

# Life in a Grammar Slammer

For most of us, English is a sentence (buh dum bum). In school we learned the basics followed by their 6,534 exceptions. We discovered, for instance, that “i” goes before “e” except after “c,” then immediately took off to SCIENCE.

In sixth grade I entered the Wildwood Elementary Spelling Bee and in the final round misspelled “lenient,” which does not, for the record, end in “-ant.”

I cried myself raw on the merry-go-round, shouting at the heavens: L-e-n-i-E-n-t, l-e-n-i-E-n-t... My shrink still enjoys the irony.

In the wake of that sinister day, I pledged to memorize every word in the dictionary, beginning with the a’s. “*Audacity*, noun. Unreserved impudence.”

Flip flip flip flip.

“*Impudent*, adjective. Impertinent disrespect.”

Flip flip flip flip.

“*Impertinence*, noun...”

In high school they made us diagram sentences that seem friendly enough but which are, beneath the surface, crawling with “prepositional phrases” and “subordinate clauses.” Example: *All people must have been laughing.*

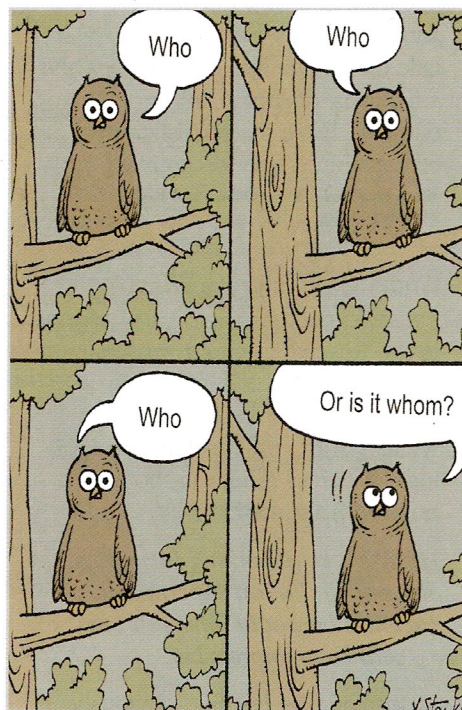
In eighth grade, “all people” is the subject, and “must have been laughing” is the verb.

By tenth grade, “all” is an adjectival modifier, “must” is a modal auxiliary verb, and “have been laughing” is a contusion of the lower occipital lobe. Wait, I’m back in science class.

The problem is that English has so many unnecessary, unneeded, needless words, and let me explicate why: Our founding grammarians had a sick sense of humor and are even now snickering in the dis-

tance. How else can you explain the pronunciation of *colonel*?

But they were the ones waving quills, and if a word is misspelled in the dictionary, how do you know? So they brainstormed new exceptions... “No, no. Let’s have ‘grammer’ end in -ar. That’ll *really* make ‘em feel stupid.”



When they finished with spellings, our twisted forebears gave each word numerous – sometimes contradictory – meanings. For example:

*Match*, verb. 1. To fit together, be in harmony 2. To pit in opposition against. 52. To light on fire (e.g., *The boy matched his dictionary*).

Then they moved on to pronunciation, which would depend, of course, on context (the part of the country you’re from). Example: *Don’t project on my project unless you effect my affects, and by that I mean my personal belongings.*

And it’s just this sort of thing that makes people speak Spanish. To this day, I say “amen” both ways just to make sure the prayer counts.

They, the grammar sickos, considered adding an “s” to “misspell,” but were far too subtle with a-b. They enjoy it most when nobody knows the word “arcane” and that phonetic begins with “ph.”

So what happens? Kids stop judging books by their covers and judge them by their movies instead. At Christmas, my nephew unwrapped *Catcher in the Rye* and asked, “Where do you plug it in?”

So it goes.

Other signs of language decay can be found in this perfectly acceptable use of online grammar: LOL BTW luv 2 chat but CUL8er :P We’ll diagram tomorrow.

Advertisers have their own rules, which include lots of verbing:

- *Staples is the best place to office.*
- *How to California in 30 Days.*

Note that California is an intransitive verb, so you couldn’t say, “Go California yourself.” You could, however, engage in Californication according to noted grammarians, The Red Hot Chili Peppers.

I personally feel that it’s immoral to put our children through English when grownups are running around using “office” as a verb. Think of all the time we slumped over those big blue English books of death. Those years could have been so much funner!

All I’m saying is that we could stand to be a little more l-e-n-i-A-n-t.

AY-men and AH-men. **T**

**Jason Love** is a syndicated humor writer and cartoonist. Contact him at [jason@jasonlove.com](mailto:jason@jasonlove.com).