

Jan 09 CTLT

Usage Games: Helping Students with Word Choices

Our students often commit usage (sometimes called grammar, but here I will define grammar as the description of the language) “errors” without knowing that the word choice they have chosen is inappropriate. For example, many readers object to the use of certain words such as *hopefully*, *contact*, *prioritize*, or *eventuate*. Writers also confuse words such as *flaunt* and *flout*. Then there are the questionable uses: would one ever write *past history*, *fun event*, or *irregardless*? We will have some fun discussing how readers and writers make word choice distinctions. This session will provide some entertaining activities for sorting out pesky usage issues and for helping students understand the reasons for usage choices. Participants will have an opportunity to work with the activities and to discuss the importance of various word choices. These activities originated in my Grammar for Writers course, but they also work for graduate students who are teaching courses with required papers or for faculty who hope to help their students avoid stigmatized words and phrases.

See handouts below.

Pet Peeves and “Proper” Usage

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Gilman, E., Ed. *Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary of English Usage*

Aggravate/Irritate Which would you say and why and where?

Ain’t Allowed? What do we think of someone who says this word?

Anxious/Eager Do you make a distinction?

Alright, all right When does spelling change? How do we know?

Altho Same as above...

Ambivalent, ambiguous Can you explain the difference?

Analyzation What would you do to a student who writes this word?

Anywheres What does this word say about social class?

Intransitive verb: approximate Does it matter if one knows what an intransitive verb is?

Astronomical A number or a science?

Author, authoress What is current thinking on the distinction?

Awake, awaken, woke, woken Which is predominant? Does it matter?

Awful What does this word say about the speaker/writer? Does it make a difference?

Back-formation (burgle, donate, enthuse) Do these matter to you? Why?

Because Any rule you know here? Where did you learn it?

Between you and I What reaction do you have when you hear this phrase?

Boughten Store-boughten (who might say this?)

Can, may ??????

Folk-etymology: chaise longue becomes chaise lounge

Americanism: claim Is there any cure for American English?

Bloody, ruddy, blooming And is there any way to understand British English?
Consider collective nouns. Judgement/judgment

Disinformation Why not say propaganda?

Disinterested/uninterested Would you mark this distinction on a paper? Whose?

Double negative What class issues arise here?

Drape A noun or verb? For whom? Class?

Due to the fact that “We tend to see wordiness in someone else’s writing.”

Farther/further ???

Flaunt/flout Easy for whom?

Graduate Transitive or intransitive?

Have got Would you admit to saying it? Why or why not?

Infer/imply Distinction? Would you mark it?

Irregardless Allowed?

Lady Pejoration

Malapropism Bob Lemon will be delegated to the front office.

Mischievous I heard Bill Moyer say “mischee-vee-us” the other night. OK?

Palimpsest From text to time...

The reason is because ???

Spay Class again?

Victual What happens when Latin is forced on English: *victualia*

Welch rabbit/rarebit When people get fussy...

“Is there no Latin word for Tea? Upon my soul, had I but known that, I would have left the vulgar stuff alone.” Hilaire Belloc

“Only presidents, editors, and people with tapeworms have the right to use the right to use the royal ‘we’.” Mark Twain