

## WEEKLY WORDS OF WISDOM

This week's writing tip is to avoid ambiguity in writing, that is. Don't say something that could be interpreted two ways. It's easy to do this and hard to spot. Why? Because you know what you mean, but your reader does not. It's one thing to e-mail a friend or family member on a regular basis. You have developed your own shorthand and references, but when writing for others you have to be explicit.

Let me give you some examples. Recently, we posted a sign on the Writing Center announcing that the evening hours would not be in effect this week. The sign said:

**On Thursday, September 5<sup>th</sup>, the Writing Center will be open from 10 AM to 5 PM. The Center will not be open till 8 PM on that day.**

A student who read the sign asked, "You mean the Center is not going to open until 8:00 p.m. on Thursday?" A valid question, given the wording of the second sentence. One way to resolve the ambiguity would be to read the two sentences together and to give the words the meaning that would make sense. Thus, the Center will close at 5:00 and will not remain open until 8:00.

There are specific structures that invite ambiguity, and I will go over those now.

1. Avoid vague pronoun references, such as those that occur when there are two people being referred to (typically both of the same sex), but it is not clear which one the pronoun is referring to. It is often clearer to name names.

UNCLEAR: Jenny's sister wondered if she made the team.

BETTER: Jenny wondered whether her sister Margaret made the team.

OR: Margaret wondered whether her sister Jenny made the team.

2. When referring to a person by a pronoun, mention the person by name the first time, and use the pronoun or a synonym thereafter.

UNCLEAR: He and his brother Tom went to the game. Tom was a Marlins fan; his brother Jack was rooting for the Cubs.

BETTER: Tom and his brother Jack went to the game. Tom was a Marlins fan; his brother was rooting for the Cubs.

3. Often, the word “it” or “which” is used in a way that creates ambiguity.

EXAMPLE: The boat bumped the edge of the dock, but it didn’t need many repairs.

BETTER: The boat bumped the edge of the dock, but the boat didn’t need many repairs.

EXAMPLE: The company prohibited smoking in the office, which many employees resented. (What did the employees resent, smoking or the ban on smoking?)

BETTER: The company prohibited smoking in the office, a policy that many employees resented.

OR: Following the complaints of many employees about smoking in the office, the company prohibited smoking in the office.

4. Finally, word placement can create ambiguity. Avoid the “squinting modifier,” in which a word is placed in between two other words and it is not clear which word the middle word is supposed to modify.

EXAMPLE: Students who miss classes frequently fail the course.

(The “squinting modifier” is “frequently.” This is ambiguous. Does this mean students who often miss classes will definitely fail the class, or does it mean that students who don’t show up for class are likely to fail the class?)

Correct a squinting modifier by rearranging the modifier to place it next to the word it modifies.

BETTER: Often, students who miss classes fail the course.

OR: Students who often miss classes will fail the course.

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This year the Institute of Achievement and Learning is expanding and making its services available to all Lynn University students on an as-needed basis. Students can sign up for subject matter tutoring, academic success coaching, and Writing Center help.

In addition, beginning this week, Writing Center Coordinator Paula Hyman and Tutor Elaine Deering will be bringing you a weekly column on Words to Know and Great Writing Tips.

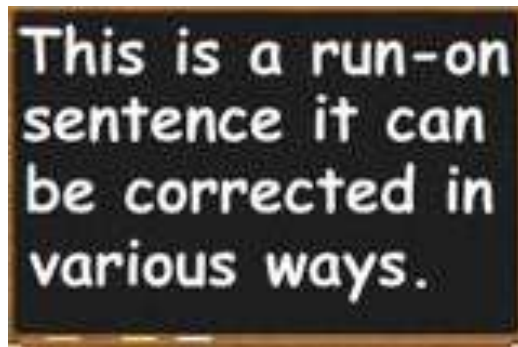
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This week's grammar tip has to do with run-on sentences, sometimes called fused sentences (not to be confused with comma splices, which we wrote about a few weeks ago).

### **What is a runon sentence?**

It's not as some people think a long, rambling sentence that's hard to follow; rather, it's two sentences run together with NO separating punctuation.



EXAMPLE:

It is corrected the same way you would correct a comma splice. First you have to determine where the first sentence ends and the second one begins. Then you apply the same strategies you did to correct the dreaded comma splice.

glad you asked. There are four ways to correct a comma splice:

1. **Keep the comma, and add one of the FANBOYS (coordinating conjunction—For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, and So).**

This is a runon sentence, **and** it can be corrected in various ways.

(Notice I have added a comma at the end of the first clause along with the connecting word “and.”)

**2. Replace the comma with a semi-colon.**

This is a runon sentence; it can be corrected in various ways.

(This method works well for two sentences that have a close relationship with each other.)

**3. Replace the comma with a period.**

This is a runon sentence. It can be corrected in various ways.

(This method may create a choppy effect—not the best writing, but at least it’s grammatically correct. It works better with longer clauses.)

**4. Rewrite the sentence to include a main clause and a subordinate clause. Introduce the subordinate clause with a word of dependency such as although, whenever, because, etc.**

This is a runon sentence **which** can be corrected in various ways.

(In this example the word “which” introduces an adjective clause modifying the word “sentence.” It cannot stand alone.)

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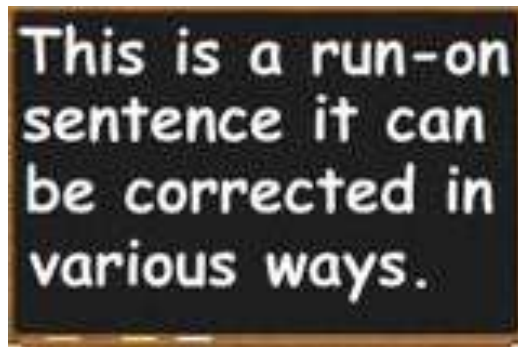
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## Word of the Day

**Extrapolation:** (ikstrpuhleyshun), noun:

**Infer** (something not known) by using, but not strictly deducing from the known facts.

**“This will allow further extrapolation of the theory to your own experiences and to your individual self-development.”** *From the Dialogue of Self and Society 100 text*

Latin *extra* outside + English *-polate* (as in *interpolate*) —  
First Known Use: 1874

**Hermeneutic:** \hər-mə-'nü-tik\ noun:

- 1 The study of the methodological principles of interpretation (as of the Bible).
- 2 A method or principle of interpretation.

“This article engages in a hermeneutic analysis of the self as it appears in cognitive behavior psychology, the psychoanalytic theories of ego and self-psychology, and humanistic–existential theories of the self” ( from *The Dialogues of Self and Society* Sleeth 7).

First Known Use of Hermeneutic **1737**

**Origin** Greek *hermēneutikós* of, skilled in, interpreting, equivalent to *hermēneú(ein)* to make clear, interpret (derivative of *hermēneús* an interpreter, itself derivative of *Hermês* Hermes) + *-tikos*

**Esoteric:** \e-sə-'ter-ik, -'te-rik\ adjective:

**Definition:** only taught to or understood by members of a special group : hard to understand

: limited to a small number of people

“Indeed, esoteric notions of the self coming from the spiritual traditions compound the ambiguity, such as *Atman* or *buddhi* from Advaita Vedanta (Griffiths, 1973; Rama, Ballentine, Ajaya, 1998), or even the idea of “no-self” (i.e., *anatma*; Murti, 1955) seem to suggest an irreconcilable inconsistency” (*from The Dialogues of Self and Society Sleeth 8*).

**Origin:** Late Latin *esotericus*, from Greek *esōterikos*, from *esōterō*, comparative of *eisō*, *esō* within, from *eis* into; akin to Greek *en* in

First Known Use: circa 1660

**Pontificating:** \pŏn-tĭfĭ-kĭt, -kāt'ng\ verb:

1. To express opinions or judgments in a dogmatic way.
2. To administer the office of a pontiff.

“Many modernist philosophers reject the notion of a deity, or worlds beyond our senses, while some take this refutation of religious world views to attention grabbing ends, **pontificating** “God is dead.” (*from The Dialogues of Belief and Reason* 7).

**Origin:** [1575–85; (v.) < Medieval Latin *pontificātus*, past participle of *pontificāre* to be an ecclesiastic]

**Paradigm**:/parəˌdīm/ *noun*

A typical example or pattern of something; a model. A worldview underlying the theories and methodology of a particular scientific subject.

“The story of the creation of the world puts forward the idea of myth as a sacred narrative for the charter of society. That is to say, it becomes a **paradigm** for life” (*from The Dialogues of Belief and Reason 11*).

**Origin:** Middle English, *example*, from Late Latin paradĭgma, from Greek paradeigma, from paradeiknunai, *to compare* : para-, *alongside*; see **para**-<sup>1</sup> + deiknunai, *to show*; see deik- in Indo-European roots.]

*Paradigm* first appeared in English in the 15th century, meaning "an example or pattern," and it still bears this meaning today.

**Temperance:** /tem-p(ə-)rən(t)s/ noun

The practice of drinking little or no alcohol.

The practice of always controlling your actions, thoughts, or feelings so that you do not eat or drink too much, become too angry, etc.

“*Mere Christianity* also explored the ethics resulting from Christian belief. He cites the four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, **temperance**, and fortitude (*from The Dialogues of Belief and Reason* 25).

Origin: [1200–50](#); Middle English *temperaunce* < Anglo-French < Latin *temperantia* self-control.

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**Ubiquity:** \yü-'bi-kwə-tē\ *noun*

presence everywhere or in many places especially simultaneously : OMNIPRESENCE

“However, like physical bodies, uniqueness is only one side of the coin. There is ubiquity as well. That is to say, at least certain features are universal, spread among even the innate uniqueness of individual selves” (*from Dialogues of Self and Society* Sleeth 12).

**Origin:** Latin *ubique* everywhere, from *ubi* where + *-que*, enclitic generalizing particle; akin to Latin *quis* who and to Latin *-que*.

**First Known Use:** 1579



**Timocracy:** /tī-mŏk'rə-sē/ noun

1: government in which a certain amount of property is necessary for office

2: government in which love of honor is the ruling principle

**“Timocracy** –governance by the powerful and military conquest” (*Dialogues of Justice and Civic Life Chapter 1 Level 100 11*).

### **Origin of TIMOCRACY**

Middle English *tymotracie*, from Middle French *tymocracie*, from Medieval Latin *timocratia*, from Greek *timokratia*, from *timē* price, value, honor + *-kratia* -cracy; akin to Greek *tiein* to honor, Sanskrit *cāyati* he respects

First Known Use: 15th century

**Derogation:** /ˌdɛrəˈɡɑːʃən/ *noun* :

1. An exemption from or relaxation of a rule or law.
2. The perception or treatment of someone as being of little worth.

“In addition to rules regarding what the King is required or allowed to do, the rule of law, it provides formal processes for oversight and correction of actions taken in **derogation** of the law” (*from The Dialogues of Justice and Civic Life* Turner 15).

**Origin:**

Late Middle English (in the sense 'impairment of the force of'): from Latin *derogatio(n)-*, from the verb *derogare*

**Conciliation:** / kənsilē' āSHən/*noun*:

1. To overcome the distrust or animosity of; appease.
2. To regain or try to regain (friendship or goodwill) by pleasant behavior.
3. To make or attempt to make compatible; reconcile.

“Rumours of plots continued, pushing the king into contradictory policies of **conciliation** and repression” (*from The Dialogues of Justice and Civic Life* Turner 18).

Origin: Latin - *conciliatus*, past participle of *conciliare* to assemble, unite, win over, from *concilium* assembly, council

First Known Use: 1545

**Fealty:** *noun* \ˈfē(-ə)l-tē\

1. loyalty to a person, group, etc.
2. the fidelity of a vassal or feudal tenant to his lord
3. the obligation of such fidelity
4. intense fidelity

“At the same time, however, John worked to bring the barons under closer control, demanding custody of their castles, surrender of hostages for their good behaviour and charters of **fealty** binding them to him” (*from Dialogues of Justice and Civic Life* Turner 19).

Origin: Middle English *feute*, *fealtye*, from Anglo-French *feulté*, *fealté*, from Latin *fidelitat-*, *fidelitas*

First Known Use: 14th century

# Cornucopia

\,kôr-nə-'kō-pē-ə, -nyə-' \ *noun*

: a container that is shaped like a horn and is full of fruits and flowers

: a great amount or source of something

: a curved goat's horn overflowing with fruit and ears of grain that is used as a decorative motif emblematic of abundance

## Examples of the use of cornucopia

The market is a *cornucopia* of fruits and vegetables.

The book includes a *cornucopia* of wonderful stories.

## Illustration of **CORNUCOPIA**



## Origin of **CORNUCOPIA**

Late Latin, from Latin *cornu copiae* horn of plenty

First Known Use: 1508

**Perspicacity:** \ pur-spi-kas-i-tee\ noun:

1. keenness of mental perception and understanding; discernment; penetration.

2. *Archaic.* keen vision.

**Example:** The students had the **perspicacity** that they would experience something new during J-term.

**Origin:** 1540–50; earlier *perspicacite* < Late Latin *perspicācitās* sharpness of sight, equivalent to *perspicāci-* (stem of *perspicāx* sharp-sighted; see perspicuous) + *-tās -ty*<sup>2</sup>

**Glean:** /'glēn/ *verb*

1. To gather or collect (something) in a gradual way
2. To search (something) carefully
3. To gather grain or other material that is left after the main crop has been gathered and left by reapers
4. To gather information or material bit by bit

Example: During Jterm, some classes were brought to farms in order to **glean** peppers.

Origin:late Middle English: from Old French *glener*, from late Latin *glennare*, probably of Celtic origin.

**Neoteric:** /nēə'terik/ *adjective*

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1. recent; new; modern.
2. a modern person; a person who advocates new ideas.

Example: During this spring semester, the students at Lynn University will learn **neoteric** information in their courses.

Origin : late 16th century.: via late Latin from Greek *neōterikos*, from *neōteros* 'newer,' comparative of *neos* .



**Insouciant** [in-**soo**-see-uh nt; *French* an-soo-**syahn**] **adjective**

1. free from concern, worry, or anxiety; carefree; nonchalant.

Example: After recently winning the lottery, the man walked down the street, feeling both lighthearted and **insouciant**.

**Origin:**

1820–30; < French, equivalent to *in-* in-<sup>3</sup> + *souciant* present participle of *soucier* to worry  
< Vulgar Latin *\*sollicitāre*, for Latin *sollicitāre* to disturb; see solicitous

**co-nun-drum** /kəˈnʌndrəm/ *noun*

1.

a confusing and difficult problem or question.

Example: Interpreting the purpose of the assignment proved to be quite a **conundrum**.

**Origin:** origin unknown

First Known Use: 1645

**Dark horse candidate: *noun***

An unexpected, somewhat unknown candidate with little public exposure who has potential to win an election against established candidates.

Example: The student could not believe he won the student government election by a landslide, since he was what is known as a dark horse candidate.

Term originated by British politician and author, Benjamin Disraeli.

**Peripeteia:** *noun* \,per-ə-pə-'tē-ə, -'tī-\

**Definition:** a sudden or unexpected reversal of circumstances or situation especially in a literary work

Example: The sudden downfall of Bernie Madoff can be considered his **peripeteia**.

### **Origin of *PERIPETEIA***

Greek, from *peripiptein* to fall around, change suddenly, from *peri-* + *piptein* to fall — more at [FEATHER](#)

First Known Use: 1591

**Meme:** \ˈmēm\ *noun*

Definitions:

1. An element of a culture or system of behavior that may be considered to be passed from one individual to another by nongenetic means, esp. imitation.
2. A humorous image, video, piece of text, etc. that is copied (often with slight variations) and spread rapidly by Internet users.

Example:

The term **meme** first appeared in 1976, in Richard Dawkins's best-selling book *The Selfish Gene*.



Meme of Oscar's "Ellfie" with an additional Homer Simpson touch.

Origin:

1970s: from Greek *mimēma* 'that which is imitated,' on the pattern of *gene* .

**legerdemain** [lej-er-duh-meyn] *noun*

Definition: deception, slight-of-hand.

Example: The leprechaun used **legerdemain** to trick people out of their pot of gold.

***Origin:***

1400–50; late Middle English *legerdemeyn*, *lygarde de mayne* < Middle French: literally, light of hand

**Luminary** /'lōomə,nerē/*noun*

Definitions:

1. A person who inspires or influences others, esp. one prominent in a particular sphere.
2. An artificial light. A natural light-giving body, esp. the sun or moon.

Example:

Elvis Presley is thought of as being a **luminary** in the rock and roll genre of music.

Origin:

Late Middle English: from Old French *luminarie* or late Latin *luminarium*, from Latin *lumen*, *lumin-* 'light.'

**Grandiloquence** [gran-**dil**-uh-kwuh ns] *noun*

**Definition:** lofty, pompous language

**Example:** The student thought her **grandiloquence** would make her sound smart, but neither the class nor the teacher bought it.

**Origin:** 1580–90; < Latin *grandiloqu* ( *us* ) speaking loftily ( *grandi* ( *s* ) great + *-loquus* speaking) + -ence



**Luddite** \ˈlə-,dīt\ noun

Definition: A person who is afraid of technology, or will not use gadgets or the internet

Original Definition: A member of the Luddite movement – a group of British cloth makers who smashed the machines that were taking their jobs.

Example:

John was so afraid of using the computer he could be categorized as a **Luddite**.

Origin:

History of the Luddites

Today, the word **Luddite** is used to describe anyone who refuses to buy a smartphone, or get a Facebook account, or even a computer. But it comes from a group of people who caused a lot of trouble in the late 1700s, during the beginning of the **Industrial Revolution**.

In England at the time, most cloth was made by hand by skilled workers in textile (cloth) factories. Some of the first machines ever made were “mechanical looms” which turned cotton into cloth much faster than a human could. These meant that fewer workers, who were paid less, could produce much more cloth in a day than the factories which used skilled people instead of machines.

The workers began to lose their jobs to the new machines, and a man called Ned Ludd (who lived in the same forest as Robin Hood, gathered them in groups, and began to attack the factories. They smashed up the machines that were taking their jobs, and became the first organized anti-technology group in history.

**Perspicacity** ,/pəspi'kasitē/ *adj.*

Definition:

Shrewdness, perceptiveness

Example:

The detective was too humble to acknowledge that his **perspicacity** was the reason for his professional success.

Origin:

1540–50; earlier perspicacite < Late Latin perspicācitās sharpness of sight, equivalent to perspicāci

**Grawlix:** *noun* (gra-licks)

Definition: A **grawlix** is a sequence of typographical symbols used to represent a non-specific, profane word or phrase.

Here's an example of a typical **grawlix**: #@\$%\*!

Origin: The term first appeared in a 1964 article called *Let's get down to grawlixes* by American cartoonist Mort Walker, who is best known as the creator of the Beetle Bailey and Hi and Lois cartoons. Later, in a book called *The Lexicon of Comicana*, Walker created and named an international set of symbols used in comics around the world. Walker called his system *Symbolia*.