



American Usage and Style

THE
CONSENSUS

Roy H. Copperud

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Preface

This book revises, brings up to date, and consolidates two earlier ones: *A Dictionary of Usage and Style* and *American Usage: the Consensus*. The first represented my own views on disputed points. The second compared the judgments of the then seven current dictionaries of usage and gave the consensus. The present book also takes this approach, and in addition gives my own views concerning points that have not been taken up elsewhere.

The authorities that were compared for *American Usage: the Consensus* were *The Careful Writer*, by Theodore M. Bernstein; *Current American Usage*, by Margaret M. Bryant; my own *Dictionary of Usage and Style*; *A Dictionary of Contemporary American Usage*, by Bergen and Cornelia Evans; *The ABC of Style*, by Rudolf Flesch; *Modern American Usage*, by Wilson Follett and others; and *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, by H. W. Fowler, Second Edition, revised by Sir Ernest Gowers. To these I have added, for the present work, the two substantial books that have been published on the subject in the meantime: *Encyclopedic Dictionary of English Usage*, by Mager and Mager; and the *Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage*, by William and Mary Morris.

Because the editors of general dictionaries have access to voluminous files on current practice, far transcending anything available to authors of dictionaries of usage, and also take a more impersonal attitude toward disputed points, careful attention has been paid to their views as well. I have consulted the two so-called unabridged American works, *Webster's New International Dictionary*, Third Edition, and the *Random House Dictionary of the English Language*; *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*; the *Standard College Dictionary*; the *American College Dictionary*; *Webster's New World Dictionary*; and the *Oxford English Dictionary*, together with its recent abridgments, such as the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, particularly for differences between British and American usage. Other dictionaries, both general and specialized, and works on grammar have also been compared.

If a single opinion is given in an entry, it is that of all the authorities that took up the point at hand. Dissents are carefully recorded. When it appears to serve a useful purpose, authorities are cited by name. This is particularly true of Fowler. Though that work, the pioneer in this field, is held in deservedly high regard, it should be kept in mind that its views represent British practice, which often diverges from American practice, a fact that the revised edition sometimes explicitly acknowledges. Citations of "Fowler" refer to the revised edition; references to the first edition are specified. Citations of "Webster" refer to the Third

Edition of *Webster's New International*; *Webster's New World* is so identified. "OED" refers to the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Dictionaries of usage often disagree, but they have one quality in common: presumption. It could not be otherwise, for the authors are saying to the reader, "I know best." Yet correct usage, whatever that may be, is not a matter of revealed truth, but oftener than not reflects taste or opinion. Such books cast a wide net. Their judgments cover common errors in grammar, misapprehensions of the meanings of words, and the acceptability of changed meanings, to name their principal concerns. The implication is that the critic is reflecting the preponderance of educated practice. But this is not necessarily so, or there would be more agreement among the authorities.

Great indignation was aroused by the publication of the Third Edition of Webster's New International Dictionary in 1961. It admitted as standard many usages that had been and continue to be widely criticized. The American Heritage Dictionary, published in 1969, was clearly intended as an antidote to Webster. The editors appointed a panel of more than 100 presumed experts—writers, editors, teachers, and officials—to give judgments on disputed points. But the experts divided all the way from 50–5 to 98–2 per cent. In making hundreds of judgments, they were unanimous only once, irrefutably illustrating the principle that even experts cannot agree on usage.

After having written about usage for many years, and having made innumerable comparisons of authorities, I reached the conclusion given earlier: that dictionaries of usage, including my own, reflect presumption above all. I decided that a more useful purpose would be served by comparing the views of these books, and indicating where the weight of opinion lay. But since authorities on usage (all self-appointed, and regarded as authorities only because they have found publishers and audiences for their views) differ, like panelists, it is a fair question whether a consensus of their opinions may not also be suspect. At least they have had the experience of considering thousands of disputed points, and the time to form their own judgments coolly.

By indicating the spread of opinion and the consensus of authorities on disputed points, it is hoped that this book will help the user to make intelligent choices of his own. As in the past, I want to express my appreciation to Jerome H. Walker, now retired as executive editor of the magazine *Editor & Publisher*, who encouraged my early efforts as a word-watcher. I am also indebted to my wife, Mary, who typed the manuscript of this book.

ROY H. COPPERUD

A

a, an. Seven authorities agree that *a*, rather than *an*, should be used before certain words beginning with *h* (notably *hilarious*, *history*, *hotel*, *humble*, *hysterical*, *habitual*, *hallucination*). The test is whether the initial *h* is sounded in pronouncing the word: *a* (not *an*) *historian*, *hotel*, *humble*, etc. Similarly, *a* is required with *unique*, *utopia*, *eulogy*, etc., which begin with a consonant sound. The persistence of usages like *an hotel*, *an humble*, *an historical*, and their appearance in old books, reflect the fact that the initial *hs* formerly were not sounded, or were sounded lightly.

Some exceptions remain in which the *h* is not (and perhaps never was) sounded: *heir*, *honest*, *honor*, *hour*. These of course take *an*. The pronunciation, then, is the key. Not *a \$800 salary*, but *an \$800 salary*; not *a RCA contract*, but *an RCA contract*. The principle governing the choice between *a* and *an* is that *a* precedes consonant sounds and *an* precedes vowel sounds.

Phrases like *a 100 miles* and *a 1,000 tankloads*, sometimes seen in print, overlook the fact that the numbers are read *one hundred*, *one thousand*, not simply *hundred* and *thousand*.

Two critics discourage misplacement of *a*, *an* in such a sentence as "Can anyone suggest more valuable a book?" *a more valuable*. This error seems rare. One critic and *American Heritage* say the article is superfluous in such constructions as *no more striking a triumph* and *no brighter an hour*. See also *the; of a*.

a- Solid as a prefix: *amoral*, *achromatic*, *atonal*, etc.

Abbreviations. It is not good form to abbreviate the month without the date (*last Dec. we went . . .*) or the state without the city (*The factory is in Ala.*). Proper names should not be abbreviated by any but their owners (*Robt.*, *Wm.*). Clipped forms like *Ed* do not take periods. See also *Acronyms; Alphabetical Designations; lb., lbs.; State Descriptives and Abbreviations*.

British usage is practical in omitting the periods after *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, *Dr.*, conforming with Fowler's dictum that abbreviations that begin and end with the same letters as the forms they stand for should be written without periods. This practice, though a labor-saving device, is unknown in the U.S. The Postal Service has adopted a new set of two-letter capitalized abbreviations for states (*CA* for *California*, for example); it remains to be seen whether they will drive out the old

2 abdomen

forms (*Calif.*) in general printed matter. New stylebooks published since by *The New York Times* and the large press associations rejected them in favor of the traditional forms.

Coining alphabetical abbreviations for unfamiliar names (IOELB for International Organizations Employees Loyalty Board) is a bad habit of newspaper writers that only impedes readability. In cases like this, subsequent references should be in the form *the board*, or whatever noun is appropriate. Some critics counsel avoidance of abbreviations entirely for the sake of readability, and there is no doubt that their use is overdone in much published matter.

abdomen. See *belly*.

able. Improper in passive constructions: *able to be melted*, *able to be deciphered*. Preferably *can be melted*, *can be deciphered*.

ability, capacity. Two critics say capacity is innate, ability is acquired. But dictionaries say ability may be either.

abjure, adjure. Sometimes confused; the first means *forswear*, the second *admonish*.

ablutions. Two authorities call the term facetious, and there seems good reason for this. It is indisputably quaint, except in religious connections (i.e., ceremonial washing).

abode. Two critics consider it facetious or pretentious in modern use.

abolishment, abolition. Three authorities prefer the second as the more usual form.

about. Redundant with indications of approximation, as in "The victims were described as about 45 to 50 years old" (omit *about*); "The number of beans in the jar was estimated to be about 6,000"; *estimated at 6,000*. Three authorities, in reference, for example, to blows, approve such expressions as *about the head*; one dissents. The criticism seems captious; the suggested substitute, *on*, does not convey the meaning of "on all sides" or "here and there upon" as *about* does. The consensus is that *about* is standard in such contexts.

about to. See *not about to*.

above. Approved by six authorities in the sense *previously mentioned* or *cited*; disapproved by two. These forms, then, are acceptable: *the statement above*, *the above statement*, *repeating the above*. Those who find this usage objectionable for whatever reason can always resort to *previously mentioned*. Some objectors say that what is referred to as *above* must be on the same page, but this seems captious.

abrasions. See *Technical Terms*.

absent. Strange as it looks, *absent* has become a preposition meaning *in the absence of*; a company president forecast the best year in history for his firm "absent unforeseen events." A *Newsweek* columnist wrote, "But absent a revolution or a towering figure like DeGaulle . . ." And still another *Newsweek* columnist: "A place to ponder Israel's situation, absent peace, is . . ." (The fact that the last two citations came from the same publication illustrates an interesting fact about usage: writers encountering new usages imitate each other. This probably accounts for the use of *on line*, originally a Britishism, in New York and along the Eastern seaboard, displacing *in line*, in reference to a queue: "They were standing on line.") Whether *absent* as a preposition will win any wide acceptance only time will tell. It has found its way into Webster.

Absolute Comparatives. Such comparatives as "the better stores," "older automobiles," are primarily peculiarities of advertising prose; Bryant describes them as "informal standard." They hardly contribute to precise expression; better or older than what? Than stores that are worse or automobiles that are newer, presumably. *Older* is often used as a euphemism in reference to people in avoidance of *old*, which to some sounds too harsh. But of course this is an age of excessive squeamishness and of unmerited preferment, as in referring to janitors as sanitation engineers and to cow colleges as universities. See *Ad Ling*o; *older*; *better*; *Universities*.

Absolute Constructions. Fowler warns against the first comma in such constructions as "The day, having dawned brightly, the weather soon grew dull and cloudy." (The second comma is correct, however.) Flesch makes a blanket criticism of such locutions, and recommends avoiding them entirely by recasting.

Absolutes. For comparison of absolutes, such as *more unique*, *most unique*, etc., see *Comparison 3*.

abysmal, abyssal. Formerly synonyms, but in modern use the first means *deep* in a figurative sense (*abysmal ignorance*) and the second has become a technical term of oceanography.

Academe. Criticized by two authorities as variously pompous or wrong in reference to a school (except for *The Grove of Academe*). But dictionaries validate its wide use in references to the world of higher education. Sometimes used facetiously or scornfully. *Academia* is, for practical purposes, a synonym.

accelerate, exhilarate. Described by two critics as sometimes confused, but such ignorance seems beyond the reach of correction.

accent, accentuate. Two critics agree that *accentuate* now predominates in figurative senses (emphasize, draw attention to: "accentuate the positive") and *accent* in literal senses (stress in speaking or writing: "accent the second syllable") but

4 Accent Marks

say this usage is chiefly British. Evans says that Americans who observe this distinction should reserve *accentuate* for small matters. Dictionaries do not recognize any distinction, treating the words as synonyms.

Accent Marks. Their use has all but disappeared in American English except for newly imported foreign words and some others that have retained them: *passé*. Anyone sophisticated enough to use such terms is unlikely to need advice about them. *Fiancee*, *fiancee*, *protege* and others are often seen without the accents they possess in French, though the accents are generally retained in dictionaries. Careful writers are referred to a dictionary when in doubt. The tendency is to drop the accents from words that have found wide use in English. The German umlaut is often indicated by adding *e* to the unlauded letter: *Götterdämmerung* becomes *Goetterdaemmerung*, but often any indication of the umlaut will simply be omitted. The dieresis (as in *coöperate*), about the only remaining native diacritical mark, has nearly disappeared. Flesch and some other critics counsel avoidance of foreign terms entirely in favor of their English equivalents, when possible. See also *Diacritical Marks*.

accept. Confusion reigns over the choice of prepositions to go with *accept*. The admissions office of an otherwise reputable university sent out thousands of letters to applicants over a period of years informing them that they had been accepted to the school. *Accept* takes *by*, not *to*, and one may wonder what effect this error may have had on linguistically sensitive parents of applicants, who may well have decided to send their offspring elsewhere. Evidently the composer of this letter confused *accept* with *admit*, which does take *to* (and also *by*, in appropriate contexts); "We were admitted by the doorman"; "She was admitted to the university."

acceptable. Sometimes misused for *receptive*. "The natives of the island are acceptable to Christianity" does not say what the writer intended. He meant to describe them as ready to sign up, but instead gave the impression they had passed some kind of entrance examination.

acceptance, acceptation. The first is the act of accepting, the second now the interpretation or usual meaning of something; for example, a concept, word, or doctrine, though there is some overlapping.

access, accession. The first means an opening or opportunity, the second ascent or attainment, two critics hold. The correct term for assumption of monarchical status is *accession* (to the throne), not *access*. *Access* has newly become a verb in computer technology ("Any one of 235 cards can be randomly accessed"). This sense is still too new for most dictionaries, but its triumph seems undeniable. *Accession* is an old verb, but lives mostly in the vocabulary of librarians, in reference to acquiring books.

accessorize. See *-ize*, *-ise*.

accident, mishap. Two critics agree that chance is the primary attribute of an accident, and that *mishap* implies undesirability or misfortune. One of them restricts *mishap* to what is unimportant. Dictionaries do not associate the idea of unimportance with *mishap*, however. The Standard College Dictionary makes the comment, "*Mishap* and *mischance* suggest a single unforeseen occurrence: a *mishap* on the road interrupted our trip." Webster cites a *great mishap*, such as a landslide.

Mishap is a favorite with newspaper headline writers because of its convenient length, and they tend to use it indiscriminately.

accidentally, accidentally. The second form is recognized only by Webster, and users of it take the chance of being considered poor spellers. The same is true of *incidentally* vs. *incidently*.

accommodate. In the form *accomodate*, one of the most misspelled words.

accompanist, accompanyist. The first form is now overwhelmingly predominant. Fowler, the strict etymologist, regrets that *-nier* or *-nyist* did not win popular favor.

according to, accordingly. *According to* is preferably avoided in attribution because it may cast a shadow on the credibility of the speaker. Flesch criticizes *accordingly* and *in accordance with* as clumsy.

accrue. Two critics recommend restricting the word to fiscal contexts. Most dictionary definitions concern money and the like, but an extended sense (*benefits accruing to society*) is usually included.

accumulative, cumulative. The second is preferable to and has nearly displaced the first as smoother.

accuse, accused. Take *of*, not *with*: *accused of a crime*. Designations like *the accused thief*, in reference to one who has been charged but not convicted, are widely criticized because they imply guilt before it has been established. The same is true of *suspected*.

accustom. Takes *to*, not *with*: *accustomed to luxury*.

acid test. A cliché.

acquaintanceship. Superfluous beside *acquaintance*.

acquiesce. Takes *in*, not *to*: *acquiesce in the arrangement*. Authorities are unanimous on this point; *acquiesce to* is now considered old-fashioned.

6 Acronyms

Acronyms. Refers to abbreviations that form pronounceable words, not merely to alphabetical abbreviations (like FHA, CIO). *Radar* (for *radio detecting and ranging*) is an acronym that has become a full-fledged word. Three authorities warn against the indiscriminate use of such devices when they may not be familiar to the reader, a favorite practice among newspaper writers in their headlong urge to compress. See also *Alphabetical Designations*.

act, action. Though one will do where the other will not, the vagaries of idiom affecting the choice make it impossible to formulate any useful rule. It is agreed, however, that only *action* has a collective sense; that is, more than one act may make up an action. *Act* in modern usage also generally indicates the thing done, and *action* the doing of it. A sentence about children who had emptied their piggy bank to pay their father's fine said, "The judge dug into his pocket and reimbursed them after learning of their action." *act*. The slangy phrases "where the action is" and "a piece of the action" where *action* displaces *activity* or *proceeds* (generally of a questionable kind) are disparaged by Harper.

activate, actuate. Two critics hold that the first means to make active, the second to cause to move. But dictionaries do not recognize any hard and fast distinction.

actual, actually. Often used for a meaningless emphasis, especially in conversation. "No sooner had the Reds appeared than they were actually pelted with tomatoes"; "The stocks were sold above actual market prices." Omission of *actually* and *actual* from these sentences has no effect on meaning or emphasis. Pointless intensives like this play the writer false by detracting, instead of adding, emphasis.

ad. Standard for *advertisement*, six of seven authorities agree; American Heritage calls it informal. This is a clipped form, not an abbreviation, and thus takes no period.

A.D. In a letter to the *Los Angeles Times* after the landing of Apollo 11 on the moon, Rockwell Schnable wrote, "Notwithstanding the phenomenal precision of the scientists concerned with the moon shot, a little mistake was overlooked. The inscription engraved on the plaque left on the moon reads, 'Here Man From the Planet Earth First Set Foot Upon the Moon, July 1969 A.D.' B.C. follows the year, whereas A.D. precedes it. How odd that in spite of man's superhuman achievements, this error—a grammatical one—has occurred in the first printed words in outer space."

While A.D. (for *anno domini*, the year of our Lord) logically and thus usually precedes the year, this usage is not invariable. Webster approves placement after the year, and American Heritage calls this sequence informal. The application of A.D. to centuries is also sometimes criticized ("the twelfth century A.D.") as illogical. Once again, Webster approves and American Heritage considers it informal. Apparently the tendency to counterpoise A.D. to B.C. is often too strong to resist.

adapted. Inappropriate as a synonym for *suitable* because it implies *changed* (to meet a requirement, for example).

add an additional. A common and careless redundancy.

added fillip. In such constructions as "He gave the project an added fillip," *added* is redundant unless there was a previous fillip.

addicted. Two critics and Random House agree that the term should be reserved for what is harmful, and criticize its facetious use for what is not (*addicted to grapes*). Webster, however, quotes Galsworthy: "addicted to pleasure." *Addicted* takes *to* and is not followed by an infinitive: not *addicted to smoke* but *addicted to smoking*.

addition. See *in addition to*; *Number in Addition*.

additionally. A clumsy synonym for *also*: "Additionally, he had acquired three houses and two cars." *He had also acquired . . .*

address. Pompous where *speech* will do.

adequate. A euphemistic counter word of the reviewing profession, employed in praising faintly, two authorities say. When the critic reports that a performance was adequate he generally believes it was something less than equal to the occasion, and should realize the reader senses this. See also *impeccable*; *consummate*.

adequate enough. Redundant; one or the other.

adhere. Five authorities approve it in such contexts as *adhere to a plan*; one dissents, on the ground that the suggestion of glue is ludicrous. The expression *give adhesion* (to a political party) is common in Britain but not used in the U.S.

adjacent. Means *near*, not necessarily *touching*. Two critics prefer simpler words such as *next to*, *near*, or *close to*. Takes *to*, not *of*: "The store is adjacent of the Lincoln Avenue School." *to*.

adjectivally, adjectively. The first is preferable.

Adjectives. See *Absolute Comparatives*; *Comparison*; *Modifiers*.

adjure. See *abjure*, *adjure*.

adjust, readjust. Often euphemistic, particularly in reference to cuts in pay and sometimes even to raises. See *Euphemisms*.

Ad Lingo. Admen gain their sometimes bizarre, sometimes amusing effects by making the old college try. Effort in writing is preferable, even if it misfires, to the automatic repetition of stereotypes.

The slogan has been abandoned, but perhaps none in advertising history caused such a commotion among purists as "Winstons taste good, like a cigarette should." The fact was—and is—that the rule against *like* as a conjunction had seen its best days, and so the advertiser was doing nothing very heinous.

It is intriguing the way *better* and *older*, which began as comparatives, have become positives in advertising. Certain products, we are told, are to be found in the *better* stores. Not *good* stores, mind you, nor the *best*, but the *better* ones. We must admit that the adwriters have invested *better* with a mysterious toniness that even *best* now lacks in these contexts. Old Hospice Beer, the admen proclaim, is so much *more* refreshing. But more refreshing than what?

Automobiles, homes, and people are never *old* in the ads; they are merely *older*, though cars generally take a specialized descriptive: *older-* (or *early*) *model*. *Pre-owned* has come over the horizon and is gaining favor; *second-hand* is all but a dirty word. Who would buy a house baldly conceded to be old? Thus *older* fills the adman's bill, even if it does not meet the requirements of logical expression.

It is perhaps antisocial these days to speak of people as old; in the ads and elsewhere they are *older people*, or better yet, *mature*. The magazine of the American Association of Retired Persons, whose members must be at least 55, is entitled *Modern Maturity*. Such euphemisms have been taken up by many journalists, who have nothing to sell but writing, but whose imitation of poor models is nevertheless notorious. If *old* is too harsh an adjective to apply to people, how about *Time's* favorite noun, *oldsters*? The euphemism *senior citizens* is distasteful to many.

We read of bread that is as many as *eight ways better*. If Elizabeth Barrett Browning had been a huckster, she might have written:

How do I love that soap?

Let me count the ways . . .

administer, administrate. Synonyms, though *administrate* is an Americanism and may be considered unnecessary beside *administer*.

admission, admittance. *Admission* predominates. *Admittance* denotes physical entry, *admission* the allowance of certain rights and privileges, a view held by five authorities. Four others consider the words synonymous and one describes the distinction as disappearing.

admit, admit to. *Admit to* is criticized by four authorities in the sense *confess* ("He admitted to having stolen the money"). Evans says the addition of *to* has a deliberately weakening effect, a view that seems quixotic. *Admit* is unsuitable in attribution unless there is reason to suggest what is undesirable or previously concealed, or to indicate a response to a challenge: "Clark admitted he had been working on the plan to restore the neighborhood." In using *admitted* as a random variant of *said*, the writer made it sound as if the neighborhood restorer were owning up to a misdeed, for the context did not justify *admitted*.

admonishment, admonition. Two critics recommend the second as the more usual form. This advice seems unarguable.

ad nauseam. (To the point of nausea.) Often misspelled *ad nauseum*.

Adolescent *they*. The use of a singular verb with the plural pronouns *they* or *their* is one of the most prevalent faults of the age. An example: "The church welcomes all students to participate in the varied programs they offer." Since *the church* is singular, *they offer* should have been *it offers*; further, *church* has already properly been the subject of a singular verb, *welcomes*. Sentences like this prompted Theodore M. Bernstein, who critiqued *The New York Times*, to ask: "They does?" "The street will be blocked at night to prevent anyone from parking their cars there." *his car*. Sometimes the use of *their* instead of *his* is advocated to avoid the purported sexism of the masculine pronoun. It is a delusion, however, that the impersonal *he*, *his*, *him* is necessarily masculine. It is considered neuter in such contexts in both grammar and law. "When a non-English-speaking person calls the operator using Spanish, they are immediately connected with a Spanish-speaking operator." *he is*; or *When non-English-speaking people*. An alternative that avoids *his* in the second example: "... to prevent drivers from parking their cars." Golfers are instructed to keep their eyes on the ball, and writers should likewise keep their eyes on verbs and pronouns to see that they correspond in number. "The judge said that because the administration finances the program, they are free to suspend it." *it is free*.

Most collective nouns, like *administration*, are regarded as singular in America, though there are exceptions depending on what the writer wants to emphasize. In Britain, things are different; many collectives Americans consider singular are construed as plurals, the most notable, perhaps, being *government* ("the government are"). But whether the noun is regarded as singular or plural, the verb and pronouns referring to the subject should be of the same number.

Indefinite pronouns (now referred to by some linguists as indefinite nouns), such as *anybody*, *anyone*, *everybody*, *everyone*, *somebody*, *someone*, *each*, are allowed plural verbs by some authorities. The reader is referred to the entries for these words.

The term "adolescent *they*" to describe the fault discussed here is admittedly a coined one. It was suggested by the fact that this misuse reflects an immature style.

Adolf (Hitler). One of the most misspelled names in recent history; often given *Adolph*.

adopt. Three authorities warn against confusion with *adapt*; see *adapted*. To adopt is to accept, to adapt is to change.

adopt a wait-and-see attitude. A windy cliché of journalism, displacing *wait and see*. *Adopt a hands-off policy*, for *keep hands off*, *let alone*, is another.

adopted, adoptive. While the common American use is *adopted* in reference to parents, the British *adoptive* is preferable; Fowler and American Heritage favor this form. One critic warns that *adoptive* may be regarded as overcorrect; Random House and Webster consider the forms interchangeable.

adult. The current euphemism for *pornographic*, as applied to books, movies, etc.

adumbrate. Means *foreshadow*, and is derogated by three critics as formal, literary, and unsuitable for ordinary contexts.

advance, advancement, advanced. The first is preferable for the general idea of progress, the second for promotion. *Advance* is redundant with *warning, planning, preparations*, and the like. Sometimes it erroneously displaces *advanced*, as in *advance writing classes* or *advance degree*.

Adverbial Genitive. The term describes such expressions as *days* in "He worked days" and *afternoons* in "They slept afternoons." Bryant reports the form well established in informal standard expression (as against such alternatives as *during the day, every day, in the afternoon*). Evans calls such forms standard usage in the U.S. but obsolete in Britain.

Adverbs. An erroneous idea that compound verbs (like *have seen, will go*) should not be separated by adverbs (*have easily seen, will soon go*) has become widespread, and is perhaps most firmly established among newspaper journalists. Most commentators agree that it is apparently an offshoot of the prohibition against splitting an infinitive, which in its absolute and arbitrary form is also a superstition. (See *Infinitives 1*.) Some examples in which the verb is split by an adverb (italicized): "The budget was *tentatively* approved"; "The decision was *automatically* delayed"; "Experts are *now* pinning their hopes on the House." In many sentences, the adverb falls naturally between the parts of the verb, and in negative sentences it is impossible to place the adverb (*not*) anywhere else: "He would not concede the election"; "The decision will not block action." Five authorities, including Fowler, who says that placing the adverb anywhere else than between the parts of the verb requires special justification, agree on the foregoing. Newspaper editors are assiduous in plucking *also* from compound verbs. Thus "He was also singled out for commendation," which says that among other things the subject was singled out, is likely to be changed to "He also was singled out . . ." which may alter the sense to "He in addition to others . . ."

An adverb should not intervene between a verb and its object: "He said every chance would be given to complete satisfactorily the negotiations." *to complete the negotiations satisfactorily*. "An applicant for a federal job should have a chance to explain informally derogatory information." *to explain derogatory information informally*. The examples cited sound like clumsy translations from German. See *Modifiers*; for wrongly hyphenated adverbs, see *Hyphens 7*.

adverse, averse (to). The expression is *averse to* ("She was not averse to a drink before dinner"); not *adverse*. Evans says *averse to* is preferable but allows *averse from*. Fowler allows either *to* or *from* with *averse*. Random House and Webster give *averse to*; this is the consensus. American Heritage says usually *to*, less often *from*.

advert to. Two critics consider it obsolete for *refer to*.

advertize. Acceptable, but *advertise* greatly predominates. See *-ize, -ise*.

advise. Criticized when it displaces *say, tell, write, inform*, especially in business correspondence ("beg to advise," which itself is a Victorianism) and in journalism, three authorities agree. Some critics of the journalistic use say "Save *advise* for giving advice." But American Heritage and Webster approve *advised* for *said* or *told*.

adviser, advisor. Insistence on *-er* is one of the peculiarities of journalism; a former editor says *-er* is preferred but neglects to explain on what grounds. Perrin calls *-or* now probably predominant. All dictionaries give both forms as synonyms and as standard.

ae, e; oe, e. The digraphs, once often given as joined characters, that is, ligatures, have been almost entirely abandoned in favor of *e* alone in such words as *archeology* (*archaeology*), *esthetic* (*aesthetic*), *encyclopedia* (*encyclopaedia*), *esophagus* (*oesophagus*), *fetus* (*foetus*). Fowler's examples show that British usage is somewhat more traditional.

aegis. A favorite of journalists, who often misuse it in the sense of *jurisdiction, surveillance*, without the connotation of *protection*. Dictionary definitions generally corroborate this view.

aero-, air-. *Aeroplane* and similar forms have disappeared from the U.S., and Fowler reports despairingly that American influence is doing them in even in Britain.

affect, effect. Although the confusion of *affect* with *effect* is perhaps the commonest error of them all, noted unanimously by authorities, it seems almost superfluous to explain that *affect* means influence ("The moon affects lovers") and *effect* means accomplish ("A merger was effected"). *Affect* is always a verb except in a specialized sense as a noun, peculiar to psychology, which never appears in nontechnical contexts. *Effect* may be either verb (as illustrated) or noun ("The effect was satisfactory").

affiliated (associated, identified) with. Hifalutin ways of saying *belongs to, works for*.

affirmative, negative. Pretentious and perhaps ridiculous displacements of *yes, no* ("He answered in the affirmative" for "He said yes" or "He agreed"). These are notably military mannerisms. A newsmagazine reported that civilian secretaries at the Manned Space Center in Houston had taken to saying *negative* over the telephone when most people would say *no*.

afflict, inflict. See *inflict, afflict*.

afford. Does not take *with* (*afford some protection*; not *afford with*).

affray. A favorite of newspaper journalists, though the term is seldom seen in other writing, for *fight, contest, game*, etc. In its technical legal sense, an affray is a fight that constitutes an offense by disturbing the peace.

affrontery. The now defunct *National Observer*, a meticulously edited paper in its early years, slipped as time passed and once said, "America's brutality to its creatures is an affrontery to our nation." Regrettably, there is no such word. Even *affront*, meaning *insult*, would not have fit this context as well as *reproach*. Then there is *effrontery* (*boldness, insolence*).

forementioned, aforesaid. Legalese; unsuitable for ordinary contexts, in the opinion of two critics. See also *said* as used in this sense. Usually any of these is superfluous, because the definite article (*the*) suffices to specify whatever is being referred to.

Africander, Afrikander; Africaner, Afrikaner. Some commentators restrict the first pair to a breed of sheep or of cattle, and the second to South Africans of Boer descent, but dictionaries now treat the forms as interchangeable. The context, presumably, must be relied upon to determine whether the subject is people or cattle.

after. In Irish dialect, it does not mean *about to*, as is often assumed, but *have just done*. "I am after taking a walk." *have just taken*, not *intend to take*.

aftermath. Should be reserved for what is disagreeable, and not used for what merely follows upon something else. The distinction is supported by American Heritage, the Standard College Dictionary, and Random House, but Webster cites *The New York Times* in "a gratifying aftermath." The consensus favors the distinction.

afterward, afterwards. Interchangeable in the U.S.; only *afterwards* is used in Britain.

age, aged. Expressions like *at age 65* and *children aged 9 to 12* sound actuarial and old-fashioned, respectively. The numbers indicating age can be used without the descriptive words: *at 65, children 9 to 12*.