

BRYAN A. GARNER

Garner's
Modern
English
Usage

*The Authority on Grammar,
Usage, and Style*

Fifth Edition

Quick Editorial Guide

If you're an editor or teacher, this list of 100 common editorial comments can save considerable time in marking text. Rather than explaining the need for various edits in marginal comments, just key your edits to the discussion in this book by marking the appropriate number alongside the edited passage. The writer can then consult this guide and the relevant pages. You'll economize in marking pages while still providing an explanation for your edits.

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GARNER'S
MODERN
ENGLISH
USAGE

OTHER BOOKS WRITTEN OR EDITED BY BRYAN A. GARNER

Black's Law Dictionary
(Thomson Reuters, 11th ed. 2019)

The Chicago Guide to Grammar, Usage, and Punctuation
(Univ. of Chicago Press, 2016)

The Chicago Manual of Style, ch. 5, "Grammar and Usage"
(Univ. of Chicago Press, 15th–17th eds.)

Garner on Language and Writing
with preface by Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg (ABA, 2009)

HBR Guide to Better Business Writing
(Harvard Business Review Press, 2013)

Quack This Way: David Foster Wallace and Bryan A. Garner Talk Language and Writing
(RosePen, 2013)

Garner's Dictionary of Legal Usage
(Oxford Univ. Press, 3d ed. 2011)

The Oxford Dictionary of American Usage & Style
(Oxford Univ. Press, 2000)

Reading Law: The Interpretation of Legal Texts
with Justice Antonin Scalia (Thomson/West, 2012)

Making Your Case: The Art of Persuading Judges
with Justice Antonin Scalia (Thomson/West, 2008)

The Redbook: A Manual on Legal Style
(West Academic, 4th ed. 2018)

Legal Writing in Plain English
(Univ. of Chicago Press, 3d ed. 2022)

The Winning Brief
(Oxford Univ. Press, 3d ed. 2014)

The Elements of Legal Style
(Oxford Univ. Press, 2d ed. 2002)

Guidelines for Drafting and Editing Legislation
(RosePen, 2016)

Ethical Communications for Lawyers
(LawProse, 2009)

The Winning Oral Argument
(West, 2009)

Taming the Tongue in the Heyday of English Grammar (1711–1851)
(Grolier, 2021)

Garner's Coursebook for Drafting and Editing Contracts
(West Group, 2020)

The Rules of Golf in Plain English
with Jeffrey Kuhn (Univ. of Chicago Press, 4th ed. 2016)

A New Miscellany-at-Law
by Sir Robert Megarry (Hart, 2005)

Texas, Our Texas: Remembrances of the University
(Eakin Press, 1984)

Securities Disclosure in Plain English
(CCH, 1999)

Basic Law Terms
(West Group, 1999)

Criminal Law Terms
(West Group, 2000)

Family Law Terms
(West Group, 2001)

Business Law Terms
(West Group, 1999)

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For Karolyne

“Usage . . . is the surest pilot in speaking, and we should treat language as currency minted with the public stamp. But in all cases we have need of a critical judgment.”

—Quintilian, ca. A.D. 88

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PREFACE

Some time ago, while I was standing at a rental-car counter in Austin, Texas, a young clerk told me that a free upgrade to a Cadillac might be available. She would have to see whether any Cadillacs were on the lot.

Two minutes passed as she typed, got on the telephone, twirled her hair around her index finger, and then typed some more. Finally, I said, “Can I get the upgrade?”

“You mean, ‘*May* I get the upgrade,’” she responded.

I thought I had imagined it. “What?”

“You said, ‘*Can* I get the upgrade.’ What you mean is, ‘*May* I get the upgrade.’”

As it happens, I had been working on the manuscript for this book only minutes before, so I couldn’t help thinking how surreal the experience was. I felt a twinge of indignation—the kind that anyone feels when corrected. But I also found her remark charming in a way. She was doing her best to uphold good English.

But she was wrong, and I gently told her so: “I’m not asking for your permission. I want to know whether you have a Cadillac on the lot. I want to know whether it’s physically possible for me to drive one of them. So: ‘*Can* I get the upgrade?’”

“Oh, I guess you’re right,” she said with resignation.

Experiences like that one give me hope: they show that some people still care about our language, however misplaced their concerns might occasionally be.

The State of the English Language

Is the English language decaying? Was it once in a pristine state? Has it been sliding ever since?

No on all counts. In many ways, writing today is better than ever. Our best journalists and authors are as talented as any who have ever worked in the language.

But a great deal of mediocre writing also appears in print and online, and both written and oral assaults on the language do seem to come at high velocities. The speed comes from mass communication and social media. Sign on to almost any social-media platform, and you’ll be treated to the heights of inarticulacy. Then imagine all the millions of readers and viewers whose linguistic perceptions are affected by this blather.

There are good, clarifying forces at work on the language. There are also bad, obscuring forces at work. One language, many realities.

The reality I care about most is that some people still want to use the language well. They want to write effectively; they want to speak effectively. They want their language to be graceful at times and powerful at times. They want to understand how to use words well, how to phrase sentences, and how to move about in the language without seeming to flail. They want good grammar, but they want more: they want rhetoric in the traditional sense. That is, they want to use language deftly so that it’s fit for their purposes.

This book is for them.

First Principles

Before going further, I should explain my approach. That’s unusual for the author of a usage dictionary—unprecedented, I believe. But a guide to good writing is only as good as the principles on which it’s based. And users of the book should naturally be interested in those principles. So in the interests of full disclosure, here are the ten critical points that, after decades of studying usage problems, I’ve settled on:

1. **Purpose.** The purpose of a usage dictionary is to help writers, editors, and speakers use the language effectively: to help them sound grammatical but relaxed, refined but natural, correct but unpedantic.
2. **Realism.** To guide users helpfully, recommendations on usage must be genuinely practical. They must recognize the language as it currently stands, encourage reasonable approaches to editorial problems, and avoid refighting battles that were long ago lost. The recommendations, in short, should have empirical support.
3. **Simplicity.** If the same idea can be expressed in a simple way or in a complex way, the simple way is better—and, counterintuitively, it will typically lead readers to conclude that the writer is smarter.
4. **Clarity.** Generally, writing is good if readers find it easy to follow; writing is bad if readers find it hard to follow.
5. **Succinctness.** Omitting needless words is important, especially in writing. As long as it's accurate and comfortably idiomatic, the briefest way of phrasing an idea is usually best because the brevity enhances speed, clarity, and impact.
6. **Word-judging.** A word or phrase is somewhat undesirable if it has any one of the following characteristics, and it's worse if it has two or more:
 - (a) it blurs a useful distinction;
 - (b) it defies logic;
 - (c) it threatens to displace an established expression (but hasn't yet done so);
 - (d) it originated in a misunderstanding of a word or its etymology;
 - (e) it sounds newfangled.
7. **Differentiation.** If related words—especially those differing only in the suffix—begin to take on different senses, it's wise to encourage the latent distinctions when they're first emerging and then to follow them once they're established.
8. **Needless variants.** Having two or more variant forms of a word is undesirable unless each one conveys a distinct meaning.
9. **Conservatism.** If two constructions are current, but one of them has been widely condemned by acknowledged usage authorities whose values are in line with those outlined in #6, the other construction is better.
10. **Actual usage.** In the end, the actual usage of educated speakers and writers—whether traditionally educated or self-educated—is the overarching criterion for correctness. But while actual usage can overcome the other factors, it isn't the only consideration.

Point #10 acknowledges that in time, the facts of what users of the language actually do will settle all disputes. But the problem of following statistical evidence of what actually occurs is that things are slowly shifting, and professional writers and editors can't wait around to see what direction the language takes. They must make decisions. And by doing so, they influence that direction.

A good usage dictionary should help in these decisions. H.W. Fowler's groundbreaking *Dictionary of Modern English Usage* did that in 1926 and influenced generations; Theodore M. Bernstein's book *The Careful Writer* did it in 1965; and Wilson Follett's *Modern American Usage* did it in 1966. That has traditionally been the job of the usage dictionary: to help writers and editors solve editorial predicaments.

Linguistic Evidence

This book contains thousands of quotations from published sources. Most are from newspapers, but many are from books and scholarly journals. These quotations came to hand in various ways.

First, they came from my own reading. For several decades, I traveled a good deal, and wherever I went, I made a point of reading and marking up at least one local newspaper, usually more. Upon my return, the marked sentences went into my database.

Second, I have dozens of allies—members of the H.W. Fowler Society, an informal organization I founded—who send me clippings from newspapers. These Fowlerians, who are spread throughout the English-speaking world, have contributed enormously to the book with hundreds of examples.

Third, I've supplemented entries with examples gleaned from online databases. Since the 1980s, these electronic sources have provided full-text searchability for millions of published documents—a luxury that earlier lexicographers never enjoyed. Online resources become better year by year.

But before delving further into online resources, I should address a question that some readers may wonder about. Should I really name names? Should I give full citations? Won't it mortify a journalist to find some badly written sentence preserved in a reference book for all the world to see?

Well, I hope it isn't mortifying, and for me it's nothing new. The citations show that the examples are real, not fabricated. They hint at the great variety of evidence on which the judgments in this book are based. And they're lexicographically noteworthy: they reflect how the language is being used in our time.

The citations are geographically diverse. Although this book is American in origin, and focuses somewhat more on American than on British English, its advice is intended to apply to the many varieties of English around the world. During the mid-20th century, the English language's center of gravity shifted from England to the U.S. That reality is reflected in the text.

It's fair to say that the guidance given here is based on a greater corpus of current published writings than any previous usage guide. For contemporary usage, the files of history's greatest dictionary makers pale in comparison with the searchable databases now available online. The approach here is leavened by a thorough canvassing of actual usage in modern edited prose.

When I say that *self-deprecating* (traditionally viewed as incorrect) is 25 times as common as *self-depreciating* (traditionally viewed as correct), I have searched databases to give this conservative figure. From 1980 to 1997, *self-deprecating* appeared in 16,040 newspaper sources in the Nexis database, and *self-depreciating* in only 353—a 45:1 ratio. (The ratio in American judicial opinions is 62:1.) The Google Books Ngram Viewer—with its corpora based on millions of English-language books—yields data from which the 25:1 ratio is easily derived for the year 2019. So much for the older usage books that recommended *self-depreciating*; that battle is lost.

In this respect—the consideration of voluminous linguistic evidence to back up judgment calls—this book represents a radical departure from most other usage dictionaries.

Big Data

Researchers now have access to the largest database for corpus linguistics ever compiled: the Google database of English-language books printed throughout the world. The use of big data in these pages doubtless makes *Garner's Modern English Usage* the most thoroughly empirical work of its kind. I am grateful to the legal department of Google for arranging for me to be the first author explicitly licensed to reproduce results from the Google Books Ngram Viewer, which shows graphs depicting the relative frequency of specified sequences of words within the corpus of English-language books as compared with other sequences. From this big-data resource, it has become possible to calculate ratios on word frequency and phrase frequency in the greater English-speaking world and its two most prominent varieties: American English and British

English. These ratios, found at the end of many entries, provide some fascinating data: the frequency of one form (the prevalent one) versus another (a variant).

Of course, the ngram data can hardly be viewed as infallible. A false sense of precision may come from a ratio such as 4,376:1 (the calculation that one word appears in print precisely 4,376 times for every one time that its variant appears). It may well be that the most current ratios available—for the year 2019—aren't as fully reliable as those for earlier years: the scanned books are a smaller proportion of all books published that year. There may be other shortcomings. Nevertheless, on balance it seemed better to provide the data than not to, with the stipulation that readers mustn't view the ratios as immutable truth. Instead, these snapshots of the language, especially when viewed in their relation to usage over time, can provide a sound basis for understanding linguistic developments and usage trends.

To arrive at accurate numbers, I used Google ngrams with contextualized searches within the 2019 Google corpus. The power of these ngrams would have astonished earlier lexicographers—just as it astonished me at first. They take much of the guesswork out of linguistic assessments of Standard Written English. Their reliability was confirmed to me time and again when I compared the results with those from other major corpora. We can now determine, for example, that the phrasal verb *to home in on* became common in English print in the 1940s. (The original metaphor related to homing pigeons.) We're also able to know that the variant form *to hone in on* emerged some decades later and has never been used as frequently in published books, though the gap is closing. The variant now rivals the traditional form.

That's in printed books throughout the English-speaking world. In British books, it's a 2:1 ratio. In American books, the ratio is 1.2:1. So in American English the variant has gained more ground. Anyone who attentively listens to American speech will notice that most people (perhaps 80%?) say *to hone in on*. Who are they? Mostly ordinary people. And who says *to home in on*? Mostly well-read people—subscribers to *The New York Review of Books*, *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, or the like. That's supportable only by anecdotal evidence—one observer having tested this hypothesis on thousands of audiences over a 20-year period. Yes, the question fascinates me, and I've had the good fortune of being able to administer quizzes containing this issue to over 50,000 people on three continents. The evidence isn't entirely anecdotal, except that I've had to take people at their word about their reading habits.

The phrasing *to hone in on* began as a simple error—an example of WORD-SWAPPING, in which a term gets replaced by its near-homophone. Professional editors have tended to stick to the original formulation, but in this instance the speech habits of English speakers, especially American ones, are increasingly at odds with what appears in well-edited English. At some point the editorial preference for the original phrasing (*to home in on*) will more decisively shift. But we're not to that point yet.

Ascertaining the facts about usage with ngrams is trickier than it might seem: you can't just search *home in* vs. *hone in*. You'd get many false positives for every reference in English-language books to a *home in Malibu* and similar phrases, with hundreds of thousands of misleading results, if not millions. So the searches have been carefully contextualized, usually by inflecting a verb: *homed in on* vs. *honed in on*. (Google ngrams allow you to use up to five consecutive words for the purpose of contextualizing.) In that search, the inflected verb and the preposition produce precise results. A little ingenuity was required to arrive at many of the ratios displayed throughout the text.

With some phrases, big-data research is exceedingly difficult. With *as such*, for example, its rightness depends entirely on what has been said in the preceding sentence: what is the antecedent of *such*? A Google ngram can't tell you that. So with some words and phrases for which useful ngram data couldn't be gathered, no comparative information could be supplied. In those instances, ratios wouldn't be meaningful (as

with *shapable* [AmE] vs. *shapeable* [BrE], or *supervisorial* [one sense] and *supervisory* [different sense]), or else no suitable search could be framed (as with the adverbial forms *supplely* vs. *supply* [the latter, of course, being much more frequent as a noun or verb], or *solon* [as contrasted with what?]). A fair amount of thought went into these decisions. Where ratios do appear, the search terms (prevalent form vs. variant) are supplied within parentheses so that it will be clear to the reader what is being compared against what.

One advantage of big data is that outlier instances become trivial. In saying that *Christmas bazaar* is standard and **Christmas bizarre* a solecism (marked here by the asterisk), it matters not that a certain writer might have written, “I thought Christmas bizarre that year.” In the larger scheme of big data, that odd instance becomes unimportant as against the others in which writers have mistakenly used the noun phrase **Christmas bizarre* in place of the standard phrase to refer to a seasonal marketplace.

A pessimist might well wonder why it’s useful to record a 25,000:1 ratio. (A few such huge discrepancies in usage are noted.) The answer is one you could hardly appreciate until you’re suddenly arguing with someone who insists that an outlier usage is correct. One of the virtues of a reliable usage guide is to settle debates between language aficionados, or between editor and author. The empirical evidence here marshaled reduces the degree of opinion involved in such matters.

Reliable data are central to decisions about good usage. The ngrams give us diachronic evidence over the entire period of Modern English (1700 to date). Again, they also allow us to calculate relative frequencies of words and phrases for any given year up to 2019. That’s the most recent year for which statistics are available. Hence all my mentions of the “current ratio in print” refer to materials published in 2019. The ratios show a snapshot of usage as it existed in that year. For an example of how valuable this information can be, see the statistics at the end of the entries for **all right (B)** and **snuck**.

Those wishing to replicate my research results with the Ngram Viewer should use these settings (unless otherwise specified in the text): “smoothing” at 3; case-sensitive searches; English 2019 database. Simply use a search engine to find “Ngram Viewer,” and you’ll soon discover the many delights that ngrams have to offer.

Let me illustrate the lexicographic utility of big data by citing what is in itself a point of only slight importance. When did the standard *hark back* start morphing into **hearken back*? (Again, the asterisk marks a nonrecommended variant.) According to *Webster’s Dictionary of English Usage* (1989)—and repeated in its 2002 update—the variant just doesn’t appear in BrE: “We have no evidence that *hearken back* is establishing itself in British use, though it has occasional use in the U.S.” That statement is an extrapolation based on the extensive Merriam-Webster lexicographic files documenting usage.

But with a few seconds of research using ngrams, it’s possible to see that the variant **hearken back* first appeared in published British books in the mid-1800s and occurred in British writing throughout the 20th century. It didn’t appear in American books with any appreciable frequency until 1888. In both varieties of English, it surged about 1960. In 1989, when *Webster’s Dictionary of English Usage* was first published, the phrase *hark back* outranged **hearken back* in AmE by a 7:1 ratio, and in BrE by a 45:1 ratio. So the inroads have indeed been greater on the American side. It’s also possible now to see that **harken back* occurred more frequently in print than **hearken back* from 1961 to 2002 in AmE and from 1981 to 2000 in BrE. In any event, both **hearken back* and **harken back* are variant phrases that have never seriously rivaled the standard phrase (*hark back*) in Standard Written English.

So the earlier usage commentators cited negatively by Merriam-Webster—Theodore Bernstein (1970) and Roy Copperud (1980)—were actually correct in their editorial recommendations against the variants. “They think it must be a mistake,” intones

the Merriam-Webster book. Well, yes. A variant newcomer that's just a by-form of an established term is going to be viewed as an editorial mistake. When Bernstein and Copperud were writing, it was probably a Stage 1 misuse, possibly Stage 2. (See p. xxv for an explanation of these stages.) The fact that Merriam-Webster's files contained a few instances of the linguistic interlopers hardly confirmed their full acceptability. In fairness, though, the Merriam-Webster editors were trying to extrapolate from the relatively sparse evidence they had.

Let's consider another simple yet even more obscure example: is the word for a wheelbarrow or dumpcart designed for farm use spelled *tumbrel* or *tumbril*? The word dates from the 1300s in English. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) and most other dictionaries record the primary entry under *tumbrel*, and that was indeed the predominant spelling through the 1700s. But beginning about 1800, the spelling *tumbril* began to dominate. By 1830, its prevalence in print was unquestioned, and the *-el* spelling has never again seriously rivaled the *-il* spelling. We know this from Google ngrams. Yet the dictionaries would lead you to conclude otherwise. This is one tiny example of the valuable information now available to us all.

It's interesting to speculate about why the change from *tumbrel* to *tumbril* occurred when it did, at the beginning of the 1800s. The fourth edition of a dictionary called *The Complete Farmer*, published in the 1790s, lists only the spelling *tumbrel* and defines it as "a dung-cart." There must be clues elsewhere.

The 1938 edition of the *Funk & Wagnalls New Standard Dictionary of the English Language* lists this as one meaning of *tumbrel*: "A type of cart in which victims were carried to the guillotine during the first French Revolution [1787]: an erroneous use." *Webster's Second New International Dictionary* (1934) contains a similar definition (it's missing from the OED). Mentions of the word *tumbrel* spiked in the late 1780s and 1790s. The switch to the spelling *tumbril* occurred in 1800 in AmE and in the early 1820s in BrE. Could it be that farmers, especially those who wrote about farm-related subjects, wished to avoid, in their ordinary mentions of dumpcarts, associations with the bloody guillotines of revolutionary France and therefore chose the other spelling? That's just speculation. But such little discoveries hold the possibility of many new avenues of research.

Hark back and *tumbril* hint at the wealth of information now available. Multiply those by 5,000 (for a usage guide)—or, ultimately, nearly a million (for a truly unabridged English dictionary). The degree of ascertainable knowledge about the language is greater than ever before. In the past, lexicographers (including me) were playing a guessing game: presented with seven instances, four of them going one way and three another, the dictionary writer would have to make an educated guess about the predominant forms in print. The available evidence was scanty and often unrepresentative. Now much of the guesswork has been eliminated by the powerful tool of big data; lexicography is being revolutionized. Certainly this book has been revolutionized. Every page has been reworked or confirmed by using the extraordinary help of big data.

Mind you, from its very inception in the late 1990s, this book has made copious use of many linguistic corpora. It's just that the corpus now available is incomparably more vast than what was available when the earlier editions were written.

Prescribing vs. Describing

The first several editions made much of the 20th- and 21st-century debates between "descriptivists" and "prescriptivists." Should we encourage normativity? The debate is old, and it has grown stale. Increasingly, it is passé: descriptivists (who seek to describe language without judging it) have in recent years tacitly accepted some degree of prescriptivism, and knowledgeable prescriptivists (who seek the best uses of language) have based their judgments more and more on empirical descriptions of English usage.

Despite its prescriptive bent, this book is assuredly descriptive in trying to record the actual state of linguistic affairs, word by word and phrase by phrase. (Please avoid reading either the P-word or the D-word in the preceding sentence with a preconceived contempt.) When this book reports ratios of frequency in print, it is essentially recommending the predominant usage and discouraging variants. But current predominance isn't the only criterion; an evaluation of usage over time comes into play. There are judgment calls.

By supporting normative recommendations with empirical evidence, this book aims to clarify what qualifies as Standard Written English or its spoken equivalent for those who want to achieve good usage. I hope you're among them.

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Dallas, Texas

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It has been gratifying over the years to hear from so many people who are interested in English usage. I'm continually heartened by their support and enthusiasm.

B.A.G.

LIST OF ESSAY ENTRIES

This book contains essentially two types of entries: (1) word entries, which discuss a particular word or set of words; and (2) essay entries, which address larger questions of usage and style. For ease of reference, the essay entries—which appear throughout the book in small capitals—are listed below.

ABBREVIATIONS	DIMINUTIVES
-ABLE	DIRECTIONAL WORDS
ABSOLUTE CONSTRUCTIONS	DOCUMENT DESIGN
ABSTRACTITIS	DOUBLE BOBBLES
ADJECTIVES	DOUBLE MODALS
ADVERBS	DOUBLESPEAK
AE	DOUBLE SUBJECTS
-AGOG(UE)	DYSPHEMISM
-AHOLIC/-AHOLISM	-ED/-'D
AIRLINESE	-EDLY
ALLITERATION	-EE
AMERICANISMS AND BRITICISMS	EN-/IN-
ANACHRONYMS	ENUMERATIONS
ANIMAL ADJECTIVES	-ER
ANTE-/ANTI-	ERGATIVE VERBS
ANTICIPATORY REFERENCE	-ESE
APPOSITIVES	-ESQUE
ARCHAISMS	ESTRANGED SIBLINGS
-ATABLE	ETYMOLOGY
-ATHLON	EUPHEMISMS
BACK-FORMATIONS	EX-
BE-VERBS	EXPLETIVES
BI-/SEMI-	EXTRA-
BUREAUCRATESE	FIRST PERSON
-C/-CK-	FLOTSAM PHRASES
CANNIBALISM	FOOTNOTES
CAPITALIZATION	FOR-/FORE-
-CAST	FORMAL WORDS
CASUALISMS	-FREE
-CE/-CY	-FRIENDLY
CENTURY DESCRIPTIONS	FUDGE WORDS
CHRONOLOGY	FUNCTIONAL SHIFT
-CIDE	FUSED PARTICIPLES
CLASS DISTINCTIONS	-FY
CLICHÉS	GALLICISMS
CO-	GENTEELISMS
COLLECTIVE NOUNS	GERMANICISMS
COMMERCIALESE	GERUNDS
COMPARATIVES AND SUPERLATIVES	GOVERNMENTAL FORMS
COMPUTERESE	HEADLINESE
CONCORD	HIERARCHICAL EXPRESSIONS
CONJUNCTIONS	HOBSON-JOBSONISM
CONTRACTIONS	HYBRIDS
CONTRONYMS	HYPALLAGE
CORRELATIVE CONJUNCTIONS	HYPERCORRECTION
COUNT NOUNS AND MASS NOUNS	-IC/-ICAL
DANGLERS	-ICS
DATES	-ILE/-INE
DEMONYMS	ILLOGIC
DIACRITICAL MARKS	INCOMPLETE SENTENCES
DIALECT	INELEGANT VARIATION
DIFFERENTIATION	INTER-/INTRA-

INVERSION
IRREGULAR VERBS
IRREVERSIBLE BINOMIALS
ITALICS
-IZE/-ISE
JARGON
LATINISMS
LEGALESE
LITERARY ALLUSION
LOANWORDS
MALAPROPISMS
METAPHORS
METATHESIS
MISCUES
MONDEGREENS
MORPHOLOGICAL DEFORMITIES
NAMES
NEEDLESS VARIANTS
NEGATIVES
NEOLOGISMS
NONWORDS
NOUN PLAGUE
NOUN SUFFIXES
NUMERALS
NUMERICAL PREFIXES
OBJECT-SHUFFLING
OBSCURITY
OFFICIALESE
-OR/-OUR
OVERSTATEMENT
OXYMORONS
PARALLELISM
PASSIVE VOICE
PER-
PERIPHRAIS
PHATIC LANGUAGE
PHRASAL ADJECTIVES
PHRASAL VERBS
PLAIN LANGUAGE
PLURALS
POINTING WORDS
POLITICAL CORRECTNESS
PORTMANTEAU WORDS
POSSESSIVES
POSTPOSITIVE ADJECTIVES
PREJUDICED AND PREJUDICIAL TERMS
PREPOSITIONS
PREVENTIVE GRAMMAR
PROFANITY
PRONOUNS
PRONUNCIATION

PUNCTUATION
PUNS
QUADRI-/QUADRU-/QUADRA-
QUESTIONS, DIRECT AND INDIRECT
QUOTATIONS
RACE-RELATED TERMS
RE- PAIRS
REDUNDANCY
REMOTE RELATIVES
RETRONYMS
RUN-ON SENTENCES
SEMANTIC CHANGE
SENTENCE ENDS
SENTENCE LENGTH
SERIAL COMMA
SESQUIPEDALITY
SET PHRASES
SEXISM
SKUNKED TERMS
SLANG
SLIPSHOD EXTENSION
SOUND OF PROSE
SPELLING
SPIN CONJUGATIONS
SPLIT INFINITIVES
STANDARD ENGLISH
SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT
SUBJECT-VERB SEPARATION
SUBJUNCTIVES
SUBORDINATION AND COORDINATION
SUPERSTITIONS
SWAPPING HORSES
SYNESIS
TENSES
TITULAR TOMFOOLERY
TMESIS
UNDERSTOOD WORDS
VERBAL AWARENESS
VICE-
VOGUE TERMS
VOWEL CLUSTERS
WEASEL WORDS
WELLERISMS
-WISE
WOOLLINESS
WORD PATRONAGE
WORD-SWAPPING
-WORTHY
ZEUGMA
ZOMBIE NOUNS

ABBREVIATIONS

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>adj. = adjective</p> <p>adv. = adverb</p> <p>AHD = <i>The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language</i> (5th ed. 2011)</p> <p>Am. = American</p> <p>AmE = American English</p> <p>Aus. = Australia, Australian</p> <p>BBBM = Charles Harrington Elster, <i>The Big Book of Beastly Mispronunciations</i> (2d ed. 2005)</p> <p>Br. = British</p> <p>BrE = British English</p> <p>ca. = (<i>circa</i>) around</p> <p>Can. = Canadian</p> <p>cap. = capitalized</p> <p>cf. = (<i>confer</i>) compare with</p> <p>CGEL = Rodney Huddleston & Geoffrey K. Pullum, <i>The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language</i> (2002)</p> <p>COD = <i>The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English</i> (8th ed. 1990)</p> <p>colloq. = colloquial</p> <p>conj. = conjunction</p> <p>DAEU = Margaret Nicholson, <i>A Dictionary of American-English Usage</i> (1957)</p> <p>DARE = <i>Dictionary of American Regional English</i> (6 vols., 1985–2013)</p> <p>DCAU = Bergen Evans & Cornelia Evans, <i>A Dictionary of Contemporary American Usage</i> (1957)</p> <p>ed. = edition; editor</p> <p>e.g. = (<i>exempli gratia</i>) for example</p> <p>Engl. = English</p> <p>esp. = especially</p> <p>ex. = example</p> <p>fig. = figuratively</p> | <p>FMEU1 = H.W. Fowler, <i>A Dictionary of Modern English Usage</i> (1926)</p> <p>FMEU2 = H.W. Fowler, <i>A Dictionary of Modern English Usage</i> (Ernest Gowers ed., 2d ed. 1965)</p> <p>FMEU3 = R.W. Burchfield, <i>The New Fowler's Modern English Usage</i> (1996)</p> <p>fr. = from; derived from; found in</p> <p>Fr. = French</p> <p>G.B. = Great Britain (i.e., England, Scotland, and Wales)</p> <p>Ger. = German</p> <p>Gk. = Greek</p> <p><i>ibid.</i> = (<i>ibidem</i>) in the same source</p> <p>i.e. = (<i>id est</i>) that is</p> <p>Irl. = Ireland</p> <p>Ital. = Italian</p> <p>Jap. = Japanese</p> <p>L. = Latin</p> <p>l.c. = lowercase</p> <p>lit. = literally</p> <p>L.J. = Law Journal</p> <p>L. Rev. = Law Review</p> <p>MAU = Wilson Follett, <i>Modern American Usage</i> (1966)</p> <p>ME = Middle English (1100–1499)</p> <p>MWDEU = <i>Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage</i> (1989)</p> <p>n. = noun</p> <p>no. = number</p> <p>NOAD = <i>The New Oxford American Dictionary</i> (3d ed. 2010)</p> <p>Norw. = Norwegian</p> <p>obs. = obsolete</p> <p>OE = Old English (450–1099)—same as Anglo-Saxon</p> <p>OED = <i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> (online 3d ed. as it was in 2021)</p> <p>OED2 = <i>The Oxford English Dictionary</i> (2d ed. 1989)</p> |
|--|---|

OED Supp. = *A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary* (4 vols., 1972–1986)

OF = Old French (700–1400)

orig. = originally

p. = page

phr. = phrase

pl. = plural

pp. = pages

p.pl. = past participle

prep. = preposition

pron. = pronoun

pr.pl. = present participle

pt. = part

quot. = quotation

repr. = reprinted

rev. = revised by; revision

RH2 = *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (2d ed. 1987)

Russ. = Russian

Scot. = Scottish

sing. = singular

SOED = *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (6th ed. 2007)

Sp. = Spanish

specif. = specifically

s.v. = (*sub verbo*) under the word

trans. = translator

U&A = Eric Partridge, *Usage & Abusage* (1942)

U.K. = United Kingdom (i.e., Great Britain and Ireland from 1801 to 1922; Great Britain and Northern Ireland since 1922)

U.S. = United States

USGPO = *United States Government Printing Office Style Manual* (rev. ed. 2016)

usu. = usually

vb. = verb

v.i. = intransitive verb

v.t. = transitive verb

W2 = *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language* (2d ed. 1934)

W3 = *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language* (1961)

W11 = *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (11th ed. 2003)

WNWCD = *Webster's New World College Dictionary* (5th ed. 2014)

PRONUNCIATION KEY

The analogous symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet are in square brackets.

ə <i>for all the vowel sounds in amok, rum, but</i> [ə]	n <i>as in note, clown</i> [n]
a <i>as in fact, vat</i> [æ]	n <i>the nasalized French n as in contretemps, Saint-Saëns</i> [ã]
ah <i>as in calm, father (1st syllable)</i> [ɑ:]	ng <i>as in long, plank</i> [ŋ]
ahr <i>as in bar, start</i> [ɑ:ɹ]	o <i>as in hot, posh</i> [ɑ] or [ɒ]
air <i>as in flare, lair</i> [ɛə]	oh <i>as in loan, home</i> [o:] or [ô]
aw <i>as in tall, law</i> [ɔ:] or [ɑ:]	oi <i>as in join, ploy</i> [ɔɪ]
ay <i>as in page, same</i> [eɪ]	oo <i>as in rule, tomb</i> [u:]
b <i>as in balk, job</i> [b]	oor <i>as in poor, pure</i> [ʊə] or [ɔ:]
ch <i>as in chief, bench</i> [tʃ]	or <i>as in board, court</i> [ɔ:]
d <i>as in deck, red</i> [d]	ow <i>as in plow, loud</i> [â]
e <i>as in leg, pet</i> [ɛ]	p <i>as in poem, drop</i> [p]
ee <i>as in flea, ceiling</i> [i:]	r <i>as in rank, hear</i> [ɹ] or [ɹ]
eer <i>as in mere, tier</i> [iə] or [iə]	s <i>as in cite, seek, pass</i> [s]
f <i>as in fence, off</i> [f]	sh <i>as in sharp, trash</i> [ʃ]
g <i>as in go, mug</i> [g]	t <i>as in time, boot</i> [t]
h <i>as in harp, hold</i> [h]	th <i>as in thin, math</i> [θ]
hw <i>as in which, while</i> [ʍ]	th <i>as in there, bathe</i> [ð]
i <i>as in rib, akin</i> [ɪ]	u <i>as in took, pull</i> [ʊ]
ī <i>as in time, eye</i> [aɪ]	v <i>as in vague, shiver</i> [v]
j <i>as in jump, magic</i> [dʒ]	w <i>as in witch, away, suede</i> [w]
k <i>as in cap, keep, quit, school</i> [k]	y <i>as in year, union</i> [j]
l <i>as in lever, pill</i> [l]	z <i>as in zone, please</i> [z]
m <i>as in muck, drum</i> [m]	zh <i>as in measure, vision</i> [ʒ]

KEY TO THE LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX

Stage 1: A new form emerges as an innovation (or some dialectal usage persists) among a small minority of the language community, perhaps displacing a traditional usage. Examples include the misspellings **baited breath* for *bated breath*; **bellweather* for *bellwether*; the misbegotten **harp back* for *hark back*; the double negative **unrelentlessly* for the correct *relentlessly* or *unrelentingly*; and the dialectal **brung* for *brought*. People normally consider innovations at this stage outright mistakes. Most people who are aware of them hope they won't spread.

Stage 2: The form spreads to a significant portion of the language community, but it remains unacceptable in standard usage. Examples include *alumni* and *criteria* used as singulars (rather than the standard *alumnus*, *alumna*, or even *alum* on the one hand, and *criterion* on the other); *sherbet* misspelled and mispronounced **sherbert* (with an extra *r*); and *infer* misused for *imply*. Although terms in Stage 2 often get recorded in dictionaries as variants, this fact alone is hardly a recommendation for their use.

Stage 3: The form becomes commonplace even among many well-educated people, but it's still avoided in careful usage. Examples include **adopted mother* for *adoptive mother*; **gladiolas* for *gladioli* or *gladioluses* (or simply *glads*); *idyllic* for *ideal*; **miniscule* for the correct spelling *minuscule*; the supposed contraction **'til* for the good old word *till* (as in *We'll be here till noon*); *peruse* used to mean “scan hastily” rather than “read carefully”; and using a nominative pronoun in compound objects such as **between you and I* rather than *between you and me*.

Stage 4: The form becomes virtually universal but is opposed on cogent grounds by a few linguistic stalwarts (the traditionalists that David Foster Wallace dubbed “snoots”: syntax nudniks of our time). Examples include pronouncing *flaccid* as /*flas*-id/ instead of the traditional /*flak*-sid/ (like *access* [/*ak*-ses/] and *accident* [/*ak*-sə-dent/]); using **hone in* for *home in* (traditionally it's what homing pigeons do); using *unbeknownst* for *unbeknown*; and saying or writing **the reason is because* instead of *the reason is that*.

Stage 5: The form is universally adopted except by a few eccentrics. It's a linguistic fait accompli: what was once merely de facto has become accepted as de jure. There's no going back here. Examples include *chaperone* (which erroneously acquired the final *e*—a spelling that didn't become standard until the 1970s); *contact* as a verb (as in *I'll contact you next week*); the verb *finalize* (*Let's finalize our plans*); the adjective *interpretive* instead of the traditional *interpretative*; *pompom* instead of *pompon* in reference to cheerleaders' ornamental fluffy balls; the adjective *self-deprecating* instead of the original *self-depreciating* (which the British still sometimes insist on); the saying *You can't have your cake and eat it too* (as opposed to the original and more logical sequence from centuries ago: *You can't eat your cake and have it too*); and *nimrod* in the Bugs Bunny sense.

Many mutations never progress beyond Stage 1. They stay in the shadows of the language, emerging now and again, mostly to the annoyance of educated people. Arguments often erupt about words and phrases in Stages 2 and 3. But if a mutation makes its way to Stage 4, its long-term progression to Stage 5 is all but certain: it's just a question of the passing of time, whether decades or mere days.

If the index were not measuring change but instead were expressing static linguistic phenomena, many serviceable analogies would come to mind. I list six of them here simply to help readers envision the levels of acceptability intended to be conveyed by the idea of stages. We begin with the notation that appears at the bottom of each right-hand page and then have the six analogies.

Literal Shorthand

References

- Stage 1: Rejected
- Stage 2: Widely shunned
- Stage 3: Widespread but . . .
- Stage 4: Ubiquitous but . . .
- Stage 5: Fully accepted

School-Grade Analogy

- Stage 1: F
- Stage 2: D
- Stage 3: C
- Stage 4: B
- Stage 5: A

School-Discipline

Analogy

- Stage 1: Expulsion
- Stage 2: 2-week suspension
- Stage 3: 1-hour detention
- Stage 4: Warning
- Stage 5: No action

Golf Analogy

- Stage 1: Quadruple bogey
- Stage 2: Triple bogey
- Stage 3: Double bogey
- Stage 4: Bogey
- Stage 5: Par

Olfaction Analogy

- Stage 1: Foul
- Stage 2: Stinky
- Stage 3: Smelly
- Stage 4: Vaguely odorous
- Stage 5: Neutral

Traffic-Penalty Analogy

- Stage 1: \$500 fine and jail time
- Stage 2: \$300 fine
- Stage 3: \$100 fine
- Stage 4: Warning
- Stage 5: No stop

Parliamentary-Discipline

Analogy

- Stage 1: Expulsion
- Stage 2: Censure
- Stage 3: Reprimand
- Stage 4: Warning
- Stage 5: No action

A

a. A. Choice Between *a* and *an*. The indefinite article *a* is used before words beginning with a consonant sound, including /y/ and /w/ sounds. The other form, *an*, is used before words beginning with a vowel sound. Since the sound rather than the letter controls, it's not unusual to find *a* before a vowel or *an* before a consonant. Hence *a eulogy* (but *an elegy*), *a European country*, *a one-year term*, *a Ouija board*, *a uniform*, *an FBI agent*, *an MBA degree*, *an SEC filing*.

The distinction between *a* and *an* was not solidified until the 1800s. Up to that time, *an* preceded most words beginning with a vowel, regardless of how the first syllable sounded. The U.S. Constitution, for example, reads: "The Congress shall have Power . . . [t]o establish *an uniform* Rule of Naturalization." U.S. Const. art. I, § 8. But that's no excuse for a modern writer—e.g.:

- "The revisions include . . . [f]iling legislation to create *an uniform* [read *a uniform*] inspection code." Doris Sue Wong, "Revisions to Title 5 Unveiled," *Boston Globe*, 2 Aug. 1995, at 25.
- "When touring Fontainebleu in 1677, John Locke noted that the back stairs leading to the apartments of the King's brother smelt like *an urinal* [read *a urinal*]." Anne Somerset, *The Affair of the Poisons* 47 (2003).
- "I would have no ethical worries if a physician who knows your medical history chose to give you *a F.D.A.-authorized* [read *an F.D.A.-authorized*] vaccine on top of our W.H.O.-listed one." Kwame Anthony Appiah, "The Ethicist," *N.Y. Times Mag.*, 8 Aug. 2021, at 15.

People worry about whether the correct article is *a* or *an* with *historian*, *historic*, and a few other words. Most authorities have supported *a* over *an*. The traditional rule is that if the *h* is sounded, then *a* is the proper form. So people who aspirate their *h*'s and follow that rule would say *a historian* and *a historic*—e.g.:

- "Because this argument isn't so much *a historical* analogy as *a historical* desecration." Paul Greenberg, "'They All Do It'—Even the Founding Fathers?," *Wall Street J.*, 12 Oct. 1998, at A18.
- "The treatment of crime in Britain shows *a historic* shift away from the protection of life and property toward the pursuit of ideological ends." Paul Johnson, "Britain: A Thieves' Paradise," *Forbes*, 17 Feb. 2003, at 35.
- "*A historical* analysis provided to Congress concluded that the Taliban had learned lessons from their takeover of the country in the 1990s." Mark Mazzetti, Julian E. Barnes & Adam Goldman, "Contradicting Biden, Reports Warned of Rapid Collapse," *N.Y. Times*, 18 Aug. 2021, at A1.
- "But Pap Ndiaye, *a historian* who specializes in Black studies, said in 2019 on France Culture radio that Ms. Baker had specifically used the stereotypes in her acts, deriding them as much as she exaggerated them." Constant Méheut, "France to Honor Baker with Panthéon Burial," *N.Y. Times*, 23 Aug. 2021, at A4.

This is not a new "rule." Even the venerated language authority H.W. Fowler, in the England of 1926, advocated *a* before *historic(al)* and *humble* (*FMEU* 1 at 1).

The theory behind using *an* in such a context is that the *h* is weak when the accent is on the second rather than the first syllable (giving rise, by analogy, to **an habitual offender*, **an hallucinatory image*, and **an hysterical crowd*). Hence no authority countenances **an history*, though a few older ones prefer **an historian* and **an historical*.

Today, however, such wordings as **an hypothesis*, **an hereditary title*, and **an historic era* are likely to strike readers and listeners as affectations in need of editing—e.g.:

- "You have *an hypothesis* [read *a hypothesis*]." Norman Mailer, *Pontifications* 127 (1982).
- "If we value the information which they provide us, then the cognitive movement is reinforced and comes to be habitual: *an habitual* [read *a habitual*] pattern or pathway between neurons in the brain, *an habitual* [read *a habitual*] association of ideas in the mind." Nigel Rapport, "Context as an Act of Personal Externalisation," in *The Problem of Context* 194 (Roy Dillely ed., 1999).
- "[A]n agreement could be found among the members of the Security Council that they had the legitimate authority to start *an humanitarian* [read *a humanitarian*] intervention." Bruno Coppieters, "Legitimate Authority," in *Moral Constraints on War* 41, 50 (Bruno Coppieters et al. eds., 2002).
- "[She] laughed aloud, *an hysterical* [read *a hysterical*] sort of giggle, quickly stifled." Katharine Kerr, *Snare: A Novel of the Far Future* 591 (2003).

As Mark Twain once wrote, referring to *humble*, *heroic*, and *historical*: "Correct writers of the American language do not put *an* before those words." *The Stolen White Elephant* 220 (1882). Nearly a century later, the linguist Dwight Bolinger harshly condemned those who write *an historical* as being guilty of "a Cockneyed, cockeyed, and half-cocked ignorance and self-importance, that knoweth not where it aspirateth." Dwight Bolinger, "Are You a Sincere *H-Dropper*?" *50 Am. Speech* 313, 315 (1975).

Anyone who sounds the *h* in words of the type here discussed should avoid pretense and use *a*. *An* humanitarian is, judged even by the most tolerant standards, a pretentious humanitarian. See **herb & humble**, adj.

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1. **an historic(al)* for *a historic(al)*: Stage 3
Current ratio in print (*a historical*
vs. **an historical*): 5:1
2. **an habitual* for *a habitual*: Stage 3
Current ratio in print (*a habitual*
vs. **an habitual*): 2:1

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX (For the full key, see front matter pp. xxv–xxvi.)

Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

B. In Distributive Senses. *A*, in the distributive sense <ten hours a day>, has traditionally been considered preferable to *per*, which originated in COM-MERCIALESE and LEGALESE. But *per* has muscled its way into idiomatic English in phrases such as *60 miles per hour*, *one golf cart per couple*, and *five books per student*. Although *an* could be substituted for *per* in the first of those phrases, *a* wouldn't work well in the second or third.

When the construction requires a PHRASAL ADJECTIVE, *per* is the only idiomatic word—e.g.: “Our *per-unit* cost is less than \$1,000.”/“The \$50-*per-parent* fee seems unreasonably high.”

C. Pronunciation. The indefinite article is ordinarily pronounced /ə/—not /ay/. The latter pronunciation is appropriate only in cases of emphasis <I didn't say “clubs”; I said “a club”> and for the name of the letter. But /ay/ is nearly ubiquitous among broadcasters, “who have been taught—and for good reason—to avoid filling pauses in their speech with *uh* or *um*. Thus, if they happen to pause on the article *a* when pronouncing it UH, they will appear to have committed this cardinal sin.” *BBBM* at 2.

aback. See **taken aback**.

abacus (= [1] an instrument for counting or calculating, usu. consisting of a frame holding wires or strings along which beads can be slid from one side to the other; or [2] in architecture, a slab forming the capital of a column), a Latin LOANWORD dating in English from the 1300s, has two plurals: *abaci* /ab-ə-si/ and *abacuses* /ab-ə-kəs-iz/. The Latinate plural *abaci* has always predominated in sense 2. The Anglicized plural *abacuses*, which came into ever-greater prominence during the 20th century, is surely the only plural known to the schoolchildren who use sense 1.

abalone (= an edible mollusk known for its mother-of-pearl shell lining) is pronounced /a-bə-loh-nee/. Cf. **calzone**.

abandon, vb. See **desert**.

abandonment; abandon, n. In most contexts, *abandonment* (= the permanent relinquishment of any right or interest in a thing) is the noun that answers to the verb *abandon*. But in one particular idiom, *abandon* is the required noun: *wild abandon* or *reckless abandon* (= unrestrained impulsiveness). The similar phrase *gay abandon* was once common but has been in decline since the early 1980s, with the surging popularity of the newer sense of *gay*. (See **gay**.) The *SOED* dates the noun *abandon* (= surrender to natural impulses; freedom from constraint or convention) back to the early 1800s. And it records *abandonment* as sharing this sense from 1834. Still, *abandon* is so preponderant in this idiom that the two terms ought to be distinguished. In the following sentences, *abandon* better accords with modern usage:

- “Like a ventriloquist, the President put these words in the mouth of Dr. King: ‘. . . I did not fight for the right of

black people to murder other black people with reckless *abandonment* [read *abandon*].” H. Bruce Franklin, “What King Really Would Have Said,” *Phil. Inquirer*, 7 Dec. 1993, at A17.

- “He walks straight into his boss's office, quits his job, goes on a pension and dives into a life of wild *abandonment* [read *abandon*], partying, drinking, taking drugs.” David Wroe, “I Chose to Be a Victim,” *The Age*, 30 Nov. 2002, at 10.
- “You can wield the epithet with complete *abandonment* [read *abandon*], and revel in it.” Drew Hayden Taylor, “When Is an Indian Not an Indian?,” *Globe & Mail* (Toronto), 10 Apr. 2021, at 6.

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abandonment misused for *abandon*: Stage 2

Current ratio in print (*reckless abandon* vs. *reckless abandonment*): 11:1

Current ratio in print (*wild abandon* vs. *wild abandonment*): 9:1

abbreviable. So formed—not **abbreviatable*. See -ABLE (D) & -ATABLE.

ABBREVIATIONS. A. Acronyms and Initialisms. Six points merit attention here. First, be aware of the technical difference between the two types of abbreviated names. An *acronym* is made from the first letters or parts of a compound term. It's read or spoken as a single word, not letter by letter (e.g., *awol* = absent without official leave, *radar* = radio detection and ranging, and *scuba* = self-contained underwater breathing apparatus). An *initialism* is also made from the first letters or parts of a compound term, but it's sounded letter by letter, not as one word (e.g., *r.p.m.* = revolutions per minute).

Second, the question often arises whether to place a period after each letter in an acronym or initialism. Searching for consistency on this point is futile. The trend today is to omit the periods. Including them is the more conservative and traditional approach. Yet because an acronym is spoken as a single word (e.g., *UNESCO*), periods are meaningless. If an initialism is made up of lowercase letters, periods are often preferable: *rpm* looks odd as compared with *r.p.m.*, and *am* (as opposed to *a.m.*) looks like the verb. But with initialisms made of uppercase letters, the unpunctuated forms are likely to prevail (as in *ABC*, *ATM*, *HIV*, *IRA*, *SUV*, *URL*, etc.). After all, it makes sense to write an abbreviation in its most abbreviated form.

Third, the best practice is to give the reader some warning of an uncommon acronym or initialism by spelling out the words and enclosing the acronym in parentheses when the term is first used. A reference to *CARPE Rules* may confuse a reader who does not at first realize that three or four lines above this acronym the writer made reference to a Committee on Academic Rights, Privileges, and Ethics. On the other hand, well-known abbreviations don't need this kind of special treatment—there's no need to announce a “Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meeting.”

Fourth, capitalization raises various questions. In AmE there was once a tendency to print initialisms

in all capitals (e.g., FMLA, NJDEP) and acronyms in small capitals (e.g., GAAP, MADD, NASA). Today, however, the strong trend is to use all capitals for both kinds. But in BrE the tendency is to uppercase only the first letter, as with *I*for and *I*sa for *Implementation Force* and *individual savings account*. An influential British commentator once suggested (with little success on his side of the Atlantic) that the lowercasing be avoided: “From the full name to the simplified label three stages can be detected. For instance, the Society [for Checking the Abuse of Public Advertising] . . . becomes first S.C.A.P.A., then SCAPA, and finally *Scapa*. In the interests of clarity this last stage might well be discouraged, since thereby the reference is made unnecessarily cryptic.” Simeon Potter, *Our Language* 177 (rev. ed. 1966). American writers have generally agreed with this view.

Fifth, don’t use abbreviations that have already been taken. Although it’s understandable how a writer in 1959 might have used *PMS* for *primary message systems*, this would be worse than ill-advised today, since *premenstrual syndrome* is more commonly referred to by its initials than by its name. E.g.: “There are ten separate kinds of human activity which I have labeled Primary Message Systems (PMS). Only the first PMS involves language. All the other PMS [read PMSes] are nonlinguistic forms of the communication process.” Edward T. Hall, *The Silent Language* 45 (1959). The language doesn’t easily embrace dual-meaning acronyms. One exception is *IRA*, which has long referred to the Irish Republican Army but in the 1980s came to denote also an individual retirement account. Other examples exist, but all are generally to be avoided. Once everyone thinks of the *FAA* as the Federal Aviation Administration, it’s unwise to use that initialism in reference to the Federal Arbitration Act.

Sixth, when an indefinite article is needed before an abbreviation, the choice between *a* and *an* depends simply on how the first syllable is sounded. A vowel sound takes *an*, a consonant sound *a*—hence *an MGM film*, *an SOS*, *a DVD player*, *a UFO*. See **a (A)**.

B. Resulting Redundancies. Some acronyms and initialisms often appear as part of a two-word phrase in which the second word is what one of the short form’s letters stands for. So a bank customer withdraws cash from an *ATM machine*, using a *PIN number* as a password. A supermarket clerk searches a milk carton for its *UPC code*. High-school seniors study hard for the *SAT test* (though the SAT owners now insist that the *T* does not stand for *test*—see **SAT**). Economists monitor the *CPI Index*. American and Russian diplomats sit down to negotiate at the *SALT talks* as their military counterparts consider whether to launch *ABM missiles*. Websites may display pages in *PDF format*. And scientists try to unlock the mysteries of the deadly *HIV virus*.

The problem with these phrases, if there is one, is that they are technically redundant (*automated-teller*

machine machine, *personal-identification number number*, *Universal Product Code code*, *Consumer Price Index Index*, *Strategic Arms Limitation Talks talks*, *anti-ballistic missile missile*, *portable document format format*, and *human-immunodeficiency virus virus*). Although some editors will insist that these redundancies are unacceptable, they help cue the mind to the precise subject whether the context is speech or writing. In short, the objections smell of pedantry.

A slightly different type of redundancy arises if you define *ATC* as the *air-traffic control system* (the hyphen is preferable for the PHRASAL ADJECTIVE) but later write *ATC system*, as here: “The third factor I mentioned is the air traffic control system (ATC). The United States ATC is the finest system [delete *system*] in the world, and on a good weather day, with runways and navigation facilities working, things operate smoothly. However, sometimes the *ATC system* [read *ATC*] must slow the arrivals at a particular airport.” Don Carty, “Why Was My Flight Canceled?,” *Am. Way*, 1 May 2001, at 10. Perhaps the better solution in that passage would be to leave *system* out of the definition—e.g.: *The third factor I mentioned is the air-traffic control (ATC) system. The United States ATC system is the finest in the world, and in good weather, with runways and navigation facilities working, things operate smoothly. But sometimes the ATC system must slow the arrivals at a particular airport.*

See REDUNDANCY.

C. Initialese. One of the most irritating types of pedantry in modern writing is the overuse of abbreviations, especially abbreviated names. Originally, to be sure, abbreviations were intended to serve the convenience of the reader by shortening names so that cumbersome phrases would not have to be repeated in their entirety. The purported simplifications actually simplified. But many writers—especially technical writers—seem to have lost sight of this goal: they allow abbreviated terms to proliferate, and their prose quickly becomes a hybrid-English system of hieroglyphs requiring the reader to refer constantly to the original uses of terms to grasp the meaning. This kind of writing might be thought more scholarly than ordinary, straightforward prose. It isn’t. Rather, it’s tiresome and inconsiderate writing; it betrays the writer’s thoughtlessness toward the reader and a puerile fascination with the insubstantial trappings of scholarship.

Three examples suffice to illustrate the malady:

- “As a comparison to these item-level indices, the factor-level indices IFS and C_ANR [sic] were both computed for the maximum likelihood factors. . . . Compression of the factor space tends to decrease both IFS and C_ANR, while excessive expansion is likely to also decrease the C_ANR, while the IFS might be expected to be reasonably stable. Thus, four rotation solutions were computed based upon Matthews & Stanton’s (1994) extraction of 21 factors, the Velicer MAP test indicator of 26 (PCA) and 28 (image

factors, and Autosree indicators of 17 and 21 factors for PCA and image respectively. From these solutions, it was hypothesized that a full 31 factor rotation might provide the optimal C_ANR parameters for the OPQ scales. Further, as a by-product of the use of MLFA, it is possible to compute a test." P. Barrett et al., "An Evaluation of the Psychometric Properties of the Concept 5.2 Occupational Personality Questionnaire," 69 *J. Occupational & Organizational Psychology* 1, 12 (1996).

- "For the initial model, the significant variable TRANS is only significantly correlated with SUBNO. SUBCTY is correlated with NI, with SUBNO, and with FSALEPER. NI, however, is significantly correlated with: (1) DOMVIN; (2) METH1; and (3) METH3. In the reduced model, these intercorrelations with NI are not an area for concern." Karen S. Cravens & Winston T. Shearon Jr., "An Outcome-Based Assessment of International Transfer Pricing Policy," 31 *Int'l J. Accounting* 419, 436 (1996) (parentheticals omitted).
- "SLIP, like VALP and ECC, is a defeasible constraint that is obeyed by all the types of head-nexus phrase considered thus far. It guarantees that (except in SLASH-binding contexts that we turn to in a moment) the SLASH value of a phrase is the SLASH value of its head-daughter." Ivan A. Sag, "English Relative Clause Constructions," 33 *J. Linguistics* 431, 446 (1997).

And so it goes throughout each article. See OBSCURITY.

When naming something new, one sometimes finds the task hopeless: consider the *ALI-ABA CLE Review*, as opposed to calling it the *American Law Institute-American Bar Association Continuing Legal Education Review*. You can't choose either one enthusiastically. Both sponsors must have their due (in part so that they can have their dues), and the initialisms might gradually become familiar to readers. But they aren't ideal because they give bad first impressions.

Remember that effective communication takes two—the writer and the reader. Arthur Quiller-Couch reminded writers never to forget the audience:

[T]he obligation of courtesy rests first with the author, who invites the seance, and commonly charges for it. What follows, but that in speaking or writing we have an obligation to put ourselves into the hearer's or reader's place? It is *his* comfort, *his* convenience, we have to consult. To *express* ourselves is a very small part of the business: very small and unimportant as compared with *impressing* ourselves: the aim of the whole process being to persuade.

Quiller-Couch, *On the Art of Writing*
291–92 (2d ed. 1943).

Abbreviations are often conveniences for writers but inconveniences for readers. Whenever that is so, the abbreviations should vanish.

Robert Burchfield warned that the proliferation of initialisms could profoundly affect the language as a whole: "As formations they are often ingenious—for example KWIC (Key Word in Context) and CARE (Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere, a federation of U.S. charities)—but they are barren, in that they cannot generate anything except themselves, and etymologically rootless. Each one that is formed takes the language fractionally away from its Germanic, and ultimately its Indo-European,

origins." Robert W. Burchfield, *Unlocking the English Language* 65 (1989).

D. Plurals. See PLURALS (H).

ABCs; ABC's. In the 1800s, and well into the 1900s, this plural abecedarian term was predominantly spaced out: **A B C's*. In the late 1930s, the closed-up *ABC's* became predominant and has remained so, as an exception to the rule that apostrophes aren't used to create plurals. In the 1970s, *ABCs* (no apostrophe) became especially common, and it has grown steadily so that it now outstrips *ABC's*. See PLURALS (H).

Current ratio in print (*ABCs* vs. *ABC's* vs. **A B C's* vs. **A B Cs*): 671:478:15:1

abdomen is most commonly pronounced /ab-də-mən/, though some people continue to use the old-fashioned /ab-doh-mən/.

abdominal (= pertaining to the abdomen or belly) is so spelled. Perhaps under the influence of *abominable*, it is sometimes wrongly made **abdominable*—e.g.:

- "The uncertainty of Cox's status—he has not been able to practice for weeks because of an *abdominable* [read *abdominal*] strain." Gerald Eskenazi, "Add Cox to List of Jets' Troubles," *N.Y. Times*, 10 Dec. 1999, at D5.
- "Alfonso Soriano, diagnosed with tendinitis in his right shoulder, sat out Yankees' exhibition game vs. Twins yesterday in Fort Myers, as did Jason Giambi, who's battling strained *abdominable* [read *abdominal*] muscle." *N.Y. Post* (graphic), 8 Mar. 2003, Metro §, at 56.
- "An adjustable silicon ring is looped around the stomach then attached to a port sewn into the *abdominable* [read *abdominal*] muscles." Tom Rawstorne, "Anne Diamond's Gastric Band Has Inspired Many Other Women," *Daily Mail* (U.K.), 21 Feb. 2006, at 50.

Sometimes the substitution isn't an error but a pun, as in this headline: "Arnaldo Magnani *Abdominable* Snowman: Hefty tenor Luciano Pavarotti packs another white meteorite to hurl at girlfriend Nicoletta Mantovani after Saturday's Elton John AIDS fundraiser." "A Test of Albright's Domestic Policy," *Daily News* (N.Y.), 11 Feb. 1997, Gossip §, at 14.

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**abdominable* for *abdominal*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*abdominal* vs. **abdominable*): 18,555:1

***aberrance; *aberrancy.** See **aberration**.

aberrant, adj.; aberrational; aberrative. These terms appear in order of descending frequency. *Aberrant* /ab-ər-ənt/ or /ə-ber-int/ = deviating from behavioral or social norms. *Aberrational* /a-bə-ray-shə-nəl/ = of, relating to, or involving an aberration. *Aberrative* /ə-ber-ə-tiv/ = tending toward aberration. For *aberrant* as a noun, see **aberration**.

aberration; aberrant, n.; *aberrance; *aberrancy. *Aberration* = (1) a deviation or departure from what is normal or correct; or (2) a mental derangement. *Aberrant*, which is almost always used in reference to people, means "a deviant; one deviating from an

established norm.” **Aberrance* and **aberrancy* are NEEDLESS VARIANTS of *aberration*—enough so to be labeled linguistic aberrations themselves. See SPELLING (A).

aberrational; aberrative. See **aberrant**, adj.

abettor; *abetter. In both AmE and BrE, *abettor* is the more usual spelling. It was otherwise from about 1640 to 1750, but since then *abettor* has been seen as a better alternative. See -ER (A). Cf. **bettor**.

Current ratio in print (*abettor* vs. **abetter*): 4:1

abhor (= to detest, esp. on grounds of morality or ethics) is pronounced /ab-**hor**/ or /əb-**hor**/—not /ə-**bor**/. For an example of *adjure* misused for *abhor*, see **abjure** (c).

abide = (1) to stay, dwell <the right of entering and abiding in any state in the Union>; (2) to tolerate, withstand <we won’t abide that type of misconduct>; (3) to obey (construed with *by*) <we abided by the rules>; (4) to await <our decision must abide the outcome of this struggle>; or (5) to perform or execute (in reference to court orders or judgments) <the lower courts must abide the judgments of the Supreme Court>. In sense 1, *abode* is the preferred past tense, and either *abode* or *abided* is the past participle. In all other senses, *abided* is the preferred past tense and past participle. See IRREGULAR VERBS.

ability; capacity. The traditional distinction is that while *ability* is qualitative, *capacity* is quantitative. Hence, *ability* refers to a person’s power of body or mind <a writer of great ability>; *capacity*, meaning literally “roomy, spacious,” refers figuratively to a person’s physical or mental power to receive <her memory has an extraordinary capacity for details>.

For the distinction between *capacity* and *capability*, see **capacity**.

abjection; abjectness. Both words refer to a state of being cast aside, abased, and humiliated. The subtle difference between the two is that *abjection* refers to the physical condition—e.g.: “*Abjection* was a way of surviving Stalin: you gave him something of your blood, without wavering.” “Other Comments,” *Forbes*, 3 Feb. 2003, at 26. *Abjectness* refers to the state of mind—e.g.: “But were he to continue in office, at least judging by the *abjectness* of his apology, MADD might just have found a national poster boy.” Jim Coyle, “We’ve Come a Long Way in Public Attitudes,” *Toronto Star*, 14 Jan. 2003, at B2. *Abjection* is used much more often today.

Current ratio in print (*abjection* vs. *abjectness*): 11:1

abjure; adjure. **A. Senses Distinguished.** *Abjure*, the more frequently used of these words, may mean

either (1) “to renounce” <Germany abjured the use of force>, or (2) “to avoid” <her evaluation abjured excessive praise>. In bygone days, people were sometimes required to “abjure the realm,” i.e., go abroad. *Adjure* means “to charge or entreat solemnly; to urge earnestly” <Reagan adjured the Soviets to join him in this noble goal>.

B. Cognate Forms. The noun forms are *abjuration* (or **abjurement*—now defunct) and *adjuration*. The adjectival forms end in -*tory*. The agent nouns are *abjurer* and *adjurer*.

C. Adjure Misused. *Adjure* is sometimes misused for two other words, *abhor* and *require*. The first of these is hard to explain but easy to illustrate—e.g.: “Most of us don’t dislike lawyers individually; we *adjure* [read *abhor*?] them as a group.” “Our Legal System’s Put Us in a Box,” *Chicago Trib.*, 23 Aug. 1988, at C19.

The other error, *adjure* for *require* or *command*, occurs often in legal writing but elsewhere as well—e.g.:

- “Arizona law *adjures* [read *requires*] that statutes should be construed to effect their objects.” *Knapp v. Cardwell*, 667 F.2d 1253, 1261 (9th Cir. 1982).
- “Assaying the quality of defendant’s acts and omissions . . . *adjures* [read *requires*] just such a judgment call.” *Swift v. U.S.*, 866 F.2d 507, 511 (1st Cir. 1989).
- “‘Use Absolut,’ he *adjures* [read *commands* or *tells*] a waiter at the restaurant where he, Iris, Kate and Daniel have an uncomfortable dinner. ‘I’ll know if the bartender uses a house brand.’” Amanda Vaill, “A Story of Reckless Passion and Race,” *Chicago Trib.*, 25 May 2003, Books §, at 3.
- “The law *adjures* [read *requires*] residents to report strays to animal control or shelters within 24 hours or possibly face a misdemeanor charge.” “Shelters Can Only Do So Much,” *Battle Creek Inquirer* (Mich.), 8 Jan. 2008, at A1.

Fortunately, most writers use *adjure* correctly—e.g.: “Some talked of open schism last week, when she *adjured* him to ‘rule’ if he wanted to save home rule, and he replied that she had failed him in his moment of need.” Michael Powell & Hamil R. Harris, “Norton’s Exercise in Flexibility,” *Wash. Post*, 7 Aug. 1997, at J1.

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1. *adjure* misused for *abhor*: Stage 1
2. *adjure* misused for *require*: Stage 1

abjurer; *abjuror. The -*er* spelling, which has always predominated, is preferred. See -ER (A).

Current ratio in print (*abjurer* vs. **abjuror*): 15:1

-ABLE. A. Choice of -able or -ible. Many adjectives have competing forms ending in -*able* and -*ible*. Some of these have undergone DIFFERENTIATION in meaning; the less commonly used forms in some pairs are merely NEEDLESS VARIANTS of the predominant forms. The lists that follow contain the most troublesome words of this class.

Unlike -*ible*, -*able* is a living suffix in the sense of being fully productive: you can add it to virtually

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX (For the full key, see front matter pp. xxv–xxvi.)

Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

any verb to make an adjective, even if there currently isn't one. The words ending in *-ible*, by contrast, make up a finite list: they are all in the dictionary, and new ones aren't being created. Following are only some of the hundreds of adjectives preferably spelled *-able*:

actionable	contestable	lovable
addable	contractable	mixable
admittable	conversable	movable
advisable	convictable	noticeable
affectable	correctable	offendable
allegeable	definable	patentable
analyzable	detectable	persuadable
annexable	diagnosable	preventable
arrestable	discussable	processable
ascendable	endorsable	protectable
assertable	enforceable	ratable
assessable	evadable	redressable
averageable	excisable	referable
avertable	excludable	retractable
bailable	expandable	revisable
blamable	extendable	rinsable
changeable	extractable	salable
chargeable	ignitable	suspendable
circumscribable	immovable	tractable
commensurable	improvable	transferable
committable	inferable	transfusable
condensable	inventable	transmittable
connectable	investable	willable
	lapsable	

Although *-ible* is now unproductive as a suffix, it is retained especially in words derived from Latin terms ending in *-ibilis*. These retain that suffix:

accessible	dismissible	perceptible
adducible	divisible	perfectible
admissible	edible	permissible
audible	educible	plausible
collapsible	eligible	possible
collectible	erodible	producible
combustible	exhaustible	reducible
compactible	expressible	remissible
compatible	extensible	reprehensible
comprehensible	fallible	repressible
compressible	feasible	*rescissible
concussible	flexible	resistible
conductive	forcible	responsible
contemptible	fusible	reversible
controvertible	gullible	revertible
convertible	horrible	risible
corrodible	impressible	seducible
corruptible	includible	sensible
credible	incorrigible	submersible
deducible	indelible	(or sub-
deductible	intelligible	mergible)
defeasible	invincible	suggestible
defectible	irascible	suppressible
defensible	irrepressible	susceptible
descendible	irresistible	terrible
destructible	legible	transmissible
diffusible	negligible	uncollectible
digestible	omissible	vendible
discernible	oppressible	visible
	ostensible	

While *-able* doesn't change the final consonant of what it's attached to (*hit* → *hittable*, *credit* → *creditable*), *-ible* often triggers consonantal changes originating in Latin phonology (*divide* → *divisible*, *omit* → *omissible*, *permit* → *permissible*, *transmit* → *transmissible*).

A few adjectives with the variant suffixes have different meanings. Thus *impassable* means "closed, incapable of being traversed"; its twin, *impassible*, means "unable to feel pain" or, less distinctively, "impassive, emotionless." *Passable* and *passible* have correspondingly positive meanings. (These pairs are formed from different Latin roots, L. *passus* "having suffered" and L. *passare* "to step.") Similarly, *impartible* means "not subject to partition" and *impartable* "capable of being imparted." *Conversable* means "oral," while **conversible* is a NEEDLESS VARIANT of *convertible*. *Forcible* means either "done by means of force" <forcible entry> or "characterized by force" <forcible behavior>; the seldom-encountered *forceable* means "capable of being overcome by force"; it would be the better term to describe a door that is "capable of being forced open." (See **forcible**.) For the similar difference between *educible* and *educable*, see **educable** (A).

Other variant adjectives, though, are merely duplicative. Typical examples are *extendable*, *extendible*, and *extensible*. The first of these is now prevalent in AmE (though labeled obsolete in OED2). *Extensible* was, through the mid-20th century, the most common form. But today, outside technical writing, it trails *extendable* by a substantial margin, while **extendible* continues to appear infrequently. See DIFFERENTIATION & SPELLING (D).

B. Attaching *-able* to Nouns. This passive suffix is usually attached to verbs, as in *avoidable*, *forgettable*, and *reproachable*. But sometimes it's attached to nouns, as in *marriageable*, *objectionable*, and *salable*. These do not mean "able to be married," "able to be objected," and so on. Although **marryable* and **objectable* would have been the more logical forms, time, idiom, and usage have made these and several other forms both ineradicable and unobjectionable.

C. Attaching *-able* to Intransitive Verbs. A few words formerly upset purists: *dependable* (*depend-on-able*), *indispensable* (*in-dispense-with-able*), *laughable* (*laugh-at-able*), *leviable* (*levy-on-able*, in one of its senses), *listenable* (*listen-to-able*), *reliable* (*rely-on-able*), and *unaccountable* (*un-account-for-able*). They're indispensable to the modern writer—not at all laughable. See **reliable**.

D. Converting *-ate* Verbs into *-able* Adjectives. When *-able* is added to a transitive polysyllabic verb ending in the suffix *-ate*, that suffix is normally dropped. Hence *accumulable*, *calculable*, *regulable*, etc. But watch for the occasional change here: *regulatable* has outstripped *regulable* in print since about 1980, especially in BrE. (See **regulable** & -ATABLE.) Exceptions to the general rule occur with two-syllable words, such as *rebatable* and *debatable*.

E. Dropping or Retaining the Medial *e*. The decision whether to drop or retain a medial *e* arises in

words such as *irreconcilable*, *microwavable*, *movable*, *resumable*, and *salable*. Although writers formerly put an *e* before *-able*, both AmE and BrE generally drop such a medial *e*, except in words with a soft *c* (*traceable*) or a soft *g* (*chargeable*). See SPELLING (D).

F. Remarkable Compounds. The formation of adjectives with *-able* is just one indication of how our word-stock is open to creative enlargement. English has a remarkable ability to accept unlikely forms such as *come-at-able* (1687) <the come-at-able facts of the case>, *get-at-able* (1799) <the source of the leak may not be get-at-able>, and *unputdownable* (1947) <an unputdownable book>. These have been fashioned by adding *-able* to PHRASAL VERBS. In both AmE and BrE, the first two tend to be hyphenated (*come-at-able*, etc.). Yet *unputdownable* is universally solid, perhaps because none of the internal syllable breaks except *-able* begins with a vowel.

able to be [+ past participle]. This construction is rare—and rightly so. A sentence such as *That speech is able to be delivered by anyone* can always be advantageously revised: *Anyone can [or could] deliver that speech*. See PASSIVE VOICE.

ablution (= washing), which appears most commonly in the plural form, should generally be reserved for washing or rinsing as part of a religious rite. E.g.: “Before every prayer, Muslims perform *ablution*—washing their hands and face, rinsing their mouth and nose, and even washing their feet.” Dr. Shagufta Hasan, “Age-Old Rituals Source of Health for Body, Mind,” *Oregonian* (Portland), 18 July 2002, at 13. And the word may belong in exotic contexts—e.g.: “Early bathers were already making their morning *ablutions* [in the Ganges River].” Glenn Leichman, “Season’s Greetings—on the Ganges,” *Seattle Times*, 22 Dec. 1996, at K1. But the word is pretentious, or else facetious, when the reference is to the ordinary act of washing one’s face and hands—e.g.: “By morning the water was usually frozen, calling for a trip to the kitchen to thaw it out before morning *ablutions*.” Oliver Andresen, “Old-Time Winters Have a Biting Story to Tell,” *Daily Herald* (Chicago), 24 Jan. 2003, at 3.

In BrE, *ablutions* can be army slang for a washroom.

aboard. Usually restricted to ships or planes in BrE, this word is applied broadly in AmE to any public conveyance—e.g.: “The bus had about 35 pupils *aboard* from Varina and Mehfood Elementary schools.” Mark Bowes, “It Was Close to a ‘Catastrophe,’” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 18 Jan. 1997, at B1. More recently, it has come to be applied to organizations as well—e.g.: “Longtime in-house attorney Thomas ‘Tad’ Decker was brought *aboard* in 2000 to become managing partner.” Jeff Blumenthal, “New Year Brings Firm Leadership,” *Legal Intelligence*, 2 Jan. 2002, at 1.

abode. For the past tense of *abide*, see **abide**.

abode, place of. This phrase is a pretentious way of referring to someone’s *home* or *house*. It’s also redundant, since an *abode* is a place. See REDUNDANCY.

abolition; *abolishment. The latter is a NEEDLESS VARIANT. Cf. **admonition** (B).

Current ratio in print (*abolition* vs. **abolishment*): 21:1

abominable (= [1] detestable, odious; or [2] extremely disagreeable) derives from the Latin adjective *abominabilis* “ill-omened” (seriously unlucky). During the Middle Ages, however, English writers mistook the ETYMOLOGY and believed—through a kind of “learned” folk etymology—that the word was **abhom-inable*, from *ab homine* (meaning “away from man; repulsive to mankind”). This usage persisted through the 1600s, and Shakespeare himself had a character in *The Tempest* (1611) refer to Caliban as “an abhominable Monster” (2.2.158). Indeed, Shakespeare’s first folio includes 18 instances of the misspelled version. In what is probably Shakespeare’s first play (*Love’s Labour’s Lost* [1588]), the laughable pedant Holofernes derides the “rackers of ortography” (5.1.24–25) who were starting to use the etymologically correct spelling of *abominable*. In fact, the rackers of orthography had done their work 300 years before the name Holofernes was ever dreamt up, when they started inserting the *h* into the Latin word: “The connection with *homo*, ‘man,’ is a very old error and antedates the adoption of the word into English.” James Bradstreet Greenough & George Lyman Kittredge, *Words and Their Ways in English Speech* 342 (1901). Today usage has settled on the spelling *abominable* (things were set aright in the 1700s). The modern meaning of the word, however, derives from the erroneous etymology of medieval times.

aborigine, as a singular noun, is a BACK-FORMATION from the plural *aborigines* (L. *ab origine* “from the beginning”). Traditionally, the word *aboriginal* was considered the proper singular, but today *aborigine* is STANDARD ENGLISH as a singular noun. It predominates in print by a 2:1 ratio. (*Aboriginal* is still current in adjectival uses.)

The spelling *Aborigine*, with the initial capital, is traditional when referring to the indigenous peoples of Australia. See RACE-RELATED TERMS (L).

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aborigine as a singular: Stage 5

abort = (1) (of a pregnancy, project, or mission) to end prematurely; (2) (of a fetus) to cause to be expelled before full development; or (3) (of a pregnant female) to cause to have an abortion. Senses 1 and 2 are more usual than sense 3, which, as an example of HYPALLAGE, strikes many readers as odd. E.g.: “In a

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Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

case of 1949, the trial judge sentenced a husband who had tried to *abort* his wife and killed her to five years' penal servitude." Glanville Williams, *The Sanctity of Life and the Criminal Law* 155 (1957).

abortifacient. See **contraceptive**.

abortive; aborted. *Abortive* means "unsuccessful because cut short." It takes on the figurative sense of *aborted* (= cut short), as *an abortive attempt*, i.e., one cut short. (Note that *-ive*, an active suffix, here has a passive sense.) E.g.: "In the 50 years after the 1916 rising, an *abortive* anti-British rebellion, nationalists incorporated the tragedy into their vision of 'a heroic struggle against seven centuries of British oppression.'" "Famine, Politics Intertwined," *USA Today*, 15 Jan. 1997, at D2. *Abortive* is archaic in reference to abortions of fetuses, except in the sense "causing an abortion."

about. A. And approximately. When possible, use *about* instead of *approximately*, a FORMAL WORD often intended to lend a scientific air to prose. But it sounds pseudoscientific and pretentious when it appears in ordinary contexts.

B. And around. When there is a choice between *about* and *around*—as in *beat around* (or *about*) *the bush*, *strewn around* (or *about*) *the garden*, or *all around* (or *about*) *the city*—the word *around* greatly predominates in AmE. *About* is more commonly found in BrE.

C. About the head. Theodore M. Bernstein called this phrase "police-blotter lingo" (*The Careful Writer* at 5) when used in the sense "on" <the victim was pounded several times about the head>. The phrase might still be common in police blotters, but in print it appears only occasionally—e.g.: "A Malaysian companion, 15, suffered a punctured eardrum from the interrogator's blows *about the head*," William Safire, "Singapore Adds Insult to Injury," *Star Trib.* (Minneapolis), 24 May 1994, at A15.

D. At about. This phrase is sometimes criticized as a REDUNDANCY, the argument being that *about* can often do the work by itself. It often can, but in many contexts, especially those involving expressions of time, the phrase *at about* is common, idiomatic, and unimpeachable <we'll arrive at about 9:00 tonight>.

above. A. Meaning "more than" or "longer than." Although *over* has come to be accepted in these senses, *above* should be restricted to informal contexts. It's a CASUALISM when used before a plural noun—e.g.:

- "Now, the RBI has allowed only the incentive of one percent for one-year deposits, 1.5 percent for two-year deposits and two percent for deposits *above two years* [read *of two years or more* or *of longer than two years*]." "NBFCs Allowed to Reimburse Part of Broker's Expenses," *Econ. Times*, 3 Oct. 1996, at 8. Cf. **over** (A).
- "A recent survey of New York City restaurants showed that only 12 percent had seating capacity *above* [read *for more than*] 200 people." Terry Fiedler, "Restaurants," *Star Trib.* (Minneapolis), 22 Apr. 1998, at D1.

- "The data shows the vast majority of users in Wales were men with *above* nine out of ten users being men in nearly every town." "Almost 3,000 Joined Adultery Website," *S. Wales Evening Post*, 24 Aug. 2015, at 2. (A possible revision: *The data show that over 90% of Welsh users were men.*)

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above meaning "more than": Stage 4

B. For above-mentioned. *Above* is an acceptable ellipsis for *above-mentioned*, and it is much less inelegant <the above statements are his last recorded ones>. It was long thought that *above* could not properly act as an adjective. But the word was used in this way throughout the 20th century, even by the best writers. Yet it's much older. *OED2* records it from the 1500s. Essentially, *above* stands attributively, through ellipsis, for *above-said*, *above-written*, *above-mentioned*, or some other phrase.

Some critics have suggested that *above* in this sense should refer only to something mentioned previously on the same page, but this restriction seems unduly narrow. Still, it's often better to make the reference exact by giving a page or paragraph number, rather than the vague reference made possible by *above*. Idiom will not, however, allow *above* to modify all nouns: **above vehicle* is unidiomatic for *vehicle mentioned above*. (If you must say *mentioned*, put *above* after that word.) Better yet, simply write *the vehicle* if readers will know from the context which one you're talking about.

Less common than the adjectival *above* is the noun use <the above is entirely accurate>. Pooley's assessment still stands: "Any writer may feel free at any time to use 'the *above* statement,' and with only slightly less assurance, 'the *above* will prove.' In either case, he has the authority of scholars and standard literature." Robert C. Pooley, *Teaching English Usage* 130 (1946).

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
1. *above* as an adjective
(as in *the above data*): Stage 5
2. *above* as a noun
(as in *all of the above*): Stage 5

abridgable. So spelled—preferably not **abridgeable*. See SPELLING (D).

Current ratio in print (*abridgable* vs. **abridgeable*): 1.3:1

abridgment; abridgement. The first spelling predominates in AmE, the second in BrE. But until the 1930s, *abridgment* was the standard spelling in all varieties of English. Cf. **acknowledgment & judgment** (A). See SPELLING (D).

Current ratio in print (*abridgment* vs. *abridgement* in AmE): 1.4:1

Current ratio in print (*abridgement* vs. *abridgment* in BrE): 3:1

abrogate. So formed—not **abrogatable*. See -ABLE (D) & -ATABLE.

abrogate; arrogate. These words are sometimes confounded. *Abrogate*, the more common term, means "to

abolish (a law or custom) by authoritative or formal action; annul; repeal.” E.g.:

- “In 1964, heavy fighting began on Cyprus after Cypriot Archbishop Makarios *abrogated* a 1960 treaty signed by Cyprus, Greece and Turkey.” “Almanac,” *Chicago Trib.*, 4 Apr. 1997, Metro §, at 10.
- “Last month, the NYSE raised its fees to as much as \$350 a branch from \$250, but the SEC can *abrogate* the increase within 60 days, a period that ends in mid-March.” Cheryl Winokur Munk, “SEC Is Reviewing Higher NYSE Fees on Branch Offices,” *Wall Street J.*, 10 Feb. 2003, at C9.

Arrogate, meanwhile, means “to usurp”—e.g.:

- “And if [the justices of the U.S. Supreme Court] rule in favor of the McDougall panel, they have even more dramatically *arrogated* to themselves the role of super legislators.” “Resolving Judicial Malpractice,” *Detroit News*, 9 Apr. 1997, at A6.
- “Two dangerous impulses of government are at work: First is the desire to *arrogate* more power to the executive branch by refusing to acknowledge Congress’ oversight role.” Editorial, “Government’s Path of Secrecy,” *St. Petersburg Times* (Fla.), 16 Jan. 2003, at A12.

The most common mistake between these words is to misuse *abrogate* for *arrogate*—e.g.:

- “Some of them have *abrogated* [read *arrogated*] to themselves the functions of faith, making claims that history will probably refuse them.” Anthony Winterbourne, *Speaking to Our Condition: Moral Frameworks in Wagner’s Ring of the Nibelung* 31 (2000).
- “Elizabeth *abrogated* [read *arrogated*] to herself the coenesthetic realm of sensuous play, investing the state (and her own person) with the subject’s primary affect, undercutting the Catholic cult of images.” David Brett, *Rethinking Decoration: Pleasure and Ideology in the Visual Arts* 162 (2005). (Note the highfalutin tone, in which it’s especially galling to see a word directly misapplied.)

See **arrogate**.

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abrogate misused for *arrogate*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*arrogate to itself* vs. **abrogate to itself*): 36:1

abscess (= a small mass of pus collected in a hollow where tissue has decayed) is sometimes misspelled **absess* or **abcess*—e.g.: “Though the jokes start out low (tooth *absesses* [read *abscesses*], fake body casts), the sassin’ siblings eventually show their true, warm, brotherly colors.” “Fall Previews,” *Newsday* (N.Y.), 8 Sept. 1996, at 4.

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abscess misspelled **abscess* or **abcess*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*abscess* vs. **abcess* vs. **absess*): 4,238:9:1

abscond, vb., is both transitive (“to conceal [something]”) and intransitive (“to depart secretly or

suddenly; to hide oneself”). The intransitive uses are more common—e.g.:

- “When two girls *absconded* with a car from their parents’ driveway for a joyride, they blamed Jenny’s stolen car escapade for giving them the idea.” Julia Prodis, “Life After Suicide Pact No Joy Ride,” *Tulsa Trib. & Tulsa World*, 30 Nov. 1997, at A5.
- “In 1970, a thief *absconded* with 66 chickens from the Eighth and Cliff location.” Eric Renshaw, “Before Chick-Fil-A, KFC Opened First Sioux Falls Location with Fanfare,” *Argus Leader* (Sioux Falls), 10 Oct. 2021, at C1.

While *abscond* is often followed by *with* to indicate a taking, and especially a theft, the word itself has no such meaning. Yet it is sometimes misused alone as a transitive with that sense—e.g.:

- “Do you . . . *abscond* [read *steal*] juicy thoughts, clever notions, oddball trivia and take it home to hang on the fridge or set under a paperweight?” Ina Hughes, “Even God Lost on Information Superhighway,” *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, 27 Aug. 2001, at A2.
- “The biggest problem is the Chinese government is going to *abscond* [read *take*] about 97 percent of his paycheck, meaning the Houston Rockets are going to buy Beijing a couple of ICBMs in the next three years.” David Whitley, “Projecting Boys into Men Won’t Be Easy Tonight,” *Orlando Sentinel*, 26 June 2002, at D1.
- “Hackers have *absconded* [read *stolen*] some very personal files.” Sally Mahan, “Is There Paper in Our Future?,” *Kokomo Trib.* (Ind.), 30 Oct. 2020, Opinion §.

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abscond misused for *steal*: Stage 1

abscondence (= the act of secretly leaving, esp. to hide something), dating in English from the 1600s, is the standard noun corresponding to the verb *abscond*. E.g.: “DYRS [the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services] can point to reduced rates of recidivism, rearrest, and *abscondence*, as well as declines in deadly violence.” Colbert I. King, “Free to Kill Again in D.C.,” *Wash. Post*, 23 Mar. 2013, at A11. **Absconsion* and **abscondment* are NEEDLESS VARIANTS. **Abscondance* is an infrequent misspelling.

Current ratio in print (*abscondence* vs. **absconsion* vs. **abscondment* vs. **abscondance*): 34:23:20:1

absent, used as a preposition meaning “in the absence of” or “without,” is commonly used in LEGALESE but is simply unnecessary JARGON. The better choices are *without* and *in the absence of*—e.g.:

- “*Absent* [read *Unless our city has*] these [qualities], the good citizens will choose to live *outside this environment* [read *elsewhere*?]” Robert J. Fauls Jr., “Let’s Have Some Police Guidance,” *Atlanta J.-Const.*, 21 Mar. 1996, at A17. (As it stood in the original sentence, *absent* was a kind of DGLER, appearing to modify *citizens* instead of the city mentioned in the preceding sentence [not supplied here].)

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Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

- “That is, *absent* [read *without* or *in the absence of*] justification, anything goes” Jonathan Rauch, “For Better or Worse?,” *New Republic*, 6 May 1996, at 18.
- “*Absent* a military solution, then, and *absent* a political one, the refugee crisis is unlikely to subside.” “Cameron Responds to the Refugee Crisis with Spin,” *Independent*, 8 Sept. 2015, at 2. (A possible revision: *Without a military or political solution, the refugee crisis is unlikely to subside*.)

The OED dates this usage from 1888. By the early 20th century, it was commonplace in legal writing—e.g.: “The *Dean* decision is a reminder . . . that fraud in the transferor is enough under 67e, *absent* good faith in and a fair consideration on the part of the transferee.” *Richardson v. Germania Bank of New York*, 263 F. 320, 324 (2d Cir. 1919). For an interesting discussion of how this American legalism has spread into nonlegal contexts, see two pieces by Alan R. Slotkin, “Absent ‘Without’: Adjective, Participle, or Preposition,” 60 *Am. Speech* 222 (1985); “Prepositional *Absent*: An Afterword,” 64 *Am. Speech* 167 (1989).

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absent for *without*: Stage 3

absentee, used as an adverb, is a useful linguistic development. E.g.: “Almost 9 percent of the voters voted *absentee*.” Barbara Schlichtman, “Phillips, Chaney Apparently,” *Sunday Advocate* (Baton Rouge), 6 Apr. 1997, at B4. It would be cumbersome in that context to have to write *voted as absentees*. Although some dictionaries record *absentee* only as a noun, the adverbial usage is increasingly widespread. The word may also function as an adjective <absentee ballot> <absentee landlord>.

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absentee as an adverb: Stage 5

absentia, in. See **in absentia**.

absinthe; ***absinth**. The word derives from *artemisa absinthium*, the botanical name for common wormwood, a bitter herb used in folk medicines and drink flavors. In reference to the herb, **absinth* was the predominant spelling in the 1700s. In the mid-1800s, a Swiss physician created a green medicinal alcoholic spirit with wormwood, green anise, and sweet fennel; he called it *absinthe*, and that has been the predominant spelling ever since, for both the herb and the drink. Both spellings occasionally appear in studies of the effects of wormwood mixed with alcohol, none of which have concluded that absinthe makes the heart grow fonder.

Current ratio in print (*absinthe* vs. **absinth*): 36:1

absolute. See **ADJECTIVES (B)**.

ABSOLUTE CONSTRUCTIONS are sentence elements that stand apart from the usual syntactic relationships of words, as with *he being late* in *He being late, we decided to delay the program*. Increasingly rare in modern prose, absolute constructions have traditionally

allowed writers to vary their syntax while concisely subordinating incidental matter. The absolute phrase doesn’t bear an ordinary grammatical relation to the rest of the sentence, since the noun or noun phrase does not perform any function (subject, object, apposition, etc.) that ordinarily attaches a noun grammatically to other words in the sentence. Yet the whole absolute phrase adverbially modifies some verb. For example: *The court adjourning, we left the courtroom*. This is equivalent to *When the court adjourned, we left the courtroom*.

This construction often has an antique literary flavor, and it gets creakier year by year. Few modern writers would use the nominative absolute in the way Herman Melville did: “A drumhead court was summarily convened, *he electing the individuals composing it . . .*” *Billy Budd* 63 (1891; repr. [Signet ed.] 1979). In that sentence, the pronoun *he* is modified by the participle *electing*; *the individuals composing it* is the object of *electing*. The whole italicized phrase is a nominative absolute, since it has no grammatical function in the statement *A drumhead court was summarily convened*.

One does encounter more modern examples—e.g.:

- “Mike would not soon forget the frantic drive back to civilization, *the four-wheel-drive Land Rover slipping and sliding up the muddy track into the hills*.” Michael Crichton, *Jurassic Park* 16 (1990).
- “When I visit the cemetery, I wonder what kind of life Mrs. Peter Anderson had, *she having been pregnant and/or caring for children throughout much of her existence*.” L.T. Anderson, “Lessons on Home Schooling,” *Charleston Gaz. & Daily Mail* (W. Va.), 15 June 1999, at C1.
- “He speaks in a voice that seems to emerge from a shadow. Perhaps it does, *he having been conceived in the dark days of Europe following the last world war, and he having been nurtured under the repression of the ensuing Iron Curtain*.” James Keeran, “Andrei Codrescu: Man of Letters . . . and Radio,” *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Ill.), 28 Jan. 2000, at D1.

Yet as nominative absolutes become rarer, fewer and fewer writers understand how to handle them. Three problems arise.

First, many writers insert *with* at the beginning of the phrase (making it something like an “objective absolute”) <with Jacobson being absent, the party was a bore>. E.g.:

- “In other local elections in France, the results were mixed, *with [delete with] the right doing a bit better than expected*.” “Balkan Dangers,” *Economist*, 24 Mar. 2001, at 33.
- “*With her [read She]* having mastered all these skills, it was time . . . to get her to face up to the biggest challenge yet.” Amy Edelstein, “It’s Jessie the Messy,” *Newsday* (N.Y.), 5 Mar. 2002, at B17. (A better revision: *Once she mastered all these skills, it was time . . .*)
- “He excelled in most subjects, *with physical education being the clear exception*.” Denise Hruby, “The ‘Plagiarism Hunter’ Terrorizing Authors,” *N.Y. Times*, 11 Sept. 2021, at A4.
- “The experts say such cases are not frequent but speak to the wider lack of predictability in American medical billing, *with patients often having little idea what their care*

will cost.” Sara Kliff, “Painful Reminder of Baby’s Death: \$257,000 Bill,” *N.Y. Times*, 21 Sept. 2021, at A1, A18.

Second, some writers mistakenly make an absolute construction—what should be a “nominative” absolute—possessive. E.g.: “*His* [read *He*] having won an astonishing thirteen major golf events, including the 1930 Grand Slam (the British Open, the British Amateur, the U.S. Amateur, and the U.S. Open Championship), it’s hard to fathom that Bobby Jones was little more than a part-time player.” William Kissel, “Great Golf Shops,” *Celebrated Living*, Mar. 2002, at 39–40.

Third, writers sometimes incorrectly separate the noun and the participle with a comma—e.g.: “President Clinton, having forcefully called attention to the atrocities in Bosnia, the U.N. decided to act.” (Read: *President Clinton having forcefully called attention to the atrocities in Bosnia, the U.N. decided to act.*) The Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is typically printed with a superfluous comma after the noun phrase (*A well-regulated militia*) that begins the nominative absolute. For an amusing story involving this comma—and Justice Antonin Scalia’s opinion interpreting the Second Amendment—see Bryan A. Garner, *Nino and Me* 98–100 (2018). See also PUNCTUATION (D).

All in all, it’s hard to quibble with the Fowler brothers’ judgment that, in most contexts, the absolute construction is “not much to be recommended.” H.W. Fowler & F.G. Fowler, *The King’s English* 124 (3d ed. 1931). Or with Lester King’s later assessment: “The absolute construction is not wrong, merely stilted and clumsy. In my own editing, I always delete it and make some appropriate substitution.” Lester S. King, *Why Not Say It Clearly* 33 (1978). It being useful in definitions, however, lexicographers have often made use of it.

For a modern remnant of an absolute construction, see **provided that**.

absolutely, in the sense “really” or “very much,” is often a meaningless intensifier. *You should be absolutely ashamed of yourself* is the sort of thing a parent might say when scolding a child, but in polished writing the word *absolutely* adds absolutely nothing of value to that type of sentence.

absolve. Depending on the context, *absolve* takes either *of* or *from*. One is *absolved of* financial liability and *absolved from* wrongdoing—assuming that the authorities treat one kindly. *Absolve from* is the more frequent phrasing.

absorb; adsorb; *sorb. *Absorb* is the common term meaning “to soak up”; *adsorb* is a scientific term that refers to the collecting of condensed gas (or similar substance) on a surface. (Just try writing that without so much sibilance: it will stump even the most sedulous scribe.) **Sorb* is a relatively obscure term that

embraces (in fact, has absorbed) both of its prefixed siblings.

absorbent (= capable of soaking up liquids), a Latin LOANWORD dating in English from the early 1700s, has always been predominantly so spelled. **Absorbant* is a variant.

abstracter. See **abstractor**.

ABSTRACTITIS. “How vile a thing . . . is the abstract noun! It wraps a man’s thoughts round like cotton wool.” Arthur Quiller-Couch, *On the Art of Writing* 109 (2d ed. 1943). *Abstractitis* is Ernest Gowers’s term for writing that is so abstract and obtuse (hence abstruse) that the writer does not even know what he or she is trying to say (*FMEU2* at 5). Far be it from the reader, then, to find coherent meaning in such writing.

An example from political science illustrates the affliction:

Rosenau defines linkage as “any recurrent sequence of behavior that originates in one system and is reacted to in another.” While there remains little doubt that such linkages exist, it has nevertheless been convenient for scholars of comparative and international politics to disregard or, to use the more contemporary term, to hold constant, factors in the other sphere. Thus, for the student of international politics, the nation functions in the international environment on the basis of the givens of that system, unrestrained by any domestic considerations. Differences existing between national systems are not considered crucial to an understanding of a nation’s international behavior. This approach to international politics has been referred to as the “realist” school, and among its leading proponents is Hans J. Morgenthau. From the other perspective, the student of comparative politics feels that the international system is virtually irrelevant for purposes of explaining domestic political events. In both cases, this has led to a rather stultified approach. Situations arose in which the actions of a nation appeared to be “irrational,” in that they could not be explained adequately on the basis of the conceptual tools of either of the two approaches.

It is to these types of problems that the emerging linkage politics approach addresses itself. The purpose of studying linkage politics is to gain a more complete understanding of events by taking account of a large number of variables that have a bearing on the ultimate behavior of a nation, whether this behavior be manifested in the domestic or international spheres. The adoption of such an approach does not imply that all previously unexplained phenomena now come within our grasp. It merely adds a new dimension to those phenomena already accounted for.

Jonathan Wilkenfeld, Introduction, *Conflict Behavior & Linkage Politics* 1 (1973).

This passage doesn’t give any examples of the principles it discusses. It combines PASSIVE VOICE with JARGON. And it has many of the archetypal abstract words known as ZOMBIE NOUNS—that is, words ending with these suffixes: *-tion*, *-sion*, *-ment*, *-ity*, *-ence*,

-ance. Writers are well advised to take these longish nouns and turn them back into verbs or participles if possible—that is, write *adopting*, not *the adoption of*, and so on.

The Fowler brothers quote the following sentence—laden with zombie nouns—in *The King's English* (1906): “One of the most important reforms mentioned in the rescript is the unification of the organization of judicial institutions and the guarantee for all the tribunals of the independence necessary for securing to all classes of the community equality before the law” [42 words]. Arthur Quiller-Couch's revision eliminates the ZOMBIE NOUNS: “One of the most important reforms is that of the courts, which need to be independent within a uniform structure. In this way only can people be assured that all are equal before the law” [35 words]. *On the Art of Writing* 109–10 (2d ed. 1943). But the following revision is even better: “Among the most important reforms is to unify the courts so as to guarantee their independence and the equality of all people before the law” [25 words].

George Orwell mocked the trend toward abstractitis by “translating” a passage from Ecclesiastes into “modern” English. The original, in Elizabethan English, read: “I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.” Orwell parodied it this way: “Objective consideration of contemporary phenomena compels the conclusion that success or failure in competitive activities exhibits no tendency to be commensurate with innate capacity, but that a considerable element of the unpredictable must invariably be taken into account.”

By some accounts, abstractitis leads to far worse things. “If concepts are not clear,” wrote Confucius, “words do not fit.” And consequences follow: “If words do not fit, the day's work cannot be accomplished, morals and art do not flourish. If morals and art do not flourish, punishments are not just. If punishments are not just, the people do not know where to put hand or foot.” Confucius, *Analects* 13.3. When we descend into abstractitis, more than just our language is harmed.

Fred Rodell, a Yale law professor, realist, and semanticist who often criticized lawyers' language, issued his own inimitable warning against abstractitis: “Dealing in words is a dangerous business, and it cannot be too often stressed that what The Law deals in is words. Dealing in long, vague, fuzzy-meaning words is even more dangerous business, and most of the words The Law deals in are long and vague and fuzzy. Making a habit of applying long, vague, fuzzy, general words to specific things and facts is perhaps the most dangerous of all, and The Law does that, too.” Fred Rodell, *Woe Unto You, Lawyers!* 39 (1939; repr. 1980). See OBSCURITY.

One sympathizes with a keen judge who wrestled with the Internal Revenue Code: “The words . . . dance

before my eyes in a meaningless procession: cross-reference to cross-reference, exception upon exception—couched in abstract terms that offer no handle to seize hold of—leave in my mind only a confused sense of some vitally important, but successfully concealed, purport, which it is my duty to extract, but which is within my power, if at all, only after the most inordinate expenditure of time.” Learned Hand, “Thomas Walter Swan,” 57 *Yale L.J.* 167, 169 (1947).

Perhaps the best antidote to this malady—which in some degree afflicts most sophisticated writers—is an active empathy for one's readers. Rigorous thought about concrete meaning, together with careful revision, can eliminate abstractitis.

ABSTRACT NOUNS, PLURALS OF. See PLURALS (1).

abstractor; *abstracter. OED2 noted that *-or* is “analogically the more regular form.” Since the early 1960s, it has been the more usual as well. See *-ER* (A).

Current ratio in print (*abstractor* vs. **abstracter*): 3:1

abstruse; obtuse. *Abstruse* = (of a subject matter, piece of writing, etc.) difficult to understand; recondite. *Obtuse* = (1) not pointed or sharp; or (2) dull in intellect, not perceptive.

abstruseness; abstrusity. For the quality or condition of being difficult to understand, *abstruseness* has always been the usual term. *Abstrusity* should be reserved to denote not the quality but the thing itself that is hard to understand <string theory and other abstrusities>.

abysm(al); abyss(al). Both nouns signify “a bottomless gulf.” *Abyss* is in more widespread use and is therefore to be preferred. Though *abysm* is obsolescent, *abysmal* thrives (indeed, in some phrases it has become trite) as a figurative term for “immeasurably bad” <abysmal ignorance> <abysmal weather>. *Abysal* is a technical oceanographic term <the geology of the abyssal deep>.

academic, adj.; *academical. For the meanings (1) “of, relating to, or involving education, esp. at higher levels,” (2) “concerned with book study as opposed to practical experience,” (3) “highly accomplished at book study,” and (4) “so theoretical, speculative, or abstract as to have little if any practical significance,” the standard adjective has been *academic* since about 1870. From 1750 to 1870, the usual adjective was **academical*, especially in senses 1–3. That form became an ARCHAISM first in AmE (by 1880) and then in BrE (by 1890). The pejorative sense 4 did not arise until the 1880s. See *-IC/-ICAL*.

Current ratio in print (*academic studies* vs. **academical studies*): 151:1

academically. So spelled—not **academically*. E.g.: “The goal of the strategic plan is to keep the university competitive economically and *academically* [read *academically*] through the year 2005, the release states.” Frank

Mastin Jr., “84 Employees Lose Their Jobs at Tuskegee University,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, 2 Oct. 1997, at C2. See -IC/-ICAL.

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academically misspelled **academicly*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*academically* vs. **academicly*): 12,287:1

academicism; *academism. Dating back to the early 1600s, *academicism* /ak-ə-**dem**-i-siz-əm/ (originally often capitalized) at first denoted one or more tenets of Plato’s Academy, especially as regarding epistemological skepticism. Since the 1880s, the term has predominantly denoted the state or quality of involving either (1) college or university education or (2) abstract theorizing. **Academism*, a variant dating from the 1700s, has never been common, even among the erudite.

Current ratio in print (*academicism* vs. **academism* [case-insensitive search]): 4:1

academy; academia; academe. An *academy* /ə-**kad**-ə-mee/ is (1) a school, esp. one to prepare for further education, usu. at the postsecondary level <college-prep academy>; (2) a school that provides specialized career training <police academy>; or (3) an organization of distinguished scholars, artists, scientists, or the like who aim to develop, promote, and maintain standards in a field <the National Academy of Sciences>. The term derives from *academia* /ak-ə-**dee**-mee-ə/, which commonly refers to the academic community at large, or the society of university scholars <authorities from the worlds of business and academia>. Capitalized, it refers to Plato’s school of philosophy in ancient Greece, which morphed into *Academe*. *Academe* /**ak**-ə-deem/ is the oldest English-language term for a school or an academic community; today it’s used almost exclusively to refer to an institution of higher education <halls of academe>, often in the SET PHRASE *groves of academe*.

a cappella (= [of singing] not accompanied by instrumental music) is sometimes misspelled **a capella*—e.g.: “Sarah Waltman and Lenore Lopez, both of Blue Island, were in the audience at Cafe Luna on the night when Yaseen made her *a capella* [read *a cappella*] debut.” Annemarie Mannion, “Instant Stardom,” *Chicago Trib.*, 17 Aug. 1997, Tempo Southwest §, at 1. Occasionally, it is misspelled with an apostrophe—e.g.: “A performance by the acclaimed Rust College *A’Cappella* [read *A Cappella*] Choir.” “SLU,” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), 1 Feb. 2001, Mandeville §, at 7. It’s also wrong to spell the term as one word.

Though borrowed from the Italian for “chapel,” the phrase has been thoroughly anglicized and should not be set in italic.

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a cappella misspelled **a capella*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*a cappella* vs. **a capella*): 5:1

accede; exceed. *Accede*, v.i., = (1) “to agree or consent”; (2) “to come into office or a position of stature”; or (3) “to enter a treaty or accord.” It takes the preposition *to*. *Exceed*, v.t., means (1) “to surpass”; or (2) “to go beyond the proper limits.” The first syllable of *accede* should be pronounced with a short /a/ sound to differentiate its sound from *exceed*.

Occasionally *exceed* is misused for *accede* (sense 1)—e.g.: “Eighty potential jurors filed into the Santa Clara County superior court chambers of Judge Charles Hastings after he, *exceeding* [read *acceding*] to the wishes of Davis’ attorneys, instructed Joel and B.J. Klaas, the slain girl’s grandparents, to remove the memorial buttons from their lapels.” Michael Dougan, “Judge Orders Removal of Polly Klaas Buttons,” *S.F. Examiner*, 14 Feb. 1996, at A2.

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exceed misused for *accede*: Stage 1

accelerate (= to speed up), in STANDARD ENGLISH, is pronounced /ak-**sel**-ə-rayt/—not /ə-**sel**-ə-rayt/.

accent, v.t.; accentuate. These synonyms have a good latent distinction. H.W. Fowler noted that *accent* is more common in literal senses, *accentuate* in figurative senses (*FMEU* 1 at 7). Hence one properly *accents* the second syllable of the word *insurance*, but *accentuates* the advantages of buying life insurance from a reputable company. *Accentuate the positive* has been a SET PHRASE since the 1940s.

ACCENT MARKS. See DIACRITICAL MARKS.

accentuate. See **accent**.

accept, in STANDARD ENGLISH, is pronounced /ak-**sept**/—not /ə-**sept**/, /ə-**sep**/, or /ak-**sep**/. See **except**, vb.

acceptance; *acceptancy; acceptance; *acceptation. *Acceptance* expresses the active sense of the verb (to accept), and *acceptation* expresses the passive sense (to be accepted). The other two are NEEDLESS VARIANTS.

Acceptance, the broadest term, means (1) “the act of accepting” <Williams’s acceptance of the award was delayed>, or (2) “the state of being accepted” <widespread acceptance of the theory>. Although the FORMAL WORD *acceptation* can bear sense 2 of *acceptance* (in which it’s really a NEEDLESS VARIANT), today its primary meaning is “a generally accepted meaning (of a word, phrase, or document)”—e.g.: “The Constitution’s ‘commerce clause,’ . . . in its original *acceptation*, had merely granted Congress limited authority over the regulation of interstate commerce.” Wilfred M. McClay, “A More Perfect Union? Toward a New Federalism,” *Commentary*, Sept. 1995, at 28.

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Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

acceptor; ***accepter**. The first is standard in all varieties of English. See -ER (A).

Current ratio in print (*acceptor*
vs. **accepter*): 43:1

access, n. **A. Confused with excess.** *Access*, n., most commonly means (1) “the right or ability to enter or get near,” (2) “a means of approaching,” or (3) “retrievability of electronic information by computer.” *Excess* = (1) an overabundance, superfluity; or (2) the amount by which one thing exceeds another. Sometimes *access* is misused for *excess*—e.g.:

- “[I]t has been noted that samples of this kind may be difficult to amplify with primers that give a product in *access* [read *excess*] of 400–500 bp.” Finbarr E. Cotter, *Molecular Diagnosis of Cancer* 117 (1996).
- “The event starts at 6:15 p.m., and carries a record purse in *access* [read *excess*] of \$2.5 million.” Will Parrish, “May Month of Speed and Money,” *Herald* (Rock Hill, S.C.), 27 Apr. 1999, at B3.
- “The following days yield[ed] a heatwave which saw weather in *access* [read *excess*] of 20C during the first lockdown.” Dominic Kureen, “Temperatures Plummet,” *Isle of Wight County Press*, 7 Apr. 2021, Weather & Climate §.

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access misused for *excess*: Stage 1

B. Meaning “outburst.” This sense, though somewhat archaic, is unimpeachable. Still, the usage is likely to give most readers pause—e.g.:

- “In an *access* [better: *outburst*] of unbridled enthusiasm, he hangs by his heels from a Calder sculpture while crooning ‘La donna e mobile.’” Donal Henahan, “A New Wave Director Goes to Work on ‘Rigoletto,’” *N.Y. Times*, 8 Sept. 1985, § 2, at 31.
- “His 90-year-old wife, Ellen, battered by years of strokes, knocked him down in a sudden *access* [better: *fit*] of wild rage, and wandered out of the house in her nightgown.” Pearl K. Bell, “The Other Side,” *New Republic*, 18 Dec. 1989, at 39.
- “Chris Denning . . . was fired, Peel recalls, for remarking on air that he awoke that morning in such an *access* of [better: delete *an access* off] high spirits that he felt like a 15 year-old boy, but that sadly there were no 15 year-old boys available at four o’clock in the morning.” D.J. Taylor, “The God of Adolescence,” *Sunday Independent*, 29 Aug. 2004, at 6.

access, vb. **A. Generally.** As a verb, *access* was popularized by its use in COMPUTERESE. Like a number of other nouns turned into verbs (e.g., *contact*), it now seems increasingly well ensconced in the language. As Ernest Gowers said about *contact*, it is an ancient and valuable right of English-speaking peoples to turn their nouns into verbs when they are so minded (FMEU2 at 108). *Gain access* to or some other such equivalent is admittedly ungainly alongside *access*. See FUNCTIONAL SHIFT (D).

But outside computing and electronic contexts, using *access* as a verb still jars sensitive ears. Avoid the verb if there’s a ready substitute—e.g.:

- “The residents had bypassed utility meters and were *accessing* [read *getting*] free gas, water, electricity and cable television, deputies said.” “Man, Mom Arrested in

Child Endangering Case,” *Press-Enterprise* (Riverside, Cal.), 4 Dec. 1996, at B3.

- “There are now over 130 miles of converted trails in New York, all easily *accessed* [read *accessible*] by, what else, train.” “Best of the Net,” *Village Voice*, 21 Jan. 1997, at 25.
- “*Accessing* [read *Using*] phones without a passcode is difficult.” Jim Rossman, “You Need a Secure Digital Emergency Kit,” *Wichita Eagle* (Kan.), 12 Feb. 2020, at 4DW.

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access as a verb outside computing contexts
<accessing the books>: Stage 4

B. For assess. Sometimes *access* is misused for *assess* (= to evaluate)—e.g.:

- “They track hundreds of trends, looking for connections and *accessing* [read *assessing*] the implications of major socio-economic and political events.” Siona Carpenter, “Turning Point,” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), 14 Jan. 1997, at F1.
- “Like all the affected businesses, we are still *accessing* [read *assessing*] what impact this will have on the business.” Michael D. Pitman & Rick McCrabb, “Miami Valley Gaming Changes Daily Hours Due to Statewide Curfew,” *Dayton Daily News*, 19 Nov. 2020, News §.

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access misused for *assess*: Stage 1

***accessary**. See **accessory** (A).

accessible. So spelled—not **accessible*. The word is pronounced /ak-ses-i-bəl/. See -ABLE (A).

Current ratio in print (*accessible*
vs. **accessible*): 4,031:1

accession = (1) a coming into possession of an office or right; (2) acquisition of (something connected to one’s property) by growth, labor, or the like; or (3) a secondary or subordinate thing that is connected with another thing. The word is pronounced /ak-se-shən/, not /ə-se-shən/.

accessory, n. **A. And** ***accessary**, n. Since the mid-1800s, *accessory* has predominated in AmE and BrE in meaning both “abettor” and “a thing of lesser importance.” Although H.W. Fowler championed a distinction between *accessory* and **accessary* (the first applying primarily to things, the second to people [FMEU1 at 8]), **accessary* is now merely a NEEDLESS VARIANT to be avoided.

Current ratio in print (*accessories*
vs. **accessaries*): 301:1

Current ratio in print (*accessory before the fact*
vs. **accessary before the fact*): 16:1

Current ratio in print (*accessory after the fact*
vs. **accessary after the fact*): 44:1

Current ratio in print (*accessory to*
vs. **accessary to*): 24:1

B. Pronunciation. *Accessory* should be pronounced with the first *c* as a hard /k/ sound: /ak-ses-ə-ree/. A common mispronunciation is /ə-ses-ə-ree/. Cf. **accession**, **flaccid** & **succinct**.

accident. Although we say *on purpose*, we've traditionally said *by accident*. **On accident* became a VOGUE TERM in youthful speech beginning about 2000—doubtless by analogy to *on purpose*. The phrasing remains nonstandard for the time being.

accidentally. So spelled. **Accidentally* is a solecism—e.g.: “Big mistake—I *accidentally* [read *accidentally*] turned on a full blast of icy water, [and] Debbie let out a bone-chilling yowl.” Bob Puhala, “Kohler’s ‘Club’ Cool Spot for Winter Whirl,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, 15 Jan. 1995, Travel §, at 4. Big mistake indeed. The confusion arises partly from the popular pronunciation and partly from seemingly analogous terms such as *evidently* and *inadvertently*. But the word is an adverb based on *accidental*, after all. Cf. **incidentally**.

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accidentally misspelled **accidentally*: Stage 1
 Current ratio in print (*accidentally*
 vs. **accidentally*): 14:1

accident working. See **working**.

acclimate; acclimatize. Although the *-ize* form is preferred by H.W. Fowler and other BrE authorities, and indeed by BrE speakers, the shorter form—which actually predates the longer—is now standard AmE. Some American dictionaries put the primary definition under *acclimatize* /ə-**kli**-mə-tīz/, but few Americans use this term; the main term is *acclimate* /**ak**-lə-mayt/. The corresponding nouns are *acclimation* /**ak**-lə-may-shən/ in AmE and *acclimatization* /ə-**kli**-mə-ti-**zay**-shən/ in BrE. See *-IZE*.

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acclimate, vb., and *acclimation*, n.: Stage 5
 Current ratio in print (*acclimate*
 vs. *acclimatize* in World Englishes): 2.3:1
 Current ratio in print (*acclimated*
 vs. *acclimatized* in AmE): 3:1
 Current ratio in print (*acclimatized*
 vs. *acclimated* in BrE): 1.1:1

accommodable. So formed—not **accommodatable*, as it is sometimes erroneously written. E.g.: “Ford [cites as the company’s values] persistence, understanding business etiquette, and a demand in the industry to know the client’s needs and deliver them in a concise, *accommodatable* [read *accommodable*] manner.” Andrea Akins, “New Agency’s Successes on the Fast Track So Far,” *Nashville Bus. J.*, 21 June 1993, at 35. But *accommodating* is far more common and familiar to readers. See *-ABLE (D) & -ATABLE*.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
 **accommodatable* for *accommodable*: Stage 1
 Current ratio in print (*accommodable*
 vs. **accommodatable*): 1.04:1

accommodate is one of the most frequently misspelled words in the language. See **SPELLING (A)**.

accompanied. Since the 1800s, idiom has required *accompanied by*, not **accompanied with*—e.g.:

- “The book, inspired by his No. 1 song ‘Butterfly Kisses,’ features pictures of various fathers and daughters *accompanied with* [read *accompanied by*] short essays on growing up together.” “Features, Books, Religious Bestsellers,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 24 Dec. 1997, at 15.
- “Acupuncture has gained acceptance because more and more people seek therapy without the undesirable side effects often *accompanied with* [read *accompanying*] pharmaceutical drug treatments.” “The Acupuncture Clinic,” *Times Record News* (Wichita Falls, Tex.), 1 Sept. 2015, at A6.

Accompanied by, like *together with* and *along with*, does not make a singular subject into a plural one because it merely introduces a prepositional phrase. See **SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT (E)**.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
 **accompanied with* for *accompanied by*: Stage 2
 Current ratio in print (*accompanied by*
 vs. **accompanied with*): 20:1

accompaniment is so spelled—not **accompanymment*. E.g.:

- “Ending his set with a shimmering 12-string guitar *accompanymment* [read *accompaniment*] to his first hit ‘Part of the Plan,’ Fogelberg returned for a one-song encore.” Jack Leaver, “Fogelberg Revisits Good Years, to Hearers’ Delight,” *Grand Rapids Press*, 22 June 1997, at B7.
- “The 35-member Ridgeville Band of Evanston was on hand to provide a musical *accompanymment* [read *accompaniment*] for the day.” Tom Krawczyk, “Ice Cream Social Draws a Crowd to History Center,” *Evanston Now* (Ill.), 22 July 2017, News §.

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accompaniment misspelled
 **accompanymment*: Stage 1
 Current ratio in print (*accompaniment*
 vs. **accompanymment*): 997:1

accompanist /ə-**kəm**-pə-nist/ is the standard form, not **accompanyist*—e.g.: “Paxton was in wonderful form, and *accompanyist* [read *accompanist*] Eric Weissberg added just enough instrumental firepower on guitar and dobro to lend the songs some spark.” Greg Haymes, “Tom Paxton Shows He’s Still at Top of His Songwriting Game,” *Times Union* (Albany), 28 Mar. 1994, at C4.

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accompanist misspelled **accompanyist*: Stage 1
 Current ratio in print (*accompanist*
 vs. **accompanyist*): 44:1

accord, n.; accordance. To be *in accord* is to be in agreement. E.g.: “The church agrees that Mary’s message at those places is *in accord* with Catholic teaching and devotion.” Steve Gushee, “For Many, Seeing Is Believing,” *Palm Beach Post*, 17 Jan. 1997, at F1.

To be *in accordance* is to be in conformity or compliance. Though sometimes cumbersome, the phrase is

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Stage 1: Rejected. Stage 2: Widely shunned. Stage 3: Widespread but . . . Stage 4: Ubiquitous but . . . Stage 5: Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

indisputably useful—e.g.: “Supporters of comprehensive sex ed are preparing to bring the battle to the states, compiling information detailing the least harmful way to design programs *in accordance* with the newly laid out federal standards,” Clare Saliba, “Just Say No,” *Village Voice*, 21 Jan. 1997, at 2. Certainly that wording is preferable to the legalistic phrase *pursuant to*. (See **pursuant to**.) But much depends on the precise phrase. For example, *in accordance with your request* is always stilted. Instead, write *as you requested* or some similar phrase.

Accord is sometimes wrongly used for *accordance*—e.g.:

- “Justice Marcos Aburto of the Supreme Court felt compelled to say that a decision would be made *in accord* [read *in accordance*] with the law and would not be influenced by outside pressure.” Calvin Sims, “Case of ’76 U.S. Assassination Reaching Final Stage in Chile,” *N.Y. Times*, 15 May 1995, at A9.
- “An outside auditor [will] determine whether . . . the payments were disbursed *in accord with* [read *in accordance with* or *according to*] state law and local policy.” “Hasty No-Bid Decision on Snap Just One Troubling Aspect of Deal,” *Sun-Sentinel* (Ft. Lauderdale), 21 Dec. 1996, at A14.
- “The transaction went down *in accord* [read *in accordance*] with general plans outlined seven and a half months ago, except shareholders made a little more money than expected.” Jeff Sturgeon, “Purchase of Valley Bank Complete,” *Roanoke Times*, 2 July 2015, at A6.

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in accord with misused for
in accordance with: Stage 1

accord, v.t. **A. And afford**. These words share the meaning “to furnish or grant” <accorded (or afforded) all the respect due him>. Yet some DIFFERENTIATION is possible: *accord* has the nuance of granting something because it is suitable or proper <some 269 charter schools in 25 states have been accorded the freedom to do what is in their students’ best interests>. *Afford*, in contrast, is the more general term meaning “to furnish (something) out of kindness, goodwill, or competitive strategy” <the airline afforded free upgrades to its most frequent fliers>.

B. Construing with Prepositions. When used intransitively, *accord* takes the preposition *in*, *to*, or *with*, depending on the context <we accord in our opinions> <we accord to plaintiff his due> <this accords with the prevailing view>.

accordance. See **accord**, n.

according. **A. According to**. This phrase means (1) “depending on”; (2) “as explained or reported by (a person)”; or (3) “in accordance with.” In sense 2, the phrase is a weak form of attribution <according to Barbara Tuchman, . . . >; a text sprinkled with *according to*’s gives the appearance of having little originality. Use the phrase sparingly.

B. According as. This phrase, which has an antique literary flavor, means “in a manner corresponding to the way in which; just as.” The phrase appears throughout the King James Version of the Bible—e.g.:

“And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man *according as* his work shall be.” Revelation 22:12. In modern prose it carries a hint of **ARCHAISM**—e.g.: “Indiana schoolchildren will or will not learn to read and to write *according as* [read *depending on whether*] they are taught by their teachers and prodded by their parents.” William F. Buckley, “What Has Caused the Gender Gap at the Polls?,” *Las Vegas Rev.-J.*, 5 Nov. 1996, at B11.

C. As a Dangler. For *according* as an acceptable dangling modifier, see **DANGLERS** (E).

accordingly = (1) consequently, therefore <they were caught red-handed; accordingly, they were summarily fired>; or (2) in a corresponding or appropriate manner <they’ll be dealt with accordingly>. The word is a heavy connector often replaceable to good advantage by *so*. See **ADVERBS** (F). Cf. **consequently**.

accost (= to approach and usu. to speak to in an abrupt or challenging manner) has historically had no connotations of physical contact. Hence it would traditionally be considered inappropriate in cases of physical violence—e.g.: “The victim, who was *accosted* [read *assaulted*] as he left the bar with three women, suffered scrapes and bruises.” “Police Beat,” *Capital* (Annapolis), 24 Aug. 1996, at A11. *Accost* simply isn’t a strong enough word for that context. Cf. **altercation** & **assault**.

Also, *accost* isn’t the right verb for what a threatening animal does, no matter how noisy it becomes—e.g.: “Two months later, a trio of yelping pit bull puppies *accosted* [read *attacked*] Waters in the basement of an apartment building.” William Gaines & Laurie Cohen, “Workers’ Comp Puts City on Injured List,” *Chicago Trib.*, 12 Jan. 1997, at C1.

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accost used in reference to a physical assault:
Stage 3

accounting. See **bookkeeping & generally accepted accounting principles**.

accoutrement (= a supplementary item of dress or equipment; accessory) is predominantly so spelled in AmE and BrE alike, and always has been. Though given preference in several American dictionaries, *accouterment* has never prevailed in print. Likewise, the prevailing verb is *accoutre* in both AmE (by a slight margin) and BrE (by a 5:1 ratio).

Having been fully naturalized in the 1500s, the word is pronounced /ə-**koo**-tər-mənt/ in AmE. The British are more likely to use the Frenchified pronunciation /ə-koo-trə-**mahn**/.

Current ratio in print (*accoutrement* vs. *accouterment* in World Englishes): 7:1

Current ratio in print (*accoutrement* vs. *accouterment* in AmE): 5:1

Current ratio in print (*accoutred* vs. *accoutered* in World Englishes): 4:1

Current ratio in print (*accoutred* vs. *accoutered* in AmE): 1.4:1

accredit (= [1] to establish as credible; or [2] to issue credentials to) is the verb corresponding to the noun *accreditation*. But **accreditate*, a BACK-FORMATION from *accreditation*, has arisen as a NEEDLESS VARIANT—e.g.: “The laboratory, on the second floor of the sheriff’s Wheaton office, is one of 77 *accredited* [read *accredited*] facilities in the country.” Art Barnum, “Du Page Crime Lab Wins National Accreditation,” *Chicago Trib.*, 13 Mar. 1991, at D9. Although the longer form finds citations in the *OED* from the mid-1600s, these provide no basis for using it in contemporary prose. Although the *OED* once labeled the word obsolete, it doesn’t anymore.

Occasionally *accredit* is loosely used in place of *credit* or *attribute*—e.g.:

- “It would be reasonable to assume that at least some of Rusedski’s astonishing recent improvement could be *accredited* [read *credited*] to his coach, Tony Pickard.” Rosie DiManno, “More than Meets the Eye in Rusedski Affair,” *Toronto Star*, 29 June 1998, at D6.
- “He was also an inventor and had several patents *accredited* [read *credited*] to his name.” “John Steven” (obit.), *South Bend Trib.*, 2 July 1999, at D5.
- “She *accredits* [read *attributes*] to her father, the retired Rev Hugh Dermot McMorran, one of the tenets of her policing ‘beliefs.’” Alan Murray, “Force for the Future,” *Belfast Telegraph*, 17 Dec. 2011, at 22.
- “If you have any doubts about a charge *accredited* [read *credited*] to your account, call the company immediately.” Larry Martin, “Debt and Charge Cards,” *Leavenworth Times* (Kan.), 27 Aug. 2013, at A4.

Citing examples from 1878 to 2004, the *OED* calls this use originally an Americanism. But it doesn’t represent the best in American usage.

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1. **accreditate* for *accredit*: Stage 1
Current ratio in print (*accredit* vs. **accreditate*): 619:1
2. *accredit* in the sense “credit” or “attribute”: Stage 2

accreditation (= official approval given to someone or something by reason of having reached an acceptable standard) is pronounced /ə-kred-i-tay-shən/—not /ə-kred-i-day-shən/. The mispronunciation has led to the occasional misspelling **accredidation*, common especially after 1960.

Current ratio in print (*accreditation* vs. **accredidation*): 20,890:1

accrual; **accruelement*. The latter is a NEEDLESS VARIANT.

Current ratio in print (*accrual* vs. **accruelement*): 204:1

accumulable. So formed—not **accumulatable*. See -ABLE (D) & -ATABLE.

Current ratio in print (*accumulable* vs. **accumulatable*): 15:1

accumulate; *accumulative*; **cumulate*; *cumulative*. *Accumulate* is far more common than **cumulate* as the transitive verb meaning “to pile up, collect.” **Cumulate* should be avoided as a NEEDLESS VARIANT. *Accumulate* has the additional intransitive sense “to increase.”

The adjectives demonstrate more palpable DIFFERENTIATION. In one sense they are synonymous: “increasing by successive addition,” in which meaning *cumulative* is the usual and therefore the preferred term. *Accumulative* = acquisitive; inclined to amass. It would be salutary to strengthen this distinction.

accurate (= correct in every detail) is pronounced /ak-yə-rit/—not /ak-ə-rit/ or /ak-rit/. It’s a matter of precision. Get it right.

accursed (= [1] being or seeming to be under a curse; or [2] extremely annoying), a word derived in the 1200s from Anglo-Saxon elements, has always been predominantly so spelled. **Accurst* is a variant.

Current ratio in print (*accursed* vs. **accurst*): 51:1

accusatory; *accusatorial*; *accusative*. *Accusatory* (= accusing; of the nature of an accusation) is occasionally confused with *accusatorial* (= of, relating to, or involving a criminal-law system in which the prosecution and the defense put forward their claims before an independent decision-maker). E.g.: “Before she could utter an *accusatorial* [read *accusatory*] word, Stella said, ‘I know what you’re thinking and the answer is no.’” Max Haines, “A Bitter Pill to Swallow,” *Toronto Sun*, 31 Dec. 1995, at 42. To contrast *accusatorial* with *inquisitorial*, see **inquisitive**.

Accusative should be restricted to its grammatical sense, i.e., the case that marks the direct object of a verb or the object of certain prepositions. But it’s sometimes used incorrectly in place of *accusatory*—e.g.: “Adopting an *accusative* [read *accusatory*] tabloid-TV style, the ad shows the Washington apartment of a lobbying firm where Kerry stayed intermittently over a period of months in 1989.” Frank Phillips, “Weld Calls a Truce on Attack Ads,” *Boston Globe*, 26 Oct. 1996, at A1.

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accusative misused for *accusatory*: Stage 1

accuse; *charge*. One is *accused of*, then *charged with*, a crime. Perhaps under the influence of *charged with*, the verb *accused* is sometimes unidiomatically paired with *with*—e.g.: “Ross and Vince Fera, Local 57’s recording secretary and a member of its executive board, were *accused with* [read *accused of*] violating the union’s code of ethics.” Jim McKay, “Monitor Accuses Union of Crime Ties,” *Pitt. Post-Gaz.*, 25 Nov. 1997, at F1. (The headline writer got it right.) See **charge** (A).

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**accused with* for *accused of*: Stage 1

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX (For the full key, see front matter pp. xxv–xxvi.)

Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

Current ratio in print (*accused* of
vs. **accused with*): 136:1

***accusee** is a NEEDLESS VARIANT of the noun *accused* (= a person accused of wrongdoing). E.g.:

- “Later, [Judge Oren R. Lewis] turned to James S. Augus, the senior Justice Department trial lawyer, and accused him of ‘shifting the burden of proof’ from the accuser [the Justice Department] to the *accusee* [read *accused*].” Robert Meyers, “Courtroom Becomes Classroom,” *Wash. Post*, 17 Mar. 1979, at C3.
- “This would, of course, suggest Nicholas Daniloff, U.S. News’ Moscow correspondent, as the actual *accusee* [read *accused*].” Rance Crain, “Spying Inside the Inside Story,” *Advertising Age*, 29 Sept. 1986, at 46.
- “Blocking is often inspired; especially inspired is an indiscretion with the *accusee* [read *accused*] defending himself with back to desk, side by side with the accuser.” Geoff Gehman, “Theatre Outlet Pulls All the Stops in Magical ‘Moonshine,’” *Morning Call* (Allentown, Pa.), 10 Mar. 2001, at A60.

Occasionally **accusee* is erroneously used for *accuser*—e.g.: “If these accusations are grounded on truth, then surely the *accusee* [read *accuser*] has a lot less to fear than the accused.” Letter of Brody Stewart, “Readers’ Views,” *St. Cloud Times* (Minn.), 12 Mar. 2002, at B5. See -EE.

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1. **accusee* for the attributive noun *accused*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*the accused*
vs. **the accusee*): 11,112:1

2. **accusee* misused for *accuser*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*the accuser*
vs. **the accusee*): 762:1

accuser; *accusor. The *-er* form is standard. It has always predominated. See -ER (A).

Current ratio in print (*accuser*
vs. **accusor*): 865:1

accustomed. Formerly, the idiom was *accustomed to do*, *accustomed to think*, etc. But in the mid-20th century the phrasing shifted to *accustomed to doing*, *accustomed to thinking*. Today the older usage sounds strange to many ears, but some traditionalists stick to it, especially in BrE—e.g.: “Both stem from the age profile of a profession in which nearly two thirds of teachers are over 40 and *accustomed to think* of early retirement as the norm.” John Carvel, “Questioning Professionalism of Teachers Can Be Harmful,” *Guardian*, 14 Jan. 1997, at 2.

Current ratio in print (*accustomed to being*
vs. *accustomed to be*): 2.5:1

acerbic, in AmE, is sometimes said to be inferior to *acerb* because it is a syllable longer. But *acerb* is so rare and *acerbic* so common—much more common than its sibling in print today—that the criticism is misplaced. *Acerbic* is also standard in BrE, in which *acerb* is now virtually unknown. (Predominant in the 1700s, *acerb* rapidly declined in the 1800s.) The corresponding noun is *acerbity*.

Current ratio in print (*acerbic* vs. *acerb*): 54:1

achieve, v.t., implies successful effort at something more than merely surviving to a given age. Thus **achieving manhood* and **achieving womanhood* are ludicrous phrases, as if prizes had been set. But these wordings and others like them are fairly common EUPHEMISMS—e.g.: “Others remember the excitement of seeing the world and the satisfaction of *achieving* [read *reaching*] adulthood in such difficult times.” Robert Preer, “Fifty Years Later, Pain of War Still Throbs,” *Boston Globe*, 29 May 1994, South Weekly §, at 1.

Achilles’ heel; Achilles tendon. Since the early 1800s, *Achilles’ heel* has predominantly sported the possessive apostrophe—though the competition between the with-apostrophe and without-apostrophe forms has been keen since before 1900. Never make it *Achilles’s heel*.

Meanwhile, though, the attributive form *Achilles tendon* (no apostrophe) has been vastly predominant since the mid-1800s. Hence many (perhaps most) dictionaries justifiably list the terms as they are recorded at the head of this entry.

Current ratio in print (*Achilles’ heel*
vs. *Achilles heel*): 1.1:1

Current ratio in print (*Achilles tendon*
vs. *Achilles’ tendon*): 50:1

acid, adj.; **acidic; acidulous; *acidulent.** The term *acid* often functions as either a noun <amino acids> or an adjective <acid wash>. This entry deals with the adjectival uses. Such phrases as *acid solution* and *acid taste* appear more commonly than *acidic solution* and *acidic taste*. The adjectival *acid* can function in both physical senses <acid gas> and figurative ones <acid wit>. Sometimes, as with *acid test*, the physical sense gradually takes on a figurative meaning <during the 1970s, John Simon’s theatrical review was considered the acid test of Broadway criticism>.

Acidic is most commonly literal and physical, and in a few phrases it predominates over *acid*—one prominent example being *acidic conditions* as opposed to *acid conditions*. Dating from the late 1800s, *acidic* describes what is acid-containing or acid-producing <acidic proteins> <acidic foods>.

Acidulous, a Latin LOANWORD dating in English from the mid-1700s, originally shared those senses but is now often narrowed to describe a harshness or sarcasm in people’s temperaments or remarks <acidulous critics> <acidulous invective>. The variant **acidulent* has never seriously rivaled *acidulous* in frequency of use.

But *acidulous* itself has been in a slow decline since the early 1800s, and its genuine utility may be open to question—unless the purpose is to signal magniloquence or ultraformality. Then again, some of the statistics may be skewed by context: an *acid critic* might be someone who opposes the use of LSD, while an *acidulous critic* may be just a caustic commentator.

Current ratio in print (*acid phosphates*
vs. *acidic phosphates*): 8:1

Current ratio in print (*acid critics*
vs. *acidulous critics*): 9:1

Current ratio in print (*acid remarks* vs. *acidic remarks* vs. *acidulous remarks*): 10:2.5:1

Current ratio in print (*acidic protein* vs. *acid protein*): 2.2:1

acknowledge. The phrasing *This acknowledges your letter of January 15* is pure COMMERCIALESE. Instead, try for a more relaxed tone: *Thank you for your January 15 letter.*

acknowledgment; acknowledgement. As with *judgment* and *abridgment*, the spelling without the medial *e* has always predominated in AmE. But in BrE the medial *e* is standard in general usage (but only since about 1970). Even so, British legal writers tend to make it *acknowledgment*. See SPELLING (D).

acoustic (= [1] of, relating to, or involving sound and how people hear sounds; or [2] of, relating to, or involving a musical instrument, esp. a stringed one, that can be played without electronic amplification), a Latin LOANWORD dating in English from the early 1600s, has always predominated over **acoustical*, a NEEDLESS VARIANT. See -IC/-ICAL.

Current ratio in print (*acoustic* vs. **acoustical*): 15:1

***acquaintanceship**, a NEEDLESS VARIANT of *acquaintance*, adds nothing to the language except another syllable, which we scarcely need. E.g.:

- “Mexicans, having been distanced from Jews for centuries, brought a mixed background to the new *acquaintanceship* [read *acquaintance*].” Adina Cimet, *Ashkenazi Jews in Mexico* 3 (1997).
- “We eat, pay bills, maneuver through the social pleasures of an average set of *acquaintanceships* [read *acquaintances*], and try to maintain the cock of whatever hat we have chosen to wear through the terrain of an entire life.” Edward Hoagland, “Sex and the River Styx,” *Harper’s Mag.*, Jan. 2003, at 49, 59.

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**acquaintanceship* for *acquaintance*: Stage 2

Current ratio in print (*their acquaintance* vs. **their acquaintanceship*): 34:1

acquiesce /ak-wee-es/ takes either *in* or *to*—e.g.:

- “We have a strong desire to work with President-elect Bush when our ideas and values intersect, but also a duty not to *acquiesce in* actions with which we fundamentally disagree.” Evan Bayh, “The Wrong Man,” *Wash. Post*, 19 Jan. 2001, at A37.
- “The question for Bush is whether to simply *acquiesce to* the demands of these industries that provided millions for Republican campaigns.” “Bush Pick Signals Big Changes for Western Lands,” *USA Today*, 16 Jan. 2001, at A14.

Acquiesce in is the more traditional choice; it has always been more common than *acquiesce to*.

A slight DIFFERENTIATION seems to be emerging. Though one may *acquiesce in* events (especially

unfortunate ones), one *acquiesces to* proposals and requests, or the people who propose them—e.g.:

- “Our president . . . will go down in history as having *acquiesced in* our nation’s moral decline.” Richard Rorty, “I Don’t Need Money from Social Security,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 9 Mar. 2000, at A21.
- “Burleigh paints a depressing picture of a society that *acquiesced in* the establishment of a brutal dictatorship and facilitated the unfolding of its increasingly murderous policies.” Omer Bartov, “Hitler’s Willing Believers,” *New Republic*, 20 Nov. 2000, at 29.
- “Bush might *acquiesce to* smaller changes made by Congress in annual spending bills.” Jim Barnett & Jeff Mapes, “Bush May Bring Rural America into White House,” *Oregonian* (Portland), 14 Dec. 2000, at A15.
- “This hasn’t stopped Gov. Greg Abbott from gleefully *acquiescing to* Donald Trump’s absurd request to hold a forensic audit of the 2020 election.” Larry Beck, “Cultural Parameter Shifts Fuel White Conservatives’ Panic,” *Denton Record-Chron.* (Tex.), 10 Oct. 2021, at A10.

acquiescence. See **permission**.

acquirement; acquisition. Here’s the difference: traditionally, *acquirement* denotes the power or faculty of acquiring, *acquisition* the thing acquired. But both may also mean “the act of acquiring”; *acquisition* is more usual in that sense.

acquirer. So spelled—not **acquiror*.

Current ratio in print (*acquirer* vs. **acquiror*): 26:1

acquisition. See **acquirement**.

acquit. This verb once took either *of* or *from*, but since the early 1700s the preferred and vastly predominant preposition has been *of*. E.g.: “In the end James was induced to withdraw a letter resigning from the Society, after the Council had passed a resolution *acquitting him from* [read *of*] any unfairness.” K.M. Elisabeth Murray, *Caught in the Web of Words* 286 (1977).

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**acquit from* for *acquit of*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*acquitted of* vs. **acquitted from*): 25:1

acquittal; acquittance; *acquittment. *Acquittal* is the usual term, meaning (1) “the legal certification, usu. by a jury’s verdict, that an accused person is not guilty of a charge”; or (2) “the discharge of a debt or other liability.” **Acquittment*, a NEEDLESS VARIANT, is obsolete. *Acquittance* is obsolete in all senses except “a written release showing that a debtor has been discharged of an obligation.” It would be advantageous to allow *acquittance* this commercial meaning and leave *acquittal* to the criminal law.

acre measures area, not length. To put it differently, *acre* is a square, not a linear, measure. But the word

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX (For the full key, see front matter pp. xxv–xxvi.)

Stage 1: Rejected. Stage 2: Widely shunned. Stage 3: Widespread but . . . Stage 4: Ubiquitous but . . . Stage 5: Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

is sometimes misused as if it referred to length—e.g.: “There were about 1,500 people buried at the Hardin Cemetery, once a pristine landscape *nine acres across* [read *of nine acres*] and now a muddy lake where minnows and snapping turtles live alongside broken headstones and toppled graves.” Isabel Wilkerson, “Cruel Flood: It Tore at Graves, and at Hearts,” *N.Y. Times*, 26 Aug. 1993, at A1.

ACRONYMS. See ABBREVIATIONS.

across, in STANDARD ENGLISH, is pronounced /ə-**kraws**/—not /ə-**krawst**/.

act; action. Distinguishing between these overlapping words is no mean task. Generally, *act* is the more concrete word <an act of Congress>, *action* the more abstract <spring into action>. *Act* typically denotes the thing done, *action* the doing of it. *Act* is unitary, while *action* suggests a process—the many discrete events that make up a bit of behavior.

activate. See **actuate**.

ACTIVE VOICE. See PASSIVE VOICE.

actual fact, in. See **fact (c)**.

actuality. See **in actuality**.

actuate; activate. The Evanses wrote that *actuate* means “to move (mechanical things) to action” and that *activate* means “to make active” (DCAU at 10). The distinction is a fine one not generally recognized by dictionaries.

The less common term, *actuate*, often appears as a fancy substitute for *motivate* in a variety of contexts. (Likewise, *actuation* sometimes displaces *motivation*.) This usage should generally be avoided on stylistic grounds, but it is not strictly incorrect—e.g.: “What we are talking about is harassment by a small but determined group of photographers *actuated* [better: *motivated*] by greed to the point that they have lost all sense of humanity.” David Mellor, “The People’s Princess,” *Daily Mail* (U.K.), 1 Sept. 1997, at 12.

acumen (= shrewd perception) is traditionally pronounced /ə-**kyoo**-men/, but in recent decades the variant /**ak**-yə-men/ has become dominant. Charles Harrington Elster, who writes on pronunciation matters, thinks “that AK-yuh-men was the innovation of younger (not well-enough-) educated speakers who think nothing of shifting an accent here and there in an effort to sound more urbane or savvy. . . . Like most pseudosophisticated innovations, AK-yuh-men soon became a follow-the-leader pronunciation with two quite different ways of saying *acumen* countenanced by the dictionaries where one, in my opinion, would do just fine.” *BBBM* at 8.

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acumen accented on first syllable: Stage 3

ACUTE ACCENT. See DIACRITICAL MARKS.

AD. See **BC**.

ad, short for *advertisement*, is acceptable in all but the most formal contexts.

adage (= a familiar saying that had its origins in antiquity) often appears in the venially redundant phrase *old adage*. The phrase is especially inappropriate when the saying is a recent one—e.g.: “Like all mathematical models, the *old adage* [read *adage*] of garbage in—garbage out holds true.” Lauren Rudd, “Intel’s Dismal Numbers Mask Earnings Growth,” *Orlando Sentinel*, 25 July 2001, at B6. The phrase *the old adage* has been about as frequent in print as *the adage* since the 1770s.

adamant (= unrelenting, unyielding) has traditionally had no corresponding noun at the ready. *Adamantness* is awkward at best. There was a gap in the language, and to fill it some writers began using *adamancy* (attested from 1898) or *adamance* (attested from 1925), on the analogy of *brilliant*–*brilliance*, *preponderant*–*preponderance*, *protuberant*–*protuberance*, and the like. Although the NEOLOGISM was comprehensible, conservative writers might insist (adamantly, one supposes) on *adamant stand*, *adamant attitude*, *insistence*, or some other word in sentences such as these:

- “Some San Fernando Valley business groups are wary of LABA because it won’t relent in its *adamance* [read *adamant stand*?] toward neighborhood councils.” Jim Newton, “A Look Ahead,” *L.A. Times*, 14 Sept. 1998, at B1.
- “Clarke was taken aback by Neilson’s *adamance on being* [read *determination to be*?] back for the second round.” “Flyers Coach Anxious to Return from Cancer,” *Ariz. Republic*, 11 Apr. 2000, at C8.
- “A Christmas Carol . . . plunks Scrooge in a soup of indecision, with unchanging portions of remorse and *adamancy* [read *obstinacy*?].” L. Janiak, “Theater Capsule,” *S.F. Chron.*, 20 Dec. 2017, at Q45.
- “More than anything, we appreciate Minister Schulz’s *adamancy* [read *insistence* or *adamant insistence*?] that any future childcare system in Alberta . . . must include private childcare operators.” Anita Turner, “Childcare Operators Deserve Seat at the Table,” *Edmonton J.*, 10 June 2021, at A8.

The two forms vied for predominance through the 1930s and 1940s. By the 1950s, *adamancy* had emerged the clear winner. It seems here to stay.

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adamancy: Stage 5

Current ratio in print (*adamancy*
vs. *adamance*): 3:1

adapt; adopt. These two are occasionally confounded. To *adapt* something is to modify it for one’s own purposes; to *adopt* something is to accept it wholesale and use it.

adaptation; *adaptation; *adaptative; adaptive. The longer form is standard in the noun (*adaptation*), the shorter in the adjective (*adaptive*).

Current ratio in print (*adaptation*
vs. **adaptation*): 32:1

Current ratio in print (*adaptive*
vs. **adaptative*): 422:1

adapter (= [1] someone who adapts; or [2] a device that connects either two different pieces of equipment or two pieces of electrical equipment to the same power supply) is predominantly so spelled in all varieties of English. **Adaptor* is a variant. See -ER (A).

Current ratio in print (*adapter* vs. **adaptor*): 3:1

addable. So spelled—not **addible*. See -ABLE (A).

Current ratio in print (*addable* vs. **addible*): 3:1

added to. See SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT (E).

addendum (= an addition or supplement) forms the plural *addenda* (not **addendums*). As with *criteria*, it's sloppy to use *addenda* as a singular—e.g.:

- “It is a new, revised and enlarged edition with an *addenda* [read *addendum*] by Robert H. Kelby.” Damon Veach, “Continental Army Officers, 1775–1783 Updated,” *Advocate* (Baton Rouge) (Mag.), 16 Feb. 1997, at 28.
- “Two Cape Cod gunning shorebird decoys that arrived too late for catalogue listing and so were included in an *addenda* [read *addendum*] are thought to be early carvings done by Crowell in the late 1800s.” Virginia Bohlin, “Decoys Gain Prestige, Patina of Folk Art,” *Boston Globe*, 24 July 2005, at G26.
- “As the new caterer at the Van Wezel, he'll be creating some pre- and post-events as an *addenda* [delete *an*] to the performances.” Deborah Seeber, “Party Time,” *Sarasota Herald Trib.*, 1 Oct. 2006, at L78.

See PLURALS (B).

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addenda used for the singular *addendum*: Stage 2

Current ratio in print (*an addendum* vs. **an addenda*): 101:1

Current ratio in print (*addenda* vs. **addendums*): 6:1

addicted; dependent. Regarding people's reactions to drugs, the distinction between these terms can be important. Someone who is *addicted* to a habit-forming drug has an intense physiological need for it. Someone who is *dependent* on a drug has a strong psychological reliance on it after using it for some time. *Addiction*, then, is primarily physical, whereas *dependency* (also known as *habituation*) is primarily psychological.

address, n. & vb. In several of its verb senses, this is a FORMAL WORD: (1) “to speak to” <Jones addressed the managers in a manner that they considered insubordinate>; (2) “to direct (a statement, question, etc.) to” <Walters addressed the question to Fawcett, not to Majors>; (3) “to call attention to” <the report addressed four issues>; (4) “to deal with” <it's time to address these problems>.

Whether as a verb or as a noun, *address* is preferably accented on the second syllable: /ə-**dres**/. But for a residence or business, /**ad**-dres/ is fully acceptable in AmE.

addressee. See -EE.

addresser (= one who addresses, as by speaking, by petitioning, or by affixing the details of where someone lives or works) is predominantly so spelled in all varieties of English. **Addressor* is a variant. See -ER (A).

Current ratio in print (*addresser* vs. **addressor*): 2.4:1

adduce; educe; deduce. All three are useful when discussing the evidence marshaled in support of an argument. To *adduce* is to put forward for consideration something such as evidence or arguments. E.g.: “What I saw were individuals who voted to cripple the education process on the basis of rumors they freely attributed to one or two unnamed sources rather than properly *adduced* evidence.” “How to Reform Our National Intelligence,” *Baltimore Sun*, 30 Nov. 1996, at A13.

To *educ* is to draw out, evoke, or elicit. This term is the rarest of the three, but it occasionally appears in the popular press—e.g.: “Hitherto, how [Thurber] fitted into the screwball reputation of that magazine has had to be *educ*ed from his ‘The Years with Ross’ (1959).” John McAleer, “The Thurber Spirit,” *Chicago Trib.*, 17 Dec. 1995, at C1. Sometimes, however, *educ* is misused for *adduce*—e.g.: “But the only evidence *educ*ed [read *adduced*] in support of this theory is a passing and rather inconclusive comment made by the Bronte family cook.” Terry Castle, “Hush Hush, Sweet Charlotte,” *New Republic*, 22 Jan. 1996, at 32. For still more complications involving this word, see **educ**.

To *deduce* is to draw an inference. E.g.: “As it happens, scientists have *deduced* the nature of an evolutionary path that a primitive blood-clotting mechanism could have followed to evolve into the more complex cascade.” Boyce Rensberger, “How Science Responds When Creationists Criticize Evolution,” *Wash. Post*, 8 Jan. 1997, at H1. See **deduce**.

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educ misused for *adduce*: Stage 1

adducible. So spelled—not **adduceable*. See -ABLE (A).

Current ratio in print (*adducible* vs. **adduceable*): 2.3:1

adenoid, adj.; **adenoidal**. As a noun, *adenoid* denotes either of two lymph glands behind the nose and at the back of the throat; they can swell, thereby obstructing breathing and affecting speech. For most adjectival uses, *adenoid* itself serves, especially for clinical purposes <adenoid tissue> <adenoid growths>. The adjective *adenoidal* is reserved for unpleasantly nasal voices and those who possess them <an adenoidal actor> <an adenoidal twang>.

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Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

Current ratio in print (*adenoid tissue*
vs. **adenoidal tissue*): 3:1

Current ratio in print (*adenoidal voice*
vs. **adenoid voice*): 11:1

adequate. A. And sufficient. Though both words were originally used in reference to quantity, *adequate* now tends toward the qualitative and *sufficient* toward the quantitative. Hence *adequate* means “suitable to the occasion or circumstances,” and *sufficient* means “enough for a particular need or purpose.” For more on *sufficient*, see **enough**, **adj.**

B. *Adequate enough. Although this REDUNDANCY dates from the 1700s, it is undeniably verbose. Either word suffices alone (or is adequate)—e.g.:

- “While Tyrol doesn’t have a particularly large or sophisticated snowmaking system, it is *adequate enough* [read *adequate*] to cover 100 percent of the slopes.” Mike Ivey, “Snowboarders Aid in Revival of Tyrol Basin,” *Capital Times* (Madison), 22 Dec. 1995, at C1.
- “The question [is] whether a translation is *adequate enough* [read *adequate*] considering not only different legal terminology but also changes from the L1 legal system into the L2 legal system.” Marie J. Myers, “Bilingualism and the Use of Voice Dictation Software for Personal Computers,” in *Language for Special Purposes* 140, 144 (Felix Mayer ed., 2001).
- “The commander of the garrison was dead. Veranius had been an *adequate enough* [read *able*] officer—*adequate enough* [read *able enough*] to be spared for this command—but the Second Legion could ill afford to send another centurion from the campaign being waged against the hill-forts.” Simon Scarrow, *The Eagle and the Wolves* 23 (2004).

See **ADJECTIVES (B)**.

adherence; adhesion. Both words derive from the verb *adhere*, but *adhesion* is generally literal and *adherence* generally figurative. One should write about *adherence* to tenets or beliefs, and about *adhesion* of bubble gum to the sole of one’s shoe. The word more often needed is *adherence*—e.g.: “Clinton’s slavish *adherence* to a corporate agenda cannot be understated.” Adolph Reed Jr., “A Slave to Finance,” *Village Voice*, 21 Jan. 1997, at 27. (The writer seems to have misused *understated* for *overstated*.)

Occasionally *adhesion* appears wrongly for *adherence*—e.g.:

- “The strong *adhesion* [read *adherence*] to technocratic rules would block self-initiative and encourage resignation.” M.K. Welge, “A Comparison of Managerial Structures in German Subsidiaries in France, India, and the United States,” *Mgmt. Int’l Rev.*, Jan. 1994, at 33.
- “Certainly they vaunted their *adhesion* [read *adherence*] to the belief in the ‘great blessings . . .’” David S. Forsyth, “Scots and the Union,” *Herald* (Glasgow), 23 Sept. 1995, at 19.
- “Some employers . . . are monitoring their staff’s *adhesion* [read *adherence*] to the rule.” Emma Connors, “Singapore PM Warns Infection Rate Could Rise,” *Aus. Fin. Rev.*, 10 Feb. 2020, at 11.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
adhesion misused for *adherence*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*adherence to rules*
vs. **adhesion to rules*): 359:1

ad hoc, **adv. & adj.**, is a widespread and useful term meaning “for this specific purpose.” Some have questioned its justification in English (e.g., Vigilans [Eric Partridge], *Chamber of Horrors* 26 [1952]). But it is firmly established and serves the language well when used correctly <ad hoc committee>.

By extension—some would say SLIPSHOD EXTENSION—the term has come to mean “without any underlying principle that can be consistently applied”—e.g.: “The D.C. Council, for example, undermines the work of the commission by approving tax changes *on an ad hoc basis* [read *haphazardly*] in response to the whims of business groups.” Rudolph A. Pyatt Jr., “One Bold Plan Deserves Another,” *Wash. Post*, 16 Jan. 1997, at E3.

Generally speaking, the phrases *on an ad hoc basis* and *in an ad hoc way* are verbose for the adverb *ad hoc*. (See **basis (A)**.) Likewise, *ad hoc* should rarely if ever be qualified by *very* or *fairly*.

Attempts to condense the phrase into one word (e.g., **adhocking*) have failed and should be forgotten, and there is no need to hyphenate it. See **PHRASAL ADJECTIVES (H)**.

Finally, the misspelling **ad hock*, dating from the 1970s, is a blunder that seems unlikely to spread much. Let us hope.

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ad hoc misspelled **ad hock*: Stage 1
Current ratio in print (*ad hoc*
vs. **ad hock*): 5,643:1

ad hominem (= [of an argument] directed to an adversary’s character rather than to the substance of the adversary’s argument), dating in English from the 1500s, is a LATINISM literally meaning “to the person.” The full phrase in Latin is *argumentum ad hominem*, denoting an argument so directed. Occasionally the full phrase appears—e.g.: “‘But supposing it had come to something?’ demanded Miss Barton, pinning the *argumentum ad hominem* with a kind of relish.” Dorothy L. Sayers, *Gaudy Night* 371 (1936).

The more usual shortened form is sometimes misspelled **ad hominum*—e.g.:

- “He is not without sin; Limbaugh himself has made *ad hominum* [read *ad hominem*] attacks on some with whom he disagrees.” Debra J. Saunders, “Rush and the Juice,” *S.F. Chron.*, 8 July 1994, at A23.
- “I don’t believe that they’ll get into a lot of *ad hominum personal* [read *ad hominem*] attacks.” Andy Sher, “Quayle Predicting Different Approach by Gore This Time,” *Nashville Banner*, 9 Oct. 1996, at A1.
- “I think most Americans are getting a bellyful of *ad-hominum* [read *ad hominem*] attacks and character assassinations.” “A Character of Conservation,” *Wash. Times*, 4 Mar. 2001, at B5.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
ad hominem misspelled **ad hominum*: Stage 1
Current ratio in print (*ad hominem*
vs. **ad hominum*): 103:1

adieu /a-**dyoo**/ or /ə-**dyoo**/ (= farewell) for *ado* /ə-**do**/ (= fuss, trouble) is a surprisingly common error—e.g.:

- “If Teevens’ 1992 and 1993 Green Wave teams . . . are the only measuring stick, then it’s much *adieu* [read *ado*] about nothing,” Dave Lagarde, “Bigger and Stronger, But Is Wave Better?,” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), 18 Aug. 1994, at D1.
- “So without further *adieu* [read *ado*], here’s an early-week primer for this 60th annual event.” John Lindsay, “The Road to San Antonio,” *Cincinnati Post*, 11 Mar. 1998, at D8.
- “She can now go to the races without *adieu* [read *ado*] and could easily rack up win number one.” Shayne O’Cass, “Gai to Fire Up,” *Sportsman* (Aus.), 2 May 2006, at 2.

Sometimes a pun is clearly intended. For example, when a football (soccer) player left a U.K. team, the *Newcastle Journal* highlighted his departure with an article titled “Much *Adieu* About Nothing for Henry” (18 July 2016, at 48). Clever.

The opposite error—*ado* for *adieu*—is exceedingly rare.

The anglicized plural *adieux* has been standard since the early 1700s. *Adieux* is a much more recent GALLICISM.

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adieu misused for *ado*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*without further ado* vs. **without further adieu*): 96:1

Current ratio in print (*adieux* vs. *adieux*): 1:1.4

ad infinitum (= continuing without end) is pronounced /ad in-fi-**nī**-təm/—not /ad in-**fīn**-i-təm/ or /ad in-fi-**nee**-təm/.

adjacency (= [1] the quality, state, or condition of being next to something; or [2] something that is next to something else), a Latin LOANWORD dating in English from the 1600s, has always been the standard noun. **Adjacence* is a variant.

Current ratio in print (*adjacency* vs. **adjacence*): 459:1

adjective (= a word typically used to modify a noun) is pronounced /**aj**-ik-tiv/—preferably not /**aj**-ə-tiv/.

ADJECTIVES. A. Definition. Adjectives constitute a large class of words (e.g., *big*, *foolish*, *good*), nearly all of which can be used either as attributive modifiers of nouns <big problem> <foolish people> <good dog> or as predicate complements <it was big> <they seemed foolish> <he’s been good>. Although adjectives are often defined as words that describe, that overbroad assertion probably gives rise to misunderstandings like these:

- “‘Excellence’ is an *adjective* [read a *noun*] that describes something which is of the highest quality.” “Their Work Stands Out,” *Barrister*, Summer 1989, at 5. (In that sentence, *describes* should probably be *denotes*, and *which* is should be deleted.)

- “Indeed, greatness is an *adjective* [read a *word*] befitting this Irish-bred 5-year-old son of 1990 Breeders’ Cup Turf champion In The Wings.” Jay Richards, “Singspiel More Versatile than Superhorse Cigar,” *Las Vegas Rev.-J.*, 4 Apr. 1997, at C6.
- “Brilliance is an *adjective* [read *attribute*] often thrown at nominees.” Heather Mallick, “Female Judges Are the Republican Weapon of Choice,” *Toronto Star*, 22 Sept. 2020, Opinion §.
- “The word ‘admirably’ is an *adjective* [read *adverb*] he adopts from a quote in reference to the UN.” “Foreign Policy Perspectives,” *Sunday Observer* (Sri Lanka), 22 Nov. 2020.

Of course, *excellence* and *greatness* and *brilliance* are nouns; their corresponding adjectives are *excellent* and *great* and *brilliant*. *Admirably* is an adverb.

B. Nongradable Adjectives. Many adjectives describe absolute states or conditions and cannot take *most* or *more*, *less* or *least*, or intensives such as *very*, *quite*, or *largely*. The best-known nongradable adjective is *unique* (= being one of a kind). Because something is either unique or not unique, there can be no degrees of uniqueness. Hence **more unique* and **very unique* are incorrect. Yet something may be *almost unique* or *not quite unique*—if, for example, there were two such things extant. (See **unique**.) The Hope Diamond is unique; a Gutenberg Bible is almost unique. The diamond is not “more unique,” though. This writer of distinction got the distinction right: “I’ve got a Dante, and a Caxton folio that is *practically unique*, at Sir Ralph Brocklebury’s sale.” Dorothy L. Sayers, *Whose Body?* 16 (1923; repr. 1995) (several variants of the folio are known to exist, but none are identical).

Many other words belong to this class, such as *preferable*: “Stoll said the city also plans dozens of hearings with groups, showing different scenarios of how growth could be handled and getting feedback on what is *most preferable* [read *preferable*].” Jack Money, “Technology Useful in City Planning,” *Sunday Oklahoman*, 27 Apr. 1997, at 2. Cf. COMPARATIVES AND SUPERLATIVES (D).

Among the more common nongradable adjectives are these:

absolute	inevitable	principal
adequate	infinite	singular
chief	irrevocable	stationary
complete	main	sufficient
devoid	manifest	unanimous
entire	only	unavoidable
false	paramount	unbroken
fatal	perfect	uniform
favorite	perpetual	unique
final	possible	universal
ideal	preeminent	void
impossible	preferable	whole

For example, the phrase **more possible* should typically be *more feasible* or *more practicable*, since

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Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

something is either possible or impossible. E.g.: “The VA medical centers, which have a long history of hospitalizing patients, have been stepping up outpatient services as they become more and more *possible* [read *compatible*] with emerging technology.” Mary McGrath, “Debate Over VA Center Comes Home,” *Omaha World-Herald*, 16 Feb. 1997, at B1.

This general prohibition against using these words in comparative senses (e.g., “absolutely impossible”) should be tempered with reason. It has exceptions. Good writers occasionally depart from the rule, but knowingly and purposefully. For example, the phrase *more perfect* appears in the U.S. Constitution: “We the People of the United States, in order to form a *more perfect* Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” U.S. Const. preamble. One writer criticizes this phrase and suggests that it “should read ‘to form a *more nearly perfect* Union.’” George J. Miller, “On Legal Style,” 43 *Ky. L.J.* 235, 246 (1955). Although the Constitution is not without stylistic blemishes, this probably isn’t one of them, and the suggested edit seems pedantic. See **more perfect**.

A few adjectives, such as *harmless*, are wrongly thought of as nongradable. It’s hopelessly donnish to insist that something is either *harmful* or *harmless* and that you can’t write *more harmful*, *more harmless*, or *relatively harmless*. The same is true of many other words.

C. Coordinate Adjectives. When two (or more) adjectives modifying the same noun are related in sense, they should be separated by a comma (or else *and*). So we say *a big, sprawling house* and *a poignant, uplifting film*. But when the consecutive adjectives are unrelated, there shouldn’t be a comma—hence *a big white house* and *a poignant foreign film*.

Some consecutive adjectives present close questions—e.g.: “The *brief, unsigned Supreme Court opinion* said that the lawyers for Ms. Bentsen had failed to show a substantial likelihood that the case would be won if it were argued before the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit.” Phillip J. Hilts, “Justices Refuse to Order Return of Abortion Pill,” *N.Y. Times*, 18 July 1992, at 1. Is the fact that the opinion is brief related to the fact that it is unsigned? If so, the comma is proper; if not, the comma is improper. Because signed opinions tend to be longer than unsigned opinions, the comma is probably justified. But the string of adjectives is awkward and might be improved: *The brief Supreme Court opinion, which was unsigned, said . . .*

For more on the punctuation of successive adjectives, see PUNCTUATION (D).

D. Proper Names as Adjectives. When a proper name is used as an attributive modifier, the writer should capitalize only that portion used in attribution <a University of Florida student> <a John Birch Society member>.

Using a multiword PLACE NAME as an attributive modifier should generally be resisted. But the practice is increasingly common. Although *California home* and *Austin jury* are perfectly acceptable, *Sacramento, California home* and *Austin, Texas jury* are not. To make matters worse, some writers place a second comma after the state (on the theory that the state is an APPOSITIVE). Hence, using a city plus the state as an adjective disrupts the flow of the sentence—e.g.: “Farmland’s president, Marc Goldman, sent out sleuths who traced the missing containers to an *Elizabeth, N.J., warehouse* he says is filled with discarded bottles of designer water.” Edward Felsenthal, “Nobody’s Crying Yet, but There Must Be Spilled Milk Somewhere,” *Wall Street J.*, 20 June 1990, at B1. Such constructions contribute to NOUN PLAGUE, lessen readability, and bother literate readers. For more on this phenomenon, see FUNCTIONAL SHIFT (B).

E. Adjectives vs. Adverbs. Verbs other than *be* can serve as linking verbs—that is, verbs that take a predicate complement. Prime examples are *appear*, *become*, *feel*, *look*, *seem*, *smell*, *taste*, and *turn*. The predicate complement is often an adjective (*He seems reasonable*), but it can sometimes be a noun phrase (*He seems a reasonable guy*). The descriptive term that follows such a linking verb applies to the subject. It doesn’t modify the verb. Hence we say *He turned professional*, not **He turned professionally*. People often fall into error with linking verbs, as by writing or saying **I feel badly about this* rather than *I feel bad about this*. See **badly (A) & feel (C)**.

Sometimes unexpected candidates may serve as linking verbs, such as *stand*—e.g.:

- “Before the vote, the senator stood *uncertainly* [read *uncertain*] for several days.” (The word describes not the manner of standing, but the man himself.)

A similar issue arises with an objective complement, in which the sequence is [subject + verb + object + complement]—e.g.:

- “Chop the onions *finely* [read *fine*].” (The sentence does not describe the manner of chopping, but the things chopped. The onions are to become fine [= reduced to small particles].)
- “Slice the meat *thinly* [read *thin*].” (As above.)

An elliptical form of this construction appears in the dentists’ much-beloved expression, *Open wide* (= open your mouth wide).

Current ratio in print (*chopped fine* vs. **chopped finely*): 3:1

Current ratio in print (*sliced thin* vs. **sliced thinly*): 2.1:1

F. Past-Participial Adjectives. In certain phrases, there is a decided tendency for past-participial adjectives to lose their participial endings. Hence *iced cream* has become *ice cream*, *creamed cheese* has become *cream cheese*, *high-backed chair* has become *high-back chair*, and *skimmed milk* has become *skim milk*. Yet *iced tea* stubbornly retains the participial inflection in most print sources. Although purists battle this

trend, its inevitability seems clear. Purists, of course, are free to continue using the past participles for the phrases in transition, but they may not get what they were expecting if they order “iced cream.” See **cream cheese, ice cream & skim milk**.

G. Order of Adjectives. When several adjectives or other attributive modifiers precede a noun, English syntax demands a specific order (loosely in order of abstractness and subjectivity to concreteness and objective characteristics):

1. Opinion
2. Size
3. Physical quality
4. Shape
5. Age
6. Color
7. Origin
8. Material
9. Type
10. Purpose

Rarely, of course, will there be more than four or five adjectives in sequence. But whatever the subject, this order tends to hold. The following examples show three to five adjectives, all following the normal sequence:

- odd carbon-black metallic material (1, 6, 8)
- short plastic child's hammer (2, 8, 10)
- really big blue cowboy statue (1, 2, 6, 9)
- large round Italian cheese wheel (2, 4, 7, 8)
- big old brown canvas fishing hat (2, 5, 6, 8, 10)
- beautiful new purple-sequined twirler uniform (1, 5, 6, 8, 9)
- amazing gigantic vertical Chinese dinosaur sculpture (1, 2, 3, 7, 9)

On the question whether to separate consecutive adjectives with commas, see (C).

H. Phrasal or Compound Adjectives. See PHRASAL ADJECTIVES.

I. Modification of Adjectives Ending in -ed. See **very (B)**.

J. Adjectives Ending in -ly. See ADVERBS (C).

K. Adjectives That Follow the Noun. See POST-POSITIVE ADJECTIVES.

L. Dates as Adjectives. See DATES (C).

M. Comparative and Superlative Adjectives. See COMPARATIVES AND SUPERLATIVES.

N. Animal Adjectives. See ANIMAL ADJECTIVES.

O. Nouns as Adjectives. See FUNCTIONAL SHIFT (B).

P. Adjectives as Nouns. See FUNCTIONAL SHIFT (C).

Q. Adjectives as Verbs. See FUNCTIONAL SHIFT (F).

R. Adjective–Noun Disagreement. See CONCORD (E).

adjournment = (1) the act of suspending proceedings to another time or place; or (2) an adjourned meeting, i.e., a meeting “scheduled for a particular time (and place, if it is not otherwise established) by the assembly’s ‘adjourning to’ or ‘adjourning until’ that time and

place.” *Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised* § 9, at 90 (10th ed. 2000). As *Robert’s* points out, because sense 2 is susceptible to confusion with sense 1, the phrase *adjourned meeting* is preferable to *adjournment* in sense 2. Reserve *adjournment* for its ordinary meaning: sense 1.

adjudicable. So formed—not **adjudicable*. See -ABLE (D) & -ATABLE.

adjudicative (= of, relating to, or involving adjudication), an adjective dating from the early 1800s, is the standard term. **Adjudicatory* and **judicative* are NEEDLESS VARIANTS.

Current ratio in print (*adjudicative* vs. **adjudicatory* vs. **judicative*): 30:20:1

adjure. See **abjure**.

adjurer; *adjuror. The -er spelling is standard. See -ER (A).

Current ratio in print (*adjurer* vs. **adjuror*): 1.3:1

adjuster; *adjustor. *Adjuster* (= one whose job is to determine the amount of loss suffered when an insurance claim is submitted and to try to settle the claim) is the preferred spelling—the one that has vastly predominated since the words came into common use in the 1700s. See -ER (A).

Current ratio in print (*adjuster* vs. **adjustor*): 8:1

adjutant general (= a chief administrative officer in the military), a phrase dating from the 1600s, consists of the noun *adjutant* (= staff officer) followed by the POSTPOSITIVE ADJECTIVE *general*. Hence the traditional plural is *adjutants general*, not **adjutant generals*. But the latter form has been in frequent use.

Current ratio in print (*adjutants general* vs. **adjutant generals*): 4:1

ad-lib (= to deliver [speech or music] extemporaneously or spontaneously) is so hyphenated as a verb <she ad-libbed her lines>. It is two words as an adverb <she delivered the lines ad lib>. But what about the noun? Dictionaries differ, and usage has swung from one practice to another. For most of the 20th century, the unhyphenated form predominated in noun uses <several ad libs proved especially successful>, but since the early 1990s, the hyphenated form has predominated <her ad-libs drew uproarious laughter>. Today the unhyphenated form predominates only with adverbial uses.

Current ratio in print (*the ad-libs* vs. *the ad libs*): 1.2:1

administer, v.t.; **minister**, v.i. *Administer*, which suffices in most contexts, has four meanings: (1) “to give” <administer treatment> <administer the oath of office>; (2) “to dispense” <administer frontier justice>; (3) “to manage” <administer the state health

department>; and (4) “to manage and dispose of” <administer the movie mogul’s estate>. The verb *minister*, now exclusively intransitive, shares all but the second sense, though only rarely. *Minister* is most commonly used in the sense of attending to others’ needs or, in religious contexts, of administering sacraments. And people in need are *ministered to*. Cf. ***administrate**.

Current ratio in print (*minister to the sick*
vs. **administer to the sick*): 4:1

***administerable**. See **administrable**.

***administerial**. See **administrative**.

administrable; ***administerable**; ***administratable**. The first is the correct form. The other two are NEEDLESS VARIANTS, the last one being an abomination to boot. See -ABLE (D) & -ATABLE.

Current ratio in print (*administrable*
vs. **administerable* vs. **administratable*): 241:6:1

***administrate**, a BACK-FORMATION from *administration*, is a NEEDLESS VARIANT of *administer*—e.g.:

- “Inevitably, his unenlightened attempts to teach and *administrate* [read *administer*] were doomed to failure.” Roger Braun, “Remember the Bad, Old Administrator-Less,” *Wis. State J.*, 31 Dec. 1994, at A9.
- “The only people who would have known just how [much trouble] Jeremy was in were the people involved in *administering* [read *administering*] the wages deal.” Christopher Brookmyre, *Quite Ugly One Morning* 108 (1996).
- “This musical comedy features adults playing prepubescent teens and the grownups who *administrate* [read *administer*] the contest.” “Is It the Weekend Yet?,” *Hartford Courant*, 17 Aug. 2015, at B8.

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**administrate* for *administer*: Stage 1
Current ratio in print (*administering*
vs. **administering*): 31:1

administration. See **government** (B).

administrative; ***administrational**; ***administerial**. *Administrative* is the general, all-purpose term meaning “of, relating to, or involving administration or an administration.” The other two are NEEDLESS VARIANTS.

Current ratio in print (*administrative*
vs. **administrational*
vs. **administerial*): 11,716:6:1

admirable (= having good qualities worthy of respect) is pronounced /ad-mi-rə-bəl/—not /ad-mīr-ə-bəl/.

admissible; ***admissable**; ***admittable**. *Admissible* (the standard word) = (1) allowable; or (2) worthy of admittance (i.e., gaining entry). The other two are NEEDLESS VARIANTS. See -ABLE (A).

Current ratio in print (*admissible* vs. **admissable*
vs. **admittable*): 2,711:6:1

admission. **A. And admittance**. The distinction between these terms is old and useful, but it has a

history of being ignored. *Admittance* is purely physical, as in signs that read “No admittance.” E.g.: “Temple Israel in Boston, one of the largest congregations in the area, has told members that tickets will be required for *admittance*, ushers will be vigilant about security, and bags might be searched.” Michael S. Rosenwald, “Synagogues Add Security for High Holy Days,” *Boston Globe*, 6 Sept. 2002, at B8.

Admission is used in figurative and nonphysical senses: “His *admission* to the bar in 1948 began a career that would be long and noteworthy.” *Admission* is also used, however, in physical senses when rights or privileges are attached to gaining entry: “He supervised 200 people involved in . . . the *admission* of immigrants at Newark International Airport and the detention of illegal immigrants at Federal detention centers.” Ronald Smothers, “Ex-Official at Office for Aliens Is Sentenced,” *N.Y. Times*, 22 Apr. 1997, at B4.

Sometimes *admittance* is misused for *admission*, as when the subject is being accepted for enrollment in a school—e.g.:

- “Your recent story on Texas Woman’s University students’ reaction to their board of regents’ decision to allow men *admittance* [read *admission*] made me wonder.” Letter of Robert L. Hazelwood, “The Other Side Now,” *Houston Post*, 30 Dec. 1994, at A26.
- “To the extent that some private colleges may not require B averages to gain *admittance* [read *admission*], it could be tougher to win a state scholarship.” “All Students Receiving Aid Should Have a B Average,” *Atlanta J.-Const.*, 20 Jan. 1995, at A10.
- “BYU’s long-awaited *admittance* [read *admission*] into the Big 12 Conference . . . is the result of a lot of hard work by a lot of people.” “Difference Maker,” *Deseret News* (Salt Lake City), 1 Oct. 2021.

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admittance misused for *admission*: Stage 2

B. And confession. In criminal law, a distinction has traditionally existed between these words: an *admission* is a concession that an allegation or factual assertion is true without any acknowledgment of guilt with respect to the criminal charges, whereas a *confession* involves an acknowledgment of guilt as well as of the truth of factual allegations. See **confess**.

admit, vb., a verb dating in English from the 1400s, has both transitive uses <he admitted his crimes> and, less formally, intransitive ones <I wouldn’t admit to it>. In the intransitive uses, the preposition can be either *of* <the rule admits of no exceptions> or *to* <he’d rather be hanged than admit to it>. When the sense is “to acknowledge (something negative) as true and valid,” it is often preferable, as a matter of editorial practice, to delete the *to* after *admit* if the passage reads just as naturally. Essentially, *admit to* (= own up to) is a CASUALISM—e.g.:

- “It turns out they did not completely *admit to* [or *admit*] their losses.” Floyd Norris, “Cooking Books,” *N.Y. Times*, 5 Sept. 1993, § 3, at 1.
- “She [a dying lung cancer patient] was one of the rare people to *admit to* [or *admit*] their fear.” B.J. Miller &

Shoshana Berger, *A Beginner's Guide to the End* 146 (2019).

Cf. **confess (A)**.

***admittable**. See **admissible**.

admittance. See **admission (A)**.

admittedly. See **ADVERBS (F)**.

admonition. A. And monition. Both terms mean “a warning; caution.” *Admonition* is the more common, less technical term—e.g.: “Then Jack Kemp chimes in with an *admonition* to listeners to beg Congress to ban the procedure in question ‘before one more life is lost.’” Nell Bernstein, “Abortion Wars: A Smaller Sequel,” *Newsday* (N.Y.), 9 Mar. 1997, at G5. This word has the additional sense “a mild reprimand”—e.g.: “Righter could face sanctions ranging from an official *admonition* to being stripped of his priesthood and rank as a bishop.” Mark O’Keefe, “Bishop’s Heresy Trial May Split Pro- and Anti-Gay Episcopal Factions,” *San Diego Union-Trib.*, 29 Sept. 1995, at E4.

Monition, a specialized term, means either (1) “a summons to appear and answer in court as a defendant or to contempt charges”; or (2) “a formal notice from a bishop mandating that an offense within the clergy be corrected.”

B. And admonishment. Strictly speaking, *admonishment* might be thought of as the act of admonishing, while *admonition* is the warning or reproof itself. In fact, though, *admonition* has always been more common in both senses. Whenever *admonishment* can be replaced with *admonition*, it should be.

Current ratio in print (*admonition*
vs. *admonishment*): 5:1

admonitory; *admonitorial; monitory; *monitorial. The *-ory* forms predominate.

ad nauseam is often misspelled **ad nauseum*—e.g.:

- “More frustrating than the targeted, test-marketed media coverage . . . is the intellectual echo chamber that diagnoses *ad nauseum* [read *ad nauseam*] with nary a cure.” Letter of Dan Sullivan, “Audible Sigh,” *Harper’s Mag.*, Jan. 2003, at 5.
- “Notice that Mark Geragos mentions . . . innuendo and references *ad nauseum* [read *ad nauseam*] to the satanic cult theory perpetrated for the last two months.” Loretta Dillon, *Stone Cold Guilty: The People v. Scott Lee Peterson* 56 (2005).

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ad nauseam misspelled **ad nauseum*: Stage 2
Current ratio in print (*ad nauseam*
vs. **ad nauseum*): 4:1

adolescent. See **teenager**.

adapt. See **adapt**.

adoptive; adopted. *Adoptive* = (1) related by adoption <adoptive parents>; or (2) tending to adopt <first

he took an adoptive posture toward the proposal, but then he rejected it>. The phrase **adopted father* is an example of **HYPALLAGE**, to be avoided in favor of *adoptive father*. The Latin sourceword, *adoptivus*, applied both to the adopting parent and to the adopted child. But today *adoptive* is almost always used to refer to the adults rather than the children. This has been true, however, only since about 1940. In the 1800s, **adopted father* predominated. But it has fallen off greatly since the mid-20th century.

Another way of looking at it is to say that *adoptive* is the active form: an adoptive parent is one who has adopted a child. *Adopted* is the passive form: an adopted child is one who has been adopted by a parent. So what happens in extended senses?

In reference to a city or country, *adopted* is the better, more logical, and much more common choice—e.g.: “[Elton] John had faith in his *adopted* city, or at least in Agassi and Sampras.” Todd Holcomb, “Agassi, Sampras Show Knack for Court Comedy,” *Atlanta J.-Const.*, 15 Dec. 2000, at D5. Although *adoptive* sometimes appears in such contexts, it is comparatively uncommon and usually less metaphorically accurate (since people can typically choose where to live)—e.g.: “My grandparents . . . were very proud of their native land [Italy]. However, their *adoptive* [read *adopted*] country was first and foremost in their minds and hearts.” James Cimino, “Why Give Cubans Preferential Treatment?,” *USA Today*, 10 Apr. 2000, at A26.

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1. **adopted mother* for *adoptive mother*: Stage 3
Current ratio in print (*adoptive mother*
vs. **adopted mother*): 3:1
2. **adoptive country* for *adopted country*: Stage 1
Current ratio in print (*adopted country*
vs. **adoptive country*): 12:1

adsorb. See **absorb**.

adult is pronounced either /ə-**dəlt**/ or /**ad**-əlt/ as a noun <adults only>, but only /ə-**dəlt**/ as an adjective <adult supervision>.

***adulter**. See **adulterer**.

adulterable (= capable of being adulterated) is so formed—not **adulteratable*. See **-ABLE (D)** & **-ATABLE**.

adulterant, adj.; ***adulterate**, adj.; **adulterated**; **adulterine**. See **adulterous**.

***adulteratable**. See **adulterable**.

adulteration. See **adultery (B)**.

adulterer; *adulter; adulteress; adultera; adulterator. *Adulterer* is the usual agent noun meaning “someone who commits adultery.” But the usage issue doesn’t stop there because that definition raises the

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX (For the full key, see front matter pp. xxv–xxvi.)

Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

question: Which participant is it, precisely, who commits adultery? The law gives three possible answers:

- Under the canon-law rule, a married participant is an adulterer and an unmarried one is a fornicator. The sex of the married participant doesn't matter.
- Under the common-law rule, both participants commit adultery if the married participant is a woman. But if the woman is the unmarried one, both participants are fornicators, not adulterers. This rule is premised on whether there is a possibility of "adulterating" the blood within a family. (Any offspring from an adulterous union were called *adulterini*.)
- Under modern statutory law, some courts hold that the unmarried participant isn't guilty of adultery (that only the married participant is), but others hold that both participants are adulterers.

The other forms occur much less frequently. **Adulter* is an obsolete variant of *adulterer*; it also had the meaning of *adulator* (= counterfeiter). *Adulteress* is the feminine form, now disfavored because of the growing awareness of **SEXISM**—likewise with *adultera*, the term from the civil law. *Adulator*, as suggested above, derives from the noun *adulteration*, and not from *adultery*.

Today all these terms—and their legal meanings—are somewhat obscure because the legal doctrines themselves have long been somnolent (not to say sleeping around).

adulterous; *adulterate, adj.; adulterant, adj.; adulterated; adulterine. *Adulterous* and **adulterate* both mean "of, characterized by, or pertaining to adultery," the former term being the more common. E.g.: "There are revelations about *adulterous* wrinkles in his generally happy fourth marriage to Lauren Bacall—an affair with a makeup artist for him and an affair with Frank Sinatra for her." L.S. Klepp, "Play It Again, Sam, and Again," *Entertainment Weekly*, 11 Apr. 1997, at 78. **Adulterate*, adj., more common in Shakespeare's day than in ours, has been relegated to the status of a **NEEDLESS VARIANT**.

Adulterant = tending to adulterate <adulterant chemicals in the mixture>. *Adulterated* = (1) corrupted or debased <an adulterated culture>; or (2) corrupted by an impure addition; made spurious <the vintage wine was thoroughly adulterated once the water was added>. *Adulterine* = (1) spurious; (2) illegal; or (3) born of adultery <adulterine bastard>.

adultery. A. And fornication; cohabitation. *Adultery* = sexual intercourse engaged in voluntarily by a married person with a person who is not the lawful spouse. Generally today, it doesn't matter whether the other participant is married. (But see **adulterer**.) *Fornication* often implies that neither party is married, but it may also refer to the act of an unmarried person who has sex with a married person. *Cohabitation* is "the fact, state, condition, or practice of living together, esp. as partners in life, usu. with the suggestion of sexual relations" (*Black's Law Dictionary* 327 [11th ed. 2019]). It's often a **EUPHEMISM** for an unmarried couple's living

together—but unlike *adultery* or *fornication*, it now carries little suggestion of wrongdoing.

B. And adulteration. *Adulteration* = (1) the act of debasing, corrupting, or making impure; (2) a corrupted or debased state; or (3) something corrupted or debased. The Latin verb *adulterare*, from which both *adultery* and *adulteration* derive, encompasses all these senses.

adumbrate (= [1] to foreshadow; or [2] to outline) is a **FORMAL WORD** that has been called an affectation. For example, two influential writers said in 1901 that the word is "so high-sounding as hardly to be allowable even in elaborate writing." James Bradstreet Greenough & George Lyman Kittredge, *Words and Their Ways in English Speech* 7 (1901). But contemporary writers (especially critics and English professors) sometimes find it serviceable in formal literary contexts—e.g.: "Auden was already of the view that 'all genuine poetry is in a sense the formation of private spheres out of public chaos,' a claim that *adumbrates* his more developed sense of literature as making a secondary world, to be set against the primary world over which otherwise we have little or no control." Denis Donoghue, "W.H. Auden," *Wash. Times*, 9 Feb. 1997, Books §, at B8.

Traditionally pronounced /ə-**dām**-brayt/, it is today more often pronounced /**ad**-əm-brayt/.

advance; advancement. Generally, *advance* refers to steady progress; *advancement* refers to progression (1) beyond what is normal or ordinary, and (2) involving an outside agent or force. Hence the *advancement* of science suggests a bigger step forward than the *advance* of science. And although you might get an occupational *advancement*, we speak of the *advance* of civilization. In senses suggesting the action of moving up or bringing forth, *advancement* is the proper word <National Association for the Advancement of Colored People>.

The distinction gets fuzzier in financial contexts. Although we speak (properly) of *cash advances* and *advances on royalties*, in law *advancement* commonly refers to a parent's expenditure made for a child with the idea that it's to be deducted from the child's inheritance.

The phrases **advance notice*, **advance plans*, **advance warning*, and the like are redundant.

advanced, adj., = (1) having progressed beyond most others <an advanced way of thinking>; (2) being beyond an elementary level <advanced studies> <advanced students>; (3) sophisticated <advanced weaponry>; or (4) toward the end of a span of time or distance <people who are advanced in age>. Though it has these several meanings, *advanced* does not mean "in advance"—a meaning for which *advance*, adj., suffices. Yet writers often misuse *advanced* for this sense—e.g.:

- "With this law, your landlord must give you two days' *advanced* [read *advance*] warning before entering your apartment." Ed Sacks, "New Tenant Wants to Get Out

of Nightmarish Apartment,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, 19 Jan. 1997, Housing §, at 7.

- “These are the parents who rarely give schools *advanced* [read *advance*] notice of planned trips and who let their children stay home from school for minor problems.” Tamara Henry, “Skipping School for Travel,” *USA Today*, 27 Mar. 1997, at D10.
- “Knowing when to move, doing a little *advanced* [read *advance*] planning for a new home, and reducing the load beforehand can significantly reduce the stress involved.” Caroline Aherne, “Considering a Downsizing Move?,” *Hastings & St. Leonards Observer* (U.K.), 26 Mar. 2021, at 24.

Although *advance* was the intended word in those examples, it could be deleted as a REDUNDANCY. Cf. **advance guard**.

Current ratio in print (*advance notice* vs. **advanced notice*): 13:1

***advancee**, an 18th-century creation not widely used until the 20th century, means either (1) “someone who advances,” or (2) “someone who receives an advance payment.” The word seems both unattractive and unnecessary—e.g.:

- “[I]f the *advancee* [read *recipient of the advance*] predeceases the intestate, no other person is affected or burdened . . .” Lawrence Newman & Richard V. Wellman, *Comparative Law Studies* 389 (1976).
- “The division’s biggest *advancee* [read *gainer*?] should be the Phoenix Cardinals (4–12), particularly if Joe Bugel’s offensive line finds a comfort zone with young talent.” John Hawkins, “Speed Reigns in NFL’s Best Division,” *Wash. Times*, 5 Sept. 1993, at G20. (A possible revision: *The Phoenix Cardinals (4–12) stand to gain the most in the division, particularly . . .*)
- “There were 12 teams and 74 individuals that made their way out of a sectional tournament this past school year . . . And most of those *advancees* [read *advancing to regionals*] come from the Ohio area.” Bryan Walters, “Regional Runs,” *Point Pleasant Register* (W. Va.), 25 June 2013, Sports §, at 6.

See -EE (A).

advance guard (= a military contingent sent before the main troops) is sometimes written **advanced guard*, a spelling that was dominant for most of the 1800s. The standard spelling today is *advance guard*, but the variant still often occurs—e.g.: “On the afternoon of April 1, after skirmishing all morning, Gen. Wilson’s *advanced guard* [read *advance guard*] ran into Gen. Forrest’s line of battle.” William Rambo, “Re-Enactor Recounts Fight,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, 21 Apr. 1996, at C7.

The variant also occurs in figurative uses, in which the true meaning might be *avant garde*—e.g.: “Schwarzkogler, who died in 1969 either after accidentally falling from a window or defenestrating himself, was a young, emotionally fragile member of the controversial Viennese artistic *advanced guard* [read *avant garde*] of the 1960s.” Robert W. Duffy, “Art as

Revelation,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 28 Jan. 1996, Everyday Mag. §, at C4. See **advanced**.

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**advanced guard* for *advance guard*: Stage 4
Current ratio in print (*advance guard* vs. **advanced guard*): 2.4:1

advancement. See **advance**.

ADVERBS. A. Generally. English has an enormous number of words belonging to the adverb category, expressing a very wide range of meanings. A few dozen are basic adverbs unrelated to adjectives; among the most frequent of these are *again, almost, already, also, always, anyway, as, even, ever, how, however, indeed, just, maybe, never, not, often, only, otherwise, perhaps, quite, rather, really, soon, still, therefore, though, too, very, and yet*. But there are many thousands of others—from *abdominally* to *zoologically*—formed by adding the suffix *-ly* to an adjective stem.

Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, prepositions, and other adverbs; they supply qualifications regarding frequency (*often*), manner (*viciously*), degree (*greatly*), evaluation (*delightfully*), place (*locally*), time (*recently*), modality (*possibly*), consequence (*therefore*), and many other kinds of information. See CGEL 565–70; Bryan A. Garner, *The Chicago Guide to Grammar, Usage, and Punctuation* 130–33 (2016).

Traditional grammars classify words like *around, down, in, off, on, out, and up* as adverbs whenever they are not followed by noun phrases. Hence they say that there is a preposition in *He’s somewhere around the house* but only an adverb in *He’s somewhere around*. Yet it probably makes more descriptive sense to call such words prepositions whether followed by a noun phrase or not: they tend to occur just where prepositional phrases do, and not in the same places as genuine adverbs. CGEL at 600–01.

Some books on writing tell people, with a striking absoluteness, to avoid adverbs—e.g.:

- **1979**: “Write with nouns and verbs, not with adjectives and adverbs.” William Strunk Jr. & E.B. White, *The Elements of Style* 71 (3d ed. 1979).
- **1980**: “Most adverbs are unnecessary.” William Zinsser, *On Writing Well* 102 (2d ed. 1980). (Note the adverb in his title!)
- **2000**: “I believe the road to hell is paved with adverbs, and I will shout it from the rooftops.” Stephen King, *On Writing* 124–25 (2000).

This drumbeat of advice is badly overdrawn. The commonest adverbs are so frequent that abstaining completely would make your writing very strange indeed.

Some writers think they have thoroughly internalized the advice. One book author, for example, praises a teacher who once “taught her to write without adverbs.” Liza Long, *The Price of Silence* 205 (2015). But then she begins the next paragraph with *I am particularly grateful . . .*

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Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

A strange case of the phobia is provided by Justice Anthony Kennedy, who once said: “I do not like adverbs. In part, it’s because it’s a rule that I want to have for myself. . . . I think adverbs are a cop-out.” (Bryan A. Garner, “Interviews with United States Supreme Court Justices: Anthony M. Kennedy,” 13 *Scribes J. Legal Writing* 79, 92–93 (2010).) He concluded: “It seems to me by not using . . . the *-ly* word, you just discipline yourself to choose your words more carefully . . . or ‘with more care.’ . . . *With more care* is much stronger than *more carefully*. Number one, it’s shorter; number two, it’s more direct.” (*Ibid.* at 93.) But is it shorter? And is it more direct?

This curious position led Justice Kennedy, over several decades of writing for the Supreme Court, to adopt roundabout wordings, often using four words in place of a single adverb—e.g.:

- “Laws restricting commercial speech . . . need only be tailored in a reasonable manner [read *reasonably*] to serve a substantial state interest.” *Edenfield v. Fane*, 507 U.S. 761, 767 (1993). [Another possible edit: *Laws restricting commercial speech must be reasonably tailored to serve a substantial state interest.*]
- “The second important governmental interest furthered in a substantial manner [read *substantially furthered*] by § 1409(a)(4) is the determination to ensure that the child and the citizen parent have some demonstrated opportunity” *Nguyen v. INS*, 533 U.S. 53, 64–65 (2001).
- “The habeas corpus statute . . . [was] recently amended in a substantial manner [read *substantially amended* most recently] by the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996.” *Miller-El v. Cockrell*, 537 U.S. 322, 326 (2003).
- “It has been the Court’s approach to interpret the term in a consistent manner [read *consistently*].” *CRST Van Expedited, Inc. v. EEOC*, 578 U.S. 419, 435 (2016).

In doggedly pursuing this strange practice, Kennedy introduced many blemishes into his writing.

Yet there is some truth in the idea that adverbs sometimes lead writers to use verbs that are less apt. It’s doubtless better not to write *She was extremely interested in the book*, but instead *She was enthralled by the book*; not *The customers were quite frightened by the gunman*, but instead *The customers were terrified by the gunman*.

When the advice about avoiding adverbs is narrowly drawn, it’s sounder. One famous novelist, for example, gave this advice: “Never use an adverb to modify the verb *said*.” *Elmore Leonard’s 10 Rules of Writing* 27 (2007). He denounced pairing the primary verb for expressing dialogue—*said*—with manner adverbs such as *bitterly*, *defensively*, *enthusiastically*, *gravely*, *scornfully*, and *shrewdly*.

In short, there are certain types of adverbs to be cautious about: adverbs of manner (like the ones Elmore listed), adverbs of degree (*absolutely*, *completely*, *totally*), adverbs that smack of dogmatism (*clearly*, *obviously*, *undoubtedly*), and redundant adverbs (*is currently*, *was formerly*). But advice suggesting that you should cultivate a loathing of all adverbs is clearly, obviously, and undoubtedly wrong.

Professor Trimble gives a good counterbalance to all the naysaying about this disparaged part of speech: “The right adverb, fresh and adroitly placed, is one of life’s finest small pleasures.” John R. Trimble, *Writing with Style* 77 (2d ed. 2000). Adroitly placed indeed!

B. Syntactic Placement. Where does the adverb go in relation to a compound verb (also known as a verb phrase)? The default is to place it after the first auxiliary verb.

Many writers fall into awkward, unidiomatic sentences when they misguidedly refuse to put an adverb between the auxiliary and the main verb. A clause-modifying adverb is ideally placed just after the first auxiliary verb: *is ideally placed*—not *ideally is placed*. Some writers think that the separation of a verb phrase is akin to the so-called SPLIT INFINITIVE. It is not. As H.W. Fowler explained long ago, when a clause with one or more auxiliary verbs preceding the main verb is modified by an adverb, “its normal place is between the auxiliary (or sometimes the first auxiliary if there are two or more) and the rest.” (*FMEU1* at 448.) Not only is there no objection to this placement, he stresses, “but any other position for the adverb requires special justification. *I have never seen her*, not *I never have seen her*, is the ordinary idiom” (*Ibid.*). Many authorities over more than two centuries have agreed on this point:

- **1782:** “[The adverb] frequently stands between the auxiliary and the verb, as ‘He . . . *was attentively heard* by the whole audience.’” Robert Lowth, *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* 135 (rev. ed. 1782).
- **1852:** “Those [adverbs] . . . which belong to compound verbs, are commonly placed after the first auxiliary.” Gould Brown, *The Institutes of English Grammar* 167 (rev. ed. 1852).
- **1938:** “When the tense of a transitive verb is compound, the adverb follows the first auxiliary if the verb is in the active voice [e.g., *the boy has always obeyed his father*], and immediately precedes the principal verb if the verb is in the passive voice [e.g., *the house can be quickly built*].” Josephine Turck Baker, *Correct English: Complete Grammar and Drill Book* 180 (1938).
- **1942:** “In a compound verb (*have seen*) with an adverb, that adverb comes between the auxiliary and the participle (‘I have *never* seen her’); or, if there are two or more auxiliaries, immediately after the first auxiliary (‘I have *always* been intending to go to Paris’); that order is changed only to obtain emphasis, as in ‘I never have seen her’ (with stress on ‘have’) There is, however, a tendency to move an adverb from its rightful and natural position for inadequate reasons, as in ‘Oxford must *heartily* be congratulated.’” Eric Partridge, *U&A* at 224.
- **1945:** “When there is a compound verb form, it is usual to put the adverb between the auxiliary and the main verb. ‘I have always wanted to do so.’ ‘He has rarely failed us.’” W.P. Jowett, *Chatting About English* 184 (1945).
- **1952:** “Barring the infinitive, verb groups should be split In verb groups formed by parts of the verbs ‘be,’ ‘have,’ ‘do,’ ‘can,’ ‘may,’ and ‘must,’ adverbs are best placed immediately before the main verb.” R.G. Ralph, *Put It Plainly* 60 (1952).
- **1963:** “Because of their misconception as to what a split infinitive really is, some have reached the erroneous

conclusion that an adverbial modifier must never be placed between parts of a compound verb phrase, with the result that they write in such an eccentric style as ‘I greatly have been disappointed’ instead of writing naturally ‘I have been greatly disappointed.’” R.W. Pence & D.W. Emery, *A Grammar of Present-Day English* 320 n.69 (1963).

- **1965:** “The truth is that more often than not the proper and natural place for an adverb is between the parts of a compound verb.” Theodore M. Bernstein, *The Careful Writer* 26 (1965).
- **1966:** “With a compound verb—that is, one made with an auxiliary and a main verb—the adverb comes between auxiliary and main verb (*He will probably telephone before starting / I have often had that thought myself / The clock is consistently losing five minutes a day*).” Wilson Follett, *MAU* at 53.
- **1975:** “There is a frequent need to link an adverb with a compound verb (*I have always been*), and the regular place for the modifier is shown in the example.” Jacques Barzun, *Simple & Direct* 63 (1975).

But confusion on this point is all but ubiquitous. The result is an unidiomatic, unnatural style—e.g.:

- “Circuit judges *currently are elected* [read *are currently elected*] in countywide races.” Michael R. Zahn, “Two Veteran Judges Favor District System to Elect More Minority Judges,” *Milwaukee J. Sentinel*, 18 Oct. 1994, at A1.
- “Capitalistic economies *easily can adjust* [read *can easily adjust*] to more unequal distributions of purchasing power.” Lester C. Thurow, “Inequalities in Wealth a Political, Not Economic Problem,” *USA Today*, 23 Nov. 1999, at A19 (also asserting that “policies . . . *easily could be designed* [read *either could easily be designed or could be easily designed*]”).

In the following example, the first adverb is awkwardly placed and the second is right: “If you’re doing serious research, possibly for a college course, then you *already have* [read *have already*] begun (or will soon begin to involve yourself in) Internet research.” H. Eric Branscomb, *Casting Your Net* 1 (2000).

A few style manuals suggest otherwise. The *AP Stylebook* long cautioned writers to “avoid awkward constructions that split . . . compound forms.” *The Associated Press Stylebook* 283 (2013). And an influential legal manual long advised: “Avoid splitting verb phrases with adverbs.” *Texas Law Review Manual on Style* 16 (5th ed. 1987). Although this bad advice was softened and finally removed from later editions of both manuals, one polemical criticism of the legal manual asserted that it had “caused entire pages of law reviews to be filled with page after page in which adverbs have been squeezed out of their normal place.” James Lindgren, “Fear of Writing,” 78 *Cal. L. Rev.* 1684 (1990).

The *AP Stylebook* didn’t excise the “split-verb” entry until 2019.

This fear of splitting compound phrases—again, not infinitives—can have momentous consequences. It seems to have caused Chief Justice John Roberts

to misspeak when administering the oath of office to President Barack Obama. Attempting to quote by memory and therefore misquoting the constitutionally mandated language—“that I *will faithfully execute* the office of President of the United States”—he instinctively moved the adverb to the end and asked Obama to repeat the words “that I *will execute* the office of President of the United States *faithfully*.” Then, while Obama struggled to repeat this incorrect version, Roberts interrupted by correcting himself to “faithfully the office of President of the United States” (still wrong). The oath had to be administered again later that evening to ensure that Obama had uttered the right words in the right order, with an adverb separating the modal auxiliary *will* from the verb *execute*.

Adverbs supplying clause information such as frequency or time often occur after the first auxiliary, or after the subject if there isn’t one <I often pay> <I have often paid> <we never use it> <we will never use it>. Adverbs of location are not numerous, but those that exist are normally positioned after an auxiliary—e.g.: “A large feline animal . . . *has locally been nicknamed* the ‘Basingstoke Beast.’” Megan Hinton, “Dog Walker Spots ‘Lynx Like Big Cat,’” *Daily Echo* (U.K.), 19 Apr. 2021.

The reason the Beatles didn’t sing **I there saw her standing* is simply that words like *there* and *here* function like prepositions or prepositional phrases, not like adverbs: compare **I in the corner saw her standing* or **We on that ridge will make our stand*.

C. Awkward Adverbs. Adjectives ending in *-ly* and *-le* often make cumbersome adverbs, e.g., *chillily*, *friendlily*, *ghastlily*, *holily*, *jollily*, *juvenilely*, *lovelily*, *sillily*, *stately*, *supplely*, *surlily*, *uglily*, *wilily*, and so on. You needn’t be timid in writing or pronouncing such adverbs when they’re genuinely needed—e.g.: “During the year’s cold months, when the abundant fenestration of her home office kept the room chilly, [the therapist] wore a pelisse of hand-tanned Native American buckskin that formed a somewhat *ghastlily* moist-looking flesh-colored background for the enclosing shapes her hands formed in her lap.” David Foster Wallace, “The Depressed Person,” *Harper’s Mag.*, 1 Jan. 1998, at 57. But if they seem unnatural, you can easily rephrase the sentence, e.g., *in a silly manner*. A few words, however, act as both adjectives and adverbs; examples are *daily*, *early*, *hourly*, *kindly*, *stately*, and *timely*.

The same is true, to a lesser extent, of many adverbs derived from adjectives that end in *y*, such as *funny* (making *funnily*). But they have a more widespread acceptance—e.g.: “His long play about the Civil War is obviously and *unfunnily* bad, but a hundred pages are devoted to reproducing the manuscript and another fifty to endless jawing about its relation to art, justice,

and order.” Jonathan Franzen, “Mr. Difficult,” *New Yorker*, 30 Sept. 2002, at 100, 111.

If you use unusual adverbs, do so sparingly. Some writers display an unfortunate fondness for them, as by using such forms as *consideredly*, *corollarly*, and the spurious **widespreadly*. Cf. -EDLY.

D. Double Adverbs. Several adverbs not ending in *-ly*—especially *doubtless*, *fast*, *ill*, *much*, *seldom*, *thus*—have NONWORD counterparts ending in *-ly*. Using **doubtlessly*, **fastly*, etc. is incorrect. See **doubtlessly*, **fastly*, *ill*, **muchly*, *seldom* & *thus* (B).

E. Adverbs vs. Adjectives. See ADJECTIVES (E).

F. Sentence Adverbs. A sentence adverb, which qualifies an entire statement rather than a single word, does not resolve itself into the form in *a* — *manner*, as most adverbs do. So in *Happily, the bill did not go beyond the committee*, the introductory adverb *happily* conveys the writer’s opinion on the message being imparted. The following words are among the most frequent sentence adverbs ending in *-ly*:

accordingly	evidently	naturally
admittedly	fortunately	obviously
apparently	importantly	oddly
arguably	interestingly	paradoxically
certainly	ironically	regrettably
clearly	legally	sadly
consequently	logically	strangely
curiously	mercifully	theoretically

Improvising sentence adverbs from traditional adverbs like *hopefully* (= in a hopeful manner) and *thankfully* (= in a thankful manner) is objectionable to many stylists but seems to be on the rise. They’re generally avoided in formal prose. See **hopefully** & **thankfully**.

Because sentence adverbs reveal the writer’s own thoughts and biases, writers often overuse them in argumentation—but danger lurks in words such as *clearly*, *obviously*, *undoubtedly*, and *indisputably*. See **clearly** & OVERSTATEMENT.

adversary, adj.; **adversarial**. *Adversary*, which can act as both noun and adjective, is traditional in phrases such as *adversary relationship* and *adversary system*—e.g.: “Granted, it is the job of an opposing political chairman working in the *adversary system* of American politics to try to make the worst case against the elected leader of the opposition party,” Bill Hall, “The Premature Failure of Gary Locke’s First Year,” *Lewiston Morning Trib.* (Idaho), 26 Feb. 1997, at A10.

Though it has only recently made its way into dictionaries, *adversarial* has become fairly common in place of the adjective *adversary*—e.g.: “Our *adversarial*, court-based system of collecting child support creates hate and misunderstanding,” Robin Miller, “Day in Court No Solace for Deadbeat Dad,” *Baltimore Sun*, 10 Mar. 1995, at A13. This shift in usage occurred mostly during the 1980s. *Adversarial* often connotes animosity <adversarial conferences>, whereas *adversary* has tended to be more neutral and even clinical.

Current ratio in print (*adversarial relationship* vs. *adversary relationship*): 14:1

Current ratio in print (*adversary system* vs. **adversarial system*): 1:1.5

adverse; averse. To be *adverse* to something is to be turned in opposition against it <Thailand was *adverse* to Japan during most of World War II>; the phrase usually refers to things, not people. To be *averse* to something is to have feelings against it <*averse* to risk>; the more common of the two phrases, *averse* to usually describes a person’s attitude. Both words may take the preposition *to*, but *averse* also takes *from*.

Each word is occasionally misused for the other—e.g.:

- “Alistair Boyle’s narrator Gil Yates is certainly not *adverse* [read *averse*] to a money-making scheme, however dubious.” Jeremy C. Shea, “Everyone’s a Con,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (Everyday Mag.), 4 May 1996, at D4.
- “He and Kasner say many investors are *adverse* [read *averse*] to risk and unlikely to substitute risky company shares for conservative muni bond investments.” John G. Edwards, “Cost of Interest Could Increase,” *Las Vegas Rev.-J.*, 9 Jan. 2003, at D1.
- “People with chronic liver problems can lead normal lives until an *averse* [read *adverse*] reaction to something such as a viral infection or a fatty diet pushes them over the edge into liver failure.” Linda Marsa, “An Artificial Liver May Bridge a Gap,” *L.A. Times*, 20 Jan. 2003, at F3.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX

1. *adverse* misused for *averse*: Stage 2

Current ratio in print (*averse to the idea* vs. **adverse to the idea*): 10:1

2. *averse* misused for *adverse*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*adverse effects* vs. **averse effects*): 20,875:1

advert; avert. To *advert* to something is to refer to it, to bring it up in speech or writing, or to turn attention to it. In AmE the word is best reserved for formal contexts, especially legal writing—e.g.:

- “Brandeis frequently *adverted* to ‘manhood’ and ‘manliness’ in rallying his supporters in reform ventures.” Clyde Spillenger, “Elusive Advocate,” 105 *Yale L.J.* 1445, 1453 n.23 (1996). See **allude** (A).
- “He sometimes *adverted* to that distinction and thought that it was an obstacle to his being appreciated by English readers such as Ruskin.” Denis Donoghue, “Of ‘Song of Myself,’” *Hudson Rev.*, 1 July 2012, at 247 (referring to Walt Whitman).

To *avert* is to turn away or avoid, or to ward off—e.g.:

- “Clinton said even ‘5 million police officers’ could not *avert* this kind of tragedy if children are not taught the difference between right and wrong.” “Clinton Cites Need for Role Models,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, 18 Oct. 1994, at 3.
- “Tuning in on the radio is like listening to the couple in the apartment next to you scream at each other. You just can’t *avert* your ears.” Bill Torpy, “How Awful Are the Braves? Just Listen,” *Atlanta J.-Const.*, 10 Sept. 2015, at B1.

Occasionally, *advert* is misused for *avert*—e.g.: “Although five persons were injured, a real tragedy was *adverted* [read *averted*] because of the way

firefighters and quick-acting neighbors in the area worked together.” Stephen Byrd, “Smoking Blamed in Independence Fire,” *Kansas City Star*, 20 May 1996, at B1. See MALAPROPISMS.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
advert misused for *avert*: Stage 1

advertise. So spelled. Although it’s not etymologically an -IZE verb, it’s occasionally transformed into the erroneous **advertize*—e.g.: “A GOP consultant . . . was forced to quit Bob Dole’s campaign yesterday after two tabloids reported he *advertizes* [read *advertises*] for group sex partners.” Helen Kennedy, “Sex Flap Hits GOPer,” *Daily News* (N.Y.), 13 Sept. 1996, at 21.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
advertise misspelled **advertize*: Stage 1
 Current ratio in print (*advertise*
 vs. **advertize*): 214:1

advertisement is chiefly pronounced /ad-vər-tīz-mənt/ or /ad-vər-tīz-mənt/ in AmE and /ad-vərt-iz-mənt/ in BrE.

advertorial. See PORTMANTEAU WORDS.

advice; advise. *Advice* /ad-vīs/ (= counsel that one person gives another) is a noun. *Advise* /ad-vīz/ (= to counsel; try to help by guiding) is a verb. The spellings are sometimes confounded—e.g.: “All the programs take pains to inform you with large disclaimers that they are no substitute for real medical professionals (good *advise* [read *advice*]) and as such cannot be responsible if you use them improperly.” Bob Bielk, “Dr. Disc,” *Asbury Park Press* (Neptune, N.J.), 10 June 1997, at D1. See **advise**.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
advise misused for *advice*: Stage 1
 Current ratio in print (*good advice*
 vs. **good advise*): 448:1

***advisatory.** See **advisory**.

advise for *tell, say, explain, inform, or warn* is a pomposity to be avoided—e.g.:

- “The judge *advised* [read *told* or *warned*] Smith that he would not have the benefit of a skilled attorney who could identify legal issues or problems with the state’s evidence.” Kathryn Kranhold, “Mother’s Plea Fails to Sway Suspect,” *Hartford Courant*, 19 Oct. 1995, at A1.
- “Police *advised* [read *informed*] him of his rights before handcuffing him and transporting him to a nearby police station for booking.” Don Babwin, “Chicago Police Arrest R. Kelly on Child-Porn Charges,” *Phil. Inquirer*, 8 June 2002, at A4.

For an example confounding *advise* with *advice*, see **advice**.

adviser was long the standard spelling from the early 1600s. *Advisor* was a variant that became common in the 1900s and surpassed its rival in the second decade

of the 2000s. It was doubtless helped by the advent of *advisee* (a correlative dating from 1797 but popular from 1920) and the analogy of *advisory*. See -ER (A).

Current ratio in print (*advisor* vs. *adviser*): 1.1:1

advisory; *advisatory. The latter is a NEEDLESS VARIANT.

Current ratio in print (*advisory*
 vs. **advisatory*): 2,289:1

advocate; *advocator. The latter is a NEEDLESS VARIANT.

Current ratio in print (*the advocate*
 vs. **the advocator*): 529:1

adze /adz/ (= a wood-shaping tool with a sharp blade at a right angle to the handle), a word of unknown origin dating in English from the 1100s, has always been predominantly so spelled in Modern English. **Adz* is a variant.

Current ratio in print (*adze* vs. **adz*): 9:1

adzuki; azuki. The small reddish bean indigenous to China and Japan is predominantly spelled *adzuki* today—though *azuki* predominated from about 1935 to 1995. The spellings **atsuki* and **adsuki* are variants.

Current ratio in print (*adzuki* vs. *azuki*): 2.1:1

AE. In many words, *ae* is a remnant of the Latin digraph, formerly ligatured (æ), appearing in words of Latin and Greek origin. In many words in which this digraph once appeared, the first vowel has been dropped, especially in AmE. One sees this tendency at work in (*a*)*eon*, (*a*)*estivate*, (*a*)*ether*, (*a*)*etiology*, *encyclop(a)edia*, *et c(a)etera*, *f(a)eces*, and *h(a)emoglobin*. But in some words, the *ae-* forms are established—for example, *aegis*, *aeolian*, *aerial*, *aerobic*, *aerosol*, *aerospace*, *aesthetic*, *diaeresis*, *paeon*, and *praetor*.

Some words in BrE retain digraphs (e.g., *anaesthetic* and *foetus*) that AmE has shortened (e.g., *anesthetic* and *fetus*). Note that the preferred AmE forms are *aesthetic* but *anesthetic*. A definitive across-the-board statement about -*ae-* isn’t possible—just as it isn’t about most other usage matters.

aegis /ee-jis/ (= auspices, sponsorship) was originally a mythological term meaning “protective shield” or “defensive armor.” The word is now used exclusively in figurative senses, usually in the phrase *under the aegis* (not *with the aegis*)—e.g.: “And they appreciate that for creditors, there are some benefits to having companies either liquidated or reorganized under the *aegis* of the bankruptcy code.” Kim Strosnider, “Involuntary Bankruptcy?,” *Portland Press Herald*, 15 Oct. 1996, at C5. The phrase is often equivalent to *under the auspices*. See **auspices**.

Be careful not to confuse *aegis* with leadership in general—e.g.: “*Under Waxman’s aegis* [read *With*

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Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

Waxman directing or *With Waxman as director*], [Neil Simon's *Lost in Yonkers* fails to achieve the razor-sharp pacing and the superb characterizations that marked its Royal Alex engagement a few years ago." John Coulbourn, "Simon's Finest Found with 'Lost in Yonkers,'" *Toronto Sun*, 6 Feb. 1997, at 56.

The variant spelling **egis* is all but defunct.

Current ratio in print (*aegis* vs. **egis*): 340:1

Current ratio in print (*under the aegis of* vs. *under the *egis of*): 956:1

aeolian; ***eolian** (= carried, deposited, or affected by the wind) derives from the name of the Greek wind god Æolus. The word retains its *æ* digraph in English (decoupled), unlike so many other Greek derivatives that drop the *a*, such as *estuary*. Although *W11* lists **eolian* as the predominant spelling, that form is today less frequent than *aeolian* in AmE print sources and is little known in BrE. The word is pronounced /*ee-oh-lee-ən*/.

Current ratio in print (*aeolian* vs. **eolian*): 3:1

aeon. See **eon**.

aerie. See **eyrie**.

aerobicise. See PORTMANTEAU WORDS.

Aesop (the Greek fabulist) is pronounced /*ee-sop*/ or /*ee-səp*/—not /*ay-sop*/.

Aesopian (= [1] of, relating to, or typical of the semi-legendary Greek fabulist Aesop or of his well-known fables; or [2] [of communications] secretly coded in such a way as to sound utterly innocent but actually carrying hidden meanings), a proper adjective dating from 1728, has been the predominant form since about 1945. Before that, the variant **Aesopic* was a serious rival from about 1900. Sense 2 of the word derives from 19th-century Russian writers who evaded Tsarist censorship by satirizing social ills in coded language.

Current ratio in print (*Aesopian* vs. **Aesopic*): 1.6:1

aesthete /*es-theet*/ or, in BrE, /*ees-theet*/ (= someone who prizes or purports to prize beauty in art, design, literature, gastronomy, etc.), a Greek LOANWORD dating in English from the 1860s, has always been the predominant spelling. **Esthete* is a variant.

Current ratio in print (*aesthete* vs. **esthete*): 20:1

aesthetic; ***esthetic**. Although some dictionaries have long recorded **esthetic* as the primary form in AmE, the form *aesthetic* remains much more common in AmE and BrE alike. See **Æ**.

**Aesthetical* and **esthetical* are obsolescent variants.

Current ratio in print (*aesthetic* vs. **esthetic* vs. **aesthetical* vs. **esthetical* in AmE): 2,301:69:10:1

Current ratio in print (*aesthetic* vs. **esthetic* vs. **aesthetical* vs. **esthetical* in BrE): 2,277:33:12:1

aestival. See **estival**.

aestivate. See **estivate**.

aetiology. See **etiology**.

affair (= [1] a matter that concerns or involves someone; [2] a social event or activity; or [3] a secret, usu. short-term sexual relationship between two people, esp. when one of them is married) is predominantly so spelled in all varieties of English. **Affaire* is a variant only in sense 3.

Current ratio in print (*had an affair with* vs. *had an *affaire with*): 657:1

affect; **effect**. In ordinary usage, *affect* is a verb meaning "to influence; to have an effect on." *Effect*, as suggested by its use in that definition, is primarily a noun meaning "result" or "consequence." To *affect* something is to have an *effect* on it. But as a verb, *effect* means "to bring about; produce." See **effect (A)**.

Perhaps the most common error with these words is misusing *effect* for *affect*—here illustrated plentifully: "Katrina *effected* [read *affected*] everyone in the state of Mississippi in some way . . . As the recovery from Hurricane Katrina began, thousands of *effected* [read *affected*] homeowners on the Coast began getting the bad news. . . . Even before the power had been restored in some *effected* [read *affected*] areas, Gulf Coast residents were looking for relief. . . . [T]he Scruggs Katrina Group . . . would be dedicated to representing homeowners *effected* [read *affected*] by the storms." Alan Lange & Tom Dawson, *Kings of Tort* 96, 97, 98, 100 (2009). It's not just an idiosyncrasy of those two writers. It appears often enough to rank at Stage 2 in the Language-Change Index—e.g.: "Her maladies were always at the edge of serious. Not enough to *effect* [read *affect*] what she did, but just enough to be on the daily agenda." Paul W. Kahn, *Testimony* 81 (2021).

Using *affect* (= to influence) for *effect* (= to bring about) is also an old error that looks ever more difficult to stamp out. The mistake is especially common in the phrase *to effect change(s)*—e.g.:

- "Throughout the book her winning personality *affects* [read *effects*] changes in the drab and pitiful 'sad' people she encounters . . ." Philip Martin, "Rags, Riches," *Ark. Democrat-Gaz.*, 17 Dec. 1995, at E1.
- "[It is] a good example of environmentalists working with corporations to *affect* [read *effect*] change." John Holusha, "Companies Vow to Consider Environment in Buying Paper," *N.Y. Times*, 20 Dec. 1995, at D5.

H.W. Fowler treated only the verb forms of these words, apparently thinking they didn't seem susceptible to confusion as nouns. But today even the confusion of nouns is fairly common in both AmE and BrE. E.g.:

- "She doubted the majority flip would have a huge *affect* [read *effect*] on the council." Rona Kobell, "Republicans Ride Ehrlich Wave," *Baltimore Sun*, 6 Nov. 2002, at B8.
- "Most players, though, did not think it will have a lasting *affect* [read *effect*]." Ed Bouchette, "Looking Ahead," *Pitt. Post-Gaz.*, 14 Nov. 2002, at C6.

- “The Challenger accident had a large and lasting *affect* [read *effect*] on the Michoud plant.” Gordon Russell & Keith Darce, “Once More, Attention Is Focused on Michoud,” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), 2 Feb. 2003, Nat'l §, at 1.

Likewise, *effect* is sometimes misused for *affect*. See **effect (B)**. Cf. **impact**.

Affect may also mean “to pretend, feign, or assume (a characteristic) artificially”—e.g.: “One wonders at her choice to have all the actors *affect* Russian accents.” Marshall Fine, “K-19,” *J. News* (Westchester County, N.Y.), 18 July 2002, at G5.

Although *affect* is almost always a verb, it does have a rare, somewhat vague noun sense in the fields of psychology and psychiatry: “In general, [*affect*] is characterized as a state brought about by actions almost wholly devoid of intentional control in accordance with moral and objective viewpoints. The term is also found in the literature as practically synonymous with ‘emotion’ in certain senses.” 1 *Encyclopedia of Psychology* 28 (H.J. Eysenck et al. eds., 1972). Other definitions seem no clearer. One text defines *affect* as “the feeling-tone accompaniment of an idea or mental representation.” Leland E. Hinsie & Robert Jean Campbell, *Psychiatric Dictionary* 18 (4th ed. 1970). The term certainly doesn’t belong outside highly specialized contexts. And it seems questionable whether it justifiably belongs within them.

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1. *affect* misused for *effect*, n. & vb.: Stage 1
Current ratio in print (*the bad effects*
vs. **the bad affects*): 217:1
2. *effect* misused for *affect*, vb.: Stage 2
Current ratio in print (*affect our lives*
vs. **effect our lives*): 101:1

affectable. So spelled—not **affectible*. See **-ABLE (A)**.
Current ratio in print (*affectable*
vs. **affectible*): 4:1

affectation. See **affectation**.

affected, adj.; **affective**; **affectional**; **affectionate**. *Affected*, adj., = artificially assumed; pretended <a highly affected accent>. *Affective* = emotional <bipolar affective disorder>. *Affectional* = pertaining to affection <affectional displays>. *Affectionate* = loving, fond <affectionate children>.

Just as *affect* is sometimes misused for *effect*, so *affective* sometimes wrongly displaces *effective*—e.g.: “Physicians are also finding some non-opiate medications used to treat disease are *affective* [read *effective*] in controlling pain, Lingam said.” Candace L. Preston, “Doctors Offer Balm of Nepenthe,” *Bus. First* (Columbus), 27 June 1997, at 15. See **affect**.

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affective misused for *effective*: Stage 1

affectation; affectation. The first means “love, fondness”; the second means “pretentious, artificial behavior.” In Elizabethan English, these words were used more or less interchangeably, but now each has acquired its own distinct sense—which is good for the language.

affectation; affectionate; affective. See **affected**.

affianced. See **affined**.

***afficionado**. See **aficionado**.

affidavit (= a voluntary declaration of facts written down and sworn to by the declarant before an officer authorized to administer oaths) sometimes appears in the **REDUNDANCY** **sworn affidavit*—e.g.:

- “[The] defendant gave no evidence whatsoever, but put in a *sworn affidavit* [read *an affidavit*], pleading in extenuation of her offence the treacherous conduct of the Fitzgeralds.” Daphne du Maurier, *Mary Anne: A Novel* 333 (1972).
- “And he released three *sworn affidavits* [read *affidavits*] from former detectives who said they were forced to resign.” Jacqueline Soteropoulos, “New Port Richey,” *Tampa Trib.*, 7 Oct. 1995, at 1.
- “In a *sworn affidavit* [read *an affidavit*], the Mexican champion said he never received any insurance money . . .” Greg Logan, “King Trial Starts Today,” *Newsday* (N.Y.), Nassau & Suffolk ed., 10 Oct. 1995, at A44.

affiliable. So formed—not **affiliatable*. See **-ABLE (D)** & **-ATABLE**.

affined; affianced. *Affined* = closely related; connected. *Affianced* = engaged; betrothed.

affirm (= [1] to declare emphatically; or [2] [of an appellate court] to uphold a lower court’s judgment) is sometimes misused for *vindicate* (= to justify by outcome): “The results tonight *affirmed* [read *vindicated*] Mr. McCain’s decision to skip the Iowa caucuses.” Richard L. Berke, “McCain Romps in First Primary,” *N.Y. Times*, 2 Feb. 2000, at A1. Although one definition of *affirm* is “to validate or confirm,” here *vindicated* or even *justified* would have been a better choice.

affirmation; affirmance. These terms, unfortunately, overlap somewhat. Yet sorting out usage isn’t difficult: *affirmation* is preferable in every context but one—when an appellate court affirms a lower court’s judgment <the Supreme Court’s affirmance of the judgment came as a surprise>.

affirmative, in the; in the negative. These phrases have been criticized as jargonistic and pompous. (See, e.g., Quiller-Couch’s statement quoted under **JARGON**.) They have frequently appeared in law-related writing since the 1600s. They can usually be improved—e.g.:

- “All the other questions were answered *in the affirmative* [read *yes*], including a query on whether the evidence

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX (For the full key, see front matter pp. xxv–xxvi.)

Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

showed that Mr. Simpson had acted with malice.” Paul Pringle, “Jury Holds Simpson Liable in Slayings,” *Dallas Morning News*, 5 Feb. 1997, at A1.

- “But the council did *vote in the affirmative* on [read *grant*] a request from the Contributory Retirement Board to accept a state law that indemnifies board members if civil actions are brought against them.” David T. Turcotte, “Plan to Buy Goose Dog Advances in Gardner,” *Telegram & Gaz.* (Worcester), 4 Mar. 1997, at B4.
- “The more I thought about these questions, the more it seemed to me that they had to be answered *in the negative* [read *no*].” Jonathan Schell, “American Democracy Defines Itself,” *Newsday* (N.Y.), 1 Dec. 1996, at A34.
- “Hirsh . . . could’ve caused a tie with *a vote in the negative* [read *a no vote* or *a vote against*].” Justin Papp, “Greenwich School Board Narrowly OKs Plans,” *Conn. Post*, 5 Dec. 2020.

afflatus; ***afflation**; ***inflatus**. For the sense “inspiration” or “supernatural impulse,” *afflatus* is the standard—though rare—term. E.g.: “Richard Brookhiser, the author and editor, reminded us that it is generally alien to Dole’s temperament to act as the advocate, charged with disseminating his *afflatus*—he is more a technician.” William F. Buckley, “Are the Conservatives Mutinous?,” *Buffalo News*, 10 Apr. 1996, at B3. ***Afflation** and ***inflatus** are NEEDLESS VARIANTS.

The plural of *afflatus* is *afflatuses*, not ***afflati**. See HYPERCORRECTION (A) & PLURALS (B).

afflict. See **infect**.

affluence; **affluent**. These words are traditionally accented on the first syllable (/af-loo-ən[t]s/, /af-loo-ənt/), not the second (/ə-floo-ən[t]s/, /ə-floo-ənt/). See PRONUNCIATION (B).

afford. See **accord**, v.t. (A).

affront. See **effrontery** (A).

***affrontery**. See **effrontery** (B).

Afghan; **Afghani**. A person from Afghanistan is an *Afghan*. A thing from Afghanistan is an *Afghan* thing. It’s a common error to make the noun or adjective *Afghani*, which correctly refers only to the basic monetary unit of the country and is not capitalized—e.g.:

- “In 1997, the organization launched a campaign to aid *Afghani* [read *Afghan*] women.” Michelle Millhollon, “Sisters Fast for Ramadan,” *Advocate* (Baton Rouge), 28 Nov. 2002, at A1.
- “The civil affairs unit is helping *Afghanis* [read *Afghans*] rebuild their nation, Parsons said.” Gary McLendon, “Citizen-Soldier Gives Afghanistan Lesson,” *Rochester Democrat & Chron.*, 18 Dec. 2002, at F1.
- “Simple, serene place for approachable *Afghani* [read *Afghan*] food including good kebabs, fried eggplant and cardamom-scented milk pudding.” “Critic’s Choice: Restaurants Serving Ginger Desserts,” *S.F. Chron.*, 20 Dec. 2002, at D17.

See DEMONYMS.

Afghan is also (1) an alternative term for the Pashto language, (2) a short form of *Afghan hound*,

and (3) (not capitalized) a crocheted or knitted blanket or shawl.

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Afghani misused for *Afghan*: Stage 2

aficionado, a Spanish LOANWORD dating from the early 1800s, is often misspelled ***aficionado**—e.g.:

- “Orson St. John and Roswell Perkins, Manhattan-based attorneys by winter, Little Compton *aficionados* [read *aficionados*] by summer, became officers and legal advisers who could start tackling the call for a light.” David Arnold, “Time to Shine: 40-Year Lighthouse Effort Ends in a Flash,” *Boston Globe*, 9 Mar. 1997, at A1.
- “You will be shocked at the wealth of information in those tomes if you are not already an almanac *aficionado* [read *aficionado*].” David Hass, *Is Your Life Out of Whack?* 40 (2002).

Since the word was first introduced into English, the standard plural has always been *aficionados*, not ***aficionadoes**.

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aficionado misspelled ***aficionado**: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*aficionado*
vs. ***aficionado**): 91:1

Current ratio in print (*aficionados*
vs. ***aficionadoes**): 2,102:1

à fond; **au fond**. These GALLICISMS have different meanings. While *à fond* means “to the bottom,” *au fond* means “at bottom.” The terms also carry different figurative senses: *à fond* /ah-fon/ means “fully, thoroughly” <she knows the subject of mineralogy *à fond*>; *au fond* /oh-fon/ means “basically, fundamentally” <every good proofreader is, *au fond*, attentive to detail>. Unless you’re a native French speaker, you’re surely better off sticking to English phrases.

aforethought. See **malice aforethought**.

a fortiori /ah for-shee-or-ee/ or /ay for-shee-or-ī/, a LATINISM most commonly used in logic and argumentation, is an adverb meaning “by even greater force of logic; so much the more.” The phrase is sometimes effective, but only if the intended readers are sure to get it—e.g.:

- “Federal judges already have pointed out that the constitutional right to abortion, that is, to destroy a life, *a fortiori* implies a right to assisted suicide, the right to destroy one’s own life.” Leon J. Podles, “The ‘Big Tent’ Case Against Abortion,” *Wash. Times*, 22 Apr. 1996, at 28. (The argument is by greater force of logic, according to this writer, because if a person can take another life, surely one can take one’s own.)
- “Indeed, human bloodshed even by an animal must be avenged, and, *a fortiori*, bloodshed by a man’s own brother—a clear reference to Cain and Abel.” Leon R. Kass, “A Genealogy of Justice,” *Commentary*, July 1996, at 44. (The argument is by greater force of logic because human bloodshed by a brother is more reprehensible.)

The phrase is used illogically when the proposition following *a fortiori* is no stronger than the one preceding it—e.g.:

- “The argument for ‘mixing’ the Jewish studies program at Queens College, of course, applies *a fortiori* to many other studies programs that have sprung up in recent years.” “PC Absurdity at Queens,” *Times Union* (Albany), 19 July 1996, at A14. (Why is the argument even stronger for non-Jewish programs? Because the sentence is reasoning from the particular to the general, a proficient editor would probably substitute *equally* for *a fortiori*.)
- “[The book] *Leakage* is an extraordinary achievement—a careful, probing, empirical analysis of the American macro-economy and, *a fortiori*, [of] any free-market economy in the world.” George P. Brockway, “The Bleeding of the American Economy,” *New Leader*, 4 Nov. 1996, at 12. (If the book *Leakage* is a good analysis of the American economy, why would it more surely be a good analysis of *any free-market economy in the world*? For *a fortiori*, substitute *even* without commas.)

Writers sometimes use *a fortiori* as an adjective, a usage to be resisted—e.g.: “Clearly, if laws depend so heavily on public acquiescence, the case of conventions is an *a fortiori* [read *even more compelling*] one.” P.S. Atiyah, *Law and Modern Society* 59 (1983).

African American. See RACE-RELATED TERMS (B).

African-American English is a variety of English traditionally spoken by many North Americans of African descent. It is variously known as *African-American Vernacular English* (AAVE), *African-American Language* (AAL), *African-American Vernacular Language* (AAVL), *Black English* (BE), and *Ebonics*. The definitive treatment of this big subject is *The Oxford Handbook of African American Language* (Sonja Lanehart ed., 2015).

Afrikaner; *Afrikander; *Afrikaaner; Africander; *Africaander. These terms, frankly, are a mess. But let’s sort through them. The first is the standard term for a South African of European, especially Dutch, descent. The second and third are variants of that word: **Afrikaaner* reflects the spelling of the language Afrikaans, just as the end of **Afrikander* (the predominant form until World War II) reflects the end of *Hollander*. The word *Africander*, meanwhile, denotes a breed of tall, red, humpbacked cattle prominent in South Africa; but it is also an obsolescent term for *Afrikaner*, and *Afrikaner* is a variant of *Africander*. **Afrikaander* is a variant spelling of the name of the cattle breed. All clear now? See DEMONYMS.

Afrikaner is pronounced /af-ri-**kah**-nər/; *Africander* and **Afrikander* are pronounced /af-ri-**kan**-dər/.

Current ratio in print (*Afrikaner people* vs. **Afrikander people* vs. **Afrikaaner people*): 155:3:1

Afro-American. See RACE-RELATED TERMS (B).

aftercare (= the treatment, help, or supervision given to someone who has been released from a hospital, prison, etc.), a compound dating from the mid-1800s, has been predominantly so written, as a solid, since the late 1960s. Before that, the standard form had been **after-care*.

Current ratio in print (*aftercare* vs. **after-care*): 8:1

aftereffect. One word.

***after having [+ past participle].** This construction is ordinarily incorrect for *after* [+ present participle]. That is, although either *having gone on for ten years* or *after going on for ten years* makes sense, coupling *after* with *having* [+ past participle] makes a REDUNDANCY—e.g.:

- “Queen Caroline, the estranged consort of George IV, . . . died at Hammersmith in 1821, three weeks *after having been* [read *after being*] excluded from the Coronation in Westminster Abbey.” Kenneth Rose, “Precedent, Protocol and the Stately Ceremonial of Death,” *Sunday Telegraph*, 7 Sept. 1997, at 29. (On the ambiguous *who* in that sentence, see REMOTE RELATIVES (A).)
- “Carlin had arrived at the prison just months before to begin his sentence *after having been convicted* [read *after being convicted*] in the murder of Kent Leppink.” “Two Charged in ‘08 Prison Slaying of John Carlin,” *Alaska Dispatch News*, 31 Dec. 2010.
- “He held the title [world champion] from 1886 to 1894, *after having dominated* [read *after dominating*] the chess scene for decades before.” Mato Jelic, “Chess,” *Advertiser* (Aus.), 9 Oct. 2021, at 22.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX

**after having been* for *after being*: Stage 3

Current ratio in print (*after being* vs. **after having been*): 7:1

afterwards; afterword. *Afterwards* (= later) is often changed to *afterward* by American editors, though in popular usage the two forms are used interchangeably. Across World Englishes, *afterwards* has predominated since the 1600s. *Afterword* is a noun meaning “epilogue.” Cf. **foreword**.

For more on *afterward(s)*, see DIRECTIONAL WORDS (A).

Current ratio in print (*afterwards* vs. *afterward*): 2.2:1

again, like *against*, is preferably pronounced in AmE with an /e/ in the second syllable—hence /ə-**gen**/ and /ə-**genst**/. The pronunciations /ə-**gayn**/ and /ə-**gaynst**/ are chiefly BrE variants—though *DARE* records that these pronunciations may be found in AmE in Atlantic States, adding that they “may be considered affected” (1 *DARE* at 19). The pronunciations /ə-**gin**/ and /ə-**ginst**/ are frequent among less educated speakers (*ibid.*).

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX (For the full key, see front matter pp. xxv–xxvi.)

Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

agape. There are two words so spelled, with unrelated senses, different pronunciations, and even different syllabification. As a noun, *agape* /ə-**gah**-pay/ comes from a Greek word for “brotherly love” and denotes (1) “spiritual love in contrast to earthly or sensual love,” or (2) “a love feast.” As an adverb, *agape* /ə-**gayp**/ means “with mouth wide open, esp. in awe, surprise, or fear.”

aged. A. Pronunciation. As an adjective, the word may be either one syllable /ayjd/ <aged cheese> or two /ay-jəd/ <an aged mentor>, depending on its sense. In the first of those uses, the word means “having been allowed to age”; in the second, it means “elderly.” As an attributive noun similar to *elderly* <the sick, the weak, and the aged>, the word has two syllables /ay-jəd/.

B. Used Adverbially in BrE. British publications have adopted a shorthand adverbial used of *aged*, found most commonly in obituaries. Essentially, BrE uses *aged* where AmE would use the phrase *at the age of*—e.g.:

- “Later in the week, I met a man who had gone to Oxford *aged* 17 to read English and by the age of 22 had become a don.” Sarah Hervey-Bathurst, “The Spectator,” *Country Life*, 17 June 1999, at 136.
- “Professor John Lawlor, scholar of medieval English, died on May 31 *aged* 81.” “Professor John Lawlor” (obit.), *Times* (London), 7 July 1999, at 23.
- “James Farmer, who has died *aged* 79, was one of America’s four leading civil rights leaders during the 1960s.” “James Farmer” (obit.), *Guardian*, 13 July 1999, at 20.
- “Patrick Saul, who has died *aged* 85, was the founder of the National Sound Archive, the aural counterpart to the British Library.” “Patrick Saul” (obit.), *Daily Telegraph*, 16 July 1999, at 31.

Though once in use in the U.S. (mostly before the mid-20th century), this adverbial use of *aged* is now little known in AmE.

C. *Aged . . . years old. To say that someone is **aged* 75 years old is redundant—e.g.: “The average pension paid the average retiree, *aged* 71.4 years old [read *age* 71.4 or 71.4 years old], was \$11,448 a year.” “State Employee Pensions to Cost \$4.7 Million More,” *Providence J.-Bull.*, 18 Apr. 1995, at C5. This unfortunate phrasing became widespread during the latter half of the 20th century.

ageing. See **aging**.

ageism (= unfair treatment of people on the basis of age), a modern noun dating from the 1960s, has always been predominantly so spelled. **Agism* is a variant. Cf. **aging**.

Current ratio in print (*ageism* vs. **agism*): 131:1

agenda is (1) the plural form of *agendum*, which means “something to be done” (another, less proper plural of *agendum* being *agendums*); and, more commonly, (2) a singular noun meaning “a list of things to be done” or “a program.” The plural of *agenda* in sense 2 is *agendas* (certainly not **agendae*). Decrying *agendas* as a double plural is bootless.

In fact, sense 1 of *agenda* is archaic today and sounds pedantic—e.g.: “Place your notes, thoughts, quotations, queries, and lists of *agenda* [read *agenda items*], divided according to topics, in envelopes.” Lester S. King, *Why Not Say It Clearly* 74 (1978).

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
agenda as a singular noun: Stage 5
 Current ratio in print (*agenda* is vs. *agenda* are): 10:1

***agendize**, an ugly bureaucratic NEOLOGISM meaning “to put on an agenda,” originated in the late 1980s and has spread—e.g.:

- “‘Mr. Eliot did not make a decision on his own,’ he [Robert Bacon] said. ‘We made an error and did not *agendize* that item.’” Craig Quintana, “West Covina Renewal Deals to Get Closer Look,” *L.A. Times*, 28 Apr. 1988, San Gabriel Valley §, at 1.
- “William R. Ferris . . . thought that starting a tradition of presidential lecturers would raise the visibility of the annual Jefferson series and set up a nice chance for presidents to speak away from their usual *agendized* forums.” Tom Peepen, “Presidency Becomes a Casualty,” *Times Union* (Albany), 29 Sept. 1999, at A9.
- “Twice the Tustin school board has *agendized*, then tabled, the matter.” George Stewart, “Red Tape Slows After-School Program Series,” *Orange County Register*, 27 Sept. 2001, Tustin §, at 1.

The word remains JARGON and should be voted down.

agent provocateur. The predominant plural in English has always taken the French form: *agents provocateurs*, not **agent provocateurs*. See GALLICISMS & PLURALS (B).

Current ratio in print (*agents provocateurs* vs. **agent provocateurs*): 3:1

aggrandize (= [1] to increase the power or influence of; or [2] to exaggerate the reputation of) is pronounced /ə-**gran**-diz/—or, archaically, /**ag**-rən-diz/.

aggravate; aggravation. Though documented as existing since the late 1500s and today an engrained CASUALISM, *aggravate* for *annoy* or *irritate* has never gained the approval of stylists and should be avoided in formal writing. Strictly speaking, *aggravate* means “to make worse; exacerbate” <writing a second apology might just aggravate the problem>.

Even Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. nodded once, using *aggravate* for *irritate* in one of his letters to Sir Frederick Pollock in 1895: “Our two countries *aggravate* each other from time to time.” 1 *Holmes-Pollock Letters* 66 (1941). The lapse is common in modern writing—e.g.:

- “It has *aggravated* [read *irritated*] me when I have seen billboards that contained misspelled words, punctuation errors and other things that are fundamental to the English language.” Letter of Shael Morgan, “Newspaper Critic Should Watch TV,” *Fla. Today*, 31 Jan. 1998, at A12.
- “He arrived *aggravated* [read *irritated*] and angry about having to spend an hour driving back and forth when he had other things to do.” Eilene Zimmerman, *Smacked* 46 (2020).

In some contexts, it's genuinely difficult to tell whether the word *aggravating* is an adjective or a present participle—e.g.: “The City of Washington is notorious for aggravating allergies, and Mr. Clinton said he expected his to be more severe there than in Arkansas.” Lawrence K. Altman, “Clinton, in Detailed Interview, Calls His Health ‘Very Good,’” *N.Y. Times*, 14 Oct. 1996, at A1, A14. The second half of that compound sentence suggests that the writer is using *aggravating* correctly. But taken alone, the phrase in the first half of the sentence (*Washington is notorious for aggravating allergies*) could refer to either (1) making allergies worse (preferred), or (2) allergies that are irritating or frustrating.

The confusion also occurs between the noun forms—e.g.:

- “Washington Coach Jim Lambright’s insistence that his Huskies deserve to go to the Cotton Bowl instead of Oregon, and that the Ducks are overrated and lucky, has been met with bemusement and *aggravation* [read *irritation*] in Eugene.” “Cotton Bowl Flap,” *Austin Am.-Statesman*, 16 Nov. 1995, at C4.
- “Rush Limbaugh, still the industry giant, has an extra tone of *aggravation* [read *irritation*] as he denounces the unyielding poll leads of ‘the Schlickmeister’ and ‘noted hetero fun-seeker,’ President Clinton.” Francis X. Clines, “Cool to Dole’s Campaigning, Talk Radio Tries to Start Fire,” *N.Y. Times*, 25 Sept. 1996, at A12.

Often when one word is commonly misused for a second word, part of the blame can go to a third word that sounds like the first but means something close to the second. Perhaps *exasperate* contributes to the misuse of *aggravate* (which sounds a bit like *exasperate*) in the sense of *irritate* (which is close in meaning to *exasperate*). Also, when *aggravate* is used in this sense, it often implies something more intense than merely *irritate*. It is closer in meaning to *exasperate*.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
aggravate for *annoy* or *irritate*: Stage 4

aggregable; aggregatable. The first has long been the standard adjective. But in the mid-1990s, *aggregatable* overtook its shorter sibling in frequency of use—and it shows no signs of declining. The word became popular in internet terminology, especially in the phrase *aggregatable global unicast address*. See -ABLE (D) & -ATABLE.

aggregate, n.; aggregation. Both may mean “a mass of discrete things or individuals taken as a whole,” *aggregate* being the more usual term. *Aggregate* /ag-rə-git/ stresses the notion “taken as a whole” (as in the phrase *in the aggregate*), and *aggregation* /ag-rə-gay-shən/ is more nearly “a mass of discrete things.” For “the act of aggregating,” only *aggregation* will suffice.

aggregate, vb. A. Sense. *Aggregate* /ag-rə-gayt/ = to bring together a mass of discrete things or individuals into a whole. The verb is sometimes misused for *total* in reference to sums—e.g.: “Trade between China and

Taiwan has grown steadily in the past decade, *aggregating* [read *totaling*] almost \$21 billion.” V.H. Krulak, “China’s Weapon Against Taiwan,” *San Diego Union-Trib.*, 9 Mar. 1996, at B8.

B. Aggregate together. This REDUNDANCY dates from the late 1700s. Although it has declined since 1900, it still appears in print today—e.g.: “Terrestrial dust is mostly tiny fragments abraded from larger things; some of it may be even smaller things *aggregating together* [read *aggregating* or *clumping together*] to form motes of dust.” C. Claiborne Ray, “Q&A,” *N.Y. Times*, 13 Feb. 1996, at C5.

aggregation. See **aggregate, n.**

aggress. See BACK-FORMATIONS.

***aggrievance.** See **grievance.**

agilely, adv., is occasionally misspelled **agiley*—e.g.: “But it’s pointless to bemoan the status quo; what we need to do is work as *agiley* [read *agilely*] and cannily as we can with the situation as given to get across the many exciting and provocative and challenging works that continue to be written—and widely read.” “Will Publishing Survive?,” *L.A. Times*, 25 Feb. 2001, Book Rev. §, at 6. Cf. **futilely & solely**. See ADVERBS (C).

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agilely misspelled **agiley*: Stage 1

aging is the standard spelling for the present participle for *age*, vb. *Ageing* is a chiefly BrE variant. See SPELLING (D). Cf. **ageism**.

Current ratio in print (*aging* vs. *ageing*): 3:1

agitable. So formed—not **agitatable*. See -ABLE (D) & -ATABLE.

agnostic. See **atheist**.

-AGOG(UE). This suffix derives from the Greek word meaning “to lead; drive.” Traditionalists and BrE writers prefer retaining the *-ue*—hence *demagogue* (lit., “a leader of people”) and *pedagogue* (lit., “a leader of children”). Among other advantages, these spellings prevent any possible confusion with the adjective and adverb *agog* (= intensely excited) <all agog over the Christmas presents>.

William Safire has predicted the demise of *-ue* forms: “Note the lack of a *u* in . . . [what] most of us would until recently *spell* [read *have spelled*] as *demagoguing*. But we live in a non-U world; just as *catalogue* and *dialogue* have been dropping their *ue* endings, so too will *demagogue* soon enough be spelled *demagog*, with its gerund *demagoging*.” William Safire, “On Language,” *N.Y. Times*, 21 May 2000, § 6, at 28, 30. For now, the traditionalist will continue to use the *-ue* forms—and their disappearance, if Safire is right, will be gradual enough that no one will get all agog over it. Cf. **demagogue**.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX (For the full key, see front matter pp. xxv–xxvi.)

Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

agree. **A. Preposition with.** *Agree with* means “to be in accord with (another)”; *agree to* means “to acquiesce in (usu. the performance or specifications of something).” One agrees *with* someone *on* or *about* a certain settlement <I agree with you about the color>. *Agree on* refers to the subject of the agreement <we agree on the color>.

B. Transitive or Intransitive. In BrE, *agree* has come since the 1980s to be used as a transitive verb <they agreed the change> where AmE would make it intransitive <they agreed to the change>. The usage may appear to be a typo when you first see it, but notice that it appears in the title as well as the first line of this: “The German cabinet yesterday *agreed* sweeping changes to unemployment benefits, aimed at making savings of DM17bn (\$11bn) by 2000.” Judy Dempsey, “Bonn Agrees Heavy Cut in Jobless Costs,” *Fin. Times*, 13 June 1996, at 2.

AGREEMENT, GRAMMATICAL. See CONCORD & SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT.

agriculturist; agriculturalist. The shorter form (*agriculturist*) has traditionally been considered preferable, but the longer form is now nearly as common in AmE. Actually, *farmer* is even better if it applies.

Current ratio in print (*agriculturist* vs. *agriculturalist*): 1.9:1

ague (= a fever accompanied by chills) is pronounced /ay-gyoo/.

ahold. This noun is an AmE CASUALISM equivalent to *hold*. It ordinarily follows the verb *get*. Though omitted from most British dictionaries, it appears in most American dictionaries and surfaces fairly often in informal contexts—e.g.:

- “Brand, the Clay juvenile officer, said she isn’t surprised the kids were able to get *ahold* of fireworks.” Julianna Gittler & Cammi Clark, “Illegal, Dangerous, and Always Around,” *Post-Standard* (Syracuse), 2 July 1998, at 13.
- “It’s not as easy to get *ahold* of Hennepin County Sheriff Pat McGowan as recent news has led us to believe.” Doug Grow, “Would Others Get Grams Treatment?,” *Star Trib.* (Minneapolis), 13 Dec. 1999, at B2.
- “He got *ahold* of Theodore while clenching his teeth and saying, ‘We’ll see about this,’ forcing the boy into his shoes.” Jan Faull, “Parenting,” *Seattle Times*, 3 Feb. 2001, at F1.

Even so, *get hold of* is much more frequent than *get ahold of* (or *get a hold of*) in AmE and BrE alike.

The dialectal variant **aholt* (barely known to BrE) is uncommon even in recorded speech, and is much more provincial-sounding—e.g.: “‘The Lord’s going to get *aholt* of people,’ she smiles.” Bo Emerson, “Joyful Noise,” *Atlanta J.-Const.*, 29 June 1997, Dixie Living §, at 1.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX

1. *ahold* for *hold*: Stage 2

Current ratio in print (*get hold* vs. *get ahold*): 8:1

2. **aholt* for *ahold*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*ahold* vs. **aholt*): 112:1

-AHOLIC/-AHOLISM. These newfangled “suffixes” derive from *alcoholic* and *alcoholism*, which were extended to *workaholic* and *workaholism*, and from there to other words indicating various addictions or obsessions. Each new term is automatically a MORPHOLOGICAL DEFORMITY to which nobody objects, given their inherent jocularly. Many examples are nonce-words (e.g., *beefaholic*, *footballaholic*, *spendaholic*, *wordaholic*). The term *chocoholic*, like *alcoholic*, has an *o* in the third-from-the-last syllable.

aide; aid, n. Both terms are used in reference to a person whose responsibility is to provide help to another <a physician’s aide> <a teacher’s aide>. The spelling *aide* is preferable—and it’s much more common, probably because *aid* also has the sense of “practical help or support, such as money or food.”

Current ratio in print (*teacher’s aide* vs. **teacher’s aid*): 15:1

aide-de-camp (= military aide) is so spelled—not **aid-de-camp*. Borrowed from French, the phrase should retain the French spelling—*aide*—especially considering that *aide* is itself now an English word (meaning “a staff member under one’s authority”). The plural is *aides-de-camp*. See PLURALS (B).

Current ratio in print (*aide-de-camp* vs. **aid-de-camp*): 17:1

Current ratio in print (*aides-de-camp* vs. **aide-de-camps*): 26:1

aigrette /ay-gret/ (= a tuft of feathers, precious stones, or other ornament worn on a hat or in the hair) has been predominantly so spelled since the mid-1700s. **Aigret* is a variant.

Current ratio in print (*aigrette* vs. **aigret*): 17:1

aim to [+ vb.]; aim at [+ vb. + -ing]. The idiom *aim to* (*do*) has long been typical of AmE—e.g.: “Rhetoric . . . aims to make us artists.” Brainerd Kellogg, *A Text-Book on Rhetoric* 18 (1881). Although some British commentators have expressed a preference for *aim at* (*doing*), that form is not prevalent today even in BrE.

Current ratio in print (*aims to provide* vs. *aims at providing*): 6:1

***ain’t.** Is this word used orally in most parts of the country by cultivated speakers? In 1961, W3 said it was, provoking a firestorm of protests from journalists and academics. See Herbert C. Morton, *The Story of Webster’s Third* 153–70 (1994). W3’s assessment was quite a change from that of W2 (1934), which had given it a tag: “*Dial. or Illit.*” The editor of W3, Philip Gove, explained the change by conceding that he had no large files of empirical evidence: “Knowledge of some kind of language behavior comes through contact with its observers and is not always documented because there seems to be no reason to collect additional evidence” (*ibid.* at 262). If that’s the method, then one can confidently say that W3’s treatment of *ain’t* was flawed in its incompleteness.

In 1962, the year after *W3* was published, an apt cartoon appeared in *The New Yorker*. A man stands in the reception area of G. & C. Merriam Dictionary Division, as the receptionist says to him, “Sorry. Dr. Gove ain’t in.”

Yes, **ain’t* is used by cultivated speakers, but usually for either of two reasons: (1) to be tongue-in-cheek; and (2) to flaunt their reverse snobbery. For most people, it remains the most notorious example of bad usage—a NONWORD. All in all, the 1934 tag has either remained accurate or been bolstered.

Admittedly, there’s a third possibility. The philosopher Hilary Putnam once wrote (in a famous dictum): “Cut the pie any way you want, meanings just ain’t in the head.” Putnam, “The Meaning of Meaning,” in *Philosophical Papers, Vol. II: Mind, Language, and Reality* 227 (1975). He was drawing special attention to what was then a strikingly unusual “externalist” claim that semantics cannot be a matter of meanings that we hold in our minds. He wanted his statement to surprise. To further this purpose, he used the non-standard *ain’t*. The nonstandard status of the word was crucial for the oomph: borrowing from another dialect enhanced the unusual emphasis being conveyed.

airbrush, n. & vb., is so written as a solid—not **air brush* or **air-brush*.

Current ratio in print (*airbrush* vs. **air brush* vs. **air-brush*): 55:6:1

air conditioner. Two words—preferably not *air-conditioner* or **airconditioner*.

Current ratio in print (*air conditioner* vs. *air-conditioner* vs. **airconditioner*): 50:6:1

aircrew (= the pilot and other personnel responsible for flying a plane or jet) is so written as a solid—not **air crew* or **air-crew*.

Current ratio in print (*aircrew* vs. **air crew* vs. **air-crew*): 128:13:1

air freight. Two words for the noun. But the verb is hyphenated <the seller air-freighted the wine>. The solid *airfreight* is a variant of both noun and verb.

Current ratio in print (*by air freight* vs. *by airfreight* vs. *by air-freight*): 21:8:1

Current ratio in print (*air-freighted* vs. *airfreighted* vs. *air freighted*): 1.9:1.4:1

airlift, n. & vb., has been solid since the 1940s. **Air-lift* and **air lift* are variant spellings.

Current ratio in print (*airlift* vs. **air-lift* vs. **air lift*): 23:1.1:1

airline has been so written, solid, since the early 20th century. **Air-line* and **air line* are variants.

Current ratio in print (*airline industry* vs. **air line industry* vs. **air-line industry*): 13,481:3:1

Current ratio in print (*the airlines* vs. **the air lines* vs. **the air-lines*): 1,365:16:1

AIRLINESE. The JARGON of the airline business is notable in several ways. First, it has an odd vocabulary, in which *equipment* refers to the airplane you wish you were boarding (“The flight has been delayed because we don’t have any *equipment*—it’s in Pittsburgh”). Second, it relies heavily on DOUBLESPEAK, with a heavy dose of ZOMBIE NOUNS; *seat cushions may be used as flotation devices* means “if we crash in water, use your seat cushion to float”; *in the event of a loss in cabin pressure* means “if we lose cabin pressure so that no one can breathe”; *please use the trash dispenser for anything other than bathroom tissue* means “don’t try to flush paper towels or anything other than bathroom tissue down the commode.” (For still another example, see **only (B)**.) Third, it is often stilted and redundant—e.g.: “It is a federal requirement to comply with all safety regulations.” Fourth, it has borrowed many nautical terms, both directly (*aft*, *bulkhead*, *crew*, *fleet*, *galley*, *hold*, *stowage*) and by analogy (*airworthy*, *flight deck*). Finally, it contains many NEOLOGISMS, some formed by combining nouns (*cross-check*, *ground personnel*), some by affixation (*inflight*, adj.), and some by changing parts of speech (e.g., *overnight*, vb., as in “We’ll have to overnight you”). Among other recent coinages are these:

- **enplane**: “PFCs are \$1 to \$3 fees that airports can tack on to the ticket price paid by each *enplaned* passenger, in order to finance the expansion of airfields and terminals.” Jon McKenna, “Trends in the Region,” *Bond Buyer*, 5 Sept. 1996, at 29.
- **enplanement**: “Though it recorded more than 600,000 *enplanements* in the mid-’70s, the state is now struggling to board about 350,000 passengers a year.” Rick Steelhammer, “Airport Group Seeking Increased Federal Role,” *Charleston Gaz.* (W. Va.), 14 Aug. 1996, at C1.
- **hub-and-spoke**: “The industry’s *hub-and-spoke* system of operating, in which short flights feed customers into big airports, where they board longer flights, has also increased demand for regional jets.” “Airline to Pay \$1.4 Billion for 67 Jets,” *N.Y. Times*, 18 June 1997, at C4.
- **interline**: “Southwest does not *interline* with other carriers, in part because it is simply unwilling to spend the extra time and money on the ground, waiting to board passengers from connecting flights that are often delayed.” Kevin Freiberg & Jackie Freiberg, *Nuts! Southwest Airlines’ Crazy Recipe for Business and Personal Success* 52 (1996).
- **load factor**: “Instead of raising fares when *load factors* (ratio of passenger capacity to tickets sold) are up, Southwest increases the number of flights and expands the market.” *Ibid.* at 53.
- **pushback**: “[The] ramp agent unhooks the *pushback* from the aircraft and the plane taxis toward the runway.” *Ibid.* at 59.

Although these neologisms serve a genuine purpose, airlineese otherwise typifies some of the worst qualities of modern AmE (e.g., “We’ll be on the ground *momentarily*”—see **momentarily**). And it

has a debilitating effect because so many people are so frequently exposed to it. Small wonder that some of them feel tempted to dash for an emergency exit. See **OBSCURITY**.

airmail. Originally two words (after its introduction into the language about 1911), the term had become predominantly solid in AmE by the late 1950s and in BrE by the early 1960s.

Current ratio in print (*airmail*
vs. **air mail* vs. **air-mail*): 14:4:1

airworthy, used in reference to aircraft, means “fit for flying.” The word, surprisingly enough first used in 1829, was analogized from *seaworthy*. The word came into widespread use after 1910. See **AIRLINESE** & **seaworthy**.

ait (BrE for “a small island”) is predominantly so spelled—not **eyot*, a variant that was never common.

Current ratio in print (*ait* vs. **eyot*): 61:1

***aitiology**. See **etiology**.

a la; à la. This **GALLICISM**, meaning “in the manner or style of,” was borrowed into English in the late 1500s. It appears in such well-known phrases as *à la carte* (= according to the menu’s individual pricing for an item) and *à la mode* (= [1] fashionable, stylish; or [2] topped with ice cream). The phrase often serves a comparative function <he’s bound to be a record-breaking baseball player *à la* Hank Aaron> <a recipe for economic instability *à la* the 1930s>. Generally, it is written without the **DIACRITICAL MARK** and without italics <he chipped in *a la* Tom Watson>, unless it appears as part of a larger French phrase <steak *à la grecque*> <pommes *à la duchesse*>.

Alabamian; *Alabaman. The first, pronounced /al-ə-bay-mee-ən/ or /al-ə-bam-ee-ən/, is standard; the second is a variant. See **DEMONYMS**.

Current ratio in print (*Alabamian*
vs. **Alabaman*): 1.6:1

à la mode (= [1] fashionable; or [2] served with ice cream) has been predominantly so written since it was introduced into English in the 1600s. **Alamode* was fashionable for a time—even predominant for a while in the late 1700s. The form *à la mode*, retaining the grave accent, remains more common than the spelling without this **DIACRITICAL MARK**.

Current ratio in print (*à la mode*
vs. *a la mode* vs. **alamode*): 19:6:1

alas; alack. *Alas*, a mild exclamation, expresses woe caused by a lamentable state of affairs. E.g.: “The creatures keep Susan alive (inexplicable unless she is meant to be mated with the king bug), and they stop evolving into humans (so we never, *alas*, see the final stage of a really ugly bug-man).” Richard Corliss, “Really Bugged: In *Mimic*, Giant Roaches Invade New York City,” *Time*, 25 Aug. 1997, at 70.

Alack, a synonymous exclamation, is archaic. *Alas* and *alack* is an old **CLICHÉ**. Because the words are so old-fashioned, virtually all uses have a touch of humorous irony. See **ARCHAISMS**.

Alaska Native. See **Native American**.

Albanian. This term may refer to someone from either Albania (in which case it’s pronounced /al-bay-nee-ən/) or Albany, New York (in which case it’s pronounced /ahl-bə-nee-ən/). See **DEMONYMS**.

albeit. Though Eric Partridge pronounced this conjunction an **ARCHAISM** (*U&A* at 41), it thrives in written AmE. Labeled “literary” in the *COD*, the word *albeit* means “though.” The predominant modern use for *albeit* is to introduce concessive phrases—e.g.:

- “How did one of the most respected engineering schools in the country, *albeit* the smallest, reach such a low point?” Gord Henderson & Ted Shaw, “Controversy Turns Dreams to Turmoil,” *Windsor Star*, 26 Oct. 1996, at A1.
- “There may be another way, *albeit* unconfirmed, to increase your odds.” Shelly Branch, “Tax Audits Aren’t Nice,” *Fortune*, 17 Mar. 1997, at 188.
- “The fair has been an annual event, *albeit* one far removed from the thrill rides and demolition derby that have become popular attractions for modern fairgoers.” Tammy Garrett, “White County Fair to Celebrate 80-Year Anniversary,” *Ark. Democrat-Gaz.*, 10 Sept. 2015, at 68.

Albeit may also begin a subordinate clause, *albeit though* or *although* is more natural and more common with this type of construction—e.g.: “The state will let the free market do it, *albeit* the effects may accrue more unevenly and, perhaps, more brutally.” Lucette Lagnado, “Sick Wards: New York’s Hospitals Merge, Cut and Fret as Deregulation Nears,” *Wall Street J.*, 25 Oct. 1996, at A1. Cf. **howbeit**.

The first syllable of *albeit* is pronounced like *all*, not like your friend *Al*.

albino. Pl. *albinos*. See **PLURALS** (D).

album /al-bəm/ is sometimes mispronounced in AmE with an intrusive *l*, as if it were /al-bləm/. See **PRONUNCIATION** (B), (E).

Albuquerque; Alburquerque. The accepted spelling of the city in New Mexico is *Albuquerque*. But the original spelling—used in the title of Rudolfo Anaya’s novel by that name (published in 1992)—was *Alburquerque*. The place name is sometimes misspelled **Alberquerque* or **Albequerque*.

Current ratio in print (*Albuquerque*
vs. *Alburquerque* vs. **Albequerque*
vs. **Alberquerque*): 1,625:24:1.5:1

Albuquerquean; *Albuquerqueian. The first is standard; the second is an uncommon variant. See **DEMONYMS**.

aleatory; fortuitous; stochastic. These words have similar but distinct meanings. The first two are especially close, meaning “depending wholly on chance.”

Aleatory derives from the Latin word for the game of dice: *alea jacta est* (= the die is cast). *Fortuitous*, meanwhile, carries the suggestion of an accident, usually but not always a happy one. (See **fortuitous**.) As it happens, *aleatory* usually refers to present descriptions or future events <the aleatory process of flipping a coin seems much too capricious for settling a dispute>, *fortuitous* to past events <how fortuitous that we met here, and on this day>. *Stochastic*, the most rarefied of these words, means “random”; it is fairly common in the writing of economic analysts and statisticians.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson. See **Tennyson**.

alfresco (= in the open air; outdoor or outdoors) can be either adverbial <dined alfresco> or adjectival <alfresco dining>. From the mid-1700s until the 1980s, the two-word spelling *al fresco* predominated in print. Although the term had become predominantly solidified by about 1980 in AmE and by 1995 in BrE, the ratio in print between the two forms remains close.

Current ratio in print (*alfresco* vs. *al fresco*): 1.2:1

algae; *algee. The plural word for the mostly aquatic, plantlike organisms capable of photosynthesis is *algae* (/al-jee/ or, in BrE, /al-gee/). No other spelling has been recorded in dictionaries, yet the phonetic misspelling **algee* occasionally and surprisingly appears in edited scholarship—e.g.: “*Typha latifolia*, *Typha augustifolia*, *Phragmites australis*, *Scirpus* sp., and different *algee* [read *algae*] were the prevalent plant species in the wetland.” V.S.T. Ciminelli, “Biohydrometallurgy,” in 11 *Process Metallurgy Series* 583 (2001).

The corresponding adjective is *algal* /al-gəl/. The (rare) singular *alga* is pronounced /al-gə/ in AmE and BrE alike. Occasionally this term is pluralized as **algas*—a rare linguistic event.

Current ratio in print (*algae* vs. **algee*): 10,746:1

Current ratio in print (*algae* vs. **algas*): 579:1

algicide /al-ji-sid/ or, in BrE, /al-gi-sid/ (= a chemical or substance that kills algae), a compound dating from the early 20th century, has always been predominantly so spelled. **Algaecide* is a variant.

Current ratio in print (*algicide* vs. **algaecide*): 1.4:1

algology. See **phycology**.

alias is both adverb (= otherwise [called or named]), as an elliptical form of *alias dictus*, and noun (= an assumed name), today usually the latter. *Alias* refers only to names and should not be used synonymously with *guise* (= assumed appearance, pretense). See **pseudonym**.

alibi. **A. As a Noun for excuse.** Strictly speaking, the words are not synonymous, although the confusion

of their meanings is understandable. *Alibi* is a specific legal term referring to the seemingly ironclad defense of having been at a place other than the scene of a crime. By SLIPSHOD EXTENSION it came to be used (beginning in the 1850s) for an excuse or explanation for misconduct, usually one that shifts blame to someone else. This broader meaning has its defenders—e.g.: “Cynicism and the common man’s distrust of the law have tinged *alibi* with a suggestion of improbability and even of dishonesty. Purists insist that it should be restricted to its legal meaning, and those who wish to be formally correct will so restrict it. In so doing, however, they will lose the connotation of cunning and dishonesty which distinguishes it from *excuse*.” DCAU at 24. Their point is well taken, but *alibi* to denote a cunning excuse remains at best a CASUALISM.

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alibi for *excuse*: Stage 3

Current ratio in print (*an excuse* for *not* vs. *an alibi* for *not*): 75:1

B. As an Adverb. In legal usage since the 1600s, *alibi* has sometimes been used as an adverb (meaning “elsewhere” <he proved himself *alibi*>), but this usage should be avoided. Although “elsewhere” is the original Latin meaning of *alibi* (originally a locative of L. *alius* “other”), in English it has long served only as a noun, and harking back to the classical sense is an affectation.

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alibi as an adverb: Stage 1

C. As a Verb. Nor should *alibi* be used as a verb, as it occasionally has been since the late 1800s. The examples below are doubly bad, since the misbegotten verb (meaning *excuse*) is based on the misused noun:

- “‘He looked very heavy-armed warming up,’ Apodaca said. ‘I’m not *alibying* [read *making excuses*] for him, but I was very worried about him because of that start in Chicago.’” Rafael Hermoso, “Reynoso Feeling ‘Lucky,’” *Record* (N.J.), 18 June 1997, at S1 (quoted speech).
- “Tyson *alibied* [read *said* or *tried to excuse himself by saying*] that he ‘snapped’ when he bit Holyfield—twice.” Jeff Schultz, “Tyson’s Main Event: Avoid Trouble,” *Atlanta J.-Const.*, 11 July 1997, at F10.
- “I’d say there’s a danger and plain lousy taste in distorting a current president’s words to zip up a movie. ‘It’s fantasy, entertainment,’ Zemeckis *alibied* [read *rationalized*]. ‘It adds verisimilitude.’” Sandy Grady, “When Hollywood Distorts Reality for Big Bucks,” *Milwaukee J. Sentinel*, 23 July 1997, at 12.

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alibi as a verb: Stage 1

alien, adj., takes the preposition *to* or, less commonly, *from*. For purposes of DIFFERENTIATION, H.W. Fowler noted, “there is perhaps a slight preference for *from* where mere difference or separation is meant (*We are*

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Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

entangling ourselves in matters alien from our subject), and for to when repugnance is suggested (*cruelty is alien to his nature*)” (*FMEU1* at 15).

Current ratio in print (*alien to* vs. *alien from*): 14:1

alienable (= transferable to another) is so formed—not **alienatable*. See -ABLE (D) & -ATABLE.

alienor (= someone who transfers or conveys property to another) has been predominantly so spelled since the 1700s. **Aliener* is a variant. See -ER (A).

Current ratio in print (*alienor* vs. **aliener*): 37:1

aliquot, adj.; **aliquant**, adj. *Aliquot* = contained in a larger whole an exact number of times <4 is an aliquot part of 16>. *Aliquant* = contained in a larger number or quantity but not an exact number of times <4 is an aliquant part of 15>.

alkali (= a substance that, when combined with an acid, forms a chemical salt) predominantly forms the plural *alkalis*—not **alkalies*—in both AmE and BrE. The two spellings of the plural vied for predominance until the 1970s.

Current ratio in print (*alkalis* vs. **alkalies* in World Englishes): 3:1

alky, a shortened CASUALISM for the noun *alcoholic*, dates from the 1940s. **Alkie* is a variant spelling. The *OED* also records this term as a variant of *alcohol* from the mid-1800s.

Current ratio in print (*old alky* vs. **old alkie*): 1.4:1

all. A. All (of). The better construction is to omit *of* and write, when possible, “*All the attempts failed.*” Since the beginnings of Modern English, the phrasing *all the* (+ plural noun) has vastly predominated over *all of the* (+ plural noun): the *of*-variant was essentially nonexistent till the beginning of the 20th century, and even now it is not nearly as frequent in print, whether AmE or BrE. E.g.: “With the end to fighting, the group was disbanded, and *all* its members were ordered to burn their identity papers and go into hiding,” P.H. Ferguson, “End of War Gave Life to Would-Be Kamikazes,” *Austin Am.-Statesman*, 3 Sept. 1995, at A20. Although *all of* is more common in AmE than in BrE, it should generally be avoided in all formal writing. See **of** (A).

In two circumstances, though, *all of* is the better choice. The first occurs when a nonpossessive personal pronoun follows <all of them> <all of us>. The second occurs when a possessive noun follows—e.g.: “Beyond *all of* Jones’ ego-stroking maneuvers and incessant need for attention, this is what he is talking about,” Paul Daugherty, “Cowboys Owner Smarter than Average Bear,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 8 Sept. 1995, at B1.

Current ratio in print (*all the* vs. *all of the*): 9:1

B. With Negatives. *Not all*—as opposed to **all . . . not*—is usually the appropriate sequence in negative constructions. E.g.:

- “All literary sentences are *not* elaborate.” George P. Krapp, *The Knowledge of English* 72 (1927). (A possible revision: *Not all literary sentences are elaborate.*)
- “All people do *not* possess *Life’s* intuitive perception that the word is so ‘monstrous’ that even to list it as a dialect variation is to merit scorn.” Bergen Evans, “But What’s a Dictionary For?” in *The Ways of Language* 77, 81 (Raymond J. Pflug ed., 1967). (A possible revision: *Not all people possess Life’s intuitive perception . . .*)
- “Students rightfully protest; and while *all of their complaints do not* [read *not all their complaints*] have merit, they too should be heard.” William O. Douglas, *Points of Rebellion* 14 (1970).
- “When he screened Foster’s office files two days after his death, Nussbaum decided that *all* of the papers were *not* relevant to the suicide inquiry.” “Cops: White House Aide Foiled Probe,” *Chicago Trib.*, 4 Feb. 1994, at N14. (Two possible revisions to remedy the ambiguity of the original: *Nussbaum decided that none of the papers were relevant./ Nussbaum decided that some of the papers were not relevant.*)
- “Since *all teachers do not* [read *not all teachers*] teach the FSA subjects, other tests, like end-of-course exams, must be used.” Sue Legg, “Testing—When Is Enough, Enough?,” *Gainesville Sun* (Fla.), 6 Sept. 2015, Opinion §.

See **not** (A). Cf. **everyone . . . not*.

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**all . . . not* for *not all*: Stage 3

Current ratio in print (*not all of them are* vs. **all of them are not*): 13:1

C. As Subject. *All*, as subject, may take either a singular or a plural verb. When a plural noun is implied after *all*, the verb should be plural <all were present>—e.g.: “Until this morning, *all were* official residents of the three Dadaab refugee camps near the Kenya–Somalia border.” David Finkel, “African Refugees Start Journey to Homes in Distant U.S.,” *Miami Herald*, 25 Aug. 2002, at A16. But when *all* denotes a collective abstraction (as a mass noun), it should take a singular verb <all is well>—e.g.: “*All she wants is* people to be touched by the gifts she believes God has given her.” Johanna D. Wilson, “Back Roads,” *Sun-News* (Myrtle Beach, S.C.), 19 Aug. 2002, at C1.

Writers sometimes err, especially when a collective *all* has a plural complement in the predicate—e.g.: “All she needs *are* [read *is*] the open-house listings in the Sunday Real Estate section.” Elliott Rebhun, “Checking Out the Scenery in Apt. 3C,” *N.Y. Times*, 26 May 2001, at A11. The Christmas song “All I Want for Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth” gets it right.

D. And any. *All* follows a superlative adjective <the best of all>; *any* follows a comparative adjective <more than any other>. Constructions such as **more than . . . all* are illogical. See **best of all** & COMPARATIVES AND SUPERLATIVES.

All-American, n.; **All-America**, adj. As the head-words suggest, *All-American* is predominantly a noun <Jones is an All-American>. In the athletic sense, the

preferred adjective has long been *All-America* <three Nebraska linemen were selected for the All-America team>, though usage is almost equally divided. In the more general sense, however, *all-American boy* or *all-American girl* is the only idiomatic phrasing.

Current ratio in print (*All-America team* vs. *All-American team*): 1:1.1

Current ratio in print (*all-American kid* vs. **all-America kid*): [none possible because the latter phrasing does not appear]

all-around, adj.; all-round. The first is the standard AmE form, the second the BrE form. In fact, though, *all-round* predominated in AmE till about 1950, when the slightly longer form overtook it in frequency of use. In both varieties of English, the other form is a variant. When Americans use *all-round*, they have traditionally felt the need to show the elision of *a* with an apostrophe: “The apostrophe is needed to indicate that the word is a shortening of ‘around,’ not the adjective ‘round.’ ‘An all round man’ would mean one who is completely curved, of globular construction.” Edward N. Teall, *Putting Words to Work* 216 (1940). See **around**.

Current ratio in print (*all-around athlete* vs. *all-round athlete* in AmE): 6:1

Current ratio in print (*all-round athlete* vs. *all-around athlete* in BrE): 4:1

all clear, n.; all-clear. To denote a signal that danger has passed, the first is standard AmE, the second standard BrE. Note that the interjection is *All clear!* But in BrE, you’re given *the all-clear*; in AmE, you’re given *the all clear*.

***allegator.** See **alleger**.

allege; contend. To *allege* is to formally state a matter of fact as being true or provable, without yet having proved it. The word once denoted stating under oath, but this meaning no longer applies. To *contend* is to strive against—or, in the advocate’s sense, to state one’s position in a polemical way.

Allege should not be used as a synonym of *assert*, *maintain*, *declare*, or *claim*. *Allege* has peculiarly accusatory connotations. One need not *allege* only the commission of crimes; but certainly the acts alleged must concern bad conduct or negligence. Of course, journalists commonly use the word when speaking about things that a suspect is thought to have done <the witnesses alleged that he stole the car from the Joneses’ garage>—and they do it to avoid legal trouble.

alleged, adj. If the thing that is *alleged* has already been verified, then *alleged* is the wrong word. So the word is inappropriate when describing something that is known to have occurred. If the police believe that some particular person has committed a crime, that person is a genuine suspect, not an *alleged* one—e.g.: “The story

goes that Pierce had a verbal beef a year ago with one of the three *alleged suspects* [read *suspects*], and, by chance, they crossed paths again.” Will McDonough, “Cops and Players II,” *Boston Globe*, 30 Sept. 2000, at G1.

Alleged is traditionally pronounced with two syllables /ə-**lej**d/, not three. The modern pronunciation /ə-**lej**-əd/ seems to be an orthoepic BACK-FORMATION from *allegedly*. Cf. **supposed**.

allegedly /ə-**lej**-id-lee/ does not mean “in an alleged manner,” as it would if the adverb had been formed as English adverbs generally are. Wilson Follett considered adverbs like this one ugly and unjustified—especially *reportedly* (MAU at 279). Yet *allegedly* is a convenient space- and time-saver for *it is alleged that* or *according to the allegations*. Though not logically formed, *allegedly* is well established and, if used in moderation, unobjectionable. See -EDLY. Cf. **shamefacedly**.

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allegedly: Stage 5

alleger (= someone who makes an allegation), an agent noun dating from the 1500s, is the standard term. **Allegator* is a NEEDLESS VARIANT.

allegro. Pl. *allegros*, preferably not the Italian *allegri*. But some writers use the pedantic foreign plural—e.g.: “His delicate touch made the andante movements glissiten like an expanse of water, his 3rd movement *allegri* [read *allegros*] skip deliriously.” Rick Jones, “Rhythm, Religion and Gowns of Green for Television,” *Evening Standard*, 29 July 1996, at 7. See PLURALS (D).

Current ratio in print (*allegros* vs. *allegri*): 2.2:1

allergen-friendly. See -friendly.

alleviable. So formed—not **alleviatable*. See -ABLE (D) & -ATABLE.

ALLITERATION. A. Pleasant Examples. How language affects the ear should be a critical concern of writers, who can use sound (even in the mind’s ear) for any of several effects. When they repeat sounds in nearby words, the result is called *alliteration* (which has two subsets: *assonance* for vowels <reverie in poetry>, *consonance* for consonants <put pen to paper>).

Sometimes alliteration reinforces sarcasm, as when Vice President Spiro Agnew referred to the *nattering nabobs of negativism* or when Fred Rodell, a Yale professor, referred to due process as *that lovely limpid legalism*. Rodell, in fact, relished sarcastic alliteration, once referring to “the *tweedledum-tweedledee twaddle* of much that passes for *learned legal argument*.” Fred Rodell, *Nine Men* 331 (1955).

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Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

At other times alliteration merely creates memorable phrasing—e.g.:

- “Only active measures, *promptly* applied, can provide this *poor, pusillanimous poop* with the *proper pep*.” P.G. Wodehouse, *Right Ho, Jeeves* 129 (1934; repr. 1986) (consonance).
- “Nothing *sounds* more *studied* than a repeated *spontaneity*.” Tom Stoppard, *Lord Malquist and Mr. Moon* pt. 2, at 1 (1966) (consonance).
- “She had a *sneaky, sly, shy, squamous* personality.” Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Lathe of Heaven* 92 (1971) (consonance).
- “Music is unique among the *fine* arts in that it calls for a response not only *from the head* and the *heart* but also, *frequently, from one or more of the feet*.” Frank Muir, *An Irreverent and Thoroughly Incomplete Social History of Almost Everything* 1 (1976) (consonance).
- “A moment later, the banister gave way, and the *pair* on the *stair* were in the *air*.” Roger Zelazny, *A Night in the Lonesome October* 200 (1993) (assonance).

Sometimes alliteration is risky. If it leads you into SESQUIPEDALITY just for the sake of sound, it will probably annoy some readers—e.g.: “Lukacs has an *eagle eye* for the *etiology* of *error* and the seductions of false logic.” Ron Rosenbaum, “Springtime for Hitler,” *L.A. Times*, 23 Nov. 1997, at 12. If that writer hadn’t been lured by alliteration, he almost certainly would have used *cause* rather than *etiology*. See **etiology**.

B. Unpleasant Examples. The unconscious repetition of sounds, especially excessive sibilance (too many /s/ sounds, as in the phrase *especially excessive sibilance*), can easily distract readers: “When used by accident it falls on the ear very disagreeably.” W. Somerset Maugham, “Lucidity, Simplicity, Euphony,” in *The Summing Up* 321, 325 (1938). E.g.: “Everybody with a stake in solving the problem will have to *bear their fair share* of the costs involved.” Robert Ebel, “Personal View: Soviet Reactors Need a Western Focus,” *Fin. Times*, 13 July 1995, at 11. (A possible revision: *Everybody with a stake in solving the problem will have to bear some of the costs*.)

The best way to avoid the infelicity of undue alliteration is to read one’s prose aloud when editing. See SOUND OF PROSE.

Yet sometimes unpleasant alliteration isn’t merely a matter of whether it’s conscious or unconscious. That is to say, a writer may use it quite consciously but also quite unpleasantly, through poor literary judgment—e.g.: “The necessarily contextual, contested, and contingent character of substantive liberal principles necessarily prevents them, qua principles, from effectively inhibiting human brutality.” Lief H. Carter, “Law and Politics as Play,” 83 *Chicago-Kent L. Rev.* 1333, 1333 (2008).

***all . . . not.** See **all (B)**.

allocable. So formed—not **allocatable*. See -ABLE (D) & -ATABLE.

Current ratio in print (*allocable* vs. **allocatable*): 16:1

allocution. See **elocution**.

all of. See **all (A)**.

all of a sudden. This is the idiomatic phrase, not **all of the sudden*—e.g.:

- “I wasn’t thinking of anything, but *all of the sudden* [read *all of a sudden*] I was no longer tired.” Sam Brumbaugh, *Goodbye, Goodness: A Novel* 108 (2005).
- “*All of the sudden* [read *All of a sudden*] there was a huge flash and explosion.” Ray A. Jones, *110 Questions and Answers on Electrical Safety* 4 (2011).
- “She came, saw and conquered, and *all of the sudden* [read *all of a sudden*], every second A-list pop star wanted a residency on the strip.” Brendan Kelly, “‘Crazy’ Gamble Pays Off in Vegas,” *Edmonton J.*, 29 Aug. 2015, at D1 (referring to Celine Dion).

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**all of the sudden* for *all of a sudden*: Stage 1
Current ratio in print (*all of a sudden* vs. **all of the sudden*): 45:1

allow; permit. These words have an important connotative difference. *Allow* suggests merely the absence of opposition, or refraining from a proscription. *Permit*, in contrast, suggests affirmative sanction or approval.

all ready. See **already**.

all right. A. Uses. So versatile is *all right* that there are at least 15 identifiable uses of the term: (1) to mean “satisfactory but not superb” <school is all right, I guess>; (2) to mean “without bodily or mental discomfort or health problems” <do you feel all right?>; (3) to express suitability or convenience <Sure. Saturday morning would be all right>; (4) to express reassurance <it’s going to be all right, believe me>; (5) to denote success <she’s a millionaire; she’s doing all right for herself>; (6) to ask or grant permission <is it all right if Sally comes along?>; (7) to acquiesce reluctantly <oh, all right, I guess>; (8) to express or elicit understanding <I’ll check with you later, all right?>; (9) to threaten or impatiently express intention <all right, I’ve had about enough>; (10) to transition to a new subject <all right, now I’d like to address this other point>; (11) to express certainty <that’s out of bounds, all right>; (12) to declare exuberance <I won? All right!>; (13) to express strong approval <your new boyfriend is all right!>; (14) to respond to a greeting <How’s it going? All right. How about with you?>; and (15) to respond to a thank-you <that’s quite all right>.

Etymologically, *okay* (etymologically an initialism for *oll korrekt*) and *all right* are equivalent. But only *all right* can be used literally today in the sense “each one correct” <the answers were all right>—though even in such a use it might be considered ambiguous for use 1 (the answers were generally satisfactory?). In the extended senses of *all right*, the term is virtually interchangeable with *okay*. In colloquial contexts, it’s hard to think of a situation in which the two could not be switched—except perhaps in use 11. See **okay**.

There is a tendency by many people to use *alright* in the 15 ways just listed and to use *all right* in the literal sense “each correct” or “all of them accurate.” Hence

Alright, I admit that you were spot-on throughout: your answers were all right. Although this distinction in meaning would serve the purpose of DIFFERENTIATION, it raises an altogether different problem of usage to which we must now turn.

B. And *alright*. Rarely has the mere solidification of a word—the creation of a compound—attracted so much opprobrium. But since the 1880s, the solid *alright* has been condemned as “all wrong,” “illiterate,” “incorrect,” “solecistic,” “vulgar,” etc. By contrast, many other words (*almost, already, also, although, altogether, and always*) have been merged, over the centuries, into single-word compounds without objection.

True, *alright* was once solid in adverbial senses in Old and Middle English, but the *OED* has only sparse illustrative quotations after the 1200s. In Early Modern and Modern English, the term, when appearing in edited English, has been overwhelmingly two words. According to the *OED*, the solid *alright* is “more widespread in non-literary printed sources (e.g. newspapers and journals) than in literary sources.” It began to attract negative attention in the late 1800s.

In the short story “Unser Karl,” first published in 1882, Bret Harte had a German character write “in English characters and as a single word, ‘Alright.’” 13 *The Works of Bret Harte* 14–15 (1889). It was a character’s idiosyncrasy. The year 1882 also drew criticism from a journal editor, who wrote: “Of course the expression consists of two separate words, *all right*; there is no [single-word] compound. And yet educated persons sometimes catch themselves writing *alright*, after the fashion of *already*.” “Questions for Answers,” 3 *Good Literature* 281 (15 July 1882).

Thus began a steady stream of disapproval through the years. What follows is merely a representative sampling. Pay close attention to the quotations from 1940 and 1983:

- **1888:** “The word *alright* . . . has never received the sanction of good authority.” Jerome B. Howard, “Questions and Answers,” 2 *Phonographic Mag.* 75 (1 Apr. 1888).
- **1902:** “*Alright* [is] sometimes seen in illiterate manuscript and ill-printed village newspapers.” “Proofroom Notes and Queries,” 29 *Inland Printer* 606 (July 1902).
- **1912:** “*All right* should never be written *alright*.” William Dana Orcutt, *The Writer’s Deskbook* 101 (1912).
- **1926:** “**all right.** The words should always be written separate; there are no such forms as *all-right, allright, [and] alright*.” Fowler, *FMEU* at 16.
- **1927:** “*All right*, adv., . . . [is] now never written as one word, *alright*.” George Philip Krapp, *A Comprehensive Guide to Good English* 32–33 (1927).
- **1937:** “*Alright* is not a word.” Harry Shaw, *Writing and Rewriting: A Handbook of Good Usage* 43 (1937).
- **1940:** “*All right* . . . is the only correct form to use. Though it may be seen in print, the one-word form with one *l* is all wrong. There is no similarity to such other pairs of words as *all ready* and *already*, in which the two spellings

have different meanings.” Clarence Stratton, *Handbook of English* 15 (1940).

- **1947:** “Which is correct, *alright* or *alright*? Answer—Neither. There are no such words. The expression must be written as two words: *all right*.” Frank Colby, *The Practical Handbook of Better English* 58 (2d ed. 1947).
- **1954:** “*All right* is the only correct spelling. *Alright*, though occasionally used by writers of advertising and fiction, has not been generally accepted. *All right* in the sense of ‘satisfactory’ or ‘very well’ is a colloquialism which is becoming standard.” Glenn Leggett, C. David Mead & William Charvat, *Prentice-Hall Handbook for Writers* 316 (2d ed. 1954).
- **1956:** “*Alright* is a common misspelling for *all right*, accepted in modern dictionaries only with reservations.” Robert M. Gorrell & Charlton Laird, *Modern English Handbook* 588 (2d ed. 1956).
- **1965:** “*Alright* . . . is still regarded as a vulgarism, inadmissible not only in those obvious cases where two words are completely independent . . . but also where they may be regarded as forming a more or less fixed phrase.” Sir Ernest Gowers in revising *FMEU* at 18.
- **1980:** “Most authorities consider the single-word form (*alright*) substandard. Simply remember that *alright* is not *all right*.” Earl G. Bingham, *Pocketbook for Writers* 86 (1980).
- **1980:** “*All right* is the only correct way to write this expression.” Edward P.J. Corbett, *The Little English Handbook* 228 (3d ed. 1980).
- **1982:** “It is always written as two words, with no hyphen; *all-right* and *alright* are both incorrect.” Charles T. Brusaw, Gerald J. Alred & Walter E. Oliu, *Handbook of Technical Writing* 35 (1982).
- **1983:** “*Alright* . . . may eventually establish itself, but for the time being most authorities agree that *alright* is unacceptable in formal writing.” Peter Davies, *Success with Words* 26 (1983).
- **1995:** “The only correct spelling is *all right*.” Gerald P. Mulderig, *The Heath Handbook* G3 (1995).
- **1998:** “*Alright* is not *all right*; you are confusing it with the spelling of *already*. Never use *alright*.” Sheridan Baker, *The Practical Stylist* 235 (8th ed. 1998).
- **1999:** “*All right* is always two words. *Alright* is a common misspelling.” H. Ramsey Fowler, *The Little, Brown Handbook* 794 (7th ed. 1998).
- **2003:** “*All right*, meaning ‘acceptable,’ is the correct spelling. *Alright* is nonstandard.” Lester Faigley, *The Penguin Handbook* 807 (2003).
- **2005:** “The standard spelling is *all right*. *Alright* is common, but some people consider it incorrect.” Michael Swan, *Practical English Usage* 43 (3d ed. 2005).
- **2011:** “. . . the solecism *alright*.” Robert Hartwell Fiske, *The Dictionary of Unendurable English* 454 n.4 (2011).

The 1940 quotation is interesting for its suggestion that the solid form signals no difference in sense, when in fact it arguably does. It’s possible to see *all right* as meaning “each one correct” <were my answers all right?>, and *alright* in senses equivalent to those of *okay*. (See (A).) The parallel with *all ready* and *already* can be seen as quite close. So in 1940 Stratton was wrong to dismiss it and suggest that *all ready* and

already are distinguishable because they bear different senses. So might *all right* and *alright*.

The 1983 quotation suggests that *alright* “may eventually establish itself.” That eventuality seems under-way. The essential problem for the one-word version is that generations of English speakers were taught that *alright* is a barbarism. The stigma has been strong.

In opinions of the U.S. Supreme Court, the one-word version has appeared only three times and only in quotations of testimony: in 1954 (“*Alright* relax and think”), 1971 (“*Alright* now stand at attention”), and 1985 (“*Alright*, listen Frank, *alright*, honest”). In state and federal courts, the one-word compound almost invariably appears in transcribed speech, not in judges’ straight writing. But there are exceptions—e.g.: “Hinson said he was not physically *alright*.” *Hinson v. Bias*, 927 F.3d 1103, 1113 (11th Cir. 2019).

In the 1930s, H.L. Mencken called *alright* a “vulgarity,” but only mockingly, adding: “Vulgarity, after all, means no more than a yielding to natural impulses in the face of conventional inhibitions, and that yielding to natural impulses is at the heart of all healthy language-making. The history of English, like the history of American and of every other living tongue, is a history of vulgarisms that, by their accurate meeting of real needs, have forced their way into sound usage.” Mencken, *The American Language* 96 (4th ed. 1936). Elsewhere, he said: “The advertisement writers and authors combine in an attempt to naturalize *alright*, a compound of *all* and *right*, made by analogy with *already* and *almost*. . . . It not seldom gets into print. So far no dictionary supports it, but in *Webster’s New International* (1934) it is listed as ‘commonly found.’” *Ibid.* at 407.

In Mencken’s day, only unconventional writers used *alright* in published prose. Gertrude Stein was among them—e.g.: “The question mark is *alright* when it is all alone.” Stein, “Poetry and Grammar” (1935), in *Perspectives on Style* 44, 48 (Frederick Candelaria ed., 1968). Since then, usage in print has shifted. In 1950, the ratio of *all right* to *alright* in published books was 77:1; by 2019, the gap had closed to a 5:1 ratio. Mencken’s prediction that a “natural impulse” would lead to solidification seems to have been right.

What are you to do, then? It depends on your point of view. A strict traditionalist will heed the odium that the word has historically attracted and stick to *all right* in all senses.

Yet the tide is turning or may already have turned. In a 2021 Twitter poll, I posed this question: “Has *alright* as one word become acceptable in Standard Written English?” I expected only a minority of respondents to say yes. With 1,317 votes in 24 hours, the answers were 68% yes and 32% no. This vote comes from the same pool of people who voted 90% in favor of the serial comma, and 58% to 42% in favor of considering *hopefully* as a sentence adverb unobjectionable. That says something: *alright* is less objectionable to people than *hopefully*. Some respondents were puzzled at the thought that anything was wrong with *alright*;

they’d never heard of any opposition. Then again, the 32% who were against admitting *alright* into the realm of STANDARD ENGLISH represent some serious opposition.

For the time being, there are four groups of people: (1) those who solidify without any awareness of the controversy; (2) those who solidify while fully aware, thinking that the objections have always been bogus and refusing to be anxious about cavilers; (3) those who, while possibly sympathetic with the melder, keep it two words either because that’s the way they’re accustomed to seeing it or because they wish to avoid criticism; and (4) those who dogmatically insist on two words because they once learned that anything else is dead wrong. In time, groups 3 and 4 are sure to dwindle. Your author belongs to group 3.

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alright for *all right*: Stage 4

1900 ratio in print (*all right* vs. *alright*): 254:1

1950 ratio in print (*all right* vs. *alright*): 77:1

1975 ratio in print (*all right* vs. *alright*): 18:1

Current ratio in print (*all right* vs. *alright*): 5:1

1975 ratio in print (*All right!* vs. *Alright!*): 22:1

Current ratio in print (*All right!* vs. *Alright!*): 1.2:1

C. Altered Forms. The term *all right* (or *alright*) is so ubiquitous that speakers have condensed and changed it in various ways. In BrE beginning in the 1870s, it was spelled *orright* as an interjection—and later as an adjective and adverb as well. According to the *OED*, *orright* represents “a colloquial pronunciation.” In the 1990s, some AmE speakers compressed the two syllables into *aight* (or *a’ight* or *’ight*)—first attested in the *OED* from 1993. That form became common in social media as well as slangy speech.

all-round. See **all-around**.

all that. In negative statements, conditions, and questions, *all that* frequently means “to the expected degree”—essentially as an equivalent of *so very* <not all that exciting>. The expression is a CASUALISM dating back to the 1600s. E.g.:

- **Negative statement:** “Sure, we may smile ruefully at the memories of these past missteps, but they’ll never really be *all that* funny.” Ken Potts, “Remembering Mistakes Helps You Learn from Them,” *Daily Herald* (Chicago), 13 Jan. 2001, at 4.
- **Condition:** “If these bogus graduates are *all that* smart and computer-savvy, why don’t they design their own phony diplomas instead of paying ‘thousands of dollars’ to someone else?” “Furthermore,” *Omaha World-Herald*, 28 Dec. 2000, at 12.
- **Question:** “As dysfunctional as the Los Angeles Lakers seem at the moment, is it really *all that* strange that notorious malcontent Isaiah Rider would actually sound like the team’s voice of reason?” David Leon Moore, “O’Neal–Bryant Flap Has L.A. Teammates Scratching Heads,” *USA Today*, 12 Jan. 2001, at C8.

See **that** (F).

all the; all these. See **all** (A).

all the time. Margaret Nicholson criticized this expression when used in a context that doesn't indicate a definite period (*DAEU* at 17). Hence she labeled the following usage "slang": "Actors act while they are on stage, but he acts *all the time*."

This may have been one of Nicholson's pet peeves, since no other usage commentator has objected to the phrase. Though slightly informal, *all the time* in the nonliteral sense (= habitually) is acceptable English.

All the time is more polished phrasing than the unidiomatic **all of the time*. See **all (A)**.

Current ratio in print (*all the time*
vs. **all of the time*): 33:1

all together. See **altogether**.

all told. One archaic meaning of *tell* is "to count." (It's hidden deep in the phrase *automated-teller machine*.) Hence the idiom is *all told* <all told, there were 14 casualties>, which dates from the mid-1800s. Some people write **all tolled*, perhaps because *toll* can mean "to announce with a bell or other signal." But this is an error—e.g.:

- "All tolled [read *All told*], perhaps half the people eligible to participate will do so." "Getting Out the Vote," *Columbian* (Vancouver, Wash.), 17 Oct. 2002, at C6.
- "In 1999–2000, each of the eight Ivy League colleges received at least 10,000 applications; *all tolled* [read *all told*], the Ivy League colleges received 121,948 applications that year and admitted only 23,532, fewer than one in five." Christopher Avery, Andrew Fairbanks & Richard Zeckhauser, *The Early Admissions Game: Joining the Elite 7* (2003).

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**all tolled* for *all told*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*all told*
vs. **all tolled*): 521:1

allude. A. And advert & refer. To *allude* is to refer to (something) indirectly or by suggestion only. To *advert* or *refer* is to bring up directly, *advert* being the more FORMAL WORD. (See **advert**.) *Allude* is misused for *refer* when the indirect nature of a comment or suggestion is missing—e.g.:

- "The generous wrath which had caused her to *allude* [read *refer*] to her betrothed as a pig in human shape had vanished completely." P.G. Wodehouse, *The Return of Jeeves* 37 (1954) (the angry fiancée had just said, "You're simply a pig in human shape!").
- "Calling on President Clinton to enter the debate forcefully, Jackson *alluded* to [read *referred to* or *quoted*] the words spoken by King on Aug. 28, 1963: 'I have a dream that this nation will rise up . . .'" Chuck Finnie, "Jackson: Proposition 209 Equals 'Ethnic Cleansing,'" *S.F. Examiner*, 25 Aug. 1997, at A1.

In the following sentence, the writer creates an OXYMORON because an allusion can't be explicit: "The images in the grid *alluded explicitly to homosexuality*

[read *depicted homosexuality explicitly*], since all showed male couples, most in sexual positions." Maud Lavin, "Robert Flynt at Witkin," *Art in America*, Feb. 1993, at 111. For more on allusion, see LITERARY ALLUSION.

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allude used for a specific reference: Stage 3

B. And illude & elude. To *illude* (a rare verb) is to deceive with an illusion; to *elude* (a common verb) is to avoid or escape. Both words are sometimes misused for *allude*—e.g.:

- "He later added that 'It's more difficult than just having the money,' *illuding* [read *alluding*] to the politics that is played in owning a major professional sports team." Charles L. Griggs, "Black Athletes Lost in Sports Power Struggle," *Jacksonville Free Press*, 12 Mar. 1997, at 5. (For the use of the singular *is* with *politics*, see **politics**.)
- "But they draw the line at *eluding* [read *alluding*] to world events." Breuse Hickman, "Halloween Happenings Mean Pleasant Screams for Fright Fans," *Fla. Today*, 4 Oct. 2002, at 16.

The reverse error—*allude* for *elude*—is somewhat less common. E.g.: "Glenn said Derogatis also was charged with aggravated assault, possession of cocaine and *alluding* [read *eluding*] police." "Law & Order," *Star-Ledger* (Newark), 19 Dec. 2002, Essex §, at 39.

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1. *illude* misused for *allude*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*allude* to
vs. **illude* to): 37,891:1

2. *elude* misused for *allude*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*allude* to
vs. **elude* to): 419:1

3. *allude* misused for *elude*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*eluded him*
vs. **alluded him*): 166:1

C. For suggest. This is an attenuated use of *allude* to be avoided—e.g.: "As Johnson *alluded* [read *suggested*], who among us has no sin?" Letter of Karen M. Piet, "Jesus Forgave Sins of Those Who Repented and Told Them to Sin No More," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), 3 Sept. 1997, at A40.

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allude misused for *suggest*: Stage 1

allusion. A. And illusion. While an *allusion* is an indirect reference <literary allusion>, an *illusion* is a deception <optical illusion>. But some writers bungle the two—e.g.:

- "Full of jokes, literary *illusions* [read *allusions*], fractured Shakespeare and physical comedy, it's a show that appeals to young and old." Nadine Goff, "'Buck Mulligan' Has Something for Everyone," *Wis. State J.*, 18 Sept. 1995, at C5.
- "'I try not to be too annoying,' he said, admitting that Councilwoman Ramona Martinez once asked if she could get 'extra credit' for enduring his literary *illusions*

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX (For the full key, see front matter pp. xxv–xxvi.)

Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

[read *allusions*].” Susan Greene, “Stalwart Pursues New Role,” *Denver Post*, 9 Apr. 2003, at A19.

For the difference between *illusion* and *delusion*, see **illusion**. See MALAPROPISMS. See also LITERARY ALLUSION.

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illusion misused for *allusion*: Stage 1
Current ratio in print (*literary allusions*
vs. **literary illusions*): 114:1

B. And reference. See **allude** (A).

allusive; *allusory. The latter is a NEEDLESS VARIANT. See **elusive**.

Current ratio in print (*allusive*
vs. **allusory*): 138:1

ally. As a noun, the accent is on the first syllable: /**al**-ī/. As a verb, the accent is on the second: /ə-**li**/.

almond is traditionally and preferably pronounced /**ah**-mænd/ in both AmE and BrE—not /**ahl**-mænd/ or (worse) /**al**-mænd/. The pronunciation /**am**-ænd/ is also sometimes heard. See PRONUNCIATION (B).

almost. A. Placement. This word is sometimes misplaced in a sentence—e.g.: “There is *almost* a *childlike simplicity* [read *an almost childlike simplicity*] in their straightforward depictions.” Myra Yellin Outwater, “Early American ‘Naive’ Art a Surprise for Sophisticates,” *Morning Call* (Allentown, Pa.), 10 Mar. 1996, at F1. Like *only*, the word *almost* should be placed immediately before the word it modifies. See **only** (A).

B. *Almost quite. H.W. Fowler branded this phrasing an “illiteracy,” and so it remains today—e.g.:

- “‘They’re feeding at the door,’ a competing bookseller says jealously, and *almost quite* [read *almost*] literally.” Raphael Sagalyn, “Bookstore Wars,” *Wash. Post* (Mag.), 11 Mar. 1979, at 28.
- “Treachle tart and cream was terrific, with enough lemon cutting the syrup to make it feel *almost quite* [read *almost* or *quite*] health-giving.” Fay Maschler, “How to Keep Cool on a Tightrope,” *Evening Standard*, 4 July 1995, at 23.
- “‘A Density of Souls’ runs straight as a string until the last third, when all hell breaks loose (*almost quite literally*) [delete the entire parenthetical] and Rice’s carefully constructed melodrama goes up like a transformer in a hurricane.” Kevin Allman, “Grand Guignol 90210,” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), 3 Sept. 2000, Travel §, at 6.

Oddly, however, this phrasing wasn’t uncommon in the 1600s and 1700s. It trailed off in the 1800s and was stigmatized in the 1900s. See **quite**.

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**almost quite*: Stage 1

alms (= money or food given to the poor) is pronounced with the *l* silent: /ahmz/—not /ahlmz/ or /amz/. Yet the /l/ can creep in with the related *almoner*.

alone. See **lone**.

alongside, prep., = at the side of. Hence one car is parked *alongside* another and logs are stacked

alongside one another. It is unnecessary—and bad style—to write **alongside of*. See **of** (A).

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**alongside of* for *alongside*: Stage 3
Current ratio in print (*alongside the*
vs. **alongside of the*): 45:1

along with. Like *together with*, this connective phrase does not affect the grammatical number of the sentence. E.g.: “He admitted that he, *along with* other board members, *are* [read *is*] no longer sure about anything concerning the [controversy].” Elizabeth W. Crowley, “Salem Dispute Drags On,” *Patriot Ledger* (Quincy, Mass.), 7 Aug. 2002, at 1. See SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT (E).

When the sense is necessarily plural, use *and* instead of *along with*—e.g.: “He *along with* [read *and*] his wife, Edith, *were* the owners of the Snug Club until they sold it in 1997.” “Thomas E. McDonald Sr.” (obit.), *Daily Oklahoman*, 8 Aug. 2002, at C8.

a lot (= many) is the standard spelling. **Alot* has always been considered nonstandard—e.g.:

- “*Alot* [read *A lot*] of people have noticed that the two teams playing in the World Series have one very important thing in common.” Charles A. Jaffe, “Investors Can Learn a Thing from Baseball,” *Boston Globe*, 22 Oct. 2000, at F10.
- “*Alot* [read *A lot*] of kids found out yesterday that the easiest thing to do on ice skates is fall down.” Eve Rubenstein, “Skating Stars, Past and Future,” *S.F. Chron.*, 22 Nov. 2000, at A27.
- “Dalmatians are active and require *alot* [read *a lot*] of exercise and attention.” “Dalmatian Alert,” *Sarasota Herald-Trib.*, 2 Dec. 2000, at B7.

Cf. **all right** (B).

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**alot* for *a lot*: Stage 2
Current ratio in print (*a lot* vs. **alot*): 1,022:1

aloud; out loud. The latter is colloquial when used in place of the former in expressions such as *read out loud*. Because of this—and because *read aloud* is much more common than *read out loud* in print—*read aloud* should be preferred in edited prose. E.g.:

- “McGuffey’s fifth and sixth readers had an abundance of the kind of poetry that demands to be read *out loud* [read *aloud*], like ‘The Raven’ by Edgar Allan Poe.” Diane Ravitch, “Children’s Books,” *N.Y. Times*, 17 May 1987, § 7, at 46.
- “Oprah loves writing that begs to be read *out loud* [read *aloud*].” Marilyn Johnson, “Oprah Winfrey: A Life in Books,” *Life*, Sept. 1997, at 44.

Current ratio in print (*read aloud*
vs. *read out loud*): 8:1

alphabetical; alphabetic. These synonymous adjectives describe the use of a set of letters that make up a system of writing—originally Greek but later other languages as well. The Latin word *alphabētum* derived from *alpha* and *beta*, the first two Greek letters being taken to represent the whole range, similar to the English ABCs. (Both abbreviations exemplify the figure of

speech **synecdoche** [see p. 1242].) The English noun *alphabet* has been traced back to the early 1500s, and the two corresponding adjectives soon followed: *alphabetical* in the mid-1500s and *alphabetic* in the mid-1600s.

The two forms have undergone DIFFERENTIATION. Whenever the idea is to denote “arranged in the conventional order of the alphabet,” the usual word is *alphabetical* <alphabetical arrangement> <alphabetical index> <alphabetical order>. But when the idea is “using or consisting of an alphabet”—typically in a more technical context—the usual word is *alphabetic* <alphabetic characters> <alphabetic signs> <alphabetic writing system>. We might reliably say that *alphabetical* is the ordinary word, *alphabetic* the specialist’s word. See -IC/-ICAL.

Current ratio in print (*alphabetical order* vs. **alphabetic order*): 19:1

Current ratio in print (*alphabetic writing system* vs. **alphabetical writing system*): 13:1

alphanumeric (= [of an outline, computing system, etc.] using both letters and numerals) has been standard in all varieties of English since it first appeared in the early 20th century. **Alphanumerical* is a variant. See -IC/-ICAL & PORTMANTEAU WORDS.

al Qaeda is preferably pronounced /al kī-də/, a fair Anglophone approximation of the Arabic pronunciation—though /al kay-də/ is also common, especially in BrE. As one authority says, “When faced with two anglicizations of a foreign name, it is generally better (and more politic) to choose the one closer to the original, [and] al-KY-duh is closer to the Arabic than al-KAY-duh, which probably arose merely because *Qae-* suggested -KAY- to many speakers.” *BBM* at 22 (with a full five-paragraph discussion of the issue). See HOBSON-JOBSONISM.

already; all ready. *Already* has to do with time <finished already>, *all ready* with preparation <we are all ready>. The terms are occasionally misused—e.g.: “The Bahhumbug with lack of tact / Now called attention to the fact, / Which made it feel to Edmund Gravel / He was *already* [read *all ready*] to unravel.” Edward Gorey, *The Headless Bust* 4 (1997).

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already misused for *all ready*: Stage 1

alright. See **all right**.

also. This word is a close synonym of *too* (= as well), but its syntactic flexibility is greater <she was also there> <she also was there> <she was there, also>. Avoid treating the word as if it were a conjunction—e.g.: “The dishes were dirty, *also* [read *and*] several of them were broken.” This nonstandard use of *also* creates a RUN-ON SENTENCE.

For more on *also*, see **too** (A).

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
also as a conjunction: Stage 2

also not. This phrasing, which ordinarily follows a negative statement, is usually inferior to *nor*—e.g.:

- “*Race should also not* [read *Nor should race*] be a matter in law enforcement, prosecution or sentencing, but it is.” Letter of Stanley S. White, “Unavoidable Reality,” *Atlanta J.-Const.*, 23 Jan. 1997, at 15.
- “*He was also not* [read *Nor was he*] told until later, he says, about the allegations of military doctor Maj. Barry Armstrong that one of the Somali men may have been killed execution-style.” David Pugliese, “Criminal Probe Delayed, Top Officer Tells Inquiry,” *Windsor Star*, 28 Jan. 1997, at A8.
- “*Tosco is also not* [read *Nor is Tosco*] afraid to duke it out with the unions.” Arthur Goldhaber, “Tosco’s Gusher,” *Fin. World*, 18 Mar. 1997, at 38.

See **nor** (A).

But when a contraction precedes the phrase and the tone is intentionally conversational, *also not* seems the more natural wording—e.g.:

- “They’re *also not* as dangerous as other animals around the compound.” Chris Vaughn, “Teen Goes Whole Hog for Hobby,” *Ft. Worth Star-Telegram*, 27 Jan. 1997, at 4.

Current ratio in print (*nor is he* vs. *he is also not*): 15:1

alter; altar. *Alter* (= to change) is a verb; *altar* (= the table or structure used for sacramental purposes) is a noun. But writers have sometimes confused the two—e.g.:

- “Civil liberties have been sacrificed on the *alter* [read *altar*] of zero tolerance.” Jeff A. Schnepfer, “Mandated Morality Leads to Legalized Theft,” *USA Today* (Mag.), Mar. 1994, at 35.
- “We are learning that privacy and truth have been sacrificed on the *alter* [read *altar*] of greed, power, safety and security.” H. Roy Kaplan, “Striking a Balance of Freedom, Control,” *Tampa Bay Times*, 4 July 2013, at A9.

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alter misused for *altar*: Stage 1
Current ratio in print (*at the altar* vs. **at the alter*): 82:1

alterative; alterant. Although neither word is frequent, each may act as both noun and adjective. As adjectives, they both mean “causing alteration.” As nouns, however, the meanings diverge. An *alterant* is anything that alters or modifies. *Alterative* appears in medical contexts—though rarely now by physicians—in reference to a medicine that gradually changes unhealthy bodily conditions into healthy ones.

altercation. The traditional view is that this word refers to “a noisy brawl or dispute,” not rising to the seriousness of physical violence. For authority limiting the term to the sense “wordy strife,” see the *OED*, W2, W3, and Eric Partridge’s *U&A*. But since about 1980

in AmE and BrE alike, the word has often denoted some type of scuffling or fighting, especially in police JARGON—e.g.:

- “A 29-year-old drugstore manager who was punched in the chest last month during an *altercation* has died of his injuries, Suffolk police reported yesterday.” Olivia Winslow, “Man Punched in Chest During Store Spat Dies,” *Newsday* (N.Y.), 12 Sept. 1997, at A32.
- “He was involved in a fight with Cincinnati’s Bob Wren, who was cut during the *altercation*.” Pete Dougherty, “Kinnear Will Miss One Game,” *Times Union* (Albany), 17 Oct. 1997, at C1.
- “Fitzpatrick ascended to the starting position when Geno Smith suffered a broken jaw in a locker-room *altercation*.” J.P. Pelzman, “Gang Green Quarterback Enjoying Ride,” *Herald News* (West Paterson, N.J.), 10 Sept. 2015, at C1.

Some will lament this development as SLIPSHOD EXTENSION, but the purely nonphysical sense seems beyond recall. Perhaps it may assuage objectors to know that Charles Dickens in 1865 used the phrase *verbal or fistic altercation*.

The real battle now is to limit *altercation* to light roughhousing. That is, it’s wrong to say that someone is killed during an *altercation*. But police (and the reporters who interview them) tend to talk this way—e.g.:

- “Jonny E. Gammage died during an *altercation* [read *a struggle*?] with white suburban police officers after a traffic stop.” Aliah D. Wright, “Veon Wants Race Relations Panel,” *Pitt. Post-Gaz.*, 10 Sept. 1997, at B2.
- “The fatal *altercation* [read *confrontation* or *fight*] between Taylor and Mancuso had been brewing for a long time.” Bill Poehler, “Death at Raceway Was Unfortunate, Preventable,” *Statesman J.* (Salem, Or.), 18 July 2015, at C1.
- “Samuel Harrell . . . was killed on April 21 during an *altercation* with several corrections officers.” Amanda J. Prucell, “Legal Action Filed for Harrell,” *Poughkeepsie J.*, 9 Sept. 2015, at A1.

Cf. **accost**.

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altercation referring to physical violence: Stage 3

alter ego (lit., “other I”) = a second self. Generally, it means “a kindred spirit” or “a constant companion,” or sometimes “a secondary persona or aspect of one’s personality.” E.g.: “Stump Connolly is the *alter ego* of Scott Jacobs, a political reporter turned video producer.” Bob Minzesheimer, “‘Trail Fever’ and ‘Stump’ Split Vote on How to Pillory Politics,” *USA Today*, 14 Aug. 1997, at D6. The phrase should not be hyphenated (except possibly as a PHRASAL ADJECTIVE).

alternate; alternative. A. As Nouns. *Alternative* is needed far more often than *alternate*. An *alternative* is a choice or option—usually one of two choices, but not necessarily. Etymological purists have argued that the word (fr. L. *alter* “the other of two”) should be confined to contexts involving only two choices. Ernest Gowers termed this contention a fetish (*FMEU* 2 at 196), and it has little or no support either among other stylistic experts or in actual usage. E.g.: “The county has *three alternatives* on how to meet the

region’s needs before its treatment plants reach capacity in 2010.” “Officials Oppose Plan Expansion,” *Seattle Times*, 26 Aug. 1997, at B2. In fact, the phrases *three alternatives* and *four alternatives* have been fairly common in print since the 1800s.

Alternative carries with it two nuances absent from *choice*. First, *alternative* may suggest adequacy for some purpose <an alternative to driving>; and second, it may suggest compulsion to choose <the alternatives are liberty and death>.

Alternate = (1) something that proceeds by turns with another; or (2) one that substitutes for another.

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three or more *alternatives*: Stage 5

B. As Adjectives. *Alternative* = providing a choice between two or more things; available in place of another. E.g.: “Herman would not oppose the light without offering an *alternative* solution, he said.” Mary Gail Hare, “Herman Opposes Traffic Signal at Springfield Ave.,” *Baltimore Sun*, 29 Aug. 1997, at B1.

Alternate = (1) coming each after one of the other kind, every second one <the divorced parents had agreed on visits in alternate months>; or (2) substitute <although he didn’t make the first team, he was named the first alternate player>.

Alternate is often misused for *alternative*, an understandable mistake given how close sense 2 of *alternate* is—e.g.: “Patton responded to the Atlanta Preservation Center’s proposal for an *alternate* [read *alternative*] site for the classroom building.” Christina Cheakalos, “Building a Better GSU in Six Years,” *Atlanta J.-Const.*, 7 Sept. 1997, at G5.

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alternate misused for the adjective
alternative: Stage 2

Current ratio in print (*alternative solution* vs. **alternate solution*): 9:1

although; though. As conjunctions, the words are virtually interchangeable. The only distinction is that *although* is more formal and dignified. From the 1500s to the present day, *though* has occurred more frequently in print. *Though* serves also as an adverb <he stated as much, though>. Cf. **while**.

**Altho* and **tho* are old-fashioned truncated spellings that were at one time very common, but failed to become standard. They should be avoided.

Current ratio in print (*although* vs. **altho*): 994:1

Current ratio in print (*though* vs. **tho*): 206:1

although . . . yet was formerly a common construction. The two words were considered CORRELATIVE CONJUNCTIONS—e.g.: “Wrote a 6th century Chinese master: ‘*Although* they dwell in seven jeweled palaces, and have fine objects, smells, tastes, and sensations, *yet* they do not regard this as pleasure . . . [and] seek only to leave that place.’” Howard Chuaeoan, “Other Faiths, Other Visions,” *Time*, 24 Mar. 1997, at 78. Today the construction is seen only in the most formal contexts. Generally, either conjunction will

suffice to give the same meaning, but with a more modern tone.

altogether; all together. *Altogether* = completely; wholly <the charges were altogether unfounded>. *All together* = at one place or at the same time <the board members were all together at that meeting>.

Current ratio in print (*altogether different* vs. **all together different*): 252:1

alum. See **alumnus (A)**.

aluminum; aluminium. *Aluminum* is the standard spelling in AmE; *aluminium* is standard in BrE. In 1812, the metallic element was named *aluminum* by the English chemist Sir Humphry Davy. The same year, *aluminium* was offered as being more “classical” in sound, since the *-ium* suffix harmonizes better with the names of other elements such as sodium, potassium, and magnesium. In his 1828 unabridged American dictionary, Noah Webster recorded the word as *aluminum*; his British counterparts, who admitted the word somewhat later, recorded it as *aluminium*. The AmE–BrE difference has existed ever since. It became most strongly pronounced beginning about 1900.

Aluminum /ə-**loo**-mi-nəm/ is sometimes, in AmE, mispronounced /ə-**lim**-i-nəm/. The BrE word *aluminium* is pronounced /al-yoo-**min**-ee-əm/ or /a-**loo**-**min**-ee-əm/.

alumnus; alumna. **A. Plurals:** *alumni; alumnae; alums; *alumns*. *Alumni* /ə-**lɒm**-nī/ traditionally refers either to male graduates or to males and females collectively; the singular form, which is masculine, is *alumnus*. *Alumnae* /ə-**lɒm**-nee/ traditionally refers to female graduates and not to mixed groups; the singular is *alumna*.

Because the plural *alumni* is not considered sex-specific, the phrase *female alumni* (much on the rise since the 1970s) isn’t redundant in the way that **female alumnae* is.

One common mistake with these words is confusing their number, as by using *alumni* or *alumnae* as a singular—e.g.: “He was an *alumni* [read *alumnus*] of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and UCLA.” “Abraham James Kennison” (obit.), *News Trib.* (Tacoma), 7 Jan. 1998, at B4. See **PLURALS (B)**.

Alum is an AmE clipped form that dodges the gender issue. This slangy **CASUALISM** appears often in chatty discussions about high-school and college sports—e.g.:

- “A group of former Kentucky residents and Wildcat *alums*—mostly female—gather to cheer on their team.” Ethan Machado, “Team Spirits,” *Oregonian* (Portland), 27 Mar. 1998, at 4.
- “He still has the support of influential *alums*, but it may be too late.” Dick Weiss, “Penders on Ropes in Texas,” *Daily News* (N.Y.), 29 Mar. 1998, at 93.

Alum is a better and more frequent spelling than **alumn*—e.g.:

- “Four Lancaster-Lebanon League *alumns* [read *alums*] are members of the 24th-ranked Penn State team.” “Sports Digest,” *Lancaster New Era*, 27 Sept. 1996, at C5.
- “I’ve been doing nothing all day but spouting bullshit: to the press, to trustees, to parents, to *alumns* [read *alums*].” Joanne Dobson, *Quieter than Sleep* 136 (1997).

B. *Former alumnus, alumna. Just as a graduate is always a graduate, an *alumnus* or *alumna* is ever thus. Yet the strange **REDUNDANCY** **former alumnus* is fairly common—e.g.:

- “Gregory Bellamy, a friend of Sean Taylor’s, speaks at a memorial service at Gulliver Preparatory School for the slain *former alumnus* [delete *former*] and NFL safety.” Shandel Richardson & Joel Marino, “Rolle: Taylor Was a Target,” *Sun-Sentinel* (Ft. Lauderdale), 29 Nov. 2007, at C1 (photo caption).
- “Many team principals are interviewed ([John] Wooden lovers all), as are entertaining *former alumni* [delete *former*] for extra juice.” Mike Clark, “New on DVD: The UCLA Dynasty,” *USA Today*, 14 Mar. 2008, at E9.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX

1. *alumni* as a singular: Stage 2

Current ratio in print (*an alumnus of* vs. **an alumni of*): 15:1

2. *alumnae* as a singular: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*an alumna of* vs. **an alumnae of*): 68:1

3. *alum* as a clipped form: Stage 5

4. **alumn* as the spelling for the clipped form: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*alums* vs. **alumns*): 185:1

5. **former alumni* for *alumni*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*the alumni* vs. **the former alumni*): 935:1

Alzheimer’s (the brain disease) is pronounced /**ah**lts-hī-mərz/ (rhyming with *malts* in the first syllable) in AmE and /**alts**-hī-mərz/ in BrE. With either version, the first syllable ends with an /s/ sound, not a /z/ sound.

a.m.; AM; p.m.; PM. A. Generally. Whether you use small capitals or lowercase, keep your document consistent throughout. The lowercase letters are now more common, and with lowercase the periods are standard. But many editors prefer the look of **AM**.

These abbreviations stand for the Latin phrases *ante meridiem* (“before noon”) and *post meridiem* (“after noon”). But some writers, when using the full phrases, mistake *meridiem* for *meridian*—e.g.: “Twelve noon is neither *ante meridian* [read *ante meridiem*] (before midday) nor *post meridian* [read *post meridiem*] (after midday).” Jim Cowley, “Notes and Queries,” *Guardian*, 2 Oct. 1996, at T17.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX (For the full key, see front matter pp. xxv–xxvi.)

Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

B. Redundant Use. Because *a.m.* and *p.m.* are well understood to designate “morning” and “night” (or “afternoon” or “evening”), it is not necessary to use both designations—e.g.:

- “It was 11:45 *a.m.* Saturday morning [delete *a.m.* or *morn-ing*] in Bangkok, Thailand.” M.A.J. McKenna, “Disease Spreads Fear,” *Atlanta J.-Const.*, 2 Apr. 2003, at A1.
- “As of 8 *p.m.* Tuesday night [delete *p.m.* or *night*], Fresno recorded 0.16 of an inch.” “Cold Weather Returns to Valley for Weeklong Stay,” *Fresno Bee*, 2 Apr. 2003, at B5.

These REDUNDANCIES sprang up in the latter half of the 1800s and spread throughout the 1900s.

C. And noon; midnight. Is *noon* 12 a.m. or 12 p.m.? What about *midnight*?

Logically—at least in theory and leaving aside the complications of time zones—neither is either. Neither one comes before (*ante*) or after (*post*) the moment when the sun is on the meridian (*meridiem*), that imaginary circle in the sky that includes the point directly overhead and both poles. Rather, *noon* is the moment from which other times are labeled a.m. or p.m. To refer to *noon* as either 12 a.m. or 12 p.m. is not just logically and astronomically wrong, but ambiguous as well. The context may clear things up—few people eat lunch at *midnight*—but to say that lunch will be served at “12 a.m.” is sloppy writing that reflects sloppy thinking.

Idiom compounds the conundrum because, by convention, *midnight* is considered the end of the previous day, not the start of the following day. That would seem to recommend 12 p.m. *midnight*, but how can 12:00 p.m. be followed by 12:00:01 a.m.?

The simple solution for noon and midnight is to shun both *a.m.* and *p.m.* and stick with the unambiguous words *noon* <registration starts at noon> and *midnight* <the deadline for filing taxes is April 15 at midnight>. The numeral 12 is superfluous with either word.

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12 a.m. or 12 p.m. for *noon* or *midnight*: Stage 2

amalgam; amalgamation. Some DIFFERENTIATION is possible. *Amalgam*, the older term, means “a combination” <the restaurant serves an amalgam of regional cuisines>. *Amalgamation* means primarily “the act of combining or uniting; consolidation” <Snobelen announced the *amalgamation* of Metro’s seven public-school boards into a single board>.

Avoid *amalgamation* whenever *amalgam* will suffice—e.g.: “This woozy *amalgamation* [read *amalgam*] of rock, funk, jazz and blues obviously tugs ardently at Connick’s heart.” Melissa Ruggieri, “For Connick, It’s About Funk,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 28 Oct. 1996, at E7.

Current ratio in print (*an amalgam of* vs. *an amalgamation of*): 1.5:1

amass, vb. This is traditionally a transitive verb meaning “to accumulate (something) systematically over time” <the investigators amassed evidence against

the suspect>. That is, someone amasses something; the things don’t simply “amass.” Although the *OED* records two intransitive uses (separated by some 300 years), it also labels those uses archaic. Instances such as the following one violate idiom, *accumulate* being the better word: “Because Mattes lacked health insurance, and the malaria left her both physically exhausted and financially drained, the medical bills that *amassed* [read *accumulated* or *piled up*] during the illness completely wiped out her life savings.” Denny Guge, “Clearing Hurdles,” *America West Airlines Mag.*, Aug. 1999, at 128.

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amass used in an intransitive sense: Stage 1

amateur. In best usage, an amateur (/am-ə-chər/ or /am-ə-tər/) is a hobbyist, one who engages in an activity out of love and enthusiasm rather than for profit. This is still the meaning in phrases such as *amateur astronomer* and *amateur golfer*. In some uses it has long had a negative connotation of undeveloped skills <rank amateur> <an amateurish job>.

In recent years, it has come to be used as a synonym for *beginner*. A good alternative would be *novice* or *neophyte* (both usually neutral in connotation) or even *tyro* (with connotations of a bumbler).

Amateur has also become a genre of low-budget pornography (an odd usage, since it apparently involves “paid” amateurs).

The word is sometimes misspelled **amature*—e.g.: “Thanks to travel sites, Web cams and the ego of *amature* [read *amateur*] photographers, you can get your fill of colorful leaves by letting your fingers do the peeping.” Stephanie Schorow, “Net Life,” *Boston Herald*, 4 Oct. 2000, at 59.

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amateur misspelled **amature*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*amateur* vs. **amature*): 1,554:1

amatory; *amative. See **amorous**.

ambassador; *embassador. The first is the standard spelling. See **embassy**.

Current ratio in print (*ambassador* vs. **embassador*): 180:1

ambiance. See **ambience**.

ambidextrous. While *dexterous* is preferably spelled with two e’s, *ambidextrous* has only one. In modern print sources, *ambidextrous* predominates. This inconsistency between *dexterous* and *ambidextrous* is something of a mystery. Cf. **dexterous**.

Current ratio in print (*ambidextrous* vs. **ambidexterous*): 136:1

ambience; ambiance. These words denote the atmosphere of a place. *Ambience* /am-bee-ən[t]s/ is an anglicized form that entered the language in the late 1800s (with a lone outlier from 1648). It’s preferable to *ambiance* /ahm-bee-ahn[t]s/, a Frenchified affectation

that, since its proliferation in the mid-20th century, has become a *VOGUE TERM*.

In modern print, *ambience* is used more than twice as often as *ambiance*. Though the *New York Times* style manual specifies *ambience*, its editors (like all other editors) have occasionally stumbled—e.g.: “Ratings reflect the reviewer’s reaction to food, *ambience* [read *ambience*] and service with price taken into consideration.” “What Lies Beneath: Serious Mexican Food,” *N.Y. Times*, 11 Sept. 2002, at F6.

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ambience for *ambiance*: Stage 4
 Current ratio in print (*ambience*
 vs. *ambiance*): 2.4:1

ambivalent (= having contradictory or mixed feelings about something or someone), a psychological term dating only from the early 20th century, is an adjective that describes a person’s mind, attitudes, sentiments, etc. It should be reserved for contexts involving mental conflict <the couple was ambivalent about having a child>. It shouldn’t be used in reference to other uncertainties or disagreements, where *ambiguous* or *uncertain* might be the more appropriate word—e.g.:

- “When a young soldier in Iraq died in *ambivalent* [read *uncertain*] circumstances, he was declared a hero.” Philip Adams, “No Pride in Feeling No Shame,” *Australian*, 4 Dec. 2007, at 12.
- “It is stimulating to note . . . that the *ambivalent* [read *uncertain*] situation of nonfiction prose may coincide with the renewed interest in the essay.” Will H. Corral, “Not Their Masters’ Voice,” *World Literature Today*, 1 Mar. 2012, at 20.
- “The task forces with some 125 officials with government and non-profits came to *ambivalent* [read *ambiguous* or *uncertain*] conclusions after meeting for 15 months.” Betsy Calvert, “Two Florida Lawmakers Take Steps to End 330-Mile Toll Road,” *Charlotte Sun* (Port Charlotte, Fla.), 11 Feb. 2021, News §.

This type of use might be considered *HYPALLAGE*—transferring the uncertainty from the perceiver to the thing perceived. But enough people object to it, and it is easily enough dodged, that we ought to avoid it. For more on ambiguity and its various forms, see p. 1192.

ambulance /am-byə-lən[t]s/ is often mispronounced /am-byoo-lan[t]s/.

***ameba**. See *amoeba*.

ameliorable. So formed—not **amelioratable*. See -ABLE (D) & -ATABLE.

ameliorate; ***meliorate**. *Ameliorate* is the standard term meaning “to make or become better.” E.g.: “If injustices abound in that region—as they do almost everywhere—they will not be *ameliorated* by heaping invective on parties to the conflict.” Letter of John B. Aycrigg, *Denver Post*, 23 Apr. 1997, at B6. **Meliorate* is a NEEDLESS VARIANT.

Ameliorate does not mean “to lessen”—e.g.: “It would also allow a return to more normal inventory management by *ameliorating* [read *lessening* or *reducing*] the likelihood of stumbling into the four pitfalls described earlier.” Peter A. Meyer, “No One Is Laughing at Good News vs. Bad News in Corn Processing,” *Milling & Baking News*, 18 Feb. 1997, at 19. Cf. *vitiate*.

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ameliorate misused for *lessen*: Stage 1

amen (the conclusion to a prayer) may be pronounced either /ah-men/ or, sometimes in AmE, /ay-men/.

amenability. See *amenity*.

amenable (= [1] suitable for a particular type of treatment; or [2] willing to accept something without argument) is preferably pronounced /ə-meen-ə-bəl/—not /ə-men-ə-bəl/.

amend; **emend**. Both derive from the Latin verb *emendare* (= to free from fault). *Amend* = (1) to put right, change; or (2) to add to, supplement. This is the general word. The other is more specialized. *Emend* = to correct (as a text). The corresponding nouns are *amendment* and *emendation*.

amenity; **amenability**. These words, of unrelated origin, are occasionally confused. *Amenity* = (1) agreeableness <as a host, he showed great amenity to his guest’s demands>; (2) something that is comfortable or convenient <the many amenities at the hotel make guests happy>; or (3) a basic social convention <it’s not just that he burps aloud—he seems to be unaware of most gustatory amenities>. *Amenability* = (1) willingness to approve, act, or yield <the bank’s amenability to make the loan>; (2) legal responsibility; answerability <the corporation’s amenability to suit in New York>; or (3) capability of being treated or tested <the victim’s amenability to psychiatric treatment>.

The words are pronounced /ə-men-i-tee/ and /ə-meen-ə-bil-i-tee/.

Amerasian. See *PORTMANTEAU WORDS*.

American. As an adjective limited in application to the U.S., this word has long been known to be anomalous. All North Americans and South Americans have claim to being called *Americans*, and yet the language has never quite recognized this fact: “In strict logic such a use is not justifiable, but common practice and understanding have long since put the word beyond the jurisdiction of logic.” 1 George Philip Krapp, *The English Language in America* xiii (1925). Perhaps one reason for the firmly established usage is the lack of any reasonable alternative (*United Statesian*?). An old-fashioned equivalent, common about 1800, was *Columbian*. But that adjective, too, would have presented difficulties if it had caught on.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX (For the full key, see front matter pp. xxv–xxvi.)

Stage 1: Rejected. Stage 2: Widely shunned. Stage 3: Widespread but . . . Stage 4: Ubiquitous but . . . Stage 5: Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

American government. This phrase is acceptable when you're talking about the way the U.S. is governed, as opposed to "the government" as an entity—e.g.:

- "This seminar, dealing with congressional policies and *American government*, is presented by the Washington Workshops Foundation and will be attended by high school leaders from across the country." "School News," *Portland Press Herald*, 20 Dec. 1995, at B7.
- "The liberal welfare-state model of *American government* has run its course . . ." John F. Stacks, "Good Newt, Bad Newt," *Time*, 25 Dec. 1995, at 90.

When you're speaking of the governing powers, though, the proper phrase is *U.S. government*—e.g.:

- "But such a situation also means that while the Chinese deal harshly with pro-democracy forces, the *American government* [read *U.S. government*] has very little leverage with which to pressure Beijing to alter its behavior." "Again, What About China?," *Wash. Times*, 23 Dec. 1995, at C2.
- "The man said he was a retired military officer from Syria, which the *American* [read *U.S.*] government deems a sponsor of terrorists." Diana Jean Schemo, "Diploma Mill Concerns Extend Beyond Fraud," *N.Y. Times*, 29 June 2008, at A14.

When *American government* is used with *an* or *any*, the reference is to the presidential administration at any particular time. *An* or *any American government* is the appropriate hypothetical phrase—e.g.:

- "Would *any American government* take similar risks with U.S. security, including delivering strategically important support in Congress?" Yossi Ben Aharon, "Momentum Madness," *Jerusalem Post*, 20 Dec. 1995, at 6.
- "At any rate, *an American government* can serve best by putting immediate American interests above almost everything." "Case for Bosnia Move Not Just U.S. Interests," *Dayton Daily News*, 20 Dec. 1995, at A14.

American Indian. See **Native American**.

AMERICANISMS AND BRITICISMS. A. Generally. Although this book points out many differences between AmE and BrE, that is not its primary purpose. For guidance on distinctions not covered here, see *Hart's Rules for Compositors and Readers at the University Press, Oxford* (39th ed. 1983); Norman W. Schur, *British English A to Zed* (1987); Norman Moss, *British/American Language Dictionary* (1984); and Martin S. Allwood, *American and British* (1964). For differences in editorial style, compare *The Chicago Manual of Style* with Caroline Drake & Maureen Leach, *Butcher's Copy-Editing*.

B. Americanisms Invading BrE. During the 20th century, the English language's center of gravity gradually shifted from England to the U.S. As a result, the most influential linguistic innovations occur in AmE, as a further result of which BrE speakers have sometimes bemoaned American encroachments. For example, on 7 February 1995, Steve Ward of Bristol said in a letter published in *The Times*: "Sir, I am disappointed to see that even *The Times's* leader columns are succumbing to the relentless invasion of American English. In your leader of January 28, on the National

Lottery, you state that 'stores which sell tickets for the draw have lottery-only lines on a Saturday.' Do you mean: 'Shops . . . have lottery-only *queues*'?"

C. Criticisms Invading AmE. To some extent, transatlantic linguistic influences are reciprocal. In the late 20th century, it became common in AmE to use the Britishism *take a decision* (as opposed to the usual AmE *make a decision*). And many Americans have begun using *amongst* and *whilst*. (See **among (A) & whilst**.) On the whole, though, BrE's influences on AmE are so slight that few people take any notice.

D. Related Entries. For several other differences between the two major strains of English, see -ER (B), -OR/-OUR & SPELLING (C).

amicable; amiable. The first came directly from Latin, the second from French, but the two forms are at base the same word. Yet they have undergone DIFFERENTIATION. *Amiable* applies to people <an amiable chap>, *amicable* to relations between people <an amicable resolution>.

Amicable is pronounced /**am**-i-kə-bəl/—not /**ə**-mɪk-ə-bəl/. *Amiable* is pronounced /**ay**-mee-ə-bəl/.

amicus curiae; friend of the court. These phrases refer to "someone who is not a party to a lawsuit but who petitions the court or is requested by the court to file a brief in the action because that person has a strong interest in the subject matter." *Black's Law Dictionary* 106 (11th ed. 2019). Lawyers write *amicus curiae*; journalists often write *friend of the court*. See LEGALESE.

The Latin phrase is variously pronounced. The singular is /**ə**-mee-kəs **kyoor**-ee-ī/ or /**ə**-mī-kəs **kyoor**-i-ee/ and the plural (*amici curiae*) is /**ə**-mee-kee **kyoor**-ee-ī/ or /**ə**-mee-see/ or /**ə**-mī-kee/ or /**ə**-mī-see/. Another acceptable pronunciation of the first word—a common pronunciation in AmE—is /**am**-ə-kəs/.

Current ratio in print (*amicus curiae* vs. *friend of the court*): 7:1

amid. A. And among. *Amid* usually connotes position—e.g.: "Amid the public tributes, the one from Felix Frankfurter stood out." Barry Siegel, *Claim of Privilege* 186 (2008). *Among* often connotes a mingling—e.g.: "To see the true [Tom] Coughlin, watch him *among* friends and family, away from football." John Branch, "Coughlin's Playful Side Has Deep Roots in Florida," *N.Y. Times*, 6 May 2008, at D1.

B. And amidst; in the midst of; mid; 'mid. *Amid* and *amidst* are slightly quaint words, especially the latter. Often the word *in* or *among* serves better. (But see **among (B)**.) Since the mid-1800s, *amid* has predominated in AmE and BrE alike. Today it is about twice as common as *amidst*.

In the midst of, a wordy equivalent, has always been more common than *amid*. It often lends a better cadence, as in these titles:

- David Freeman Hawke, *In the Midst of a Revolution* (1961).
- Louis Breger, *Freud: Darkness in the Midst of Vision* (2000).

- Geoffrey Warner, *In the Midst of Events: The Foreign Office Diaries and Papers of Kenneth Younger* (2005).

See **midst**.

The preposition *mid* is poetic in all uses except traditional compounds (e.g., *mid-1800s*, *midnight*, *midstream*) or scientific uses; if the word is appropriate, however, *mid* is better than *'mid*.

amnion (= the sac membrane enclosing amniotic fluid), a Greek LOANWORD dating in English from the 1600s, has two plurals: the homegrown *amnions* and the Latinate *amnia*. Since about 1920, *amnions* has strongly predominated.

Current ratio in print (*amnions* vs. *amnia*): 14:1

***amn't I?** See **aren't I?**

amoeba; ***ameba**. Since the mid-1800s, *amoeba* has been the standard spelling in all varieties of English. During the 1920s, AmE seemed close to adopting **ameba* as standard, but that spelling has long since receded.

The traditional Latinate plural *amoebae* /ə-**mee**-bee/ has always predominated over *amoebas*, but since 1990 or so the latter form has begun to vie closely for predominance.

Current ratio in print (*amoeba* vs. **ameba*): 6:1

Current ratio in print (*amoebae* vs. *amoebas*): 1.5:1

amok; **amuck**. *Amok* is now the standard spelling. Usage authorities once held firmly to the idea that *amuck* is preferable to *amok*—solely on the mistaken notion that *amuck* is older in English and *amok* (though a better transliteration of the Malaysian word) was a late-coming “didacticism.” In fact, both forms date from the 1600s. And in any event, *amok* became predominant in BrE about 1905 and in AmE about 1955. It is three times as common as *amuck* in print today—e.g.: “But by 2005, federal banking regulators were beginning to worry that mortgage lenders were running *amok* with exotic and often inscrutable new products.” Edmund L. Andrews, “Fed Shrugged as Subprime Crisis Spread,” *N.Y. Times*, 18 Dec. 2007, at A1. But some publications fight the trend—e.g.: “One symptom of lobbying run *amuck* is the proliferation of earmarks—spending placed in legislation without public review, for specific projects.” Mike Allen & Perry Bacon Jr., “Can This Elephant Be Cleared Up?,” *Time*, 15 Jan. 2006, at 22.

The long-term effect of the prevalent spelling may be that it will be mispronounced, as happens when the spelling doesn't match the sound. People may well come to say /ə-**mok**/ instead of the correct /ə-**mæk**/, just as so many overpronounce *buttock* as /bət-tok/ instead of the correct /bət-ək/. See **buttock**.

On the other hand, one benefit may be avoidance of the misspelling **run a muck*: nobody seems tempted to **run a mok*.

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amok for *amuck*: Stage 5

Current ratio in print (*amok* vs. *amuck*): 3:1

among. **A. And *amongst***. Most forms ending in *-st*, such as *whilst* and *amidst*, are ARCHAISMS in AmE. *Amongst* is no exception: in AmE it is pretentious at best. E.g.: “Imagine a city where the electricity and water companies are owned by the local authorities and, thanks to progressive planning and construction, prices are *amongst* [read *among*] the lowest in the country.” Michael Dibdin, “Seattle Is the America Thatcher Ignored,” *Seattle Times*, 17 Jan. 1997, at B5.

Amongst is more common and more tolerable in BrE, where it doesn't suggest affectation—e.g.:

- “With the deft wit of a real technician, Marber sets up the relationships *amongst* the employees.” Michael Billington, “A Dab Hand,” *Guardian*, 11 Feb. 1995, at 28.
- “But imagine the in-take of breath (muted) *amongst* the grey old heads bending over their Tupperware lunch-boxes.” Sue Mott, “Champion of British Sport,” *Daily Telegraph*, 9 Dec. 1996, at 10.

Cf. **amid (B)**; **whilst**.

Current ratio in print (*among* vs. *amongst* in AmE): 30:1

Current ratio in print (*among* vs. *amongst* in BrE): 9:1

B. With Mass Nouns. Generally, *among* is used with plural nouns and *amid* with mass nouns. Hence one is *among* friends but *amid* a crowd. (See COUNT NOUNS AND MASS NOUNS & **amid**.) *Among* is occasionally misused for other prepositions—e.g.:

- “Incompetence in writing English is widespread *among* [read *in* or *within*] the legal profession.” Robert W. Benson, “The End of Legalese,” 13 *N.Y.U. Rev. L. & Soc. Change* 519, 570 (1984–1985).
- “*Among* [read *With*] the president's contingent are Mr. Robert Mosbacher, commerce secretary, and around 20 top U.S. executives” Stefan Wagstyl, “Japan Promises to Boost U.S. Imports,” *Fin. Times*, 8 Jan. 1992, at 1.
- “*Among* [read *Contributing to*] last year's toll was a gas blast that leveled part of a New York City block, killing eight people and injuring 48 more.” Nick Penzenstadler, “Scientists: Gas-Pipe Upgrades Paying Off in Cities,” *Greenville News* (S.C.), 10 Sept. 2015, at B3.

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among used with a mass noun: Stage 2

C. And *between*. See **between (A)**.

amoral. See **immoral**.

amorous; **amatory**; ***amative**. *Amorous* = (1) strongly moved by love and sex <amorous passions>; or (2) indicative of love <amorous glances>. *Amatory* = of, relating to, or involving sexual love <amatory

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX (For the full key, see front matter pp. xxv–xxvi.)

Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

poetry> <amatory songs>. **Amative* is a NEEDLESS VARIANT, not of *amatory* but of *amorous*.

***amortise**. See **amortize**.

amortization; ***amortizement**. The latter is a NEEDLESS VARIANT.

Current ratio in print (*amortization*
vs. **amortizement*): 744:1

amortize; ***amortise**. The *-ize* form is standard in both AmE and BrE.

Current ratio in print (*amortize*
vs. **amortise*): 8:1

***amortizement**. See **amortization**.

amount; **number**. The first is used with mass nouns, the second with count nouns. Hence we say “an increase in the *amount* of litigation” but “an increase in the *number* of lawsuits.” But writers often bungle the distinction—e.g.:

- “The *amount* [read *number*] of ex-players who talked shows that the authors did their homework” John Maher, “If Notre Dame Has to Cheat, Who Can Win Fairly?,” *Austin Am.-Statesman*, 20 Sept. 1993, at D1, D9.
- “But they seldom mention the great *amount* [read *number*] of people who have been lifted out of poverty over the last few hundred years.” Bjorn Lomborg, *The Skeptical Environmentalist* iv (2001).
- “Concerning fashion, artistic education at schools, children and youth literature, we can connect the high *amount* [read *number*] of women in these fields with their gender role model.” Elisabeth Mayerhofer, “Exchange, Deception, and Disillusionment,” in *Exchange and Deception: A Feminist Perspective* 133, 140 (Caroline Gerschlagler & Monika Mokre eds., 2002).

See COUNT NOUNS AND MASS NOUNS.

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amount misused for *number*: Stage 2

Current ratio in print (*number of people*
vs. **amount of people*): 44:1

amount of, **in the**. See **check (B)**.

amoxicillin (a synthetic penicillin), a medical NEOLOGISM introduced in 1971, was originally spelled **amoxycillin* (*amino* + *oxy* + *penicillin*). The spelling with the medial *i* had become standard in AmE by the mid-1970s and in BrE by the late 1990s. *Oxy* got shortened to *ox* and the *-icillin* was made on the analogy of *penicillin*.

Current ratio in print (*amoxicillin*
vs. **amoxycillin* in World Englishes): 24:1

ambibology; **ambiboly**. The form *ambibology* (= a quibble; ambiguous wording) predominates in AmE and BrE alike—though you might be hard-pressed to find anybody but a quibbler who uses either word. E.g.: “*Ambibology* [occurs] when a phrase or sentence has two often-contrary meanings.” Stephen Wilbers, “Can’t Say Too Many Good Things About Clarity,” *Orange County Register*, 15 May 1995, at D10.

The corresponding adjectives are *ambibological* and *ambibolous*. The evidence of predominance is appropriately ambiguous.

Current ratio in print (*ambibology*
vs. *ambiboly* in AmE): 1.1:1

Current ratio in print (*ambibology*
vs. *ambiboly* in BrE): 1.2:1

Current ratio in print (*ambibolous*
vs. *ambibological* in AmE): 1.5:1

Current ratio in print (*ambibological*
vs. *ambibolous* in BrE): 1.2:1

amphitheater; **amphitheatre**. To denote a large circular roofless building with rising tiers of seats for viewing a performance or spectacle, the first is AmE (standard since the late 1970s) and the second is BrE. Cf. **theater**.

amphora (= a two-handled clay jar or vase, esp. one used for oil or wine in the ancient world), a Latin/Greek LOANWORD dating in English from the 1300s, has two plurals: the classical *amphorae* /*am-fə-ree/* and the homegrown *amphoras* /*am-fə-rəz/*. Since the early 1800s, *amphorae* has strongly predominated.

Current ratio in print (*amphorae*
vs. *amphoras*): 4:1

ample (= abundant; plenty of), according to H.W. Fowler, should refer to abstract things <ample goodwill> but never to substances of indefinite quantity <ample foliage> (*FMEU1* at 19). Fowler’s view appears to follow the *OED*’s principal definition, which reads: “Of things immaterial: Large in extent or amount, extensive, abundant, excellent.” Some writers use it in that sense, to good effect—e.g.: “One advantage of the midwinter darkness is the *ample* opportunity it (in theory) provides for gazing at the colorful northern ignis.” Wayne Curtis, “In Hot Water,” *Atlantic*, Dec. 2006, at 155. But the distinction between immaterial and material things is hard to sustain in actual usage and leads to idle hairsplitting. Today the word frequently and naturally applies to material substances—e.g.:

- “The bread that came with it was tasty, with *ample* butter included.” Rick Gershman, “At the Greenery, Dinner Takeout Is a Cut Above,” *St. Petersburg Times* (Fla.), 11 Jan. 1996, at D3.
- “Mortar must be cleaned up with *ample* water before it starts to harden.” John O’Dell, “Bigger and Boulder,” *L.A. Times*, 25 Jan. 1997, Home Design §, at 1.
- “China’s tree-planting campaign has successfully reforested areas with *ample* rain, says Luo.” Dennis Normile, “Ecology: Getting at the Roots of Killer Dust Storms,” *Science*, 20 July 2007, at 317.

ampoule (= a sealed glass vessel, esp. one designed to hold a sterile medicine to be injected by syringe), dating in English from the 1200s, has long been predominantly so spelled. In AmE, *ampule* is a common variant. **Ampul* and **ampoul* are nonstandard variants.

Current ratio in print (*ampoules* vs. *ampules* vs. **ampuls* vs. **ampouls* in World English): 2,493:1,532:64:1

amtrac (= an amphibious tractor—that is, a flat-bottomed military vehicle used in sea-to-shore operations) has been predominantly so spelled since the term was introduced during World War II. **Amtrack* is a variant spelling.

Amtrak, the name of the national passenger-railroad system of the U.S., founded in 1971, was coined as a blend of *American* and *track* (with a funky spelling)—and perhaps also as a pun on *amtrac*, which conjures up patriotic notions because of the important role it played in helping the Allied Forces win World War II.

Current ratio in print (*amtrac* vs. **amtrack*): 7:1

amuck. See **amok**.

amuse. See **bemuse**.

an. See **a (A)**.

***anachronic**. See **anachronistic**.

anachronism; *parachronism; prochronism; archaism. All these words indicate that, in some respect, the time is out of joint. An *anachronism* is any error in chronology, or something that is chronologically out of place <the Western movie contained several anachronisms, including a jet's vapor trail visible in the opening scene>. **Parachronism* is a NEEDLESS VARIANT of *anachronism*. A *prochronism* is a reference to a person, thing, or event at a date earlier than it existed <Shakespeare's notorious prochronism of putting a striking clock in *Julius Caesar*>. An *archaism* is something archaic, outmoded, or old-fashioned <the Senate's creaky archaisms, such as the two snuffboxes filled constantly with fresh snuff, can be endearing>. See **ARCHAISMS**.

anachronistic (= belonging to a bygone era; outdated), an adjective dating from the 1700s, is the standard term. **Anachronic* and **anachronous* are NEEDLESS VARIANTS.

Current ratio (*anachronistic* vs. **anachronic* vs. **anachronous*): 133:1.7:1

ANACHRONYMS. If you don't have broadband internet service, you may still connect by *dial-up* service. If you phone someone but get a busy signal, you may try again by punching the button on your phone that is labeled *redial*. But try to buy a telephone that actually has a dial on it and you'll come home empty-handed. The *dial* in *dial-up* and *redial* is an anachronym: a word that lives on in a figurative sense even though technology or culture or history has rendered its literal sense absurd.

Anachronyms live on longer than might be expected when there is no ready replacement (say *dial*

and people immediately think *telephone*). So we still "tune in" to a radio or television program even though there is no conventional tuner in digital sets, because how else are we going to select a station or channel?

But anachronyms live on by sheer force of habit as well. We still say *tin can* even though the cans are made of steel these days. It's still common to hear *tin-foil*, even though the technically correct *aluminum foil* is prevalent. When we send an email, we may still include a *carbon copy* addressed to a third party. A few old fogeys still keep their beverages cool in the *icebox*. Cf. **RETRONYMS**.

anacoluthon (= an instance of syntactic incoherence or grammatical inconsistency within a sentence) predominantly makes the Greek form of the plural (*anacolutha*) in AmE and BrE alike—not **anacoluthons*.

Current ratio in print (*anacolutha* vs. **anacoluthons*): 7:1

anaemia. See **anemia**.

anaesthetic. See **anesthetic** & **AE**.

anagogy /an-ə-goh-jee/ (= mystical interpretation of a text, as opposed to literal or even figurative interpretation), a Greek **LOANWORD** dating in English from the 1400s, has been predominantly so spelled—on the analogy of *analogy*—since the late 1970s. Before that, *anagoge* was the predominant form.

The corresponding adjective is predominantly *anagogical*, the form *anagogic* being a variant. See **-IC/-ICAL**.

Current ratio in print (*anagogy* vs. *anagoge*): 5:1

Current ratio in print (*anagogical* vs. *anagogic*): 3:1

analects; analecta. The English plural *analects* predominates over the Latin plural *analecta*. See **PLURALS (B)**.

Current ratio in print (*analects* vs. *analecta*): 1.7:1

analog. See **analogue**.

analogism. See **analogy**.

analogous; analogical. These words mean different things. *Analogous* /ə-nal-ə-gəs/ = parallel in certain respects. The word should be avoided where *similar* suffices, but the two are not perfectly synonymous. What is *analogous* serves as an analogy for guidance, while *similar* carries no such connotation.

Analogical /an-ə-loj-i-kəl/ = of, by, or expressing an analogy. E.g.: "Much of constitutional law is a tradition of 'common law' development, as judges specify and alter constitutional meaning through *analogical* reasoning in the course of deciding individual disputes." Cass R. Sunstein, "Making Amends," *New Republic*, 3 Mar. 1997, at 38.

analogue; analog. An *analogue* is a thing that is analogous to something else—e.g.: “Apparently, the planned conformity of Levittown and its *analogues*, coupled with the close proximity of the world’s media capital, makes it the perfect crucible for ambient celebrities.” G. Beato, “Long Island’s New Breed of Low-Wattage Celebs,” *Newsday* (N.Y.), 7 Sept. 1997, at G6. The spelling *analog* should be confined to technical contexts involving physics or computers. For a comment on the decline of some *-ue* forms, see *-AGOG(UE)*.

Current ratio in print (*analog computer* vs. **analogue computer*): 2.5:1

analogy; analogism. An *analogy* is a corresponding similarity or likeness. In logic, *analogy* means “an inference that, if two or more things are similar in some respects, they must be alike in others.” *Analogism* is a fairly rare term meaning “reasoning by analogy” <analogism is not the most rigorous form of reasoning>.

analyse. See **analyze**.

analysis; *analyzation. The first, of course, is the standard word. **Analyzation*, a pseudo-learned variant of *analysis*, is a NONWORD—e.g.:

- “Dr. David L. Carnes Jr. . . . will be heading the computer *analyzation* [read *analysis*] project.” Paul H. Carr, “Dentists Drill into Big Market with Root Tool,” *San Antonio Bus. J.*, 27 June 1988, at 1.
- “The module assists in the computerized design and performance *analyzation* [read *analysis*] of wooden pallets and skids.” “Company Connections,” *Buffalo News*, 28 Dec. 1996, at C14.
- “The younger Dylan has grown tired of such *over-analyzation* [read *overanalysis*].” Aaron Wherry, “Generation Gap: The Wallflowers Have a New Album,” *Nat’l Post*, 3 Dec. 2002, at B4.

For the similar NONWORD **paralyzation*, see **paralysis**.

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**analyzation* for *analysis*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*analysis*

vs. **analyzation*): 16,572:1

analyst; analyzer; *analyzist. The first is standard in reference to a person who analyzes. The second is a NEOLOGISM for software that examines data for patterns, relationships, etc. The third is a NEEDLESS VARIANT.

analytical; analytic. No DIFFERENTIATION has surfaced between the two. The long form is twice as common in print as the short, perhaps because it is perceived as being generally more euphonious. This being so, *analytic* could justifiably be labeled a NEEDLESS VARIANT—except in the few SET PHRASES denoting disciplines or schools of thought, such as *analytic geometry* and *analytic philosophy*. See *-IC/-ICAL*.

Current ratio in print (*analytical* vs. *analytic*): 2:1

***analyzation.** See **analysis**.

analyze; analyse. The first is AmE, the second BrE.

***analyzer; *analyzist.** See **analyst**.

anonym. See **anonym**.

anarchic; *anarchical; anarchist, adj.; anarchistic; *anarchistical. Not surprisingly, these words seem to refuse to follow any rules. *Anarchic* (= [1] lacking order, rules, and regularity; lawless; or [2] rejecting the moral rules of society), a Greek LOANWORD dating in English from the late 1700s, has long predominated over its older by-form, **anarchical*, dating from the 1500s. The eclipse took place about 1915.

The other three adjectives relate more clearly to the philosophical doctrine of *anarchism*, the political belief that governments should be overthrown and that people would then voluntarily cooperate to improve society. *Anarchist* can function as either an agent noun <three anarchists were arrested> or an adjective <anarchist violence>. As an adjective, it tends to focus on the person <anarchist ideas> <anarchist tendencies>. The alternative *anarchistic* is more abstract, and the *-istic* ending carries a greater tone of disparagement <anarchistic individualism> <anarchistic views>. But the adjective *anarchist* proves more prevalent than *anarchistic* in almost any phrase you might posit. **Anarchistical* is a NEEDLESS VARIANT of *anarchistic*. See *-IC/-ICAL*.

anarchy; anarchism. *Anarchy* is a state of lawlessness or disorder in society. *Anarchism* is a political theory antithetical to any form of government. The preferred adjectival forms are *anarchic* and *anarchistic*.

Anchorageite; *Anchoragite. The first spelling is standard. See **DEMONYMS**.

anchor baby, a phrase dating from the mid-1990s, didn’t come to widespread public attention until the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign. The phrase refers to a child born in the U.S. of a mother who has illegally crossed the border or overstayed her visa specifically to benefit from the Birthright Citizenship Clause of the U.S. Constitution, which makes every person born on U.S. soil a citizen of the country. Although the extent of the anchor-baby “problem” is a matter of debate, its existence is not. It is not clear whether opponents of the term object to the term itself or to the public highlighting of the existence of the issue. When asked to suggest an alternative term, opponents often cite *baby*—which, of course, is a vague hypernym that obscures the denotative fact that *anchor baby* is intended to convey. Arguments about the term and what it denotes will play out in coming years. Some will argue that it’s a snarl-phrase, and others will insist that it’s a straightforward descriptor uttered without malice or enmity. Any proposed synonym that doesn’t approach **DOUBLESPEAK** is likely to inflame the debate—which suggests that the difficulty is not merely with the words themselves.

anchorite /angk-ə-rīt/ (= someone who lives in seclusion usu. for religious reasons; a pious hermit), a French/Latin LOANWORD dating in English from the 1400s, has been predominantly so spelled since

the 1600s. **Anchoret* is a variant. The feminine forms *anchoress* and **ancess* are largely unnecessary given that *anchorite* can be applied to someone of either sex.

Current ratio in print (*anchorite* vs. *anchoress* vs. **anchoret* vs. **ancess*): 414:112:21:1

***anchorperson**. See SEXISM (c).

anchors aweigh; anchors away; anchor's aweigh; anchor's away. Although we can authoritatively say that the first of these predominates today, the linguistic history is murky. The original phrase, in the early 1800s, seems to have been *anchor's away* (as in “the anchor has been put away”) or *anchors away* (same but plural). But in 1906, the U.S. Navy song “Anchors Aweigh” was written, with the plural form in the title but the singular *anchor's aweigh* in the sheet-music lyrics. *Aweigh* here means “clear of the bottom” or “hoisted.”

By the time of World War I, the plural *Anchors aweigh!* was the usual exclamation. The phrase can also be used predicatively <after the repairs to the boat were finished, it was anchors aweigh>. The word choice favoring *aweigh* over *away* may well have been influenced by the ancient phrase *weigh anchor* (= to heave the anchor up before sailing).

Sometimes *aweigh* is corrupted into *way*, often as part of an ineffectual pun. E.g.: “Anchors way [read *aweigh*?]: Former Chicago news anchors Larry Mendte and Giselle Fernandez . . . manage not to bump into each other.” Marla Hart, “Pssst!,” *Chicago Trib.*, 10 Dec. 1996, at C1.

For a related blunder—**under weigh* for *underway*—see **underway**.

Current ratio in print (*anchors aweigh* vs. *anchors away* vs. *anchor's aweigh* vs. *anchor's away* in World Englishes): 55:31:7:1

anchoveta /an-choh-**vet**-ə/ (= a small anchovy found off the Pacific coast of the Americas), a Spanish LOANWORD dating in English from about 1910, has always been predominantly so spelled. **Anchovetta* is a variant.

Current ratio in print (*anchoveta* vs. **anchovetta*): 117:1

anchovy (the small salty fish) is pronounced /an-choh-**vee**/ in AmE—not /an-**choh**-**vee**/. In BrE, the second syllable commonly has a schwa sound: /an-**chə**-**vee**/.

ancient regime; ancien régime. The French phrase *ancien régime* denotes the system of government in France before the revolution of 1789. By 1792, the term had been fully anglicized to *ancient regime*—only a slight alteration (the addition of a *t* and the dropping of italics). By the mid-1800s, the phrase had been extended beyond French references to any old system or outmoded way of doing things. Today there is a

helpful tendency to use *ancient regime* in reference to anything other than the pre-1789 French government, and to restrict the GALLICISM to this sense.

ancillary (= connected with or supporting something else) is preferably pronounced /an-si-ler-ee/ in AmE but invariably /an-sil-ə-ree/ in BrE.

and. A. Beginning Sentences with. It is rank superstition that this coordinating conjunction cannot properly begin a sentence:

- **1870**: “[T]he idea that a sentence should *never* begin with [*and*] is absurd. It would be quite as sensible to and worthy of consideration to insist that a sentence should never begin with *but* or *nor*.” S.W.W., “‘And’ at the Beginning of a Sentence,” 19 N.Y. *Teacher & Am. Educ. Monthly* 204, 205 (May 1870).
- **1896**: “Objection is sometimes taken to employment of *but* or *and* at the beginning of a sentence; but for this there is much good usage.” Adams Sherman Hill, *The Principles of Rhetoric* 88 (rev. ed. 1896).
- **1939**: “Another stumbling-block to a certain type of academic mind is the conjunction *and*. It is often laid down as a rigid rule that a sentence should never begin with *and*. This was a point on which my own schoolmaster was inflexible. And quite recently a training college student whom I asked to comment on a passage from Malory condemned him for using ‘the objectionable conjunction *and*’. And printers have an ugly trick of emasculating my meaning by turning my periods into commas because they happen to be followed by *and*. Taking down my Bible and opening it at random, I find that the eighth chapter of Exodus contains thirty-two sentences, twenty-five of which begin with *and*.” Philip Boswood Ballard, *Teaching and Testing English* 26 (1939).
- **1956**: “In medieval prose . . . *and* is a dominant word, especially at the beginning of the sentence. One sentence follows on another in simple succession, with a conjunction as head-word representing a link in a chain, or (to jump to another metaphor) a single step in the chronological development of the narrative. The pattern, as has already been pointed out, is familiar to us in the Authorized Version.” G.H. Vallins, *The Pattern of English* 83 (1956).
- **1965**: “That it is a solecism to begin a sentence with *and* is a faintly lingering superstition. The *OED* gives examples ranging from the 10th to the 19th c.; the Bible is full of them.” Ernest Gowers, *FMEU2* at 29.
- **1966**: “A prejudice lingers from the days of school-marmish rhetoric that a sentence should not begin with *and*. The supposed rule is without foundation in grammar, logic, or art. *And* can join separate sentences and their meanings just as well as *but* can both join sentences and disjoin meanings.” Wilson Follett, *MAU* at 64.
- **1985**: “Many years ago schoolteachers insisted that it was improper to begin a sentence with *and*, but this convention is now outmoded. Innumerable respected writers use *and* at the beginning of a sentence.” William Morris & Mary Morris, *Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage* 37 (2d ed. 1985).
- **1997**: “*And* the idea that *and* must not begin a sentence, or even a paragraph, is an empty superstition. The same goes

for *but*. Indeed either word can give unimprovably early warning of the sort of thing that is to follow.” Kingsley Amis, *The King’s English* 14 (1997).

Schoolteachers may have laid down a prohibition against the initial *and* to counteract elementary-school students’ tendency to begin every sentence with *and*. As Follett and Amis point out, the same superstition has plagued *but*. See **but (A)** & SUPERSTITIONS (D).

The very best writers find occasion to begin sentences with *and*—e.g.:

- “*And* the technique of the approach to poetry has not received half so much serious systematic study as the technique of pole-jumping.” I.A. Richards, “An Experiment in Criticism” (1929), in *Richards on Rhetoric* 25, 31 (Ann E. Berthoff ed., 1991).
- “*And* the thought of being engaged to a girl who talked openly of fairies being born because stars blew their noses, or whatever it was, frankly appalled me.” P.G. Wodehouse, *Right Ho, Jeeves* 95 (1934; repr. 1986).
- “Mr Rossiter quotes the observation of a B.B.C. official that his talks were ‘too much the spoken word for *The Listener*. *And* that in itself is significant. It means that in the medium of print, the long established syntax of the sentence, with its complex relationships, still holds its own. But what will happen in the future it is too early, as yet, to prophesy.” G.H. Vallins, *The Pattern of English* 94 (1956; repr. 1957).
- “It sounds quite simple, put that way. But of course it is not simple at all. *And* it is not an easy thing to learn.” Lucile Vaughan Payne, *The Lively Art of Writing* 11 (1965).
- “A dictionary is good only insofar as it is a comprehensive and accurate description of current usage. *And* to be comprehensive it must include some indication of social and regional associations.” Bergen Evans, “But What’s a Dictionary For?” in *The Ways of Language* 77, 79 (Raymond J. Pflug ed., 1967).
- “If we view the paragraph as a *discursive development of a proposition*, we can predict that the topic sentence of the paragraph in question will generate a development based on objectives. *And* this is exactly what we do find.” W. Ross Winterowd, *Rhetoric: A Synthesis* 147 (1968).
- “*And* one had better make use of whatever beauty, elegance, riches the translator’s language possesses, and hope that something emotionally, intellectually, aesthetically equivalent will emerge.” John Simon, *The Sheep from the Goats* 397 (1989).
- “*And* there is, come to think of it, that unsounded *b*, to keep alive some small doubt.” Christopher Ricks, *Beckett’s Dying Words* 51 (1993).

B. For *or*. Oddly, *and* is frequently misused for *or* where a singular noun, or one of two nouns, is called for—e.g.: “While third-party candidates have mounted serious challenges for senator *and* [read *or*] governor in almost two dozen states this year, building an effective third-party apparatus is rare.” Jonathan Rabinovitz, “Weicker’s Victory: Lasting Legacy?,” *N.Y. Times*, 5 Oct. 1994, at A13. (The phrase should be *senator or governor*; as written, the sentence says that in each of almost 24 states third-party candidates were running for both senator and governor—an idea belied by the context of the article.)

C. In Enumerations. Some writers have a tendency, especially in long enumerations, to omit *and* before

the final element. To do so is often infelicitous: the reader is jarred by the abrupt period ending the sentence and may even wonder whether something has been omitted. One may occasionally omit *and* before the final element in an enumeration with a particular nuance in mind. Without *and*, the implication is that the series is incomplete—rhetoricians call this construction “asyndeton.” With *and*, the implication is that the series is complete. This shade in meaning is increasingly subtle in modern prose.

D. Serial Comma (Oxford Comma) Before *and* in Enumerations. On the question of punctuating enumerations, the better practice is to place a comma before the *and* introducing the final element. See SERIAL COMMA.

E. *But* misused for *and*. See **but (c)**.

F. Mistaken for *in*. For the error of hearing *and* as ‘n’ and therefore writing *in* in its place, see **day and age, neck-and-neck & one and the same**.

***and etc.** See **etc. (B)**.

and hell. See **sure as hell**.

and/or. A legal and business formula dating from the mid-1800s, *and/or* has been vilified for most of its life—and rightly so. To avoid ambiguity, don’t use it. Many writers—especially lawyers—would be surprised at how easy and workable this solution is.

Or alone usually suffices. If you are offered coffee or tea, you may pick either (or, in this case, neither), or you may for whatever reason order both. This is the ordinary sense of the word, understood by everyone and universally accommodated by the simple *or*.

But in two situations this ordinary sense of *or* does not accomplish everything we need. Both involve the level of exclusivity between the elements on either side of *or*. One comes up in the standard statement of punishment, “a \$1,000 fine or a year in jail or *both*.” The other comes up when the choices are mutually exclusive. If that exclusivity is important to point out—if the judge must choose between a fine and jail, for instance—the writer may substitute *but not both* for *or both* in the previous example. But these situations generally arise only when linguistic rigor is imperative, as in legal drafting.

and particularly. See **particularly**.

androcracy. See **GOVERNMENTAL FORMS**.

and which. See **which (D)**.

anecdotalist. See **anecdote (c)**.

anecdote. A. Adjective Forms: *anecdotal*; **anecdotic*; **anecdotal*. The form *anecdotal* is standard; the other forms are NEEDLESS VARIANTS. In reference to evidence, *anecdotal* refers not to anecdotes, but to personal experiences reported by one or more people.

Current ratio in print (*anecdotal* vs. **anecdotic* vs. **anecdotal*): 340:3:1

Current ratio in print (*anecdotal details* vs. **anecdotic details*): 29:1

Current ratio in print (*anecdotal history* vs. **anecdotic history*): 6:1

B. And *antidote*. *Anecdote* (= a brief story, usu. true and intended to amuse) is sometimes confused with *antidote* (= something that counteracts poison), resulting in a MALAPROPISM—e.g.:

- “One dog was poisoned but we found the *anecdote* [read *antidote*].” Dennis Pollock, “Home Alone Is Not This Guy’s Choice During Holidays,” *Fresno Bee*, 5 Dec. 1994, at F2.
- “The Oilers were 6–6 and staggering and looking for an *anecdote* [read *antidote*] to whatever was poisoning their system.” John McClain, “On the Road Again,” *Houston Chron.*, 22 Dec. 1996, Sports §, at 4.
- “He went to the hospital quickly but still died because there is no *anecdote* [read *antidote*] for glory lily poisoning.” Katherine Snow Smith, “Know What to Do if Your Child Eats a Toxic Plant,” *St. Petersburg Times* (Fla.), 7 Apr. 2002, Neighborhood Times §, at 12.

The opposite error is less common, but it does occur—e.g.:

- “Laughter could be heard. It was the apparent jovial reunion following a successful hunt, no doubt accompanied by a few amusing *antidotes* [read *anecdotes*] of Spade’s undress.” John M. Bishop, *Casting Shadows with Shamans* 21 (2003).
- “Amanda delighted the two women by playing the consummate hostess, serving tea and cookies to their guest, telling funny *antidotes* [read *anecdotes*] about the cats, and describing the dolls in remarkable detail.” R.C. Morris, *Tender Prey* 162 (2005).

See WORD-SWAPPING.

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1. *anecdote* misused for *antidote*: Stage 1
 2. *antidote* misused for *anecdote*: Stage 1
- Current ratio in print (*amusing anecdote* vs. **amusing antidote*): 132:1

C. Corresponding Agent Noun. *Anecdotalist* /an-ik-doh-tist/ (= someone skilled in telling stories based on personal experience), an agent noun dating from about 1760, has long been the standard term. *Anecdotalist*, a rival form that emerged in the mid-1800s and achieved significant popularity after 1980, is a variant. Given the predominance of *anecdotalism* (= the propensity for storytelling) over **anecdotism*, the corresponding noun *anecdotalist* seems likely to succeed in the end. (The *anecdotalist* evidence isn’t yet in.) Forget the obsolete NEEDLESS VARIANTS: **anecdotarian* and **anecdotographer*.

Current ratio in print (*anecdotalist* vs. *anecdotalist*): 2.2:1

Current ratio in print (*anecdotalism* vs. **anecdotism*): 32:1

anemia; anaemia. Denoting a medical condition in which one’s blood has too few red blood cells, *anemia* has been the standard spelling in AmE only since about 1900. From the time when the word was first used in English in the 1820s,

the BrE spelling has predominantly been *anaemia*. But the two spellings have been locked in close competition in BrE since about 1980.

anemone /ə-nem-ə-nee/ (= [1] a flower of the buttercup family; or [2] a flowerlike sea polyp) is so spelled and pronounced—not **anenome*. But the misspelling (like the mispronunciation /ə-nen-ə-mee/) is common—e.g.:

- “On the right rear tail brilliantly colored clown fish have made their home in a sea *anenome* [read *anemone*], waving in the warm water like a happy baseball crowd.” Bob Howarth, “Guadalcanal’s Ironbottom Sound: A Terrible Beauty,” *Indianapolis Star*, 6 Aug. 1995, at K1.
- “Two further points, illustrated by the *anenome* [read *anemone*] fish, are worth highlighting.” Michael Begon, Colin R. Townsend & John L. Harper, *Ecology: From Individuals to Ecosystems* 555 (2006) (word misspelled five times on page).

The phrase *any money* can be a helpful mnemonic device for spelling, *an M on E* for pronunciation. See METATHESIS.

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anemone misspelled **anenome*: Stage 1
Current ratio in print (*anemone* vs. **anenome*): 303:1

anent. Theodore M. Bernstein writes, “Except in legal usage, *anent* [= about] is archaic and semiprecious.” *More Language That Needs Watching* 24 (1962). He could have omitted *except in legal usage* and *semi*. Perhaps the best statement is that *anent* “is a pompous word and nearly always entirely useless.” Percy Marks, *The Craft of Writing* 47 (1932). Common in the 1600s, it has been in retreat ever since. See ARCHAISMS.

anesthesia. See **anesthetic**.

anesthesiologist. See **anesthetist**.

anesthetic, n.; anesthesia. An *anesthetic* (e.g., ether) causes *anesthesia* (= loss of sensation). Writers often administer the wrong term—e.g.: “Coroner’s investigators said Jackie was ‘very nervous’ and was given *anesthesia* [read *an anesthetic*] by dentist Thien Luong, who was extracting a molar.” John Asbury, “Death of Girl Who Choked on Tooth Ruled Accidental,” *Press Enterprise* (Riverside, Cal.), 27 Aug. 2008, at C1.

AmE prefers the spellings above; the BrE spellings are *anaesthetic* and *anaesthesia*. See AE.

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anesthesia misused for *anesthetic*: Stage 2
Current ratio in print (*without an anesthetic* vs. **without an anesthesia*): 9:1

anesthetist; anesthesiologist. Generally, *anesthetist* will serve for “someone who administers an anesthetic.” The term dates from the late 1800s. *Anesthesiologist*, of World War II vintage, refers specifically to

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Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

a physician specializing in anesthesia and anesthetics. The BrE spellings are *anaesthetist* and *anaesthesiologist*.

aneurysm (= a bulged blood vessel caused by disease), dating from the 1400s, has been the standard spelling since about 1930. **Aneurism*, an etymologically inferior spelling common in the 1800s, is best avoided.

Current ratio in print (*aneurysm* vs. **aneurism*): 27:1

Angeleno; *Los Angelean. The first is the standard term for someone who hails from or lives in Los Angeles. The second is a fairly uncommon equivalent. See DEMONYMS.

Current ratio in print (*Angeleno* vs. **Los Angelean*): 67:1

angelic (= [1] of, relating to, or involving angels; or [2] being or appearing to be kind, gentle, and altogether good), a French/Latin LOANWORD dating in English from the 1400s, has been the standard adjective since the mid-1700s. **Angelical* is a variant. See -IC/-ICAL.

Current ratio in print (*angelic* vs. **angelical*): 46:1

angina pectoris (= a medical condition that causes chest pains because of a weak heart) is pronounced /an-jī-nə pek-tə-ris/. It is typically shortened to *angina*.

A 2019 Twitter poll showed *angina* to be pronounced /an-jī-nə/ far more often than /an-jə-nə/—the vote being more than 95% to 5%. (Some 595 people participated.)

Yet most physicians and Latinists have long said /an-jə-nə/. More than a century ago, a physician who was also a Latinist concluded: “The weight of the evidence . . . seems to me to be in favor of the ‘i’ in *angina* being pronounced short, but it will take long before scholars break down the prejudice of those who have been educated to pronounce it long.” Henry Barnes, “Serenus Sammonicus,” 55 *St. Louis Medical Rev.* 469, 471 (11 May 1907). Long indeed.

angioma /an-jee-oh-mə/ (= a tumor consisting of blood vessels or lymph vessels), a German/Greek LOANWORD dating in English from the mid-1800s, has two plurals: the homegrown *angiomas* (standard since the 1930s) and the Latinate *angiomata* (standard until the 1930s). See PLURALS (B); see also GERMANICISMS.

anglicize /an-gli-sīz/ (= [1] to convert [a foreign word, phrase, etc.] to English-language purposes; or [2] to make [something or someone] more English), a verb dating from the early 1700s, has been predominantly a lowercase word since about 1950. Before that, the word was normally capitalized.

Current ratio in print (*anglicize* vs. *Anglicize*): 1.3:1

Anglophile (= someone from outside England who likes the country and its people), a compound dating from the mid-1800s, has always been the standard term. **Anglophil* is a variant.

Current ratio in print (*Anglophile* vs. **Anglophil*): 56:1

angst (= strong anxiety and intense unhappiness brought on by worries) is traditionally pronounced in the German way /ahngkst/, but today /ayngkst/ or /angkst/ predominates in AmE. See GERMANICISMS.

anilingus; *anilinctus. The term denotes a nonstandard thing, of course, but the standard form is *anilingus*. The term dates from the late 1800s. **Anilinctus* is a NEEDLESS VARIANT that many dictionaries record but that almost never appears in print.

Because of its etymological association with *anal*, writers often, by false analogy (ahem) with that word, use a deviant spelling—e.g.:

- “The list contained 20 words for sexual acts that spanned the alphabet, from *anilingus* [read *anilingus*] to zoerasty.” Teresa Burney, “Sex Definitions Perplex Council,” *St. Petersburg Times* (Fla.), 9 Sept. 1993, Pasco Times §, at 1.
- “It was Carrie and chums who persuaded a couple of my friends to experiment with *anilingus* [read *anilingus*].” “Learn to Love,” *Guardian*, 4 Feb. 2003, at P20.

Cf. **cunnilingus**.

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anilingus misspelled **anilingus*: Stage 4

Current ratio in print (*anilingus* vs. **anilingus* vs. **anilinctus*): 6:4:1

ANIMAL ADJECTIVES. If you have an English–Latin dictionary, look up any animal to find the corresponding Latin term. Then look up that term in an unabridged English-language dictionary and you’re likely to find an English adjective—perhaps rare, but there nevertheless—ending in *-ine*. Some of these, of course, are well known:

asinine	= of, relating to, or like an ass (donkey)
bovine	= of, relating to, or like a cow
canine	= of, relating to, or like a dog
elephantine	= of, relating to, or like an elephant
equine	= of, relating to, or like a horse
feline	= of, relating to, or like a cat
serpentine	= of, relating to, or like a snake

Others are somewhat less well known. Aficionados of Sherlock Holmes know that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle described Holmes more than once as having an *aquiline* nose. (That means “eagle-like.”) Others that are middlingly well known appear from time to time—e.g.:

- “Jagger [acted as if he were] in the midst of a shopping spree, and the lean, *leonine* singer was a pounding, preening song-and-dance man—a kindlier version of the ‘Clockwork Orange’ rounder he played in the ‘70s.” Greg Kot, “Stones Are Risk-Free, but Rockers in the End,” *Chicago Trib.*, 25 Sept. 1997, at 2. (*Leonine* = of, relating to, or like a lion.)
- “‘You have to treat the bear like a loaded, fully explosive-laden gasoline tanker,’ Tamahori said. The *ursine* star came with his longtime trainers, who oversaw him in ‘The Bear.’” Steve Murray, “Call of the Wild Put ‘Edge’ Director

into His Element,” *Atlanta J.-Const.*, 5 Oct. 1997, at L2. (*Ursine* = of, relating to, or like a bear.)

- “Jonathan Heale’s colored woodcuts perfectly suit the two *porcine* heroes.” Michael Dirda, “Children’s Books,” *Wash. Post*, 5 Oct. 1997, Book World §, at 11. (*Porcine* = of, relating to, or like a pig.)

For those who dabble in SESQUIPEDALITY, the less familiar ones are equally appealing, if the sense fits:

accipitrine	corresponds to	hawk
alcelaphine		antelope
anserine		goose
avine		bird
bisontine		bison
cancrine		crab
caprine, hircine		goat
ceratorhine		rhinoceros
cervine, damine		deer
corvine		crow; raven
crocodiline		crocodile
crotaline		rattlesnake
equine		horse
falconine		falcon
ferine		any wild animal
hippopotamine		hippopotamus
hirundine		swallow
hystricine, porcupine		porcupine
lacertine		lizard
larine, laridine		gull
leporine		hare
limacine		slug
lumbricine		earthworm
lupine		wolf
macropodine		kangaroo
murine		mouse; rat
myoxine		dormouse
myrmicine		ant
ovine		sheep
pardine		leopard; panther
parine		titmouse
passerine		sparrow
pavonine		peacock
picine		woodpecker
piscine		fish
psittacine		parrot
ranine		frog
sciurine		squirrel
scolopendrine		centipede
soricine		shrew
struthionine		ostrich
suilline		swine
taurine		bull; ox
tigrine		tiger
vespine		wasp
viperine		viper
vituline		calf; veal
viverrine		mongoose
vulpine		fox
vulturine		vulture

zebrine	corresponds to	zebra
zibeline		sable

In each of these words, the last syllable is most commonly pronounced /-in/, but /-in/ is also acceptable. Avoid /-een/, except in AmE pronunciations of *elephantine* and *serpentine*. For more on the pronunciation of words ending in *-ine*, see -ILE.

For more on animal words, see Darryl Lyman, *Dictionary of Animal Words and Phrases* (1994); Stephen Potter & Laurens Sargent, *Pedigree: The Origins of Words from Nature* (1974).

animalculum (lit., “little animal”) forms the plural *animalcula*, not **animalculae*—e.g.: “John Crawford, a reputable Baltimore physician and an early promoter of contagion theory in America, lost both his reputation and his practice for maintaining, in 1806/7, that disease was spread by microscopic insects or *animalculae* [read *animalcula*].” Ronald Rees, “Under the Weather: Climate and Disease, 1700–1900,” 46 *History Today* 35 (1996). But the more common term is *animalcule* (pl. *animalcules*). See DIMINUTIVES (B).

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**animalculae* for *animalcula*: Stage 3

animator (= [1] someone or something that animates; or [2] someone who makes animated films) is predominantly so spelled in all varieties of English. **Animator* is a variant spelling. See -ER (A).

Current ratio in print (*animator* vs. **animator*): 206:1

animus is double-edged. At times the word is neutral, meaning “intention; disposition”—especially in legal texts. But more often in AmE *animus* denotes ill will, as if it were synonymous with *animosity*—e.g.:

- “Thomas won [the Senate’s] approval by 52–48 and said it was ‘a time for healing, not a time for anger or for *animus* or animosity.’” Aaron Epstein, “Bush Nominee Carries Closest Vote Since 1888,” *Phil. Inquirer*, 16 Oct. 1991, at A1.
- “He . . . spent his whole life strung out between need of, and *animus* toward, his mother.” Colin Walters, “The Life and Loves of Lord Byron,” *Wash. Times*, 18 May 1997, at B6.
- “There’s no *animus*, at least outwardly, between the one-year-and-done offensive coordinator and a Ravens franchise that he helped to franchise-record offensive numbers.” Jon Meoli, “Over to the Other Side,” *Baltimore Sun*, 10 Sept. 2015, at D1.

anise (= a plant with seeds strongly tasting of licorice) is pronounced /an-is/, rhyming with *Janice*.

annex, n.; **annexation**; ***annexment**; ***annexion**. *Annex* = something attached, as an appendix or a wing of a building. (**Annexe* is a chiefly BrE variant.) *Annexation* = (1) the act of attaching or incorporating (as territory within a municipality or nation); or

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Stage 1: Rejected. Stage 2: Widely shunned. Stage 3: Widespread but . . . Stage 4: Ubiquitous but . . . Stage 5: Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

(2) the state of having been attached or incorporated. **Annexment* and **annexion* are NEEDLESS VARIANTS of *annexation*.

annexable. So spelled—not **annexible*. See -ABLE (A).

annexation; *annexment; *annexion. See **annex**.

annihilable. So formed—not **annihilatable*. See -ABLE (D) & -ATABLE.

anniversary (= the day of the year on which an event occurred in a previous year) is today used informally to denote a milestone in months or even weeks. That usage has become increasingly common since the late 1930s, perhaps because there is no convenient equivalent for terms shorter than a year (*milestone* is close, but it doesn't connote observance and recurrence the way *anniversary* does). Given the word's tight association with "year" however, this loose usage is subject to criticism and should be avoided if possible—e.g.:

- "So, how's he doing at the one-month anniversary of his arrival [read *a month after arriving*] in Richmond?" Margaret Edds, "Shucet Steers Troubled Roads Department on a Straight Course," *Virginian-Pilot* (Norfolk), 19 May 2002, at J5.
- "The only other week in 2002 when terrorism was the top evening news story came during the six-month anniversary [read *remembrance*] of the New York and Washington attacks." Mark Jurkowitz, "News Media Try to Give Public Fair Warnings," *Boston Globe*, 30 May 2002, at D6.

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anniversary denoting any milestone: Stage 2

announce; announce; *enounce; enunciate. *Announce*, the best-known of these terms, may mean (1) "to proclaim" <she announced her independence>; (2) "to give notice of" <he announced that he would leave within the hour>; or (3) "to serve as announcer of" <Henry Longhurst announced the tournament>.

Annunciate is generally a NEEDLESS VARIANT of *announce*, except that it sometimes appears in religious contexts to lend a weighty effect. It has no place in other contexts—e.g.: "Mr. Clinton has made it difficult for union workers to receive a refund for dues used for political purposes, a right *announced* [read *announced* or, perhaps, *enunciated*] by the Supreme Court in a ruling known as the Beck decision." Greg Pierce, "Inside Politics," *Wash. Times*, 11 Feb. 1997, at A5.

Enunciate = (1) to formulate systematically; (2) to announce, proclaim; or (3) to articulate clearly. **Enounce* is a NEEDLESS VARIANT in sense 1 of *enunciate*. Sometimes writers misuse **annunciate* for *enunciate* (sense 3)—e.g.: "While her voice was clear and solid, she *annunciated* [read *enunciated*] just a little too much." Maureen Johnson, "'Grease!' Rocks, Despite a Few Slips," *Charleston Daily Mail* (W. Va.), 12 May 1997, at A10.

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**annunciate* misused for *enunciate*: Stage 1

annoy. See **aggravate**.

annoyance; *annoyment. The first has always been the standard term in Modern English. The second, when used with a straight face, is worse than a NEEDLESS VARIANT—it's a NONWORD that is itself what it denotes. E.g.: "Even into July, Howe had not stirred. Nor had Washington been active, to Adams's considerable *annoyment* [read *annoyance*]." John E. Ferling, *John Adams: A Life* 178–79 (1996). Occasionally it appears as a jocular antonym that echoes *enjoyment*—e.g.: "So here, for your *enjoyment/annoyment*: What new director found his preteen daughter's pot stash moments before his big film's premiere party, and what critic took the rap for it?" Michael Musto, "La Dolce Musto," *Village Voice*, 4 Feb. 1997, at 30.

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**annoyment* for *annoyance*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*annoyment* vs. **annoyment*): 8,191:1

annulment. So spelled—not **annullment* (a common misspelling). See **divorce** (A).

Current ratio in print (*annulment* vs. **annullment*): 792:1

annunciate. See **announce**.

anoint is sometimes misspelled **annoint*—e.g.:

- "The piece did everything except *annoint* [read *anoint*] Gov. William Weld." Jon Klarfeld, "With These Friends, Who Needs Enemies?," *Boston Herald*, 16 Sept. 1994, at 27.
- "A few hundred years ago, doctors treating a wound with ointment also made sure to *annoint* [read *anoint*] the weapon that inflicted it." Scott McLemee, "Better Living Through Science," *Newsday* (N.Y.), 12 May 2002, at D33.

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anoint misspelled **annoint*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*anoint* vs. **annoint*): 201:1

anomalous; anomalistic. Something that is an anomaly is *anomalous*. That is, *anomalous* is the general adjective corresponding to the noun *anomaly*. But for astronomical anomalies, the adjective is *anomalistic*. Sometimes, though, this much narrower adjective erroneously displaces the broader one—e.g.:

- "Whether the conflicting findings between the levels of analysis are *anomalistic* [read *anomalous*] is unclear." David W. Romero, "Requiem for the Lightweight," *Presidential Studies Q.*, 1 Sept. 2001, at 454.
- "It fails to mention the *anomalistic* [read *anomalous*] 1981–83 digression of Gov. Frank White." Michael Storey, "Paper Trails: Has Hillary Forgotten Us?," *Ark. Democrat-Gaz.*, 26 Jan. 2003, at 53.

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anomalistic misused for *anomalous*: Stage 1

anomie /a-nə-mee/ (= cultural anarchy and social instability) is the standard spelling. **Anomy* is a variant. The adjective is *anomic* /ə-nom-ik/.

Current ratio in print (*anomie* vs. **anomy*): 23:1

anonym; anonym; ananym. An *anonym* (preferably spelled without the *e*) is an anonymous person. (See

pseudonym.) An *anonym* is a pseudonym arrived at by spelling the author's name backward (as, hypothetically, *Renrag* for *Garner*).

anorectic; anorexic. *Anorectic* (= suffering from a loss of appetite) is the general term, *anorexic* (= suffering from *anorexia nervosa*) the term specific to the medical condition characterized by self-starvation. As an adjective and also as a noun, both may refer to people with *anorexia nervosa*, but *anorexic* is far more common. *Anorectic* is mostly confined to the medical and scientific communities, while *anorexic* predominates in general writing.

As an adjective, *anorectic* has the additional meaning of “causing a loss of appetite” and is used to refer to drugs and their physical effects <anorectic drugs>.

another has a short /a/ or schwa in the first syllable (/a-/ or /ə-nəθ-ər/)—not /ay-/.

another think coming; *another thing coming. The traditional idiom is “If you think X, you’ve got another think coming.” That phrasing has predominated since the expression became popular in the early 20th century. It may not be funny anymore, but it makes sense: X is wrong, so eventually you’re going to think Y instead. But a surprising number of writers substitute *thing* for *think*, which is grammatical but not even vaguely clever. E.g.:

- “If Osama bin Laden imagined, in releasing a threatening new videotape days before the presidential election, that he could sway the votes of Kerry supporters like David and Jan Hill and Bush supporters like Paul Christene, he has *another thing coming* [read *another think coming*].” Kirk Johnson, “Voters, Their Minds Made Up, Say bin Laden Changes Nothing,” *N.Y. Times*, 31 Oct. 2004, § 1, at 1.
- “If the leaders of the Democratic Party hope that they can fool the holy people by buying themselves white leatherette-bound Bibles and pink plastic Jesuses and turning up to give testimony at church, they’ve got *another thing coming* [read *another think coming*].” Nicholas von Hoffman, “Democrats Should Oppose Empowering the Pious,” *N.Y. Observer*, 29 Nov. 2004, at 4.
- “If anyone is expecting Francona to gloat, they’ve got *another thing coming* [read *another think coming*].” Jeff Horrigan, “Unwelcome Mat: Not Much Brotherly Love in Philly for Francona,” *Boston Herald*, 24 June 2005, at 123.

The OED lists *think* as a colloquial noun, with several citations from the 1800s. It shows the phrase *to have another think coming* first used in print in 1896, with the *thing* variant close on its heels in 1897.

The heavy-metal band Judas Priest may share some blame for the widespread acceptance of the variant wording; its most commercially successful song was “You’ve Got Another Thing Coming,” first recorded in 1982.

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**another thing coming*
for *another think coming*: Stage 4

Current ratio in print (*another think coming* vs. **another thing coming*): 1.2:1

answer back has been a common REDUNDANCY since the late 1800s, especially in BrE—e.g.: “Hilary and Piers du Pre seem determined to wreak the ultimate revenge on their sister by discrediting her while she lies—unable to *answer back* [read *answer*—in her grave.” Julian Lloyd Webber, “An Insult to Jackie’s Memory,” *Daily Telegraph*, 4 Jan. 1999, at 15.

In AmE, the phrase is fairly common in sportswriting in the sense “to equal an opponent’s recent scoring effort”—e.g.:

- “Jake Armstrong quickly *answered back* for the Knights, but the two-goal cushion was short-lived.” Joe Connor, “La Jolla, Bishop’s Tie One On in Wester,” *San Diego Union-Trib.*, 16 Dec. 1998, at D6.
- “Wimberley would *answer back* with senior wide-out Matt Stroman hauling in a 22-yard TD pass from sophomore quarterback JoJo Weeks to knot the game up at 7—all late in the first quarter.” Mark Rico, “More Than a Game,” *San Marcos Daily Record* (Tex.), 9 Sept. 2015, Sports §, at 5.

Some writers have used the sports phrase metaphorically—e.g.: “The last time somebody tried to impose prohibition on Chicago, the city *answered back* with Al Capone.” Peter Annin, “Prohibition Revisited?,” *Newsweek*, 7 Dec. 1998, at 68. Despite the currency of this usage, *answer* alone can carry the load.

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answer back for *answer* (outside sports): Stage 3

antagonist. See **protagonist** (c).

Antarctica is often misspelled and mispronounced **Antartica*—e.g.: “Kroc expanded the golden-arches empire to every continent on the globe (except *Antarctica* [read *Antarctica*]).” Bob Ivry, “A Zillion Burgers Later—Perfection,” *Record* (N.J.), 13 Sept. 1997, Your Time §, at 1. During the 1990s, this misspelling occurred about 3% of the time in newspapers. See **Arctic**.

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Antarctica misspelled **Antartica*: Stage 1
Current ratio in print (*Antarctica* vs. **Antartica*): 177:1

ANTE-/ANTI-. The prefix *ante-* means “before,” and *anti-* “against.” Thus *antecedent* (= something that goes before) and *antipathy* (= feelings against, dislike). In a few words *ante-* has been changed to *anti-*, as in *anticipate* (= to consider or use before the due or natural time) and *antipasto* (= an Italian appetizer, usu. consisting of an assortment of cheeses, vegetables, meats, and olives).

In some compound words, the prefix *anti-* may cause ambiguities. See **antinuclear protester**.

antebellum. One word.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX (For the full key, see front matter pp. xxv–xxvi.)

Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

ANTECEDENTS, AGREEMENT OF NOUNS WITH. See CONCORD.

ANTECEDENTS, REMOTE. See MISCUES (C) & REMOTE RELATIVES.

antedate; predate. Both words are so common that it would be presumptuous to label either a NEEDLESS VARIANT. One sees a tendency to use *antedate* in reference to documentary materials, and *predate* in reference to physical things and historical facts. The DIFFERENTIATION is worth encouraging. Although *antedate* has historically been the more common of the two, *predate* has occurred more frequently in print since the late 1970s—in 2019 by a 6-to-1 margin.

For another sense of *predate*, see **predate**.

antenna. When the reference is to insects, *antennae* /an-ten-ee/ is the usual plural. But when the reference is to televisions and electronic transmitters, *antennas* is better. See PLURALS (B).

Current ratio in print (*insect antennae* vs. *insect antennas*): 15:1

Current ratio in print (*TV antennas* vs. *TV antennae*): 3:1

antenuptial. See **prenuptial**.

antepenultimate (= the next to the next-to-last) is sometimes misspelled **antipenultimate*—e.g.: “The two versions of the *antipenultimate* [read *antepenultimate*] poem on the Houghton manuscript offer an even stronger indication.” Ashby Bland Crowder, “Attribution or Misattribution: New Poems by Robert Browning?,” 43 *Philological Q.* 443 (2012). The corresponding noun *antepenult* is pronounced either /an-tee-pee-nəlt/ or /an-tee-pi-nəlt/.

Current ratio in print (*antepenultimate* vs. **antipenultimate*): 110:1

anthropocentric; homocentric. Both words may denote a philosophy or worldview that puts human beings at the center of the universe or views them as the reason for creation. While *anthropocentric* is older and always correct in this sense, *homocentric* takes this sense only by SLIPSHOD EXTENSION. *Homocentric* is primarily a scientific term describing (1) a path that is round and concentric rather than oblique, esp. the path of a planet; or (2) the spreading rays of light from an apparent focal point, esp. rays of sunlight. So *anthropocentric* is always the better choice—e.g.:

- “I’m not *homocentric* [read *anthropocentric*]. I don’t think people are the most important thing on the planet. We are part of the community of life.” “Earth Lovers Battle Green Alien,” *Baltimore Sun*, 11 June 2000, at A2 (quoting Mary Burks).
- “If the astonishing complexity of the double helix argues against a random emergence and argues in favor of intelligent design, and since no evidence of life elsewhere exists, then, though our location is not geocentric, the universe might very well be *homocentric* [read *anthropocentric*].” Jeffrey Hart, “The Once and Future Life of Zoos,” *Wash. Times*, 17 June 2001, Books §, at B7.

- “Some scientists say it is *anthropocentric* hubris to think people understand the living planet well enough to know how to manage it.” Andrew C. Revkin, “Managing Planet Earth,” *N.Y. Times*, 20 Aug. 2002, at F1.

Homocentric is inferior for another reason: to many people today the *homo-* prefix suggests primarily sexual orientation, not the species. And *homocentric* is now sometimes used in a homosexual sense—e.g.: “The introduction by the late Martin Taylor is a model of explication that discusses the strong homoerotic element of much of the poetry without ever becoming a tedious, *homocentric* [read *gay-pride?*] rant.” Scott Eyman, “Soldiers’ Letters Give Civil War a Human Face,” *Palm Beach Post*, 10 Nov. 2002, at J4.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX

1. *homocentric* for *anthropocentric*: Stage 1
Current ratio in print (*anthropocentric view* vs. *homocentric view*): 71:1
2. *homocentric* in the sense “homosexually oriented”: Stage 1

anti- (= opposed to, against) is most traditionally pronounced /an-tee/ in AmE and BrE alike, but /an-ti/ is perfectly acceptable in AmE and tends to predominate among speakers born after about 1980. See **ANTE-**.

***an’t I?** See **aren’t I?**

anti-aircraft. See VOWEL CLUSTERS.

anticipate = (1) to sense beforehand; (2) to take care of beforehand; to preclude by prior action; forestall <they anticipated the problem by filing for bankruptcy>; (3) to await eagerly <this much-anticipated film is a great disappointment>; or (4) to expect <we anticipate that 40 people will attend>. Senses 3 and 4 have long been considered the result of SLIPSHOD EXTENSION. Sense 3 no doubt resulted from the unfortunate tendency for people to choose longer words. Generally, avoid *anticipate* when it’s merely equivalent to *expect*. See **expect**.

And yet the mere-expectation senses are exceedingly common—e.g.: “It is *anticipated* [read *expected* or *estimated*] that the 70-team, invitation-only tourney will realize about \$15,000 for the clubs.” Bubbles Greer, “Fish Tales Part of Bass Tourney Preparations,” *Sarasota Herald-Trib.*, 10 Sept. 1997, at B2. Indeed, sometimes this usage leads to near-ambiguities. In the following example, *anticipate* means “expect,” but it suggests “forestall”—e.g.: “The foreboding of traffic snarls, towing and overall melee in connection with last night’s Ohio State University football game may have prevented the problems officials had *anticipated*.” Dean Narciso, “Fears of Football-Related Traffic Frenzy Fizzle Out,” *Columbus Dispatch*, 29 Aug. 1997, at D2.

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anticipate for *expect*: Stage 4

anticipatory; *anticipative. The first is standard; the second is a NEEDLESS VARIANT.

Current ratio in print (*anticipatory* vs. **anticipative*): 34:1

ANTICIPATORY REFERENCE (known also as *cataphora*) here denotes the vice of referring to something that is yet to be mentioned. A sentence will be leading up to the all-important predicate but before reaching it will refer to what is contained in the predicate. Or the reference may not even be explained until a later sentence. The reader is temporarily mystified. E.g.: “Conflict of laws is the study of whether or not, *and if so, in what way*, the answer to a legal problem will be affected because the elements of the problem have contacts with more than one jurisdiction.” (A possible revision: *Conflict of laws is the study of whether the answer to a legal problem will be affected because the elements of the problem have contacts with more than one jurisdiction—and, if so, what the effect will be.*)

Only rarely can anticipatory reference be used in a way that doesn’t bother the reader—e.g.: “We think it’s clear—and *nobody has disputed this point*—that Carla has the first choice in deciding whether to take the furniture.” Innocuous examples tend to involve personal pronouns <his most recent biographer called Lindley Murray a blockbuster author>.

Vexatious examples occur in a variety of forms. First, they’re frequent with *do*-constructions—e.g.:

- “New Mexico, as *do* most states, invests a great deal of money in its highways.” (Either put *as most states do* at the end of the sentence or change *as do* to *like*.)
- “English professors, *as do* [read *like*] novelists and journalists, produce a body of writing that can be analyzed to discern their underlying philosophies.”

See **like (A), (C)**.

Second, sometimes *have* appears too early in the sentence—e.g.: “The president, *as have* [read *like*] many others, has tried to understand the dynamics of this dispute between the company and its workers.”

Third, problems often occur with pronoun references that anticipate the appearance of the noun itself—e.g.: “Mr. Hytner is a director who knows how to keep the pot on the boil; whether you agree with *them* [read *his points*] or not, he makes *his points* [read *them*] with boldness and panache.” John Gross, “A Badly Brought-Up Bunch of Girls,” *Sunday Telegraph*, 15 July 1990, at ix. (Another possible revision: *whether you agree with him or not, he makes his points . . .*)

The best antidote to this problem is to become a stickler for orderly presentation and to develop an abiding empathy for the reader.

ANTICIPATORY SUBJECTS. See **EXPLETIVES**.

anticlimactic /an-tee-kli-mak-tik/ is the correct form. **Anticlimatic* is a solecism (referring seemingly to climate) that somehow became fairly widespread in the 20th century—e.g.: “The *anticlimatic* [read *anticlimactic*] character of this encounter between St. Preux and

Julie, in which writing seems to replace or displace person and event, recalls the almost comically *anticlimatic* [read *anticlimactic*] moment of the consummation of their affair in the first part of the novel.” David Marshall, *The Frame of Art: Fictions of Aesthetic Experience* 121 (2005). But in print, the erroneous form has never seriously rivaled the standard form. See **climactic**.

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anticlimactic misspelled **anticlimatic*: Stage 1
 Current ratio in print (*anticlimactic* vs. **anticlimatic*): 54:1

antidote. See **anecdote (B)**.

antihero; anti-hero. To denote a protagonist who lacks traditional heroic qualities, the first has been predominant in AmE since the early 1980s; the second is BrE.

As a matter of word formation, *antihero* looks like an antonym of *hero*—which it isn’t. Although some people mistake the term as a synonym of *villain*, in fact *antihero* denotes a protagonist who lacks some or many of the admirable attributes of a traditional hero. The archetype goes back to ancient Greek plays. As for the term itself, the Irish playwright Richard Steele used it in 1714, but its modern sense in literary criticism dates from the late 1800s. Essentially, an antihero is a less-than-perfect hero: “An antihero is a protagonist who is as flawed [as] or more flawed than most characters; he is someone who disturbs the reader with his weaknesses yet is sympathetically portrayed, and who magnifies the frailties of humanity.” Mohan Gopinath et al., *Vignettes Relating to Kathakali and Shakespeare* 57 (2022).

Among classic literary protagonists who are antiheroes are Holden Caulfield (*The Catcher in the Rye*), Huckleberry Finn (*Huckleberry Finn*), Jay Gatsby (*The Great Gatsby*), Willy Loman (*Death of a Salesman*), J. Alfred Prufrock (“The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”), and Raskolnikov (*Crime and Punishment*). Examples among popular movie and television characters are Carrie Bradshaw (*Sex and the City*), Archie Bunker (*All in the Family*), Frasier Crane (*Frasier*), Jim Hacker (*Yes, Minister*), Liz Lemon (*30 Rock*), Jim Rockford (*The Rockford Files*), Horace Rumpole (*Rumpole of the Bailey*), Jerry Seinfeld (*Seinfeld*), and Tony Soprano (*The Sopranos*).

Given the psychological awareness of modern culture, the old notion of the faultless hero is hardly sustainable. People are flawed, and it’s hard to think of any interesting literary character who isn’t flawed in some way. So as protagonists go today, antiheroes are more common than a hero who is portrayed without faults, as in a hagiographic biography.

antinomy; antimony. These words are not to be confused. *Antinomy* = a contradiction in law or logic; a

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Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

conflict of authority. *Antimony* = a brittle silvery-white nonmetallic chemical element common in alloys.

antinuclear protester is technically ambiguous, though everyone should know what is intended. For the literal-minded, however, it might suggest “a protester *denouncing* the antinuclear cause,” instead of “a protester *espousing* the antinuclear position.” So it might be preferable to write *nuclear-energy* (or *-weapon*) *protester* or *antinuclear advocate*. The same might be said of antiwar, anti-abortion, and antiglobalization protesters.

antipathy (= strong aversion; intense dislike) is sometimes misused for *antithesis* (= opposite; contrast)—e.g.: “Jiang can wear tri-cornered hats and tour Independence Hall, but his regime represents the *antipathy* [read *antithesis*] of America’s democratic values.” “Jiang’s Smiles Are a Thin Mask,” *Wis. State J.*, 30 Oct. 1997, at A13.

Antipathy usually takes the preposition *toward* or *against* <they feel strong antipathy toward each other> <antipathy against the lame-duck mayor is palpable>. Also, it sometimes takes *to* or *for* <in the late 1990s, antipathy to tobacco manufacturers reached an all-time high> <society has always had an antipathy for child abuse>.

The adjectival form is *antipathetic*.

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antipathy misused for *antithesis*: Stage 1

antipodes /an-**tip**-ə-deez/. This noun, meaning “the exact opposite or contrary things,” is used most often in the plural form—sometimes even when the sense is singular <greed is the antipodes of charity>.

But the singular *antipode* /an-ti-pohd/, dating from the late 1700s, is also frequent in AmE—e.g.: “Still, the black mood about the group seems the *antipode* of those heady days over two years ago.” Vito J. Racanelli, “Will Vodafone Be a Bellwether of the Bottom?,” *Barron’s*, 6 May 2002, at MW6. This singular form might be worth encouraging when the meaning is singular because it promotes DIFFERENTIATION and makes intuitive sense. Yet the synonym *antithesis* is better understood by most readers.

The capitalized plural—*Antipodes*—refers to Australia, New Zealand, and nearby islands (being on the opposite side of the planet from Europe, when that was thought to be the center of civilization). E.g.: “He toured the role in the *Antipodes* a few years ago, but this is Soul’s first shot at the West End.” Jasper Rees, “From Here to Fraternity (or Whatever Happened to David Soul?),” *Independent*, 30 Jan. 1997, Arts §, at 8.

The standard corresponding adjective, *antipodal*, has several NEEDLESS VARIANTS: **antipodean*, **antipodic*, **antipodeal*, and **antipodical*.

antisocial, n. See **psychopath**.

antisocial personality. See **psychopath**.

antiterrorism; counterterrorism. The military distinguishes between these terms. *Antiterrorism* is defensive, involving measures to protect against vulnerability to a terrorist attack. It is also sometimes called “hardening the target.” *Counterterrorism*, the more frequent term, “includes the full range of offensive measures to prevent, deter, and respond to terrorism.” *U.S. Army Field Manual FM-78* (1992).

But the distinction is lost outside the military, where the words are used interchangeably. In each of the following examples, they illustrate the vice of INELEGANT VARIATION:

- “The Department of Defense is pouring billions of dollars into upgrading security and protection for U.S. forces, as well as funding private research and development of *antiterrorism* technology. . . . For Idaho Technology and the handful of other obscure entrepreneurs that provide highly specialized *counterterrorism* products and services, business is booming.” Tony Pugh, “In a Changed World, Security Sells,” *Phil. Inquirer*, 13 Oct. 2001, at C1.
- “Despite President Bush’s promise that his *antiterrorism* chief will have Cabinet-level status and undefined control over 46 agencies and \$11 billion in *counterterrorism* spending, the betting is that the czar won’t get far unless he can give orders and control purse strings.” Lorraine Woellert, “Can Tom Ridge Take On the Terrorists? It’s Up to Bush,” *BusinessWeek*, 15 Oct. 2001, at 57.
- “The FBI is designated the leading agency for *counterterrorism*, but receives only 1 percent of the government’s *antiterrorism* budget.” George Will, “The New Investigators,” *Tulsa World*, 16 Oct. 2001, at 10.

antithesis. For a misuse of this word, see **antipathy**.

antithetical; *antithetic. *Antithetical* (= exhibiting direct opposition) has become established in the phrase *antithetical to* and in most other contexts. The shorter form should be avoided as a NEEDLESS VARIANT. See -IC/-ICAL.

The phrase *directly antithetical* verges on REDUNDANCY—e.g.: “The question is simple: Will Americans be forced to finance teachings *directly antithetical* [read *antithetical*] to their best interests?” Leonce Gaiter, “School Vouchers Spit in the Eye of Our Democratic Principles,” *L.A. Times*, 4 Feb. 1996, at M5.

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**antithetic* for *antithetical*: Stage 2

Current ratio in print (*antithetical* vs. **antithetic*): 13:1

antitrust. So written—without a hyphen.

antivenin (= an antitoxin for venom, esp. from snakes) is often mistakenly written **antivenom*. The word *venin* refers to a toxic constituent of venom, and the name of the counteracting agent is formed from this word, not *venom*. But even though no general English-language dictionary recognizes the incorrect form, it now appears in print somewhat more often than the correct form—e.g.:

- “A new approach may lead to better snake *antivenoms* [read *antivenins*] than have been possible so far.” Stephen

Reucroft & John Swain, “Better *Antivenoms* [read *Antivenins*],” *Boston Globe*, 26 Sept. 2000, at D6.

- “He was fine after receiving *antivenom* [read *antivenin*].” Evan Henerson, “Preparing for the Hazards of the Season,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), 5 June 2001, at D3.
- “The bites of venomous snakes are indeed dangerous, but not always as deadly as many people think. In fact, the *antivenom* [read *antivenin*] is about as bad as the venom.” Michael Dongilli, “He’s Out to Shed Snake’s Image,” *Pitt. Post-Gaz.*, 25 July 2001, at N9.

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**antivenom* for *antivenin*: Stage 4

Current ratio in print (*antivenins*
vs. **antivenoms*): 1:3

a number of. See **number of (A).**

anxious. This word has a range of meaning. As the adjective corresponding to *anxiety*, it has long meant “uneasy, disquieted.” In the most unimpeachable uses, the word stays close to that association—e.g.: “The latest holdup is the EPA’s final approval of the companies’ plans to test for lead at the 150 homes . . . Some residents are getting *anxious*.” Stacy Shelton, “Toxic Investigation,” *Atlanta J.-Const.*, 13 Sept. 2002, at D1.

Today the word typically encompasses both worry and anticipation—e.g.: “Creator and anchorman Brian Lamb, the prince of un-chic, tirelessly fields the remarks of obnoxious callers, preening journalists, and *anxious* authors.” “Spanning the Spectrum,” *Nat’l Rev.*, 24 Mar. 1997, at 16. The word carries a sense of expectation. Here, for example, it seems appropriately used as the author discusses a major life change: “I was *anxious* to leave for Boston . . . I was looking forward to a change.” Elizabeth Morgan, *The Making of a Woman Surgeon* 219 (1980).

But when no sense of uneasiness is attached to the situation, *anxious* isn’t the best word. In those instances, it displaces a word that might traditionally have been considered its opposite—namely, *eager*. E.g.: “Three years ago, the Latin music industry was caught up in crossover mania, *anxious* [read *eager*] to ride the popularity of singers such as Ricky Martin and Enrique Iglesias by selling their English-language albums to the American mainstream.” David Cazares, “Songstresses from Peru, Mexico to Grace Stages,” *Sun-Sentinel* (Ft. Lauderdale), 13 Sept. 2002, at 30.

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anxious for *eager*: Stage 4

any. A. Uses and Meanings. As an adjective, *any* has essentially six uses. (1) The most common occurrence is in conditional, hypothetical, and interrogative sentences, where *any* means “a (no matter which)” or “some” <if you have any salt, I’d like to borrow some> <if any problem were to arise, what would it likely be?> <is there any evidence of the crime?>. (2) In negative assertions, it creates an emphatic negative, meaning

“not at all” or “not even one” <it was not in any way improper> <she did not know any member who was at the event>. (3) In affirmative sentences, it means “every” or “all” <any attempt to flout the law will be punished> <you are required to produce any documents relating to the issue>. (4) In a sentence implying that a selection or discretionary act will follow, it may mean “one or more (unspecified things or people); whichever; whatever” <any student may seek a tutorial> <pick any books you like> <a good buy at any price>. (5) In a declarative sentence or imperative involving a qualitative judgment, it means “of whatever kind” <you’ll have to take any action you consider appropriate>. In this sense, there is sometimes the implication that the quality may be poor <any argument is better than no argument>. (6) In a declarative sentence involving a quantitative judgment, it means “unlimited in amount or extent; to whatever extent necessary” <this computer can process any quantity of numbers simultaneously>. In a related colloquial sense, it may mean “of great size or considerable extent” when following a negative <we won’t be able to make any real headway this week>.

As an adverb, *any* is used before a comparative adjective or adverb in questions and in negative sentences <is he any better?> <they can’t walk any faster>. Cf. **all (D)**. See **COMPARATIVES AND SUPERLATIVES**.

B. Singular or Plural. *Any* may take either a singular or a plural verb. The singular use is fairly rare—e.g.:

- “He and Didi prop Sissy up in front of an Elvis mural to see if *any* of them *is* tall enough to ride the Rock ‘n’ Rollercoaster.” Sandy Smith, “Sharing a Good Time,” *Tennesseean*, 18 July 1996, at D1.
- “If *any* of them *is* successful, it would be the first time an Asian American would serve on the council.” Sarah Kershaw, “Chen Bumped Off Ballot in Flushing Race for Council Seat,” *Newsday* (N.Y.), 15 Aug. 1997, at A6.
- “Many of the other professors have Washington strings to pull, and Tal isn’t sure which side *any* of them *is* on.” Laurie Muchnick, “A Debut Novel of Suspense and Social Observation,” *Chicago Trib.*, July 7, 2002, Books §, at 7.

In such contexts, *any* is elliptical for *any one*; the sentence often reads better if *one* is retained. See **anyone (A)**.

C. Illogical Use. Avoid such ambiguities as this: “She was the best of *any* senior in the class.” (Read: *She was the best senior in the class*. Or: *She was the best of all the seniors in the class*.) See **all (D)** & **best of all**.

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of *any* for *of all*: Stage 3

anybody. See **anyone (B)** & **PRONOUNS (D)**.

anybody else’s. See **else’s & POSSESSIVES (I)**.

anyhow (= in any way; in any manner) is a folksy CASUALISM for *anyway* or *nevertheless*. E.g.: “I’m not sure they would *anyhow*.” John Ed Pearce, “Old Age:

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Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

Not for the Unwary,” *Courier-J.* (Louisville), 8 Jan. 1995, at D3.

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anyhow for *anyway*: Stage 4

Current ratio in print (*anyway* vs. *anyhow*): 10:1

anymore. A. Meaning “now.” In the sense “any longer,” “nowadays,” or “still,” the word *anymore* fits in three contexts: (1) negative declaratives <you don’t bring me flowers anymore>, (2) yes/no questions <do you go there anymore?>, and (3) hypothetical clauses introduced by *whether* or *if* <I wonder whether they go there anymore>. In sense 1, the meaning is “now” or “nowadays”; in senses 2 and 3, the meaning is “still.” When *anymore* is used in some other type of positive statement (not in sense 2 or 3), it is dialectal—e.g.: “The price of housing is outrageous *anymore* [read *these days* or *nowadays*].” In a linguistic study of Missourians, informants considered this dialectal usage “well established, though controversial.” See Gilbert Youmans, “Any More on *Anymore*,” 61 *Am. Speech* 61, 61 (1986). That means that the informants were all familiar with it, but many didn’t like it. The findings would probably hold throughout most of the U.S. See DIALECT.

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anymore misused for *nowadays*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*Nowadays* vs. *Anymore* as first word in sentence): 18:1

B. And *any more*. AmE has developed this distinction: while the solid *anymore* conveys a temporal sense <they don’t eat there anymore>, *any more* conveys a sense of comparing quantities <I don’t want any more tea, thank you> or degrees <I don’t like it any more than you do>. Sometimes even careful writers muddle this distinction—e.g.:

- “*Peruse* . . . is not a word we use very often *any more* [read *anymore*].” Merriam-Webster’s *Concise Dictionary of English Usage* 584 (2002).
- “By Fowler’s time it apparently was not so rare *any more* [read *anymore*], and it is not at all rare today.” *Ibid.* at 630.

In BrE, the nuance hasn’t taken hold: the two-word *any more* tends to serve both functions.

anyone. A. And *any one*. For the indefinite pronoun, the one-word spelling is required <anyone could do that>. Though formerly written as two words, the unification of the phrase is now complete. *Any one* = any single person or thing (of a number). E.g.: “When he died, none of us could remember *any one* thing he’d said.” Richard Hoffer, “The Player,” *Sports Illustrated*, 30 Sept. 1996, at 13.

B. And *anybody*. The two terms are interchangeable, so euphony governs the choice in any given context. In practice, *anyone* appears in print about three times as often as *anybody*. Cf. **everyone (c); somebody**.

C. *Anyone . . . they*. In all types of writing, sentences like this one are on the rise: “If *anyone* thought Diana would be chastened, *they* were wrong.” Jerry Adler & Daniel Pedersen, “Diana’s Battle Royal,” *Newsweek*, 11 Mar. 1996, at 20. Americans who care about good

writing tend to disapprove. But the tide against them is great, primarily because the construction is ubiquitous (and so handy) in speech. For more on this subject, see CONCORD (B), SEXISM (B), PRONOUNS (D) & **they (A)**.

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anyone . . . they: Stage 4

D. **Anyone . . . are*. Although *anyone . . . they* is now widely regarded as acceptable (see **they (A)**), **anyone . . . are* isn’t—e.g.: “Indeed, *anyone* who thought he or she could solve *their* immigration problems by getting hitched *are* in for a shock.” Julie Tilsner, “Guardians of the Green Cards,” *N.Y. Times*, 12 Apr. 1997, at 19. (A possible revision: *Indeed, those who thought they could solve their immigration problems by getting hitched are in for a shock.*)

E. *Anyone else’s*. See **else’s** & POSSESSIVES (I).

***anyplace** for *anywhere* has appreciably crept into print only since the early 1960s. It remains nonstandard—e.g.: “The old [athletic director] hasn’t gone *anyplace* [read *anywhere*], though.” Ron Bush, “Green Replaces Smith at CSTCC,” *Chattanooga Free Press*, 31 Jan. 1997, at H5. When the meaning is “any location,” *any place* should always be two words <at any place>. E.g.: “Readers out there are looking for . . . *anyplace* [read *any place* or *a place*] that serves a good Italian beef sub, like the ones Cousins used to sell.” Jeremy Iggers, “Celebrate Asian New Year in French,” *Star Trib.* (Minneapolis), 7 Feb. 1997, at E15. Cf. ***noplace** & **someplace**.

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**anyplace* for *anywhere*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*anywhere* vs. **anyplace*): 102:1

anything; any thing. *Anything* is the far more general word, meaning “whatever thing.” *Any thing*, for practical purposes, is limited to plural constructions <do you have any things to donate?> and to contrasts with *any person* <is there any thing or person that might be of help?>.

anytime, adv., = at any time; whenever. E.g.: “*Anytime* a seller rents back from a buyer, an interim occupancy agreement should be completed.” Dian Hymer, “Seller Rent-Back Can Benefit Both Sides,” *S.F. Examiner*, 25 Oct. 1992, at F1. Some writers consider this term a CASUALISM, but it is highly convenient and has—for whatever reason—gained more widespread acceptance than *anymore* (in positive contexts) and **anyplace*. Cf. **anymore** & ***anyplace**.

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anytime for *whenever*: Stage 5

***anyways**. Since 2000, this dialectal variant of *anyway* has been very much on the rise in AmE, mostly in speech. It usually falls at the beginning or end of a sentence, to mean “in any event” or “just the same”—e.g.: “‘Anytime a kid plays, it’s learning *anyways* [read *anyway*].’” Peggy Hager, “Real-Life Playing,” *Daily*

News (L.A.), 17 Sept. 2002, News §, at AV4 (quoting Danielle Rothe).

At the beginning of a sentence, it often means “as I was saying before” or “be that as it may” (*anyhow* would be a better choice)—e.g.: “*Anyways* [read *Anyhow*], the Times sent a feller name-a Mark Stein out Phoenix way to report on where East Coast businessmen should hang their feedbags and sack out if they finds theyselves stranded in the desert.” E.J. Montini, “Load Yer Guns, Boys, It’s Time to Hunt Yankees,” *Ariz. Republic*, 28 July 2002, at B3. See DIALECT.

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**anyways* for *anyway*: Stage 2

Current ratio in print (*anyway* vs. **anyways*): 49:1

anywhere; ***anywheres**. The first is standard. The second is dialectal. Cf. **nowhere**.

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**anywheres* for *anywhere*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*anywhere* vs. **anywheres*): 328:1

A-OK; **A-okay**; **A-Okay**; **A-O.K.** The first is standard in all varieties of English. See **okay**.

Current ratio in print (*A-OK* vs. *A-okay* vs. *A-Okay* vs. *A-O.K.*): 110:44:20:1

A1, adj., which describes something of the highest quality, has been predominantly so written since the term was introduced in the early 1800s. Variant forms include **A one*, **A-1*, and **A-one*. The term relates to the highest classification that a ship’s hull and fittings could be given (in terms of seaworthiness and risk) by Lloyd’s, the London insurance underwriters—hence the old long form *A1 at Lloyd’s*.

Current ratio in print (*A1* vs. **A one* vs. **A-1* vs. **A-one*): 713:90:72:1

aorta (= the largest coronary artery) has two plurals: the homegrown *aortas* and the Latinate *aortae*. Since the early 1960s, *aortas* has been predominant; before that, *aortae* was more usual.

Current ratio in print (*aortas* vs. *aortae*): 1.6:1

apart from. See **aside** (B).

apartheid. The traditional and preferred pronunciation of this Afrikaans term is /ə-**pahrt**-hayt/, the last syllable appropriately mimicking the word *hate*. But it is so commonly pronounced /ə-**pahr**-tīt/ or /-tīd/ (like *tight* or *tide*) that those variants are widely accepted. Not accepted are pronunciations that meld the *t* and *h* into a digraph. The term dates only from the late 1940s.

apex forms the plurals *apexes* and *apices*. The latter has greatly predominated since the 1600s. See PLURALS (B).

Current ratio in print (*apices* vs. *apexes*): 5:1

aphrodisiac (= a food, drink, or drug that strengthens the sex drive) is pronounced /af-rə-**diz**-ee-ak/—not /af-rə-**deezh**-ee-ak/.

apiary. See **aviary**.

aplomb (= self-assurance and poise) is pronounced either /ə-**plom**/ or /ə-**pləm**/.

apnea (= a temporary stoppage in breathing, usu. during sleep), a Greek/Latin LOANWORD dating in English from the early 1700s, has been predominantly so spelled in AmE since about 1900. In BrE, the two forms *apnea* and *apnoea* have vied closely since about 1975.

Current ratio in print (*apnea* vs. *apnoea* in World Englishes): 5:1

apocalyptic (= of, relating to, or involving terrible events that are predicted or prophesied, such as the end of the world), a Greek LOANWORD dating in English from the 1600s, has been the standard form of the word since 1800. Before that, *apocalyptic* vied with **apocalyptical*, now a NEEDLESS VARIANT. See -IC/-ICAL.

apocalypticism (= [1] a premonition or expectation of imminent doom; or [2] a doctrine about the impending destruction of the world and final judgment), a not-exactly-popular word dating in English from 1884, has always been the standard form of the word. **Apocalyptism* is a variant.

apodictic /ap-ə-**dik**-tik/ (= clearly proved by incontestable evidence), a Latin/Greek LOANWORD dating in English from the 1600s, has been the standard form of the word since 1940. Three variants that formerly vied with it are **apodeictic*, **apodictical*, and **apodeictical*. See -IC/-ICAL.

Current ratio in print (*apodictic* vs. **apodeictic* vs. **apodictical* vs. **apodeictical*): 92:20:1.1:1

***apolog**. See **apologue**.

apologia. See **apologue**.

apologue (= an allegorical story) is the standard spelling. **Apolog* is a variant. (Cf. **analogue**, **catalogue** & **epilogue**.) For a comment on the decline of some -*ue* forms, see -AGOG(UE).

Current ratio in print (*apologue* vs. **apolog*): 41:1

apology; **apologia**. *Apology*, in its general sense, applies to an expression of regret for a mistake, usually with the implication of guilt. It may also refer to a defense of one’s position, a sense shared with *apologia* /a-pə-**loh**-jee-ə/. But *apologia* should preempt this meaning for purposes of DIFFERENTIATION.

apophthegm. See **apothegm**.

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Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

apostasy; *apostacy. The latter spelling is inferior, the original Greek word being *apostasía*. E.g.: “The church has had its share of negative publicity, most recently stemming from its September 1993 purge of writers and thinkers it accused of *apostacy* [read *apostasy*] for publishing work the church said preached false doctrine.” Lisa Carricaburu, “Media-Wise Men Charting PR Path for LDS Church,” *Salt Lake Trib.*, 23 Aug. 1997, at B1.

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apostasy misspelled **apostacy*: Stage 1
 Current ratio in print (*apostasy*
 vs. **apostacy*): 20:1

APOSTROPHES. See PUNCTUATION (A).

apothegm; apophthegm. These are variant synonyms for *aphorism*, *maxim*, or *epigram*. Although the longer spelling matches the Greek etymon, the shorter *apothegm* is now universally accepted. It's also easier to spell and seemingly to say /**ap**-ə-them/—though in fact the longer spelling is pronounced identically, with a silent *-ph*-. In his famous dictionary of 1755, Samuel Johnson gave the longer form a boost by listing both terms (two pages apart) but declaring the longer one to be “proper.” It predominated till about 1850—not long after Noah Webster gave preference to the shorter form. In AmE there is a decided preference for *apothegm*; in BrE the two forms vie for predominance. Doubtless these trends are traceable in large measure to the two great national lexicographers—Johnson (BrE) and Webster (AmE).

Silent in the noun, the hard /g/ sound is pronounced in the adjective *apothegmatic* /ap-ə-theg-**mat**-ik/. The word should not be confused with *apothem*, a term in geometry for a line connecting the center of a regular polygon with the center of any of its sides. See PRO-NUNCIATION (D).

Current ratio in print (*apothegm*
 vs. *apophthegm* in World Englishes): 2.1:1

appall; appal. For this verb meaning “to shock and upset,” the standard spelling in BrE was *appall* until shortly after Samuel Johnson listed the word as *appal* in his 1755 *Dictionary of English Language*. Since the mid-1780s, *appal* has predominated in BrE. That spelling predominated also in AmE until the 1860s, when *appall* became preeminent. The dichotomy has remained: *appall* is AmE, *appal* BrE.

appanage /ap-i-nij/ (= [1] a monarch's grant of land or revenue to a member of the royal family; or [2] a property or privilege given as a perk), a French LOAN-WORD dating in English from the early 1600s, has always been predominantly so spelled. Although the OED long listed its main entry under **apanage*, today that spelling is a mere variant. See GALLICISMS.

Current ratio in print (*appanage*
 vs. **apanage*): 5:1

apparatchik /ap-ə-rat-chik/ (= a government or corporate official who, through blind allegiance, follows

orders unthinkingly), a Russian LOANWORD dating in English from 1941, has two plurals: the homegrown *apparatchiks* and the Russian **apparatchiki*. Beginning in the late 1970s, the word was considered fully anglicized, and the anglicized plural has predominated since then.

Current ratio in print (*apparatchiks*
 vs. **apparatchiki*): 6:1

apparatus has the plural forms *apparatus* (the Latin form) and *apparatuses* (the native-English form). Because the word has been thoroughly naturalized, *apparatuses* is standard—e.g.: “This . . . is meant to mean an incapacity, uncured by education, to know what our vocal *apparatuses*, along with our brains, are doing when sounds are uttered.” Anthony Burgess, *A Mouthful of Air* 6 (1992). But the Latin plural does still appear occasionally—e.g.: “Two men were sitting there: one in an armchair, the other at a table where a curious selection of *apparatus* was laid out: mahogany boxes with brass terminals, copper-bound induction coils, and an instrument like a piano keyboard, the keys each marked with a letter of the alphabet.” Phillip Pullman, *The Tin Princess* 173–74 (1994). See PLURALS (B).

**Apparati* is not a correct plural, even in Latin. It's an example of HYPERCORRECTION—e.g.:

- “Even out of competition, exercycles, ab crunchers, and personal-trainers-as-therapists are the *apparati* [read *apparatuses*] of life in the 90's.” Marjorie Rosen, “Fat Chance,” *N.Y. Times*, 4 Aug. 1994, § 6, at 37.
- “Who serves in the *apparati* [read *apparatuses*] of violence? . . . Are the rank and file in the *apparati* [read *apparatuses*] of violence likely to follow the orders of the top authorities?” Thomas S. Szayna, *Identifying Potential Ethnic Conflict* 318 (2000) (the solecism appears eight times on this one page).
- “Interestingly, an evolutionary epistemology that draws insights from the evolution of sensory *apparati* [read *apparatuses*] of living organisms provides a very Deweyan critique of spectator theory without any apparent awareness of Dewey's thought (Bartley 1987).” James L. Webb, “Dewey: Back to the Future,” *J. Econ. Issues*, 1 Dec. 2002, at 981.

Cf. **nexus** & **prospectus**.

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**apparati* for *apparatuses*: Stage 1
 Current ratio in print (*apparatuses*
 vs. **apparati*): 29:1

apparel, vb., makes *appareled* and *appareling* in AmE, *apparelled* and *apparelling* in BrE. See SPELLING (C).

apparent = (1) seeming <the apparent motion of the planets>; or (2) obvious <the problems are quite apparent>. Sense 2 is usual after a BE-VERB.

In sense 1, the word is often misapplied to fatalities. What happens is that the adverb *apparently* gets morphed into an adjective and paired with the wrong word (a noun) when logically it should modify a verb. For example, a person may die “*apparently* of a

heart attack,” but one doesn’t die “of an *apparent* heart attack.” Yet variations on this ILLOGIC are legion—e.g.:

- “Less than a month after basking in the Thanksgiving glow of release from North Korea, where he was held as a spy and threatened with execution, Evan C. Hunziker was found this morning in a rundown hotel here with a bullet in his head—dead of an *apparent suicide*.” Timothy Egan, “Man Once Held as a Spy in North Korea Is a Suicide,” *N.Y. Times*, 19 Dec. 1996, at A12. (A possible revision: . . . *Evan C. Hunziker was found this morning in a rundown hotel here with a bullet in his head, dead apparently by suicide.*)
- “Buster Auton will take over for the popular Elmo Langley, who died of an *apparent heart attack* in Japan in November.” Mark Znidar, “Changes Abound as Another Season Nears Starting Line,” *Columbus Dispatch*, 11 Feb. 1997, at F3. (A possible revision: *Buster Auton will take over for the popular Elmo Langley, who died in Japan in November, apparently of a heart attack.*)
- “Davenport, who died June 1 of *apparent ‘natural causes’*, was exchanging texts with a convicted prostitute at the time of the crash.” Lydia X. McCoy, “Families Sue Over Bush Crash,” *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, 21 July 2015, at 5A. (A possible revision: *Davenport, who died June 1 (apparently of unrelated natural causes), was texting with a convicted prostitute when the crash occurred.*)

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**apparent heart attack*, etc.: Stage 3

appear. The phrase *it would appear* is invariably inferior to *it appears* or *it seems*—e.g.: “*It would appear* [read *It appears*] that more than a few of us are desperate for an easy dinner.” Ruth Fantasia, “Desperate Times Require Desperate Measures,” *Virginian-Pilot & Ledger Star* (Norfolk), 7 Jan. 1998, at F1. See **would** & SUBJUNCTIVES.

On the sequence of tenses in phrases such as *appeared to enjoy* (as opposed to *appeared to have enjoyed*), see **TENSES** (B).

appellant. This word is ordinarily a noun meaning “a litigant who appeals against an adverse decision.” Although dictionaries may provide some historical support for using *appellant* as an adjective corresponding to the noun *appeal*, this usage violates modern legal idiom, which reserves *appellate* for this purpose. E.g.: “The ruling must be reviewed by an *appellant* [read *appellate* or *appeals*] court before a new test can be scheduled.” “Rifle, Bullet Should Be Retested, Judge Rules in King Case,” *Columbia Daily Trib.*, 21 Feb. 1997, at A10.

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appellant misused for *appellate*: Stage 1
Current ratio in print (*appellate court*
vs. **appellant court*): 452:1

appendant (= attached, associated) is the standard spelling. **Appendent* is a variant that, despite the seeming analogy of *dependent*, remains uncommon. See **SPELLING** (B).

Current ratio in print (*appendant*
vs. **appendent*): 24:1

appendectomy; appendicectomy. The first is standard in AmE. The second was long standard in BrE—e.g.: “We early called the process of *appendicectomy* ‘hanger-on-cutting-out.’” Basil Cottle, *The Plight of English* 15 (1975). The longer form was long considered etymologically preferable—and perhaps it still is, in some quarters, since the appendix and not the “append” is removed (*-ectomy*)—but today the syncopated form *appendectomy* is the undisputed favorite across World Englishes. The AmE preference for the shorter term was established by 1900; not until the mid-1970s did the shorter form become predominant in BrE.

Current ratio in print (*appendectomy*
vs. *appendicectomy* in World Englishes): 7:1

***appendent.** See **appendant**.

appendixes; appendices. Both are correct plural forms for *appendix*, but *appendixes* has long been considered preferable outside scientific contexts—e.g.:

- “The authors of ‘The Bell Curve’ tell readers that they may limit their perusal to the summaries that precede each chapter, and that they may skip the main text. Still, ‘The Bell Curve’ is 845 pages long, and a reader who skips even the *appendixes* will miss many of the points the authors are at pains to make.” Malcolm W. Browne, “What Is Intelligence, and Who Has It?,” *N.Y. Times*, 16 Oct. 1994, § 7, at 3.
- “The book’s three *appendixes* . . . will be helpful to newcomers to church traditions.” “Beyond Smells and Bells: The Wonder and Power of Christian Liturgy,” *Publishers Weekly Reviews*, 11 Feb. 2008, at 66.

Nevertheless, the nonnative plural is more frequent by a 5-to-1 margin. See **PLURALS** (B). Cf. **index** (A).

appertain; pertain. Some DIFFERENTIATION is possible. Both take the preposition *to*, but *appertain* usually means “to belong to rightfully” <the privileges appertaining to this degree>, whereas *pertain* usually means “to relate to; concern” <the meeting pertains to the headmaster’s continued employment>. Also, *appertain* is an **ARCHAISM**.

applause. A. Singular or Plural. This word, derived from the Latin verbal noun *applausus*, means (1) “loudly expressed approval,” or (2) “marked commendation.” In English, the word traditionally appears in such a way that its number (singular or plural) is disguised <we could hear the applause> <he gained our applause>. But the *OED* gives only singular definitions, and when *applause* is the subject of a verb it takes a singular verb—e.g.: “The biggest *applause* comes after his nod to party loyalty.” Paul Demko, “Here We Go A-Caucusing,” *City Pages* (Minneapolis), 25 Apr. 2001, at 6.

Yet because the end of the word sounds much like a plural ending in *s*, some writers (who deserve

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some hoots) erroneously use the word as if it were plural—e.g.:

- “Big *applause* are [read *applause is*] in order for the entire cast,” Don Thomas, “‘Ragtime’: Broadway’s Got a New Hit Musical,” *N.Y. Beacon*, 25 Feb. 1998, at 26.
- “The largest *applause* were [read *applause was*] reserved for the favourite oldies including ‘Come Home,’ ‘She’s a Star,’ and an excellent performance of ‘Tomorrow.’” Graham Young, “Shania Twain Special,” *Evening Mail* (London), 8 Dec. 1999, at 27.
- “Talley . . . falls just once and is back on his feet before his family’s teasing *applause* die [read *applause dies*] out.” Nora K. Froeschle Jenks, “Speed Skater Qualifies for Winter Games in Alaska,” *Tulsa World*, 13 Dec. 2000, at 4.

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applause misused as a plural: Stage 2

Current ratio in print (*the applause was* vs. **the applause were*): 84:1

B. Narrowing of Meaning. As suggested in (A), the word has never referred merely to clapping. Huzzahs would count as applause. But today the word is increasingly thought to be interchangeable with clapping—e.g.:

- “Several of the legislators burst into *applause*—and the loudest *clapping* seemed to come from the men.” Yolanda Jones, “In Brief,” *Commercial Appeal* (Memphis), 15 Feb. 2008, at 1.
- “His answer was met with hearty *applause* from those in the audience, to which Clemens jokingly replied, ‘Are you *clapping* because you want me not to be on city council?’” Marquita Brown, “Salem Residents Hear from Candidates,” *Roanoke Times*, 23 Apr. 2008, at B10.
- “At Chelsea Cinema on Saturday there were close on 700 people (mainly women, all ages, and a smattering of homosexual men), whooping, *clapping* (Samantha, with the best lines, gets the most *applause*) and crying (look out for Charlotte saying ‘no’).” Glenda Cooper, “Carrie and Co. Beat Indy in Battle of Films,” *Daily Telegraph*, 2 June 2008, at 5.

apple cart (= a street vendor’s handcart for carrying apples to be sold) has gone through some strange changes. From the 1800s until the late 1920s, it was predominantly hyphenated (*apple-cart*); from 1939 until 1992, it was predominantly solid (*applecart*); since 1992 it has been spelled predominantly as two words. One sees this odd evolution even in the metaphorical phrase *upset the apple cart* (= to spoil someone’s plans).

Current ratio in print (*apple cart* vs. *applecart* vs. *apple-cart*): 6:4:1

apple cider. Strictly speaking, this phrase is a REDUNDANCY because *cider* has traditionally referred to a drink made from apple juice. But for many decades now, beverage manufacturers have marketed other types of “ciders,” from the juice of peaches, pears, raspberries, and the like. So if *apple cider* is redundant, it is also sometimes necessary for clarity. In any event, the phrase *apple cider* is old: it dates from the 1800s. Cf. **tuna fish**.

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apple cider for *cider*: Stage 5

applicable. **A. And **applicable*; **applicable*.** These two variants are incorrect. *Applicable*, the correct form, is traditionally accented on the first syllable in AmE /*ap-li-kə-bəl*/. But /*a-plik-ə-bəl*/ is usual in BrE and quite common in AmE. See PRONUNCIATION (B).

Current ratio in print (*applicable* vs. **applicable* vs. **applicable*): 31,856:10:1

B. And **applicative*; **applicatory*. These forms are NEEDLESS VARIANTS of *applicable*. **Applicative* is also a needless variant of *applied*, as in the phrase **applicative psychology*.

Current ratio in print (*applicable* vs. **applicative* vs. **applicatory*): 2,955:16:1

C. *Be applicable*. This construction is almost always inferior to the simple verb *apply*—e.g.:

- “Not all of these ideas, of course, *are really applicable* [read *really apply*] to my house or my life.” Monty S. Leitch, “Home Improvement Via the Satellite Dish,” *Roanoke Times*, 1 Sept. 1997, at A7.
- “Because no new lands will be added until the year 2000, the current brochure will *be applicable* [read *apply*] for the next three seasons.” Charlie Meyers, “Public Hunting Access Getting a Shot in the Arm,” *Denver Post*, 12 Sept. 1997, at D3.
- “They call Heath Miller ‘Big Money,’ but ‘Big Country’ would *be just as applicable* for [read *apply just as well*] to or *be just as apt* for] the veteran tight end.” Dan Giger, “Pairing Steelers and Food,” *Pitt. Post-Gaz.*, 9 Sept. 2015, at C1.

See BE-VERBS.

applicant; applicator; **applier*. An *applicant* is “someone who applies for something (as a position in a firm).” *Applicator* = (1) a device for applying a substance; or (2) someone who applies a substance. **Applier* is a NEEDLESS VARIANT of *applicator*.

Current ratio in print (*applicator* vs. **applier*): 14:1

****applicative*; **applicatory*.** See **applicable (B)**.

****applier*.** See **applicant**.

****applyable*.** See **applicable (A)**.

apposite. See **apt (A)**.

apposition (= the grammatical relation between two words or phrases that stand for the same idea) is sometimes misused for *opposition*—an odd MALAPROPISM. E.g.: “Their accounts were in stark *apposition* [read *opposition*] at several other points, too.” Maureen Dowd, “Testimony Conflicts at Military Hearing on Abuse by Fliers,” *N.Y. Times*, 18 Aug. 1993, at A1.

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apposition misused for *opposition*: Stage 1

APPPOSITIVES. An appositive points out the same person or thing by a different name, usually in the form of an explanatory phrase that narrows an earlier, more general phrase. So in the sentence “My brother Blair lives in Tennessee,” *Blair* is the appositive of *brother*. Typically, in phrases less succinct than *my brother*

Blair (in which *Blair* is restrictive), the appositive is set off by commas or parentheses:

- “‘Gotta watch what I do,’ joked the dark-haired 18-year-old, the youngest child of Councilwoman Dominique Thornton and her husband, *Richard Thornton*.” “In the Running for First Daughter,” *Hartford Courant*, 11 Sept. 1997, at B7. (*Richard Thornton* is an appositive of *her husband*. And the entire phrase *the youngest child* . . . *Thornton* is an appositive of *18-year-old*.)
- “In that community, individual farming compounds were spaced between the complex of the community leader, *the caddi*, and the complex of *the xinesi*, the paramount religious authority.” Timothy K. Perttula, Book Rev., *Southwest Hist. Q.*, Apr. 2001, at 616. (*The caddi* is an appositive of *the community leader*, and *the paramount religious authority* is an appositive of *the xinesi*.)

Generally, a pair of commas (or, less often, parentheses or dashes) must frame an appositive unless the appositive is restrictive. So a person might write *my brother Blair* to distinguish Blair from another brother (say, Tom). But if Blair were the only brother, the reference should be to *my brother, Blair*. This is not a hard-and-fast rule, and many publications ignore commas with a name as a short appositive of relationship, for two reasons. The first is stylistic: the written comma <my husband, Bob> does not reflect any audible pause in the spoken sentence <“my husband Bob”>. The second is practical: enforcing the rule would require finding out how many brothers the subject has before deciding between *his brother Blair* or *his brother, Blair*, and that can be a lot of effort for a small payoff.

One telltale signal that an appositive is restrictive is the definite article (*the*) preceding the noun—e.g.: *The grammarian Henry Sweet provided Shaw a model for Henry Higgins*. (But reverse the order and it comes out differently: *Henry Sweet, the grammarian, provided Shaw a model for Henry Higgins*.) The signal is not infallible, however. Consider: *My favorite restaurant is Abacus. The chef, Kent Rathbun, trained at . . .* Here, *the chef* is the main information and the name adds to it but could be omitted. In the previous example, though, *the grammarian* could not stand alone.

Emphatic appositives (also termed “intensive pronouns”) are never set off by commas—e.g.: “*He himself* flunked the test.” See PRONOUNS (E).

Some writers erroneously omit the comma that should follow an appositive introduced with a comma—e.g.:

- “In the lawsuit, Douglas Hartman, an Illinois air traffic controller[,] says he was forced to walk through a Tailhook-style gantlet during a workshop designed by Eberhardt to combat sexual harassment.” Jean Marbella, “Daring Tailhook-Style Gantlet Stirs Up Debate,” *Detroit News*, 12 Oct. 1994, at A12.
- “Barry Popik, an etymologist[,] has found the earliest use so far in a Dec. 1, 1883, Washington weekly called *The Hatchet*.” William Safire, “On Language,” *N.Y. Times*,

15 Dec. 2002, at 48, 49 (assuredly a copyediting error—inside information has confirmed).

As a matter of CONCORD, an appositive should match its noun in part of speech and number. For example, it’s wrong to use a noun appositive after a possessive—e.g.: “Merton W. Starnes’s (Starnes) claim arrived in this office after the deadline had passed.” The better strategy would be to avoid the shorthand definition altogether; on a second reference, *Merton W. Starnes* becomes *Starnes*—and no reasonable person would be confused. Likewise, it’s wrong to use a singular noun with a plural appositive—e.g.: “The *spelling* ‘kinda’ and ‘coupla’ probably reflects [read *spellings* ‘kinda’ and ‘coupla’ probably reflect] the writer’s feeling about the special status of these ‘words.’” Dwight Bolinger, “Couple: An English Dual,” in *Studies in English Linguistics* 30, 40 n.5 (Sidney Greenbaum et al. eds., 1979).

For the problem of the “disjointed” appositive, see ILLOGIC (D). For problems related to ostensible appositives in a series, see SERIAL COMMA (C).

appraisal; appraisement. Although some dictionaries treat these as variants, the *OED* definitions suggest some divergence in meaning. Both may mean “the act of appraising, the setting of a price, valuation.” But *appraisement*, when connoting the acts of an official appraiser, is the term usually used in reference to valuation of estates.

The more broadly applicable and more frequent term is *appraisal* in both literal and figurative senses—e.g.:

- “The plaintiffs cannot touch the money allotted them under a court-ordered *appraisal* of the market value of their properties.” Laura Mansnerus, “The Mail’s Expanding—and You’re Evicted,” *U.S. News & World Rep.*, 15 Sept. 1997, at 43.
- “Clinton should bring with him an honest *appraisal* of the situation.” “Clinton’s Indefinite Commitment to Bosnia,” *S.F. Chron.*, 19 Dec. 1997, at A30.

Strange to say, H.W. Fowler classified *appraisal* among those words “that have failed to become really familiar and remained in the stage in which the average man cannot say with confidence off-hand that they exist” (*FMEU1* at 14). Yet *appraisal* has become the standard term in BrE as well as in AmE, largely from the American influence.

Current ratio in print (*appraisal* vs. *appraisement*): 93:1

***appraisal valuation**, an early-20th-century innovation that has become fairly common in financial and insurance contexts, is illogical and redundant—e.g.:

- “Clarifications are expected to be issued on performance measurement, accounting policies and *appraisal valuations* [read *appraisals*], according to Richard Carlson.” “Task Force Sets Vote on Industry Reporting Standards,” *Real Estate Fin. & Investment*, 4 Nov. 1996, at 2.

- “In reality, most home *appraisal valuations* [read *appraisals*] are based on recent, nearby comparable home sales prices.” Robert J. Bruss, “Your Place: A Judgment Call How to Get a Fair Appraisal of Your Home,” *Chicago Trib.*, 28 Jan. 2000, at 26.

appraise; appraise; *apprize. To *appraise* is to put a value on or set a price for (a thing). To *apprise* is to inform or notify (someone). Writers often misuse *appraise* when they mean *apprize*—e.g.:

- “‘Other employees also are kept *appraised* [read *apprised*] of developments within the company,’ Highsmith said.” Elena Bianco, “New Dimensions in Lumber,” *Lewiston Morning Trib.* (Idaho), 4 Nov. 1990, at E1.
- “Bandidos could be *appraised* [read *apprised*] of potential customers through Morse code.” Larry Habegger & Natanya Pearlman, *Central America: True Stories* 130 (2002).
- “[Jennifer] Music knocked on an unfamiliar neighbor’s door and *appraised* [read *apprised*] them of the situation in their back yard.” Susan Bromley, *Livonia Observer & Troy Eccentric* (Mich.), 11 Mar. 2021, at A4.

Occasionally, the opposite mistake occurs—e.g.: “The maximum loan-to-value is the percentage of the *apprised* [read *appraised*] value of the house the lender will finance.” “Fall Mortgage News,” *Seattle Times*, 20 Oct. 1996, at G1.

The NEEDLESS VARIANT **apprize* (rare) is synonymous with *appraise*, although it is sometimes erroneously used as an equivalent of *apprise*—e.g.: “You, in turn, for a fee, would be *apprized* [read *apprised*] of the date the city was notified of the potholes’ existence.” Bruce Williams, “Cities, States Limit Own Liability for Damage,” *Cincinnati Post*, 5 Mar. 2002, at B12.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX

1. *appraise* misused for *apprise*: Stage 1
Current ratio in print (*apprised of* vs. **appraised of*): 13:1
2. *apprise* misused for *appraise*: Stage 1
Current ratio in print (*appraised at* vs. **apprised at*): 44:1
3. **apprize* misused for *apprise*: Stage 1
Current ratio in print (*apprised of* vs. **apprized of*): 12:1

appraisement. See **appraisal**.

appreciable. So formed—not **appreciatable*. E.g.: “It is most unlikely that it has been in the river where it was recently discovered for any *appreciatable* [read *appreciable*] length of time, the report said.” “Cockroach Gives Cat an Alibi in Slayings,” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), 8 Aug. 1995, at A4. See -ABLE (D) & -ATABLE.

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- *appreciatable* for *appreciable*: Stage 1
Current ratio in print (*appreciable* vs. **appreciatable*): 5,956:1

appreciate = (1) to fully understand; (2) to perceive or detect; (3) to increase in value; or (4) to be grateful for. Sense 4, which originated in the early 1800s as an extended sense, is now firmly established.

Sense 4 is often part of a wordy construction: “I would *appreciate it if you would send* [read *appreciate your sending*] me an application.” Better yet: “Please send me an application.”

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appreciate in the sense “to be grateful for”: Stage 5

apprise; *apprize. See **appraise**.

approbation; approval. There is no generally accepted distinction between these two words, except that the first is the FORMAL WORD—less usual and more dignified. Wilson Follett suggested that we should restrict *approbation* to a favorable response on a particular occasion and use *approval* for a more general favorable attitude (MAU at 72).

As for the corresponding verbs, rarely does *approve* justifiably displace *approve*—e.g.: “Now the timid North Atlantic Treaty Organization ‘expansion,’ by practically *approbating* [read *approving*] the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939, invites the always-hungry Russian empire again to expand into Baltic States.” “A Date to Remember,” *Orlando Sentinel*, 8 May 1997, at A26. See **disapprobation**.

approbatory (= expressing approval; commendatory), dating from the 1500s, is a FORMAL WORD usually equivalent to *approving*. Its sibling, *approbative*, dates from the 1600s. The two vie against each other among those who spurn PLAIN LANGUAGE. Although *approbatory* held the lead for most of the 20th century, *approbative* recently drew ahead. Only in the stuffiest circles will either adjective earn its user approbation.

Current ratio in print (*approbative* vs. *approbatory*): 1.2:1

appropriable—not **appropriatable*—is the adjective corresponding to *appropriate*, v.t. See -ABLE (D) & -ATABLE.

Current ratio in print (*appropriable* vs. **appropriatable*): 43:1

appropriate, v.t. **A. And misappropriate.** *Appropriate* = (1) to set apart for a particular person or organization for a specific purpose <government-appropriated funds>; or (2) to take from a particular person or organization for a specific purpose <by appropriating her valuables and locking them away, her stepmother in effect stole them>. Sense 1 is the more usual in AmE, perhaps because it is better to give than to receive. Sense 2 is gradually fading. *Misappropriate* = to apply (as another’s money) dishonestly to one’s own use. *Appropriate* has a more neutral, nonaccusatory connotation. Still, in meaning “to take from a particular person or organization for a particular purpose,” it is tinged with some of the negative connotations made explicit in *misappropriate*. See **embezzle**.

B. And expropriate. *Expropriate* = (1) to exercise eminent domain over; to take, by legal action, private land for public use; or (2) to transfer title to another’s property to oneself. Sense 1 is more usual—e.g.: “The government had every legal right to *expropriate* the

land.” Sheryl WuDunn, “Farmers Holding Out Against Japan Airport,” *Dallas Morning News*, 7 Sept. 1997, at A26. Although sense 2 of *appropriate* seems generally consonant with sense 1 of *expropriate*, the latter is the better, more concrete term whenever it fits.

C. As a Contronym. See CONTRONYMS.

approval. See **approbation**.

approve. **A. Approve (of).** One may either *approve* something or *approve of* something. Usually, *approve* suggests formal sanction <the council approved the stadium plans>, whereas *approve of* suggests favorable sentiments <she approved of her mother’s remarrying>. To put it differently, you *approve* something over which you have authority; you *approve of* something over which you might or might not have authority. As a matter of linguistic frequency, the collocation *approve the* appears in print about twice as often as *approve of the*. Cf. **disapprove (of)**.

B. And endorse. The two should be distinguished. To *endorse* is to support actively and explicitly. The word connotes action as well as attitude. To *approve*, apart from the sense of giving official sanction, is to consider right or to have a favorable attitude toward. The verb conveys an attitude or thought. In both senses, *approve* is more passive than *endorse* <she approved his stand on most issues but never endorsed his candidacy>.

C. And approbate. See **approbation**.

approximate; approximal; proximate. *Approximate* = (1) closely resembling; (2) nearly accurate; or (3) close together. *Approximal* = contiguous. *Proximate* = (1) very near; or (2) directly related. Sense 3 of *approximate* should usually yield to either *approximal* (if the two things are touching) or *proximate* (if the two things are close). See **proximate**.

***approximately about** is a REDUNDANCY. See **about (A)**.

apricot (the fruit) is pronounced /ay-pri-kot/ throughout the English-speaking world—/ap-ri-kot/ being a chiefly AmE variant characteristic of northern states from Montana to Maine.

April Fool’s Day; *April Fools’ Day; *April Fools Day. The singular-possessive form has been consistently more common since the term became popular in the mid-1800s. The other spellings are nonstandard variants.

Current ratio in print (*April Fool’s Day* vs. **April Fools’ Day* vs. **April Fools Day*): 11:8:1

apropos (of). Both the long form (*apropos of*) and the short form (*apropos*) are generally unnecessary, though they might prove serviceable in informal letters. *Apropos of* (suggested by the French phrase *à*

propos de)—meaning “with respect to”—is well established in English. Yet the GALLICISM *apropos* may be used as a preposition to mean “concerning, apropos of” <apropos your plans, let me tell you about our schedule>. Hence *of* can usually be included or omitted, as the writer desires. E.g.:

- “Then, *apropos of* nothing, he proclaims: ‘I’m 105 years old!’” Anne Rochell, “The Goat Man Lives,” *Atlanta J.-Const.*, 10 Sept. 1997, at D1.
- “As Leo Varadkar . . . put it last week *apropos* Greece, ‘It seems like the student union has taken over the government.’” Ruth Dudley Edwards, “Sinn Féin Is Panicking as Its Brothers Wreak Havoc in Greece,” *Sunday Independent*, 5 July 2015, at 23.

As for comparative frequency in print, *apropos of* has predominated over the rival form ever since it emerged in English in the early 1800s.

The word is sometimes misused for *appropriate*, adj., a mistake often signaled by the use of *to*—e.g.: “Just three years ago, Sears, Roebuck and Co.’s finance department built a data warehouse which the retailer, *apropos to* its business, calls a data mall.” Leslie Goff, “Beitler Sees the Data Side of Sears,” *ComputerWorld*, 15 Sept. 1997, at 79. (A possible revision: *Just three years ago, Sears, Roebuck and Co.’s finance department built a data warehouse called (appropriately) a data mall.*)

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apropos misused for *appropriate*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*it is appropriate that* vs. **it is apropos that*): 328:1

apt. A. And apposite. Both words mean “fit, suitable.” Whereas *apt* is the ordinary term, *apposite* is a FOR-MAL WORD.

B. And likely. Although some critics have objected to *apt* in a sense similar to *likely*, this usage has long been considered perfectly acceptable: “Even the dictionary justifies ‘apt’ in the sense of ‘habitually likely,’ thus graciously acknowledging the custom of many high-grade writers and the crowd.” Edward N. Teall, *Putting Words to Work* 279 (1940). As Ernest Gowers explains, however, “in British usage *apt* always implies a general tendency; for a probability arising from particular circumstances *likely* is the word” (*FMEU2* at 34).

The same distinction between *apt* and *likely* applies in the best American usage. In the following sentences, *apt* is correctly used of general or habitual tendencies, rather than a likelihood in a particular instance—e.g.:

- “But be aware: seedling foliage looks like grass, and it is *apt* to be treated as such by meticulous gardeners.” Nell Lewis, “Freeze Lays Fall Colors to Rest,” *News & Record* (Greensboro), 10 Dec. 1997, at R4.
- “The kind of people who seek out written arguments are *apt* to bring to the written word a fund of information and opinions.” George F. Will, “The Pursuit of Happiness Is Happiness,” *Watertown Daily Times* (N.Y.), 17 Sept. 2021, at A4.

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Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX

1. *apt* for “habitually likely”: Stage 5
2. *apt* for a particular instance: Stage 4

aquaculture (= the cultivation of marine life) is now the standard spelling. **Aquiculture*—once given as the main headword in several American dictionaries—is now a variant.

Current ratio in print (*aquaculture* vs. **aquiculture*): 578:1

aquarium. The anglicized plural *aquariums* has been predominant in both AmE and World Englishes since the 1980s. In BrE, the predominant plural was *aquaria* until the early 2000s. See PLURALS (B).

Current ratio in print (*aquariums* vs. *aquaria* in World Englishes): 2.1:1

aquatic (= involving water) is pronounced either /ə-**kwah**-tik/ or /ə-**kwat**-ik/.

***aquiculture.** See **aquaculture**.

Arab; Arabic; Arabian. As an adjective, *Arab* has predominated in all varieties of English since the 1920s and has the broadest applicability. The longer terms tend to have specific applications. *Arabic* usually describes language, art, script, and numerals. *Arabian* refers to the cultures and geography of the regions where Arab peoples reside or to animals native to the Arabian peninsula.

Now for the nouns. *Arab* typically refers to any person of Arabic descent or an Arabic-speaking inhabitant of the Middle East or northern Africa. *Arabic* refers to the language. *Arabian* should be reserved for the breed of horse. See **Saudi**.

Arapaho, the name of American Indian people of the Great Plains region, dates in English from the early 1800s. It has been predominantly so spelled since about 1900. The older spelling *Arapahoe*, however, has been retained by the northern branch of the tribe to refer to specific corporate bodies. Nevertheless, the spelling *Arapaho* is the one most often seen in ethnographic literature.

Current ratio in print (*Arapaho* vs. *Arapahoe* in AmE): 4:1

arbalest /ahr-bə-ləst/ (= a medieval-style crossbow), a French LOANWORD dating in English from the 1100s, has been predominantly so spelled since the 1840s. **Arbalist* is a variant. See GALLICISMS.

Current ratio in print (*arbalest* vs. **arbalist*): 6:1

arbitrator. See **arbitration**.

arbitrable; arbitrability. Although these are the established forms, some writers use the NEEDLESS VARIANTS **arbitratable* and **arbitratability*, which have an extra syllable—e.g.: “Courts have held that an arbitration clause is to be construed so as to favor *arbitratability* [read *arbitrability*].” W. Dudley McCarter, “Arbitration Agreements Binding in Missouri,” *Springfield Bus. J.* (Mo.), 25 Apr. 1994, at 7. See -ABLE (D) & -ATABLE.

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**arbitratability* for *arbitrability*: Stage 1

arbitrage. See **arbitration** (A).

arbitrageur; *arbitrager. English-language dictionaries have traditionally preferred the Frenchified *arbitrageur* (= someone who simultaneously buys and sells different securities, commodities, currency, and the like to profit on price differences). Some journalists and courts have preferred the naturalized form, **arbitrager* (with the main accent on the first syllable: /ahr-bi-trah-jər/)—e.g.:

- “The *arbitragers* who were indicted yesterday were D. Ronald Yogada [and others] . . .” Kurt Eichenwald, “Two Firms Are Charged as Insiders,” *N.Y. Times*, 3 Nov. 1988, at 29.
- “Robert Freeman, 46, of Goldman, Sachs & Co., was one of the country’s most powerful takeover-stock speculators, or *arbitragers*.” Steve Swartz & James B. Stewart, “Kidder’s Mr. Wigton, Charged as ‘Insider,’ Ends His Long Ordeal,” *Wall Street J.*, 21 Aug. 1989, at 1.

But usage is now firmly set in favor of the GALLICISM *arbitrageur* (with the main accent on the last syllable: /ahr-bi-trah-**zhoo**r/)—e.g.:

- “In a world adhering to the purities of the rational-markets faith, *arbitrageurs* should have instantly eliminated this discrepancy by simultaneously buying 3Com and selling Palm short, making themselves a mint.” Holman W. Jenkins Jr., “Business World: Short Sellers Are People, Too!,” *Wall Street J.*, 29 Jan. 2003, at A19.
- “The *arbitrageur* simultaneously buys the lower-priced asset and shorts the higher-priced version based on the certainty that the prices will eventually converge, at which point he will liquidate the position and collect a guaranteed profit.” Mark Anderson, “How to Invest Like the Pros: A Cheat Sheet on the Leading Market Strategies That Have Made Some Investors Famously Rich,” *Nat’l Post Bus. Mag.*, 1 Feb. 2003, at 56.

**Arbitrager* ought to be considered a NEEDLESS VARIANT.

Current ratio in print (*arbitrageur* vs. **arbitrager*): 14:1

***arbitratable.** See **arbitrable**.

arbitration. A. And arbitrage. *Arbitration* = the process of submitting a dispute to a neutral third party whose decision is binding on the participants. *Arbitrage* = the simultaneous buying and selling of currencies or securities at different values in order to profit by price discrepancies.

Writers occasionally err by substituting *arbitrage* for *arbitration*, especially in the phrase **arbitrage panel*—e.g.:

- “In a terse statement on Wednesday, Sir Leon said the EU ‘will carefully study both the *arbitrator*’s report and the two panel reports, and of course meanwhile reserve our right of appeal.’ . . . In a parallel ruling, an *arbitrage* [read *arbitration*] panel decided the U.S. retaliation is legal but excessive.” Elizabeth de Bony, *J. of Commerce*, 8 Apr. 1999, at A1.

- “What’s more, in a hotly contested move, a state *arbitrage* [read *arbitration*] panel granted the Florida Windstorm Underwriting Association, a state pool of insurers, an average increase of 96 percent statewide.” Sharon Harvey Rosenberg, “Wind Damage Is Down This Hurricane Season, but Not Insurance Rates,” *Miami Daily Bus. Rev.*, 26 Oct. 2000, at A1.
- “Any case [over Brexit] would go to an *arbitrage* [read *arbitration*] panel or to a WTO tribunal.” Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, “Europe’s War of ‘Equivalence’ Risks Violating International Law,” *Daily Telegraph*, 13 Feb. 2021, at 37.

The opposite error is rare but not unknown—e.g.: “Futures and options based on the Russell 1000 provides *arbitrage* opportunities for investors The degree to which such *arbitrations take* [read *arbitrage takes*] place is likely to determine the pace at which the Russell 1000 overtakes the S&P 500.” C. Michael Carty, “Favored Large-Cap Barometer Will Change,” *Pensions & Investments*, 1 Nov. 1999, at 36.

In the Russian Federation, courts that settle commercial disputes are popularly called *arbitrage courts* (reflecting the Russian pronunciation /ahr-bi-**trazh**/)—e.g.: “Here, she is outside the Federal *Arbitrage* Court in Kazan in front of a mural of Lenin.” “Judge Discovers Striking Differences in the Way Russian Society Views Women,” *Albuquerque J.*, 4 June 1999, at 14 (photo caption). The federation’s highest such court, however, calls itself the “Supreme Arbitration Court” to avoid confusion with the term of speculation.

B. And mediation. Both terms refer to resolving disputes through a neutral third party. Traditionally, the results of *arbitration* are binding—that is, the parties to the arbitrator’s decision are bound by it. Because that aspect of the proceedings is not universally understood, the REDUNDANCY *binding arbitration* is unassailable in most contexts. In *mediation*, to the contrary, the mediator merely tries to help two disputing parties reach an agreeable solution; the parties are not, however, bound by a mediator’s decisions.

This distinction is muddled somewhat by the emergence of *nonbinding arbitration* in the U.S. and Canada. But nonbinding arbitration generally addresses just one aspect of the dispute, and the decision (there is no award) serves merely to help the parties reach a settlement. The arbitrator, unlike a mediator, does not actively negotiate toward a settlement.

arbitrator; arbiter. An *arbitrator* is a person chosen to settle differences between two parties. *Arbiter*, by contrast, is more general, meaning “anyone with power to decide disputes, such as a referee, judge, or commissioner.” The terms overlap considerably, and they cause confusion on both sides of the Atlantic. When referring to legal arbitration, the term should

be *arbitrator*. When legal disputes aren’t at issue, the better term is *arbiter*.

Hence in the popular phrase *final* or *ultimate arbiter*, the word *arbitrator* is inferior—e.g.: “Foreign attention enhances Assad’s image as the *ultimate arbitrator* [read *ultimate arbiter*] in the region.” John Walsh, “Accord: Diplomacy Ends Mideast Border Attacks,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, 4 May 1996, at A8.

**Arbitor* is a frequent misspelling—e.g.:

- “Under the owners’ proposal, they would have the right to reject an *arbitor’s* [read *arbiter’s*] ruling and declare the player a free agent.” Dave Fay, “Union Says League Is Holding Up Agreement,” *Wash. Times*, 30 Nov. 1994, at B2.
- “Ever since the 1954 Supreme Court desegregation decision, judges, not legislators, have been the *arbitors* [read *arbiters*] of social policy.” Paul Craig Roberts, “Victory Trail from the New Majority Corral,” *Wash. Times*, 11 Aug. 2000, at A17.

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1. *arbitrator* for *arbiter*: Stage 1

2. *arbiter* misspelled **arbitor*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*arbiter* vs. **arbitor*): 1,309:1

arboretum. The predominant plural is *arboretums* (AmE) or *arboreta* (BrE). See PLURALS (B).

arc, vb., now uniformly makes *arced* and *arc*ing, no longer **arcked* and **arcking*. See -C-.

Current ratio in print (*arc*ing vs. **arcking*): 335:1

archaeology (= the study of the remains of ancient peoples and their cultures) is the standard spelling in both AmE and BrE. **Archeology* is a variant spelling. (See AE.) The word is pronounced /ahr-kee-**ol**-ə-jee/, preferably not /ahr-kay-/.

Current ratio in print (*archaeology* vs. **archeology*): 13:1

archaic; obsolete; obsolescent. *Archaic* = old-fashioned; antiquated; characteristic of an earlier time and rarely used today. *Obsolete* = no longer in general use; out of date. *Obsolescent* = passing out of use; becoming obsolete. The phrase **totally obsolescent* or **completely obsolescent* is an OXYMORON—e.g.: “Widespread acceptance of that work would render his own much more conventional, delicately Impressionist poetry *completely obsolescent* [read *obsolete*].” Christopher Hampton, “The Long Brief Encounter,” *Sunday Telegraph*, 6 Apr. 1997, at 9.

archaism. See **anachronism**.

ARCHAISMS. A. Generally. Language that is current in one age may come to be viewed, within a few generations, as pompously archaic. Once a term becomes an archaism, it may be stuck with that status for

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Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

centuries—forever sounding old-fashioned to literary people and outright alien to everyone else. Many archaisms persist in people's knowledge only because they're encountered in ancient religious texts or in classic literature.

The obvious advice is to avoid archaic terms unless you're being jocular in some way. But we need a nuanced approach. Some writers use them for effect. Consider what Somerset Maugham said: "I do not think a far-fetched, and archaic or even an affected word is out of place when it sounds better than the blunt, obvious one or when it gives a sentence a better balance." *The Summing Up* (1938), in *Classics in Composition* 219, 225 (Donald E. Hayden ed., 1969). But that's almost like the breaking of a rule by a virtuoso: you must master the rules first—including an abstemious approach to outmoded diction—before learning when to ignore them altogether.

The following list of archaisms, with modern translations to the right, hints at the bewhiskered language you must needs avoid. If thou wilt besprinkle such vocables aplenty within thy inditements, dost thou not think, mayhap, that thou shouldst be bewigged—perhaps periwigged? 'Tis your burthen. Think no further thereanent. Mark you well.

Archaic

afear'd
alack (see **alas**)
anent (see **anent**)
anon
apiently
appertain (see **appertain**)
aught (see **ought**)
bade me tell you
bedchamber
bedclothes
bedfast
befoul
begrime
be it ever so [adj.]
belike
benison

bepaint
beseem
besmear
bespatter
besprinkle
bestead
betake yourself to [a place]
bethink
betide
betimes
betroth
betrothed, n.
betwixt (see **betwixt**)
bewhiskered
bewigged
burthen
certes (see **certes**)
days of yore

Modern

afraid
alas (a little archaic itself)
about
soon
in abundance
pertain
anything
asked me to tell you
bedroom
sheets and blankets
bedridden
pollute
soil, sully
however [adj.] it is
probably
blessing, benediction,
well-wishing

tinge
befit
smear
spatter
sprinkle
help, be useful to
go to [a place]
remember
happen, befall
early, soon
become engaged
fiancé, fiancée
between
whiskered, whiskery
wearing a wig, wigged
burden
certainly, in truth
days gone by

Archaic

divers (see **diverse**)
dost thou?
doth
durst not (see **dare (E)**)
eftsoons
eke (when used adverbially)
eldritch (see **eldritch**)
ere
fain
forenoon
forsooth
gyves
had as lief

haply (see **haply**)
hath
henceforward, henceforth
hereinafter, hereinbelow
hereinbefore
hereunto
hither
hitherto
howbeit
I care not a whit,
I care not a fig

if I be
if it be
if such they be
indite
in faith, i' faith
in sooth
I trow
it were futile to deny
look to it
look ye
maketh
mark you well
maugre
mayhap (see **maybe (B)**)
meed
meseems
methinks (see **methinks**)
mine eyes
much at one with
must needs
naught
nay
needs must
nigh
not a whit
oft, oftentimes (see **often (B)**)
peradventure (see **maybe (B)**)
perchance (see **maybe (B)**)
plight one's troth
pray <pray enter> <pray tell>
presently (see **presently**)
prithce
quondam (see **erstwhile & quondam**)
quoth (see **quoth**)
remove to (another town)
right glad

Modern

various
do you?
does
dare not
soon after
also
eerie, weird
before
glad(ly), willing(ly)
morning
in truth, indeed
shackles
would just as soon,
would just as readily
by chance
has
from now on
below
above
up to now, until now
here
up to now, until now
although
I don't care

if I am
if it is
if they are
write, compose
really, truly
in truth, really, truly
I believe
it is futile to deny
be careful, take care
look
makes
notice
despite, notwithstanding
maybe, perhaps
reward, recompense
it seems to me
I think
my eyes
much the same as
need to
nothing
no
need to
near
not a bit
often
possibly, perhaps, maybe
possibly, perhaps, maybe
propose marriage
please
in a moment
please
former, onetime

said
move to (another town)
very glad

<i>Archaic</i>	<i>Modern</i>
runneth	runs
saith	says
save (see save)	except
sennight	week
shalt	shall
shan't	won't
shew	show
shouldst thou	you should
sirrah	sir
sith	since
sit you down	please sit
sometime (see erstwhile)	former
spake	spoke
stand they	they stand
stoppeth	stops
subtile	subtle
surcease	cessation, discontinuation
take no thought	don't trouble yourself
thee, thou	you
thereanent	about that, about it
therefor	for it, for them
therein	in it, in them
thereof	of it, of them
thereto	to it, to them
theretofore	till then, up to that time
therewith	with it
thine own	your own
thither	there
thou hast	you have
thou wast	you were
thy soul	your soul
thy, thine	your, yours
tidings	news
'tis	it is
to meward	toward me
to wit	namely
transpire	become known, come to light
twain	two
twelvemonth	year
unbidden	unasked, uninvited
unhand	let go
unto	to
verily	truly
viz.	namely
wain	wagon
wherefore	why
wherein	in which
whilom (see erstwhile)	former
wight	person
wilt thou	will you
withal (see *withal)	besides, nevertheless
woe	sorrow
wot (see *wot)	know
wot not, know not	don't know
wotted not why	didn't know why

<i>Archaic</i>	<i>Modern</i>
would it were (see SUBJUNCTIVES (A))	if only it were so
yare	ready, prepared
yclept (see yclept)	named, called
ye (see ye)	you
ye olde (see olde)	the old
yesternight	last night
yesteryear	years past
yon, yonder	over there
you were better go	you should go, you had better go

B. Mistakes Caused by Archaism. Archaism can be faulted in itself. But a still more embarrassing problem arises when the indulger doesn't understand how the phrasings work. In Early Modern English, the following singular forms were typical:

<i>Second Person</i>	<i>Third Person</i>
thou goest	he (or she) goeth

Up to the 1600s, the *-eth* suffix was merely an alternative third-person singular inflection for an English verb. Used primarily in southern England, it had, by the end of that century, become obsolete. *She calls* and *he answers* took the place of *she calleth* and *he answereth*. Some writers, straining for an archaic literary touch, use this suffix with no regard to whether the subject is singular or plural. The following title illustrates this tendency: Bill Rogers, "The Bowls *Overfloweth* [read *Overflow*]," *Canyon News* (Tex.), 25 Dec. 1994, at 9 (referring to the football bowls). This use of *-eth* with a plural subject has become lamentably common—e.g.:

- William F. Powers, "The Friendly Faces *Giveth*, the Fine Print *Taketh* Away," *Wash. Post*, 13 July 1993, at D1 (the singular use of *taketh* with *print* is correct here).
- "They *giveth* legroom, and they *taketh* away," Barbara Ann Curcio, "Worldwise," *Wash. Post*, 5 June 1994, at E3.
- "What the travel Gods *taketh* away, they sometimes *giveth* back." Alan Reinhart, "Taking Advantage of Life on the Road," *Nat'l Dragster*, 28 Aug. 2015, at 22.

Sometimes the second-person *-est* appears in the third person or even the first person—e.g.:

- "Whither *goest* the sport of boxing these days?" Bill Dwyre, "Arum's Next Big Promotion Definitely Goes the Distance," *L.A. Times*, 10 Aug. 2013, Sports §, at 2.
- "These silver linings provided balm to some, while the editorial writers and columnists—as always—worried aloud: Whither we *goest* into this nuclear night?" Bob Hill, "A Glimpse of News and Views at the Dawn of the Atomic Age of World War II," *Courier-J.* (Louisville), 3 Aug. 1995, at B1.

Sometimes an error creeps in from the mangling of a SET PHRASE. A famous quotation from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, for example, is that "the lady doth protest too much" (3.2.230). Translate this to the first person and you have: "Perhaps *I doth* protest too much; it's just that the players' timing could have been better managed, methinks." Stephen Foster, "Case of Awkward

Timing?,” *Roanoke Times*, 8 Aug. 1995, NRV §, at 2. That’s equivalent to saying *I does*.

A similar example appears in the phrase *the ice man cometh*, from Eugene O’Neill’s play by that name. Refer instead to *men*—or to some other plural noun—and you make a hash of the phrase or at best an inept allusion:

- “The tax men *cometh*,” Mary Ann Galante, “More Tax Audits Due as FBI Adds to County Force,” *L.A. Times* (Orange County ed.), 21 May 1987, § 4, at 1.
- “Tickets are hot in Denver now that they know the ice men [i.e., hockey players] *cometh*,” “Icy Reception May Await in Nashville,” *Boston Globe*, 25 June 1995, at 94.
- “Cometh the hour, *cometh* the brothers,” Adam Lusher, “Jeremy Corbyn Wants to Run the Country. His Brother Wants to Control the Weather,” *Independent*, 29 Aug. 2015, at 8 (the use of *cometh* with *hour* is correct here).

Even when the writer gets the grammar right, it’s not very heartening because the archaism makes the sentence ring false—e.g.:

- “But *doth* Nippon see through the wooden masks of a Noh drama—slow, plotless, and mistily symbolic?” James W. Scott, “Ad 1995,” *Kansas City Star*, 1 July 1995, at C6.
- “As an example, what *doth* one think would happen in Washington if it was discovered that the chief guy in charge of the nation’s finances had made his fortune in part by avoiding American taxes by way of putting his operations under flags of convenience?” Allan Fotheringham, “Columnists Need to Step into Fields Where Politicians Fear to Tread,” *Fin. Post* (Can.), 12 Aug. 1995, § 1, at 19. (This passage is particularly inept because a redundant CASUALISM [*chief guy in charge*] is mixed with a pseudo-biblical style.)
- “When he goes to bed at night, the taxpayer pays for the pillow upon which Walker *doth* rest his weary head.” Thomas L. Knapp, “Election 2016: Scott Walker vs. Government Dependence,” *Jackson Star News* (Ravenswood, W. Va.), 23 July 2015, at A3.

And even in jocular contexts, the humor is typically of debatable merit—e.g.:

- “Yet it’s fitting that a comic rockumentary, Spinal Tap, has come closest to portraying the ridiculous truth of life as it *doth* rock and thence roll,” David Belcher, “Source of the Sound That Goes with the Flow,” *Herald* (Glasgow), 10 Aug. 1995, at 12.
- “So ‘all the world’s a stage,’ says Shakes, but *doth* the world need another staging of Hamlet, say I?” Shannon Harvey, “Bell Rings Up an Accessible Hamlet,” *West Australian*, 5 Aug. 2015, at 6.
- “The Denver star receiver *doth* protest too much, methinks,” Mark Kiszla, “D.T. Isn’t Catching a Lot of Respect,” *Denver Post*, 28 Aug. 2015, at B1.

Finally, even when the intent is to be humorous, one shouldn’t betray an utter ignorance of how a given form was once used. In the mid-1990s, British Airways ran a commercial in which an Englishman strikes up a mock-Shakespearean dialogue that ends, “’Tis the way we make you feeleth.” This construction is doubly bad because *feel*, in that sentence, is actually an infinitive in an elliptical construction: “’Tis the way we make you [to] feel[eth].” How awful. Maybe an ad agency was to blame.

Archean (= of, relating to, or involving the very earliest period of geological history), a proper adjective dating from the 1870s, has been predominantly so spelled in AmE since the 1890s. *Archean*, long predominant in BrE, has recently given way to *Archean*—in a kind of geological progression.

Current ratio in print (*Archean* vs. *Archean* in AmE): 3:1

Current ratio in print (*Archean* vs. *Archean* in BrE): 1.03:1

***archeology**. See **archaeology**.

archetype; prototype. Although these words are close in meaning, a distinction between them should be encouraged. As commonly used, *archetype* means “an ideal, a standard or typical example,” and most often applies to living things, especially human characteristics <Mother Teresa was an archetype of benevolence>. *Prototype*, by contrast, means “the original type that has served as a model for successors”; it most often refers to a physical model of a mechanical invention <the investors may want to see a prototype>.

Inconsistently enough, the corresponding adjectives are *archetypal* and *prototypical*. The several by-forms (**archetypic*, **archetypical*, **prototypal*, and **prototypic*) are NEEDLESS VARIANTS.

Current ratio in print (*archetypal* vs. **archetypical* vs. **archetypic*): 794:104:1

Current ratio in print (*prototypical* vs. **prototypic* vs. **prototypal*): 53:4:1

archipelago (= a group of small islands) is pronounced /ahr-ki-**pel**-i-goh/, not /ahr-chi-/. Pl. *archipelagos* or (archaically) *archipelagoes*. See PLURALS (D).

Current ratio in print (*archipelagos* vs. *archipelagoes*): 2.1:1

architectural; architectonic. *Architectural* is usually the literal, and *architectonic* the figurative, term. Whereas *architectural* relates to the design of physical structures, *architectonic* relates to rational organization or to the abstract structure of a thing or idea. Although *architectonic* is sometimes used like *architectural*, it should be confined to figurative or abstract senses to make the DIFFERENTIATION complete.

-**ARCHY**. See GOVERNMENTAL FORMS.

***arcked; arcking**. See **arc**.

Arctic; Antarctic. Always spelled (and best pronounced) with the first c: /**ark**-tik/, /ant-**ark**-tik/. See **Antarctica**.

ardor; ardour. The first is AmE, the second BrE. The BrE spelling was the predominant AmE spelling until the 1840s. See -OR/-OUR.

area, an abstract word, is sometimes used almost as a space-filler: *a problem in the area of domestic policy* should be *a problem in domestic policy*. E.g.: “Madeline Andrews, a third-grade teacher from the North School, in Londonderry, . . . has developed activities

using computers for each theme and *subject matter area* [read *subject*].” “Celebrating All Aspects of Education in NH,” *Union Leader* (Manchester, N.H.), 10 June 1996, at A8. Cf. **field**.

aren’t I?; *amn’t I?; *an’t I? *Aren’t I*, though illogical, is the standard contraction corresponding to *am I not*. **Amn’t*, a dialectal form, is found mostly in Scotland and Ireland. See ***ain’t**.

In the 1930s, the lexicographer Frank Vizetelly denounced *aren’t I* as a “hopelessly ungrammatical . . . representation of ‘*an’t I*,’” and declared **an’t* (pronounced /ahnt/) to be “correct” and preferable to *aren’t* if used with a singular pronoun. Vizetelly, *How to Use English* 83 (1932). Even though he acknowledged that there was no support for his position and that the term was an **ARCHAISM** heard only in London dialect, he insisted that educated people should use **an’t I* so that the verb would agree with its subject. (*Ibid.* at 71, 89–90.) To this day, however, **an’t* occurs only in **DIALECT**. It is not limited to the first-person singular. E.g.:

- **First-person singular**: “Much earlier in the novel, Bone adamantly tells Granny that she ‘*an’t* no fool and *an’t* no bastard’ ([page] 144); but, as the years progress, Bone has a harder time rejecting the horrible names that are given to her.” Vincent King, “Hopeful Grief: The Prospect of a Postmodernist Feminism in Allison’s *Bastard*,” *Southern Literary J.*, 1 Oct. 2000, at 128.
- **First-person plural**: “‘We don’t never talk, do we?’ Dede asks her mother near the end of *Cavedweller*. Delia shakes her head: ‘We *an’t* the type.’” Dorothy Allison, “Book Review: *Cavedweller*,” *Boston Globe*, 15 Mar. 1998, at F1.
- **Third-person singular**: “‘I say,’ said Haley, and leaning back in his chair and gesturing impressively, ‘I’ll say this now, I alays meant to drive my trade so as to make money on’t, fust and foremost, as much as any man; but then, trade *an’t* everything, and money *an’t* everything, ‘cause we’s all got souls.’” Editorial, “A Bill with the Devil,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 18 Sept. 1998, at B6.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
aren’t I? for *am I not?*: Stage 5
Current ratio in print (*aren’t I*
vs. **amn’t I* vs. **an’t I*): 83:1:1

areola; aureole; aureola. *Areola* /a-ree-oh-lə/ or /ə-ree-ə-lə/ = a circular pigmented area of skin, esp. that surrounding a nipple. Pl. *areolas* (or, in medical contexts, *areolae*). *Aureole* = a corona around the sun or moon. *Aureola* is the short name for *Hakonechloa macra Aureola*, an ornamental Japanese forest grass. But it is also a variant spelling of *aureole* and a common misspelling of *areola*—e.g.:

- “When it is still too difficult for the baby to latch on, it is sometimes necessary to use soft silastic nipple shields which cover the *aureola* [read *areola*] and nipple and give the baby a papilla that can be utilized.” Fima Lifshitz, *Childhood Nutrition* 26 (1995).

- “The *aureola* [read *areola*] surrounds the nipple; it’s darker than the rest of the breast.” Felice Newman, *The Whole Lesbian Sex Book* 25 (1999).
- “She is naked, with one marionette-like arm upraised. Her *aureolas* [read *areolas*] are surrounded by concentric circles so that her breasts resemble marksmanship targets.” Edward Guthmann, “Still in the Shadows, an Artist in His Own Right,” *S.F. Chron.*, 3 Oct. 2006, at E1.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
aureola misused for *areola*: Stage 2
Current ratio in print (*aureole* vs. *aureola*): 7:1
Current ratio in print (*aureoles* vs. *aureolas*
vs. *aureolae*): 28:1.3:1

Argentine; Argentinian. These terms are essentially interchangeable in practice, but *Argentine* predominates as both noun and adjective. The disparity in use is almost great enough to label *Argentinian* a **NEED-LESS VARIANT**. See **DEMONYMS**.

Current ratio in print (*Argentines*
vs. *Argentinians*): 3:1
Current ratio in print (*Argentine writer*
vs. *Argentinian writer*): 2.2:1

ARGOT. See p. 1195.

arguably. See **ADVERBS (F)**.

argument, n.; argumentation. *Argumentation* refers to the act or process of arguing, or the art of persuading. *Argument* should be reserved for all other contexts. See **case (B)**.

argumentative; *argumentive. The longer form is the preferred adjective corresponding to *argumentation*.
Current ratio in print (*argumentative*
vs. **argumentive*): 375:1

arise. A. Inflected Forms: arise > arose > arisen. See **IRREGULAR VERBS**.

B. And rise. Although these words are sometimes interchangeable, there is a distinct tendency to make *arise* metaphorical <doubts arise> and *rise* literal <I rise about 6 a.m. each day>.

Arizonan; *Arizonian. The first is standard; the second is a variant that, although predominant in the 1800s, now occurs much less often in print. See **DEMONYMS**.

Current ratio in print (*Arizonan*
vs. **Arizonian*): 2:1

Arkansan; Arkie; *Arkansawyer. The first is standard. Some Arkansas denizens don’t like it because of the *Kansan* it contains and therefore prefer the fairly common **CASUALISM** *Arkie*. **Arkansawyer* is an infrequent variant. See **DEMONYMS**.

Current ratio in print (*Arkie*
vs. *Arkansan* vs. **Arkansawyer*): 12:9:1

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX (For the full key, see front matter pp. xxv–xxvi.)

Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

Arkansas /ahr-kən-saw/. But the Arkansas River—which flows from Colorado through Kansas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas into the Mississippi River—is pronounced /ar-kan-zəs/ in the Kansas part of its run.

A 19th-century Arkansas statute ineptly prescribes the “only true” pronunciation of the state name: “Be it therefore resolved by both houses of the General Assembly, that the only true pronunciation of the name of the state, in the opinion of this body, is that received by the French from the native Indians and committed to writing in the French word representing the sound. It should be pronounced in three (3) syllables, with the final ‘s’ silent, the ‘a’ in each syllable with the Italian sound, and the accent on the first and last syllables. The pronunciation with the accent on the second syllable with the sound of ‘a’ in ‘man’ and the sounding of the terminal ‘s’ is an innovation to be discouraged.” Ark. Code § 1-4-105 (1881). One can only imagine what happens when American speakers try to mimic an “Italian sound.” One also wonders how many orthoepists testified before the legislative committee on this statute or were consulted about how the statute should be worded. In any event, no litigation has ever ensued over its interpretation.

***Arkansawyer**; **Arkie**. See **Arkansan**.

armadillo. Pl. *armadillos*—not **armadilloes*. Cf. **peccadillo**.

Current ratio in print (*armadillos*
vs. **armadilloes*): 25:1

armful. Pl. *armfuls*—not **armsful*. See **PLURALS** (G).

Current ratio in print (*armfuls*
vs. **armsful*): 51:1

Armistice Day. See **Veterans Day**.

arm’s-length; ***arms-length**. In phrases such as *arm’s-length transaction*, the correct form is to make *arm* possessive; the phrase is usually and best hyphenated when it appears before the noun it modifies <arm’s-length negotiations>, but not otherwise <negotiate at arm’s length>. Even when two people are dickering, the figurative distance between them is still a single *arm’s length*. If the word becomes popular enough, it may one day become solid, like *beeswax* and *oneself*. But that day is not yet.

Current ratio in print (*at arm’s length*
vs. **at arms’ length* vs. **at arms length*): 32:1.5:1

Current ratio in print (*arm’s-length transaction*
vs. **arms-length transaction*): 7:1

around; **round**. AmE prefers *around* <they walked around the gardens>, while BrE prefers *round* <they walked round the gardens>. See **all-around**. Cf. **about** (B).

arouse; **rouse**. In modern usage, *arouse* tends to be metaphorical <the speech aroused much interest>, and *rouse* tends to be literal <the alarm clock roused everyone in the cabin>. But since the mid-20th century, *arouse* (like its corresponding noun *arousal*) has

carried connotations of sexual excitement: think of the different perceptions of *he roused himself* and *he aroused himself*.

arraignment; **indictment**. The meanings of these terms vary, depending on the jurisdiction. An *indictment* is almost universally the instrument charging a person with a felony; it also loosely refers to the act of charging someone with a crime. An *arraignment* is the reading of the indictment to the defendant or informing the defendant of the substance of the charge and calling for a plea to the charge. For more on *indictment*, see **indictment**.

arrant. See **errant**.

arrear(s). The most common use of either of the terms is the phrase *in arrears* (= behind in the discharge of a debt or other obligation). Current AmE and BrE idiom calls predominantly for this plural form, though in the late 1700s and 1800s **in arrear* predominated. **In arrearages* is obsolete.

Current ratio in print (*in arrears* vs. **in arrear*
vs. **in arrearages*): 542:67:1

arrivee. See -EE.

arriviste. See **nouveau riche** (B).

arrogate (= to claim or seize without legal justification) shouldn’t be used reflexively. Although it’s possible to *arrogate* something to oneself, one cannot *arrogate* oneself something—e.g.:

- “The Court of Appeal stated that if such an injunction were granted, the English court would be *arrogating itself* [read *arrogating to itself*] the power to resolve the precise dispute between the parties.” Aviva Golden, “Digest of Cases Reported in the Hilary Term,” *Fin. Times*, 13 Apr. 1988, at 1-20.
- “The hinges were being oiled to open the door for Lewis *shamelessly to arrogate himself onto* [read *to shamelessly arrogate to himself a place on*] the sprint relay team to win his unprecedented 10th gold medal.” Steve Jacobsen, “Atlanta Olympics,” *Newsday* (N.Y.), 2 Aug. 1996, at A89.
- “Robert Lowell and Richard Wilbur wrote poetry as a civic instrument, but few today seem willing to *arrogate themselves* [read *arrogate to themselves*] such an audience.” Dave Lucas, “Masters of Verse Pinsky, Boland and Simic Provide Rhyme and Reason,” *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland), 20 Apr. 2008, at G4.

Without the edits, those sentences illustrate the vice described at **OBJECT-SHUFFLING**.

For the distinction between *arrogate* and *abrogate*, see **abrogate**.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX

**arrogate oneself* for *arrogate to oneself*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*arrogated to himself*
vs. **arrogated himself*): 73:1

arse; **ass**. *Arse* is the spelling of the BrE **SLANG** term—in the anatomical sense, that is, not in the horse sense. In AmE, *ass* is the spelling for both meanings.

There’s a story behind this. Today *ass* means both (1) “donkey,” and (2) “a person’s bottom.” Sense 1 is

the historical one; sense 2 originated in the mid-1700s as the result of a phonological change, as *arse* and *ass* became homophones. By the early 1800s, it was possible to engage in wordplay between the words—as in the 1802 cartoon in which one female rider says to another, “I’ll show my Ass against any Lady’s at Wells” (“Neddy Paces at Tunbridge Wells,” Kent). See Tony Fairman, “How the Ass Became a Donkey,” 10 *English Today* 29–35 (1994).

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
ass meaning “derriere” (for *arse*): Stage 5

arsenious; *arsenous; arsonous. *Arsenious* /ahr-sen-ee-əs/ (= of, relating to, or involving arsenic) should not be confused as being an adjectival form of *arson* (*arsonous*). As for the arsenic-related adjective, the spelling with the *i* is standard; the other form is a NEEDLESS VARIANT.

Current ratio in print (*arsenious*
 vs. **arsenous*): 4:1

artefact. See **artifact**.

***artesan.** See **artist (B)**.

arthritis (the disease in joints) has three syllables: /ahr-**thrī**-tis/. Avoid adding the epenthetic schwa that makes it sound like *Arthur-itis*.

arthroscopic; orthoscopic. *Arthroscopic* (= of, relating to, or involving surgery performed with a viewing instrument inserted at a joint in the body) derives from *arthro-* “joint” + *-scopic* “viewing.” The word is pronounced /ahr-thrə-**skop**-ik/. Yet many people confuse the beginning of this word with the many terms beginning *ortho-* “straight, correct” (such as *orthodontist*, *orthopedist*, and *orthotic*). So they mistakenly refer to **orthoscopic surgery*—e.g.:

- “*Orthoscopic* [read *Arthroscopic*] surgery, physical therapy and rehabilitation followed.” Chris Antonacci, “Davis Feeling Good Again, Reaching New Highs,” *Newsday* (N.Y., Nassau ed.), 19 Nov. 2004, at A76.
- “At the time, Isaac, as he was called by friends and family, had recently had *orthoscopic* [read *arthroscopic*] surgery on his knee and was using crutches to get around.” Elizabeth Fitzsimons, “Death Becomes Lifesaving Cause,” *San Diego Union-Trib.*, 2 May 2005, at B1.

Just to confuse matters, though, *orthoscopic* is in fact a word that means “rendering a proportionate image” or “giving a flat, undistorted image” <modern TVs give an orthoscopic view>.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
orthoscopic misused for *arthroscopic*: Stage 1
 Current ratio in print (*arthroscopic surgery*
 vs. **orthoscopic surgery*): 91:1

ARTICLES. A. Definition. See p. 1195.

B. Capitalization of. See CAPITALIZATION (D).

C. Omitted from Headlines. See HEADLINESE (C), (E).

D. In Foreignisms. See HYPERCORRECTION (J).

E. Pronunciation. See **the (A)**.

F. In Book Titles, etc., After Possessive. See POSSESSIVES (M).

articulable, not **articulatable*, is the standard form—e.g.: “The salient conclusion is, therefore, to scratch such invidious issues from one’s *articulatable* [read *articulable*] political concerns.” Letter of John R. Blake, “Modern Anti-Liberal Logic Sometimes Difficult to Grasp,” *Seattle Times*, 7 Dec. 1991, at A21. See -ABLE (D) & -ATABLE.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
**articulatable* for *articulable*: Stage 1
 Current ratio in print (*articulable*
 vs. **articulatable*): 45:1

artifact (= an object made or used by humans in an earlier era) is the standard spelling in AmE. *Artefact* is a chiefly BrE variant, and the predominant form there, though the spelling with *i* is almost as frequent in BrE.

artifice is sometimes misspelled **artifice*—e.g.: “There are subtle lines between art and *artiface* [read *artifice*], between performance and reality.” Jerry O’Brien, “No More Cocktail Dresses,” *Providence J.-Bull.*, 10 Nov. 1995, at C1.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
artifice misspelled **artiface*: Stage 1
 Current ratio in print (*artifice*
 vs. **artifice*): 2,303:1

artisan, n. See **artist (B)**.

artisanal /ahr-tiz-ə-nəl/ (= of, relating to, involving, or produced by skilled workers using traditional methods), an adjective dating only from the 1940s, might be thought unnecessary given that *artisan* itself is often used adjectivally <artisan class> <artisan trades>. But it is the predominant adjective in several common phrases, such as *artisanal cheeses*, *artisanal fisheries*, and *artisanal production*. Although *artisan work* has been a traditional collocation since the mid-1800s, *artisanal work* has been rivaling it in frequency of use since about 1990.

The word is preferably pronounced as given at the outset of this entry—not /ahr-**tee**-zə-nəl/ or /ahr-ti-**zan**-əl/.

Current ratio in print (*artisanal cheeses*
 vs. *artisan cheeses*): 1.4:1
 Current ratio in print (*artisanal fisheries*
 vs. *artisan fisheries*): 106:1
 Current ratio in print (*artisanal production*
 vs. *artisan production*): 2.4:1

artist. A. And artiste. *Artist* /ahr-tist/ is the general word for someone who creates works of aesthetic

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX (For the full key, see front matter pp. xxv–xxvi.)

Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

value, especially in the fine arts. *Artiste* /ahr-teest/, a GALLICISM, is a more specialized word denoting (1) a public performer or entertainer, esp. in song and dance; or (2) an affected, often flamboyant fop with artistic pretensions. Sense 2, the pejorative one, is now more common—e.g.:

- “Goodwin’s Leontes, in long hair and greatcoat, has been conceived as a pathological *artiste*; we see him at a piano, lighted by a candelabrum and moodily fingering the keys.” Peter Marks, “The Banked Fire of ‘Winter’s Tale,’” *Wash. Post*, 4 Sept. 2002, at C1.
- “It is the voice of Pearl Jam’s Eddie Vedder, Creed’s Scott Stapp and all the other sulking, groaning *artistes* who have labored over the past decade to rid rock ‘n’ roll of its unpretentious joy.” Elysa Gardner et al., “Lifehouse Not Up to Code,” *USA Today*, 17 Sept. 2002, at D4.
- “From the realm of show biz . . . came musical comedy veteran Leigh Scarritt in three roles—Babe the supermarket checker, Roberta the hooker and Dolores the waitressing *artiste*.” Anne Marie Welsh, “‘Working’ Is Getting a Bit Tired,” *San Diego Union-Trib.*, 23 Sept. 2002, at D1.

B. And *artisan*. Although these terms were once synonymous, they have undergone DIFFERENTIATION: an *artist* is someone skilled in any of the fine arts (such as painting), while an *artisan* is a crafter or one skilled at a trade. (**Artesan* and **artizan* are variant spellings.) Yet *artist* has degenerated to the point where many people use it in reference to anyone with a talent—e.g.:

- “‘Burlesque is back!’ bubbles Dixie Evans, the legendary 1950s-era striptease *artist*.” “Bare-All Reunion,” *L.A. Times*, 23 May 2002, § 6, at 37.
- “Here is where Rothan comes alive as a natural slapstick *artist*, her slim frame bending and whipping into frantic shapes as she flies into a panic at the fear of forgetting the signals, blowing the act and getting them both thrown into the clink.” Elaine Limer, “Love You to Death,” *Dallas Observer*, 18 July 2002, at 55.
- “Story follows a phobic con *artist* (Cage) and his protegee (Rockwell), who are on the verge of pulling off a lucrative swindle when Cage’s teenage daughter (Lohman) arrives unexpectedly.” Dana Harris, “Lohman Joins ‘Matchstick,’” *Daily Variety*, 29 July 2002, at 12.

Current ratio in print (*artisan* vs. **artizan* vs. **artesan*): 3,582:55:1

artless has opposing connotations. On the one hand, it is favorable when contrasted with the idea denoted by *artificial*—e.g.: “Generally, Ms. Benedis’s works seem as *artless* as nature itself.” Patricia Malarcher, “Show Features Artwork Formed from Cuttings and Branches,” *N.Y. Times*, 9 Feb. 1997, at WC13. But it’s often unfavorable when contrasted with *artful*—e.g.: “In an age of *artless* novels, here was an artful book.” Richard Dyer, “Sibling Reveries,” *Boston Globe*, 22 May 1994, at B15.

as. A. Causal Words: *as*; *because*; *since*; *for*. In the causal sense, *as* should generally be avoided because (not *as*!) it may be misunderstood as having its more usual meaning “while,” especially when it is placed anywhere but at the beginning of the sentence. H.W. Fowler states: “To causal or explanatory *as*-clauses, if they are placed before the main sentence . . .

there is no objection” (*FMEUI* at 31). This is most common in BrE—e.g.: “As she didn’t get the original money, could she please have the larger sum?” Martin Waller, “Mail Shot,” *Times* (London), 30 May 1997, at 29.

As Fowler suggested, however, the reverse order is infelicitous unless the reader necessarily knows what is to be introduced by the *as*-clause. So don’t use it in midsentence—e.g.: “Indeed, some jurors confirmed later that they wished they had been given the manslaughter option *as* [read *because*] they didn’t believe the *au pair* intended to harm the baby.” Kimberly Mills, “‘Au Pair’ Decision Does Injustice to the Lone Innocent,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 14 Nov. 1997, at A15.

Given the syntactic restrictions on *as*, we are left with three general-purpose causal conjunctions. *Because* is the strongest and most logically oriented of these. *Since* is less demonstratively causal and frequently has temporal connotations. But using *since* without reference to time is not, despite the popular canard, incorrect. (See SUPERSTITIONS (G).) *For*, the most subjective of the three, is the least used. If *because* points out a direct cause-and-effect relationship, *for* signals a less direct relationship, adding independent explanation or substantiation. Moreover, *for* is a coordinating conjunction and not, like *because* and *since*, a subordinating conjunction; hence it can properly begin a sentence—that is, one consisting only of an independent clause <I want to go home now. For I am tired.>.

B. And *like*. See **like** (B), (C).

as against (= as opposed to, in contrast with) dates from the 1600s. Originally a legal idiom, it has been more broadly used but remains rather formal. E.g.: “The last Wednesday before the change, the newscast drew a 7.9 rating and 23 percent audience share in its first quarter hour, *as against* an 8.7 rating and 25 share for Channel 4.” Gail Pennington, “St. Louis Daytime TV Gets New Shows, New Times,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 4 Sept. 1997, at G6. The phrase is most common in Indian English, quite common in BrE, and somewhat uncommon in AmE.

The phrase is sometimes misused for *against*, especially in American law—e.g.: “Accordingly, for the foregoing reasons, petitioner is awarded summary judgment *as against* [read *against*] respondent.” “Harmit Realities LLC v. Phillips Educational Servs.,” *N.Y.L.J.*, 9 July 1997, at 27.

Speakers of AmE sometimes use the phrase in completely different ways that can give rise to MISCUES. First, it’s occasionally a shorthand for *as being against*—e.g.: “‘I wouldn’t classify our campaign *as against* [read *as being against*] Wisconsin,” CMAB official Nancy Fletcher said.” “Cheese Wars,” *Wis. State J.*, 12 Sept. 1997, at C1. And sometimes it’s part of an *as . . . as* construction—e.g.: “Often the law enforcement agencies and the drug czar seem to spend as much time fighting among themselves *as against* [read *as they do against*] the drug lords.” Gordon

Witkin, "The Troubled Reign of the Nation's Drug Czar," *U.S. News & World Rep.*, 8 Sept. 1997, at 26.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX

as against misused for *against*: Stage 1

as . . . as. A. And so . . . as. In positive statements, the *as . . . as* construction is customary—e.g.: "The corn, which should be *as tall as* I am at this time of year, is barely half my height." Eason Jordan, "A Visit to the Land of the Vanishing Lake," *Time*, 25 Aug. 1997, at 52.

In the mid-20th century it was commonly held that *so . . . as* is preferable to *as . . . as* in negative statements—e.g.: "The Republican governor said he might support future efforts to raise the ballot bar on non-major party candidates, but *not so high as* Senate Bill 200 tried to set." Mario F. Cattabiani, "Ridge Vetoes Bill on Ballot Access," *Morning Call* (Allentown, Pa.), 26 June 1997, at A1. But *as . . . as* generally serves equally well in such negative statements, and examples abound in good literature.

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as . . . as for *so . . . as*
in negative statements: Stage 5

B. First *as* Omitted. It is fairly common to see this phrase with the first *as* left off <they were thick as thieves>. The construction is a CASUALISM that is often employed with CLICHÉS. It is unobjectionable in informal speech and writing, but avoid it in formal contexts.

C. Repetition of Verb After. Often, when the second *as* in this construction is far removed from the first *as*—or when there's otherwise an opportunity for ambiguity—the verb is repeated for clarity. E.g.: "Owner Ray Haynie—tall, slim and baritone-voiced—is *as likely to be cleaning tables as is* any employee." Ruth Fantasia, "Not Just Any Port in a Storm Sting," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 3 Dec. 1995, at H5. (If we deleted the *is*, employees might bring sexual-harassment claims against Ray.) But if the second verb isn't needed, omit it—e.g.: "Montreal is *as likely to survive as is* [read *as*] common civility." Mike Celizic, "Baseball Players Making Nice," *Record* (N.J.), 9 Apr. 1995, Sports §, at 3.

D. *As* [+ *adj.*] *a* [+ *n.*] *as*. In AmE, writers sometimes err by inserting *of* after the adjective. But good usage rejects this—e.g.: "From the sidelines, Nunez became nearly *as good of a cheerleader* [read *as good a cheerleader*] as he was a running back." Jaime Aron, "Westlake's Nunez Leads AP Honor Roll," *Austin Am.-Statesman*, 26 Oct. 1994, at C3. See **of (B)**.

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**not as good of a* for *not as good a*: Stage 2
Current ratio in print (*not as good a*
vs. **not as good of a*): 12:1

E. *As* . . . *than*. *Than* is sometimes misused for the second *as*—e.g.: "A Roper Starch poll says that 24 percent of consumers—twice *as many than* [read *as*] in 1987—say they never go to malls." Allison Lucas, "The Fall of the Mall," *Sales & Marketing Mgmt.*, 1 Apr. 1996, at 13. (But it would be *twice more than*.) See SWAPPING HORSES.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX

**as . . . than* misused for *as . . . as*: Stage 1

as at (= *as of*) originated in the late 1800s and remains characteristic today chiefly of BrE financial JARGON—e.g.:

- "This book reflects the law *as at* August 1986." Stanley Berwin, *The Economist Pocket Lawyer* i (1986).
- "The restructuring was needed, the group said, after a cumulative loss of GBP 75.4m *as at* December 31, 1996." "Seafeld Plans Restructuring," *Fin. Times*, 27 Nov. 1996, at 22.

Cf. the cautionary note at **as of**.

as a whole. See **in whole**.

as best; *as best as. The traditional idiom is *as best she can*, meaning "in the best way that she can." The *as* isn't part of a comparative *as . . . as* construction, which takes the positive form of the adjective (*as good as*), not the superlative (*best*). So adding a second *as* is incorrect—e.g.:

- "But in the meantime, Michelle combed his coat *as best as she* [read *as best she*] could and adorned him yesterday with a pink ribbon and a yellow bandanna around his neck." Celeste Tarricone, "Lost Six Weeks, Sebastian Is Back in the Family Fold," *Providence J.-Bull.*, 10 June 1998, at C1.
- "Good dog owners try to discipline their dogs *as best as they* [read *as best they*] know how, but I don't think people give us a chance." D. Andrich, "Dog Bias," *Chicago Trib.*, 26 Sept. 1998, at 20.
- "He raised himself *as best as he* [read *as best he*] could on his hands and knees and crawled out of the store." Bruce Von Deylen, "Store Owner Felt Remorse, Fear After Shooting," *South Bend Trib.*, 31 Jan. 1999, at A1.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX

**as best as he can* for *as best he can*: Stage 1
Current ratio in print (*as best he can*
vs. **as best as he can*): 9:1

asbestos (= a fire-resistant gray mineral formerly used as a building material or in protective clothing but no longer so used because it is now known to be carcinogenic), a term dating from the early 1600s in something like this sense, has the archaic variant spelling **asbestus*, which mimics the preferred pronunciation: /as-**bes**-təs/, not /as-**bes**-tohs/.

Current ratio in print (*asbestos*
vs. **asbestus*): 1,009:1

as between. See **between (E)**.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX (For the full key, see front matter pp. xxv–xxvi.)

Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

ascendable. So spelled—not **ascendible* (though, surprisingly, the spelling with *i* predominated for a brief period around 1800). For an anomaly in spelling, see **descendible**. See **-ABLE (A)**.

Current ratio in print (*ascendable* vs. **ascendible*): 11:1

ascendancy; ascension. *Ascendancy* (= a position of dominant control; supremacy) is the more common term. **Ascendancy* is a NEEDLESS VARIANT, and both **ascendancy* and **ascendence* are variant spellings. *Ascension* denotes the act or process of rising to an important position or a higher level. *Ascendancy* occasionally displaces *ascension*—e.g.:

- “As Gloria Molina today takes her seat on the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, her meteoric *ascendancy* [read *ascension*] is the focus of attention across the country.” Cathleen Decker, “Molina—Catch a Rising Star Politics: The New County Supervisor Is the Focus of Attention Nationwide,” *L.A. Times*, 8 Mar. 1991, at B6.
- “He’s clearly relishing the prospect of putting his stamp on the Turbine, but his rapid *ascendancy* [read *ascension*] has come at a cost.” Nick Curtis, “Feel the Power at Battersea,” *Evening Standard* (U.K.), 3 Sept. 2019, at 32.
- “Ronald Reagan called his *ascendancy* [read *ascension*] to the White House ‘Morning in America.’” Peter Lucas, “Spineless Joe Cuts and Runs,” *Boston Herald*, 2 Sept. 2021, at A15.

See **ascent (A)**.

Current ratio in print (*ascendancy* vs. **ascendancy* vs. **ascendence*): 208:73:48:1

Current ratio in print (*rapid ascension* vs. **rapid ascendancy*): 1.9:1

ascendant. A. Spelling. *Ascendant* (= [1] moving upward; or [2] becoming more popular or powerful), a French LOANWORD dating in English from the 1300s, has always been predominantly so spelled. **Ascendent* is a variant.

Current ratio in print (*ascendant* vs. **ascendent*): 37:1

B. In the ascendant. Derived from astrology and denoting the part of the zodiac that is rising above the eastern horizon at a particular time, this phrase is sometimes mistakenly written **in the ascendancy*—e.g.:

- “A slower pace of reform, as advocated by Prime Minister Viktor S. Chernomyrdin, whose star is in the *ascendancy* [read *ascendant*] here, will only delay the dawn of recovery.” R.W. Apple Jr., “Clinton in Europe: A Russian Tightrope,” *N.Y. Times*, 15 Jan. 1994, § 1, at 6.
- “No such justification is available to support affirmative action for conservatives, who have never been excluded, and in fact were once greatly in the *ascendancy* [read *ascendant*], and who are no longer in the *ascendancy* [read *ascendant*] in some disciplines because they have chosen to go into others.” Stanley Fish, “Postmodern Warfare,” *Harper’s Mag.*, 1 July 2002, at 33.

Avoid the variant spelling **ascendent*.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX

**in the ascendancy* for *in the ascendant*: Stage 2

Current ratio in print (*in the ascendant* vs. **in the ascendancy*): 3:1

ascent. A. And ascension. Both *ascent* and *ascension* mean “the act of ascending.” *Ascent*, however, has these additional senses: (1) “the act of rising in station or rank, or in natural chronological succession” <the ascent of man>; (2) “a method of ascending” <an unorthodox ascent>; and (3) “the degree of slope or acclivity” <a steep ascent>. And *ascension* also denotes (1) in Christianity, the ascent of Jesus Christ to heaven 40 days after his resurrection; and (2) in the astronomical term *right ascension*, the measure of the position of a celestial body along an equator as an arc from the first degree of Aries.

B. And assent. *Assent* (= agreement) is surprisingly often misused for *ascent*—e.g.:

- “Weihenmayer and several other climbers from throughout the United States have begun their *assent* [read *ascent*] to Mount Everest’s summit with a lofty goal.” Robert Sanchez, “Blind Climber Heads for Peak of Everest,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), 4 May 2001, at A24.
- “Mehrunnisa is calculating even as a child; by the age of 8, she tells everyone around her that she intends to marry Prince Salim (who is called Jahangir upon his *assent* [read *ascent*] to the throne).” Carmela Ciuraru, “‘Twentieth Wife’ Opens the Door on Palace Life,” *USA Today*, 14 Mar. 2002, at D4.
- “Analysts welcomed Zafirovski’s *assent* [read *ascent*] to the position of Motorola president and chief operating officer.” Rob Kaiser, “Motorola’s No. 2 a Turnaround Vet,” *Chicago Trib.*, 27 July 2002, Bus. §, at 1.

For the difference between *assent* and *consent*, see **assent**.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX

assent misused for *ascent*: Stage 1

ascesis /ə-see-sis/ (= self-discipline), a Greek LOANWORD dating in English from the mid-1800s, has been predominantly so spelled since the late 1880s. *Askesis* /ə-skee-sis/ is a variant. The plural forms are *asceses* and *askeses*.

Current ratio in print (*ascesis* vs. *askesis*): 1.3:1

as concerns. See **as regards**.

ascribe (= to attribute to a specified cause) is sometimes misused for *subscribe* in the sense “to think of favorably.” Although the mistake was once thought to be found only among the semiliterate, today it appears in print with some frequency. Perhaps there is some influence from *aspire*, as the first and second examples suggest—e.g.:

- “Within the field of family and couple counseling, models are not generally *ascribing* [read *subscribing*] to the view of normality as process.” Ray Woolfe & Windy Dryden, *Handbook of Counseling Psychology* 424 (1996).
- “Maybe there are enough readers in the publishing industry who *ascribe* [read *subscribe*] to Oscar Wilde’s aphorism—‘There is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about.’” Janice D’Arcy, “‘Happiness’ Sadly Weak as Satire,” *Hartford Courant*, 23 June 2002, at G3.

- “During opening arguments yesterday, prosecutor James Willett told the jury Powell ‘happens to be a racist of the highest order’ who *ascribes* [read *subscribes*] to the beliefs of the Ku Klux Klan and Adolf Hitler.” Matthew Barakat, “Death-Penalty Trial Set in Motion by Letter Starts,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 14 Jan. 2003, at B2.

Still, *ascribe* is far more commonly used correctly—e.g.: “Van Gogh’s accelerating cycles of mental disturbance will probably never be fully diagnosed, but they continue to be variously *ascribed* to epilepsy, manic-depressive illness and alcohol.” Jo Ann Lewis, “Trove of Van Goghs to Visit Washington,” *Wash. Post*, 13 Jan. 1998, at A1.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
ascribe misused for *subscribe*: Stage 2

Current ratio in print (*don’t subscribe to that* vs. **don’t ascribe to that*): 17:1

as do. See ANTICIPATORY REFERENCE.

as equally. See **equally as**.

as far as. In its figurative uses, this phrase must be followed by some complement such as *that’s concerned*, *that goes*, or *I know*—e.g.: “*As far as* they’re concerned, January 1, 2000, will bring enough of a hangover.” Neil Randall, “Welcome to the Millennium,” *PC Mag.*, 23 Sept. 1997, at 229.

When the complement is omitted, idiom is violated. This seems to happen most often in reported speech—e.g.: “*As far as* Ron Lynn [insert *is concerned*], I have no idea what the inner workings of [his] team are.” Lee Shappell, “Miracle Win over Redskins Revived Cardinals in ‘96,” *Ariz. Republic*, 12 Sept. 1997, at C1 (quoting Vince Tobin, a coach). Having first been noted by Robert L. Chapman in “Trouble with the Pointing Phrase,” 44 *Am. Speech* 305 (1969), this error is becoming fairly widespread in spoken English.

Idiom aside, however, *as far as* usually signals verbosity. So instead of *As far as he is concerned*, it’s possible to save half the words by writing *As for him*, See **insofar as**.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
as far as without a subject and verb following: Stage 2

as follows; *as follow. *As follows* is always the correct form, even for an enumeration of many things. The expression is elliptical for *as it follows*—not *as they follow*.

Although the plural **as follow* sometimes appeared in 19th-century and earlier texts, today it is unidiomatic. In fact, the 19th-century grammarian Lindley Murray disfavored **as follow* long ago: “The phrases *as follow*, *as appears*, form what are called impersonal verbs, and should, therefore, be confined to the singular number: the construction being, ‘as it follows,’ ‘as it appears.’” 1 Lindley Murray, *An English Grammar* 222

(5th ed. 1824) (adding that “analogy and usage favour this mode of expression” [*as follows*]).

Current ratio in print (*as follows* vs. **as follow*): 107:1

as good as or better than; *as good or better than.

The second *as* is obligatory—e.g.: “It follows . . . that the dialogue will be either *as good as or better than* an exposition along the same lines.” George Rudebusch, “Plato’s Aporetic Style,” in *Plato: Critical Assessments* 350, 351 (Nicholas D. Smith ed., 1998). Another, less creaky way of putting the idea is this: *It follows that the dialogue will be as good as an exposition along the same lines, or even better*.

Many writers, however, mangle their grammar by omitting the second *as* without rearranging the syntax as suggested above—e.g.: “A locally made cheese can be *as good or better than* [read *as good as or better than*] an imported, well-known variety.” Jennifer Darling, *New Cook Book* 276 (2003). [An alternative wording: *A locally made cheese can be as good as an imported, well-known variety—or even better.*] Cf. **as much as or more than; as well as or better than**.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
**as good or better than* for *as good as or better than*: Stage 3

ashen; ashy. A useful DIFFERENTIATION has emerged here. *Ashen* means “resembling the color of ashes” or, by extension, “pale” <her face became ashen when she heard the news>. *Ashy* more broadly means “of, relating to, or involving ashes” <an ashy residue>. The following examples track this distinction:

- “Seeing her husband *ashen*, with sunken eyes and a stooped look, Mickie had had enough. ‘You’re going to the doctor,’ she said.” Alexander Wolff, “Back in Action,” *Sports Illustrated*, 23 Oct. 1995, at 94.
- “Panicked, he had turned pale, almost *ashen*.” Laura Yee, “The View from the Flower Shop,” *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland), 14 Feb. 1997, at F1.
- “It takes more than a frumpy wardrobe, constricted hairdo, overtly *ashy* makeup and cane to convert France’s venerable, radiant diva of the big screen, Catherine Deneuve, into the glum, bisexual philosophy professor.” Roger Hurlburt, “No Honor Among Bungling ‘Thieves,’” *Sun-Sentinel* (Ft. Lauderdale), 31 Jan. 1997, at 7.
- “Winter’s frigid temperatures, lower humidity and icy winds leave skin dry, *ashy* and scaly.” “Spring Forward: Skin Care for a More Beautiful You,” *Ebony*, Mar. 1997, at 28.

ashtray (= a small dish for the remains of used cigarettes and cigars), a compound dating from the late 1800s, was commonly written as two words for the first half of the 1900s (**ash tray*). But after 1958 the solidified *ashtray* became predominant, as it has been ever since.

Current ratio in print (*ashtray* vs. **ash tray*): 16:1

ashy. See **ashen**.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX (For the full key, see front matter pp. xxv–xxvi.)

Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

Asian; Asiatic. *Asian* is the predominant adjective for people or things from or related to Asia. Until the 1950s, *Asiatic* was 8 to 12 times as common in print as *Asian*. But after WWII, *Asian* rapidly became preferred and now predominates by a 17:1 ratio. Today, *Asiatic* is limited to academic uses such as *Asiatic style* (florid rhetoric), *Asiatic mode of production* (Marxist economic theory), and *Asiatic lion* (zoology). See RACE-RELATED TERMS (G), (H).

aside. **A. Mistakenly Meaning “on each side.”** *Aside*, adv., properly means “to one side, on one side” <she lay the book aside and fell asleep>. But it’s sometimes used wrongly in the sense “on each side, per side”—e.g.:

- “For the lawyers, and there are three *aside* [read for each side] in this case, [jury selection] is vitally important.” Christie Blatchford, “The End of the Beginning,” *Toronto Sun*, 15 Nov. 1995, at 5.
- “Bill Guerin scored a controversial goal with the teams skating five *aside* [read a side] with 6:31 left in the second to gain a brief 3–2 lead.” Kisha Ciabattari, “Richter Nets Two Goals as Canadiens and Devils Tie,” *Asbury Park Press* (Neptune, N.J.), 15 Dec. 1996, at H3.
- “With teams locked 0–0 after regulation time, McCambridge used her pace to exploit the additional space afforded to her as both sides dropped to nine *aside* [read a side] then seven *aside* [read a side].” Adam Clifford, “Extra Time Counts as Ships Shoot to Defend Title,” *Mercury* (Hobart, Aus.), 6 Sept. 2015, at 61.

This usage occurs most commonly in sports contexts—and particularly (though not exclusively) outside the U.S., where games with different team-size variants are more popular. Soccer, for instance, is usually played with 11 on each team, but seven-a-side and five-a-side variants are also common. While *aside* is used adverbially in the examples above, when such phrases are used as adjectives or nouns, they should properly take two hyphens—e.g.:

- “The sporting world splits into two camps over whether McLroy was reckless in playing *five-aside* [read five-a-side] football so close to The Open or simply living his life.” Derek Lawrenson, “There Is Life in G-Mac Yet,” *Scottish Daily Mail*, 10 July 2015, at 82.
- “The winning team after *seven-asides* [read seven-a-sides] would be rewarded with Mars bars, the losers sent off on a punishing run.” Lee Clayton, “Mars Bars and Brandy Prove Perfect Ingredients for the ‘Lunatic’ Who Goes His Own Way,” *Daily Mail* (U.K.), 5 Aug. 2006, at 100.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
aside misused for *on each side*: Stage 1

B. *Aside from* vs. *apart from*. Though once considered inferior to *apart from*, *aside from* has become standard in AmE and BrE alike. But in print, *apart from* appears far more frequently on both sides of the Atlantic. Cf. **outside**.

Current ratio in print (*apart from* vs. *aside from*): 5:1

as if; as though. Attempts to distinguish between these idioms have proved futile. Euphony should govern the choice of phrase. As a matter of word

frequency, *as if* has always been the more common phrase in Modern English. Eric Partridge suggested that *as if* is usually preceded by a comma and that *as though* rarely is (*U&A* at 47).

A better distinction is that *as if* often suggests the more hypothetical proposition when cast in the subjunctive <as if he were a god>. E.g.: “As he came closer to it he felt a great strength flow into him from the west, *as if* Silence had taken him by the hand after all.” Ursula K. Le Guin, *Tales from Earthsea* 161 (2001). By contrast, *as though* suggests a more plausible suggestion <it looks as though it might rain>.

asinine. So spelled. See SPELLING (A) & ANIMAL ADJECTIVES.

as is; as was. “He bought the company ‘as is.’” Although a martinet of logic might insist on *as was* in the preceding sentence, that phrase is jarringly unidiomatic. *As is*, in the context of that sentence, is really an elliptical form of *as it is* or *on an “as is” basis* and is infinitely better than those paraphrases. The purpose of the phrase *as is*, of course, is for a seller to disclaim warranties and representations.

This use of *as is* sprang up in the mid-20th century and spread rapidly through English-speaking countries.

as it were. The *OED* defines this phrase as meaning “as if it were so, if one might so put it, in some sort,” and describes it as “a parenthetical phrase used to indicate that a word or statement is perhaps not formally exact though practically right.” It is a highly self-conscious phrase typically found in highly self-conscious writing. Each of the following examples would probably be improved by its deletion:

- “His unit gone ahead without him, Melander accepted an invitation, *as it were*, to become a runner for a company commander, Lt. Al Ungerlichter.” Ed Lowe, “Unlocking Memories of Liberation,” *Newsday* (N.Y.), 16 May 1997, at A8.
- “They first assembled during humid two-a-days at the pool of the Collegiate Village Inn, where many players are housed, to walk—or wade, *as it were*—through their playbook.” Brian Schmitz, “Knights Prepared for Quixotic Quest,” *Orlando Sentinel*, 13 Sept. 1997, at B1.
- “There was the slight inconvenience of ‘training in a vacuum’ in that first week, preparing for a match, *as it were*, without knowing who Kerry would be playing in that match.” Paul Brennan, “Draw Keeps Kerry in a Vacuum for Another Week,” *Kerryman* (Irl.), 2 Sept. 2015, at 66.

Cf. **if you will**.

asked /askt/ is sometimes mispronounced /ast/ or, through METATHESIS, /akst/. See PRONUNCIATION (B).

askesis. See **ascesis**.

as much as or more than. The second *as* should appear in this phrase—e.g.: “In our sample, 31.5% of the wives earned *as much as or more than* their husbands.” Diane F. Halpern & Susan E. Murphy, *From Work–Family Balance to Work–Family Interaction* 164 (2005).

A common blemish is to write **as much or more than*—e.g.: “Suppositional Departures lead to just *as much* bitterness, and even *more* subjunctives, *than* Actual Departures.” James Thurber, “Ladies’ and Gentlemen’s Guide to Modern English Usage,” in *The Ways of Language* 142, 146 (Raymond J. Pflug ed., 1967). [A suggested revision: *Suppositional Departures lead to just as much bitterness as, and even more subjunctives than, Actual Departures.*] Cf. **as good as or better than; as well as or better than**. See CANNIBALISM & ILLOGIC (B).

as of. A. Generally. *As of* should be used with caution. Originally an Americanism, the phrase often signifies the effective date of a legal document, as when the document is backdated, postdated, or signed by various people at different times <this contract is effective as of July 1>. When such a nuance is not intended, *as of* is the wrong phrase. Often it is inferior to *on*—e.g.: “Barnaby’s employment with New Jersey Public Service ended *as of* [read *on*] September 30.” Cf. **as at**.

B. As of now. This phrase arose in AmE in the 1930s and had spread to BrE by the early 1940s. It soon attracted criticism. Lord Conesford wrote: “An illiteracy is introduced when the words *as of* precede not a date, but the adverb *now*. *As of now* is a barbarism which only a love of illiteracy for its own sake can explain. What is generally meant is *at present*.” Lord Conesford, “You Americans Are Murdering the Language,” in *Advanced Composition* 374, 383 (J.E. Wariner et al. eds., 1968).

But *as of now* does not mean “at present”; rather, it means “up to the present time.” Wilson Follett also disapproved of the phrase—recommending instead *up to now* or *for the present* (MAU at 76)—but *as of now* is today unobjectionable in AmE and BrE alike.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
as of now meaning “up to now”: Stage 5

***as of yet.** See ***as yet**.

***as per** is commonly understood to mean “in accordance with.” But writing texts have long condemned the phrase—e.g.:

- “**As Per.** This hybrid is inexcusable. Instead of ‘as per your request’ say ‘in accordance with your request,’ or ‘in compliance with your request.’” Maurice H. Weseen, *Crowell’s Dictionary of English Grammar* 55 (1928).
- “**as per**, ‘in accordance with,’ is such horrible commercialese that even merchant princes are less than riotously happy when their secretaries wish it on them.” Eric Partridge, *U&A* at 47.
- “When used to mean ‘according to’ (*per* your request, *per* your order), the expression [*per*] is business jargon at its worst and should be avoided. Equally annoying is the phrase *as per*.” Charles T. Brusaw et al., *The Business Writer’s Handbook* 478 (3d ed. 1987).

Originating in 18th-century COMMERCIALESE, **as per* is redundant for *per*. Yet even *per* is a LATINISM in

place of which any one of several everyday equivalents would be better (*as, according to, in accordance with, etc.*)—e.g.:

- “*As per her request* [read *At her request* or *As she had requested*], her family scattered her ashes Saturday at the summit of Mt. Washington in New Hampshire, said her husband, James Gardner.” Joe Haberstroh, “Irene S. Gardner, Retired Nurse” (obit.), *Newsday* (N.Y.), 10 Sept. 1997, at A49.
- “*So as per our predictions* [read *as we predicted*], we’ll have to give Foss’ date at South Sound Stadium with River Ridge on Oct. 24 the nod as the key game.” Gary Brooks, “Key Games,” *News Trib.* (Tacoma), 12 Sept. 1997, at C2.
- “*As per usual* [read *As usual*], Trump blew the little uber lefty punk out of the water with his reply.” Roddy D. Riggs, “Game Plan,” *Belleville News-Democrat* (Ill.), 10 Sept. 2015, at 242.

The phrase **as per usual*, which first emerged in the 1860s and became suddenly popular early in this century, is an embarrassing barbarism.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX

1. **as per* for *per* or *in accordance with*: Stage 3

2. **as per usual* for *as usual*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*as usual*
vs. **as per usual*): 133:1

aspersions, to cast is a prolix CLICHÉ for *asperse* (= to disparage; criticize harshly), a little-known but useful verb—e.g.:

- “Fazio et al. should cast their barbs at ordained character assassins . . . rather than *aspersing* the American majority that claims to be both Christian and conservative.” “An Undeserved Whacking,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), 14 July 1994, at A48.
- “And so to *asperse* her performance in this shabby way is to report irresponsibly and to forsake a goodly measure of any newspaper’s goal of fairness.” “Ford’s Husband Denounces Use of Unnamed Critics,” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), 10 Dec. 1999, at B6.

asphyxia; asphyxiation. The first refers to the condition of having insufficient oxygen resulting in suffocation. The second is the action of producing suffocation. Hence: “*Asphyxiation* [/as-fik-see-ay-shən/], also known as suffocation, is any interruption of breathing resulting in *asphyxia*.” Ann Ehrlich & Carol L. Schroeder, *Medical Terminology for Health Professions* 201 (2004).

as regards, a much-maligned phrase, is sometimes called a solecism. Actually, it’s a traditional, perfectly good literary idiom dating from the 1700s and now more common in BrE than in AmE—e.g.:

- “The superiority *as regards* directness of association is not invariably on the side of gesture-language.” Henry Sweet, *The History of Language* 4 (1900).
- “We might expect . . . a more wary approach *as regards* some of the dangers of the test.” I.A. Richards, *Practical Criticism* 5 (1929; repr. 1964).

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX (For the full key, see front matter pp. xxv–xxvi.)

Stage 1: Rejected. Stage 2: Widely shunned. Stage 3: Widespread but . . . Stage 4: Ubiquitous but . . . Stage 5: Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

- “Southeast Asia’s troubles could magnify what has already been a difficult summer for many U.S. multinational companies, at least *as regards* their ability to meet earnings growth targets.” Tom Petrino, “Wall Street, California,” *L.A. Times*, 2 Sept. 1997, at D1.
- “As regards the use of troops, Clinton’s apparent stratagem is to deploy troops by executive action.” James Gardner, “Exactly Which U.S. ‘Values’ Are Right for Bosnia?,” *News & Record* (Greensboro), 7 Sept. 1997, at F3.

Though *as regards* is no more objectionable than *with regard to*, the whole basketful of such phrases is suspect: “Train your suspicions to bristle up whenever you come upon *as regards*, *with regard to*, *in respect of*, *in connection with*, *according as to whether*, and the like. They are all dodges of jargon, circumlocutions for evading this or that simple statement.” Arthur Quiller-Couch, *On the Art of Writing* 114 (2d ed. 1943). Although Quiller-Couch overargued his point, there is some truth in it. See **regard (A)**.

ass. See **arse**.

assassin; assassinator. Generally speaking, the latter can be regarded as a NEEDLESS VARIANT—e.g.: “Dr. Samuel Mudd was imprisoned there for setting the broken leg of Lincoln assassinator [read *assassin*] John Wilkes Booth.” Morgan Stinemetz, “Lost in Time,” *Tampa Trib.*, Sports §, 22 June 2001, at 8.

Yet *assassinator* has a rarefied mathematical sense. If you must know, it’s the unique associated prime of a uniform right module over a right noetherian ring (and please don’t ask for further elucidation of this bit of arcania). E.g.:

- “The set of all associated primes of M is denoted by $\text{Ass}(M)$ (the ‘assassinator’ of M).” Paul Moritz Cohn, *Basic Algebra: Groups, Rings, and Fields* 380 (2003).
- “If U is a uniform right module over a right noetherian ring, the unique associated prime of U is called the *assassinator* of U .” K.R. Goodearl, *An Introduction to Noncommutative Noetherian Rings* 102 (2004).

Got that?

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
assassinator as an equivalent of *assassin*: Stage 1

assassination. When does a murder become an assassination? If a political figure is murdered—but not for political reasons or for hire—is it an assassination? The following passage rightly suggests that it is not: “An Egyptian diplomat was shot to death in the parking garage of his Geneva apartment building, authorities said yesterday. The victim was Alaa el-Din Nazmi, the commercial counselor in the Egyptian mission to the United Nations and other international organizations based in Geneva. Police said Nazmi was hit by six bullets. Prosecutors said they were treating the slaying as a *possible assassination*.” “Egyptian Diplomat Shot to Death in Geneva,” *S.F. Chron.*, 15 Nov. 1995, at C1.

Today, the word’s meaning has been broadened beyond political killing. Here’s a good modern definition of *assassination*: “the act of murdering someone (esp. a public figure) by surprise attack, usu. for hire

or for political reasons.” The word also appears figuratively in the sense “malicious ruining or destruction” in the SET PHRASE *character assassination*.

assassinator. See **assassin**.

assault; battery. In popular usage, these two are virtually synonymous. Most people use *assault* in referring to an incident that might begin with a threat and end with hitting and kicking. In fact, most people wouldn’t say that someone had been *assaulted* unless the incident included physical contact. So in the popular mind, *assault* is essentially the same as *battery* (a rarer term).

But in law these terms have precise meanings. Essentially, an *assault* is the use or threat of force that causes the person to whom the force is directed to have a well-founded fear of physical injury or offensive touching. A *battery* is the use of force or violence on another (in the criminal sense), or any repugnant intentional contact with another (in the noncriminal, tort sense).

Shooting a gun just to the side of someone, if that person reasonably feared physical injury, or shooting a blank gun directly at someone, would be an *assault*. Hitting someone with a bullet would make the act a *battery*, even if the shooter never knew about the hit. And in the tort sense, an uninvited kiss by a stranger is considered a *battery*. Cf. **accost**.

assay; essay, v.t. These words, related etymologically, have distinct meanings. *Assay* = to test, to analyze. E.g.: “‘They all but stuck pure *HIV virus* [read *HIV*] in the mosquitoes. They *assayed* a huge variety of mosquitoes at various times in the first few days and found that the virus had been entirely digested.’” Donna Jacobs, “Pests & Pestilence: Why Can’t a Mosquito Transmit AIDS?,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 9 Mar. 1997, at C4 (quoting Dr. Paul Grimstad).

Essay (as a verb), though sometimes used synonymously with *assay*, most frequently takes on the meaning “to attempt; to try to accomplish.” In this sense it is a FORMAL WORD—e.g.: “Caesar, a Durham native, played a church singer in the original production, but she has *essayed* the role of the meddling Mother Winters in the subsequent productions.” Bill Morrison, “Blessed Assurance: Caesar Shines,” *News & Observer* (Raleigh), 2 Mar. 1997, at G1. This usage is really an ARCHAISM; *attempt* or *try* serves better in ordinary contexts. Cf. **endeavor**.

assemblage; assembly. An *assemblage* is an unorganized group of people or things. An *assembly* is a group of people organized and united for some common purpose.

assent; consent. The traditional distinction is that *assent* denotes agreement with an opinion, while *consent* denotes permission to let something happen. *Assent* contains a touch more enthusiasm and support than *consent*, which suggests mere acquiescence. Today *assent* is becoming less and less

common; it survives mostly in formal uses <with the override vote, the bill became law without the President's assent>.

For the confusion of *assent* with *ascent*, see **ascent (B)**.

assert; exert. Writers sometimes confuse these quite different words. *Assert* = (1) to state with force and confidence <they asserted that the world is flat>; (2) to exercise or demonstrate (authority, a right, a privilege, etc.) <the committee never fully asserted its authority>; or (3) to behave or speak forcefully <instead of backing down, assert yourself in the debate>. *Exert* = (1) to put forth or apply (energy, force, strength, etc.) to something <the team members exerted all their strength and won the tug-of-war>; or (2) to make a physical or mental effort <you can't possibly write well without exerting yourself>.

When it comes to asserting authority or asserting a right—that is, sense 2 of *assert*—some writers use *exert*. This seems to be the main context in which WORD-SWAPPING occurs between the words—e.g.:

- “Engine builders will *exert* [read *assert*] executive privilege, making sure the session is nothing more than a light workout.” Don Coble, “One-Engine Rule Faces Test,” *Augusta Chron.*, 25 May 2002, at C3.
- “The Ojibwe [tribe members] were simply *exerting* [read *asserting*] their rights under a treaty between the nation and the United States government.” Steve Arney, “Ojibwe Indian Spreads Culture, Tradition,” *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Ill.), 8 Feb. 2003, at D1.
- “U.S. forces arrested . . . an [Iraqi] exile who named himself Baghdad's mayor. U.S. Central Command accused him of *exerting* [read *asserting*] authority he didn't have.” “Baghdad ‘Mayor’ Held,” *Chicago Trib.*, 28 Apr. 2003, at 3.

Yet the modern idiom of *asserting authority* was not set until the 1860s. Before that time, *exerting authority* was predominant in English prose.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
exert misused for *assert*: Stage 1

assertable. So spelled in ordinary contexts—not *assertible* (except in philosophy). See -ABLE (A).

2017 ratio in print (*assertable* against
vs. **assertible* against): 146:1

assertedly. See -EDLY.

assertor, not **asserter*, is the usual agent noun corresponding to the verb *assert*. See -ER (A).

Current ratio in print (*assertor* vs. **asserter*): 1.1:1

assess. See **access**, vb. (B).

asseverate. See **aver** (A).

assignation. See **assignment**.

***assigner.** See **assignor**.

assignment; assignation. *Assignment* = (1) a task or job; (2) the transfer of property; (3) the property so transferred; or (4) the legal document that brings about the transfer.

Assignation = (1) an assignment; (2) a tryst; or (3) an assignee (meaning “one to whom property rights or powers are transferred”). Because *assignation* is a NEEDLESS VARIANT of *assignment* in sense 1 and of *assignee* in sense 3, it should be confined to sense 2, in which it is truly useful <despite precautions, a pregnancy resulted from their middle-of-the-night assignation>. The word is pronounced /a-sig-**nay**-shən/—not /ə-sīn-**ay**-shən/.

assignor; *assigner. The second has long been said to be the general term, and the first to be the legal spelling (as the correlative of *assignee*). In fact, though, the -or spelling has always predominated in all varieties of English. See -ER (A).

Current ratio in print (*assignor* vs. **assigner*): 12:1

assimilable. So spelled—not **assimilatable*. See -ABLE (D) & -ATABLE.

Current ratio in print (*assimilable*
vs. **assimilatable*): 78:1

assimilative; *assimilatory. Meaning “of, relating to, or involving assimilation,” *assimilative* has been the standard form since introduced in the 1300s. **Assimilatory*, an innovation from the mid-1800s, is a variant.

Current ratio in print (*assimilative*
vs. **assimilatory*): 2.4:1

assist, n., has come into the language through basketball and ice-hockey lingo <with an assist from her editors>. For now, it remains a CASUALISM.

assist, v.t., is genuinely useful in a few phrases in which *help* simply wouldn't do <assisted reproductive technology> <physician-assisted suicide>. But when *help* suffices, it's the better choice—e.g.:

- “The Trumbull officer . . . could have stopped the chase and *assisted* [read *helped*] the innocent victims of the crash, he said.” Michael Remez, “Police Chases,” *Hartford Courant*, 9 Dec. 1997, at A1.
- “Arvedson . . . slumped to the ice, where he stayed for about three minutes before being *assisted* [read *helped*] to the locker room.” “Salo Makes a Point for Islanders,” *Star-Ledger* (Newark), 17 Dec. 1997, Sports §, at 7.

Assist is even worse when it's buried in a phrase such as *be of assistance* to or *provide assistance* to. Once again, try *help* instead—e.g.: “Phone lines opened early this year to *provide assistance* to [read *help*] people in need.” Mary Sansom, “Director Seeks Support to Open Tri-County Mission,” *Charleston Gaz.* (W. Va.), 18 Jan. 1995, Metro West Kanawha §, at 5. See ZOMBIE NOUNS.

assisted suicide. See **euthanasia (B)**.

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Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

***associate together** is a REDUNDANCY. **Associate together in groups* is even worse. Cf. ***congregate together**.

associational; associative. These words are virtual synonyms ('of, relating to, or characterized by association'). *Associative* is now somewhat more common, especially in contexts involving psychology and mathematics <associative memory>. But *associational* also appears with some frequency, especially in legal contexts <associational rights>.

ASSONANCE. See ALLITERATION.

assuage (= to make less painful or severe) is pronounced /ə-swayj/—not /ə-swayzh/ or (worse) /ə-swahzh/.

as such. In this phrase, *such* is a pronoun requiring an antecedent—e.g.:

- "There has been an abundance of English slang from at least the sixteenth century to the present time, but it has always been recognized *as such* [i.e., as slang], and has at no time been supposed to be anything but a minor part of the English language." Sir William Craigie, "Our American English Marches Onward," *N.Y. Times*, 18 Aug. 1935, § 7, at 15.
- "I saw in this a threat to the British way of life, but I saw also that my seeing it *as such* [i.e., as a threat] was nonsense." Anthony Burgess, *A Mouthful of Air* 20 (1992).
- "Jake Coker was the starter even if Saban didn't anoint him *as such*." "Tide Buzz," *Huntsville Times* (Ala.), 11 Sept. 2015, at B6. (*Starter* is the antecedent of *such*.)
- "We recognize that parents are the ultimate arbiters of their children's education, and *as such*, should be permitted to pull their children out of certain lessons in the curriculum." "Pulling Out Is Not the Answer," *Nat'l Post* (Can.), 11 Sept. 2015, at A8. (*Arbiters* is the antecedent of *such*.)

Sometimes the phrase causes an ambiguity when the referent isn't clear. When that is so, substituting *in principle* or some like phrase is recommended—e.g.: "There could, accordingly, be no grounded objection to the existence of images *as such*." Arthur C. Danto, "Likeness and Presence," *New Republic*, 7 Nov. 1994, at 43. (A possible revision: *There could, accordingly, be no objection in principle to the existence of images*.)

Also, some writers faddishly use *as such* as if it meant "thus" or "therefore"—e.g.: "These efforts represent a fundamental change in the way responsibility is spread throughout the organization, what practices and behaviors are nurtured and rewarded, and how care will be provided in the future. *As such*, [delete phrase] the change will not occur immediately nor easily." Kenneth W. Kizer et al., "The Veterans Healthcare System," *Hosp. & Health Servs. Admin.*, 22 Sept. 1997, at 283. This misuse is perhaps a SLIPSHOD EXTENSION from correct sentences such as the following, in which *icon* is the antecedent of *such*, but the sentence could be misread in such a way that *as such* would mean "therefore": "She will become an icon; *as such*, she will be a role model for years to come." Letter of Ruth W. Junk, "It Can Be OK to Imitate, but Not Deify, Good People," *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Ill.), 11 Sept. 1997, at A12.

Obviously, this phrase requires much care.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
as such for *therefore*: Stage 2

assume; presume. *Assume* means (1) to take upon oneself; to take over duties and responsibilities; or (2) to take for granted or without proof. *Presume* means (1) to take for granted or without proof; or (2) to undertake without permission. So one may *assume* a rank or office or authority by right, but another may *presume* to exercise the privileges of a rank, office, or authority despite a lack of right. *Presume* often carries a sense of arrogance, of going too far in acting without justification—hence the adjective *presumptuous*.

assuming. For *assuming* as an acceptable dangling modifier, see DANGLERS (E).

assumption; presumption. The connotative distinction between these words is that *presumptions* are more strongly inferential and more probably authoritative than mere *assumptions*, which are usually more hypothetical. *Presumptions* may lead to decisions, while *assumptions* typically don't.

Assumptive is pretentious for either *assumed* <assumptive beliefs> or *assuming* or *presumptuous* <an assumptive character>.

As for adverbs, always use the common forms derived from *presume*—that is, *presumably* (= I presume, it is to be presumed) or *presumptively* (= there is a presumption that). Stay away from **assumedly* and **assumptively*.

assurance. See **insurance** (A).

assure; ensure; insure. **A. Assure for ensure.** A person *assures* (makes promises to, convinces) other people <our hosts assured us that we would have comfortable rooms>; a person *ensures* (makes certain) that things occur or that events take place <our hosts ensured that we had comfortable rooms>. To put it a little technically, if the verb is in the active voice, a predicate beginning with *that* should be introduced by the verb *ensure*.

Assure takes a personal object—e.g.: "Davis assured residents they can help decide which trees are to be cut." Bruce Schultz, "Cajundome Neighbors Air Problems," *Advocate* (Baton Rouge), 12 Sept. 1997, at B3.

In word frequency since 1900 (when the phrases came into common use), *ensure that* greatly outstrips **assure that*. But the discommended usage crops up in other locations as well—e.g.: "That would defeat the entire purpose of the legislation, which is to assure [read *ensure*] public perception of total independence." William Safire, "See-Nothing Congress," *N.Y. Times*, 23 June 1994, at A15. Theodore Bernstein doesn't discuss this point in *The Careful Writer*, but here's a less-than-careful usage: "What good writing can do . . . is to assure [read *ensure*] that the writer is really in communication with the reader, that he

is delivering his message unmistakably and, perhaps, excellently. When that happens, the reader takes satisfaction in the reading and the writer takes joy in the writing.” Theodore M. Bernstein, *The Careful Writer* vii (1965).

The following sentences illustrate the correct use of *ensure*:

- “There used to be an Eastern Idaho Sailing Association with more than 100 people, but the members’ independent-minded personalities eventually *ensured* its demise.” Paul Menser, “Wadsworth Set Sail into Yachting Business in 1940,” *Idaho Falls Post Register*, 24 Mar. 1997, at A9.
- “The suspension of talks until midmorning *ensured* another gridlocked rush-hour throughout the San Francisco Bay area.” “Transit Talks Called Off After Marathon Session,” *Buffalo News*, 11 Sept. 1997, at A11.
- “The volcano’s shieldlike shape *ensures* that the air at the summit is . . . cool and clear.” “Hawaii: Under the Volcano,” *Economist*, 12 Sept. 2015, at 70.

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assure for *ensure*: Stage 3

Current ratio in print (*to ensure that* vs. **to assure that*): 32:1

B. *Insure* and *ensure*. *Insure* is best restricted to financial contexts involving indemnification; it should refer to what insurance companies do. *Ensure* should be used in all other senses of the word. Intransitively, *insure* is commonly followed by the preposition *against* <insure against loss>; it may also be used transitively <insure one’s valuables>. Following is a commonplace peccadillo: “He has an agenda, but with Clinton, he’s reached the top and is going to *insure* [read *ensure*] that he serves his master,” says an observer.” “The Young Master of the White House,” *Time*, 4 Apr. 1994, at 25.

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insure for *ensure*: Stage 3

Current ratio in print (*ensure that* vs. *insure that*): 65:1

C. Corresponding Nouns. See **insurance (A).**

assurer; *assuror. The *-er* spelling, which has predominated since the late 1800s, is standard. See **-ER (A).**

Current ratio in print (*assurer* vs. **assuror*): 20:1

-ASTER. See **DIMINUTIVES (A).**

asterisk /as-tə-risk/. The mispronunciation of this word, as if it had no second *s*, is well known. (See **PRO-NUNCIATION (B).**) Not so well known are the resulting misspellings of the word. The most common one is **asterick*—e.g.:

- “Speaking of Khannouchi, when he and Belgian Eddy Hellebuyck become U.S. citizens this fall, will the critics of American distance running put *astericks* [read *asterisks*] next to their performances . . . ?” Steve Nearman,

“Chicago, New York Battle for Top Marathon Runners,” *Wash. Times*, 9 Aug. 1998, at C8.

- “Entries marked with the *asterick* [read *asterisk*] (*) did not run in the Sebastian River edition.” “Crimewatch,” *Fla. Today*, 4 May 1999, at B4.
- “*Astericks* [read *Asterisks*] appear for schools that are new and did not have test results from last year.” “Reading the Charts,” *San Diego Union-Trib.*, 28 July 1999, at A20.

Another misspelling, **asterik*, is nearly as common—e.g.: “The most memorable score in the 80-year history of the NFL—Chicago 73, Washington 0 in the 1940 championship game—always has deserved an exclamation point. Now it has got an *asterik* [read *asterisk*].” Bob Broeg, “59 Years Later, Baugh Casts Doubt on Bears’ Rout,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 5 Dec. 1999, at D1.

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1. **asterisk* for *asterisk*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*asterisk* vs. **asterick* vs. **asterik*): 2,049:1.4:1

2. *asterisk* pronounced like **asterick*: Stage 2

as . . . than. See **as . . . as (E).**

as the case may be. See **case (A).**

asthma /az-mə/. The *-th-* is silent.

as though. See **as if.**

astigmatism (= an uneven curvature of the cornea; a defect in a lens) is often incorrectly written (and pronounced) *stigmatism*—which, according to the *OED*, is actually a rare antonym of *astigmatism*. Sometimes the word is mistaken for a singular count noun (**a stigmatism* instead of *astigmatism*), as in the second and third examples below—e.g.:

- “Singh, the 1983 and 1995 Buick winner, had laser eye surgery last week to correct slight *stigmatism* [read *astigmatism*] and nearsightedness.” John Nicholson, “Major Preparation Makes Tiger Woods Pass on Buick Open,” *Nat’l Post*, 8 June 2000, at B15.
- “He has tried contacts, too, but that didn’t work out, primarily due to *a stigmatism* [read *astigmatism*] on his right eye.” Tim Buckley, “Polynice Eyes Better Shooting,” *Deseret News* (Salt Lake City), 5 Oct. 2000, at D1.
- “One son was in special education classes, the mom was suffering from *a stigmatism* [read *astigmatism*], another son was juggling college and work to help support the family.” Piper Nichole, *The For Sale by Owner Handbook* 223 (2005).

For further misuse of *stigmatism*, see **stigma (B).**

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**a stigmatism* for *astigmatism*: Stage 1

as to. A. Defensible Uses. First, it must be said that *as to* is an all-purpose preposition to be avoided whenever a more specific preposition will do. But *as to* isn’t always indefensible. The phrase is most justifiable when introducing something previously mentioned only cursorily: “As to concerns the fair might lose on-track business if it offered its signal to the OTBs, [Dun

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Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

said]: ‘I figured we were going to lose the handle either way.’” Jay Burns, “Farmington Takes Step Forward, Using OTB for New Revenue,” *Portland Press Herald*, 7 Sept. 1997, at D8. In beginning sentences this way, *as to* is equivalent to the more colloquial *as for*. In effect, the phrase is a passable shorthand form of *regarding*, *with regard to*, or *on the question of*.

The phrase is also (minimally) defensible when used for *about*, but that word is stylistically preferable in most contexts. *As to* smells of JARGON—e.g.:

- “The bill carries no presumptions *as to* [read *about*] the effect of incorporation.” “Citizens and Swift Creek,” *News & Observer* (Raleigh), 17 Mar. 1997, at A9.
- “Reasonable people may disagree *as to* [read *about*] the importance of the school system’s efforts to prevent and detect thefts in the schools.” Roy D. Nichols Jr., “Searches at Granby Are ‘Reasonable,’” *Virginian-Pilot & Ledger Star* (Norfolk), 6 Sept. 1997, at B8.

B. Poor Uses. The main problem with *as to* is that it doesn’t clearly establish syntactic or conceptual relationships, so it can hamper comprehensibility. In each of the following examples, another preposition would more directly and forcefully express the thought:

- **For *about*:** “There’s no rule *as to* [read *about*] how long you have to wait before you can enjoy your creation.” Dan Macdonald, “At-Home Winemaking,” *Fla. Times-Union*, 14 Aug. 1997, at E6.
- **For *on*:** “It is always possible that your neighbor is not aware of how disturbing his or her behavior is and that he or she can be more sensitive to your concerns, or you can agree *as to* [read *on*] certain time *parameters* [read *limits*] or (if music is the culprit) what is an acceptable volume level.” Robert Griswold et al., “What to Do When Noise Becomes Intolerable,” *San Diego Union-Trib.*, 24 Aug. 1997, at H6. (On the use of *parameters* in the second example, see **parameters**.)
- **For *of*:** “The same is true *as to* [read *of*] other cases finding for leaders by applying the regulation.” Robert P. Simons, “Environmental Lender Liability Rule Vacated,” *Bankr. Ct. Decisions*, 24 Mar. 1994, at 11.
- **For *for*:** “There is no change in the prior IRA rules with regard to an individual’s participation in other qualifying retirement plans. *As such* [read *Therefore*], the rules remain the same *as to* [read *for*] the maximum amount of adjusted gross income a taxpayer can have before the IRA deduction begins to phase out.” George W. Smith III, “New Law Offers Businesses, Workers Retirement Options,” *Gaz. Telegraph* (Colo. Springs), 12 Mar. 1997, at D1. (On the use of *as such* in that sentence, see **as such**.)
- **For *by* or *at*:** “Some people are a little surprised *as to* [read *by* or *at*] how quickly Veniard has gotten to his present level.” Peter Zellen, “Bolles Grad Proves He Can Pitch in Pros,” *Fla. Times-Union*, 28 June 1997, at 9.
- **For *into*:** “During a trip to the Mars Pathfinder Mission Control Center in Pasadena this summer, House Aeronautics and Space Subcommittee member Sheila Jackson-Lee, D-Texas, inquired *as to* [read *into*] whether the Pathfinder Mission had taken pictures of the American flag planted by Neil Armstrong in 1969.” Leah Gar-chik, “Getting There,” *S.F. Chron.*, 15 Sept. 1997, at E10. (Another wording, *asked whether*, would work even better in that sentence.)
- **Superfluous:** “Another equally important question is *as to* [delete *as to*] whether technical efficiency

improvements due to economic reforms for each province over the periods were statistically important.” K.P. Kalirajan Shiji Zhao, “Did the Technical Efficiency of State Enterprises Improve with the Same Speed in All Provinces of China?,” *Applied Econ.*, 1 Mar. 1997, at 269. / “With the season down to a dozen games, it’s an open question *as to* [delete *as to*] whether Sele would have been placed at risk if he’d been asked to throw a couple of dozen more pitches.” Gordon Edes, “Red Sox Called Out,” *Boston Globe*, 17 Sept. 1997, at D3. See **question whether & whether** (B).

astrologer (= someone who purports to use the positions and movements of stars to tell people about their character, life, or future), an Anglo-Latin term dating from the 1300s, has always been the predominant form. **Astrologist* is a variant.

Current ratio in print (*astrologer* vs. **astrologist*): 38:1

as was. See **as is**.

as well. When used at the beginning of a sentence, this phrase has traditionally been considered poor usage. But in Canada it’s standard as an equivalent of *Also*, . . . or *In addition*, . . . —or more likely the sentence-starting *And*. (See **and** (A).) Each of the following examples comes from a Canadian publication. In AmE they would be edited as shown in the brackets:

- “*As well*, [read *And*] people would have to work longer to qualify for UI [unemployment insurance].” Derek Ferguson, “‘Attack’ on Jobless Riles Labor Chief,” *Toronto Star*, 16 Apr. 1996, at A5.
- “*As well* [read *Also*], people can place a sticker announcing their donor consent on their driver’s license at the time of renewal or on their Care Card.” Pamela Fayerman, “\$250,000 TV Ad Blitz Aims to Get More People Donating Organs,” *Vancouver Sun*, 22 Apr. 1997, at B4.
- “*As well*, [read *And*] many of today’s workers are stashing money in RRSPs, an estimated \$6.5 billion this year alone.” Mary Janigan, “Making the Middle Class Pay,” *Maclean’s*, 29 Sept. 1997, at 42.

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as well as a sentence-starter
(outside Canada): Stage 2

Current ratio in print (capitalized *Also*
vs. capitalized *As well*): 14:1

as well as. See **SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT** (E).

as well as or better than; *as well or better than. Some writers—a slight majority even, judging from the evidence of big data—illogically leave out *as after well*—e.g.:

- “Women would write in detail why they were working *as well or better than* [read *as well as or better than*] their male counterparts.” Simon Hoggart, “All Present and Incorrect,” *Observer Sunday*, 15 Dec. 1991, at 37, 38.
- “The second worry is whether Tennes can do *as well or better than* [read *as well as or better than*] the model.”

Robert Barker, "A New Fund Rides the Big Mo," *Business-Week*, 1 July 2002, at 134.

Cf. as good as or better than & as much as or more than. See CANNIBALISM & ILLOGIC (B).

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*as well or better than for
as well as or better than: Stage 3

***as yet; *as of yet.** These are both invariably inferior to *yet* alone, *still*, *thus far*, or some other equivalent—e.g.:

- "Seven years ago, a woman, *not as yet* [read *not yet*] identified, died in a stream in Monroe, Clarion County," "Probe of 1990 Death Goes On," *Pitt. Post-Gaz.*, 25 July 1997, at B3.
- "From the American point of view, at least, there are *as yet* [read *still*, or simply delete *as yet*] relatively few signs that a worrisome deflation cycle is dawning." Tom Petrino, "Could Deflation Be the Next Bogeyman to Threaten the U.S. Economy?," *Buffalo News*, 25 Aug. 1997, at C2.
- "There are no plans *as yet* [read *yet*] to develop major Java products." Richard Evans, "Going Soft?," *Barron's*, 15 Sept. 1997, at 33.

*As of yet is a vulgarity. Cf. **as of (B)** & ***but yet**.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX

1. *as yet* for *yet*: Stage 3
Current ratio in print (*not yet* vs. **not as yet*): 48:1
2. *as of yet* for *yet*: Stage 2
Current ratio in print (*not yet* vs. **not as of yet*): 4,853:1

asylee. See PORTMANTEAU WORDS.

asymmetric; asymmetrical. See **symmetrical**.

-ATABLE does not generally appear other than in *-able* adjectives derived from two-syllable verbs (e.g., *create*, *vacate*). It does so in those cases because the *-able* adjectives would be unrecognizable. H.W. Fowler notes some long exceptions to the general rule (*inculcatable*, *inculpatable*, *incubatable*), and states his standard: "The practice should be to use *-atable* where the shorter form is felt to be out of the question" (*FMEUI* at 36). Other examples with which the shorter form is impracticable are *anticipatable*, *translatable*, and *infiltratable* (so that *infiltrable* not be thought to be derived from *infilter* [= to sift or filter in] rather than from *infiltrate*).

The following words, which occur with some frequency, are better than the *-atable* forms:

abbreviable	alleviable	corroborable
abdicable	allocable	cultivable
abrogable	ameliorable	delegable
accommodable	annihilable	delineable
accumulable	appreciable	demonstrable
activable	appropriable	detonable
administrable	arbitrable	differentiable
adulterable	articulable	eradicable
affiliable	calculable	evacuable
aggregable	communicable	evaluable
agitable	compensable	expropriable
alienable	confiscable	generable

indicable	medicable	propagable
inebriable	navigable	regulable
inextirpable	obligable	replicable
inextricable	obviable	repudiable
infatuable	operable	segregable
infuriable	originable	separable
invalidable	participable	subjugable
investigable	penetrable	terminable
isolable	perpetrable	vindicable
litigable	perpetuable	violable
manipulable	predicable	vitiable

At least one pair distinguished by the two suffixes has undergone DIFFERENTIATION. *Estimable* = worthy of esteem; *estimatable* = capable of being estimated.

at about. See **about (D)**.

at all events. See **in any event**.

at arm's length. See **arm's-length**.

at fault; in fault. Today, *at fault* is commonly used in the sense "responsible for a wrong committed; blame-worthy" <in a divorce, it's of little value to try to determine which spouse is more at fault>. An American critic once wrote that "hunting dogs which lose the scent are said to be *at fault*". Hence the phrase means perplexed, puzzled." He added that *in fault* means "in error, mistaken," with this example: "No certified public accountant should be *in fault*." Clarence Stratton, *Handbook of English* 24, 158 (1940). The phrase is virtually never used for *perplexed* or *puzzled* anymore.

Current ratio in print (*at fault* vs. *in fault*): 7:1

atheist; agnostic; unbeliever; nonbeliever; free-thinker. These terms denote different levels of religious skepticism. An *atheist* denies the existence of God altogether. An *agnostic* thinks a person cannot know for sure—in other words, God's existence cannot be proved or disproved. An *unbeliever* or *nonbeliever* might believe in God but not in a particular religion. Finally, a *freethinker* might belong to a particular religion but refuse to accept that religion's dogmas as incompatible with reason. See **disbelief**.

atheroma (= a fatty deposit within the body, esp. within an artery), a Latin/Greek LOANWORD dating in English from the mid-1800s in this sense, has two plurals: the homegrown *atheromas* and the Greek-formed *atheromata*. Although the latter predominated in medical journals through most of the 1960s, the homegrown plural has strongly predominated since 1970. See PLURALS (B).

Current ratio in print (*atheromas* vs. *atheromata*): 4:1

athlete has two syllables /ath-leet/, not three /ath-ə-leet/. See PRONUNCIATION (B). Cf. -ATHLON.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX

athlete pronounced with three syllables: Stage 2

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX (For the full key, see front matter pp. xxv–xxvi.)

Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

-ATHLON. This suffix, from the Greek word for “contest,” has two syllables. Avoid adding an *a* when spelling it and slipping in an epenthetic schwa when pronouncing it. For example, *triathlon* (an athletic contest featuring swimming, running, and bicycle races) is pronounced /tri-**ath**-lon/, not /tri-**ath**-ə-lon/. Likewise with *pentathlon* (swimming, running, steeplechase, fencing, and shooting) and *decathlon* (three races of varying distances plus high hurdles and six field events). See PRONUNCIATION (B). Cf. **athlete**.

ATM machine. For this redundant initialism, see ABBREVIATIONS (B).

at most; at the most. Both wordings convey that one thinks an amount being mentioned couldn’t be any larger <ten minutes at most> <ten minutes at the most>. The version without the definite article has generally predominated since the phrases became widespread in the 1700s, but both are fully idiomatic—and the definite article is necessary in the emphatic rendering *at the very most*.

Current ratio in print (*three days at most*
vs. *three days at the most*): 1.2:1

atomic; atom, adj. These words should generally be confined to their natural parts of speech: *atomic* as an adjective and *atom* as a noun. But *atom* is sometimes used adjectivally, especially in the phrase *atom bomb*.

Current ratio in print (*atomic bomb*
vs. *atom bomb*): 4:1

at present. See **at the present time**.

atrium (= [1] a high open space within a building of more than one story; or [2] either of two spaces at the top of the heart for pushing blood into the ventricles), a Latin LOANWORD dating in English from the late 1500s, has two plurals: the Latinate *atria* and the homegrown *atriums*. *Atria* has always been strongly predominant. See PLURALS (B).

Current ratio in print (*two atria*
vs. *two atriums*): 20:1

Current ratio in print (*large atria*
vs. *large atriums*): 3:1

atrocious; atrocious. See ESTRANGED SIBLINGS.

***attached hereto.** This phrase, symptomatic of 20th-century COMMERCIALESE and LEGALESE, is normally redundant. Delete *hereto*.

attain; obtain. These two—both FORMAL WORDS—are susceptible to WORD-SWAPPING. *Attain* = to achieve, accomplish <she put extraordinary effort into attaining that goal>. *Obtain* = (1) to get, acquire <obtain a license>; or (2) to apply; be prevalent <several unusual customs obtain in that village>.

Attain, in another sense, is also a FORMAL WORD for “to reach (an age).” It’s often simplifiable—e.g.: “Under prior law, if neither you nor your wife had *attained* [read *reached*] the age of 55 before you sold your house, the amount by which the adjusted sale

price of your old house exceeded the purchase price of your new house would have been subject to the federal income tax.” Walter Bithell, “New Tax Laws Will Help Parents Afford High Costs of College,” *Idaho Statesman* (Boise), 31 Aug. 1997, at E4.

Occasionally—as a MALAPROPISM—*obtain* is misused for *attain*. E.g.: “The same exception . . . applies if U.S. residency or citizenship is renounced before *obtaining* [read *attaining*] age 18.” Don W. Llewellyn, “Income and Transfer Tax Planning for Nonresident Aliens Holding or Disposing of U.S. Investment Assets,” *Tax Mgmt. Int’l J.*, 11 Oct. 1996, at 643.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX

obtain misused for *attain*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*attaining the age of*
vs. **obtaining the age of*): 79:1

attempt. For phrasing such as *was attempted to be done*, see PASSIVE VOICE (B).

attend. See **tend**.

***attendee.** See -EE.

at the back of. See **back of**.

at the most. See **at most**.

at the present time; at this moment in time; at this time; at present. These are inferior to *now*, *nowadays*, *today*, or *currently*. On the use of *presently* in this sense, see **presently**. See also **at this time**.

at the time (that); at the time (when). These phrases are almost invariably verbose for *when*. An exception occurs when another *when*-clause is nearby <at the time it happened, when the moon had not yet risen, nobody was on the beach>.

at this juncture. See **juncture**.

at this moment in time. See **at the present time**.

at this time. This phrase often smacks of waffling OFFICIALESE, especially when the phrase comes at a SENTENCE END—e.g.: “‘We don’t have any comments *at this time*,’ said Disney spokesman Ken Green. . . . ‘Our revenues and profits are record-setting *at this time*,’ Mr. Green said.” Christine Wicker, “Giant Against Giant,” *Dallas Morning News*, 14 June 1997, at G1. The more natural wording would be something like this: *We don’t have any comments right now. Our revenues and profits are currently setting records.* Worse, of course, is *at this point in time*. See **at the present time**.

attorney. See **lawyer**.

attorney general. Pl. *attorneys general* (both AmE and BrE)—though *attorney-generals* occurs also in BrE. See PLURALS (G) & POSTPOSITIVE ADJECTIVES.

Current ratio in print (*attorneys general*
vs. *attorney generals* in World Englishes): 8:1

Current ratio in print (*attorneys general*
vs. *attorney-generals* in AmE): 185:1

Current ratio in print (*attorneys-general*
vs. *attorney-generals* in BrE): 4:1

attractor (= someone or something that attracts) has been the predominant spelling since the term was first used in the 1600s. **Attracter* is a variant. See -ER (A).

Current ratio in print (*attractor*
vs. **attracter*): 775:1

attribute, n.; **attribution**. An *attribution* /a-trə-byoo-shən/ is the act or an instance of ascribing a characteristic, quality, or source. An *attribute* /a-trə-byoot/ is a characteristic or quality so ascribed.

attribute, v.t. (= to credit [something] as resulting from a specified cause; to ascribe), is sometimes confused with *contribute* (= to play a significant part in producing something). The WORD-SWAPPING blunder is especially common among sportswriters—e.g.:

- “The Buccaneers made 22 percent of their shots in the first half and had 17 turnovers at halftime. Most of that can be *contributed* [read *attributed*] to Kansas’ defense.” Shannon Rose, “Kansas Freshman Pierce Scores 30 Points in Rout,” *Kansas City Star*, 5 Jan. 1996, at D1.
- “Most of the Broncos’ troubles this year can be *contributed* [read *attributed*] to their defense.” Bert Sahlberg, “Flush with Inspiration,” *Lewiston Morning Trib.* (Idaho), 23 Nov. 1996, at B1.

See MALAPROPISMS. For a brief comment on the misuse of *accredit* for *attribute*, see **accredit**.

The verb is pronounced /ə-**tri**-byoot/.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
contribute misused for *attribute*: Stage 1

attribution. See **attribute**, n.

attributive is the standard term. **Attributory* is a variant.

Current ratio in print (*attributive*
vs. **attributory*): 979:1

attributor (= someone who attributes or ascribes) has long been the predominant spelling. **Attributer* is a variant. See -ER (A).

Current ratio in print (*attributor*
vs. **attributer*): 5:1

at which time is a phrase that can almost always be improved, either by substituting *when* or by reworking the sentence—e.g.:

- “The letter says patients reported the incidents on April 16, *at which time* Luster was placed on administrative leave from his psychiatric technician position before he was fired [the next month].” Tammie Smith, “Mental Health Workers Fired After Sex Claims,” *Tennessean*, 7 Aug. 1997, at B1. (A possible revision: *The letter says that when patients reported the incidents on April 16, Luster was placed on administrative leave from his position as psychiatric technician. The following month, he was fired.*)
- “Lester operated the company until he was 84 years old, *at which time* [read *when*], on January 1, 1979, he sold

the business to Space Center, Inc. of St. Paul.” “Robert R. Lester” (obit.), *Kansas City Star*, 14 Sept. 1997, at B9.

- “The lasers trained on the sails help push it to a transition point, *at which time* the craft essentially coasts all the way to the next star.” Nick Wilson, “Cal Poly Professor Gets Grant to Build Interstellar Spacecraft,” *Tribune* (San Luis Obispo, Cal.), 11 Sept. 2015, Local News §. (A possible revision: *The lasers trained on the sails help push it to a transition point; from there the craft essentially coasts all the way to the next star.*)

at your service. See HIERARCHICAL EXPRESSIONS.

atypical; ***untypical**. *Atypical* has been the standard term since the late 1800s. (Before that time, neither term was common.) **Untypical* is a variant.

Current ratio in print (*atypical*
vs. **untypical*): 24:1

***auctorial**. See **authorial**.

auditorium. Pl. *auditoriums*—preferably not **auditoria*. See PLURALS (B).

Current ratio in print (*auditoriums*
vs. **auditoria*): 3:1

au fond. See **à fond**.

auger. See **augur** (A).

aught. **A. Generally**. *Aught* (= [1] anything; or [2] all) is an ARCHAISM in rapid decline. Today it is generally restricted to BrE, and not even particularly common there—e.g.: “For *aught* I see they adjust themselves to their stations with all proper humility.” Fintan O’Toole, “Race Issue Reflects Shameful Double Standards,” *Irish Times*, 30 May 1997, at 14. In legal contexts, however, the term sometimes surfaces in the phrase *for aught that appears*.

B. For nought. By error, a *nought* (= a zero) was widely misconstrued as *an aught*. Thus, *aught* has come—mistakenly—to bear the sense “zero.” One explanation from folk etymology (see ETYMOLOGY (D)) is that, among graduating seniors in 1900, the class of *nought-nought* sounded too negative; the class of *oh-oh* sounded too accident-prone; and the class of *zero-zero* sounded like a bunch of losers. So it became *aught-aught*. E.g.:

- “At the grass roots, a new organization, the National Alumni Forum, is urging its troops to withhold checks from alma mater until she bends her intellectual agenda to terms more favorable to the class of *aught* nine.” Rick Perlstein, “Professional Correctness: Literary Studies and Political Change,” *Nation*, 18 Dec. 1995, at 792.
- “Some old-timers say at the turn of the century, high school graduates were the class of double ‘*aught*.’” Rebecca Simmons, “The Class of ’00 or 2000: What’s It Going to Be?,” *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, 10 Nov. 1996, at E1.
- “Twenty *aught* six . . . isn’t that how they said it a century ago?” Jeff Metcalfe, “Class of ’86,” *Ariz. Republic*, 29 Dec. 1996, at F1.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX (For the full key, see front matter pp. xxv–xxvi.)

Stage 1: Rejected. **Stage 2:** Widely shunned. **Stage 3:** Widespread but . . . **Stage 4:** Ubiquitous but . . . **Stage 5:** Fully accepted. Invariably inferior forms marked by asterisk (*). • Ratios represent frequency of prevalent forms vs. variants in current books.

These uses, to the American ear, sound either self-consciously old-fashioned or very British; to the British they just sound old-fashioned. The American way of saying “2006” is not “twenty aught six” but “twenty oh six” or “two thousand six.” For more on *nought*, see **naught**.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
aught in the sense of *nought*: Stage 5

C. Misused for *ought*. Occasionally, *aught* displaces *ought* (= should)—e.g.: “Maradona and Cantona *aught* [read *ought*] to show humility for their failure to live up to superstardom.” Rob Hughes, “Maradona’s Union,” *Int’l Herald Trib.*, 20 Sept. 1995, at 21. See **ought**. Cf. **naught**.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX
aught misused for *ought*: Stage 1

augmenter (= someone or something that increases the value, amount, or effectiveness of something), an agent noun dating from the 1500s, has always been the predominant spelling. **Augmentor* is a variant that was predominant from 1885 to 1947 and also from 1968 to 1998. See -ER (A).

Current ratio in print (*augmenter*
vs. **augmentor*): 7:1

au gratin (= sprinkled with breadcrumbs or grated cheese before being browned) is pronounced /oh **grah**t-ən/ or /oh **grat**-ən/ in AmE. Avoid /aw/ in the first syllable. In BrE, the quasi-French pronunciation /oh grə-**tan**/ was once common but is becoming less so. This GALLICISM has been STANDARD ENGLISH since about 1800.

augur, n. & vb. **A. And *auger***, n. & vb. These are very different words with similar spellings. They are pronounced identically: /aw-gər/. The more common one is *augur*. As a noun, it refers to a soothsayer or fortune-teller—e.g.: “[In ancient Rome], a man called an *augur* was said to be able to tell the future by observing the flight of birds.” “No Ducks, No Glory,” *Wash. Post*, 18 Jan. 2001, at C13. The word appears in Deuteronomy (18:10–12, NRSV): “one who practices divination, or is a soothsayer, or an *augur*, or a sorcerer, or one who casts spells.” As a verb, *augur* means to forebode or presage—most commonly in phrases similar to those in which *bode* appears <augurs well> <augurs ill>. E.g.: “No theatrical spectacle could have been more majestic. It was poignant, it was glorious. And it *augured* war.” Carolly Erickson, *Alexandra: The Last Tsarina* 219 (2001).

Augur refers to a tool with a center shaft and a helical flange, used for boring holes or for moving loose material—e.g.: “His machine roughs up the ice with an *auger*, squirts warm water over the ice and then squeegees that water to leave a smooth-as-glass surface behind the Zamboni.” Nancy Lofholm, “Tres Slick: Zamboni in No-Rink Town,” *Denver Post*, 2 Feb. 2001, at A1. The word also refers to a drill-like tool that rotates to gradually release particles of material such as animal feed—e.g.: “A computer-controlled

system monitors temperatures and an *auger* feeds pellets into the furnace as needed.” John Spears, “Put Another Blade of Grass on the Fire, Dear,” *Toronto Star*, 7 Jan. 2001, at WB5. As a verb, it means to use such a tool. E.g.: “Durst . . . steered his six-rowhead Case 2166 combine through the fields and *augered* corn into a wagon driven by his father.” Clare Howard, “Watching His Harvest,” *Peoria J. Star*, 30 Sept. 2000, at A1.

Not surprisingly, some writers confuse the two words. Most commonly, *auger* is misused for *augur*—e.g.:

- “The highly partisan vote to begin open-ended impeachment proceedings against President Bill Clinton *augers* [read *augurs*] ill for the United States and for the world that depends upon its stability and leadership.” “Partisan Impeachment Vote,” *Ariz. Daily Star*, 10 Oct. 1998, at A18.
- “The dearth of rainfall that pervades virtually all of the Midlands *augered* [read *augured*] against pheasants and other game birds in several deadly ways.” Charlie Meyers, “Tough Times Are Ahead for Pheasant Hunters,” *Denver Post*, 23 July 2000, at C3. (Note also the clashing words in *dearth of rainfall that pervades*.)
- “Sens. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Russell D. Feingold (D-Wis.) said that the skyrocketing election spending and new Senate allies *auger* [read *augur*] well for at least a ban on soft money.” Alan C. Miller & T. Christian Miller, “America Waits,” *L.A. Times*, 8 Dec. 2000, at A1.

And the reverse error sometimes occurs, especially with the noun (*augur* being misused for *auger*)—e.g.: “Chesapeake Fire Chief R. Stephen Best said most of the barrels recovered were found in one location, near the spot where an *augur* [read *auger*] drilled into a buried drum last fall during excavations.” Robert McCabe, “Officials Find More Waste on City Land,” *Virginian-Pilot* (Norfolk), 31 Jan. 2001, at B1.

LANGUAGE-CHANGE INDEX

1. *auger* misused for *augur*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*augurs well*
vs. **augers well*): 9:1

2. *augur* misused for *auger*: Stage 1

Current ratio in print (*soil auger*
vs. **soil augur*): 25:1

B. And *augury*, n. An *augury* is an omen, portent, or indication of the future; or it can refer to the art of reading omens and the like. *Augur* is to *augury* as *soothsayer* is to *omen*—e.g.:

- “The results were invigorating and fearless, an exciting *augury* for the performances still to come.” Joshua Kosman, “S.F. Symphony Gets Stravinsky ‘Rite,’” *S.F. Chron.*, 14 June 1999, at E1.
- “Unfortunately for Bush, the *auguries* are disquieting: A recession and a fall in the stock market are both overdue.” John O’Sullivan, “Profiting from Recession,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, 26 Dec. 2000, at 33.

The word appears much more commonly in BrE than in AmE. But writers commonly misuse *augur* for *augury*—e.g.:

- “In what may be an *augur* [read *augury*] of coming events, soon after the ECAR meeting closed Enron Power