

One word plus one word equals new word

“Can someone share what they use to backup their files?”

This was the subject line in an email to a Listserv I’m on. In this case, the person wrote backup (one word), which is an adjective, when he meant to say back up (two words), which is a verb.

There are several things about English that seem to trip up a lot of people. This is one of those things.

It happens when you have two words that are often used as a pair and you put them together in one word. However, the new word is not the same as the pair. In some cases the pair is a verb and the resulting new word is an adjective. In some cases the resulting word is a noun.

Back up is not the same as backup.

When back up is two words, there’s some sort of action taking place, which means it’s a verb. You put your car in reverse gear so you can *back up* (verb) out of your driveway. Maybe you *back up* (verb) your files on an external hard drive (I don’t but I should). You *back up* (verb) your claims with proven information (although some presidential candidates don’t).

When backup is one word, it can be an adjective, meaning the word is modifying or describing something. You may have a *backup* computer in case your usual computer conks out. You may have a *backup plan* in case something goes wrong. Sometimes, a backup is a noun: You may have your *backup* with you on a thumb drive.

Shut down is not the same as shutdown.

At the end of your work day, perhaps you *shut down* (verb) your

computer. Now your computer is in *shutdown* (adjective) mode.

This past Wednesday here in the Washington area, the Metro was *shut down* (verb) for more than 24 hours to conduct emergency inspections and repairs. Metro's general manager said the *shutdown* (noun) was necessary.

Every day is not the same as everyday.

Every day (noun) that passes I think about some *everyday* (adjective) tasks that can get done quickly.

Just some everyday information to pass on to you. Happy Friday!

P.S. If you get tripped up with this type of thing in your documents, I can help fix it. Contact me about copy editing.

Grammar rules again

I think I hit a nerve yesterday with my post Grammar rules. I got the second highest number of visitors in one day to my blog in its two plus years of existence. And, several of you commented. First, let me say thanks for checking it out, and second, let me issue a plea to everyone who works with words, spoken or written, pay attention! Make grammar, spelling and proper usage a priority in your communications.

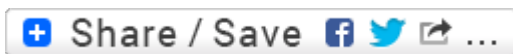
The response made it clear that many people are irritated by the lack of care we are seeing in English usage. Please take a look at the comments to the post to see what different people are experiencing.

What is not so clear is the reason behind the lapse in grammar. Is it laziness? Is it improper/insufficient

instruction? Is it sheer ignorance? What do you think?

How do we change this? Mignon Fogarty, “Grammar Girl,” gives seminars on grammar across the country. She has also written a couple of books on the subject. But how do we get people to a) realize they need to improve their grammar and b) learn what they are doing wrong?

Please let me know your ideas. I am so frustrated when I see my colleagues and otherwise educated folk use English so poorly.



Grammar rules

Yes, we all make mistakes. But the key is to realize our mistakes and correct them, right? And yet, I see the same grammar mistakes over and over again. And the people who are making said mistakes work in a language-based industry like PR, advertising, social media consulting and so forth.

I have seen the following grammar mistakes so many times I want to scream:

- Affect versus effect. No one seems to know or recognize the difference.
- Me versus I. So many people refer to themselves as I in the reflexive.
- Assure versus ensure. They mean different things, really.

I am currently reading Grammar Girl’s Quick and Dirty Tips for Better Writing by Mignon Fogarty. I suggest reading it too. Or

check out Mignon's tips online at Grammar Girl.

Like I said, we all make mistakes. But let's learn how to avoid them.

The bottom line is that bad grammar makes you sound ignorant.

What do you think? What grammar mistakes do you see repeated?



It's National Grammar Day!

Today, March 4th, is officially designated here in the United States as National Grammar Day. How will you celebrate?

If I may offer some suggestions:

- Read a grammar book or my favorite book about punctuation: *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* by Lynne Truss
- Mind your apostrophes (here's a hint: apostrophes do not make a word plural)
- Practice gender neutrality, but don't use "they" to signify ONE person.
- Read a well written book, any book.
- Try to effect change by not using big words you don't understand (it affects how people perceive your writing and speaking)

What would you like to see on National Grammar Day?



Do U Ck Spelling?

A victim of all the texting and instant messaging is spelling. You simply don't have time to spell everything out. Everything becomes acronyms or shortenings. Page 3 in today's Washington Post has a feature on the importance of spelling and grammar. One reader likens proper grammar/spelling to using the proper notes in music (if you don't, the music just doesn't sound right). As a writer, I agree. However, does the public agree? Do most people even realize when something is not spelled correctly or when grammar is poor? I once worked with a "writer" who did not know how to make his subject and verb agree. And he was completely unaware. Recently, on a DCPubs (a Yahoo group) discussion, someone asked what was wrong with using "their" as a gender-neutral alternative to "he or she." This person was completely unaware that one is plural and the other singular. (As an aside, we HEAR this all the time in conversation, but in formal writing?)

So, I ask you, are spelling and grammar important? Do you notice lapses in either or both?