

memorium/memorium

The correct spelling of the
Latin phrase is “in memoriam.”

March

1/2

© 2008

2008

SATURDAY/SUNDAY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23 _{/30}	24 _{/31}	25	26	27	28	29

prepositions (repeated)

In the sentence “Alex liked Nancy, with whom he shared his Snickers bar with,” only one “with” is needed—eliminate either one. Look out for similarly duplicated prepositions.

Incidentally, an often-cited example of this pattern is from Paul McCartney’s “Live and Let Die”: “In this ever-changing world in which we live in.” But if you listen closely, you’ll hear instead a quite correct “In this ever-changing world in which we’re livin’.” Americans have a hard time hearing the soft British “R” in “we’re.”

March	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
3							1
<small>THURSDAY</small>	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
2008	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
MONDAY	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
	²³ / ₃₀	²⁴ / ₃₁	25	26	27	28	29

stance/stand

When you courageously resist opposing forces, you take—or make—a stand. The metaphor is a military one, with the defending forces refusing to flee from the attacker. Your stance, on the other hand, is just your position—literal or figurative—which may not be particularly militant. A golfer wanting to improve her drives may adopt a different stance, or your stance on cojack may be that it doesn't belong on a gourmet cheese platter; but if you organize a group to force the neighbors to get rid of the hippo they've tethered in their front yard, you're taking a stand.

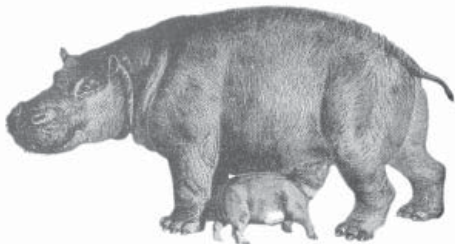
March

4

FOUR

2008

TUESDAY



*Howard the infant hippo
assumed his usual stance.*

portentious/portentous

People being pretentious get confused about “portentious,” which is related to “portents”—omens.

March

5

2008

WEDNESDAY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
²³ / ₃₀	²⁴ / ₃₁	25	26	27	28	29

can goods/canned goods

Is there a sign at your grocery store that says “can goods”? It should say “*canned* goods.”

March

6

FRIDAY

2008

THURSDAY



*Can goods last over a year?
They can if they're canned!*

abstruse/obtuse

Most people first encounter “obtuse” in geometry class, where it labels an angle of more than 90 degrees. Imagine what sort of blunt arrowhead that kind of angle would make and you will understand why it also has a figurative meaning of “dull, stupid.” But people often mix the word up with “abstruse,” which means “difficult to understand.”

When you mean to criticize something for being needlessly complex or baffling, the word you need is not “obtuse,” but “abstruse.”

March

7

—THE CALENDAR

2008

FRIDAY

“Lying in it, as in a grave or sarcophagus, with a hurried drapery of sheet and blanket thrown across it, was the body of a heavily-made man, with an obtuse head, and course, mean, common features.”

—Charles Dickens,
Little Dorrit

got/gotten

In England, the old word “gotten” dropped out of use except in such stock phrases as “ill-gotten” and “gotten up,” but in the U.S. it is frequently used as the past participle of “get.” Sometimes the two are interchangeable. However, “got” implies current possession, as in “I’ve got just five dollars to buy my dinner with.” “Gotten,” in contrast, often implies the process of getting hold of something: “I’ve gotten five dollars for cleaning out Mrs. Quimby’s shed,” emphasizing the earning of the money rather than its possession. Phrases that involve some sort of process usually involve “gotten”: “My grades have gotten better since I moved out of the fraternity.” When you have to leave, you’ve got to go. If you say you’ve “gotten to go” you’re implying someone gave you permission to go.

Daylight Saving Time Begins—March 9

March
8/9

—

2008

SATURDAY/SUNDAY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23 _{/30}	24 _{/31}	25	26	27	28	29

a/an

If the word following begins with a vowel, the word you want is “an”: “Have an apple, Adam.” If the word following begins with a consonant, but begins with a vowel sound, you still need “an”: “An X-ray will show whether there’s a worm in it.” It is nonstandard and often considered sloppy speech to utter an “uh” sound in such cases.

When the following word definitely begins with a consonant sound, you need “A”: “A snake told me apples enhance mental abilities.”

March
10

© 2008

2008

MONDAY



*Dare to eat a peach instead—
they're sweeter than apples, and
who trusts snakes, anyway?*

spaded/spayed

If you have sterilized your dog, you've spayed it; save the spading until it dies.

March

11

2008

TUESDAY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
²³ / ₃₀	²⁴ / ₃₁	25	26	27	28	29

redundancies

Redundancies are phrases which say twice what needs to be said only once, like “past history.” Advertisers are particularly liable to redundancy in hyping their offers: “as an added bonus” (as a bonus), “preplan” (plan), and “free gift” (but look out for the shipping charges!). Two other common redundancies that are clearly errors are “and plus” (plus) and “end result” (result). But some other redundancies are contained in phrases sanctioned by tradition: “safe haven,” “hot water heater,” “new beginning,” and “tuna fish.”

March
12

—

2008

WEDNESDAY



“I vow for a new beginning—no more repetitive and repetitious speech, and also a terminal end to redundancies.”

muchly/much

Drop the nonstandard “-ly” ending from “much,”
or substitute the word “very” when appropriate.

March

13

© 2008

2008

THURSDAY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
²³ / ₃₀	²⁴ / ₃₁	25	26	27	28	29

**would have liked to have had/
would have liked to have**

“She would have liked to have had another glass of champagne” should be “She would have liked to have another glass. . . .”

March

14

2008

FRIDAY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
²³ / ₃₀	²⁴ / ₃₁	25	26	27	28	29

do respect/due respect

When you preface your critical comments by telling people “with all due respect” you are claiming to give them the respect they are due—that which is owed them. Many folks misunderstand this phrase and misspell it “all do respect” or even “all-do respect.” You shouldn’t use this expression unless you really do intend to be as polite as possible; all too often it’s used merely to preface a deliberate insult.

March
15/16

STANDARD

2008

SATURDAY/SUNDAY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
²³ / ₃₀	²⁴ / ₃₁	25	26	27	28	29

cope up/cope with

When you can't keep up with your work you may not be able to cope with your job; but you never "cope up" with anything. In casual speech we say "I can't cope" but in formal writing "cope" is normally followed by "with."

Saint Patrick's Day

March

17

© 2008

2008

MONDAY

"The first step was to collect an army to cope with the Danes."

—Mary Francis Cusack,
*Illustrated History of Ireland,
from the Earliest Period*

healthy/healthful

Many argue “people are healthy, but vegetables are *healthful*.” Logic and tradition are on the side of those who make this distinction, but I’m afraid phrases like “part of a healthy breakfast” have become so widespread that they are rarely perceived as erroneous except by the hyper-correct. On a related though slightly different subject, it is interesting to note that in English adjectives connected to sensations in the perceiver of an object or event are often transferred to the object or event itself. In the 19th century it was not uncommon to refer, for instance, to a “grateful shower of rain,” and we still say “a gloomy landscape,” “a cheerful sight,” and “a happy coincidence.”

March
18

2008
TUESDAY



*A big bunch of delicious grapes—
always a cheerful sight!*

sluff off/slough off

You use a loofah to *slough* off dead skin.

March

19

2008

WEDNESDAY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
²³ / ₃₀	²⁴ / ₃₁	25	26	27	28	29

dual/duel

“Dual” is an adjective describing the two-ness of something—dual carburetors, for instance. A “duel” is a formal battle intended to settle a dispute.

Spring Begins

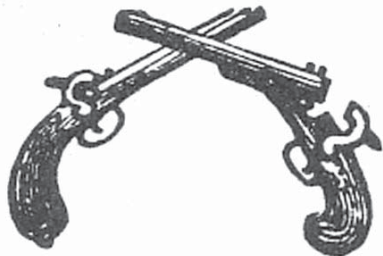
March

20

© 2008

2008

THURSDAY



*Dueling pistols—
not exactly dual purpose!*

hoard/horde

A greedily hoarded treasure is a *hoard*. A herd of wildebeests or a mob of people is a *horde*.

March

21

•••••

2008

FRIDAY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
²³ / ₃₀	²⁴ / ₃₁	25	26	27	28	29

doctorial/doctoral

“Doctoral” is occasionally misspelled—
and often mispronounced—”doctorial.”

Easter—March 23

March

22/23

2008

SATURDAY/SUNDAY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
²³ / ₃₀	²⁴ / ₃₁	25	26	27	28	29

for free/free

Some people object to “for free” because any sentence containing the phrase will read just as well without the “for,” but it is standard English.

March
24
FRIDAY
2008
MONDAY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
²³ / ₃₀	²⁴ / ₃₁	25	26	27	28	29

double negatives

It is not true, as some assert, that double negatives are always wrong; but the pattern in formal speech and writing is that two negatives equal a mild positive: “He is a not untalented guitarist” means he has some talent. In informal speech, however, double negatives are intended as negatives: “He ain’t got no talent” means he is a lousy musician. People are rarely confused about the meaning of either pattern, but you do need to take your audience into account when deciding which pattern to follow.

One of the funniest uses of the literary double negative is Douglas Adams’ description of a machine dispensing “a substance almost, but not quite, entirely unlike tea.”

March

25

—

2008

TUESDAY



—“I feel as though I’ve never not known you.”

—“That’s not the least kind thing I’ve never not heard!”

dangling and misplaced modifiers

It is not necessary to understand the grammatical details involved to grasp the basic principle here: words or phrases which modify some other word or phrase in a sentence should be clearly, firmly joined to them and not dangle off forlornly on their own.

Sometimes the dangling phrase is simply too far removed from the word it modifies, as in “Sizzling on the grill, Theo smelled the Copper River salmon.” This makes it sound like Theo is being barbecued, because his name is the nearest noun to “sizzling on the grill.” We need to move the dangling modifier closer to the word it really modifies: “salmon.”
“Theo smelled the Copper River salmon sizzling on the grill.”

March	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
26							1
<small>THE UNIVERSITY OF</small>	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
2008	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
WEDNESDAY	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
	23 _{/30}	24 _{/31}	25	26	27	28	29

begs the question

An argument that assumes as true the very point the speaker is trying to argue for is said in formal logic to “beg the question.” Here is an example of a question-begging argument: “This painting is trash because it is worthless.” The speaker simply asserts the worthlessness of the work without any evidence to demonstrate that this is the case. Since we never use “begs” with this odd meaning (“to improperly take for granted”) in any other phrase, many people mistakenly suppose the phrase implies something quite different: that the argument demands a question be asked. If you’re not comfortable with formal terms of logic, it’s best to stay away from this phrase.

March

27

—

2008

THURSDAY

“John Stuart Mill begs the question on the very title-page of his book, for he assumes the subjection of women. How is he to convince his opponents when he assumes in the first part of his argument that the present system ‘entirely subordinates the weaker sex to the stronger?’”

—Carlos White,
*Ecce Femina: An Attempt to
Solve the Woman Question*

interment/internment

Interment is burial; internment is merely imprisonment.

March

28

FRIDAY

2008

FRIDAY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
²³ / ₃₀	²⁴ / ₃₁	25	26	27	28	29

threw/through

“Threw” is the past tense of the verb “throw”: “The pitcher threw a curve ball.” “Through” is never a verb: “The ball came through my living room window.” Unless your sentence involves someone throwing something—even figuratively, as in “she threw out the idea casually”—the word you want is “through.”

March
29/30

—

2008

SATURDAY/SUNDAY



*Cy Young won many games
and threw many pitches
before he was through.*

parameters/perimeters

When parameters were spoken of only by mathematicians and scientists, the term caused few problems; but now that it has become widely adopted by other speakers, it is constantly confused with “perimeters.” A parameter is most commonly a mathematical constant, a set of physical properties, or a characteristic of something. But the perimeter of something is its boundary. The two words shade into each other because we often speak of factors of an issue or problem being parameters, simultaneously thinking of them as limits; but this is to confuse two distinct, if related ideas. A safe rule is to avoid using “parameters” altogether unless you are confident you know what it means.

March	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
31							1
<small>*****</small>	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
2008	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
MONDAY	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
	²³ / ₃₀	²⁴ / ₃₁	25	26	27	28	29