

7 Misuse II

7.1 System. Frequently used without need.

Bad: Dayton has adopted the commission system of government.

Good: Dayton has adopted government by commission.

Bad: The dormitory system

Good: Dormitories

7.2 Thanking you in advance. This sounds as if the writer meant, “It will not be worth my while to write to you again.” Simply write, “Thanking you,” and if the favor which you have requested is granted, write a letter of acknowledgment.

7.3 They. A common inaccuracy is the use of the plural pronoun when the antecedent is a distributive expression such as *each*, *each one*, *everybody*, *every one*, *many a man*, which, though implying more than one person, requires the pronoun to be in the singular. Similar to this, but with even less justification, is the use of the plural pronoun with the antecedent *anybody*, *any one*, *somebody*, *some one*, the intention being either to avoid the awkward “he or she,” or to avoid committing oneself to either. Some bashful speakers even say, “A friend of mine told me that they, etc.”

Use *he* with all the above words, unless the antecedent is or must be feminine.

7.4 Very. Use this word sparingly. Where emphasis is necessary, use words strong in themselves.

7.5 Viewpoint. Write *point of view*, but do not misuse this, as many do, for *view* or *opinion*.

7.6 While. Avoid the indiscriminate use of this word for *and*, *but*, and *although*. Many writers use it frequently as a substitute for *and* or *but*, either from a mere desire to vary the connective, or from uncertainty which of the two connectives is the more appropriate. In this use it is best replaced by a semicolon. This is entirely correct, as shown by the paraphrase,

Bad: The office and salesrooms are on the ground floor, while the rest of the building is devoted to manufacturing.

Good: The office and salesrooms are on the ground floor; the rest of the building is devoted to manufacturing.

Its use as a virtual equivalent of *although* is allowable in sentences where this leads to no ambiguity or absurdity.

Good: While I admire his energy, I wish it were employed in a better cause.

Good: I admire his energy; at the same time I wish it were employed in a better cause.

Compare:

Bad: While the temperature reaches 90 or 95 degrees in the daytime, the nights are often chilly.

Good: Although the temperature reaches 90 or 95 degrees in the daytime, the nights are often chilly.

The paraphrase,

Good: The temperature reaches 90 or 95 degrees in the daytime; at the same time the nights are often chilly,

shows why the use of *while* is incorrect.

In general, the writer will do well to use *while* only with strict literalness, in the sense of *during the time that*.

7.7 Whom. Often incorrectly used for *who* before *he said* or similar expressions, when it is really the subject of a following verb.

Bad: His brother, whom he said would send him the money

Good: His brother, who he said would send him the money

Bad: The man whom he thought was his friend

Good: The man who (that) he thought was his friend (whom he thought his friend)

7.8 Worth while. Overworked as a term of vague approval and (with *not*) of disapproval. Strictly applicable only to actions: “Is it worth while to telegraph?”

Bad: His books are not worth while.

Good: His books are not worth reading (not worth one’s while to read; do not repay reading).

The use of *worth while* before a noun (“a worth while story”) is indefensible.

7.9 Would. A conditional statement in the first person requires *should*, not *would*.

Good: I should not have succeeded without his help.

The equivalent of *shall* in indirect quotation after a verb in the past tense is *should*, not *would*.

Good: He predicted that before long we should have a great surprise.

To express habitual or repeated action, the past tense, without *would*, is usually sufficient, and from its brevity, more emphatic.

Bad: Once a year he would visit the old mansion.

Good: Once a year he visited the old mansion.