

American English Discourse: What *Not* to Do*

David E. Weber

[The following examples of inelegant words and sentences, strained or grammatically impaired phrases, common malapropisms and misspellings, and silly formats for possessives, were listed at the beginning of a magazine article concerning the use of the English language in the United States. Please don't let mistakes of this sort appear in your own written work!]

- "The cause was due to numerous factors."
- "As drinking water becomes more and more in short supply"
- "At this point in the time frame, the individual in question was observed, and subsequently apprehended by authorities. At some later point in time"
- "The accident equated to a lot of damage."
- "I choose to view my opponent's negative attacks as unproductive to the real issues facing the citizens of this campaign."
- "True facts are often impactful."
- "Processing of feelings is a major component of the grieving process."
- "Both sides are working together to achieve a workable consensus."
- "My wife and myself wish to express our gratitude and thanks to you for being here to support us at this difficult time in our life."
- "Travel-times on the expressways are reflective of its still being bad out there."
- "It's ____ A.M. in the morning."
- "Come in and take advantage of our knowledgeable staff."
- "We get the job done, not make excuses."
- "Chances of rain are prevalent."
- "The Fred Pryor Seminar has opened my eyes to better time management techniques. Also it has given real life situations and how to deal with them effectively."
- "Each of the variants indicated in boldface type count as an entry."
- "Insert and tighten metric calibrated hexscrews (K) into arc (C) comprised of intersecting vertical pieces (A) along transverse section of Structure."
- "The artist's employment of a radical visual idiom serves to decontextualize both conventional modes of representation and the patriarchal contexts on which such traditional hegemonic notions as representation, tradition, and even conventional contextualization, have come to be seen as depending on for their privileged status as aestheto-interpretive mechanisms."
- "I don't feel well and hope I recoup."
- "As parents, the responsibility of talking to your kids about drugs is up to you."
- "A longstanding tradition of achievement in the arena of excellence."
- "Iran must realize that it cannot flaunt with impunity the expressed will and law of the world community"
- "My workable options are at this time few in number"
- "This anguishing national ordeal"

- “A tradition of servicing your needs.”
- “A commitment to accountability in a lifetime of public service.”
- “As best as we can”
- “But I also want to have--be the president that protects the rights of, of people to, to have arms. And that--so you don't go so far that the legitimate rights on some legislation are, are, you know, impinged on.”
- “The mutual advantage of both sides in this widespread conflict”
- “We will make a determination in terms of an appropriate response.”
- “The enormity of his accomplishment “
- “Her ten-year rein atop the competition”
- “The reason is because she still continues to hue to the basic fundamentals.”
- “Please wait here until the next available clerk.”
- “I thought to myself”
- “Fellow countrymen”
- “Your efforts to recover from the experience of growing up in an alcoholic family may be very difficult and threatening for your family to hear about and accept, especially if they are still in the midst of their own survival.”
- “I'm not adverse to that”
- “misappropriate” for “steal”
- “further” for “farther”
- “misrepresent” for “lie”
- “individual” for “person”
- “whom” for “who”
- “that” for “who”
- “if” for “whether”
- “it's” for “its”
- “fail to comply with” for “violate”
- “quote” for “quotation”
- “nauseous” for “nauseated”
- “indicated” for “said”
- “parameters” for “limits”
- “options” for “choices” . . . “viable options” for “options”
- “workable solution” for solution”
- “convince” for “persuade”
- “append” for “attach”
- “which” for “that”
- “I” for “me”
- “portion” for “part”
- “request” for “ask” . . . “share” for “speak”
- “eventuate” for “happen”
- “valid” for “true”
- “meretricious” for “meritorious”
- “orientated” for “oriented”

- “besides” for “beside”
- “grow” for “develop” (e.g., “grow a business”)
- “amount” for “number” (e.g., “amount of people”)
- “quality” as an adjective
- “data” as singular . . . “media” as singular . . . “graffiti” as singular
- “escalate” as a transitive verb
- “biggest” as an imprecise superlative (e.g., “biggest reason,” “biggest idea”)
- comprised of
- between you and I
- free gift
- somewhat of a
- to mentor, to parent. to partner
- in point of fact
- prior to this time
- serves to
- commence . . . cease
- expedite
- subsequent to this time
- aid in
- in regards to
- could care less
- issues . . . core issues
- fellow colleagues
- not too good of a
- pay the consequences of
- at this juncture
- to reference
- commensurant
- efficacious . . . effectual
- this phenomena . . . these criterion
- functional . . . dysfunctional
- from whence
- merge together
- whomever wants it
- quality time
- self confessed
- precise estimate
- staunch the flow
- most especially
- sum total . . . final totals
- complete dearth
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Rule and Regulation Amendment Task Force

- to message . . . to send a message . . . to bring our message to
- a decisive factor . . . myriads of decisive factors
- on a ____ly basis
- from the standpoint of
- within the parameters of this context
- defamiliarize
- last and final call
- pursuit of a standard of total excellence
- an astute observance
- visible to the eye . . . audible to the ear
- proportionate response
- to impact
- contingent upon . . . every possible contingency
- loud volume
- surrounded on all sides
- nocular
- bedroom suit
- lucrative salaries . . . expensive prices
- substantiate . . . unsubstantiated
- future plans
- notorious

[Here are a few additions to the list:]

- “a part” for “apart”
- “penultimate” for “final,” “highest,” “greatest,” “most important,” “most influential”
- “defiantly” for “definitely” (inept spelling + trusting SpellCheck = needless errors)
- “these/those ones” for “these/those”
- “there” for “their” . . . “their” for “there” . . . “their” for “they’re”
- “__s”/“ __’s”/“ __s” for “__s”/“ __’s”/“ __s” . . . “__y’s” for “__ies”
- “forte” pronounced like *norte* instead of like “sort”
- “Everyone [transitive verb] their” “Everyone [transitive verb] his or her”
- more/most/very unique . . . more/most/very essential

* Wallace, David F. (2001, April). Tense present. *Harper’s Magazine*, 302, 39-59. Edited and reformatted after retrieval and copy-pasting on 18 April 2001 from EBSCOHost < http://ehostvgw17.epnet.com/ehost.asp?key=204.179.122.140_8000_1658406761&return=n&site=ehost&profile=web > The article—its abstract explains—comments on “the rules and arguments regarding correct English usage in the United States...evolution of language use with contemporary culture...[and] the linguistic authority and rhetorical persona of readers.”