

GRAMMAR QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK

THE WRITE ADVICE

COLLECTORS' EDITION

UWF WRITING LAB

Summary of Grammar Hotline Calls
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Since its establishment by Writing Lab Director Mamie Webb Hixon in 1986 – then the only one in Florida – the UWF Grammar Hotline has responded to nearly ten thousand callers' inquiries about grammar, syntax, diction, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, pronunciation, documentation, and usage. The Hotline has attracted local, out-of-state, and even international attention with callers inquiring as far away as Alaska and Japan. The hotline is currently listed with at least forty other college campus and community hotlines in the *National Grammar Hotline Directory* published by Tidewater Community College in Tidewater, Virginia. This issue of *The Write Advice* newsletter contains some of the most common and unusual questions from the UWF Grammar Hotline log.

UNUSUAL QUESTIONS

1. What's the symbol for medicine called? **CADUCEUS**
2. Is **12:00 P.M.** midnight or noon? (From the Post Office) **NOON**
3. Is **sprinklered** a word? **NO**
4. Can a drink be described as delicious, or should only food be described as delicious? **BOTH**
5. Is this preposition correct at the end of this sentence: *Where are you originally from?* **YES**
6. Is this headline in the "Life" section of the *News Journal* correct: *They Are You and I?* **YES**
7. How do I write a novel? **THERE'S NO RECIPE.**
8. Isn't **irregardless** a word? It's in the dictionary! **NO, the Usage Note in the dictionary explains that irregardless is nonstandard for regardless.**
9. What's the publisher's symbol at the bottom of a page in a magazine called? **COLOPHON**
10. How does one file a legal brief in the circuit court of Atlanta, GA? **REFERRED CALLER TO POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT**
11. How do you address two doctors in a letter? **DEAR DRs. SMITH AND WESSON**
12. How do you address a husband-wife team if the wife holds the doctorate degree? **MR. AND DR. SMITH-Remember, however, that academic titles are not relevant in some social settings.**
13. What's the singular form for **clothes** and **clothing**? **NONE**
14. What is the spelling of **visqueen**, a type of plastic? **VISQUINE**

JEOPARDY QUESTIONS -- I'll give you a definition; you give me a word

1. Words spelled differently but sound alike **HOMOPHONES**
2. Created words **NEOLOGISMS/NONCE WORDS** (e.g. *racialism*)
3. Device for remembering **MNEMONIC** (such as "**HOMES**" for the Great Lakes)
4. Word meaning *it doesn't matter or it makes no difference.* **INCONSEQUENTIAL**
5. The origin and roots of words **ETYMOLOGY**
6. A brief overview of something **SYNOPSIS or SUMMARY**

UNUSUAL REQUESTS

1. Analyze this handwriting.
2. Recommend a good grammar handbook.
3. Listen to an eight-page paper.

STUMP THE LABBIES/HOTLINE OPERATORS, OR ARE YOU QUALIFIED TO ANSWER HOTLINE QUESTIONS

1. What's **cherries** in a **bowl of cherries**? What about **bowl**? Both are nouns. **Cherries** is the object of the preposition **of**.
2. Is **had** transitive or intransitive? **TRANSITIVE**
3. What's a pronominal adjective? **A WORD LIKE HER**
4. What's a copulative verb? **SAME AS A LINKING VERB**
5. What's the difference between **ironic** and **ironical**? **NONE**
6. What's the other word that ends in **-gry**? **Hungry** and **angry** are two of them. **SYNDICATED COLUMNIST RICHARD LEDERER SAYS THE OTHER -GRY WORDS ARE OBSOLETE.**
7. What's the third word that ends in **-shion**? **Cushion** and **fashion** are the other two.
8. Is there a plural for **correspondence**? **YES**
9. What are the perfect tenses of **understood**? **NONE**
10. Can the word **clothes** ever be singular? (Caller was looking for the word **clothing**.)
11. Definitions of **devout**, **pious**, **anecdote**, and **devoted**.
12. What determines the case of a pronoun--its position in the sentence or within the dependent clause? **POSITION IN THE CLAUSE**
13. **One such character** is Macbeth. Is this a sentence? **YES**
14. Can a verbal noun subject have a verbal predicate adjective? **YES (Seeing is believing.)**
15. How does a secretary indicate **blind copy**? **TYPE BLIND COPY ON COPY TO BE SENT**
16. Where does one place the certified letter number on a business letter? **BOTTOM OF LETTER**
17. Do you always place a comma before **and** in a compound sentence? **YES**
18. Which is correct--**I feel bad** or **I feel badly**? (Caller had made a bet.) **BAD**
19. Is there any punctuation for the heading, inside address, and salutation in the open form for business letters? **NO**
20. My professor said that we should never start a sentence with **however**. Is he correct? **NO**
21. What's the meaning of **member-at-large**? **NONDESIGNATED MEMBER**
22. Is **enriching** a word? **YES**
23. What's the difference between **who** and **whoever**? *The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* states that **who** means "that one" and **whoever** means "anybody."
24. What's the difference between **continually** and **continuously**?
25. If **bigger** is the comparative and **biggest** is the superlative, what's **big**? **POSITIVE**
26. Does one leave a towel **lying** or **laying** around? **LYING**

THE STRANGEST QUESTIONS

1. A senior citizen wanted to know what a **nerd** is.
2. A lawyer's secretary asked how to spell a word her boss had dictated to her: **ararity**. When I asked her to read the sentence, she said "It's a rarity to find..."
3. Spell **chores**.

THE 'EVERYTHING ELSE BUT GRAMMAR' HOTLINE

1. **FRENCH HOTLINE:** What does **pour vous** mean? **FOR YOU**
2. **BIOLOGY HOTLINE:** What's the difference between an **amphibian** and a **reptile**?
3. **SPANISH HOTLINE:** Pronunciation of the Spanish word **puede**

4. **BABY NAMING HOTLINE:** A mother called from the hospital and wanted us to pronounce her new born daughter's name **D'Yani Ahssshyah**

WE LEARN STUFF TOO

1. **Graffiti** is the plural form of **graffito**.
2. **Debrez** is the plural of **debris**.
3. Spelling of **shiskebab**
4. Spelling of **numbchucks** -- **nunchaku**
5. **accoutrement** not **accouterment** - **DEPENDS**

SPELLING

camaraderie
 abbreviation of **Florida** **FL**
acerbic or **aserbic**? **acerbic**
 entrepreneur
resell or **resale** the product **resell**
 Kissimmee
 hors d'oeuvres
 Houdini
 renege
 plural of **appendix** **appendices**
 plural of **census** **censuses**
 two-by-four
 Alzheimer's disease
 Jacuzzi
 Is there another spelling for **chauffeur** besides **shofer**?
 A word for troublesome **ornery**
 innuendo
 Capistrano
 awry
 Styrofoam
 sincere
 itinerary
 leniency
 cruelty
 Phoenix
 spelling of South American country **Colombia**
 heart murmur
 pharmaceutical
 discretionary
 rallies (From the Texas House of Representatives in Austin)
 500 people or 500 persons **people** - large group; **persons**
 - specific, relatively small group
The Smiths OR **The Smith's** **THE SMITHS**
 Caller needed spelling of what he spelled **quoagulate** **coagulate**
 Caller was naming a van **the Mariah** and needed the spelling
Vita or **vitae** at the top of a resume? **VITA**

WE'RE NEEDED

On a resume, do I put **rung up** or **rang up** transactions? **RANG UP**

DEFINITION

e pluribus unum **one of many**
 What does **copisedic** mean? **Copacetic** or **copesetic** is slang for "dandy, fine, very interesting."

PRONUNCIATION

pe-kan or pe-kaan

UNNECESSARY NONCE WORDS

recrution	recruitment
administrated	administered
compulses	compels

HELP!!! WE HAD TO CALL ALTERNATIVE SOURCES

nunchaku a martial arts studio whose employee found spelling in a catalog
 abbreviation of **Florida State Board of Education School Board**
Jacuzzi phone book
colophon Playboy, Inc., Communication Arts Department, News Journal

MOST COMMON QUESTIONS

- a** or **an** university **a**
a or **an** historical occasion **a**
a or **an** harmonious group **a**
a or **an** RN **an**
a or **an** AM/FM radio **an**
a or **an** LPN **an**
a or **an** Rx for disaster **an**
- Is it correct to use **myself** with **between**? **NO**
- Salutation for two men **Messrs.**
- Capitalization: **Olympic Gold Medal, Olympic gold medalist/flag/torch**
- Are periods and commas placed inside or outside the closing quotation marks? **ALWAYS INSIDE**
- Is **dues** singular or plural? **PLURAL**
- Are seasons capitalized? **NO**
- The criteria is or **are**? **ARE**
- On behalf of John and **me** or **myself**? **ME**
- When to use **who**, **which**, and **that** **WHO FOR PEOPLE, WHICH FOR PLACES AND THINGS, THAT FOR ALL OF THE ABOVE**
- I **could** or **couldn't** care less? **COULDN'T**
- Is **data** singular or plural? **PLURAL**
- Is **media** singular or plural? **PLURAL**
- Is a person **hanged** or **hung**? **hanged**
- Can you ever use **alright**? **NO, use all right**
- Is **time frame** one or two words? **TWO timesheet? ONE**
- Is an additional period needed at the end of a sentence that ends with a standard abbreviation like **Washington D.C.**? **NO**
- Which is correct -- **It is I** or **It is me**? **I**
- Are **spanish mackerel** and **king mackerel** capitalized? **NO**
- Are **Jr.** and **III** separated from a person's name with a comma? **Jr. usually is but may be written without the comma; Roman numeral designations are never separated from names with commas (Queen Elizabeth I, for example)**
- What's the best way to avoid using the masculine pronoun to refer to a word of dual gender? **Use his or her or change the antecedent to a plural noun.**

OFFICE-TYPE QUESTIONS

- Are **personnel** and **staff** singular or plural? **DEPENDS**
- Is **State of Florida** capitalized? **SOMETIMES**
- Is a one-sentence paragraph in a business letter appropriate? **YES**
- Do you add an **-s** to Martinez' name since it ends in **z**? **NO**
- Is the apostrophe before or after the **z** in **Citizens Assistance Programs**? **AFTER**
- Standard abbreviation for **Florida State Board of Education** **NONE - DOE only**
- For additional information, please contact Mr. Jones and **me** or **myself**? **ME**
- FLORIDA LOTTERY DEPARTMENT:** Should figures or words be used with a **one-dollar ticket**? **WORDS**
- Is **City of Five Flags** capitalized? What about **City of Brotherly Love**? **YES**

POSSESSIVES

one year's pay
 one week's vacation
 the boss's desk
 Parents' Night
 the Joneses
 bachelor's and master's degrees
 Speakers' Bureau
 21 years' experience
 Morris Marx's inauguration
 Season's Greetings
 Punctuation of **the James Dean look** or **the Kenny Rogers look**
NONE
 Caller was writing down a recipe and wanted to put **All Grandmas Are Made of Gold**. Caller wanted to know if **grandmas** needed an apostrophe.

CALLERS QUESTIONING THE 'EXPERTS'

Is the verb in this sentence from a *Time* magazine cover correct? **This is one of the 18 million Americans who have a drinking problem.**

HIXON'S PERSONAL FAVORITES FROM JUST CONCERNED CITIZENS

Q: Could you tell me the meaning of "[so-and-so] called me out (of) my name"?

Grammar Music Lover

A: *Calling someone out [of] his or her name refers to addressing that person by some other name, usually an epithet or some other offensive term.*

*Here's additional information from the book **Black Talk – Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner** by Geneva Smitherman, published in 2000:*

CALL SOMEBODY OUTA THEY NAME: *To insult someone; to talk about a person in a negative way, especially to call someone a name or to hurl an accusation at that person. "She come talkin bout I stole her ring. I don't appreciate nobody callin me outa my name" (i.e. callin her a thief).*

Q: I'm teaching a Writing & Grammar course at Okaloosa-Walton College, and a question has come up that has stumped my class, me, and several other English instructors here.

Here's the sentence: In the middle of the fourth period, a quarter of the fans walked out.

Is "walked out" a phrasal verb or just a verb followed by an adverb?

Our department is divided on this question, and fist fights are breaking out. What do you think?

A: *"Walked out" has the form of a phrasal verb (verb plus preposition) and can be substituted for a single verb ("left"), so I'd choose phrasal verb, though I think an argument could be made for verb plus adverb, with "out" being the adverb, of course. I'd ask the question, "Does 'out' have the same meaning (it's in the same grammatical position, but does it have the same meaning) as say an adverbial prepositional phrase such as 'to the store' or another single adverb such as 'in' or an adverbial noun such as 'home'?"*

Q: In the phrase "all day, every day," is "every day" one or two words?
Piccadilly Cashier

A: *Two words. According to several dictionaries (Webster's Universal College, American Heritage College, and Oxford Illustrated), "everyday" is one word when used as an adjective. A reasonable synonym to replace this adjective form would be "commonplace." In the case of this saying, however, "every day" is being used as an adverb to describe the manner in which a thing is done.*

Q: Is the saying "learn by hard" or "learn by heart," and what are the origins of this saying?
Piccadilly Server

A: *Learn by heart. When a student "learns by rote," he or she may be able to recite the words but might not necessarily understand what the words mean. A student who learns something by heart understands the concept of the lesson. The lesson is internalized and becomes part of the person's knowledge. Mr. Hendrickson applies this*

*explanation to the phrase, "The ancient Greeks believed that the heart, the most noticeable internal organ, was the seat of intelligence and memory as well as emotion. This belief was passed on down the ages and became the basis for the English expression 'learn by heart,' which is used by Chaucer (1374) and must have been proverbial long before that. 'To record' reminds us again of this ancient belief in the heart as the seat of the mind. When writing wasn't a simple act, things had to be memorized; thus we have the word 'record,' formed from the Latin 're,' 'again,' and 'cor,' 'heart,' which means exactly the same as 'learn by heart.'" From *Encyclopedia of Word and Phrase Origins* by Robert Hendrickson (Facts on File, New York, 1997).*

Retrieved from http://www.phrases.org.uk/bulletin_board/6/messages/210.html

Q: I saw this on the menu at Steak 'n Ale: *the best steak you will have ever had.* Is this correct?
Post Office Clerk

A: *YES. This ad slogan is written in future perfect tense – the auxiliary will have or shall have with the past participle of a verb; this tense is used to describe an action that will have been completed at a specified future time.*

EXAMPLES:

By the end of the semester, five hundred students will have used the Writing Lab

After I graduate, I shall have written over 50,000 words.

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