Grammar Tweets

2011 ~ 2015

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March 16, 2015 – *Alumni*

It's mid-March which means that is time to start the spring series of #queensgrammar tweets, my twice-yearly effort to explain, cajole, and occasionally rant on points of grammar, style, spelling and vocubulary--uh, vocabulary. I'm fond of Latin so there's some of that too. Today's subject is alumni, speaking of Latin. The term 'alumnus' originally denoted a pupil, or a child placed in foster care and derives from the verb 'alere', to feed or nourish. It has come of course to mean anyone who is a former student at a school or university. I'm sure you all knew that (-:. Why a topic for #queensgrammar? Because last week I heard at least 3 people refer to themselves as 'an alumni'. While I am delighted at their pride in their association with Queen's, their Latin needs some work. 'Alumni' is a plural and refers to two or more of the aforementioned grads. The singular is 'alumnus' for males, 'alumna' for females, Latin being a gendered language. I am an alumnus; my wife @jagwoolf will soon be (we expect) an alumna. Two or more female grads are 'alumnae' (feminine plural) not 'alumni'. Convention uses the masculine plural 'alumni' for a mixed group of men and women. Hence the Queen's Alumni Review, Alumni Association etc. I'll close this with a reminder to our alumni of the coming Alumni Volunteer Summit on March 28th. Back tomorrow with more.

March 17, 2015 – *Emeritus*

Yesterday's #queensgrammar brought a request from one follower that I address the issue of professors emeritus and the gender of the title. The word 'emeritus' is a Latin loan word (that is a Latin term that has crept into English usage). The 'loan word' aspect is important as it allows some variation of the 'inflection' rules, ie the degree to which endings change to reflect gender. The word itself in Latin is the past participle of the verb emerere ('to earn, to deserve' etc). 'Emeritus' is a title that affixed to another title (eg president, pope [in a recent case], chancellor etc) allows a person to relinquish most of their duties but (in some cases, e.g. profs.) hang on to others. It is pronounced with the 2nd, not the 4th syllable stressed: thus eMERitus (not, as I have heard a couple of times recently, emeritus, which sounds like a disease one might catch). The title Professor Emeritus is bestowed on faculty when they retire (in some univs, on all of them, in others on a subset such as those who achieved the rank of full professor. Tomorrow we will tackle the reason why 'emeritus' is gendered--or not.

March 18, 2015 – *Emeritus/Emerita*

Good morning from Ottawa; time to conclude yesterday's discussion of the word 'emeritus' and its feminine form. In most universities, retiring male professors (or a selection of them) are given the title 'professor emeritus'. Sometimes the adjective (as the Latin participle has become in English) 'emeritus' will precede the noun professor; in informal speech 'emeritus' may be used on its own, as in "I retired to Napanee but I'm still emeritus at Queen's". But what of the gender? Again, in most places I've worked, a female is given the title 'emerita' rather than emeritus, reflecting the Latin gender of the person holding the title 'professor' (which itself you will note does not change endings in English). But not all schools observe this practice. My previous university insisted on one title--'professor emeritus' for men and women. I tried to argue the point without success as a faculty dean there; 'emeritus' it remained. And here's the interesting bit--strictly speaking they were not entirely wrong, linguistically, to stick to 'emeritus' for both males and females, even though to my ears and I suspect others it sounds odd to call a woman univ. retiree 'emeritus' not 'emerita'. Tomorrow I will explain why.

March 19, 2015 - *Loanwords*

I'm a little late with this morning's owing to a very late arrival back home from Toronto. So let's get to it. Today I promised to have an answer to why adjectival titles such as 'emeritus' are sometimes gendered (eg 'emerita' for females) and sometimes not. The answer: it depends whether one is treating the word strictly as a Latin term (in which case changing endings is correct) or simply considering it a 'Lehnwort' (German for 'loanword'), that is a term that has been so thoroughly and familiarly adopted into English that neither gendering nor case inflection (also a Latin feature) is deemed necessary.   We pluralize and gender many Latin terms that could be considered loanwords--I would suggest that 'alumnus/alumna, pl. alumni' are so familiar as to be considered loanwords. And in most institutions the same is true for 'emeritus/emerita'. My point is simply that those institutions that do not gender Latin (or German, French or Italian) loanwords are not, strictly speaking, being grammatically or linguistically incorrect. (Whether you deem failure to gender titles as politically incorrect is another matter entirely.) Tomorrow a bit more on loanwords in general and the related linguistic term, the 'calque'.

March 20, 2015 – *More Loanwords*

Today I'd like to discuss the idea of loanwords (or loan-words) more fully, following the week's #queensgrammar tweets on 'emeritus'. English is a language full of loanwords reflecting both its Germanic Anglo-Saxon roots, French Norman influences and more modern borrowings from elsewhere. It is also, of course, an exporter of words to other languages. We'll stick to the imports for this discussion. You'll recall that in the title 'professor emeritus' that the postpositive adjective 'emeritus' is a loanword from Latin, meaning that it is correct NOT to gender its ending, though also correct to do so. But what of the noun 'professor'? It, too, is a loan word, also derived from Latin. And in English, it is never inflected to reflect gender. But that isn't true of other Latin-derived (ie 'romance') languages. In Spanish for instance, a female teacher or professor is rendered as 'profesora' (there's only one 's'). We don't do that in English because it's a loanword that has been so completely assimilated into our language that gendering it would seem very odd to the spoken ear. So why gender 'emeritus' and not 'professor'? Simple usage and familiarity I

would suggest has a determinative role here. We think of 'professor' as being an English word; it has been a more stealthy infiltrator than 'emeritus' which still sounds as if it's a Latin word even though its claim to be a loanword (and thereby free of the 'duty to inflect') is just as strong. Clear? Well, there's a further dimension to such inter-language borrowings: what happens when a word is borrowed from another language and translated? That's a phenomenon known as a 'calque'. We'll take that up next week. Have a good Wochenende.

March 23, 2015 - 'Calque' or Loan Translation

Time for a Monday morning wake up. On Friday the subject was 'loanwords', terms borrowed intact from another language. The subject today is, if you like, their opposite, the 'calque', or loan translation. This is what happens when a word or phrase in a source language is adopted in a host language but not in its original form--rather, it is translated into a host-language word, phrase or idiom. (Ironically the term 'loan-word' is itself a calque from its original German term--many original words for linguistic concepts derive from German or French, showing their roots in 19th century philology; but that is an aside). So what are some other examples, in English, of calques? Tolkien famously used one, 'Bag End' as a kind of joke. It is a translation of the French 'cul-de-sac' (which of course when used in its original form isn't a calque but a loan-word) and there are a lot of words, especially in North American English with its multiethnic origins, which are calques. 'New wave' is a direct translation of 'nouvelle vague' from French; 'masterpiece' derives from German or Dutch words. You get the general idea. But the traffic isn't just one-way; English has increasingly lent words or phrases to other languages either as calques or loan-words: sometimes both. In high school French class we were taught that the translation of 'coca-cola' was 'cacolac' which would be a calque of coke. But any time I've been to France I've found that 'le coca-cola' is more commonplace, which is a loan-word not a calque. Here's a little exercise for today: think of a common English phrase or word that is a calque from another language. Tomorrow we'll start a series of on some Latin phrases and grammar points I've been asked about.

March 24, 2015 – In Medias Res

Readers of and those who know me will be aware that I am fond, as an early modern historian, of Latin words and phrases. For the next few days I'm going to tweet about a few not uncommon expressions that those of you writing essays can use to impress your instructor (as long as you use them properly!). Today's subject is 'in medias res'. This literally means 'into the middle of things or events'. It is a narrative technique in which one starts midway through the flow of events and then goes backward and forward. Homer's Odyssey is a good example; so is the movie Pulp Fiction. But why 'medias' and not 'media' as I've often seen erroneously? Because the 'case' of the noun 'medium' is governed by the preposition 'in', which in Latin can mean either 'in' OR 'into'; if the former, a governed noun takes the ablative case. If the latter, as in this expression, it takes the accusative case. It is also a plural. I've explained accusative and ablative in these tweets on prior occasions so won't repeat that here. But if one is using a Latin expression (not a Latin loan-word as described last week), then case endings are important. I'll be back tomorrow with another example of why.

March 25, 2015 – *More In Medias Res*

Good morning from land. Timing of these tweets for the rest of this week will be a bit irregular owing to travel schedules. Yesterday as I tweeted about 'in medias res' I had a nagging feeling that something was wrong as I explained 'medias' as an accusative plural. It didn't sound right as 'medium' is a neuter noun the acc. pl. of which would be 'media' (as in 'mass media'). It was almost as if the shades of my undergrad classics profs the late Profs Kilpatrick and Smethurst, were wagging the fingers at me disapprovingly and shaking their heads. But I didn't need a 'medium' to communicate my error from the Stygian depths. I only had to look as far as my twitter feed where classicist @AvenSarah spotted the problem right away. 'In medias res' does mean 'into the middle of things'. But a peculiarity of Latin is that in this instance 'medias' is not a noun but an ADJECTIVE (medius, a, um) modifying 'res' (which here is a feminine accusative plural). Latin adjectives change endings in accordance with the gender and case of the noun they modify; hence 'medias' rather than 'media'. Crystal clear? Tomorrow I will try to explain a famous classical title/expression, "De Rerum Natura" and why it isn't "De Natura Rerum", a question posed by my daughter (who is currently in that birthplace of modern classical philology, Berlin) some months ago.

March 26, 2015 – *Latin Case Priority*

Good morning from Calgary where dawn is just breaking as I write this tweet. Good to be back if only very briefly in Alberta. The Roman poet Lucretius wrote a famous work entitled "De Rerum Natura'" which translates into 'Of the Nature of Things'.   So why is it 'De Rerum Natura' and not 'De Natura Rerum'? The answer has to do both with Latin case priority (the order in which words, especially nouns, appear depending on whether they are nominative, genitive, accusative, dative,or ablative) and with the meaning of the word 'de' which doesn't mean in Latin what you think it does. We'll start with 'de' which is a preposition meaning 'of, about, concerning'. But it's not 'of' in a possessive sense and thus is not referring to the noun 'rerum' but to the noun 'natura'. 'De' is one of those prepositions that takes the ablative case (signifying by, with, etc.) So where does 'rerum' (the 'things' in Lucretius title) come in? We'll tackle that one tomorrow morning.

March 27, 2015 – *Possession in Latin*

It's a very early morning at Pearson airport where I've just arrived overnight from Calgary. My first duty (on 3 hours sleep) is to conclude this week's #queensgrammar series. Yesterday we dealt with the phrase 'De Rerum Natura' and explained that the preposition 'de' doesn't mean 'of' but 'about'. So where is the 'of' in 'About the Nature OF things'"? It lies in the case ending of the word 'rerum' itself, the genitive case of the noun 'res, rerum'. Possession in Latin is signified by the genitive, where in English we use the preposition 'of'. It's confusing because French of course does use 'de' to denote possession. So: 'De Rerum Natura' is 'Concerning the Nature of Things'. But, you say, that still doesn't explain why the "Rerum" precedes the 'natura'. Again, case order matters in Latin, and the genitive typically takes precedence over cases such as the ablative, in this instance, 'natura'. An ancient Roman would have had no difficulty with this word order. I suspect Yoda would have liked it also. Back on Monday will I be with the last week of this spring's series of #queensgrammar. Good weekend, have all of you.

March 30, 2015 – 'ized'

A couple of weeks ago I read a story about Harper Lee's long awaited sequel to "To Kill a Mockingbird" in which the beloved author indicated that she had not felt 'pressurized' to publish this sequel. The use of that word caused me to ponder the phenomenon whereby verbs in English get expanded and 'ized'. It happens when a noun derives from a verb (in this case the word 'pressure' from the verb 'to press') and then get reconverted into a verb by 'izing'. Ms Lee could simply say she had not been 'pressed' to publish the sequel. Another favourite example (which my late parents, native Britons like me, used to take delight in mocking) is 'burglarize'. The original verb is 'burgle', and one who does it is a 'burglar'. Yet, in US usage the original verb has virtually disappeared (been burgled?) from common parlance. One is unlikely to hear of a museum or home being 'burgled', at least on this side of the ocean. In the UK however, where such verb expansion is less common, burgled is still in use; pressurized has also not caught on to my knowledge but another variant of 'pressed', 'pressured' has--it too is a verb expansion from a noun. I don't think it's a matter of one being 'correct' and the other 'wrong', but it is an interesting feature of how languages can evolve in common usage in different locations. That's our #queensgrammar for Monday.

March 31, 2015 – *Less and Fewer*

A topic that bedevils many writers is the difference between 'less' and 'fewer'. They are not infrequently mixed up and one will hear "I drank less cokes yesterday" when 'fewer' is the correct term. There is an easy rule here: if the item being referred to is countable or not: if the former, then 'fewer' is correct. Thus 'I drank fewer cokes' BUT 'I drank less sprite'. There are some exceptions, such as time and distance--we say 'Easter is less than 4 days away' (though fewer would also be correct IMHO); or, 'it's less than 40 miles to Gananoque'. However, one of my favourite grammar bloggers, @GrammarGirl points out in her blog (here http://t.co/haCzt6cSb1) that the exceptions aren't really exceptions: time and distance are often of as singular units even when they look like plurals: e.g. '$1500.00 IS a lot of money to pay for that dog', which would mean it can take 'less' instead of 'fewer'. 'Eve paid less than a hundred dollars for her dress' is thus correct. I hope this #queensgrammar allows those of you struggling over essays this week to make FEWER mistakes.

April 1, 2015 - *Enjoy*

My dad, a surgeon and avid reader, was also a stickler on grammar and usage and loved to mock colloquialisms. One of his favourite targets was that word uttered thousands of times a day by waiters and waitresses across the continent: 'Enjoy!' why the objection? It wasn't the sentiment that irked him but the use of the word 'enjoy', a transitive verb, without an object. 'Enjoy what exactly? The tablecloth? the ambience? The overly loud background music? Oh, I get it--enjoy the FOOD.' Transitive verbs are verbs that require a direct object, that is a thing to which the action is being done. 'Enjoy' is an imperative usage--a directive to do something: (e.g.: 'Run!'; 'Hide!' 'Clean up your Desk!' (frequently intoned by my assistant Cheryl). But 'enjoy!' used in this way does not grammatically make sense without an object behind it, as in 'enjoy your meal'. Dad realized he was tilting at a usage windmill here and I suspect most wait-staff will be disinclined to add the additional couple of words 'your meal' to their encouragement of delight in the repast; I offer this more as an example of how spoken English can modify the strict rules of grammar in ways that can cause a purist NOT to enjoy a meal. I'll be back tomorrow with one final #queensgrammar for this cycle (Friday being a holiday). Meanwhile--enjoy [your day].

April 2, 2015 - *Aforementioned*

For my last #queensgrammar for this season I thought of a word that seems straightforward to me but appears to cause confusion elsewhere.

The aforementioned word is in fact 'aforementioned'; recently @jagwoolf had it bounced out of her group assignment in her Master's program because several group members were apparently unfamiliar with it. It is a form of circumlocution--a way of denoting something without saying it directly, or in this case repeating it. As a part of speech, it is an adjective. Its use can be traced back to Elizabethan English (that's Elizabeth I btw). A good example: 'We discussed the aforementioned motion' would refer back to something specified or named in detail in a previous sentence. I think there is a tendency to regard it as legalese, something one finds in contractual or legislative texts. But I think it a perfectly usable word and so long as the item being referred to is clear (if it isn't you have a 'vague ref'), it can be used, like any term, sparingly, to avoid unnecessary repetition. That's it for the aforementioned #queensgrammar series for this spring. Happy long weekend to all.

Fall 2014

November 10, 2014 – *Buzzwords and Phrases*

Good morning grammar enthusiasts. It's time for the fall cycle of #queensgrammar tweets. To start off, we are going to do a deep dive on buzz words and phrases. These aren't ungrammatical, but they have become annoying features of speech and writing. In essence they are varieties of what George Orwell famously called "dead metaphors"-so overused that they become trite and ineffective. If you've been paying attention you will note I used one such phrase, 'deep dive' in the 1st tweet today. That's a variant of another such phrase, to 'drill down', meaning to take a closer look at some data. Some of these are worse than others IMHO. One of my least favourite, which causes me to reach for a palmful of red pens, is 'go forward', as in 'what's the go forward' on this? or 'as we go forward into the future' (as opposed to backward into the future?!) or 'forward planning' (there's backward planning?. I will concede that the occasional use of this in speech or conversation is harmless and perhaps occasionally useful. But please, essay writers: KEEP THESE OUT OF YOUR PROSE! This will lengthen your marker's life and lead to a happier outcome all round. Back tomorrow with a couple more examples of irritating buzz phrases. As always, topic ideas are welcome on a 'go forward' (aaargh!) basis. Have a great Monday and be buzzword free.

November 11, 2014 – *More Buzzwords and Phrases*

Good morning. My #queensgrammar crusade against buzzwords and phrases continues today. Thanks to those who sent in suggestions, among them one from @coffeeco, 'look fors'--apparently school inspectors come armed with lists of these when visiting schools; this one is not only an awkward sounding phrase; it is also grammatically problematic as it is missing an object after the preposition 'for'; that's like listening to a Beethoven symphony and missing the final resolving note: ie, not done in polite company. My fellow historian @medhistorian cited 'looking back in history' as her 'red pen' phrase. That's a good example of a phrase that includes both unnecessary words (why not just say 'examining history' or even 'looking into

history') but redundant ones. Since one cannot plainly look forward into history unless one is, say, Mr Peabody the dog, or perhaps claims prophetic powers.

I'll be back tomorrow with a couple more examples. Meantime, unrelated to buzzwords, let me end with an observation on spelling. Today, 11 Nov., is Remembrance Day--not, as I have seen a couple of times recently, 'RemembErance Day'. May you observe it in peace and with reflection on the past (and not 'looking back into history').

November 12, 2014 – *Challenge and Issues*

It's time for this morning's #queensgrammar. At the request of my lovely wife @jagwoolf, I am going to take on 'challenges' and 'issues'. In contrast to the 'buzzwords' I have been criticizing in the last couple of days, these are really euphemisms--legitimate words that have been appropriated to stand in the place of a word that sounds negative or upsetting. In this case, the word in question is usually 'problem' or some variant. 'This plan presents certain challenges' or 'I have some issues with this suggestion' are both seen as more 'polite' or less 'negative' ways of saying 'this is a problem'. We've all done this, but the practice can be carried to extremes, so far that the original word disappears. Personally, I have no 'issues' with calling something a problem or difficulty etc when it is. But I'm old-fashioned and rather Britophile in my usages. I still say 'died' and not 'passed away', for instance. In most cases, the simpler and more straightforward word is the most clear and direct. Euphemisms have their place in certain circumstances, but be aware that when you are using them you are inserting a word that is a substitute for the 'real thing'. Back tomorrow with more #queensgrammar. May your day be challenging but problem-free.

November 13, 2014 – *Buzz Phrase Period of Time*

It's a little early for today's #queensgrammar but I am presenting to a large group in just over an hour, so here goes. Credit for today's suggestion to @qui_oui who reminded me of another buzz phrase: 'period of time'. This is one I've seen a lot over the years in history essays. The word crime (sorry Weird Al!) here is plain old redundancy, i.e. both 'period' and 'time' are not needed as they essentially mean the same thing in the context in which they are used to together. 'In this period, goddesses were worshipped' is perfectly adequate, as is 'at this time, tigers were not yet an endangered species'. Each carries the same sense as 'time' in this sense MEANS period, and period means time. So next time you refer to an earlier period take the time not to be redundant and just use 'time' or 'period'. Period.

November 14, 2014 – *Tenets or Tenants*

Good morning #queensgrammar folk. I was going to finish the week with another buzzword but something I saw in a piece of official writing yesterday caused steam to come from my ears, namely the mistaking of 'tenets' for tenants. I've done this one before but It would seem a refresher is in order. A tenant is a person or company renting space or land from another. The word itself is a straight Latin import from the verb 'tenire', to hold, the 3rd person plural present tense of which is 'tenant', literally 'They hold'. 'Tenet' come from the same Latin route (as for that matter does 'tenure') but refers not to property held but beliefs or principles. It is thus a TENET of good writing that one should not talk of 'tenants' as principles when you mean 'Tenets'. A principle cannot be a tenant. (Of course a principAL) could be but that's a different matter; this principal owns I hope that is reasonably clear. I will be back Monday with week 2 of #queensgrammar.

November 17, 2014 – *it's vs its*

It's #queensgrammar time and an opportunity for my annual rant about "it's" vs "its". The confusion of the two has, I think, gotten worse in the past 12 months as I continue to see the contracted form "it's" (contraction for "it is") misused as the possessive "its". One of the culprits, I think, is the autocorrect function on iPads, smart phones, blackberries etc which seems routinely to insert the apostrophe whether one wants it there or not. The problem comes in the belief that because one says "Eve's book" or "Rob's car" (which are possessives) that therefore the pronoun "its" should also have an apostrophe. But Eve and Rob are not pronouns, but proper nouns (ie names). The pronouns one would use to stand in for them "her" and "his" do not take an apostrophe, and neither should the neuter form "its". Thi's i's too good a topic not to spend more time on so I will continue tomorrow with more on the misuse of the poor, abus'ed apos'trophe.

November 18, 2014 – *Possessive and apostrophe*

"Yesterday on #queensgrammar we had a go at the 'it's/its' confusion. Here is an easy way of remembering how to get it right. If you are "writing the word 'it' and want to put an 's' on the end ask yourself whether it is a possessive, and if so whether you would write 'hi's' if it were a masculine possessive pronoun (I would have used 'her's' as an example but unfortunately I've seen apostrophes there too). No you wouldn't? then don't put an apostrophe in 'its' unless it is a contraction. For that matter if you are writing a formal essay, there is an even easier way to remember which is not to use 'it's' with an apostrophe at all. Why? Because 'it's' is a a contraction, which is best avoided in any case--grammatically correct but too informal. Use "it is" instead where you mean 'it's' (contracted form) and 'its' when a possessive is called for, and you won't go wrong. Back tomorrow with one more run at the abuse of the poor apostrophe, this time in plurals.

November 19, 2014 – *Pluralizing possessives*

I'm a bit late with this morning's #queensgrammar, and time will be a bit variable for the rest of this week owing to some overseas travel. I promised one more defence of the harmless apostrophe today, this time not in the context of 'it's' but something that drives me even battier: its (not it's!) use in plurals. Every time I see a sign on someone's property cutely proclaiming that this is the home of the "the Kennedy's" or "the Smith's" I wonder if the occupants think they are Gaelic chieftains who once were known as THE O'Neill etc. Really? this is the home of THE Kennedy or THE Smith? The apostrophe is totally unneeded, and improper. In fact, it has been dragged kicking and screaming in front of an 's' when a plural, not a possessive is intended. But the problem has gone beyond doorsigns, folks. I now see memos referring to "the dean's and vice-principal's" where clearly a plural is meant. There's NO place for apostrophes in plural nouns or pronouns UNLESS they are also possessive. More on the pluralizing of possessives tomorrow. Till then, care for your apostrophes as if you had a lifetime limited supply.

November 24, 2014 – *Stint and Stent*

After a couple of days off last week (time zones and travel schedule didn't align) I'm back home for a stint with some more.

In fact 'stint' is a word I'm going to talk about. It is an old English word in origins, and its original meaning was to dull or blunt something. Over time it evolved into both a noun and a verb. The noun carries some of that earlier meaning--sort of: in the sense that it has become a word for a thing with limits, in particular a

period of time: 'I did a stint in the army' or 'Boris did his stint of work for the day'. As a verb, it has a not unrelated meaning--to limit or restrict. "Don't stint on the gravy"; or "the cherry swirl cookies didn't turn out because I stinted on the sugar". Clear? OK, one more point: a stint is not the same as a STENT which is a medical device used for cardiovascular patients to keep a clogged blood vessel open.

If you are going in to hospital for a stint make sure that you get the spelling right or you may find yourself with a stent

November 25, 2014 – *Pluralization of names*

I'm a little late with #queensgrammar this morning owing to a very late return from Toronto last night. I promised last week something further on the pluralization of names. This one is actually quite complicated because there are two schools (not school's) of thought on this when it comes to possessives of single syllables. Basic pluralization is simple: if your name is Smith, then two of you are Smiths. If your name is Jones, then it is Joneses (as in keeping up with...). Animal type names subscribe to the same rule. Although we often joke in my family about we 'woolves' (thanks @Justforpun) it is correctly Woolfs, and the plural of Mrs Deer's name is Deers. Tomorrow we will handle the issue of making these possessive, especially in single syllable names.

November 26, 2014 – *Turning surnames into possessives*

Today our #queensgrammar topic is turning surnames into possessives, whether singular or plural. This one is actually tougher than it sounds. There are two schools of thought on one sub-issue, what one days with names ending in 's' (whether surnames or given names).

With non-s-ending names it's quite simple. "Mr Smith's cottage" or "Mr and Mrs Smith's cottage" but "the Smiths' cottage". Note the key placement of the apostrophe AFTER the possessive 's' signifying a plural possessive. For the error of placing it before the 's' ("the Smith's or the Smith's cottage") see last weeks #queensgrammar. Clear so far? Good. But what about Jones? Is it Jone's cottage? No, clearly not unless his name is Jone not Jones. But this is where it gets murky and there is some difference between UK and North American style. I was roundly chastised at my Oxford thesis defence in 1983 for having written "King James' version" or "Hobbes' histories" throughout. Was I wrong? We'll take that point up tomorrow on #queensgrammar .

November 27, 2014 – *Apostrophe and words ending in 's'*

We've spent a fair bit of time on apostrophes the past couple of weeks on #queensgrammar. Perhaps the most divisive issue among grammarians is what to do with words ending with 's' when one needs an apostrophe. As I mentioned yesterday, there is disagreement here and perhaps no right answer apart from being consistent. The clearest statement of this that I have seen can be found at the grammar site here: http://t.co/2NaAIY1XQm, which points to the division of opinion. Ok: now to the substance of the issue. Is it Mr Jones' cottage or Mr Jones's cottage? I was made to correct several instances of the former into the latter on my 1983 doctoral thesis and have been for 30 years correcting essays in this way. But it's not that clear that this is an agreed rule everywhere (that is, to add the extra "s" after the apostrophe). And what about multisyllabic words or names ending in 's', such as Harris or cactus? I think we would in speech (as with single syllable words) add the extra "s" (Mr Harris's car; the cactus's spines); but in writing

it is more common NOT to add the extra s on the polysyllabic noun (unlike the monosyllabic one, eg Jones, lens). Rule number 1 however is BE CONSISTENT. That's all for today class: tomorrow we'll deal with pluralizing of possessives ending in "s" which is a slightly less complicated problem. Meanwhile go watch Bridget Jones's diary. Or should that be Bridget Jones' diary? (-:

November 28, 2014 – *Apostrophe and monosyllables*

It's the last day of the week and of classes, so for my final #queensgrammar of the fall series we'll wrap up our apostrophe treatment.

We looked at words ending in 's' and how to make them possessive; what about when they are plural? That one is fortunately a little simpler. There is almost always an 's' to make the plural (I say "almost") because words like "deer" or "fish" are usually pluralized without an 's'). And where there is an 's' to make the plural, the apostrophe always goes on the outside. E.G.: "The Williams' cottage"; "the Carters' car". What about those pesky monosyllables? Is it "the Jones' dog" or is it "the Joneses' dog"? It is the latter, since there are plural Joneses with whom one is trying to keep up. There is still more that could be said regarding the humble but useful apostrophe, for instance what to do with words ending with 'x' such as "fox" or "Alex". Always add 's' for a singular "the fox's mate; Alex's car" or 'es' for the plural: "the foxes' den".

Winter 2014

March 10, 2014 – *i.e. vs. e.g.*

It's March 20 and spring is less than two weeks away, in theory at least, which means it's time for a new season of #queensgrammar

A few of you wrote last week with suggestions for topics. One of those was 'i.e.' vs 'e.g.' This is a good one since the two are often treated as if synonymous. They aren't. Both are, as one might expect, initials for Latin phrases. Let's take e.g. It is short for 'exempli gratia' which more or less means 'for the sake of example'. Note that it's not 'exemplum'. It is 'exempli' because we are using the Latin genitive, for the sake (gratia) OF example. e.g. should be used when you're offering an instance or example of something. "Eve gave several treats to her dog, e.g., a milkbone" or "There are many good shows on television, e.g. Lost and Breaking Bad." If in doubt just remember 'e.g.=eggzample'. Tomorrow we will look at 'i.e.' (id est) which means something different. Enjoy your Monday.

March 11, 2014 – *i.e.*

Today's #queensgrammar concerns 'i.e.', that short form often mistaken for 'e.g.', which we looked at yesterday. As with its pal, i.e. is a Latin derivation, in this case 'id est': literally, 'that is'. It performs a function that might seem similar to 'e.g.' but is actually a bit different. In using 'e.g.' you are offering one or more instances of a thing, person, or action--or even an adjective or adverb: e.g. (!!) "I like many kinds of cookie, e.g. peanut butter, chocolate chip and shortbread." The 'e.g.' is a 'for instance'. Not so 'i.e.'. which offers an alternative way of saying something, not an example of it. Take this example: "The US civil war

was about slavery, i.e. it concerned northern states' wish to abolish the practice". (No criticizing, US historians!) Or "The room had been redecorated, i.e. it had been painted and new furniture added". If that sounds a bit clunky you are correct: I personally avoid using i.e. as much as possible. A simple 'that is' will do as well, or, 'in other words'. Trying to remember the difference? Yesterday I suggested EG-ZAMPLE for 'e.g.'. @jagwoolf suggested 'IN other words' as a mnemonic (i.e. a way of remembering) for 'i.e.' All for today. #queensgrammar will be back in 24 hours, i.e., tomorrow.

March 12, 2014 – *immigration*

For today's #queensgrammar we're going to discuss immigration: not the phenomenon, but the word and its different forms and antonym. I recently read a sentence that said of someone that he 'immigrated from England'. Unfortunately it is tough to immigrate FROM anywhere. One immigrates TO a country; one emigrates FROM another country: e.g., "I emigrated from the UK to Canada in 1961" (which for me is actually a true statement!). But "I immigrated to Canada in 1961 from the UK". Note the word order is what makes the difference; it was ok to use the 'from' with 'immigrate'--just not right after the verb. How to remember this? As usual, Latin is a helper: IMmigrate sounds like 'in-migrate'; EMigrate sounds like 'exit', or leave. One final point: where does 'migrate' fit into the picture? It depends. Individuals don't 'migrate' except figuratively "the dog migrated from its bed to the food dish", for instance. In the literal sense, animals migrate, as in "the geese migrate south for winter", and entire peoples can--the wandering of so-called barbarian tribes in late antiquity was a migration; there is no particular #queensgrammar origin or destination in mind in this instance, the emphasis simply being collective movement.

March 13, 2014 - *Consensu*

This morning's #queensgrammar is a consensus builder in a way--I was asked recently about the plural of the word 'consensus'. There are 2 different answers to this, and also an important principle with respect to the migration (not immigration) of Latin words to English. First of all, the plural of consensus is not, definitively, 'consensi'. Why? because the Latin word is a particular declension of noun, the 4th declension (not the same as the '4th dimension'!) of which the plural is identical to the singular. Yes, that's right, the plural of consensus in Latin is consensus. However: one would be perfectly correct to write 'consensuses' in English because the word has become, regardless of its derivation, a commonplace English noun. And this is where it starts to get even trickier. 'But, @queensprincipal', you ask 'isn't alumnus a Latin word also that we pluralize as alumni'? Indeed. But that is by convention; one probably could say alumneses, but it sounds weird. Basic rule is: if the word is in common usage in English, you can probably pluralize the way you would a non-Latin derived term. But there will be exceptions, so you have to pay attention to convention--or in this case, respect the consensuses.

March 17, 2014 – *The verbing of nouns*

It's Monday morning and time for another #queensgrammar. Someone asked me to address the 'verbing of nouns'. That very phrase illustrates the subject and the problem--the phenomenon of the past quarter century of turning verbs (action words) into nouns (things). Sorry, last tweet came out wrong: I meant turning nouns into verbs. Bring on the coffee. The first time I noticed this as a practice was at a political debate in 1984 in Kingston between candidates for the YGK seat. The late George Speal, former mayor of YGK, asked the audience to 'inventory a student' in their employment plans. Great idea I thought (and

George was ahead of his time) but why 'inventory', which is a noun? Well, in the 30 years since the tide of nouns turned into verbs has become almost unstoppable. It 'impacts' every memo or discussion. Some of these (like the one I just used) have become so commonplace one barely notices them anymore. Some are bizspeak buzzwords, e.g. 'to leverage' which have almost acquired technical definitions. I would say that as a linguistic phenomenon the noun-into-verb is probably here to stay. Some in fact are older than we think. Dieting? Sorry--started as the noun 'diet'. And as grammatical offences I must admit I can think of worse ones (that doesn't mean I would encourage doing this--note, students in Hist 400/802).

March 18, 2014 – *Complimentary and Complementary*

This morning's #queensgrammar concerns two homophones (words that sound alike) which are often confused, complimentary and complementary. Both ultimately derive from the Latin verb complire (to complete, finish), but mean different things. 'Compliment' can mean either 'praise' or 'something that is given as a gift'. Thus "I complimented the barkeeper on his complimentary peanuts" means I praised him for giving me free nibblies. 'Complement' means to complete, or finish (as a verb) and as a noun refers to a 'complete set', for instance "the ship had a complement of 52". "That bracelet complements Eve's dress" means that Eve has 'accessorized' (alert! verbed noun!) Well, not that the bracelet is speaking and saying nice things about the dress. There is no easy mnemonic for this difference but try this one: compl-i-mentary' means "I get this for free or I get praised" compl-e-mentary means "I have a complEte sEt". What's even more interesting is that complEment also has a formal grammatical meaning. More on that tomorrow on #queensgrammar. Until then, please accept these tweets with my compliments.

March 19, 2014 – *Complements*

Yesterday I promised you a complimentary set of #queensgrammar tweets on 'complements' (with an 'e'). This one is quite technical-warning!   'Complement' is also a grammatical term for a word or phrase that 'completes' a sentence. It's typically found after the copula (linking) verb 'to be' (is, was, were, etc). Unlike a 'modifier', which is optional, a complement is necessary or you won't have a complete sentence. That's what's called a 'subject complement'. E.G. (NOT i.e.!) "Eve is the girl with the curls" or "Queen's is the school with the most awesome students'. Now there is also an OBJECT complement, which follows a direct object. "I decided to keep the room dark"--dark is the complement, though in this example it could mean "I decided to keep the room" (meaning continue to pay rent on my lodgings). Confused? This is a very technical point, not often discussed. Just remember that you need to complEte your sentence with a 'complEment', not a compliment. That's enough for today.

March 20, 2014 - *Pace*

For today's #queensgrammar I will explain the word 'pace'--no, not the English word meaning 'step', as in 'a quick pace', but rather a Latin word. Twitter doesn't allow italics or this use of 'pace' would be italicized, as with many non-English terms. Doubtless you have run into an article or book in which the writer says something like: "the cost of Obamacare, pace Dick Cheney, is not unreasonable". The word 'pace' here derives from the Latin word pax of which the ablative case is pace, literally 'peace to'. One could interpret that as 'with all due respect to' or simply as 'notwithstanding the arguments of'. The point of the word 'pace' and the phrase or person's name it introduces is to show that the writer has understood that there are contrary views and that 'with all due respect to' or 'notwithstanding these' he or she is asserting

the opposite or at least qualifying such other views. Try using the word next time you write a sentence acknowledging different views. Go ahead and be a pace-setter.

March 21, 2014 – *With Regards To*

For the last #queensgrammar of the week I'll address one of the several suggestions I had from readers: 'with regards to'. I see this occasionally and hear it a lot: the error lies in the 's'. The proper expression is 'With regard to' which is another way of saying 'with respect to' (which isn't the same of course as 'with all due respect to--see 'pace' yesterday) Here's an example. "Eve wanted to speak to the vet with regard to her dog being sick from having eaten too many cookies". The 'with regard' signifies the subject of the conversation. One could also say simply 'about' but it doesn't sound quite right--it's grammatically ok but makes the sentence sound 'run-on'. Now, with respect to 'with regards to', there is of course a legitimate use of that phrase, but with a different meaning, namely 'greetings to', as in 'please give my regards to' which is the same as saying 'my compliments (NOT complements) to...'. I'm back on Monday with a last week of #queensgrammar for this series.

March 24, 2014 – *Participles and Gerunds*

Last week a reader of #queensgrammar raised a good point not yet addressed in these tweets, the difference between participles and gerunds.

This is quite a tricky one, and the best concise explanation, off twitter, that I have seen, is the excellent @GrammarGirl whose contribution on the subject can be found at http://t.co/3qwKWLwEv3. I suspect many won't have heard of gerunds at all. Essentially they are nouns that look like verbs with an 'ing' ending. Whether they are gerund or participle depends on how they are being used and on the ways they can, or can't, be modified. Take this: "Tweeting is one of my favourite pastimes".

'Tweeting' in that sentence is the subject, not the verb (that would be 'is' in the example) and therefore is a gerund. In contrast, "I am tweeting" is a sentence in which "tweeting" is part of a verb form, and therefore a participle. You may be thinking by now that this is easy--not so fast. There are complications we'll explore tomorrow, all being (gerund? y/n?) well.

March 25, 2014 – *'ing' words*

Yesterday on #queensgrammar I discussed gerunds, those 'ing' words that function as nouns: e.g. "I love tweeting". But the endING 'ing' has another function, which is to signify a verb participle. It can be hard to tell the difference. @james_miller pointed out this ambiguity in a #queensgrammar tweet last week. Why is the word 'tweeting' (or 'being' or 'eating' etc') a gerund in one place and a participle in another? The answer is mainly its function. If I say 'I am tweeting', I am using a form of the present tense of the verb 'to tweet'. (I could similarly do this as a past tense: 'I was tweeting'). In this case, 'tweeting' is an action and therefore a participle. If however I say "Tweeting is one of my favourite activities" I am using the word 'tweeting' as an object--in essence, a noun. Seems simple enough so far. But there are some further complexities I will get into tomorrow.

March 26, 2014 – More Gerunds and Participles

For our last set of tweets on gerunds and participles, here are a couple of ways to tell them apart--which is not always easy One way is to ask whether the 'ing' ending word in question is part of a preposition is a sentence in which 'sleeping' is acting as a verb, and is thus a participle. However if I were instead to say "Before sleeping, I brush my teeth", sleeping is an object of the preposition 'before' and thus is a gerund. Another way that is suggested on @GrammarGirl's very useful site is whether or not the word could be modified by an adverb or adjective. That method is a little complicated, not least because some 'ing' words themselves have over time evolved into adjectives. Generally, if you can modify the 'ing' word with an adverb such as 'very', then it is a participle (that is a verb form) and not a gerund. This is a very tough subject for tweeting [that's a gerund] in 140 characters. A thorough explanation is to be found at @grammargirl's 'quick and dirty tips' site http://t.co/3qwKWLwEv3 on which I AM RELYING (participle) for this set of tweets. I will be coming [p] back tomorrow for more tweeting [g] about grammatical points.

March 27, 2014 – *Common Latin Expressions*

Good morning from Toronto for the last two days of this season's #queensgrammar tweets. After a heavy 2 or 3 days of gerunds and participles I thought I'd end with something a bit lighter--some common Latin expressions everyone should know (yes, that's my idea of 'light'). Let's start with 'et al', which is like 'etc' but not the same. 'etc' is short for et cetera meaning 'and others'. 'et al.' is short for 'et alii', 'et aliae' or 'et alia' (respectively masc, fem and neuter plural versions of 'alius, alia alium' (an other). Ok, so far sounds the same as 'et cetera', right? Technically this is so; but in writing and publishing, they have acquired slightly different meetings. 'Etc' (which one should use only very rarely--it has an air of 'I'm too lazy to list the rest of these' about it) tends to mean 'and others like the thing I've just mentioned'. 'Et al' in contrast is used (often in footnotes) to abbreviate a long list of authors (for instance in a scientific paper which can often have a great many authors). So after citing 'Smith, Jones, Black, Brown and Grey' as authors, in subsequent notes you would use 'Smith et al.' meaning 'Smith and the others'--in short a specific set of others already named, rather than a general set of 'things like this (Smith)' for which etc would be more appropriate. Finally, note that et al. has a period after 'al' but not after 'et'--simply because 'et' is a complete word unabbreviated and 'al' is the short form described earlier. And now I have to run off to a breakfast meeting; with someone named Al. Back tomorrow for one last spring 2014.

March 28, 2014 – *pro bono*

Time for one last #queensgrammar for this spring, which I will provide pro bono. No, I don't mean that I charge money for the other tweets.

But someone asked me why it was 'pro bono' and not 'pro bona' or 'bonus'. First, I'm sure most people will know that pro bono means 'for the good' and does not refer to a service provided only to a U2 musician or to Cher's late ex-husband. But why the 'o'? As always, let's remember our Latin. First, note that the good, the 'bonus' is a masculine noun, which means that in the ablative case it takes an 'o' not an 'a' ending. (Refresher: the ablative is the case of instrumentality--by, with, on behalf of, about, etc. Secondly, that ablative is determined by the noun following the preposition 'pro'(for, on behalf of in pursuit of, etc). The phrase could thus never be 'pro bonus' (wrong case--a preposition can only take an accusative or ablative case). I hope you have enjoyed the last 3 weeks of #queensgrammar. Good luck to anyone writing essays as our terms come to an end.

I'll be back in the autumn with another series, once again provided (of course) pro bono. And if the U2 singer wants one earlier I'm sure it can be arranged if he just lets me know. Enjoy your weekend I think I'll have to tackle this one, a tricky issue, next fall on #queensgrammar.

Fall 2013

November 10, 2013

Looking forward to seeing the Threepenny Opera with @jagwoolf later this afternoon. A nice way to Weill away the afternoon.

For those who don't know Brecht and Weill's famous Weimar musical, it features one of the best known of all jazz songs," Mack the Knife". It's major characters include Polly Peachum, Macheath the criminal and police chief 'Tiger' Brown. 'Mack' has been covered by many singers. And if you noticed that I just wrote 'It's' where it should be 'its' you're right-time for another round of #queensgrammar starting Tuesday!

November 12, 2013 – *Remembrance not Rememberance*

Good Tuesday morning; it is time to launch this fall's series of #queensgrammar tweets. We didn't start yesterday because of Remembrance Day. Note that's REMEMBRANCE not RemembErance as I saw frequently in the runup to Nov 11. That 3rd 'e' has no place in the word.

But it reminds me (ha ha) of another little memory related gaffe that one often sees, in cards, invitations and at funerals. That would be 'in memorium'. That I fear is a misuse of the Latin. The correct phrase is 'in memoriam'.   Why? Latin 'cases'

We may need to talk about 'cases' again at some point in this series. For now I will point out that 'in' is a Latin preposition which can take either the accusative or ablative cases. In this case it's the accusative, which for a feminine noun like 'memoria' (memory) means the spelling is 'memoriam'. That has unfortunately been heard as 'memorium' and oft printed that way thereby shortening the lives of many a Latin or English teacher; or early modern historian such as the present tweeter. So, if you want to use the phrase remember not to say 'um' but 'am'.

 Tomorrow we'll have a quick refresher on 'cases'.

November 13, 2013 – *Noun Cases*

For the next couple of days of #queensgrammar we are going to return to an old topic from a couple of years ago, noun cases. These are not boxes in which one stores and ships nouns, or displays them. Rather they are grammatical functions that help determine such things as a noun's position, its relation to verbs and prepositions, and so on. They are less obvious in English (or French) than in some other modern languages (German for instance) and ancient ones (esp. Latin). But they occur nonetheless. In Latin we conventionally speak of 6 cases: nominative, genitive, vocative, accusative, dative and ablative.

Latin is a 'declining' language (not in the sense of fewer people using it, which has been true for a while) but meaning noun ends change depending on the noun's position and function (also their gender, but that's not as relevant to English). Latin nouns are organized in groups called declension, which follow a pattern

of 'declining', ie changing their endings.   Example: the word for 'friend', amicus has that spelling for the nominative (or subject) case; for the genitive (possessive) it would be 'amici'. Dative and ablative would be 'amico'. And that's for a masculine noun; feminine would be different.

Tomorrow we'll explain what these different cases do in Latin; Friday we'll see why they matter to us in English.

November 14, 2013 – *Latin cases*

Good morning. #queensgrammar is a little early today as I'm about to catch a flight to Calgary. As promised, today's subject is Latin cases.

Latin, and many modern languages, have case endings--the noun ending changes depending on its grammatical function.   This is not generally the case in English. 'Dog' is 'dog' no matter where in the sentence it falls. "Eve petted her dog" has is unaltered, 'Eve' does change endings, acquiring the apostrophe and s; but one could have said "the dog of Eve" instead. In Latin nouns routinely change endings according to 6 cases: nominative, vocative, accusative, genitive, dative and ablative.

Each of those cases signifies a different function. 'Nominative' can be thought of as the 'home base'--the noun as subject. 'Amicus' or friend is the nominative; the accusative would be amicum, genitive (possessive) amici, dative and ablative amico. The endings would be different with a feminine noun such as 'puella' (girl) (acc: puellam; gen; puellae). You get the idea.

English, again, does not use cases, but it is handy to know about them in writing English. We'll take that subject on tomorrow.

November 15, 2013 – *Function/Position of Nouns*

'Case' again is what we are talking about--functions/positions of nouns. I promised today to tell you why this Latin relic is important in English. Even though Eve's dog is still a dog whether subject, object, or addressee ('Here Dog!'), other words such as pronouns can depend on the case. "Natasha decided that it was Boris WHOM she liked", for instance. We will have a refresher on pronouns another time, but I offer that example to illustrate that it is useful to know about cases even if the noun ending (unlike Latin, or German) does not change. (I would also add that any knowledge of parts of speech as they are known will help you in your writing. Believe me--they've helped me for over 45 years!).

On Monday I'll continue to explicate the cases, including dative, accusative and ablative (which English doesn't really have). Until then, have a great weekend and may your own language not 'decline' in the meantime.

November 18, 2013 – *Cases: Accusative and Dative*

It's Monday and time for week 2 of #queensgrammar. We'll continue a couple of days more with cases, today the accusative and dative.

These Latin cases translate in English into the direct and indirect object of a sentence, eg:"Natasha gave Boris a new fedora". In that sentence Natasha, the doer, is the subject (nominative case); the fedora (hat) is the thing given (direct object). Boris is the indirect object (dative) case as beneficiary of the action. This one is a little confusing because of the way I worded it. Why isn't Boris, recipient of the giving action, the

direct object? Because you can reword the sentence this way: "Natasha gave the new fedora TO Boris". In short, she (N) did something to a hat, namely giving it, 'TO' her fellow cartoon spy.

English is trickier than Latin in some respects because the lack of declining noun endings sometimes makes it hard to tell whether something is a direct or indirect object. Rule: ask if a noun needs a 'to' in front of it--if so it is likely an indirect object and in the dative case, not the accusative. Tomorrow we'll deal with a lost case (no, this isn't Law & Order) namely the ablative. Till than I (sub) wish you (dat) a good day (acc).

@dipbrat70 gets the prize for spotting the typo in this morning's last #queensgrammar- 'then' needed not 'than'!

November 19, 2013 – *Ablative Case*

Time for today's #queensgrammar lesson. Today we will do the ablative case. This is a useful relic of Latin that is not really used in English parts of speech, but it denotes a noun that is neither direct (acc) nor indirect (dat) object but essentially a means or an instrument. To use yesterday's example from Rocky and Bullwinkle (I'm showing my age). "Natasha gave Boris a new fedora with her hand". The preposition introduces the means BY WHICH the hat is handed over. The other use is to signify MOTION.

For instance: "Boris and Natasha pursued the moose and squirrel TO Frostbite Falls". If we translated that into Latin (really!) the place name would have an ablative case ending. Remember that this would also vary depending on the gender of the noun.

That's probably enough about the cases for this season's #queensgrammar. Tomorrow I have an interesting request in about plurals.

November 20, 2013 – *Gin and Tonic or Gins and Tonic*

Over the weekend someone asked me to do a #queensgrammar on gin and tonic (meaning one ABOUT gin and tonic, not that I should do it while sipping one). Specifically, is the plural of this 'gin and tonics' or 'gins and tonic'. This is a more complicated question than one might think which requires sober reflection. My own thought in this is that while there is an argument for 'gins and tonic', that just doesn't sound right. And there is a reason: the thing being ordered at the bar is not plural 'gins' plus some tonic water; it is a drink specifically CALLED a 'gin and tonic'-sometimes even with a dash (not of lime) between the words.

I suppose if one ordered multiple shots of gin AND a big bottle of tonic water to add oneself, then one could ask for 'gins & tonic', but that seems unlikely. So 'gin and tonics' is correct. However, there are circumstances where the first word in a compound noun is pluralized but not the second. We'll look at those tomorrow.

@denielsen yes and no. If one said "I had some gin last night" it could mean several drinks. But if one came home from the LC with a bottle of Gordon's and one of Gilby's, that would be 'gins' plural.

November 21, 2013 – *Compound Plural Nouns*

Today we're going to talk more on #queensgrammar about compound plural nouns. This is a sticky one where opinions differ and there is a UK/US divide. Take the military rank of major-general or its immediate superior, lieutenant-general: what do you call more than one of them? Lieutenant-generals? Major-generals? or Lieutenants-general etc? Most common usage would say the former and I'm not sure

I've ever seen 'majors-general'. Easy? Not so fast, soldier. What about Governor-General? It is not uncommon to refer to these as governors-general; similarly attorneys-general. And in England there are a whole bunch of such titles in which the first part of the compound is the one pluralized. Take the old county rank of deputy lieutenant which is typically pluralized deputies lieutenant. I was tempted to say that if there is no hyphen, then pluralize the first word, And if there is a hyphen, the second; but I am not sure that that applies 100%. As with many such tricky points of style,

I turn to the advice many of my teachers once gave me (applicable always if one wants to become a better writer): READ LOTS.

And I've just been reminded by @iangadd of 3 word compounds such as 'sons-in-law'; one would almost never say 'son-in-laws'; or 'fathers-in-law' not 'father-in-laws' if you've had two (as many people have). I can't think of an example of a 3 word compound in which the last word is pluralized. Can you? Send it in to #queensgrammar; I'm taking ideas for tomorrow's topic also.

November 22, 2013 – *I and Me*

To close off this week's series of #queensgrammar I'm going to return to a favourite grammatical horror, the incorrect use of 'I and me'.

I often hear people say "He spoke with Emily and I". This grammatical zombie refuses to die. What's wrong with the sentence? Well, think back to our earlier tweets on the cases. The personal pronoun I has an objective form, which is 'me' and also a reflexive form, 'myself'. Unlike in Latin or German, where pronouns, like nouns, have multiple case endings, there is no difference between the accusative (direct obj.) and dative (indirect obj.), and, grammar grasshopper, you will recall that English has no ablative. In short, unless you are the agent, the doer of the action, 'I' cannot be correct. I can think of only one circumstance in which "He spoke with Emily and I" would be right--if one were referring to a person whose name or nickname were 'I' (as in short for Ivan or Igor or Inez). In that case it would be another proper noun (name), not a pronoun.

Let's leave Ivan and Inez out of the equation for now and assume the speaker is self-referencing. Should it be "He spoke with Emily and myself"? No, no, no. Equally wrong. For the correct form tune in Monday as we start the last week of this season's @queensgrammar.

November 25, 2013 – *Me, Myself and I*

Good morning from snowbound London where I am on a course for non-profit leaders all week and thus will be minimally tweeting.#queensgrammar

But essentials first, such as today's #queensgrammar: an oldie but baddie. Last Friday we did 'I' vs 'me'. 'I' must be the subject of a sentence. The correct object form is 'me'. Most people get it right when it's just themselves—"Eve gave me a present" for instance. Where they get confused is when it is two people who are the objects (direct or indirect--same in both cases).

For instance: "David spoke with Sarah and I". The ' I' should be 'me'. But why not 'myself'? That's the common 'overcorrection' people often make--saying 'myself' instead of 'me'. For some reason 'me', a 2 letter word, seems to be thought a 4 letter one. So "David spoke with Sarah and myself" is no more

correct than if 'myself' were 'I'. Use the 'me' word. There's nothing wrong with it. It's harmless, won't bite, and is actually correct; it will use less space than 'myself'. So what about the latter?

That is a reflexive, used purely when referring to oneself. "I myself flew the plane, solo'" or Charlie Mingus' famous line "Myself when I am real'". So don't ask people to "Don't hesitate to ask Ted or myself". Use 'me' in that context.

But enough about 'me'. Tomorrow it's on to a different topic on #queensgrammar. Till then, remember to dot your 'I's.

November 26, 2013 – *Who vs That*

This morning on #queensgrammar: 'who' vs 'that'. Thanks to @qui_oui that proposed this idea. Sentence sounds wrong, no? The 'that' should be 'who'.The typical rule (as also stated by that impeccable authority @GrammarGirl, with whom [note the 'whom'] I concur 98% of the time is that 'who' should be used for persons, that for objects. "This is the cat that ate the rat that ate the malt..." vs "This is the spy who stole the secret cookie recipe" or "This is the woman who collects rocks". It seems easy till one realizes that there have been literary uses of 'that' where one would expect 'who', so it is not strictly incorrect. However, on the whole one is best to stick with 'who' rather than 'that' when speaking of persons acting as agents. A little mnemonic: If in doubt, be wise like an owl, and say 'who'. By the way, anyone catch the 50th anniversary of Dr That? @peterbearse thanks for providing tomorrow's subject!

November 27, 2013 - *Because*

It's time for today's #queensgrammar. I had planned to start a mini-series on footnotes but then @peterbearse sent me an interesting link: "http://t.co/Djn5k8Xu6F

I must admit I was only dimly conscious of this one, which refers to the new pop use of the conjunction "because". What has crept into vogue (the internet is credited or blamed, depending on your perspective) is the use of this conjunction in a weird way linked only to a noun or adjective, for instance: "The fox killed the rabbit. Because hunger/hungry'.

The article in the link says linguists are fascinated by this and I suppose as an example of the evolution of language it is socially and intellectually of interest. I am not a fan, because apart from being a total abuse of an innocent conjunction which had simply been going about its business for centuries doing vital work in clause linkage, I think it is actually both unclear and a bit lazy. Now lest you all think I have taken my 'fogey' pill this morning, I would concede that there is a difference between internet-ese or text-ese and regular English. On twitter for instance, we tend to shrtn sntncs or wrds b/c of 140 char lmt. But the internet and the phone are not how one normally writes in a formal essay, even if it is submitted over the web, say via moodle. So: because away with your pals on twitter elsewhere, but I would strongly advise not doing so in any essay you are handing in this term to an instructor, even a younger, hipper one. Because grades.

November 28, 2013 – *Citations and Footnoes/Endnotes*

Good morning. We are down to the last two #queensgrammar tweets for this fall series. I thought I would say something about 'citations' and 'footnotes/endnotes'. The first rule of using these (and we all have to) is

this: be consistent in your practice across the whole essay/article. The second rule is that there are different standard systems out there: MLA (Modern Language Assoc.) is # perhaps the most commonly used for humanities work. Social science and science citation are quite different and you need to understand the requirements of the instructor for the essay. You can't just mix and match as a rule. If you are using notes (either foot--at the bottom of each page) or end, you normally don't mix those either, though there are exceptions-some books for instance will use endnotes for purely reference-related notes and footnotes for more informational ones, or vice-versa.

Why does one reference material? First, to be intellectually honest: "I got this idea, point or quotation from HERE" is what it says to the reader, along with "check it if you don't believe me" and "you might be interested in reading this also". In short, references are not just mandatory for our academic integrity; they are a service to your reader. It is often the case that I will open a new book and look first to the notes and bibliography before I read a word of the text just to see how current the author is and if there are titles I should know and have missed. Tomorrow we will answer a couple of queries I have had about Latin abbreviations in notes that are commonly used such as 'ibid', which is not the sound a frog makes.

Another is 'op. cit' which is NOT (yes, I've seen this!) 'opposite'. More on Friday to wrap up our series.

November 29, 2013 – *ibid. and op. cit.*

To wrap up this fall's #queensgrammar series let's talk about a couple of words one finds in footnotes and endnotes done according to the humanities citation style, namely 'ibid.' and 'op. cit.' Both are abbreviations of Latin words as you probably guessed.

Let's take 'op. cit.' First. It is now seen as a little archaic and not much used but you'll see it in older works from time to time. The full expression is 'opere citato', the Latin ablative (recall 'case's from last 2 weeks) meaning literally "in the work cited". This obviously presumes you have given full bibliographic details of a book or article earlier in the notes so the reader understands what the op. cit. refers to. Typically it is preceded by the author surname. A good example would be a foot/endnote saying "Woolf, op. cit., p. 23" referring to a work the full info on which has already been provided. It doesn't work very well if more than one work by the author has been cited, as is often the case. 'Ibid.' is more useful and less ambiguous-- the full Latin, ibidem more or less means 'the same place'. It can only be used to refer to the work last cited. So if footnote 23 of your paper cited "Rowling, Half Blood Prince, p 23" and your next note referred to the same book, instead of repeating author and title you can use 'ibid.' (the period is important--it's an abbreviation of 'ibidem', which no one uses). What you can't do is refer back to a previous item if there are others cited in between. A final note: many journals and publishers now don't use either ibid. or op. cit. but prefer author/short title for repeat citations. And some, even in the humanities, have gone with social science citation style (author and date, plus page reference, right in the body of the essay, or sometimes in a note, keyed to a bibliography with full details).

I'm hoping you are on the final notes of your last term papers soon. Thanks for comments the past 3 weeks. #queensgrammar is back in March.

Winter 2013

March 17, 2013 - *Paddy or Patty?*

St. Patrick's Day seems as good a day as any to start another series of #queensgrammar. @AdamCBlank has suggested the first topic. A lot of people have been tweeting about St. Patty's Day. I don't believe that today was named for St. Patricia (Patty). St. Paddy would be more correct (though I doubt that the Saint himself used that nickname) since the Celtic is Padraig. However you use the name, have an enjoyable March 17, and if you are celebrating, please do so safely and responsibly!

March 18, 2013 - *Make do*

Good morning. Today's #queensgrammar topic is the oft misused phrase *make do*, which simply means 'improvise or work with what you have'. It is a colloquial expression but one that has crept into the realm of legit usage. Unfortunately, it is sometimes rendered wrongly as *make due* or even *make dew*. Neither is correct and both are probably examples of linguistic 'overcorrection'. The writer <u>thinks</u> *make do* can't be right and substitutes something else that sounds like it should be correct, such as *due*. One <u>could</u> of course '*make due*' something like a loan, or a library book, but that's a different context and meaning altogether. And as for *make dew*--I'm not sure where that comes from unless one refers to manufacturing condensed precipitation. Tomorrow we'll deal with another misspelt or misused expression, 'catch-all'. Enjoy your Monday, or at least *make do* with it.

March 19, 2013 - *Catch-all*

The subject for today's #queensgrammar, in response to a request, is *catch-all*. This is simply an expression to denote an umbrella term for other expressions or phrases. E.g.: "Star Wars has become a *catch-all* expression for big blockbuster movies". Perhaps because the catch-all is thought to 'store' meanings it is sometimes written, incorrectly, as *cache-all*. But it is *catch*, not *cache*. Recently *catchall* (sometimes without the hyphen) has acquired an e-meaning: to denote a common email address that messages to several different accounts. Happy Tuesday.

March 20, 2013 - *Then / Than*

#queensgrammar looks today at the confusion of *then* and *than* which often occurs. *Than* is a variously a conjunction or a preposition. It is used for comparison, unlike *then* which refers typically to temporal sequence, e.g. *now and then,* meaning *occasionally*. "I would rather have cake *than* pie" is correct, indicating a preferential comparison of two desserts. "I would rather have cake *then* pie" would also be correct but would have a different meaning, i.e. a wish to have one after the other; in short, greed. "Jill did her homework faster *then* Judy" is wrong because *than* should have been used. Interestingly, *then* is often substituted for *than* but not often the other way around. Try this to remember which: compArison needs *thAn*, whEn needs *thEn*.

Have a great Wadnasdey.

March 21, 2013 - *Because since when?*

Today's #queensgrammar concerns *since* and *because*, which are sometimes confused. *Since* is properly a word referring to time. For instance "I have been doing this *since* autumn, 2011". But it is often used in another way, where *because* would be better. "Since she had a dog, Eve had to go home at lunch since she had to walk it". The first since is ok, implying the time *since* Eve got her mutt. The 2nd *since,* however, refers to causation, and should really be *because* -- she has to go home at lunch *because* the pup needs to be let out. Easy rule: if it refers to time elapsed, use *since*; if it refers to cause, use because. And I'd better wrap up this #queensgrammar *because* I need to get to my first meeting. I hope this made *since* to you all.

March 22, 2013 - *However…*

Thanks to @amvbee for today's #queensgrammar idea - the conjunction *however*. This one is actually more complicated than one might think. Many of us were raised to think *however* could only be used in mid-sentence, as a coordinating conjunction. Thus, "Robert and Joanne went out for pizza; Robert, *however*, had fish instead." Verboten, traditionalists said, is this use: "Bill and Betty took a vacation. However, it was interrupted by an emergency at home." Time was, I would have red-circled this as an error. But, grammar does evolve and it seems modern style authorities do now permit *however* at the start of sentence. *However*, putting a comma after it (as I just did) is critical--otherwise a completely different meaning of *however* is given. This latter meaning is something like 'in whatever way'. Thus "*However* this was done" means something slightly different than "However, this was done". For a longer explanation of this I recommend, *however*, @GrammarGirl's page on the subject. This can be found at http://t.co/5HUNisrJMO.

Have a good weekend; back Monday with more grammar and style suggestions.#queensgrammar

March 25, 2013 – *I could(n't) care less!*

Today's #queensgrammar deals with a common expression often reversed (wrongly): "I couldn't have cared less". Often *could* is used instead. But when you think it through, "I *COULD* have cared less" means in fact, you care more about the supposedly unimportant thing than about a set of other things that you care less about. But the point you want to make is that your capacity for caring about the item under discussion is minimal; in math terms, the slope is approaching or at 0 on the x axis. Of course you could say "I *could* have cared more", but that somehow doesn't convey the same feeling of disinterested contempt as '*couldn't* have cared less'. I hope this point wasn't so trivial that you too *couldn't* have cared less about it.

No #queensgrammar tomorrow owing to Passover holiday but back Wednesday. Happy Monday to all you grammar and usage buffs.

March 27, 2013 - *I cannot overstate this*

Today's #queensgrammar picks up from the *reverse-negative* issue of Monday's *couldn't have cared less* with a similar expression. The importance of getting one's negatives correct cannot be overstated or overemphasized. That expression is today's subject. Sometimes one hears "That can be overstated" when one means it can't. What is confused here is the meaning of the modal verb *can*. The intent of the expression is literally "This point is so important that one should stress it as much as possible", not "This is so important that it *CAN* [in the sense of 'might'] be overstated." In short, overstatement is impossible for the point you are trying to make, because it is so crucial that you *can* always make it again. If, however, you say it 'can be overstated', you are saying the opposite--that it is possible to overstate it, or say it too often--it isn't important enough. The same rule would apply to 'over-communicate', 'over-emphasize' etc. It also applies, in reverse, to 'understated' though such usage is less common: e.g. 'that can be understated' would mean "It's possible not to say that sufficiently strongly".

This point can't be overtweeted. Tomorrow we'll deal with the subjunctive mood and one of my personal favourites, was vs. were.

March 28, 2013 - *If I were grammatically correct…*

Today's #queensgrammar topic was suggested some time ago by @ChadGaffield. *If I were vs. If I was*. That opens up a very big topic, the subjunctive mood, which requires a couple of days' worth of #queensgrammar. If I were to do this properly (subjunctive) it would take several days. Generally speaking, the subjunctive is a 'mood' of a verb (as opposed to indicative or imperative) which expresses either a counterfactual state or a desired state--in short, something not true. "I wish it were the weekend"

when it is only Tuesday would be an example. "If I were 7 feet tall I would play in the NBA" is another. In informal speech, the form *was* is sometimes used instead of *were*. However, it is all a bit more complex than my 140 char limit allows.

If it were Monday, I would continue to discuss the subject. However, we have a long weekend ahead of us so we will continue this topic then. Happy Easter weekend to all.

April 1, 2013 - *Is, was or be?*

It is Monday, a holiday for some and not for others. I am in the latter category, so am following up with today's #queensgrammar. On Thursday we started looking at the subjunctive mood in the context of *was/were*. But there is more to this tricky mood than this. One can also use 'be' instead of *is or was* (or *are/were*), especially when a request, directive or wish is involved. "Lord Voldemort commanded that his deatheaters BE there" is a present subjunctive; the indicative would have had *were*. You'll note that the tense doesn't change from past to present. "I would have been glad *were* you to be there" uses 'be' also. Or how about this one, from a course syllabus: "It is essential that every student *BE* [not *is*] prepared to write a test"

For more on the subjunctive see the following useful site http://t.co/dVcvY1lhel. It is important that the mood BE used well.#queensgrammar

April 2, 2013 - *It would be better that we all be grammar fiends*

Today we'll continue our exploration of the subjunctive. How do you tell a subjunctive form of verb from indicative? One easy rule is that the verb doesn't change to match the 'person' (ie I, you, he/she/it, we, you (pl), they). Take, e.g., the verb *act*. I act, you act, he/she/it ACTS etc. is the indicative mood. In the subjunctive, it would be *he/she/it ACT*.

So much for a regular verb. With irregular or copula verbs (e.g. 'to be' that already change their form in the indicative) it is a bit more complex. Thus 'I am, you are, he/she/it is' (singular indicative). But 'I be, you be, he/she/it be, we/you/they be' for subjunctive in all persons, singular and plural. Of course that usage makes no sense unless expressly in a subjunctive construction. So "I am a grammar fiend/You are a good student" indicative becomes "It would be better that we all BE grammar fiends". The use in a sentence involving a desired, wished or counterfactual state (us all being grammarians) leads to the use of the subjunctive. That's a lot of tweets for one morning so it is best that *I BE* going. More #queensgrammar tomorrow.

April 3, 2013 - *The learned grammarian*

Greetings from Boston, #queensgrammar readers, home of Harvard and several other institutions that have produce very *learned* people. The word *learned* is today's subject. The past tense of *learn* it can also be used as an adjective to describe someone of great learning. The difference is pronunciation. At the end of this year you will have *learned* a lot one hopes. In that use, a past tense, *learned* is monosyllabic (rhymes with 'turned'). At the end of your degree, you will be *learned* which in this case is two syllables, *learn-ed* (not to be confused with a command to a student named Edward: *Learn, Ed!*. There is a variant past participle *learnt* which is more common in UK English than American and in fact it's quite a while since I saw it used in a book published more recently than 40 years ago. "I *learned/learnt* my lessons well", for example.

Both are correct, but *learnt* has fallen out of common usage. Good luck learning whatever knowledge comes your way today.

April 4, 2013 - *Lay or lie?*

Good morning from NYC, appropriately the home of Grammar-cy Park. Today's #queensgrammar topic was suggested by @ckws_julie: *lay vs lie*.

I'm not going to *lay* to you--this one is more complicated than it seems. Ok, so that should have been *lie*, i.e. 'fib' which can be used as a verb *to lie* or noun 'tell *a lie'*. We will park that one to the side. What causes confusion is the other meaning of *lie* as in 'put something down' or 'recline'. Here *lay* is often misused. There is an easy rule here *Lie* does not require an object; *lay* does. "I lie down on the sofa" means I have a nap. *Lay* however requires an indirect object—"I lay the table" for instance. In this instance "I lay down on the bed" (in the present tense) would mean I covered my bed with goose down or a down quilt. So, so much for *lay vs. lie*. However it is not so easy once we switch to the past tense.

We will tackle that tomorrow and I will *lay* off the #queensgrammar for today.

April 5, 2013 - *More about lay or lie*

For this week's last #queensgrammar we'll continue with *lie* and *lay*. We did the present tense yesterday. Things get trickier now. In the past tense *lie* becomes lay and *lay* becomes *laid*; "Bill *lay* on the bed" means he did so in the past; "Sheila *laid* the table" means she set the table, also past tense. The past participles of *lie* and *lay* are also different. "Eve has *laid*...off tweeting for a while". But "Joe has *lain* down for the past 3 hours". It's a bit confusing to say the least and this is not one for which there is an easy mnemonic. If anyone out there has one please hashtag with #queensgrammar. Have a good weekend.

April 8, 2013 – *Flush / flesh out*

Today's #queensgrammar was suggested by my colleague @nancedor, and it is *flush out* vs. *flesh out*, two expressions that sound similar. *Flesh out* is a phrase often used in writing. "J.K. developed the skeleton of her story on a train but then had to *flesh out* the characters and the plot". In short, it means adding metaphorical meat to the 'bones'. (It could, in a different context have some reference to a zombie attack such as that in last week's @queensu April Fool's gag: e.g. a shortage of *flesh* at the local zombie store, *flesh out*. But the previous meaning is more commonplace. *Flush out* is quite different and has a meaning implying 'expelling, driving, pushing' something out. In hunting for instance, dogs *flush out* the prey, pushing the poor duck, fox, deer or other animal into the open. But it can be used medically: "After two weeks of overindulgence in March Madness snacks Eve really needed to *flush out* her system with some healthier food". So I hope having *flushed out* this stylistic error that these tweets have now *fleshed out* the idea in the original tweet. #queensgrammar wraps up tomorrow for this spring.

April 9, 2013 – *Loose / lose*

For the last #queensgrammar for this spring, I've gone with a suggestion (from a few months ago) from @stellaklee: *lose vs loose*.

This looks simple but it is surprising how often the two are mixed up. *Lose* is a verb, *loose* either a verb or adjective. "Eve let her dog wander *LOOSE,* though she worried that she might *LOSE* him". In speech it's easy to distinguish the 'sss' sound in *loose* from the 'z' sound ending *lose*; that's harder in written form. A complication is that *loose* can also be used as a verb, though this is a bit archaic. "*Loose* thy bonds" is really a shortening of *loosen* (but sounds better) or 'let loose' and one doesn't hear it all that often. So for this exercise we will focus on *lose* as verb and *loose* as adjective.

Here's a rule: *loose* the adjective rhymes with the noun 'use' (sss sound); *lose* the verb rhymes with verb 'use' (z sound). And for a mnemonic "To use *lose*, lose the 2nd o". I hope this doesn't leave you at a loss. Thanks

to those who sent in comments and suggestions for this spring's cycle of #queensgrammar; it will return in November.

April 10, 2013 – *Lightning / lightening*

Plane stuck at the gate here in Chicago owing to a quite spectacular thunder and *lightning* (#queensgrammar note- not *lightening*!) storm.

Fall 2012

November 5, 2012 - *The Misuse of Of in place of Have, With, Should, or Would*

It's time for another round of #queensgrammar tweets. Perhaps I *should of* started them earlier. In fact, that's today's subject. I did this one last year but I've been seeing it a lot, that is the misuse of *of* in place of *have* with *should* or *would*. Example: "Eve *should of* taken her lab for a walk"; this should be "Eve should *have* taken her lab for a walk." *Would* and *should* are modal verbs and they take other verbs (in this case *have*), not a preposition such as *of*. Watch out for this in your writing; markers don't like it and you'll realize you should *have* avoided it when you get the mark.

November 6, 2012 - *Bears, not Bares*

I think I have done today's #queensgrammar tweet before but it *bears* repeating. Yes, *bears*, not *bares*. These two (not too) are often confused. The two are homophones (words that sound the same but are spelt differently and mean different things). Thus, "Grin and *bear* it" is correct, as is "He *bared* his soul" (as in stripped naked). "This won't *bare* examination" is wrong. Of course it is possible to imagine the phrase *bare examination* e.g. if one were having a physical by one's doctor. And of course there could be a *bear examination*, e.g. by a park ranger or vet, or if Winnie the Pooh were doing midterms. That's all for today, grammar fans.

November 7, 2012 - *Fleshing Out? No, not Flushing Out*

Today's #queensgrammar comes courtesy of @ctausigford and may need *fleshing out*. No, not *flushing out* which, as she points out, is wrong. One *fleshes out* an idea, or a concept, for instance: "The ideas in your essay are good but require *fleshing out*". Essentially it means putting some meat on a skeletal idea (don't make it too verbose; that would make for *flabby* prose). Now, *flushing out* is a different idea altogether; typically a hunting term, e.g. *flushing out* one's prey, typically game. It could also refer to *flushing out* one's system, e.g. getting rid of harmful toxins in the body. Just plain *flushing* of course means something altogether different. Anyway if your ideas are well *fleshed out*, you should be *flush* with success.

Tomorrow we will take on the spelling of words to do with spelling. Happy post US Election Day.

November 8, 2012 - *Spelt or Spelled*

Good morning from Boston. Today's #queensgrammar is about spelling. In particular it concerns how to spell the past participle of spell. Is the correct word *spelt* or *spelled*? There is no doubt that the latter is much more commonly used, especially in N. America. Both actually go back several hundred years. However, meaning is important. *Spelled* can be correct with at least two meanings of *spell*: e.g. "I *spelled* 'Aphrodite' correctly"; or "Natasha was tired so Boris *spelled* her off" (as in, relieved). In the latter case, one would not use the past *spelt*. I have said nothing about *spell* as in *magic,* which doesn't really have a verbal form. "The White Witch put Narnia under a *spell*", not "The White witch *spelled* Narnia". In that last case we are assuming that the word *spelled* doesn't mean that the Witch was in a kind of interdimensional spelling bee against Aslan. Finally let us not forget one more use of *spelt*--as a noun, it is also a type of grain.

Tomorrow we will stick with spelling but a different issue, the vexed one of the *u* in *labour*, *colour* etc.

November 9, 2012 - *U* (not *You*)

Good morning from Winnipeg where the fall colours are pretty much gone. That's right, *colours*, not *colors*. As I promised yesterday, today's #queensgrammar tweets are all about *u* (not *you)*, that is the controverted US/UK spelling difference. You'll run into this with your spell checks. Mine annoyingly wants to correct *labour, neighbour*; similar words to US version. So I've tied my colours to the mast as a devotee of the UK version, perhaps because I was born in England to British parents. However, there is nothing 'wrong' about US spelling. Rather it represents a deliberate attempt at simplification along phonetic lines. What's interesting is that the *u* itself is NOT contrary to myth, a 'ye olde' ancient English spelling. On the contrary, there was very little standard spelling in England prior to the mid-18th century and Dr Samuel Johnson's famous dictionary. In the 17th cent., the period in which I usually work, words like *labour, colour* etc. were often spelled without the *u* and sometimes with, sometimes both ways in the same book. I think I may do another tweet on how the spelling of some common words has changed. But back to the *u*. What is interesting is that in the last decade or so, the *u* has been dropped a lot more in Canada. One can argue creeping American cultural influence, but it is what it is. My view: both are correct, but in writing papers, BE CONSISTENT. Have a good weekend.

We'll continue this theme on Monday with some US spelling exceptions

November 12, 2012 - *Why Do Some US Words Maintain the 'U' that Labor and Color Lost?*

Good morning and welcome back to #queensgrammar. Why do some US spelling words maintain the *u* that *labor* and *color* lost? *Neighb(o)ur* doesn't. It's also *tournament,* not *tornament* and *tour* not *tor* though we still say *Toronto,* not *Touronto*). Once again, the spelling that departed from the norm was US, following a revolutionary-era inclination to reform orthography. As mentioned Friday, the norm was of recent vintage-mid-18th century, there having been no standardization previously. And so after the American Revolution, patriots stayed in the new country, with new spelling. Loyalists, known as Tories by American revolutionaries, fled to Canada, sticking with British orthography, which we might call 'Tory (not Tori) Spelling'. However, as mentioned last week, either version is now in use in Canada. The key is consistency. Don't use *colour* and *labour* in a sentence followed by *harbor* in the next. It wouldn't be *neighborly*. Enjoy your Mounday.

November 13, 2012 - *Dead Right* and *Dead To Rights*

I got some great #queensgrammar subjects suggestions last week. One of these was the phrases *dead right* and *dead to rights*, oft confused. The former simply means the same as *absolutely right* (as in the song by the 70s group The Five Man Electrical Band). So, for instance, "Harry guessed on the last question on the Potions exam and fortunately he was *dead right*". *Dead to rights* has a more narrow application, usually meaning catching someone out, often in a criminal situation. e.g. "Lucifer the thief thought he had escaped but a search of his van revealed the loot. The cops had him *dead to rights*". In that case the police had their criminal *dead to rights*; in thinking he had gotten away with it, Lucifer was *dead wrong*. Thanks @GregFergus for that suggestion which he was *dead right* to make. Tomorrow on #queensgrammar, an old and *fulsome* discussion.

November 14, 2012 - *Fulsome*

We're a bit early today but I have an early flight to catch. We'll return to a subject from last year, the word *fulsome*. I have seen this lot in the last few weeks; it once meant full, comprehensive, complete. Unfortunately, it has another sense. The original meaning (medieval) was *full,* but for a few centuries it has meant something like unctuous or exaggerated. So "Let's have a *fulsome* discussion" does not mean "Let's discuss this matter completely and fully". Rather, it implies "Let's discuss it in an entirely flattering and annoyingly sycophantic way". The standard usage would be more like this: "His followers heaped *fulsome*

praise on him when he was successful"--praise that was excessive and probably also insincere. So, because of its early origins, *fulsome*'s correct use is a grey zone. If you want to avoid raising an eyebrow with it, you are best sticking to other words; save *fulsome* for its narrower meaning. I hope this has been a full explanation.

November 15, 2012 – *Me Myself and I*

Good morning #queensgrammar ians. Today's subject is another oldie but goodie, and it is about *me, myself* and *I*. No, not your humble scribe. It will in fact require a couple of days' worth of tweets on #queensgrammar but I fear a refresher is necessary. Every day I hear this error: "Eve asked to speak with Adam and *I*" or "He gave that to Bridget and *myself*". Both are wrong, but for different reasons. The correct word to use is the lonely, unloved, *me*. I don't know why *me* is so neglected and can only think that it's become a kind of *bad word* to avoid. "I don't want to sound egotistical so I'd better not refer to *me*, uh, I mean *I*". But you wouldn't say "She gave a candy to *I*" or "He wanted to speak to *I*", now would you? If in doubt, the easiest way to get it right is by taking the other indirect object out of the sentence. If you feel yourself about to say this: "The cab will pick up Tom, you and *I*", get rid of *Tom and you* from the sentence and it will be clear that you need *me*. Why is *me* correct? Or why am I correct that *me* is correct? We'll tackle that tomorrow with tweets on subjects and objects. And now *me* is heading for the plane to come back to Kingston.

November 16, 2012 – Objects : *I* and *Me*

Last #queensgrammar for the week. Yesterday was all about *me*. Monday I will discuss *myself*. (No, this is not a bio-tweet.)

Today: *objects*. A sentence must have a subject, the doer, and a verb, the action: e.g.: "I (sub) slept (action)". It usually also has (but doesn't have to have) an object, essentially something in receipt of the action. An object can be direct or indirect. "Eve gave the apple to Adam" -- Eve is the subject, *gave is* the action, and *the apple* and *Adam* are objects. In fact, *the apple* and *Adam* are different kinds of objects: direct (*the apple*) and indirect (*Adam*) respectively. The difference between those two kinds of object is also important but will require a separate lesson.

For now, let's stick with how it relates to *I and me*. Very simply, *I* is the subjective pronoun, *me* is the objective pronoun. So, as noted yesterday in this space, "Fred gave the car to Bill and I" is wrong because Bill and the speaker are objects, not subjects. The *I* in that last one should be *me*. *Myself* would also be wrong, because it is a different part of speech again. I'll explain why and when *myself* should and shouldn't be used on Monday.

And we'll come back to direct and indirect objects.

Enjoy (action) your weekend (object). [that sentence has no subject, because it's in the imperative mood--another 'subject'!]

November 19, 2012 - *Myself*

This morning's #queensgrammar concerns the reflexive, *myself*. This is not, contrary to popular usage, a synonym for *me*. "Jim gave the list to Bob and *myself*" or "Just let Jane or *myself* know" have become common usages. The *myself* should be *me*. This, according to sociolinguists (thanks @qui_oui) is *hypercorrection*--we think *myself is* more academic or perhaps less egotistical than *me*, so we substitute. The problem is that *myself* is not an object pronoun but a reflexive one. It can be used as an object but only along with me, and rather unusually. "He gave the dog to me, myself" is technically correct because the *myself* follows the *me*, but certainly sounds odd and the myself is really redundant. More common usage is together with *I*, modifying the subject. "I *myself* have seen the film" or (as an ablative) "I write the

#queensgrammar tweets by *myself*". So next time you have to refer to yourself (correct, reflexive), to quote the Simple Minds song, *Don't You Forget About Me.*

November 20, 2012 – *Direct and Indirect Objects*

It's time, if no one objects, to be subjected to more #queensgrammar. Today we will do *direct* and *indirect objects*. Subjects, you will recall, are the doers of an action in an indicative mood, active voice sentence (the norm in description). We'll leave off moods and voices for another day as that's a whole other level of complexity. So why are there different kinds of objects? Objects in a sentence are persons or things to, with, by, or for something is done. A *direct object* is the immediate recipient of the action. "Aphrodite gave the biscuit to her dog, BB" is a complete sentence in which *Aphrodite* is clearly the subject. *The biscuit* is the immediately affected thing (by the verb, to give) is the *direct object*. The dog is the *indirect object* as the eventual recipient of the action of giving. In a language like Latin, one can easily tell whether a noun is a direct or indirect object by its case (or noun ending). English, like French, does not 'decline', that is, endings don't change according to the noun's function. So both *biscuit* and *dog* would be unchanged even if Aphrodite instead gave *the dog* to *the biscuit* (making the dog the direct object, biscuit indirect). So how do we know which object is direct and which is indirect? I'll tell you about this on Wednesday (I=sub; you=direct ob; Wed.=indirect ob).

November 21, 2012 – *The Apostrophe*

Good morning #queensgrammar fan's. No, wait, that should be *fans*. Yes, we are back to the *apostrophe*. No punctuation error drives me up the wall more than the use of an apostrophe in plurals. It is unnecessary and wrong unless it's a plural possessive. Consider the following: "Voldemort's plan was to hide several horcrux's; it's fortunate he didn't succeed". The apostrophe in You-Know-Who's name is correct--a possessive; so is the one in *it's* (a contraction of *it is*); but not the one in horcruxes, which is a straightforward plural. Someone emailed me about making sure all the *dean's* had been informed about something. I wondered 'all the dean's what'? They meant plural, *deans*. Just repeat: no possessive, no apostrophe. There are plural possessives, which are a bit more complicated, and do need an apostrophe, and require a separate set of tweets.

November 22, 2012 – *Plural Possessives*

Yesterday on #queensgrammar a couple of sharp-eyed followers spotted the following (deliberate) error: I used *horcrux's* as a plural. It should, of course, have been horcruxes because no possessive was intended as we discussed yesterday. *Plural possessives* are a little more complicated but needn't be.

"The girl's dog fetched the ball" is an obvious plural singular possessive. If there were more than one girl, it would be "The girls' dog fetched the ball" which has the apostrophe outside the letter *s*. It would have a different meaning entirely if commas were added and the apostrophe deleted. "The girls, dog, fetched the ball" might be something a rap artist would say, addressing someone called dog. But comma positioning is another story. Some plural possessives are more problematic, esp. those where the plural word is spelled differently than the singular.

November 23, 2012 - *Plural Possessives and the Placement of the Apostrophe*

Yesterday our #queensgrammar tweets looked at plural possessives and the placement of the apostrophe. Always outside the *s*? Not quite. There are some words that change form in their plural. You know them: mouse, mice; goose, geese; moose, meese (ok not that one). In these cases, the apostrophe precedes the *s* rather than follows it because the *s* is only being used for possessive, not pluralizing. Thus 'The badgers' den' follows the usual rule--apostrophe after *s*. But the mice's cheese has the apostrophe before the *s*. Similarly, one would say *the man's car* or *the woman's book* but *the men's room* or *the women's club*. Simple rule: if an *s* is needed to make the plural, it has to precede the apostrophe; if the *s* is only needed because

it is possessive, then the *s* must follow the apostrophe. Enjoy the weekend, back Monday with more #queensgrammar.

November 26, 2012 – *Lose and Loose*

Today's #queensgrammar suggestion comes courtesy @stellaklee and concerns the words *lose* and *loose*, which I increasingly see confused. The conflation only seems to occur in the present tense of the verb *lose*. *Lost* does not seem to confuse people. (Unless of course by *Lost* one means the TV series, which was very confusing). The problem may be that while *lose* is only a verb, its variant *loose* can be both an adjective and a verb (most often as *loosen*, but sometimes just as *loose*). "Loose the dogs of war" is one example, though is really short for *let loose*. More often, *loose* is used as an adjective. "He lost so much weight that all his suits were loose". *Lose* however, in the sense of c*an't find it* is only a verb. "Student wizards were worried they might lose [*not loose*] their wands" would be a simple instance of this. "He wants to *lose* his accent" (not *loose*) is another. Simple rule: if it is about forgetting or abandoning something, *lose the 2nd o*. Adding a 2nd o makes lose *looser* by stretching it out. This will stop you using these words *loosely*.

Tomorrow--an overdue look at verb moods, starting with the imperative. Have a good day (which itself is an imperative).

November 27, 2012 – *The Imperative Mood*

It's #queensgrammar for Tuesday. Wake up. Pay attention. We are going to discuss the *imperative mood*, two examples of which I just used. Moods are a somewhat difficult concept (essentially same word origin as *mod*). The standard one which we use to recount information past, present or future is the indicative. "Eve missed her dog" is an indicative mood statement in the imperfect tense (we will leave tenses alone today; moods are bad enough). However, "Eve, take your dog for a walk" is not an indicative but an imperative--essentially a directive to the recipient to do an action. In Latin, nouns decline so there is a *vocative case* which is a give-away that an imperative is being used. In English, nouns do not have cases so we have to rely on the positioning of the words, on punctuation (for instance an exclamation mark) and the absence of an obvious subject in the sentence. The imperative should be easy to remember because of its name--it orders something, even if it is polite about it. For instance *rejoice* is a directive to do something nice, but still an imperative. A tougher mood is the subjunctive. We did that one last spring. No grammar lesson tomorrow as I am on airplanes all day. Back on Thursday with more #queensgrammar.

November 29, 2012 - *Clichés*

Good morning from LA, home of Hollywood, script-writing, good and bad dialogue and *clichés*. The last word is our #queensgrammar topic today. I think we all know what a *cliché* is--an overused expression. Lots of business buzz-phrases would qualify very quickly. But the key thing about a cliché is that it is a noun, not an adjective. In the past few years it has become regrettably common to use the word as an adjective. "Oh, that's so cliché!" or "That's such a cliché expression". Both are misuses of the word which could be easily corrected either by adding a *d* to the end or an *a* (indefinite article) in front. For example, "That's such a cliché" or "That is so clichéd" (the latter meaning a saying that was probably original at one point but now has become hackneyed). So next time you hear an expression, or see a scene in a movie that makes you roll your eyes, by all means call it out as a *cliché* or as *clichéd* (that is, has been turned into a cliché). Of course you might consider whether doing this too often is itself a form of cliché as the word itself is often overused, but that's another story.

November 30, 2012 – *Homonyms and Homophones*

Good morning from LA where it is 5:45 am and thus this #queensgrammar tweet is coming a bit later than usual. It's also the end of November, and thus, sadly, the end of this fall's round of #queensgrammar. But don't worry [imperative voice], it will return in the spring with another month's worth of tweets. To finish things off I thought I'd return to the subject of *homonyms* and *homophones*, with a #queensgrammar

example in a similar vein. Yes, *vein*. Not *vain*, not vane. (Thanks @qui_oui again for this one). This is a very common error, and it is one that spellchecks on computers haven't helped. *In a similar vein* is an interesting expression, the origins of which aren't clear, at least to me. But a vein is a vessel (blood) in the body and can also be a geological term (vein of coal, eg) a *vane* is something that swings with the weather. *Vain* is what you think it is, as in the Carly Simon classic "You're So Vain". I don't think Ms Simon was singing about someone who thought they were a weather vane or a blood vessel, so we'll assume she did in fact mean *vain*. At any rate, watch your homonyms and homophones when writing, or all of this will have been in...#queensgrammar. Good luck to everyone out there finishing essays and exams for this term. Suggestions welcome for the March round of #queensgrammar.

Winter 2012

March 4, 2012 – *May* and *Might*

Today is National Grammar Day. Good morning and welcome back to another few weeks of grammar tweets, back by popular demand.

Last term's tweets will be posted in a few days in a single blog. As an innovation, I am hashtagging them this time around.

The honour of inspiring the first new tweet goes to John Grisham, celebrated lawyer turned author. He is a good writer but I found this choice phrase on p 37 of the Kindle edition of his new book, *The Litigators* "If he hadn't been drunk, he *may have* succeeded". Ouch. Sorry Mr G, but I think you meant *might have* succeeded.

I think we *may* have had this one last term, but it's worth repeating. *May* and *might* sound similar but don't perform quite the same function. In the future I *might* continue my grammar tweets, as in the sense that it is possible that I will do so. I *may* continue them in the future carries that sense, but also one of permission-- that is, the conditions exist that enable me to do so, or which give me permission so to do. In the past tense it is even simpler.

"If response to last term's tweets had been poor, I *might* not have continued them" is correct--it sets up a subjunctive. That is, an unreal past that did not occur. *May* should not be used instead of *might* in this circumstance. If I were describing a real event, *may* could be correct. "I was told that I may come to the party" enables me to attend. However," I was told that I *might* come to the party" provides more a sense of being told that I could choose to attend. If there is interest, I *might* spend more time on the subjunctive mood in future tweets. But only in March or April, not MAY.

March 5, 2012 - *Forewords*

Good morning. Today's tweet is about *forewords*. Not *forwards*. It is a frequent though not universal practice for a book to have a *foreword*, often written by a person other than the author (as editor of a series, for instance, I have one in every volume of that series, even if I wasn't the volume author or editor. In the last 10 years however, I have increasingly seen this referred to as a *forward* in essays--and even in scholarly books! The error is easy to understand: the piece is in the front of the volume and therefore *forward*. But it isn't a forward, which is a position in hockey or soccer; it's a *foreword*.

BTW, a *preface* is distinguished from a *foreword* by usually being a preliminary set of remarks about the book by the author, whereas the *foreword* is more like a 3rd-party validation of the book. Forewords are less common than they used to be, having been displaced by blurbs or short quotes from experts about the value of the book, printed on its back cover or dust jacket. Tomorrow: correct use of the word *cite*. So revisit this site.

Good morning. Today the subject is the word *cite*. To begin with, this is a verb, not a noun. One can *cite* a source in an essay or paper. The noun is a *citation*, like the car of the same name. So don't say "There were 26 *cites* of that article". *Cite* is not the same as *sight* or *site*. I think we all know that *sight* isn't right (hey, that rhymes). *Site* refers to a place or location, real or virtual (e.g. campsite vs. website). Perhaps that is why it and *cite* are often mistaken. One might think of a *cite* as a place or location in a source to which one is referring. But one would be wrong. Of course, one could *cite* a *site*, as in referring to a source URL on JSTOR, or if one wanted to cite an example of campsites. But other than such circumstances, when you *cite* a source, there should be no *site* in *sight*.

Travelling overnight to Europe tonight so no #queensgrammar tweet on Wednesday. I will be back with a tweet on Thursday.

Dear #queensgrammar followers: while I'm on Eurotime the tweets will be going out in the middle of the night, your time. Use the #tag to find 'em.

March 8, 2012 - *Differences between German and English*

Today and tomorrow in honour of my trip to Germany I am going to discuss some major differences between it and English.

The first of this is its use of *case* or its declensions. Those who know Latin will understand this concept; essentially it means that a noun or pronoun will have a different form depending on its function in the sentence. English does this to a much more limited degree (I vs. me). But in German, as in Latin, the ending on a noun, and indeed the form of the article *der* (the) or *ein* (a) depends on the noun's position and function: subject? direct object? (accusative) indirect object? (dative) person addressed (vocative) or thing by or with something is done (ablative). All of this sounds very confusing until one realizes that these are all rules and make German, like Latin, much more rule-organized than English. That said, I know native German speakers who will still get their *ders* and *dies* wrong. A further complication, also affecting the articles, is the gender of the noun. German, again like Latin, has 3, masculine, feminine and neuter, so one needs to know this too. More on gender and German words tomorrow. Until then, *auf wiedersehn* from Berlin.

March 9, 2012 – *Gender in German Words*

Day 2 of my Berlin conference. Time to talk about gender in German words. English is not a highly gendered language except for pronouns (he/she, his, her, its etc.). French is more so -- masculine and feminine (*le, la; mon, ma; ton, ta* etc). But German has 3 genders: masculine, feminine, and neuter. Articles for nouns reflect this: *der, die and das* (but these also vary with *case* per yesterday's tweets on declension). So in German it's not enough to know that *girl* is *maedchen* (I've used the first *e,* by the way, because I don't have an umlaut character on my iPad). You need to know that despite being a *girl* it is also a neuter noun (counter to the expectation that it would be feminine). This can be a bit confusing when learning the language, but of course it's one of those things one simply learns; and again, the rules are quite straightforward in contrast to English. One more set of tweets tomorrow on German and then I'm off to London where we will revert to English. Meanwhile, *Guten Tag*.

March 10, 2012 - *More German*

I'm getting packed up to leave for Berlin Tagel airport shortly, so will close this week's comments on German. We've mentioned cases and genders. German also, like French, has formal and familiar forms of address. *Du* is a very familiar form of *you*; one would use it on family, very close friends, pets and children. It is a counterpart of the French *tu*. The formal version is *Sie*. *Du bis* is *you are*, familiar; *Sie sind* would be the formal mode. A younger woman at my conference explained to me that though the younger

generation of Germans is much less formal than their elders, nonetheless the *du and sie* are still taken very seriously. So are forms of address/titles, much more so than in North America. So if over here, mind your *sies* and *dus*. There's of course lots more to be said about German but I will leave that to experts like Prof @jillscott68 (or my fluently bilingual father, who met my mother in Germany though both are British). No tweet on Sunday but I'll be back Monday tackling the list of suggestions that has been coming in. Enjoy the weekend.

March 12, 2012 - *Dominate*

This morning's grammar tweet is inspired by a tweet I read last night that referred to something as *dominate*. *Dominate*, however, is a verb, not an adjective. The tweeter would have been correct if s/he had used the word *dominant*. *Dominant* is an adjective, *dominate* a verb. The same applies to *predominate* and *predominant*. The latter is the adjective. Thus, to revert to my favourite source of examples, Harry Potter (appropriate as I am heading to the Castle): "In the realm of craft and cunning, Slytherin was *predominant*; but in academics, Gryffindor *dominated* the school".

Tomorrow I will discuss a common misuse of the word *for*. Have a great Monday back home.

March 13, 2012 - *For*

Good morning. I am heading for Paddington station and then on to Oxford for the day. Note the use of the word *for*, a common preposition. We use *for* a great deal, and for a 3 letter word, it is very useful. But sometimes the poor little critter is abused. My favourite example of this turned up several times in the Grisham novel I just finished reading (sorry John!): it is something like this: "I would like for you to look into this matter" or "He wants for you to attend that meeting". This has been creeping into parlance more and more and is incorrect. A preposition such as *for* is redundant in this context because it is sufficient to say "I would like you to go to the meeting" or if you prefer "I would like it if you were to attend".

Of course we could consider this a variant of the abuse of *like*: *like*. In fact, correctly used it is a variant of the subjunctive mood, a complicated topic that might require a couple of days' worth of tweets. Coming in the near future.

Please hashtag any suggestions with #queensgrammar. Enjoy your Tuesday wherever you are.

March 14, 2012 - *Gotten*

I was asked yesterday to tweet about the word *gotten* as in "I had *gotten* into a lot of trouble". The tweeter wondered if this were correct (note I said were, not was...subjunctive mood, coming soon...consider this a trailer). In fact, *gotten* is legitimate, as is *got*. They are used differently. "I *got* an invisibility cloak for my birthday" [I wish!] is correct. But so is "I *got* a new sweater for my birthday, but I wish I had *gotten* a pet goldfish". In this instance, the verb form *gotten* is used in yet another subjunctive (in this instance, a wished counterfactual). There is another angle which connects to the ambiguity of *get* as an active and passive voice. "I *got* groceries" means usually "I went shopping and purchased food". But it could also mean "I received groceries from someone else". Same applies for *gotten* in this context. In short, there is nothing wrong with *gotten* in the right context. In the incorrect usage, it would just be misbe*gotten*.

March 16, 2012 – *Begs the Question*

Back in YGK. Today, in response to a suggestion, I am going to address the widely misused phrase *begs the question*. This is very widely used in the sense of *raises the question*: for instance "Peter lost his watch at the fair, which *begs the question* of what he was doing there in the first place". Unfortunately, that's not what *begs the question* means. It is in fact a logical fallacy, *petitio principi* meaning "assuming as proven that which is in need of proof". For example "Slytherin House was thought to be crafty because its members were sneaky". Here, one has *explained* one thing simply by using a synonym for the same thing.

Begging the question is thus a problem in logic rather than grammar; its misuse is a problem of style or usage. For further information there are a number of web pages devoted to this issue and other usage errors. See in particular http://t.co/Jy3D3XVd

Back Monday with more #queensgrammar

March 19, 2012 - *You're Welcome*

I was asked to comment on an error that one finds occasionally in written English but not that often since it is mainly a phrase spoken conversationally. The phrase is *you're welcome* (that's the correct form). It is sometimes rendered as *your welcome* which of course is wrong...unless of course it refers to the welcome you are extending. For instance:

Bill: "Thanks for hosting us today".

Jill: "*You're welcome*".

Bill: "I appreciate the warmth of your welcome".

This small example indicates a more common confusion of *your* and *you're*: the first is a possessive pronoun; the 2nd is simply a contraction for *you are*. I've found that the *you're* form is frequently (wrongly) displaced by the *your* pronoun. Was that useful? Good, you're welcome.

March 20, 2012 - *Fulsome*

Today's grammar tweet is about the word *fulsome*, per a request I had a few weeks ago. Contrary to popular usage, this does not really mean the same as *full* or *abundant*. In fact, in the strictest sense it is not a complimentary term. *Fulsome* praise really means over-the-top and insincere. There is an older meaning which is even more negative and carries the same connotation as *repulsive*. That isn't much used, but the insincere meaning remains. So next time you offer someone your sincere congratulations perhaps make them *full* rather than *fulsome*, or they may doubt that you mean what you say.

March 21, 2012 - *Vicious Cycle*

For this morning's #queensgrammar tweet I've picked a particular irritant of mine, the phrase *vicious cycle*. This in fact is a corruption of the phrase *vicious circle*. That phrase first appears in the late 18th century, in an early edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica. Rather like *begging the question* which we discussed a few days ago, a *vicious circle* was originally a logical issue, referring to a fallacious proof based on its own premise. The term gradually was extended, in particular by economists to describe a process which continues with no conceivable benefit (they also speak of a *virtuous circle*). The *vicious circle* also appears in medical terminology, reflecting the cycle of life and death (perhaps that's where it became *cycle*?). At any rate, *circle* is the traditional usage. *Cycle*, though it doubtless conveys the same meaning, is a popular misphrasing. I don't think we need to go around and around on this. See http://t.co/lq61T0Mr for a good explanation on which I've drawn.

March 22, 2012 – *Moods of Verbs*

I'm heading off to Toronto early for a 10 am meeting, so a short #queensgrammar tweet today, on moods. Not "He is in a bad mood", but rather *moods of verbs*. There are 3 main ones, indicative, imperative, and subjunctive. They are not to be confused with *voice*, which is either active or passive (see a previous #queensgrammar on my blog for that one). Indicative mood is declarative: "I saw you". It states a fact or action. The imperative mood is essentially a command; it is directive. "See me tomorrow"; "Write your letter to your parents"; or "Don't use contractions". The most complex of *moods* is the subjunctive, and

it will require at least a couple of days of tweets. We'll get started on them tomorrow I think. I hope this has set the mood for your day.

March 23, 2012 - *Subjunctive*

It is time that I speak of the *subjunctive*. That sentence was an example of it right there. It is an extremely useful *mood* (for moods see yesterday's #queensgrammar). It has a number of uses, not least in complex sentences with relative clauses such as the one with which this set of #queensgrammar tweets began. The subjunctive is used, for instance, to express a hypothetical or desired state or act such as "I wish that she be there". Note the use of *be* instead of *is*. That's because the subjunctive is indicated by use of the infinitive form of the verb where one would normally have the 3rd person singular form. Or, to put it another way, to make a subjunctive verb form out of an indicative, take the 3rd person singular which usually ends with an *s* and drop the letter *s*. (Note: the verb *to be*, as so often, is a special case; more on that another time). So instead of *she allows* the subjunctive would be *she allow*. Of course this must be part of a subjunctive construction. "She allows her children to watch TV" is an indicative, a statement. "It is reasonable that she allow her children to watch television" is a subjunctive--it expresses not a real but a possible or desired state. Note that it could also be reasonable that she *allows* her children to watch television. The difference, and why *allow* has the *s* is that in this case two indicatives are being linked. (That is, factually the subject "She *is* allowing TV to be watched" and we are stating that to be reasonable).

Confused? If so it would be useful if you were to practice turning indicatives into subjunctives. More on *to be* and subjunctives on Monday. It would be great if you were to have a good weekend.

http://t.co/Z0vYQewM : a good site on use of semicolon.

March 26, 2012 - *Continuing Our Exploration of the Subjunctive*

Monday morning, and we are continuing our exploration of the subjunctive. As already mentioned, this is a very useful mood in complex sentences, especially involving verbs like *wish*, *suggest*, *recommend*. Again, the subjunctive uses the infinitive form of the verb even where an indicative would use a terminal s. "He *goes* to the store" BUT "I suggest that he *go* to the store". In the past tense, usage is slightly different. "I wish that she had painted the door" is not distinct from "She had painted the door" (both use the 3rd person *painted*), except the first is a past indicative, the second a past subjunctive (if one wants to be strict, they were both pluperfects or past perfects, but I will save past tenses for another session). However, there is one exception to this rule, and it is again the verb *to be*. Thus "She was there" but "I wish that he WERE there" (note it's *were* instead of *was*). In another tweet I'll discuss a distinctive construction called the *conditional* which is similar to but different from the subjunctive. But that's enough complexity for this hour on a Monday morning.

March 27, 2012 – *Conditional Mood*

Recent submissions indicate... it's time for another apostrophe lesson I'm afraid. http://t.co/Nx4mb0bm"

If I were to pick a construction that is most often misused in writing it would be the *conditional mood*. That sentence illustrates it. Strictly speaking, English (unlike highly inflected languages) has no separate conditional mood, but we do use conditional constructions. What usually trips people up is the verb *to be*. "I went to the store" is an indicative in the imperfect tense. "I will go to the store" is a future tense indicative. But the hypothetical state (see tweets on subjunctive) of possibly going to the store (in past or future) set up a conditionality which requires a different verb usage: 'If I WERE to go to the store, then...'. The other key element of a conditional is often (though not always) a modal verb. More on modal verbs tomorrow.

March 28, 2012 – *Modal Verbs*

The past week's exploration of first the subjunctive and then the conditional has raised the issue of *modal verbs*. These are verbs that do not signify actions themselves but enable, will or mandate actions. They include *can, would, should must, have to*, etc. They can grant permission, e.g., "She may read that book". Or they can express a past counterfactual. "If he had left 5 minutes earlier, he *might have* caught the bus". (That example combines a modal verb with a conditional construction.) "I must have forgotten" and "They should go there" are further examples of modal verbs. Modal verbs do not take an *s* in the 3rd person sing. (e.g. he, she, it). "I sing, she hums", but "I can sing, she can hum". If one can follow all this, then one will be able to use modal verbs. You can do this too. Become a modal citizen.

March 29, 2012 - *Modal Verbs: We are not out of the Woulds yet*

On the road today so we will take a break from *modal verbs*, but we are not out of the *woulds* yet.

On occasion someone will say "Great movie. I literally jumped out of my seat". That is only true if, indeed, you physically ejected yourself from a sitting position. *Literally* is misused to add emphasis whereas its literal (sorry!) meaning is that the phrase means exactly what it says. So "It was literally raining cats and dogs" does not mean that it was a really heavy rainfall, but rather that the clouds or an airplane were dropping some unfortunate felines and canines on our heads. So next time you want to emphasize something, consider that if you misuse literally, you will *literally* be making an error!

March 30, 2012 – *Will* and *Shall*

To end this week's #queensgrammar we shall discuss *will* and *shall*. No, not Will and Grace. There are, so far as I can tell, two schools of thought on their distinctive use. According to one, there is a proper place for *will* and another for *shall* depending on the person (1st, 2nd, 3rd) speaking. According to the other *shall* is rapidly becoming archaic. I would also note a difference which I have observed between UK and N Am usage--Brits tend to use *shall* and *should* more than we do. Essentially, as a modal verb, *will* will work in all persons as a statement of intent or a predictive: "I will tweet, you will tweet, she will tweet…" etc. *Shall* when used in the first person in the UK carries much the same force as *will*. Over here it is used more for emphasis. I SHALL tweet! (Just you watch me...). In the 2nd and 3rd person it acquires a compulsory tone. "You *will* clean your room" somehow sounds slightly less forceful than "You *shall* clean your room". Again, however, this is a grey area. Many of my British friends use *will* and *shall* more or less indiscriminately. Monday we will check out the related forms *would* and *should*. Where there's a will there's a way. I hope you shall have a good weekend.

April 2, 2012 – *Should* and *Would*

Good morning. I would like to tweet this morning about *should and would*. A lot has been written on this topic but to keep it simple we will concentrate on the conditional usage. *Should* in common usage carries a normative connotation that *would* may or may not have. "I *would* tweet every day if I had the time" indicates an inclination on my part. "I *should* tweet" implies that it is somehow a failing if I do not do so. Once again, however, there is also a UK/NAm divergence of practice, as in that it is somehow a failing if I do not do so. Once again, however, there is also a UK/NAm divergence of practice, as with *shall* and *will*. It is not uncommon in British usage to say "I *should* expect so" or "I *should* think so" where in Canada we would say (not should say) "I *would* expect so", or even simply "I expect so" without the modal verb. Of course both *would* and *should* have past tense uses also. "I *should have* emptied the trash bin" once again implies an action desired but not completed. "I *would have* emptied the trash" implies something not done but which might have been done had conditions been different. I should think that this is sufficient for a Monday morning.

April 3, 2012 - *Litotes*

Today's grammar tweet is on a particular figure of speech that is less used in N AM than in my native Britain*: litotes.* Litotes is a figure of speech used to express a positive as a double negative. Why not just use the positive? Because the effect of the double negative is to mute the positive. This can be obvious in the case of *not bad* instead of *good* where *not bad* carries a tinge of mediocrity. But in other instances, too, it is not unuseful in this regard (I just did it). "Prof Woolf's course on Tudor England was not uninteresting" is not exactly a raving endorsement. "Bill's house was not unattractive" is similarly saying the house may have nice features but is not likely to win a Home and Garden Prize. @jagwoolf says I use litotes rather a lot which I ascribe to my British parentage and lots of time in the UK. This is a *not inaccurate* assessment on my wife's part. Litotes, in the double negative form, is quite common in many languages. In contrast, I was once told by a linguist that there is no language in which the opposite is true, that is, a double positive used to express a negative. Yeah, right....

April 4, 2012 – *Alternative* vs *Alternative*

This morning as an alternative to more discussion of tenses and moods we're going to discuss *alternate vs alternative*. In common parlance, the two have often been used indiscriminately and the use of *alternative* as an adjective is in danger of disappearing. *Alternate* is first and foremost a verb meaning *to take turns.* AC is *alternating current* for reasons that our electrical eng students will understand. "Harry and Rupert alternated in the role of Seeker" (yes, I know Rupert was never a Seeker, folks, but work with me on this...). *Alternative* is an adjective or a noun. "You leave me with no alternative", for instance. What one sees often however is "I have an alternate suggestion" when one really means *an alternative suggestion*. Sounds funny to our modern ears but strictly speaking it is correct. So, next time you have to use alternate or alternative, pause before doing so; if in doubt, use an alternative word, or *alternate* it with another word such as *choice*, or the prof. may have no *alternative* but to alter the grade.

April 5, 2012 – *If...Then*

There has to be an *if..then* in this usage, that is, if subject does something, then something else will occur. In the past tenses it is somewhat more straightforward: "If JFK had not gone to Dallas, Oswald might not have shot him" (note however the *might* rather than *may* per an earlier #queensgrammar lesson. In the future conditional one starts with the present: "If I take the earlier train, then I will arrive by dinnertime"; (not 'If I will take the earlier train'). How to remember the *was* and *were* in the conditional: pretend the subject is *you* rather than *I or he/she/it*. You would never say "if you was to go to the party, you would enjoy it"; so if you were to use *were* with *you* then you should use it with I and he/she/it. Plurals more obviously require a *were*: "if we were to study harder, then our grades might improve". Last #queensgrammar tweet for this week; back for one more week after the Easter/Passover weekend. Enjoy! (And I'll explain why *enjoy* as an imperative, often issued by wait-staff in restaurants, is actually incorrect, next week.) Extra marks if you caught the punctuation error in that last pair of tweets. Have a good weekend.

April 9, 2012 – *Transitive Verbs*

Over the weekend at a cafe a waitress served our food and said "Enjoy it". I was pleased to hear it, not merely because it was the standard bidding (command?) to take pleasure in what was offered, but because it was also grammatically correct. Mainly one simply hears *Enjoy* without an object of enjoyment. Unfortunately, enjoy is a *transitive verb*, which means a verb that requires something as a target of its action. "Enjoy the movie" is correct: a verbal imperative followed by a direct object in the movie. The imperative itself can be softened by thinking of it less as "Enjoy the movie! (or else!)" and more as a short form of subjunctive expressing desire: "[I wish that you would] enjoy the movie". I must admit after years of *Enjoy* I tune it out but it irritates my 81 year old dad in Winnipeg. It has become something of a family joke. At any rate I hope everyone had a fine long weekend. Enjoy....your day.

April 10, 2012 – *Basic Tenant*

Last week someone tweeted at me that something was a *basic tenant*. I wondered what a *basic tenant* might be. Perhaps a tenant who lives in the basement? Or a tenant with a standard (basic), as opposed to optional or deluxe lease? In fact, I suspect what was meant was a basic *tenet,* which means a fundamental principle (though not a principal) or belief. The mistake is commonly made, and I've seen it in writing as well as heard it. The word derives from the Latin *tenire.* That's the verb meaning *to hold* and *tenant* comes from the same origin, so it is easy to see why the confusion arose. 3 more grammar tweets this week, at the end of which I will bring the regular series to a close for now. Suggestions welcome.

April 11, 2012 – *Led* **and Le***ad*

I have been led to today's #queensgrammar topic by @qui_oui. The topic is, in fact, the word *led* -- the past tense of the verb *to lead*. Over the last decade or so people have been using *lead* (the present tense) as the past also, thinking of *led* as an error. "You lead by example" is correct but "She *lead* the team" should be *led*. *Lead* has other meanings and can be a noun. The element on the periodic table is *lead* not *led* (as in*: lead pencil*, or the substance that can stop kryptonite). And of course apart from *lead* (rhymes with *sled*) there is *lead* (rhymes with *feed*), which also can be a noun. "He was the lead in that play"-- though strictly speaking that is a contraction for *leader* or *leading role*. So, when using the past tense of the verb *to lead*, get the *lead* out of your prose. To paraphrase the Beatles: led it be.

April 12, 2012 – *Co***ul***d* **into** *Good*

Today's #queensgrammar is inspired by an error I hadn't ever seen before yesterday, but it's a good one. Someone tweeted about a meeting. They wrote "This good be our biggest meeting ever". I couldn't understand it at first but soon figured it out. The author, or perhaps their autocorrect function, had turned *co***ul***d* into *good*. When spoken, they do sound similar, so this would be a similar error to one we have looked at previously: *would of* and *co***ul***d of* instead of *would/could have*. I will predict that *good be* will, thanks to the power of social media, enter common writing parlance (incorrect as it is). Unlikely as it seems, it good...uh...*co***ul***d* happen. Tomorrow I will wrap up this spring's #queensgrammar with some thoughts on 'buzzwords'.

April 13, 2012 – *Buzzwords and Phr***as***es*

#queensgrammar is going on hiatus for the summer. I've saved one of my (un)favourite topics for last: *buzzwords and phrases*. The mutant descendent of something once called (by George Orwell I think) a 'dead metaphor', these are overused phrases. They are especially commonplace it seems in business and administrative circles; where they come from is unclear; but they very quickly gain common acceptance. I learn new ones every year. One used to *drill down* into data: no longer enough. Now one has to do a *deep dive*(?!). Often they involve redundancy--for instance, *forward planning*. I wasn't aware of anything called *backward planning* (unless perhaps one is Dr Who or Skynet and can time travel). You'll hear these a lot, but they don't make for good writing. Their use on occasion can make a point. Their repetition, in meetings, memos, letters etc. will indicate that you really haven't thought about what you want to say. Instead, you are borrowing a tool--essentially a cliché--to make your point rather than using your own words. We all do this. The trick is not to do it very often--so often that you become associated with the buzzword. That's my parting advice for this season of #queensgrammar. Thanks for your suggestions; I may bring them back at essay time in the fall.

Fall 2011

November 12, 2011 – *Common Misspellings*

Given that it is term-paper time here in academe, I thought I would share over the next few days some grammatical and stylistic points. These are the ones that bug me; your instructors may have different preferences, but most will not like the ones I'm about to name.

I will begin with a couple of common misspellings that have crept into usage. First, one is struck by *lightning, not lightening*. Unless of course one means "I was struck by the lightening of Fred's hair".

Another is confusion of *predominant* and *predominate*. Correct: "Bank failure is the *predominant* (not *predominate*) cause of recession".

And, last one for today, *underline* instead of *underlying*. *The underlying* cause, not the *underline* cause. Unless of course you mean the **control u** function on a keyboard, which does cause underlines; indeed, it is the underlying cause of them.

November 13, 2011 – *It's* and *Its* and *Might* and *May*

Some more grammar, spelling and style errors.

An oldie but a baddie: *it's* and *its*. There is NO apostrophe if used as a possessive. It's correct to use *it's* as I just did, as a contraction (but I will say more about contractions). But NOT "The dog slipped *it's* leash".

A tougher one involves the subjunctive *might*, for which *may* is often incorrectly used.

 eg: "Had JFK not been shot, LBJ *might* never have become president and the US *might* have avoided the Vietnam War" is correct but the slight variation "Had JFK not been shot, LBJ *may* never have become president and the US *may* have avoided the Vietnam War" is wrong because *may* usually implies a future conditional. So "If I don't stop tweeting soon I *may* not finish my homework" is ok.

Tomorrow, one of my real bugbears: *me, myself, and I.*

November 14, 2011 – *Me, Myself* and *I*

OK, let's start the week with a family of grammar offences that personally drive me up the wall, involving *'me, myself,* and *I'.*

"Please don't hesitate to email Fred or me" is correct. "Phone Fred or *I*" and "Phone Fred or *myself*" are incorrect, but for different reasons. *I* is the subject; something cannot be done to or for *I* any more than for *he* or *she*, only for *him, her, it, you* or *me* - objective case. As for *me,* it is the reflexive. Only *I* can phone *myself* (an admittedly odd action); you will phone *me* (not *I*).

This particular set of usages started I think about 20 years ago; I ascribe it to a noble but misplaced aversion to referencing *me*. For some reason *I* is supposed to sound less egocentric. Basic rule is simple; if in doubt, take the other one out. That is, if you are not sure whether it is *I, he* or *she* vs *me, him* or *her*, in a sentence, simplify. You wouldn't say "Give it to *I*" or "Give it to *she*."

And that's all I myself have to say on this matter today. Feel free to retweet *I*, uh, *me*.

Today's grammar tip. *Who* and *whom*? *Whom* appears in danger of extinction. "Who gave you that?" is correct—*who* being the subject.

But not "You said that to *who*?!". Instead, "You said that to *whom*?" Tip: if you would have said *him* or *her* instead of *he* or *she*, use *whom*. Same applies to *whoever/whomever*. "*Whoever* wants to go, please raise your hands". But: "I will choose whomever you suggest". If the sentence would be *him/him* or *her/her*, then use *whomever*.

For a site with some of these rules see http://t.co/z4LwCwmn

In response to yesterday's grammar tweets, I was asked about *He and I* and *her and me*. It's a simple subject/object distinction.

"He and I went to the movie where we met his friend Jill. Jim bought her and me some popcorn". The *he and I* are doing something (subjects). The *her and me* are at the receiving end of an action. Again, if in doubt, just take out the *him* or *her*; if it sounds wrong as just *me* or *I* then it most likely is wrong.

grammar/style tip time.

Today: *commas, colons and semicolons*. A common device is to stick 2 principle or main clauses into a single sentence. A main clause has both a subject (doer/actor) and a predicate (action done). "Tom Marvolo Riddle killed his father" is a main clause. Here are two main clauses in a sentence, correctly. "Mad-eye was killed helping Harry escape; Hedwig also perished". Note the semicolon. It plays the part of almost a soft period or soft full stop, allowing two clauses that could have been stand-alone sentences to be joined.

Linking 2 such clauses with a colon can also be correct: "Readers were sad when Sirius died: a predictable reaction". Here a colon is used. Why a colon? Because the 2nd clause is NOT a main clause but a subordinate clause (no, those are not Santa's elves). It has no verb. So whether you use a semicolon or colon depends on the type of clause you are linking. Dashes are also commonly used in place of colons.

Another question often asked is how to use colons and semicolons in a list. Think of the semicolon, notwitstanding that 'semi' makes it sound weaker, as the stronger of the pair, as it can join two main clauses and a colon can't. In a list, the colon comes first."Voldemort created several horcruxes: the snake was one; the tiara was another; Harry himself was a third".

The semicolon denotes individual items--note that all items are also main clauses. If the list were just items without predicates, one would use neither colon nor semicolon. "The four houses were Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, Griffindor and Slytherin".

Tomorrow: the comma splice, an error sure to be noticed by your instructor.

Today's grammar tweet is the *comma splice*-- linking two main clauses (recall yesterday's definitions) with a comma rather than semicolon. "Harry captured the golden snitch, the game was over" is a comma splice, and wrong. If the comma were a semicolon it would be correct.

Using a conjunction (e.g., *and, but*) would also be correct. "Slytherin had won the game but Gryffindor still won the season on points". Simplest rule: if the two parts of the sentence could be sentences in their own right, you need a semicolon or a conjunction to separate.

November 21, 2011 – *The Dreaded Apostrophe*

Today's grammar/style tip. The dreaded apostrophe, the comma's rather elevated cousin. When should it be used and when not?

The example that hangs most people up is *its* and *it's*. There is a tendency (wrong) to put an apostrophe in *its* to denote possession. For instance "The dog seized the cat with it's paws". One might think that this is a possessive as in *the dog's paws*. It is, but in this instance the pronoun *its* takes priority over its purpose, possession. The pronoun *its* is the brother of *his* and *her*. And since *his* and *her* don't take apostrophes ("Snape laid down hi's wand"), neither does *its*.

The other use of an apostrophe (other than as a closing single quotation mark--different subject) is for contractions. I'll discuss them another day, but for now let's agree that the ONLY circumstance in which *it's* should have an apostrophe is when it is short for *it is*.

Finally, on the apostrophe and possessives: do NOT use them on plurals. "*Hogwart's* had four different *house's*". Here, the apostrophe is correct in *Hogwart's* (as in the school of Hogwart) but not in *houses* which is a straight plural, not a possessive.

But perhaps I've apostrophized enough for one morning (if you don't get that one, hit the dictionary).

@teamlowry thanks for the correction re spelling of Hogwarts with no apostrophe No butter beer for me

November 22, 2011 – *The Split Infinitive*

Today's grammar tweet: *the split infinitive*. Here are we are on somewhat more ambiguous ground than with some of the other errors posted. Most people, including me (note I said *me*, not *myself* or *I*), prefer that the infinitive not be split. Others are a bit more permissive.

If in doubt, don't do it. So what is a split infinitive? It is putting a word between *to* and the verb form. English infinitives all are prefaced by *to*: eg. *to go, to stop, to read, to fly*. This is contrast to other languages which have single word infinitives; for instance, the French *tenir* (to hold), *aller* (to go). (Efforts by French physicists have yet to find a way to split their infinitive).

A classic and notorious example of a split infinitive is Cpt. Kirk's famous *to boldly go*. A better construction would be *to go boldly*, or *boldly to go*. Simple rule: if the verb should have *to* in front of it, don't separate those two words. Remember this *to avoid it* easily.

Another useful site on the *me* and *I* issue discussed in one of last week's tweets: http://t.co/UBgKtyQn

November 23, 2011 – *Should Have and Would Have*

Today's grammar tweet is a simple one: *should have* and *would have*. These have often been corrupted into *should of* and *would of*. "Harry *would have* preferred someone other than Snape as the new Defence against Dark Arts Master" is correct. But "Lucius *should of* been a better father to Draco" is not. The error is doubtless a result of mistakenly hearing *of* instead of *have*. This one is unambiguously wrong and will make steam come from your instructor's ears--without aid of magic.

November 24, 2011 - *Data*

Today's grammar and spelling tip is a quick one: the word *data*. Commonly referred to in the singular, it is in fact a plural.

It is a Latin word, like many in English, that has entered English usage. But the Latin singular is *datum*, meaning literally *given*. The plural of this 3rd declension Latin noun is *data*. Thus "Let's analyze this *data*" is wrong. "These *data* tell us something new" may sound funny, but is correct. The sole exception where *data* is a singular is when referring to the android dude in Star Trek TNG. But as a loyal classic Trekkie, I would never do so.

November 25, 2011 – Prepositions

Today's grammar tweet concerns prepositions. These exist in many languages (for instance Latin, French, German). But in English they are especially important because it is an uninflected language (ie, the form of the noun doesn't change to reflect its grammatical function)

So the preposition is an important clue as to the role of a related noun. Thus "Harry gave the wand to Ron with Hermione's permission". In that sentence *to* and *with* are prepositions. Harry is the subject, the doer. The wand is the direct object of the verb *gave*.

Ron is the indirect object. And Hermione--well, she's an onlooker. In Latin, this would be much clearer as it has 'cases' to describe the particular place and function of a noun (the wand would be accusative case; Ron, the dative--he is given something); Hermione would be the ablative case, through, which, or by something is done. (To confuse you further, Latin prepositions sometimes take the accusative and sometimes the ablative case.

Common English prepositions are words like *to, with, by, from* -- they 'position' the noun in the sentence in the sense of identifying its relation to the action. It is generally considered bad style to end a sentence with a preposition, e.g. "Queen's is a school I got *into*".

In a famous example, someone (Churchill?) said "A preposition at the end of a sentence is something *up with which I shall not put*". This demonstrated that sometimes NOT having the preposition end the sentence may make for a strange sounding sentence, but still correct.

And that's all that is to be said about prepositions *BY* me *IN* this morning's grammar tweet *WITH* hopes all have a great weekend.

November 30, 2011 – *Double Negatives*

Good morning. It's time for a few more grammar tweets this week before wrapping up for the term.

Today: *double negatives*. This is not an error (except when misused), but often a figure of speech. You may be not unfamiliar with it; it is known as litotes. This sentence had an example in *not unfamiliar*. It is a way of giving a somewhat muted affirmative. My spouse @jagwoolf says I use it a lot and thinks it comes from my British background (and it is true I hear it more in the UK than here). There are of course wrong double negatives.

A commonplace example is *didn't hardly. Hardly* implies a scarcity of a particular action; therefore *didn't* would negate that. "I had *hardly* finished chairing the meeting before my blackberry rang" is ok; "I *hadn't hardly* finished (etc)" is not.

Double negatives are featured in many languages as an affirmative, but I am told by a linguist friend that there is no language in which a double affirmative can constitute a negative. To which one might say, *'yeah, right'*.

December 1, 2011 – *Passive Voice*

Early morning grammar tweet: today, the passive voice. This is more a style than a grammar matter as passive voice constructions are (or can be) grammatically correct. But many markers (me included) prefer to see them as rarely as possible. Voice refers to how the sentence describes the action. "Bellatrix killed Sirius Black" is in the active voice--the subject, nasty Ms Lestrange, does something.

"Sirius was killed by Bellatrix" is in the passive voice. Here the action is not killing but 'being killed'. Most would agree that the active construction is simpler and clearer. Passives are sometimes used as a kind of weasel phrase to avoid ascribing action. Thus when explaining to your dad the dent in the car "I backed into a hydrant" is very clear re cause. "The hydrant was backed into" is not.

There are some occasions when the passive may in fact be more useful and accurate than the active, but they aren't many. Always ask if you can express the thought more clearly in the active. And that's today's tweet *which was issued by me.*

December 2, 2011 – *Conversion of Nouns into Verbs*

A quick grammar tweet today as it is Board Friday. A bugbear of mine is the conversion of nouns into verbs, eg *impact*. This may be a lost cause because it has already had an effect (not affect) on common language, but I am not alone in my dislike.

December 5, 2011 – *Effect* and *Affect*

Today's grammar tweet: *effect* and *affect*. True or false: effect is a noun, affect a verb? False. Each can be either noun or verb, depending on usage, which may be one reason they are often mixed up. Let's start with the verbs. One can *affect* an outcome, or an event. (The result is an *effect*). But one can also *effect* change (that is, cause a particular thing to occur).

An *effect*, as mentioned, is the result of a cause or series of causes. So when is *affect* a noun? Only when it is used in an entirely different sense, related to the word *affection*. A person *without affect* is one who appears to be without emotion or feeling.

So: "Uncle Vernon viewed Harry with no affection" BUT "Tom Riddle seemed entirely without *affect* but as Voldemort had a serious *effect*". "Harry meantime was affectionate toward Ginny (and the Weasleys, generally) and effective in defeating Voldemort."

I very much hope today's tweets have been *effective* and that your essay results are *affected*.

December 6, 2011 – *Accept* and *Except*

Grammar tweet: Yesterday's subject was the difference between *affect* and *effect*. A very similar error is the use of *accept* and *except*.

This one is admittedly less commonplace, but it still turns up. Markers will find it difficult to *accept* if you misuse *except*. In this case both are verb forms. We all know what *accepted* means; *excepted* in some way is the opposite--something on its own, set aside. Example, "All the applicants were *accepted, except* for her." (note that it takes the objective *her*, not *she*. One can be *excepted* just as much as one can be *accepted*.

December 7, 2011 - *Apostrophes and Names ending In S*

Grammar tweet- *apostrophes and name's ending in 's'* (you did notice I hope the apostrophe in this sentence that shouldn't be there....)(-: .

This issue isn't clear cut. My standard practice is that if a word or name is monosyllabic and ends in s, it should take an additional s.

Thus "Sirius was one of Lily and James's closest friends" BUT "Sirius' family disliked him because of his defection from Slytherin." I was corrected on this point at my doctoral oral exam at Oxford 30 years ago because I had written James' and Hobbes' throughout my thesis.

I have seen other arguments in favour of preserving the single syllable but in general this rule should keep your possessives on-side. What would not be correct however is to put the apostrophe before the *s*. So *Jame's* book wouldn't be right unless the person's name was *Jame*.

Suggestions welcome for tomorrow's grammar tweet....

December 8, 2011 – *2nd Person Pronoun*

Thanks for all the suggestions for grammar tweets today. It's given me a list for a few days. (I have already done apostrophe, semicolon).

The first one in the door was the use of the 2nd person pronoun *you* (sing or pl) in essays. *One* doesn't want to do that. Take, for instance, the sort of comment I used to get in essays on 16th c England. "If *you* were a nobleman and offended the king, *you* were likely to be beheaded".

That would be fine in ordinary conversation (esp. with an actual 16th c English person), but not in an essay. The usual word employed to denote a generic person or group is *one*. "*One* did not, if an aristocrat, offend Henry VIII unless *one* wanted to risk quick execution."

If one uses a construction like that, as awkward as it may sound in conversation, *one* is less likely to be marked down by *one's* instructor.

Tomorrow: which and that (thanks @nancedor for that suggestion which I shall take up).

December 9, 2011 – *Correct Use of That and Which*

For the last grammar tweet of the week, I have selected that which can cause much confusion, namely the correct use of *that* and *which*.

This may be one of the hardest ones to get right and I myself (note correct use of *myself* as a reflexive pronoun) have been corrected from time to time by a vigilant press copy editor. The best explanation I have seen is provided by @GrammarGirl at http://t.co/qlaTsERN

It involves the difference between restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses. Briefly, a restrictive clause is one you can't do without, because to get rid of it would change the meaning of the sentence. For instance "Birds that fly can travel for miles". Here, *that* is essential to the sentence because it narrows the category of birds into a subset of those that fly. To get rid of *that fly* would alter the sentences meaning. In contrast, if the clause is non-restrictive, then *which* is appropriate. "Bees, which fly, can also sting."

Confused? See the site at http://t.co/qlaTsERN. @GrammarGirl even uses Harry Potter jokes (lots of *whiches* and wizards at Hogwarts).

Have a great weekend. On Monday we'll talk about contractions, WHICH are a favourite target of professors WHO don't like them.

Prize for recognizing the deliberate error goes to "A little grammar mistake in your grammar tweet on the day. *sentence's". Missing '

Monday grammar tweet: contractions. I have been saving this one up for a while. They [contractions] are not ungrammatical so much as stylistic, marking a rather blurry boundary between formal academic writing and common speech (including fictional writing).

A contraction is simply taking two words and shortening them into one with an apostrophe. For instance: *can't* instead of *cannot; shouldn't* instead of *should not*, or *won't* instead of *will not* (interestingly, when my daughter was 4 or so she used to say 'willn't' rather than *won't*. *They've* rather than *they have* or *we've* rather than *we have* are good examples. If you use these forms on an essay, you risk the professor's oxymoronic comment in the margin, '*don't* use contractions'.

Of course outside formal writing contractions are fine. It would be odd to hear Fleetwood Mac (remember them anyone?) singing "Do Not Stop Thinking about Tomorrow" or the late Karen Carpenter chanting "We have only just begun..." On the other hand, Mark Knopfler found the variation between "We're the sultans" and "We ARE the sultans" of swing useful from the point of view of metre.

I will admit that I have occasionally used a contraction for emphasis, a few times in my last book but *do not* try that at home. Finally, for fun something that is less a contraction than an outright error, the combination *alot*, instead of *a lot*. This has been the subject of a very funny website, http://t.co/30YRmD74

Tuesday grammar tweet: some common spelling errors. *Publicly*. Yes, that's the word.

Unfortunately, the alternative, and incorrect spelling *publically* has crept into usage. Of course if you split the words up you could have a *public ally*. So "Harry defeated Voldemort *publicly*; in this endeavour Neville was a public ally, Mrs Malfoy a private one".

Irregardless. Sorry, this is not a word. Indeed, if you think about it, it's a double negative. The correct word is *regardless*. Adding the prefix *ir* to it only negates it.

Tomorrow: correct and incorrect use of 'somewhat'.

Wednesday grammar tweet: *somewhat and something*. I think it was in the mid '80s that I first heard baseball announcer Tony Kubek mix these. He referred to a pitcher as *somewhat of a maverick* or something like it. I remember cringing. He should have said *something of a maverick* which would have been correct. *Something* denotes an object; *somewhat* is an adjective.

"Draco was something of a bully of whom the other boys in Slytherin were somewhat afraid" is correct. And apologies, in the preceding tweet I said *somewhat* was an adjective; I meant an adverb. One can't be just *somewhat* but must be *somewhat* some*thing*, as in for instance "The grammar tweet was *somewhat* incorrect when it referred to somewhat as an adjective, something of an error for @queensprincipal."

December 15, 2011 – *As and Like*

Thursday grammar tweet. As I promised yesterday (note: not LIKE I promised yesterday), we need to spend some time on *as* and *like*.

These two are often confused, and *like* has become, *like*, such an important part of the, *like*, spoken teenage discourse that it's no wonder that it's misused. Let's set aside the verbal form *to like* and concentrate on *like* used as a comparator between two things.

For instance, "Sirius was not like the other Slytherins, as he quickly discovered". Note that the *like* is used to compare him with others. The *as*, on the other hand, introduces a separate clause with separate information (ie, his discovery), a verbal action.

Most of you will not recall a famous cigarette ad from the 60s, "Winston tastes good like a cigarette should". Yes, they had ads for these on TV, believe it or not. Various people pointed out it should be '*as* a cigarette should' to which the company responded with another ad, "What do you want, good grammar or good taste?" But *as* should have been used if the ad was run at all.

The simple rule of thumb I use is this: if comparing similar thing to similar thing, *like* is appropriate; if an action is the thing being compared or is modifying the sentence, then *as* is to be used. Shakespeare got it right, not calling his famous boreal comedy, *Like You Like It*.

And AS they say [not LIKE they say], that's enough on this subject for one day.

December 16, 2011 – *Toward and Towards*

Friday grammar tweet: several people have asked about *toward* and *towards*. Which is correct? This is a tough one, and the answer appears to be BOTH. There appears to be a UK/US difference, with *towards* being more common in Brenglish (note that it is NOT the case that one uses *towards* when the noun which the preposition precedes is plural, ie "I went toward the river but Fred went towards the lakes".

a good longer definition is at the following webpage http://t.co/goiBlEnT This is also confirmed by @grammargirl at http://t.co/TrWWvwjA

Enjoy the day and weekend as we edge toward(s) the holiday break.

December 19, 2011 – *Good and Well*

Monday grammar tweet: *good* and *well*. Recall the adverb/adjective distinction from last week; it applies here. *Good* is an adjective; it modifies nouns (person, place or thing). *Well* is an adverb, modifying a verb or an adjective.

"Severus was a good boy who did well in his classes at Hogwarts" is fine. "Harry did good on the potions exam" is not only not grammatically incorrect but unlikely since we all know that Snape would never give Harry a break on that class. Seem easy?

So far so good. However, English always likes throwing a few curveballs, and there are some involving *good* and *well*. Take *good* for instance. It (*good*) can also be a noun, that is, something done. So while Harry cannot have *done good* on the exam, he is still capable of *doing good* as in the general sense of performing benevolent acts.

Another example. "The food tastes good" would be common expression. In this case what it really means is that the food induces a good taste in the taster. You wouldn't say *the food tastes well* even if *well* is an adverb because it just sounds wrong.

However if the food itself were doing the tasting, then 'well' would be correct. "I taste good" might imply an act of self-cannibalism. "I taste well" might simply mean that I have an accurate sense of taste, e.g., for wine, scotch, or spices.

So have a good Monday, do WELL on exams and do GOOD to those you meet.

December 20, 2011 – *Momentarily* and *Presently*

Tuesday grammar tweet. I just received from Doug Babington, outgoing Director of our Writing Centre, a neat little volume, *A Writer's Handbook*. The editor is Leslie E. Casson. It is full of good advice on writing, grammar, style and so on. Recommended if you don't have a copy.

Today's tweet is about two of my (un)favourite misused words, *momentarily* and *presently*. The former is often used to mean 'very soon'. *Presently* is often used to mean *right now* or *at present*. In fact neither usage is correct. *Presently* means *in a short while*, that is, *soon*.

In other words, it means exactly what momentarily is misused to denote. And *momentarily*? That means not <u>in</u> a short time but rather <u>for</u> a short time. "Harry paused momentarily before dismounting his broom" is correct. Hermione wrote to Ron "I will see you presently".

One more grammar tweet, tomorrow, before I call it a year. I'll be back presently, though given the brevity of tweets, only momentarily.

December 21, 2011 – *In Regards To*

Last grammar tweet for 2011. A colleague suggested *in regards to*. This is often used in place of the correct form, 'in regard to'.

It's ok to say *regards* as in *greetings*, but it is a singular regard when referring to a matter to be introduced. I have to say that I prefer the more UK usage which is actually *regardless* (<u>not</u> *irregardless*!) but respectful, namely, *with respect to*, but that may just be my British background and grad school experience.

At any rate, thanks for the feedback on the grammar tips over the last month.

Have a great holiday and a safe new year. Drive carefully and write grammatically.