Q: I believe that the word *next*, when it identifies a day of the week, can be confusing because the person speaking may mean "next week," and the listener may understand it to mean "the same day a week later."

A: You are not the first correspondent to mention that ambiguity. Some time ago an annoyed reader sent the following question: "Am I the only person who—when I tell a person on Monday, 'I'll see you next Friday—would show up four days later? Doesn't *next* mean 'closest to today'"?

Not always. The word *next*, in that context, can create an intrinsic problem because it means "the one that directly follows the one now being discussed." If that seems to mean "the Friday following the Friday we are now discussing," it implies that *next* refers not to this coming Friday but to the Friday of next week. However, if *next* means "this coming Friday," it means, as the reader argued, "in four days." When the question was first sent, I took an informal poll of members of this faculty, and, as I recall, opinions split down the middle. So it is wise to state the exact date.

The small word *up* can also be confusing, and you can't rely on a dictionary for help. In the phrase "walk up and down," the words *up* and *down* are synonyms; the phrase means "to and fro." But in "fill it up" *up* means "completely," while in "time is up" *up* means "finished." In "Your time is up," *up* means "exhausted." The word *up* is needed in the phrase "bring it up," but it has little meaning. On the other hand, *up* means "altogether" in the phrase "use it up," distinguishing that phrase from "use it." If I give you permission to "use" the cream, I may not want you to "use it up."

English speakers are more apt to add unnecessary words than to omit necessary words. We ask recipients of our letters to "reply back" to us when "reply" would be sufficient. We refer to "decapitated heads" and "demented minds," when the nouns *heads* and *minds* are unnecessary additions. Why add *out* to *exempt* and *adopt*? The phrase "and so" should be shortened to "so"; the phrase "yet still" should be either "yet" or "still"—not both.

Why do we say, "from whence they came," when *whence* by itself means "from that place"? And to speak of "a prognosis of coming events" makes no sense, since one could hardly predict past events. The phrase "old antique clothes" is redundant, as is "the reason is because"; and so is the second *is* in "the fact is *is* that... ." The judge who said that "the wife's rights are as *paramount* as the husband's" and added that her husband "had battered her *sufficiently enough* to be charged with a crime" must not have been thinking.

A reader correctly chided me for redundance when I added the to the Greek-derived phrase *hoi polloi*: the phrase itself means "the many." Adding the word *desert* to "the Negev desert" is also redundant (Negev means "desert); so is adding *ad hoc* ("for this purpose") to the phrase "task force." (A "task force," by definition, is appointed "for this purpose").The common idiom, "I am friends with her," is redundant, merging "We are friends" with "I am her friend."

But redundancy often serves a purpose: to make the unimportant seem important or the important seem unimportant. Here are two comments by federal government appointees:

- What I do is to orchestrate a series of people who put in inputs that eventually come out as a draft which I personally submit to the Secretary-General. (Response to a reporter's question about the duties of a newly appointed deputy.)
- We should address the matter of how we can maximize the fact of our incumbency in dealing with persons known to be active in their opposition to our administration. (John Dean, who later added a briefer, more candid explanation: "Stated more bluntly, 'How can we use available federal machinery to screw our enemies?'")

Attorney William Zinsser, prolific author and critic of legal jargon, said, "Clutter is the disease of American writing. We are a society strangling in unnecessary words, circular constructions, pompous frills, and meaningless jargon."

Potpourri

The following anecdotes interested and amused me, and you may also enjoy them.

- Daniel Schorr commented that compound words were invented at a time when cablegrams cost five cents a word, so to save money *sign off* became *offsign*, *play down* became *downplay*, *put off* became *offput*, and so on. Irritated by these compound words, Schorr then added, "For [goodness'] sake, *offlay* already!"
- From a letter to *The New York Times*' "Metropolitan Diary": "My daughter, who was five years old, cried out from the backseat of our car as we approached the Queens-Midtown Tunnel, 'Look, Daddy, there's the Jesus building!' After some confusion, I realized she was pointing to the Chrysler Building."
- (That anecdote reminded me of my grandson's comment (as a first-grader) from the backseat of my daughter's car: "Look, Mommy, there's the President! (Then President Kennedy had been reported to be visiting in the area, so my daughter excitedly began looking for a sight of him—that is, until her son continued, "She's the president of my school!")

A final personal anecdote: My granddaughter, aged seven, loved to talk. One day she sadly announced that her teacher had called her "the trunk of an elephant." On checking, I found out that the teacher had called her "a disruptive element." Later, my granddaughter proudly reported that the teacher had appointed her to a new post: "director of silence." Apparently, the teacher had learned how to keep my granddaughter quiet. **TFL**

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