WORD USAGE

REVISED MARCH 9, 2015 BY STAN GARFIELD

RECOMMENDED WEB SITES AND BOOKS

- The American Heritage Dictionary (Houghton Mifflin) http://www.ahdictionary.com/
- Roget's International Thesaurus revised by Robert L. Chapman (Harper & Row) http://www.bartleby.com/110/
- The Elements of Style by William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White http://www.bartleby.com/141/ and http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/020530902X/
- On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction by William Zinsser http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0060006641/
- Fumblerules by William Safire http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0385413017/
- English Grammar for Dummies by Geraldine Woods http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0764553224/
- Championship Writing - 50 Ways to Improve Your Writing by Paula LaRocque http://www.marionstreetpress.com/ChampHome.html
- The Book on Writing - The Ultimate Guide to Writing Well by Paula LaRocque http://www.marionstreetpress.com/BOWhome.html
- Marion Street Press http://www.marionstreetpress.com/
- Bartleby http://www.bartleby.com/reference/
- Merriam-Webster http://www.m-w.com/home.htm
- Reference http://www.reference.com/
- Word Court http://www.wordcourt.com/nonflash/index.html
- Common Errors in English http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~brians/errors/errors.html
- World Wide Words http://www.worldwidewords.org/index.htm

PLAIN ENGLISH

Nothing is too complex for the use of plain English. Sentences should

1. be of short average length,
2. predominate in the use of active rather than passive voice,
3. use strong instead of weak verbs,
4. predominate in the use of positive, instead of negative form, and
5. use parallel form.

Use of words should avoid

1. old English words (e.g., "hereby"),
2. obsolete formalisms (e.g., "now comes"),
3. redundant phrases (e.g., "each and every"),
4. using long words for short words (e.g., "utilize" for "use"), and
5. word clusters (e.g., "prior to" for "before").

GENERAL TIPS

Always ensure that a pronoun matches its subject correctly.

- Correct: Each person brings his or her experience to the task.
- Incorrect: Each person brings their experience to the task.

Avoid the use of all upper case letters.

Avoid the use of "/" to combine two words.

When creating documents that may be sent using electronic mail, avoid the use of special fonts, underlining, and bold text due to the possibility these attributes may not be preserved between different mail systems.

Avoid the unnecessary use of graphs, pictures, clip art, and shading.

Assume that any worthwhile presentation will be copied, so ensure that it will reproduce well by avoiding the use of shading and color.

USING HYPHENS

Use a hyphen to combine words to form an adjective. Do not use a hyphen if both words are not modifying a third word. For example:

- We need to use third-party vendors to sell real-time systems. Each third party we use can help us deliver a system that works in real time.

USING QUOTATION MARKS

Avoid using quotation marks except when quoting someone or when referring to the spelling or usage of words rather than to their meaning. Do not use quotation marks to indicate colloquial expressions or buzzwords.

GOOD	BAD
"Spell better," she said.	He seemed pretty "laid back" to me.
"To" is a preposition.	IBM provides "best in class" solutions.

USING COLONS AND SEMICOLONS

Use a colon to set off a list or an example. Use a semicolon to combine two sentences into one compound sentence, or to separate a list of phrases that contain commas. For example:

- The following cities have domed stadia: New Orleans, LA; Houston, TX; and Indianapolis, IN. NFL football is played in all of these stadia; baseball is no longer played in domed stadia in Seattle or Minneapolis.

USING APOSTROPHES

Apostrophes are often misused. As a rule, an apostrophe should be used to form a possessive, but not a plural. One exception involves the words "its" and "it's" -- these are often confused. "Its" is the possessive form of "it," and "it's" is the contraction of "it is." Following are examples.

SINGULAR	PLURAL
PAC	PACs
memo	memos

An apostrophe is used when forming a possessive. For example:

- There are many PACs. Visit a specific PAC's web site to learn more about its agenda.
- When sending out multiple memos, it's a good idea to ensure that each memo's subject is clearly defined and its addressees are listed.

SINGULAR POSSESSIVES

>From The Elements of Style by Strunk and White, page 1:

Form the possessive singular of nouns with 's. Follow this rule whatever the final consonant. Thus write,

- Charles's friend
- Burns's poems
- the witch's malice

This is the usage of the United States Government Printing Office and of the Oxford University Press.

Exceptions are the possessives of ancient proper names ending in -es and -is, the possessive Jesus', and such forms as for conscience' sake, for righteousness' sake. But such forms as Achilles' heel, Moses' laws, Isis' temple are commonly replaced by

- the heel of Achilles
- the laws of Moses
- the temple of Isis

The pronominal possessives hers, its, theirs, yours, and oneself have no apostrophe.

PLURAL POSSESSIVES

When forming the possessive of a plural, the apostrophe goes after the final "s" in the word. If the apostrophe appears before the final "s" in a word, then the word must be singular. For example:

- We have many customers. We understand our customers' problems.
- One customer's problem will not necessarily be the same as another customer's problem, and we are able to propose solutions for most customers.

COMMON ERRORS IN USING PLURALS

SINGULAR	PLURAL	INCORRECT
alumnus	alumni	an alumni
analysis	analyses	several analysis
criterion	criteria	criterions, criterias, a criteria
medium	media	mediums, medias, a media
phenomenon	phenomena	phenomenons, phenomenas, a phenomena

NOTE: Add "es" to form the plural of nouns when the plural results in an extra syllable. Example: taxes

EXPRESSIONS THAT ARE OFTEN MISUSED

- begs the questions -- an argument that improperly assumes as true the very point the speaker is trying to argue for is said in formal logic to “beg the question” – it does not mean “raises the question”
- could care less -- use "couldn't care less"
- don't disagree -- use "agree"
- down the tubes -- use "down the drain"
- showstopper -- means "a wonderful performance," not "an obstacle"

WORDS TO AVOID USING

- analyzation (not a word) -- use "analysis"
- connotate (not a word) -- use "connote"
- consense (not a word) -- use "achieve consensus"
- consultate (not a word) -- use "consult"
- decomplexify (not a word) -- use "simplify"
- equivalate (not a word) -- use "is equivalent to"
- hopefully -- use "I hope that" or "it is hoped that"
- incent (not a word) -- use "give incentives for"
- irregardless (not a word) -- use "regardless" or "irrespective of"
- is comprised of -- use "comprises," "is made up of," or "is composed of"
- more/most importantly -- use "more/most important"
- oftentimes -- use "often"
- orientate -- use "orient"
- snuck -- use "sneaked"
- summarization -- use "summary"
- supposingly (not a word) – use "supposedly"
- unrelentless (not a word) – use “relentless” or “unrelenting”
- work ethics -- use "work ethic"

ABBREVIATIONS THAT ARE OFTEN MISUSED

e.g., -- for example (an example should follow, or an incomplete list)
i.e., -- that is (a clarification should follow, or a complete list)

- Note: Always include the periods and follow the second one with a comma (not "eg" or "ie", but "e.g.," or "i.e.,").

etc. -- and so forth (not to be used when referring to people)
et al. -- and others (to be used when referring to people)

- Detroit has some good teams (e.g., the Tigers). Michigan State is also good (i.e., they win). The Pistons give up too many points, rebounds, etc., and the Lions lose winnable games despite their high draft choices – Matthew Stafford, Nick Fairley, et al.

FREQUENTLY MISSPELLED WORDS

CORRECT SPELLING	INCORRECT SPELLINGS
absence	absense
acceptable	exceptable
achieve	acheive
accommodate	acomodate, accomodate, acommodate
Allegheny	Alleghany
assess	asses
calendar	calender
category	catagory
Cincinnati	Cincinnatti, Cincinatti
commitment	committment
congratulations	congradulations
consensus	concensus
consistent	consistant
credibility	credability
definitely	definately
develop	develope
discrete	descrete
escalation	excalation
essence	essense
excel	excell
existent	existant
expertise	expertice
fanfare	fanfair
farewell	farwell
grammar	grammer
heighten	highten
holistic	wholistic
indispensable	indispensible
initiative	inititive
insight	insite
integrate	intergrate
kernel	kernal
liaison	liason
linchpin	lynchpin, lynch pin
mandatory	manditory
meantime	mean time
mutually	mutially
nickel	nickle
opposed	apposed
perceive	percieve
persistent	persistant
Pittsburgh	Pittsburg
precede	preceed
presenter	presentor
privilege	privalege, privaledge
proceed	procede
protocol	protocal
pursue	persue
questionnaire	questionaire
receive	recieve
relevance	relevence
remuneration	renumeration
response	responce
responsible	responcible
seamless	seemless
separate	seperate

structural	structual
substantial	substancial

CORRECT SPELLING	INCORRECT SPELLINGS
tendency	tendancy
tonight	tonite
through	thru
videotex	videotext
verbiage	verbage
visible	visable
vulnerability	vulnarability

FREQUENTLY MISSPELLED COMPANY NAMES

CORRECT	INCORRECT
AlliedSignal	Allied Signal, Allied-Signal
Booz Allen & Hamilton	Booze Allen Hamilton
Caterpillar	Caterpiller, Catepillar, Catipillar
Cincinnati Milacron	Millacron, Millicron, Milicron
Cincom	CIMCOM
COMDISCO	CONDISCO
Eli Lilly	Eli Lilley, Ely Lilly
Hewlett-Packard	Hewlitt Packard
Ingersoll-Rand	Ingersol Rand
Lockheed Martin	Lockhead-Martin
Mallinckrodt	Mallinkrot, Malinckrot
Marion Merrell Dow	Marion Merrill Dow
Morton Thiokol	Morton Thiakal
Navistar	Navastar
Northrop Grumman	Northrup-Grumman
Palette Systems	Pallette
Philip Morris	Phillip Morris
Philips	Phillips
Pritsker	Pritzker
Procter & Gamble	Proctor and Gamble
R.R. Donnelley	R.R. Donnelly
Tektronix	Tektronic, Tektronics
Tenneco	Tennaco
Thomson SA	Thompson
Tippins	Tippens
Unisys	Unisis
Volkswagen	Volkswagon
Weyerhaeuser	Weyerhauser

COMPANY NAMES THAT CONTAIN HYPHENS

- Anheuser-Busch
- Coca-Cola
- Colgate-Palmolive
- Georgia-Pacific
- Ingersoll-Rand
- Kimberly-Clark
- Temple-Inland

COMMON ERRORS IN CAPITALIZATION

CORRECT	INCORRECT
Ada	ADA
Java	JAVA
Macintosh	MacIntosh, MAC
Microsoft	MicroSoft
Pascal	PASCAL
Web	WEB

Certain words should only be capitalized when they are part of a title:

- I need to visit a different region each month. I will visit the Midwest Region next month.

NOUNS THAT SHOULD NOT BE USED AS VERBS

- action
- architect
- author
- back burner
- back end, front end
- base line
- bookend
- caveat
- goal
- honcho
- impact
- leverage
- mentor
- metric
- peanut butter
- public
- skill, reskill
- snowball
- solution
- vision (as in "visioning")
- workshop

VERBS THAT SHOULD NOT BE USED AS NOUNS

- ask
- build
- solve
- take-away

WORDS THAT ARE OFTEN USED INCORRECTLY

abbreviation/acronym/initialism
- abbreviation -- a shortened form of a word or phrase
- acronym -- a word (that can be pronounced) formed from the initial parts of a series of words
- initialism -- a group of initial letters used as an abbreviation for a name or expression, each letter being pronounced separately
"USMC" is an initialism of "United States Marine Corps."
"SCUBA" is an acronym for "Self Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus."
Acronyms and initialisms are two types of abbreviations. So are words such as "apps," which is an abbreviation of "applications."
See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acronym and http://www.lyberty.com/encyc/articles/abbr.html

accept/except
accept -- to receive with consent; except -- to exclude
I do not accept your attempt to except me from participating.

access/assess/excess
access -- (noun) ability to enter; a way to approach
access -- (verb) to get at
assess -- (verb) to determine the importance, size, or value of; to impose a tax or other charge on
excess -- (noun) the fact of exceeding something else in amount or degree; the amount or degree by which one thing exceeds another; an extreme or excessive amount or degree
excess -- (adjective) more than or above what is necessary, usual, or specified
In order to assess the damage, I need access to the basement where there is an excess of water.

adverse/averse/diverse
adverse -- antagonistic or unfavorable, or turned toward the stem or axis
averse -- disinclined or having a feeling of distaste, or turned away from the stem or axis
diverse -- differing from one another
He is averse to diverse forms of exercise, and this has an adverse effect on his health.

advice/advise
"Advice" is a noun; "advise" is a verb.
When I need your advice, I will ask you to advise me.

affect/effect
affect -- verb: to have an influence on, bring about change in; to feign
effect -- noun: result; verb: to produce as a result, to execute
- "Affect" and "effect" have no senses in common; therefore the tendency to confuse the words must be guarded against. As verbs, "affect" (the more common) is used principally in the senses of influence ("how smoking affects health") and pretense ("affecting nonchalance to hide fear"), whereas "effect" applies only to accomplishment or execution ("reductions designed to effect economy;" "means adopted to effect an end"). As nouns, the terms can be kept straight since "affect" is confined to psychology.

The potion affected me in a strange way, but there were no bad effects.

allude/elude
allude -- to make indirect reference; elude -- to avoid
He alluded to the fact that I had successfully eluded him.

amuse/bemuse
The meanings of these two words differ significantly. "Bemuse" = (1) to make confused or muddled; bewilder <the jury was bemused by all the technical evidence>; or (2) to plunge into thought; preoccupy <the math student was bemused with the concept of infinity>. "Amuse," of course, means "to entertain" or "to cause laughter in" <the speaker amused the audience with various anecdotes>. Yet many writers mistakenly use "bemuse" as a synonym for "amuse."

anecdote/antidote
anecdote -- a short narrative of an interesting or amusing incident
antidote -- something that relieves, prevents, or counteracts
I related an anecdote about the time I needed an antidote for hemlock.

appraise/apprise
 appraise -- to set a value on; apprise -- to give notice to
She apprised me of the appraised value of my coin collection.

ascribe/subscribe
 ascribe -- to attribute; subscribe -- to support
I ascribe your frown to the fact that you don't subscribe to my theory.

born/borne
 born -- brought into existence by or as if by birth
 borne -- past participle of "bear"
The fact that I was born in Illinois was borne out by my father.

breach/breech
 breach -- an infraction, a broken area, or a break in friendly relations
 breech -- the buttocks, or part of a firearm or pulley
Exposing his breech was a breach of etiquette.

cache/cachet
 cache -- a hiding place or a secure place of storage
 cachet -- a characteristic feature or quality conferring prestige
It gives one a certain cachet to have a PC with lots of cache memory.

capital/capitol
 "Capital" has several meanings; "capitol" is a legislative building.
Lansing is the capital of Michigan and the capitol is located there.

calvary/cavalry
 calvary -- an experience of intense suffering
 cavalry -- an army component mounted on horseback or moving in motor vehicles
His calvary was a result of the cavalry attack.

censor/censure
 censor -- to review communications and delete forbidden material
 censure -- to find fault with and criticize as blameworthy
The senator was censured for attempting to censor the hearing transcript.

cite/sight/site
 cite -- to quote
 sight -- something that is seen, or the process of seeing
 site -- location
Catching sight of the debate site, the students began to cite facts.

complementary/complimentary
 complementary -- serving to fill out or complete
 complimentary -- expressing a compliment, or given free as a courtesy
Alpha AXP hardware and OpenVMS software are complementary.
We do not give out complimentary systems; we insist on payment from our customers.

compose/comprise
 compose -- to make up; comprise -- to consist of
The Union comprises 50 states. Fifty states compose the Union. The Union is composed of 50 states.

concomitant/itinerant
 concomitant -- accompanying
 itinerant -- traveling from place to place
Becoming itinerant is concomitant with becoming a professional musician.

conscience/conscious
 conscience -- the sense of the moral goodness of one's own conduct
 conscious -- aware or awake
I was conscious of the fact that my conscience was bothering me.
contingency/contingent
 contingency -- the state of being contingent, or a possible occurrence
 contingent -- possible, something contingent, or a quota of persons
We planned for contingencies in the visit of the Russian contingent.

council/counsel
 council -- a governing body
 counsel -- advice, lawyer, or to advise
I requested that the council meet to counsel me on my choice of counsel.

cubical/cubicle
 cubical -- shaped like a cube
 cubicle -- a small partitioned space
There was a cubical object sitting on the desk in my cubicle.

delineate/differentiate
 delineate -- to portray, or to describe in vivid detail
 differentiate -- to mark or show a difference
She differentiated the products by delineating their features.

depended/dependent
 depended -- relied
 dependent -- subordinate
I depended on you for help, but you were dependent on other people.

desperate/disparate
- desperate – having little or no hope or extreme/extensive
- disparate – distinct, unlike another or different in quality or character
The survivors came from two disparate cultures, and were desperate for food.

devote/devout
 devote -- to dedicate by a solemn act, or to center the attention
 devout -- devoted to religion
She was a devout Catholic and was devoted to serving her church.

discreet/discrete
 discreet -- having good judgement in conduct
 discrete -- individually distinct
He was discreet in pointing out the discrete crumbs on her coat.

disinterested/uninterested
 disinterested - impartial or not taking sides (not having a personal interest at stake.)
 uninterested - not interested (not showing any interest)
As a disinterested party, I was asked to mediate the dispute, but I was uninterested in doing so.

dispensation/disposition
 dispensation -- a general ordering, an exemption, or the act of dispensing
 disposition -- the act of disposing, property transfer, or an inclination
My disposition is to ask for special dispensation from writing the report.

disburse/disperse
 disburse -- to pay out
 disperse -- to cause to become spread widely
Once I disburse the funds, then you can disperse the crowd.

elapse/lapse

elapse -- vi -- to slip or glide away : PASS
lapse -- vt -- to let slip : FORFEIT
My contract lapsed because too much time elapsed before I decided to sign.

eminent/imminent
eminent -- standing out
imminent -- ready to take place
The hiring of an eminent professor is imminent.

emission/omission
emission -- something sent forth or put into circulation
omission -- something neglected or left undone
Through an omission on my part, my car did not pass the emissions test.

entomology/etymology
entomology - a branch of zoology that deals with insects
etymology - the history of a linguistic form
The etymology of “entomology” is: “from Greek entomon insect (from neuter of entomos cut up, from en- + temnein to cut) + French -logie –logy”

faze/phase
faze -- to disturb the composure of
phase -- to adjust so as to be in phase or to introduce in stages
He was not fazed by the need to phase in the new product.

fewer/less
fewer -- a smaller number of persons or things (that can be counted)
less -- a smaller portion or quantity (that cannot be counted)
If you drink less beer, you will consume fewer calories.

flesh out/flush out
flesh out -- to give substance to
flush out -- to force something out of hiding or to clean something (usually by forcing water through a container)
You need to flesh out your proposal to flush out the sewer.

formally/formerly
formally -- in a formal manner
formerly -- in time past
I was formally told that I formerly worked for the company.

formative/formidable
formative -- relating to formation
formidable -- having qualities that discourage approach or attack
We faced many formidable problems during our formative years.

gleam/glean
gleam -- to shine with moderate brightness or to appear briefly or faintly
glean -- to gather grain left by reapers or to gather information bit by bit
From what I was able to glean about the gleaming star, it is in our galaxy.

good/well
"Good" is an adjective; "well" is the adverb form of "good."
It is good that you know how to use the English language well.

historic/historical
historic – having great importance to human history
historical – related to the past
The historic debate took place at the historical museum.

hyberola/hyerbole
hyperbola -- a mathematical curve; hyperbole -- exaggeration.
Saying "seeing a hyperbola makes me hyperventilate" is hyperbole.

I/me
Always use "me" as the object of a preposition. When there are multiple objects, it is tempting to use "I" because we were drilled as children not to use "me" as the subject of a sentence. This led to overcompensation. Also, when there are multiple objects, "me" should come last.
Correct: She will be presenting to Sally and me. Sally and I are here.
Incorrect: She will be presenting to Sally and I. Sally and me are here.

imply/infer
imply -- to state indirectly, hint, or intimate
infer -- to draw a conclusion or make a deduction based on indications
When I say that you look like you have been eating well, you infer that I think you are fat, but I mean to imply that you look healthy.

incite/insight
incite -- to urge on
insight -- the power or act of seeing into a situation
If you have sufficient insight, you will not incite a riot.

incur/occur
incur -- to meet with (as an inconvenience) or to become subject to
occur -- to appear, to take place, or to come to mind
It occurs to me that you allowed me to incur the cost of dinner.

in lieu of/in view of
in lieu of -- instead of; in view of -- because of
I drink root beer in lieu of beer in view of my fear of becoming drunk.

jibe/jive
jibe -- to be in accord; jive -- swing music or special jargon of slang terms
Your idea doesn't jibe with mine, and it is full of jive.

lead/led
"Lead" is the current tense; "led" is the past tense.
I want Sue to lead the effort to get the team led by Sam to disband.

lets/let's
"lets" is the third-person present of "let," which means allows; "let's" is the contraction of "let us"
Let's hope that she lets us go the movies.

light-year
the distance that light travels in a year -- a unit of distance, not time
That star is 100 light-years away from us.

loose/lose, loosing/losing
loose -- to let loose (pronounced "luce" & usually used as an adjective)
lose -- to miss from one's possession (pronounced "luze" & always a verb)
If they lose any more business, they may have to loose some employees.

moot/mute
moot -- debatable or deprived of practical significance
mute -- unable to speak or refusing to plead directly
Whether or not he was mute became a moot point after the truck hit him.

moral/morale
 moral -- relating to principles of right and wrong, or a practical lesson
 morale -- mental and emotional attitudes
The moral of the story is that morale drops when moral judgment worsens.

penultimate/ultimate
 penultimate -- next to the last
 ultimate -- last
Alaska and Hawaii were the penultimate and ultimate states added.
personal/personnel
 personal -- private
 personnel -- an organization of persons
I would like a personal conference with you to evaluate our personnel.

perspective/prospective
 perspective -- the aspect in which a subject is mentally viewed
 prospective -- relating to or effective in the future
Her perspective is that the prospective changes are positive ones.

prescribe/proscribe
 prescribe -- to dictate or to ordain
 proscribe -- to outlaw or to prohibit
All attempts to prescribe drugs will be proscribed.

principal/principle
 principal -- most important, or a capital sum placed at interest
 principle -- a rule or code of conduct, or an origin
The principal question facing us is whether to adopt new principles.

profitability/profitably
 profitability (noun) -- the state of being profitable
 profitably (adverb) -- in a manner that is profitable
If we deliver service profitably, our profitability will increase.

prostate/prostrate
 prostate -- a male gland
 prostrate -- extended in a horizontal position, or overcome
A prostate operation is performed while the patient is prostrate.

reluctant/reticent
 reluctant -- opposing or unwilling
 reticent -- inclined to be silent or secretive
Although I appeared reticent, I am not reluctant to help you.

rend/render
 rend -- to wrest, split, or tear
 render -- to melt down, deliver, yield, restore, make, depict, or administer
The verdict that was rendered was heart-rending.

renown/renowned
 "Renown" is a noun meaning fame; "renowned" is an adjective meaning famous.
The renowned writer was not comfortable with her renown.

respectfully/respectively
 respectfully -- with esteem; respectively -- each in the order given
I respectfully informed my mother and father, respectively.

rife/ripe
 rife -- widespread, prevalent, abundant, plentiful, or abounding

ripe -- mature, late, suitable, ready, mellow, or plump
The meeting was rife with anger, and then ripe tomatoes were thrown.

riff/rift
riff -- an ostinato jazz phrase typically supporting a solo improvisation
rift -- a breach
A rift developed between them due to his choice of riff in the solo.

role/roll
role -- a characteristic of an individual, a function, or position
roll -- to move ahead by revolving (among many other meanings)
The role that I will play is to take the roll call.
skew/skewer
skew -- to distort from a true value
skewer -- to fasten or pierce with as if with a pin
Her view was skewed by the fact that the roast had not yet been skewered.

stationary/stationery
stationary -- immobile; stationery -- letter paper
I wrote on the stationery while remaining stationary.

tack/tact
tack -- several meanings, one of which is "a course or method of action"
tact -- a keen sense of what to do or say in order to avoid offense
You should have used more tact when you decided to take a different tack.

team/teem
team -- a number of persons associated together, or to form a team
teem -- to be present in large quantity
The baseball team played on a field teeming with mosquitoes.

that/which
Generally, use "that" to introduce restrictive, or defining, clauses and "which" to introduce nonrestrictive clauses.
- Restrictive: The pencil that needs sharpening is on my desk.
- Nonrestrictive: The pencil, which needs sharpening, is on my desk.

http://www.kentlaw.edu/academics/lrw/grinker/LwtaThat_Versus_Which.htm
http://afterdeadline.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/11/24/that-which-or-what/
http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar/which-versus-that-0
http://www.getitwriteonline.com/archive/103103whichthat.htm
http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/qanda/data/faq/topics/Whichvs.That.html

that/who/whose
The rule requiring the use of "that" when referring to things and "who" when referring to persons has been relaxed.
Now you may choose whichever word seems more natural when referring to either persons or things.
The most impartial judge that could be found ...
Anyone who can answer my question ...
That building, whose architect is a local resident ...

the & this
"The" should only be used when referring to a specific instance of a noun.
- Good: We should find out what customers need.
- Bad: We should find out what the customer needs.

"This" should only be used when referring to a specific antecedent.
- Good: Influenza is a common malady. This disease is usually not fatal.
- Bad: We seek profits. So when pursuing this business, sell software.

throes/throws
throes -- a hard or painful struggle; throws -- propels through the air
After he throws out his back, he is in the throes of a long night.

to/too
"To" is a preposition; "too" means "also" or "excessively."
Eating too much food will cause you to stay up and feel bad, too.

trooper/trouper
trooper -- a cavalryman or a policeman
trouper -- a faithful and good-natured worker
He was a trouper and went on with the show despite the trooper's heckling.

uniform/unilateral
uniform -- conforming to one rule; consistent in conduct or opinion
unilateral -- affecting one side of a subject: one-sided
There was uniform opinion that no unilateral action should be taken.

verse/versus
verse – writing arranged with a metrical rhythm
versus – against
The poetry competition featured the verse of Wordsworth versus that of Yeats.

waive/wave
"Waive" means to relinquish voluntarily; "wave" has multiple meanings.
I waved to her and told her I had decided to waive my claim on the land.

whence/where
"Whence" means "from where." "From whence" is redundant.
I asked her whence she came. She said from where she came was a secret.

who's/whose
"Who's" is a contraction of "who is." "Whose" means "relating to whom."
Whose hot sauce is this, and who's going to use it up?

your/you're
"Your" means "relating to you." "You're" is a contraction of "you are."
You're going to have to stop using up your hot sauce so quickly.

BUZZWORDS, CLICHES, AND PUBLIC SPEAKING EXPRESSIONS TO AVOID (ABRIDGED)

absolutely
added value, value-added, value add
and beyond
architecture
arguably
around
as we approach, as we enter
bandwidth
based (when used as a suffix)
basically
benchmarking
best-in-class, best-of-breed, best of the best
bet the business, bet your business
bottom line
business {challenges/issues/needs/objectives/problems}, the business
buy in, buy into, buy off
capture
clearly
closed loop
closure
competitive {advantage/edge}
comprise
critical (when used to mean very important)
crucial
delight
dialogue
disconnect (as a noun)
drive (except in relation to driving a vehicle)
empowered
enterprise
environment
feedback
finalize
focal point, focus (except in relation to a lens)
framed up
framework (except an engineering design management framework)
front-end
global
goodness
gridlock
grow the business, grow your people
{both/two} hands on the wheel
headset
impact (as a verb), impactful
infrastructure
input
internalize
leadership (as an adjective)
leading edge
learnings, a learning
leverage
line of sight
major
mega (as a prefix except when it specifically means one million)
methodology
metrics, metric (as a verb)
mission-critical
move forward, go forward, going forward

must (when used to pontificate)
net it out
new millennium, next millennium, 21st century, etc.
no-brainer
norm
obviously
off-line
on board
outside the box, outside nine dots
overarching
own, ownership (other than of possessions)
paradigm, paradigm shift
parse (except in the context of grammar or computer science)
partner, partnership
perspective
planful
playing field
position (as a verb)
prioritize
proactive
process
proof point
push back
raise the bar
rationalize
reality check
resonance, resonate
revisit
rich
roadmap
room (when personified, as in "what does the room think?")
scenario
seamless
sense [my sense is, do some sensing]
share, sharing
showstopper
space
speak to
spot on
stake in the ground
standpoint
strategic
straw horse, straw man
synergy, synergistic, synergism
takeaway
template
thrust
thumbprint
tied out
timeframe
total solutions
ultimate
up front
utilize
versus, vs.
very senior
via
viable
virtual, virtually
vision, visioning

vital
win-win
work it, working the issue
world-class