I do not feel better soon, I think I had better go home.’” “If I do not feel better soon, I think you had better go home.” “If you do not feel better soon, I think I had better go home.” “If you do not feel better soon, I think you had better go home.”

“The lad cannot leave his father; for, if he should leave him, he would die.” To avoid ambiguity substitute his father for the italicised pronouns. The repetition is not pleasant, but it is the lesser of two evils.

Needless Pronouns

Avoid all pronouns and other words that are not essential to the meaning.



“The father he died, the mother she soon followed after, and the children they were all taken down sick.”

“Let every one turn from his or her evil ways.” Unless there is special reason for emphasizing the feminine pronoun, avoid the awkward expression his or her. The pronoun his includes the other.

Mixed Pronouns

Do not use two styles of the pronoun in the same Sentence. “Enter thou into the joy of your Lord.” “Love thyself last, and others will love you.”

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Them, Those

It should not be necessary to caution the reader against the use of them for those.

“Fetch me them books.” “Did you see them, fat oxen?” “Them’s good; I’ll take another dish.”

Which, Who

“Those which say so are mistaken.” Who is applied to persons; which, to the lower animals and to inanimate things.

“He has some friends which I know.” Whom, the objective case form of the pronoun who, should here be used.



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“The dog, who was called Rover, went mad.” Use which.

What, That

That is applied to persons, animals, and things. What is applied to things. The antecedent of what should not be expressed. What is both antecedent and relative.

“All what he saw he described.” Say, “What he saw,” or “All that he saw,” *etc.*

Uniform Relatives

When several relative clauses relate to the same antecedent, they should have the same relative pronoun.

“It was Joseph that was sold into Egypt, who became

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governor of the land, and which saved his father and brothers from famine.” Change that and which to who.

Choice of Relatives

Since who and that are both applied to persons, and which and that are both applied to animals and things, it often becomes a serious question which relative we shall employ. Much has been written upon the subject, but the critics still differ in theory and in practice. The following is probably as simple a statement of the general rule as can be found:

If the relative clause is of such a nature that it could be introduced by and he, and she, and it, and they, *etc.*, the relative who (for persons) and which (for animals or things) should be used in preference to the relative that.

“Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.” The language of the Bible and of Shakespeare must stand, although the forms of expression differ greatly from those employed at the present day. According to modern standards, that should be who.

“The earth is enveloped by an ocean of air that is a compound of oxygen and nitrogen!” Change that to which.



The relative that should be used in preference to who or which:

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(1) When the antecedent names both persons and things; (2) When it would prevent ambiguity; (3) After the words same, very, all; (4) After the interrogative pronoun who; (5) After adjectives expressing quality in the highest degree.

“The wisest men who ever lived made mistakes.” Use that. See (5).

“He lived near a stagnant pool which was a nuisance.” Use that. See (2).

“All who knew him loved him.” Say that. See (3).

“Who who saw him did not pity him.” See (4).

“He spake of the men and things which he had seen.” See (1).

“These are my pupils which I have brought to see you.” Use whom, as which is not applied to persons.

“This is the window whose panes were broken by the rude boys.” Use “the panes of which.” Because of its convenience, perhaps, the faulty whose is very largely used; as, “The eagle whose wings,” “The house whose gables,” “The ocean whose waves,” “The vessel whose sails,” “The play whose chief merit,” “Music whose chief attraction,” etc.



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Which and Who after “And”

Which and who cannot follow and unless there has been a preceding which or who in the same sentence and in the same construction.

“The more important rules, definitions and observations, and which are therefore the most proper to be committed to memory, are printed with a large type.”— Murray’s Grammar. In Moore’s *Bad English* the sentence is corrected thus: “The rules, definitions, and observations which are the more important, and which are therefore the most proper to be committed to memory, are printed in larger type.”

Adverbs for Relative Pronouns

Adverbs are often employed where a preposition with a relative pronoun would better express the sense.

“There is no method known how his safety may be assured.” Use *by which* instead of *how*.

“He wrote me a letter where he repeated his instructions.” “Letter in which he repeated,” *etc.*

“And curse the country where their fathers dwelt.” “In which their fathers dwelt.”

“This is a case where large interests are involved.” The preposition and relative will better express the meaning; as, “This is a case in which large interests are involved.”

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Misplaced Relative

The relative should be so placed as to prevent ambiguity, and as near as possible to its antecedent.

“Mr. Smith needs a surgeon, who has broken his arm.” Say, “Mr. Smith, who has broken,” *etc.*

“The figs were in small wooden boxes, which we ate.” “The figs which we ate,” *etc.*

“He needs no boots that cannot walk.” “He that cannot walk,” *etc.*



Omitted Relatives

The relative pronoun is often omitted when it should be expressed.

“The next falsehood he told was the worst of all.” Say, “The next falsehood that he told,” *etc.*

“It is little we know of the divine perfections.” Say, “Little that we know.”

“Almost all the irregularities in the construction of any language have arisen from the ellipsis of some words which were originally inserted in the sentence and made it regular.”— Murray’s Grammar. The sentence should end with “and which made it regular.”

The one, the other

When the one and the other refer to things previously mentioned, the one applies to the first mentioned, and the other to the last mentioned.

“Homer was a genius, Virgil an artist: in the one we most admire the man; in the other, the work.”

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CHAPTER VI

Number

Many persons of moderate education regard nouns that do not end with s or es as singular. Even the gifted pen of Addison once slipped so far as to betray him into using the word seraphim, in the singular.



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Cherubim, Seraphim

The words cherub and seraph, are singular. Cherub, as applied to a little child, takes the English plural, cherubs. As applied to an order of angels, it takes the Hebrew plural, cherubim. The singular, seraph, has an English plural, seraphs, as well as the Hebrew plural, seraphs. The double plurals, cherubims and seraphims, although found in the King James version of the Bible, are regarded as faulty in modern writing, and should be avoided.

News

Although plural in form, the word news is singular in meaning; as, "The news from Europe this morning is quite interesting."

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Acoustics

Names of sciences ending in ics, are generally regarded as singular. "Acoustics is a very considerable branch of physics." Do not say, "The acoustics of this hall are good," but "The acoustic properties of this hall are good."

Dialectics, dynamics, economics, mathematics, ethics, politics, tactics, when used as substantives, require a verb in the singular.

Analysis

Many words like analysis, crisis, ellipsis, emphasis, hypothesis, oasis, parenthesis, synopsis, form their plurals by changing the termination is into es; as, analyses, crises, *etc.* The word iris takes the English plural irises; Latin plural is irides. Chrysalis has only the Latin plural, chrysalides; but chrysalid, which means the same as chrysalis, takes the English plural, chrysalids.

Terminus

Terminus, radius, alumnus, and some other words ending in us, form their plurals by changing the termination us into i; as termini, radii, *etc.*

Many words ending in us that formerly were written with only the Latin plural, are now given an English plural also; as, focuses, foci; cactuses, cacti; sarcophaguses, sarcophagi; convolvuluses, convolvuli; funguses, fungi; nucleuses, nuclei.



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Isthmus, prospectus, rebus, take only the English plural.

Apparatus has no plural. Avoid apparatuses.

The plural of genius, as applied to a man of unusual vigor of mind, is geniuses. When applied to a good or bad spirit, the plural is genii.

Formula

Formulas, larvas, stigmas, are regular English plurals; formulae, larvae, and stigmata are the classical plurals. Nebulae and alumnae are the proper plurals, the latter being the feminine noun corresponding to the masculine plural alumni.

Datum, Phenomenon

Datum, erratum, candelabrum, and memorandum form their plurals by changing um to a; as, data, errata, *etc.* The last two also take the English plurals, memorandums, candelabrum.

The plural of phenomenon and criterion are phenomena, criteria, although criterions is sometimes employed.



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The plural forms, data, strata, and phenomena, are so much more frequently used than their singular forms, datum, stratum, and phenomenon, that some writers have slipped into the habit of using the plurals with a singular meaning; as, "The aurora borealis is a very strange phenomena." "Our data is insufficient to establish a theory." "The strata is broken and irregular."

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Mussulmans

While most words ending in man become plural by changing this termination to men, as gentlemen, noblemen, clergymen, statesmen, the following simply add s: dragomans, Mussulmans, Ottomans, talismans "A dozen dragomans offered their services as guides and interpreters." "A band of Mussulmans cut off our retreat." "Those fierce Ottomans proved to be very revengeful." "He purchased five finely upholstered ottomans for his drawing-room."

Heroes, Cantos

Most nouns ending in o add es to form the plural; as, heroes, negroes, potatoes, stuccoes, manifestoes, mosquitoes. Words ending in io or yo add s; as, folios, nuncios, olios, ratios, embryos.

The following words, being less frequently used, often puzzle us to know whether to add s or es to form the plural: armadillos, cantos, cuckoos, halos, juntos, octavos, provisos, salvos, solos, twos, tyros, virtuosos.

Alms, Odds, Riches

Many nouns that end in s have a plural appearance, and we are often perplexed to know whether to use this or these, and whether to employ a singular or a plural verb when the noun is used as a substantive.

Amends is singular. Assets, dregs, eaves, bees, pincers, riches, scissors, sheers, tongs, vitals, are plural. When we

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say a pair of pincers, or scissors, or shears, or tongs, the verb should be singular. Tidings, in Shakespeare's time, was used indiscriminately with a singular or plural verb, but is now generally regarded as plural.



Alms and headquarters are usually made plural, but are occasionally found with a singular verb. Pains is usually singular. Means, odds, and species are singular or plural, according to the meaning.

“By this means he accomplished his purpose.” “What other means is left to us?” “Your means are very slender, and your waste is great.”

Proper Names

These are usually pluralized by adding s; as, the Stuarts, the Caesars, the Beechers, the Brownings.

Titles with Proper Names

Shall we say the Miss Browns, the Misses Brown, or the Misses Browns? Great diversity of opinion prevails. Gould Brown says: “The name and not the title is varied to form the plural; as, the Miss Howards, the two Mr. Clarks.”

Alexander Bain, LL. D., says: “We may say the Misses Brown, or the Miss Browns, or even the Misses Browns.”



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The chief objection to the last two forms is found when the proper name ends with s, as when we say, the Miss Brookses, the Miss Joneses, the Miss Pottses, the

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Miss Blisses. The form the Misses Brooks is objected to by some on the ground that it sounds affected. On the whole the rule given by Gould Brown is the best, and is quite generally observed.

Knight Templar

Both words are made plural, Knights Templars, a very unusual way of forming the plural.

Plural Compounds

The plural sign of a compound word is affixed to the principal part of the word, to the part that conveys the predominant idea; as, fathers-in-law, man-servants, outpourings, ingatherings. In such words as handfuls, cupfuls, mouthfuls, the plural ending is added to the subordinate part because the ideas are so closely associated as to blend into one.

Beaus, Beaux

Some words ending in eau have only the English plurals, as bureaux, portmanteaus; others take both the English and the French plurals, as beaus, beaux; flambeaus, flambeaux; plateaus, plateaux; and still others take only the foreign plural; as, bateaux, chateaux, tableaux.

Pair, Couple, Brace

After numerals, the singular form of such words as these is generally employed; as, five pair of gloves, eight couple of dancers, three brace of pigeons, five

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dozen of eggs, four score years, twenty sail of ships, fifty head of cattle, six hundred of these men, two thousand of these cattle, *etc.*

After such indefinite adjectives as few, many, several, some of the above words take the plural form; as, several hundreds, many thousands.



Index, Appendix

Indexes of books; indices, if applied to mathematical signs in algebra. Appendixes or appendices.

Fish, Fly

The plural of fish is fishes when considered individually, and fish when considered collectively. "My three pet fishes feed out of my hand." "Six barrels of fish were landed from the schooner."

Most words ending in y change this termination into ies, as duties, cities, *etc.* The plural of fly, the insect, is formed in the usual manner, but fly, a light carriage, adds s; as, "Six flies carried the guests to their homes."

Animalcule

The plural of this word is animalcules. There is no plural animalculae. The plural of the Latin animalculum is animalcula.

Bandit

This word has two plural forms, bandits and banditti.

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Brother

Plural brothers, when referring to members of the same family; brethren, when applied to members of the same church or society.



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Die

Plural dies, when the stamp with which seals are impressed is meant; dice, the cubes used in playing backgammon.

Herring

The plural is herrings, but shad, trout, bass, pike, pickerel, grayling, have no plural form. "I caught three bass and seven fine pickerel this morning."

Grouse

The names of game birds, as grouse, quail, snipe, woodcock, usually take no plural form.

Pea

Considered individually the plural is peas; when referring to the crop the proper form is pease.

Penny

"He gave me twelve bright new pennies," referring to the individual coins. "I paid him twelve pence," meaning a shilling.

Wharf

Plural, generally wharves in America; wharfs in England.

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CHAPTER VII

Adverbs

The clearness of the sentence is often dependent upon the proper placing of the adverb. No absolute rule can be laid down, but it should generally be placed before the word it qualifies. It is sometimes necessary to place it after the verb, and occasionally between the auxiliary and the verb, but it should never come between to and the infinitive.



“I have thought of marrying often.” As the adverb relates to the thinking, and not to the marrying, the sentence should read, “I have often thought of marrying.”

“We have often occasion to speak of health.” This should be, “We often have occasion,” etc,

“It remains then undecided whether we shall go to Newport or Saratoga.” Place undecided before then.

Adjective or Adverb?

There is often a doubt in the mind of the speaker whether to use the adjective or the adverb, and too frequently he reaches a wrong decision. When the limiting word expresses a quality or state of the subject

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or of the object of a verb, the adjective must be employed; but if the manner of the action is to be expressed, the adverb must be used. The verbs be, seem, look, taste, smell, and feel furnish many stumbling-blocks.

“This rose smells sweetly.” As the property or quality of the rose is here referred to, and not the manner of smelling, the adjective sweet should be employed, and not the adverb sweetly.

“Thomas feels quite badly about it.” Here, again, it is the condition of Thomas’s mind, and not the manner of feeling, that is to be expressed; hence, badly should be bad or uncomfortable.

“Didn’t she look beautifully upon the occasion of her wedding?” No; she looked beautiful.

“The sun shines brightly.” Bright is the better word.

“The child looks cold,” refers to the condition of the child. “The lady looked coldly upon her suitor,” refers to the manner of looking.



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“The boy feels warm” is correct. “The boy feels warmly the rebuke of his teacher” is equally correct.

While license is granted to the poets to use the adjective for the adverb, as in the line

“They fall successive and successive rise,”

in prose the one must never be substituted for the other.

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“Agreeably to my promise, I now write,” not “Agreeable to my promise.”

“An awful solemn funeral,” should be “An awfully solemn funeral.”

“He acts bolder than was expected,” should be “He acts more boldly.”

“Helen has been awful sick, but she is now considerable better.” “Helen has been very ill, but she is now considerably better.”

Do not use coarser for more coarsely, finer for more finely, harsher for more harshly, conformable for conformably, decided for decidedly, distinct for distinctly, fearful for fearfully, fluent for fluently.

Do not say “This melon is uncommon good,” but “This melon is uncommonly good.”

The word ill is both an adjective and an adverb. Do not say “He can illy afford to live in such a house,” but “He can ill afford.”

“That was a dreadful solemn sermon.” To say “That was a dreadfully solemn sermon” would more grammatically express what the speaker intended, but very or exceedingly would better express the meaning.

Such, So

Such is often improperly used for the adverb so.

“In such a mild and healthful climate.” This should be, “In so mild and healthful a climate.”



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“With all due deference to such a high authority on such a very important matter.”
Change to, “With all due deference to so high an authority on so very important a matter.”

Good, Well

Many intelligent persons carelessly use the adjective good in the sense of the adverb well; as, “I feel good to-day.” “Did you sleep good last night?” “Does this coat look good enough to wear on the street?” “I can do it as good as he can.” The frequent indulgence in such errors dulls the sense of taste and weakens the power of discrimination.

Very much of

“She is very much of a lady.” Say, “She is very ladylike.” “He is very much of a gentleman.” Say, “He is very gentlemanly.”

Quite

This adverb is often incorrectly used in the sense of very or rather. It should be employed only in the sense of wholly or entirely. These sentences are therefore incorrect:

“He was wounded quite severely.”

“James was quite tired of doing nothing.”

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How

This word is sometimes used when another would be more appropriate.

“He said how he would quit farming.” Use that.



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“Ye see how that not many wise men are called.” We must read the Bible as we find it, but in modern English the sentence would be corrected by omitting how.

“Be careful how you offend him.” If the manner of offending is the thought to be expressed, the sentence is correct. But the true meaning is doubtless better expressed by, “Be careful lest you offend him.”

No, Not

“I cannot tell whether he will come or no.” “Whether he be a sinner or no I know not.” In such cases not should be used instead of no.

This much

“This much can be said in his favor.” Change this much to so much or thus much.

That far

The expressions this far and that far, although they are very common, are, nevertheless, incorrect. Thus far or so far should be used instead.

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Over, More than

“There were not over thirty persons present.” Over is incorrect; above has some sanction; but more than, is the best, and should be used.

Real good

This is one of those good-natured expressions that insinuate themselves into the speech of even cultured people. Very good is just as short, and much more correct. Really good scarcely conveys the thought intended.

So nice

“This basket of flowers is so nice.” So nice does not tell how nice. So requires a correlative to complete its meaning. Use very nice or very pretty.

Pell-mell

“He rushes pell-mell down the street.” One bird cannot flock by itself, nor can one man rush pell-mell. It will require at least several men to produce the intermixing and



confusion which the word is intended to convey.

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CHAPTER VIII

Conjunctions

As a general rule, sentences should not begin with conjunctions. And, or, and nor are often needlessly employed to introduce a sentence. The disjunctive but may sometimes be used to advantage in this position, and in animated and easy speech or writing the coordinate conjunction and may be serviceable, but these and all other conjunctions, when made to introduce sentences, should be used sparingly.

Reason, Because

“The reason I ask you to tell the story is because you can do it better than I.” Because means “for the reason.” This makes the sentence equivalent to “The reason I ask you to tell the story is for the reason that you can do it better than I.” Use that instead of because.

“Because William studied law is no reason why his brother should not do so.” The following is better: “That William studied law is no reason why his brother should not do so.”

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Only, Except, But

“The house was as convenient as his, only that it was a trifle smaller.” Use except for only.

“The field was as large as his, only the soil was less fertile.” Use but for only.

But, Except

“Being the eldest of the brothers but Philip, who was an invalid, he assumed charge of his father’s estate.” Except is better than but.

But what, But that

“Think no man so perfect but what he may err.” Say, “but that he may err.”

“I could not think but what he was insane.” Use but that.

But, If

“I should not wonder but the assembly would adjourn to-day.” Use if instead of but.

But, That

“I have no doubt but he will serve you well.” Say, “that he will serve you well.”

That, That

“I wished to show, by your own writings, that so far were you from being competent to teach others English composition, that you had need yourself to study its first principles.”— Moon, Dean’s English.

The second that is superfluous. This fault is very

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common with writers who use long sentences. The intervention of details between the first that and the clause which it is intended to introduce causes the writer to forget that he has used the introductory word, and prompts him to repeat it unconsciously.

But



“There is no doubt but that he is the greatest painter of the age.” The word but is superfluous. “He never doubted but that he was the best fisherman on the coast.” Omit but.

That

“He told me he would write as soon as he reached London.” Say, “He told me that he would write,” *etc.*

Than

“The Romans loved war better than the Greeks.” Such ambiguous forms should be avoided. As it is not probable that the speaker intended to say that the Romans loved war better than they loved the Greeks, he should have framed his sentence thus: “The Romans loved war better than the Greeks did.”

But that

“He suffered no inconvenience but that arising from the dust.” But that, or except that, is correct. Some persons improperly use than that after no.

“I don’t know but that I shall go to Europe.” Omit that. “I don’t know but I shall go,” *etc.*

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Other than

“We suffered no other inconvenience but that arising from the dust.” This is incorrect. After other we should use than. Therefore, “We suffered no other inconvenience than that arising from the dust.”

After else, other, rather, and all comparatives, the latter term of comparison should be introduced by the conjunction than.

Either the

“Passengers are requested not to converse with either conductor or driver.” This is one of those business notices that are often more concise than correct. It implies that there are two conductors and two drivers. The sentence should read, “Passengers are requested not to converse with either the conductor or the driver.”



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Lest, That

“I feared lest I should be left behind.” Use the copulative that, and not the disjunctive lest. “I feared that I should be left behind.”

Otherwise than

“He cannot do otherwise but follow your direction.” Use than, not but, after otherwise. Hence, “He cannot do otherwise than follow,” *etc.*

After that

“After that I have attended to the business I will call upon you.” The word that is superfluous.

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But what

“His parents will never believe but what he was enticed away by his uncle.” Omit what. The use of but that would be equally objectionable. But is sufficient.

A reconstruction of the sentence would improve it. “His parents will always believe,” or “Will never cease to believe that,” *etc.*

Doubt not but

“I doubt not but your friend will return.” Say, “I doubt not that your friend will return.”

Not impossible but

“It is not impossible but he may call to-day.” Use that instead of but.

Whether, Whether

“Ginevra has not decided whether she will study history or whether she will study philosophy.” As there is nothing gained in clearness or in emphasis by the repetition of “whether she will,” this shorter sentence would be better: “Ginevra has not decided whether she will study history or philosophy.”

As though

“He spoke as though, he had a customer for his house.” Say, “as if he had a purchaser,” *etc.*



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Except

“I will not let thee go except thou bless me.” This use of the word except occurs frequently in the Scriptures, but it is now regarded as obsolete. The word unless should be used instead.

“Few speakers except Burke could have held their attention.” In this sentence, besides should take the place of except.

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CHAPTER IX

Correlatives

Certain adverbs and conjunctions, in comparison or antithesis, require the use of corresponding adverbs and conjunctions. Such corresponding words are called correlatives. The following are the principal ones in use:

- as, as. not merely, but also.
- as, so. not merely, but even.
- both, and. so, as.
- if, then. so, that.
- either, or. such, as.
- neither, nor. such, that.
- not only, but. though, yet.
- not only, but also. when, then.
- not only, but even. where, there.
- not merely, but. whether, or.

The improper grouping of these correlatives is the cause of many errors in speech and writing.



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As... as

“She is as wise as she is good.” “Mary is as clever as her brother.”
The correlatives as... as are

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employed in expressing equality. Their use in any other connection is considered inelegant. “As far as I am able to judge, he would make a very worthy officer.” This is a very common error. The sentence should be, “So far as I am able,” *etc.*

As is often followed by so. “As thy days, so shall thy strength be.”

So... as

In such negative assertions as, “This is not as fine a tree as that,” the first as should be changed to so. Say, “She is not so handsome as she once was.” “This edition of Tennyson is not so fine as that.”

Either, Neither

The correlatives either, or, and neither, nor, are employed when two objects are mentioned; as, “Either you or I must go to town to-day,” “Neither James nor Henry was proficient in history.”

“He neither bought, sold, or exchanged stocks and bonds.” The sentence should be, “He neither bought, sold, nor exchanged stocks and bonds.”

“That is not true, neither.” As we already have one negative in the word not, the word neither should be changed to either, to avoid the double negation.

A negative other than neither may take either or or nor as its correlative, “She was not so handsome as her mother, or so brilliant as her father.” “He was never happy nor contented afterward.”

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Position of correlatives

The placing of correlatives requires care. “He not only gave me advice, but also money.” This is a faulty construction because the first member of the correlative, not



only, being placed before the verb gave leads us to expect that the action of giving is to be contrasted with some other action. The close of the sentence reveals the fact that the words advice and money represent the ideas intended for contrast. The first correlative should, therefore, have been placed before advice, and the sentence should read, "He gave me not only advice, but also money."

"I remember that I am not here as a censor either of manners or morals." This sentence from Richard Grant White will be improved by changing the position of the first member of the correlative. "I remember that I am not here as a censor of either manners or morals."

"I neither estimated myself highly nor lowly." It should be, "I estimated myself neither highly nor lowly."

"He neither attempted to excite anger, nor ridicule, nor admiration." The sentence should be, "He attempted to excite neither anger, nor ridicule, nor admiration." But here we have the correlative neither, nor, used with more than two objects, which is a violation of a principle previously stated. The



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sentence is purposely introduced to call attention to the fact that many respectable writers not only use neither, nor, with three or more objects, but also defend it. This usage may be avoided by a reconstruction of the sentence; as, "He did not attempt to excite anger, nor ridicule, nor admiration."

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CHAPTER X

The Infinitive

Many errors arise from not knowing how to use the infinitive mood. Perhaps the most common fault is to interpose an adverb between the preposition to and the infinitive verb; as, "It is not necessary to accurately relate all that he said." "You must not expect to always find people agreeable." Whether we shall place the adverb before the verb or after it must often be determined by considerations of emphasis and smoothness as well as of clearness and correctness. In the foregoing sentences it is better to place accurately after the verb, and always before the preposition to.

Supply "to"

The preposition to as the sign of the infinitive is often improperly omitted.

"Please write clearly, so that we may understand," "Your efforts will tend to hinder rather than hasten the work," "Strive so to criticise as not to embarrass"

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nor discourage your pupil." These sentences will be corrected by inserting to before the italicized words.

In such expressions as "Please excuse my son's absence," "Please write me a letter," "Please hand me the book," many authorities insist upon the use of to before the verb. The sentences may, however, be regarded as softened forms of the imperative; as, "Hand me the book, if you please." Transposed, "If you please, hand me the book." Contracted, "Please, hand me the book." From this, the comma may have slipped out and left the sentence as first written.



Omit "to"

When a series of infinitives relate to the same object, the word to should be used before the first verb and omitted before the others; as, "He taught me to read, write, and cipher." "The most accomplished way of using books at present is to serve them as some do lords— learn their titles and then brag of their acquaintance."

The active verbs bid, dare, feel, hear, let, make, need, see, and their participles, usually take the infinitive after them, without the preposition to. Such expressions, as "He bade me to depart," "I dare to say he is a villain," "I had difficulty in making him to see his error," are, therefore, wrong, and are corrected by omitting to.

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Incomplete Infinitive



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Such incomplete expressions as the following are very common: "He has not gone to Europe, nor is he likely to." "She has not written her essay, nor does she intend to." "Can a man arrive at excellence who has no desire to?" The addition of the word go to the first sentence, and of write it, to the second would make them complete. In the case of the third sentence it would be awkward to say, "Can a man arrive at excellence who has no desire to arrive at excellence." We therefore substitute the more convenient expression "to do so."

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CHAPTER XI

Participles

Participles relate to nouns or pronouns, or else are governed by prepositions. Those ending in ing should not be made the subjects or objects of verbs while they retain the government and adjuncts of participles. They may often be converted into nouns or take the form of the infinitive.

"Not attending to this rule is the cause of a very common error." Better, "Inattention to this rule," etc. "He abhorred being in debt." Better, "He abhorred debt," "Cavilling and objecting upon any subject is much easier than clearing up difficulties." Say, "To cavil and object upon any subject is much easier than to clear up difficulties."

Omit "of"

Active participles have the same government as the verbs from which they are derived. The preposition of, therefore, should not be used after the participle, when the verb would not require it. Omit of in such expressions as these: "Keeping of one day

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in seven," "By preaching of repentance," "They left beating of Paul," "From calling of names they came to blows," "They set about repairing of the walls."

If the article the occurs before the participle, the preposition of must be retained; as, "They strictly observed the keeping of one day in seven."



When a transitive participle is converted into a noun, of must be inserted to govern the object following. "He was very exact in forming his sentences," "He was very exact in the formation of his sentences."

Omit the possessive

The possessive case should not be prefixed to a participle that is not taken in all respects as a noun. It should, therefore, be expunged in the following sentences: "By our offending others, we expose ourselves." "She rewarded the boy for his studying so diligently." "He errs in his giving the word a double construction."

The possessives in such cases as the following should be avoided: "I have some recollection of his father's being a judge." "To prevent its being a dry detail of terms." These sentences may be improved by recasting them. "I have some recollection that his father was a judge." "To prevent it from being a dry detail of terms."



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When the noun or pronoun to which the participle relates is a passive subject, it should not have the possessive form; as, "The daily instances of men's dying around us remind us of the brevity of human life." "We do not speak of a monosyllable's having a primary accent." Change men's to men, and monosyllable's to monosyllable.

After verbs

Verbs do not govern participles. "I intend doing it," "I remember meeting Longfellow," and similar expressions should be changed by the substitution of the infinitive for the participle; as, "I intend to do it," "I remember to have met Longfellow."

After verbs signifying to persevere, to desist, the participle ending in ing is permitted; as, "So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them."

Place

In the use of participles and of verbal nouns, the leading word in sense should always be made the leading word, and not the adjunct, in the construction.

"They did not give notice of the pupil leaving." Here, the leading idea is leaving. Pupil should, therefore, be subordinate by changing its form to the possessive; as, "They did not give notice of the pupil's leaving." Better still, "They did not give notice that the pupil had left."

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Clearness

The word to which the participle relates should stand out clearly. "By giving way to sin, trouble is encountered." This implies that trouble gives way to sin. The relation of the participle is made clear by saying, "By giving way to sin, we encounter trouble."

"By yielding to temptation, our peace is sacrificed." This should be, "By yielding to temptation we sacrifice our peace."

"A poor child was found in the streets by a wealthy and benevolent gentleman, suffering from cold and hunger." Say, "A poor child, suffering from cold and hunger, was found," *etc.*

Awkward Construction



Such awkward sentences as the following should be avoided. In most cases they will require to be recast.

“But as soon as the whole body is attempted to be carved, a disproportion between its various parts results.”

“The offence attempted to be charged should be alleged under another section of the statute.” The following is a better arrangement:

“But as soon as an attempt is made to carve the whole body,” *etc.* “The offence which it is attempted to charge,” *etc.*

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Is building

The active participle in a passive sense is employed by many excellent writers and is condemned by others.

“Corn is selling for fifty cents a bushel.”

“Corn is being sold for fifty cents a bushel.”

The commercial world evidently prefers the former sentence. There is a breeziness and an energy in it that is lacking in the latter. It must, however, be used with caution. In the following examples the passive form is decidedly better than the active: “The foundation was being laid,” “They are being educated,” “While the speech was being delivered,” *etc.*



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CHAPTER XII

Prepositions

Clearness and elegance of style are, in no small degree, dependent upon the choice and right use of prepositions. Many rules have been formulated, some of which are deserving of consideration, while others are nearly or quite useless. Among the latter may be mentioned, by way of illustration, the oft-repeated rule that *between* or *betwixt* must invariably be used when only two things are referred to, and that *among* must be employed when more than two are named. While it is true that the order could not be reversed, that *among*, when used, must be employed in reference to three or more persons or things, and that *between* may always be employed in speaking of two objects, yet the practice of many of the best writers does not limit the use of *between* to two objects. In fact, there are cases in which *among* will not take the place of *between*; as, "I set out eighty trees with ample space *between* them." "The stones on his farm were so plentiful that the grass could not grow up *between* them."

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Between, Among

"The seven children divided the apples *between* them." Two children may divide apples *between*, them, but in this case it is better to say, "The seven children divided the apples *among* them."

George Eliot, in *Middlemarch*, says: "The fight lay entirely *between* Pinkerton, the old Tory member; Bagster, the new Whig member; and Brook, the Independent member." In this case, *between* or *with* is more satisfactory than *among*, although three persons are referred to.

Choice

Many sentences betoken ignorance and others indicate extreme carelessness on the part of the writers by the inapt choice of their prepositions, which often express relations so delicate in their distinctions that nothing short of an extended study of the best writers will confer the desired skill. We present some examples.

By, In



“We do not accept the proposition referred to by your letter.” The writer should have employed the preposition in.

Differ with, From

We differ with a person in opinion or belief; we differ from him in appearance, in attainments, in wealth, in rank, *etc.*

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Different from, To, Than

“Your story is very plausible, but Henry’s is different to that.” “My book is quite different than his.” The adjective different must not be followed by the preposition to or than. The sentences will be correct when from is substituted.

At, To

Never use the vulgar expression, “He is to home.” Say at home.

Preferred before, To

“He was preferred before me.” Say preferred to me.

With, Of

“He died with consumption.” Of is the proper preposition to employ. But we say, He is afflicted with rheumatism, or bronchitis, or other disease.



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In respect of, To

“In respect of this matter, he is at fault.” Better, “to this matter.”

Of, From

“He was acquitted from the charge of larceny.” Acquitted of the charge.

In, Into

Into implies direction or motion. “They walked into the church,” means that they entered it from the outside. “They walked in the church,” means that they walked back and forth within the church.

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“The vessel is in port.” “She came into port yesterday.”

Of, In

“There was no use of asking his permission, for he would not grant it.” In asking.

In, On

“He is a person in whom you can rely.” “That is a man in whose statements you can depend.” Use on for in.

To, With

Two persons are reconciled to each other; two doctrines or measures are reconciled with each other when they are made to agree.

“This noun is in apposition to that.” Use with.

With, By

These two prepositions are often confounded. They have a similarity of signification with a difference of use. Both imply a connection between some instrument or means and the agent by whom it is used. With signifies the closer relation and by the more remote one.

It is said that an ancient king of Scotland once asked his nobles by what tenure they held their lands. The chiefs drew their swords, saying, “By these we acquired our lands, and with these we will defend them.”



By often relates to the person; with to the instrument.

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“He lay on the ground half concealed with a clump of bushes.” “That speech was characterized with eloquence.” Use by in the last two sentences.

With, To

We correspond with a person when we exchange letters. In speaking of the adaptation of one object to another, the preposition to should be used after the verb correspond; as, “This picture corresponds to that.” With is often incorrectly used in such cases instead of to.

Position

The old grammarian gave a very good rule when he said, “A preposition is a very bad word to end a sentence with;” but it is sometimes easier to follow his example than his precept. In general, the strength of a sentence is improved by not placing small particles at the end.

“Which house do you live in?” Better, “In which house do you live?”

“Avarice is a vice which most men are guilty of.” Say, “of which most men are guilty.”

“He is a man that you should be acquainted with.” Say, “with whom you should be acquainted.”

“Is this the man that you spoke of?” Better, “of whom you spoke.”

“These are principles that our forefathers died for.” Rather, “for which our forefathers died.”



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Omission

Prepositions are often omitted when their use is necessary to the correct grammatical construction of the sentence.

“They now live on this side the river.” Say, “on this side of the river.”

“Esther and Helen sit opposite each other.” It is more correct to say, “sit opposite to each other.”

“John is worthy our help.” Better, “of our help.”

“What use is this to us?” Of what use, *etc.*

“This law was passed the same year that I was born.” Say, “In the same year,” *etc.*

“Washington was inaugurated President April 30, 1789.” Some critics insist upon the insertion of on before a date, as “on April 30,” but general usage justifies its omission. With equal force they might urge the use of in before 1789. The entire expression of day, month, and year is elliptical.

If the same preposition be required by several nouns or pronouns, it must be repeated in every case if it be repeated at all. “He is interested in philosophy, history, and in science.” This sentence may be corrected by placing in before history or by omitting it before science. The several subjects are individualized more strongly by the use of in before each noun. This is shown in the greater obscurity given to history by the omission of the preposition in the foregoing sentence.

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“We may have a feeling of innocence or of guilt, of merit or demerit.” Insert of before demerit.

Needless Prepositions

Prepositions, like other parts of speech that contribute nothing to the meaning, should not be suffered to cumber the sentence.

Where am I at? Where is my book at? I went there at about noon. In what latitude is Chicago in? Where are you going to? Take your hat off of the table. Where has James been to? They offered to Caesar a crown. This is a subject of which I intended to



Speak about (omit of or about, but not both). She has a sister of ten years old. Leap in with me into this angry flood.

The older writers employed the useless for in such expressions as, What went ye out for to see? The apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

All of

A very common error is the unnecessary use of the preposition of after all; as, “during all of this period,” “in all of these cases,” “for all of the conditions,” *etc.*

Up above

In most cases one of these prepositions will be found useless. “The ladder reached up above the chimney.”

From hence

The adverbs hence, thence, whence, include the idea of from. The preposition should, therefore, be omitted.

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CHAPTER XIII



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The Article

A, which is a shortened form of an, signifies one, or any. An was formerly used before nouns beginning with either a consonant or a vowel sound, but now an is used before a vowel sound and a before a consonant sound; as, a book, a hat, an apple, an eagle.

It will be observed that an heiress, an herb, an honest man, an honorable career, an hourly visit, a euchre party, a euphemism, a eulogy, a union, *etc.*, are not exceptions to the foregoing rule, for the h being silent in heiress, herb, *etc.*, the article an precedes a vowel sound, and in euphemism, eulogy, union, the article a precedes the consonant sound of y. Compare u-nit with you knit.

In like manner some persons have felt disposed to say many an one instead of many a one because of the presence of the vowel o. But the sound is the consonant sound of w as in won, and the article should be a and not an.

There is a difference of opinion among writers concerning the use of a and an, before words beginning

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with h, when not silent, especially when the accent falls on the second syllable; as, a harpoon, a hegira, a herbarium, a herculean effort, a hiatus, a hidalgo, a hydraulic engine, a hyena, a historian. The absence of the accent weakens the h sound, and makes it seem as if the article a was made to precede a vowel. The use of an is certainly more euphonious and is supported by Webster's Dictionary and other high authority.

The Honorable, The Reverend

Such titles as Honorable and Reverend require the article the; as, "The Honorable William R. Gladstone is often styled 'The Grand Old Man,'" "The Reverend Henry Ward Beecher was an eloquent orator," not Honorable William, E. Gladstone, or Reverend Henry Ward Beecher.

Article omitted

"A clergyman and philosopher entered the hall together." "A clergyman and philosopher" means one person who is both clergyman and philosopher. The article should be repeated. "A clergyman and a philosopher entered the hall together."

"A red and white flag" means one flag of two colors. "A red and a white flag" means two flags, a red flag and a white flag. "A great and a good man has departed." The verb



has implies that only

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one man has departed, hence the sentence should be, "A great and good man has departed."

"They sang the first and second verse," should be, "They sang the first and the second verse." "The literal and figurative meaning of words" should be, "The literal and the figurative meaning of words."

"In framing of his sentences he was very exact," should be, "In the framing," *etc.*, or, "In framing his sentences he was very exact." "The masculine and feminine gender," should be, "The masculine and the feminine gender."



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“After singing a hymn, Miss Willard made a stirring address.” If Miss Willard alone sang the hymn the sentence is correct. If the congregation sang the hymn the sentence should be, “After the singing of a hymn, Miss Willard made a stirring address.”

“He is but a poor writer at best.” Say, “at the best.” “He received but a thousand votes at most.” Say, “at the most.”

“John came day before yesterday.” Say, “the day before yesterday.”

Article redundant

“Shakespeare was a greater writer than an actor,” should be, “Shakespeare was a greater writer than actor.”

“This is the kind of a tree of which he was speaking,”

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should be, “This is the kind of tree,” *etc.* “What kind of a bird is this?” should be, “What kind of bird.”

“The one styled the Provost is the head of the University,” should be, “The one styled Provost.”

“The nominative and the objective cases,” should be “The nominative and objective cases.”

“He made a mistake in the giving out the text.” Say “in giving out the text,” or, “in the giving out of the text.” In the latter instance, the participle becomes a noun and may take the article before it.

Articles interchanged

“An elephant is the emblem of Siam,” should be, “The elephant is the emblem,” *etc.* “A digraph is the union of two letters to represent one sound.” Should be, “A digraph is a union,” *etc.*

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CHAPTER XIV

Redundancy

We are all creatures of habit. Our sayings, as well as our doings, are largely a series of habits. In some instances we are unconscious of our peculiarities and find it almost impossible to shake them off.

The following are verbatim expressions as they dropped from the lips of a young clergyman in the pulpit. They show a deeply-seated habit of repetition of thought. As he was a graduate of one of the first colleges in the land, we are the more surprised that the habit was not checked before he passed through his college and seminary courses. The expressions are here given as a caution to others to be on their guard: "Supremest and highest," "separate and sever us," "derision, sarcasm, and contempt," "disobedient and disloyal and sinful," "hold aloof from iniquity, from sin," "necessity of being reclaimed and brought back," "their beautiful and their elegant city," "so abandoned and given up to evil and iniquity," "soaked and stained with human gore and blood," "beautiful and resplendent," "hardened and solidified into stone and adamant," "this

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arctic splendor and brilliancy," "were being slaughtered and cut down," "in the rapidity and the swiftness of the train," "with all the mightiness and the splendor of his genius," "the force and the pressure it brings to bear," "has and possesses the power," "lights flashed and gleamed."



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The above were all taken from a single discourse. Another peculiarity of the same speaker was his use of the preposition between. Instead of saying, "Between him and his father there was a perfect understanding of the matter," he would say, "Between him and between his father there was a perfect understanding of the matter."

Young writers will find it a valuable exercise to go through a letter, essay, or other composition which they have written, with the view of ascertaining how many words they can eliminate without diminishing the force of what has been written. An article or two from the daily paper, and an occasional page from some recent work of fiction will afford further opportunity for profitable practice in pruning.

Widow woman

"And Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephrathite of Zereda, Solomon's servant, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow woman, even he lifted up his hand against the king."— I Kings xi, 26.

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The expression is now regarded as an archaism, and not to be used in modern speech or writing. Omit woman.

Why

Many persons have a foolish habit of beginning their answer to a question with the word why. In some cases it doubtless has its origin in the desire to gain time while the mind is preparing the answer, but in most instances it is merely a habit.

Some persons prefix the word why to the statement of a fact or to the asking of a question. This is even worse than to employ it to introduce the answer. Restrict it to its legitimate use.

Look at here

This is one of the numerous expressions designed to call the attention of the person addressed to the speaker. It is both ungrammatical and vulgar. The omission of at will render it grammatical. "See here" is still better.

Look and see

"Look and see if the teacher is coming." The words "look and" are superfluous. "See whether the teacher is coming" is a better expression.



Recollect of

The word of is superfluous in such expressions; as, "I recollect of crossing Lake Champlain on the ice," "Do you recollect of his paying you a compliment?"

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Settle up, down

"He has settled up his father's affairs." "He has settled down upon the old farm." Up and down may be omitted.

"He has settled down to business" is a colloquial expression which may be improved by recasting the sentence.

In so far

"He is not to blame in so far as I understand the circumstances." "In so far as I know he is a thoroughly honest man." "In so far as I have influence it shall be exerted in your favor." Omit in.

Pocket-handkerchief

The word handkerchief conveys the full meaning. Pocket is therefore superfluous and should be omitted. If a cloth or tie for the neck is meant, call it a neck tie or a neckerchief, but not a neck-handkerchief.



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Have got

“I have got a fine farm.” “He has got four sons and three daughters.” “James has got a rare collection of butterflies.” In such expressions got is superfluous. But, if the idea of gaining or acquiring is to be conveyed, the word got may be retained; as, “I have got my license,” “I have got my degree,” “I have got my reward.”

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Off of

“Can I borrow a pencil off of you?” “I bought a knife off of him yesterday.” Such faulty expressions are very common among school children, and should be promptly checked by the teacher. The off is superfluous.

“He jumped off of the boat.” Say, “He jumped off the boat.”

The young lady appointed to sell articles at a church fair entreated her friends to “buy something off of me.” She should say, “Please buy something from me,” or “Make your purchases at my table.”

For to see

“But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment?” Matt. xi, 8. “I will try for to do what you wish.” This form of expression, once very common, is now obsolete. Omit for.

Appreciate highly

To appreciate is to set a full value upon a thing. We may value highly, or prize highly, or esteem highly, but the word highly when used with appreciate is superfluous.

Ascend up

“With great difficulty they ascended up the hill.” As they could not ascend down the hill it is evident that the word up is superfluous.

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Been to



“Where has he been to?” The sentence is not only more concise, but more elegant without the terminal to.

Both

The sentence, “The two children both resembled each other,” will be greatly improved by omitting the word both. So also in “These baskets are both alike,” “William and I both went to Cuba.”

But that

“I do not doubt but that my uncle will come.” The sentence is shorter and more clear without the word but. “I have no idea but that the crew was drowned.” Here but is necessary. Without it the opposite meaning would be conveyed.

Equally as well

“James did it well, but Henry did it equally as well.” As well or equally well should be used instead of equally as well. “This method will be equally as efficacious.” Omit as.

Everywheres

“I have looked everywheres for the book, and I cannot find it.” This is a vulgarism that should be avoided. Say everywhere.

Feel like

“I feel like as if I should be sick.” The word like is unnecessary.

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Few

“There are a few persons who read well.” This sentence will be improved by saying, “Few persons read well.”



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Help but be

This is an awkward expression which is improved by being reduced to the two words help being; as, "I could not help being moved by his appeal."

Kind of a

"He jumped into a kind of a chaise, and hurried off to the station." A kind of chaise would be better.

New beginner

"Mary plays on the piano very well for a new beginner." If she is a beginner she must of necessity be new to it.

Opens up

"This story opens up beautifully." The up is superfluous.

Seeming paradox

The word paradox alone implies all that the word seeming is intended to convey, hence seeming is superfluous. "This was once a paradox but time now gives it proof."

Different

"There were ten different men ready to accept the offer." As no reference to the appearance or characteristics of the men is intended, the word different is unnecessary.

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Rise up

"They rose up early and started on their journey." Up is superfluous and should be omitted.

Sink down

"The multitude sank down upon the ground." As they could not sink up or in any other direction than down, the latter word should be omitted.

Smell of



“Did you smell of the roses?” “No; but I smelled them and found them very fragrant.”
“The gardener smelt of them for he has been culling them all morning and his clothing is perfumed with them.” The *of* is superfluous in such expressions as taste of, feel of, and usually in smell of.

Think for

“He is taller than you think for.” For is unnecessary. “He is taller than you think” is the contracted form of “He is taller than you think he is.”

Differ among themselves

“The authorities differed among themselves.” The words among themselves may be omitted.

End up

“That ends up the business.” Say “that ends (or closes) the business.”

Had have

“Had I have known that he was a lawyer I should have consulted him.”
Omit have.

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Had ought to

“I had ought to have gone to school to-day; I hadn't ought to have gone fishing.”
Incorrect. Say, “I ought to have gone (or I should have gone) to school to-day; I ought not to have gone fishing.” If the second clause is not an after-thought the sentence can be still further improved by condensing it; as, “I should have gone to school to-day, and not to have gone fishing.”

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CHAPTER XV

Two Negatives

The use of two negatives in a sentence is much more common than is generally supposed. To assume that only those who are grossly ignorant of grammatical rules

and constructions employ them, is an error. Writers whose names are as bright stars in the constellation of literature have slipped on this treacherous ground.

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A negation, in English, admits of only one negative word. The use of a single negative carries the meaning halfway around the circle. The meaning is therefore diametrically opposed to that which would be expressed without the negative. The use of a second negative would carry the meaning the remaining distance around the circle, thus bringing it to the starting point, and making it equivalent to the affirmative. The second negative destroys the effect of the first. The two negatives are equivalent to an affirmative.

Double Negatives

While two negatives in the same sentence destroy each other, a double negative has the effect of a more

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exact and guarded affirmative; as, "It is not improbable that Congress will convene in special session before the end of the summer." "It is not unimportant that, he attend to the matter at once." "His story was not incredible." "The fund was not inexhaustible."

Redundant Negatives

"No one else but the workmen had any business at the meeting." Omit else.

"Let us see whether or not there was not a mistake in the record." Omit either or not or the second not.

"The boat will not stop only when the signal flag is raised." Omit not or change only to except.

"He will never return, I don't believe." Say, "He will never return," or, if that statement is two emphatic, say, "I don't believe he will ever return."

Don't want none

"I don't want none," "I ain't got nothing," "He can't do no more," are inelegant expressions that convey a meaning opposed to that intended.

"I don't want any," or, "I do not want any," or, "I want none," are correct equivalents for the first sentence; "I haven't anything," or, "I have nothing," should take the place of the second; and, "He can't do any more," or, "He can do no more," or "He cannot do more," will serve for the third.



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Not—Hardly

“I cannot stop to tell you hardly any of the adventures that befell Theseus.” Change cannot to can. “I have not had a moment’s time to read hardly since I left school.” Say, “I have hardly a moment’s time,” *etc.*

No—no

“The faculties are called into no exercise by doing a thing merely because others do it, no more than by believing a thing only because others believe it,” says George P. Marsh. He should have used any instead of the second no.

Nothing—nor

“There was nothing at the Columbian Exposition more beautiful, nor more suggestive of the progress of American art, than Tiffany’s display.” Change nor to or.

Can’t do nothing

“He says he can’t do nothing for me.” Use “He can do nothing,” or “He can’t do anything for me.”

Cannot by no means



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This double negative should be avoided. “I cannot by no means permit you to go.” Say, “I cannot possibly,” or “I cannot, under any consideration, permit you to go.”

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Nor—no

“Give not me counsel, nor let no comforter delight mine ear,” says Shakespeare.

“There can be no rules laid down, nor no manner recommended,” says Sheridan.

“No skill could obviate, nor no remedy dispel the terrible infection.”

The foregoing sentences may be corrected by changing nor to and.

Not—no

“I pray you bear with me; I cannot go no further,” says Shakespeare. “I can go no further,” or “I cannot go any further,” will make the sentence correct.

Nor—not

“I never did repent for doing good, nor shall not now.”

“We need not, nor do not, confine the purposes of God.”

“Which do not continue, nor are not binding.”

“For my part I love him not, nor hate him not.”

In these sentences, change nor to and.

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CHAPTER XVI

Accordance of Verb with Subject



No rule of grammar is more familiar to the schoolboy than that which relates to the agreement of the verb with its subject, or nominative, and none that is more frequently violated. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the schoolboy is the only transgressor. Ladies and gentlemen of culture and refinement, writers and speakers of experience and renown, have alike been caught in the quicksands of verb constructions.

“This painting is one of the finest masterpieces that ever was given to the world.” A transposition of the sentence will show that the verb should be were, and not was. “Of the finest masterpieces that ever were given to the world, this painting is one.”

“His essay on ‘Capital and Labor’ is one of the best that has ever been written on the subject.” The verb should be have.

“The steamer, with all her passengers and crew, were lost.” The subject is steamer, and the verb should be was.

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Interrogative sentences

“What signifies his good resolutions, when he does not possess strength of purpose sufficient to put them into practice?” Resolutions is the subject, and the verb should be signify.

“Of what profit is his prayers, while his practices are the abomination of the neighborhood?” Prayers being plural, the verb should be are.

“What avails good sentiments with a bad life?” Use avail.

Subject after the Verb

“In virtue and piety consist the happiness of man.” Happiness, the subject, being singular, the verb should be consists, to agree with its nominative.



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“To these recommendations were appended a copy of the minority report.” A transposition of the sentence will show that the verb should be was, and not were. “A copy of the minority report was appended to these recommendations.”

Whenever the sentence is introduced by a phrase consisting in part of a noun in the plural, or several nouns in the singular or plural, and, especially, where the subject follows the verb; care must be taken to keep the nominative well in mind, so that the verb may be in strict accord with it.

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Compound Subjects

When a verb has two or more nominatives it must be plural. These nominatives may or may not be connected by and or other connecting particle. The nominatives may consist of nouns or pronouns, either singular or plural, or they may be phrases.

“Washington and Lincoln were chosen instruments of government.”

“Judges and senates have been bought for gold,
Esteem and love were never to be sold.”— Pope.

“Art, empire, earth itself, to change are doomed.”— Beattie.

“You and he resemble each other.”

“To read and to sing are desirable accomplishments.”

“To be wise in our own eyes, to be wise in the opinion of the world, and to be wise in the sight of our Creator, are three things so very different as rarely to coincide.”— Blair.

Singular in Meaning

Nominatives are sometimes plural in form but singular in meaning. Such nominatives require a verb in the singular.

“The philosopher and poet was banished from his country.” Was is correct, because philosopher and poet are the same person.

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“Ambition, and not the safety of the state, was concerned.” Was is correct, because ambition is the subject. The words, “and not the safety of the state,” simply emphasize the subject, but do not give it a plural meaning.

“Truth, and truth only, is worth seeking for its own sake.” Another case of emphasis.

Each, Every, No, Not

When two or more nominatives are qualified by one of the foregoing words the verb must be singular.

“Every limb and feature appears with its respective grace.”— Steele.

“Not a bird, not a beast, not a tree, not a shrub were to be seen.” Use was instead of were.

Poetical Construction

When the verb separates its nominatives, it agrees with that which precedes it.

“Forth in the pleasing spring, Thy beauty walks, thy tenderness, and love.”— Thomson.

Or, Nor, As well as, But, Save

When two or more nominatives in the singular are separated by such words as the preceding, the verb must be singular.

“Veracity, as well as justice, is to be our rule of life.”— Butler.



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“Not a weed nor a blade of grass were to be seen.” Change were to was.

“Nothing but wailings were heard.” Transpose. “Nothing was heard but wailings.” The verb should be was.

“Either one or the other of them are in the wrong.” The verb should be is.

If, however, one or more of the nominatives are plural, the verb must be plural.

“It is not his wealth, or gifts, or culture that gives him this distinction.” Gifts being plural, the verb should be give.

Some authorities say that the verb should agree in number with the subject which is placed next before it, and be understood (or silent) to the rest; as, “Neither he nor his brothers were there,” “Neither his brothers nor he was there,” “Neither you nor I am concerned.”

Prof. Genung, author of *Outlines of Rhetoric*, says: “When a clash of concord arises, either choose subjects that have the same number, or choose a verb that has the same form for both numbers.” He gives this sentence to show the change of verb: “Fame or the emoluments of valor were (was) never to be his.” “Fame or the emoluments of valor could never be his.” And this sentence to show the change of one of the subjects: “Neither the halter nor bayonets

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are (is) sufficient to prevent us from obtaining our rights.” “Neither the halter nor the bayonet is sufficient to prevent us from obtaining our rights.”

Collective Nouns

Collective nouns, like army, committee, class, peasantry, nobility, are, grammatically, singular, but they are often so modified by their surroundings as to convey a plural idea, and when so modified the verb must be plural. When the collective noun conveys the idea of unity, the verb must be singular.

“The army was disbanded.”

“The council were divided.”

“A number of men and women were present.”

“The people rejoice in their freedom.”



“The peasantry go barefoot, and the middle sort make use of wooden shoes.”

“The world stands in awe of your majesty.”

“All the world are spectators of your conduct.”

Weights, Measures, and Values

The names of weights, measures, and values, when considered as wholes, require singular verbs, and when considered as units require verbs in the plural.

“There is twenty shillings in my purse,” meaning one pound in value.

“There are twenty shillings in my purse,” meaning twenty separate coins, each being a shilling. “Sixty-three gallons equals a hogshead.”

“Ten tons of coal are consumed daily.”

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Titles of Books

Whether the form be singular or plural, the title is considered a unit, and requires a verb in the singular; as, “‘The Merry Wives of Windsor’ was written by Shakespeare.” “Dr. Holmes’s American Annals was published in 1805.”



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Whereabouts

“The whereabouts of his cousins were not known to him.” The plural form of this word is misleading. The verb should be was.

Phenomena, Effluvia

“A strange phenomena,” “A disagreeable effluvia” are incorrect forms not infrequently met with. Both words are plural, and require plural verbs and also the omission of the article a.

You was

This very incorrect form is often employed by those who know better, and who use it, seemingly, out of courtesy to the uneducated people with whom they are brought in contact. If it be a courtesy, it is one that is “more honored in the breach than in the observance.”

Those who use the expression ignorantly are not likely to read this book, or any other of a similar character, and need scarcely be told that was should be were.

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