

## USAGE

**Usage** refers to the traditions or conventions of appropriate and effective language. Formal (professional) writing requires conventional language; therefore, language choices that are acceptable in normal conversation should be avoided in professional writing. The list which follows should help you avoid some common mistakes in usage.

**A-an:** In choosing *a* or *an*, consider the sound, not the spelling, of the following word. Use the article *a* before all consonant sounds, including sounded *h*, long *u* (a *unit*), and *o* with the sound of *w* (as in *one*). Use *an* before all vowel sounds except long *u* and before words beginning with silent *h* (an *heir*). Note: in speech, both *a historic occasion* and *an historic occasion* are correct, but in writing a historic occasion is the form most commonly used.

**A lot-alot-allot:** A *lot* is two words- but either way, it should be avoided. It's overworked.

**A-of:** Do not use *a* in place of *of* (a lot a faculty).

**Accept-except:** *Accept* means to receive, *except* means to exclude.

**Affect-effect:** We *affect* things, but things have an *effect* on us.

**All of:** *Of* is not necessary unless the following word is a pronoun (All the staff members; all *of* us).

**And:** Beginning a sentence with *and*, *but*, *or*, or *nor* can be an effective means of giving special attention to the thought that follows the conjunction. No comma should follow the conjunction at the start of a new sentence unless a parenthetical element occurs at that point. Example: Beginning sentences with *and* is not wrong. *But don't overdo it*. Or: Beginning a sentence with *but* is correct. *But*, like everything else, this can be overdone.

**As:** Use *because*, *since*, or *for* rather than *as* in clauses of reason: "I cannot go *because* (not *as*)."

**Being-being as-being that:** Use *because* or *since*.

**Borrow-lend-loan:** Watch for regional misuse of *borrow*. Examples: *Lend* me your book (not: *Borrow me*.) I went to the bank to see if they would *loan* me some money (not *borrow me* some).

**Both alike-equal-together:** Both is unnecessary when used with *alike*, *equal*, or *together*.

**Bring-take:** *Bring* indicates motion toward the speakers. *Take* indicates motion away from the speaker. Example: "Please *take* (not bring) the letter to Frank when you go to his office."

**Due to-because of-on account of:** *Due to* introduces an adjective phrase and should modify nouns. It is normally used only after some form of the verb *to be*. Examples: Her resignation was *due to* ill health. She resigned *because of* ill health.

**Etc.:** This abbreviation of *et cetera* means "and other things." Therefore, "and, etc." is wrong. Use a comma before and after *etc.*, but avoid the word in formal writing. Note: Do not use *etc.* at

the end of a series introduced by *such as*. The term *such as* implies that only a few selected examples will be given. Adding *etc.* only suggest the examples were all the writer could think of.

**Fewer-less:** *Fewer* refers to number and is used with plural nouns; *less* refers to degree or amount and is used with singular nouns. The expression *less than* precedes plural nouns referring to periods of time, amounts of money, and quantities. The expression *or less* is used after a reference to a number of items.

**First-firstly, etc.:** In enumerations, use *first, second, third-* not *firstly, secondly, thirdly*.

**In regard to-as regards:** *In regards to* confuses two different phrases, *in regard to* and *as regards*. Use one or the other.

**Like-as:** *Like* is a preposition and should be followed only by a noun or noun phrase; *as* is a subordinating conjunction that introduces a subordinate clause. Examples: He looks like a tramp. You don't know him *as* (not *like*) I do.

**Media-medium:** *Media* is the plural of *medium*. Example: Of all the *media* that cover sports, the newspaper is still the *medium* that I prefer.

**Per-a:** *Per* is a Latin word meaning "by the" (as in *miles per gallon*). Use *a* or *an* instead of *per* (except in Latin phrases such as *per diem*.) Do not use *per* in the sense of "according to" or "in accordance with." Example: As you requested, we are... Not: "Per your request."

**Principal-principle:** *Principal* means "most important," *principle* refers to a basic law or truth.

**Reason is because-reason why:** Substitute *reason is* or *reason is that* for *reason is because*; in the phrase *reason why*, *why* is redundant (The reason Jones lost is...).

**Retroactive to (not from).**

**Shall-will:** *Shall* has been replaced by *will* in all but the most formal writing. In *formal* circumstances use *shall* with the first person (*I, we*) and *will* with the second and third persons (*you, he, she, it, they*). To indicate determination in *formal* circumstances, use *will* for the first person and *shall* for the second and third: "I *will* go," "They *shall* not pass." To indicated *willingness*, use *will* in informal and formal writing.

**Sure and:** Use *sure* to instead of *sure and* in profession writing: "Be *sure* to (not *sure and*) bring the reports." *Try and* should also be replaced with *try to*.

**That-which:** Use *that* with *restrictive clauses* and *which* with *nonrestrictive clauses*.

**Than-then:** *Than* is a conjunction introducing a comparison; *then* is an adverb meaning "at that time" or "next."

**Would have:** Not *would of*. And do not use *would have* in the place of *had* in clauses beginning with *if*: if you *had* (not *would have*) come early...