

The English Language is in an of itself a marvelous world, embracing and communicating all that truly is life and thought and experience and creativity. For the writer, it is the stock-and-trade of what we do. Developing a mastery of the language is one of the core fundamentals to successful writing. We take our task of storytelling very seriously, and constantly seek to improve our skills through blood, sweat and tears. Well, this article isn't about all that.

In fact, this article is about the lighter side of writing and the English Language. It is a brief compendium of humorous articles and emails I've received over the last couple of years. Proper citation is provided, where I have it. Otherwise, I'm just passing along the funnies as I received them. You may have seen some of these in the past.

PART I: DEFINITIONS

The following are the ingenious and creative creations of individual words, either new definitions for existing terms, or entirely new ones needed to convey a concept or idea more clearly.

Winners of the *Washington Post* Definition Contest:

- **Intaxication**, (n.) Euphoria at getting a tax refund, which lasts until you realize it was your money to start with.
- **Reintarnation**, (n.) Coming back to life as a hillbilly.
- **Foreproy**, (n.) Any misrepresentation about yourself for the purpose of getting laid.
- **Giraffiti**, (n.) Vandalism spray-painted very, very high.
- **Sarchasm**, (n.) The gulf between the author of sarcastic wit and the person who doesn't get it.
- **Inoculatté**, (v.) To take coffee intravenously when you are running late.
- **Hipatitis**, (n.) Terminal coolness.
- **Osteopornosis**, (n.) A degenerate disease.
- **Karmageddon**, (n.) It's like, when everybody is sending off all these really bad vibes, right? And then, like, the Earth explodes and it's like, a serious bummer.
- **Glibido**, (n.) All talk and no action.
- **Dopeler Effect**, (n.) The tendency of stupid ideas to seem smarter when they come at you rapidly.
- **Coffee** (n.) a person who is coughed upon.
- **Flabbergasted** (adj.), appalled over how much weight you have gained.

- **Abdicate** (v.), to give up all hope of ever having a flat stomach.
- **Esplanade** (v.), to attempt an explanation while drunk.
- **Willy-nilly** (adj.), impotent.
- **Negligent** (adj.), describes a condition in which you absentmindedly answer the door in your nightgown.
- **Lymph** (v.), to walk with a lisp.
- **Gargoyle** (n.), an olive-flavored mouthwash.
- **Flatulence** (n.), the emergency vehicle that picks you up after you've been run over by a steamroller.
- **Balderdash** (n.), a rapidly receding hairline.
- **Testicle** (n.), a humorous question on an exam.
- **Rectitude** (n.), the formal, dignified demeanor assumed by a proctologist immediately before he examines you.
- **Oyster** (n.), a person who sprinkles his conversation with Yiddish expressions.
- **Circumvent** (n.) the opening in front of boxer shorts.
- **Frisbeetarianism** (n.) The belief that, when you die, your soul goes upon the roof and gets stuck there.
- **Pokemon** (n), A Jamaican proctologist
- **Ignoramus**: A person who's both stupid and an asshole.

New Office Words for the Workplace:

- **BLAMESTORMING**: Sitting around in a group, discussing why a deadline was missed or a project failed, and who was responsible.
- **SEAGULL MANAGER**: A manager who flies in, makes a lot of noise, craps on everything, and then leaves.
- **ASSMOSIS**: The process by which some people seem to absorb success and advancement by kissing up to the boss rather than working hard.
- **CUBE FARM**: An office filled with cubicles.
- **PRAIRIE DOGGING**: When someone yells or drops something loudly in a cube farm, and people's heads pop up over the walls to see what's going on.
- **MOUSE POTATO**: The on-line, wired generation's answer to the couch potato.
- **SITCOMs**: Single Income, Two Children, Oppressive Mortgage. What yuppies turn into when they have children and one of them stops working to stay home with the kids.

- **STARTER MARRIAGE:** A short-lived first marriage that ends in divorce with no kids, no property and no regrets.
- **STRESS PUPPY:** A person who seems to thrive on being stressed out and whiny.
- **SWIPEOUT:** An ATM or credit card that has been rendered useless because the magnetic strip is worn away from extensive use.
- **XEROX SUBSIDY:** Euphemism for swiping free photocopies from one's workplace.
- **IRRITAINMENT:** Entertainment and media spectacles that are annoying, but you find yourself unable to stop watching them. The O.J. trials were a prime example. Bill Clinton's grand Jury testimony is another.
- **PERCUSSIVE MAINTENANCE:** The fine art of whacking the shit out of an electronic device to get it to work again.
- **VULCAN NERVE PINCH:** The taxing hand position required to reach all the appropriate keys for certain computer commands.
- **ADMINISPHERE:** The rarefied organizational layers beginning just above the rank and file. Decisions that fall from the adminisphere are often profoundly inappropriate or irrelevant to the problems they were designed to solve.
- **404:** Someone who's clueless. From the World Wide Web error message "404 Not Found," meaning that the requested document could not be located.
- **GENERICA:** Features of the American landscape that are exactly the same no matter where one is, such as fast food joints, strip malls, subdivisions.
- **OHNOSECOND:** That minuscule fraction of time in which you realize that you've just made a BIG mistake.

PART II: METAPHORS

Sometimes a single word is wholly insufficient to capture the true essence and meaning you wish to impart, so a whole phrase or collection of clauses is required to provide more fullness and clarity of meaning.

Taken from actual essays by sixteen year-old students:

- Her face was a perfect oval, like a circle that had its two other sides gently compressed by a Thigh Master.
- His thoughts tumbled in his head, making and breaking alliances like underpants in a tumble dryer.
- She caught your eye like one of those pointy hook latches that used to dangle from doors and would fly up whenever you banged the door open again.
- The little boat gently drifted across the pond exactly the way a bowling ball wouldn't.

- McMurphy fell twelve stories, hitting the pavement like a paper bag filled with vegetable soup.
- Her hair glistened in the rain like nose hair after a sneeze.
- Her eyes were like two brown circles with big black dots in the centre.
- Her vocabulary was as bad as, like, whatever.
- He was as tall as a six-foot-three-inch tree.
- The hailstones leaped from the pavement, just like maggots when you fry them in hot grease.
- Long separated by cruel fate, the star-crossed lovers raced across the grassy field toward each other like two freight trains, one having left New York at 6:36 p.m. traveling at 55 mph, the other from Pittsburgh at 4:19p.m.at a speed of 35 mph.
- The politician was gone but unnoticed, like the period after the Dr. on a Dr Pepper can.
- John and Mary had never met. They were like two hummingbirds that had also never met.
- The thunder was ominous sounding, much like the sound of a thin sheet of metal being shaken backstage during the storm scene in a play.
- The red brick wall was the color of a brick-red crayon.
- Even in his last years, Granddad had a mind like a steel trap, only one that had been left out so long it had rusted shut.
- Shots rang out, as shots are wont to do.
- The plan was simple, like my brother Phil. But unlike Phil, this plan just might work.
- The young fighter had a hungry look, the kind you get from not eating for a while.
- Oh, Jason, take me!” she panted, her breasts heaving like a college student on fifty-cent-beer night.
- He was as lame as a duck. Not the metaphorical lame duck either, but a real duck that was actually lame. Maybe from stepping on a land mine or something.
- Her artistic sense was exquisitely refined, like someone who can tell butter from “I Can’t Believe It’s Not Butter.”
- She had a deep, throaty, genuine laugh, like that sound a dog makes just before it throws up.
- It came down the stairs looking very much like something no one had ever seen before.
- The ballerina rose gracefully en point and extended one slender leg behind her, like a dog at a lamppost.

- The revelation that his marriage of thirty years had disintegrated because of his wife's infidelity came as a rude shock, like a tax at a formerly tax-free checkout.
- The dandelion swayed in the gentle breeze like an oscillating electric fan set on medium.
- It was a working class tradition, like fathers chasing kids around with their power tools.
- He was deeply in love. When she spoke, he thought he heard bells, as if she were a truck backing up.
- She grew on him like she was a colony of E. coli and he was room-temperature beef.
- She walked into my office like a centipede with 98 missing legs.
- Her voice had that tense, grating quality, like a first-generation thermal paper fax machine that needed a belt tightened.
- It hurt the way your tongue hurts after you accidentally staple it to the wall.

PART III: HISTORICAL ACCURACY

It's important to every writer to try and be as historically accurate to the periods in which they place their characters and storyline. It's also important to know the derivation of many words and idioms in our language, as well as the traditions of our culture in order to employ them correctly. Many writers have romanticized the past, believing it to be a simpler, yet more natural and pleasant way of living.

Here's a short essay entitled: **"The Good Old Days"**

The next time you are washing your hands and complain because the water temperature isn't just how you like it, think about how things used to be.... Here are some facts about the 1500s:

- Most people got married in June because they took their yearly bath in May and still smelled pretty good by June. However, they were starting to smell so brides carried a bouquet of flowers to hide the body odor.
- Baths consisted of a big tub filled with hot water. The man of the house had the privilege of the nice clean water, then all the other sons and men, then the women and finally the children—last of all the babies. By then the water was so dirty you could actually lose someone in it—hence the saying, "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water."
- Houses had thatched roofs—thick straw, piled high, with no wood underneath. It was the only place for animals to get warm, so all the dogs, cats and other small animals (mice rats, and bugs) lived in the roof. When it rained it became slippery and some-

times the animals would slip and fall off the roof—hence the saying “It’s raining cats and dogs.”

- There was nothing to stop things from falling into the house. This posed a real problem in the bedroom where bugs and other droppings could really mess up your nice clean bed. Hence, a bed with big posts and a sheet hung over the top afforded some protection. That’s how canopy beds came into existence.
- The floor was dirt. Only the wealthy had something other than dirt, hence the saying “dirt poor.” The wealthy had slate floors that would get slippery in winter when wet, so they spread thresh on the floor to help keep their footing. As the winter wore on, they kept adding more thresh until when you opened the door it would all start slipping outside. A piece of wood was placed in the entry way—hence, a “thresh hold.”
- They cooked in the kitchen with a big kettle that always hung over the fire. Every day they lit the fire and added things to the pot. They ate mostly vegetables and did not get much meat. They would eat the stew for dinner, leaving leftovers in the pot to get cold overnight and then start over the next day. Sometimes the stew had food in it that had been there for quite a while--hence the rhyme, “peas porridge hot, peas porridge cold, peas porridge in the pot nine days old.”
- Sometimes they could obtain pork, which made them feel quite special. When visitors came over, they would hang up their bacon to show off. It was a sign of wealth that a man “could bring home the bacon.” They would cut off a little to share with guests and would all sit around and “chew the fat.”
- Those with money had plates made of pewter. Food with a high acid content caused some of the lead to leach onto the food, causing lead poisoning and death. This happened most often with tomatoes, so for the next 400 years or so, tomatoes were considered poisonous.
- Most people did not have pewter plates, but had trenchers, a piece of wood with the middle scooped out like a bowl. Often trenchers were made from stale paysan bread which was so old and hard that they could use them for quite some time. Trenchers were never washed and a lot of times worms and mold got into the wood and old bread. After eating off wormy moldy trenchers, one would get “trench mouth.”
- Bread was divided according to status. Workers got the burnt bottom of the loaf, the family got the middle, and guests got the top, or “upper crust.”
- Lead cups were used to drink ale or whiskey. The combination would sometimes knock them out for a couple of days. Someone walking along the road would take them for dead and prepare them for burial. They were laid out on the kitchen table for a couple of days and the family would gather around and eat and drink and wait and see if they would wake up--hence the custom of holding a “wake.”
- England is old and small and they started out running out of places to bury people. So they would dig up coffins and would take the bones to a “bone-house” and reuse the grave.

- When reopening these coffins, one out of 25 coffins were found to have scratch marks on the inside and they realized they had been burying people alive. So they thought they would tie a string on the wrist of the corpse, lead it through the coffin and up through the ground and tie it to a bell. Someone would have to sit out in the graveyard all night (the “graveyard shift”) to listen for the bell; thus, someone could be “saved by the bell” or was considered a “dead ringer.”

PART IV: LOGIC AND REASONING

An important element in good writing is to carefully think through all the logical ramifications of your story elements, and not leave any gaps or holes that confuse or frustrate readers, or worse, reflect poorly on your thinking. Such was not the case with this short essay from a truly creative and original thinker, entitled “**Is Hell Exothermic or Endothermic?**”

Introduction: *This essay is forwarded from a UO graduate, citing one of Dr. Schlambaugh’s final test questions for his final exam of 1997. Dr. Schlambaugh, of the University of Oklahoma Chemical Engineering Dept. is known for asking questions on his finals like: “Why do airplanes fly?” In May 1997, the “Momentum, Heat, and Mass Transfer II” final exam question was: “Is Hell exothermic or endothermic? Support your answer with proof.” Most of the students wrote proofs of their beliefs using Boyle’s Law or some variant. One student, however, wrote the following:*

First, we postulate that if souls exist, they must have some mass. If they do, then a mole of souls also must have a mass. So, at what rate are souls moving into hell and at what rate are souls leaving? I think we can safely assume that once a soul gets to hell, it does not leave. Therefore, no souls are leaving.

As for souls entering Hell, let’s look at the different religions that exist in the world today. Some religions say that if you are not a member of their religion, you will go to Hell. Since there are more than one of these religions, and people do not belong to more than one religion, we can project that all people and all souls go to Hell.

With the birth and death rates what they are, we can expect the number of souls in hell to increase exponentially. Now, we look at the rate of change in the volume of Hell. Boyle’s Law states that in order for the temperature and pressure in hell to stay the same, the ratio of the mass of the souls and volume needs to stay constant.

[A1] So, if Hell is expanding at a slower rate than the rate at which souls enter hell, then the temperature and pressure in Hell will increase until all Hell breaks loose.

[A2] Of course, if Hell is expanding at a rate faster than the increase in souls in Hell, then the temperature and pressure will drop until Hell freezes over.

So which is it? If we accept the postulate given to me by Theresa Banyan during freshman year, that, “It’ll be a cold day in Hell before I sleep with you,” and taking into account that I still have not succeeded in having sexual relations with her, then [A2] cannot be true... thus, Hell is exothermic.

The student, Tim Graham, got the only A.