LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Introduction

It is impossible to cover all important aspects of the correct use of language in one session that occupies many years of formal schooling. Following, is an overview of key issues concerning language and communication to be aware of during formal studies and in an engineering career. Wherever possible, try to use rich spoken and written language appropriate to the audience, context and setting.

There is a big difference between "colloquial or casual" language and "formal" language. Casual use of language and colloquial expressions may be more prevalent when working on site but may be less appropriate in formal site or work group meetings. Terms used in the first case may not be appropriate when used in the second case e.g. a "gutsy motor" should be called a "high capacity motor". At the same time each country has "idioms" that may not be understood by people from another location e.g. "flat strap". Try to avoid them in formal situations such as report writing.

As you will see, effective spoken and written communication is quite complex, ultimately measured by its effectiveness; not in how much you think you have impressed the audience or the reader. Interestingly, Engineers Australia places the importance of communication and presentation skills even above computer skills. (Refer to Appendix)

Bad use of language

We are also plagued by situations of wrong or bad use of language e.g. "could of" instead of "could have". One bad habit that has also crept in is the overuse of "like", "OMG", "LOL" etc. common in social media but inappropriate in professional situations. Older people and possibly your manager will not like "like". "Like" means "similar to" but all too often it is used to mean just about anything when coupled with a gesture or a facial expression to convey the meaning.

> *He was like (pause with an angry facial expression) and I was like OMG (eyebrows raised and hands thrown in the air).*

The meaning may be conveyed in verbal communications but impossible in written situations when one cannot see the body language and hear the tone to gauge the meaning. Furthermore, it is a case of lazy avoidance when one cannot be bothered finding the correct word.

> *He was abhorred by my performance and I was awe stricken by his over-reaction.*

This was possibly the intended message. Try to avoid slang and the bad use of language.

Common errors

These include *spelling*, *punctuation*, *grammar* and *syntax*. Common ones include;

- Theirs and there's
- Starting a sentence with "and"
- Using a comma when there is a break in a sentence warranting a full stop

A summary of some common examples of each may be found in the Appendix. Fortunately Microsoft products such as Word have inbuilt grammar and syntactical checks as well as a thesaurus; use them wherever possible to check your written work.

Colloquial language/slang and jargon

Colloquial language is distinct from formal speech or formal writing. It is the variety of language typically used when one is in familiar settings, relaxed and not especially self-conscious. Colloquialisms are distinct from slang or jargon. *Slang* refers to words used only by specific social groups, such as teenagers or site workers.

Colloquial language may include slang, but consists mostly of contractions or other informal words and phrases known to most native speakers of the language. In Australia, a colloquial expression when referring to very heavy rainfall is "raining cats and dogs".

Jargon refers to the language used by people who work in a particular area or who have a common interest. Much like slang, it is a kind of shorthand used to express ideas that are frequently discussed between members of a group. However, it may present a barrier to communication for those people unfamiliar with the respective field.
Jargon specific to one area may have a different meaning in another situation;

- "plant" – equipment or machinery in engineering/"plant" – vegetation in agriculture
- "derivative" – a term in mathematics/"derivative" – in currency and economics
- "jamb" – the frame around a door/"jamb" – general usage for getting caught or stuck

Try to avoid jargon if a commonly used term can be found since the jargon may not be understood by the intended audience.

Idioms and proverbs

An *idiom* is a phrase or expression that has a meaning different to its literal meaning. There are thousands of idioms occurring frequently in all languages. Examples include;

- "The ball is in your court" – meaning it is up to you to make the next decision or step.
- "Round table discussion" – meaning discussion where everyone has an opportunity to contribute.

A *proverb* is a short popular saying that expresses some commonplace truth or useful thought;

- "Birds of a feather flock together."
- "A bad workman blames his tools."

Communication styles

Developing effective communication skills is extremely important when you are in constant contact with people ranging from colleagues through to clients; no matter the industry or role that you may have. When we communicate, along with the message would be; the sender's feelings, emotions, values and attitudes. This may be picked up by their tone (written or spoken), gestures, body language and other non-verbal subliminal indicators. Be aware of and take note of all these aspects in both receiving and sending any form of communication.

In the workplace environment, most people will be presented with and will have access to a substantial amount of information to interpret and comprehend. This may involve more than just the words used. Ever been on either end of a misunderstood email? The culprit was *tone*, which is how you say something. Writing, deprived of gestures, facial expressions or voice has to be carefully considered to avoid misunderstandings.

Everyone communicates in a different way. The individual way in which you communicate is called your *style*. Everybody will fit into one or more of the nine different communication styles (both verbal and written) identified by experts. These are; relaxed, contentious, attentive, precise, dramatic, animated, open, dominant and friendly. Being aware of these may help you understand, appreciate or survive when dealing with different personality types.

As a receiver, in order to interpret and comprehend spoken information, it is suggested that you;

- Become an active listener
- Ask plenty of questions to gather/clarify information
- Give lots of feedback
- State your understanding of the message or information you have received

Audience

The audience might be any of the following; a single person, a group of people selected or random. An awareness of your audience is a critical factor in efficient and effective spoken and written communication. Always put yourself in the position of the audience; will they know what you are saying or asking? Efficient writers and effective speakers target their audience as closely as possible. Efficiency can be improved by choosing the vocabulary, tone, and style which are appropriate for the audience.

- The vocabulary of a newspaper is chosen very carefully with its readership in mind.
- Radio and television programmes adapt their use of language to their target audiences.
- We write messages to our friends in a style which is different to what we use for the bank manager or someone we don't know.
- If someone stops you to ask for directions, they won't be interested in how long you've lived in the town.
- On the other hand, if you're a member of an engineering group you may be invited to give a half-hour lecture on a topic using engineering terminology.

Your audience in each case is different.

Subjective and objective language

Subjective expressions are based on personal opinion or tastes. Stating "the person was driving recklessly" is subjective. *Objective* statements are based on fact and will return the same outcome irrespective of the person e.g. "the person was driving at 100 km/hr in a 60 km/hr zone". Subjective expressions should be avoided in formal, factual communication unless it is obviously one's feeling or impression. Making a statement such as "This project was very challenging," obviously applies to on person's views and cannot be confused to apply to every person or situation.

Contextualised language

Language, text or conversations are often said to be contextualised; appropriate for or characteristic of a situation or context. The surrounding text or conversation may provide the meaning to what has been communicated. We sometimes hear people say not to cite or quote people "out of context" or to apply what they have said to a different situation where it may have a different meaning. There are also social contexts where something is relevant to one race or culture but cannot be applied generally to all situations. You may be asked to write a report relevant to a specific context e.g. about the principles of good communication not generally but specific to an engineering design office or a construction site.

Examine the two pieces of information below, one is contextualised and one is general.

General

The 'cost of quality' is not the cost associated with producing a quality product or service. It is the cost of 'not' producing a quality product or service. Investing in the prevention of non-conformance to requirements and appraising the finished product prior to sale can greatly reduce overall costs due to internal and external failures.

Context specific

Toyota Motors places a great emphasis on regulating supply chains, using robotics on the production line, field testing of products and training of staff in production and quality systems. The tight operating margins in this industry can result in bankruptcy as a result of excessive failures and recalls.

Purpose

Define the purpose of why you are writing or presenting information. This will assist you in choosing relevant information, being succinct and will also affect the tone. *Function* is the term used to express the purpose of the written or spoken text. Below are some broad categories;

WRITING

- Persuasion an advertisement
- Information a train timetable
- Entertainment a short story
- Instruction how to build a wardrobe

SPEECH

- Persuasion a sermon
- Information a radio weather forecast
- Entertainment a joke
- Instruction how to get from A to B

The style of language used will vary drastically, depending on each of these functions.

Structure

Good communication in whatever form is measured by its effectiveness and if the receiver is confused or unclear, you have not done your job very well. Try to start with the situation or context and build up the detail in stages so that the reader or listener can visualise the situation. When writing, in particular, prioritise your ideas, placing the most important ones (to your reader) at the start. Begin with an overview of the message so that the reader or listener knows what to expect.

Compare the two situations with you as the listener.

> *The car felt like it was getting out of control. I didn't know whether to stop or try to adjust the bolts on the wheels. The car was swerving all over the place. I was getting scared. I really thought I was going to be late for class.*
>
> *On the way to class today I had a frightful experience. The car started to swerve all over the place to the point that I was losing control. I didn't know whether to stop to adjust the bolts on the wheels.*

Succinct writing

Being *succinct* or concise does not mean leaving out important information; rather it is the skill of getting to the point and conveying the key information using the minimum number of words. This is seen in movie and book reviews where the writer utilizes rich, descriptive language and is able to say so much with the efficient use of only a few words.

At the same time it important to work out the aim or purpose of what you are saying or writing so as not to complicate it with additional irrelevant information. Keep it simple and avoid using a long word when a simple one will do. The simplest way to say something is often the best. Don't try to impress your listeners or readers with your "intelligence" or long winded statements; just try to be clear.

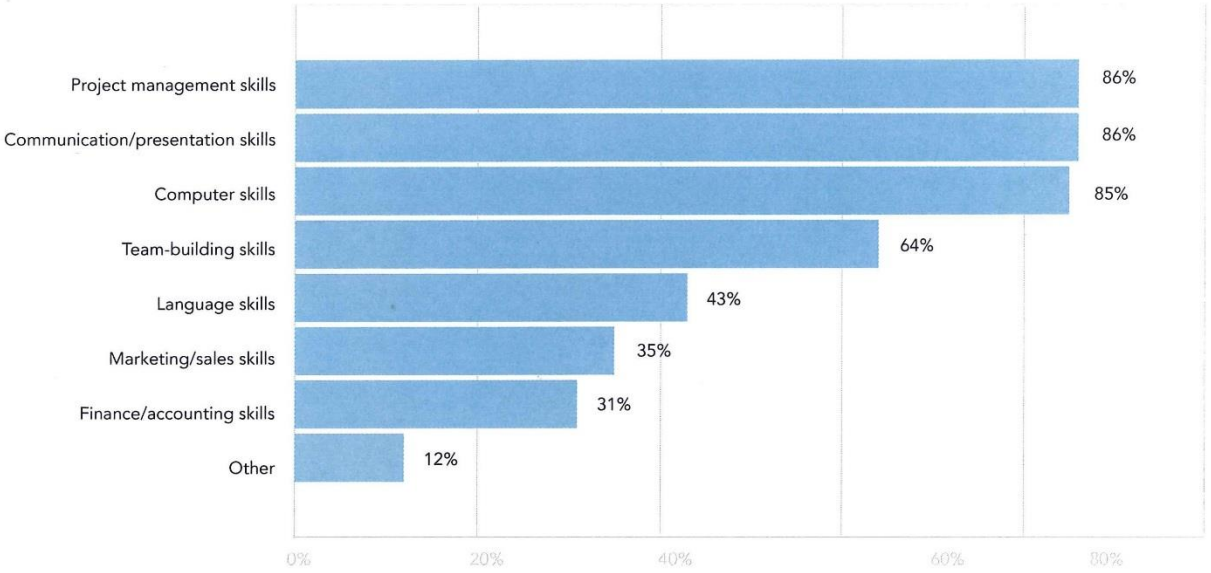
Important terms

There are many terms that you will encounter in your engineering studies and employment, *scope*, *discriminate*, *define*, *differentiate* etc. that need to be clearly understood to ensure you are performing the task as required. An extensive glossary is provided in the Appendix; refer to it from time to time for guidance.

APPENDIX

What skills do engineers need to get ahead in their profession today?

The majority of engineers say that communication/ presentation and project management skills are most important to get ahead in their profession today



Proofreading for Common Surface Errors: Spelling, Punctuation, and Grammar

What is proofreading?

Proofreading refers to the process of reading written work for "surface errors." These are errors involving spelling, punctuation, grammar and word choice.

Why should I care about proofreading, and what should I know about it?

In most college courses, instructors expect that your writing will be free of surface errors, but you may be uncertain of the rules for spelling, punctuation, grammar and word choice. The following rules and examples, taken primarily from *The St. Martin's Handbook, 3rd ed.*, by Andrea Lunsford and Robert Connors, may help you find and correct some of the most common surface errors in your writing. If you have questions about these rules, consult any good grammar book.

How can I proofread effectively?

The following four steps should help you become a better proofreader.

1. Familiarize yourself with the errors you commonly make by looking over writing that has already been marked. Make a list of your errors, and check your writing for each of them.
2. **Carefully** and **slowly** read your writing out loud. Often your ear will hear what your eye did not see.
3. Read your writing, sentence by sentence, from the last sentence to the first sentence. This technique interrupts the logical flow of the prose and neutralizes any impression of correctness arising from your knowledge of what you meant to say.
4. Use your dictionary to check any words of which you are unsure, and to check for correct prepositions, verb tenses, and irregular forms.

What are some of the more common surface errors?

Here is a listing of some of the more common surface errors, broken down by category. Either select the link you would like to view or scroll down to the appropriate topic.

Spelling

Spelling errors are among the most common surface errors as well as the most easily corrected. To correct spelling errors, use a spell-checker, regardless of your spelling skill, along with a dictionary to help you find the right alternative for a misspelled word. Remember that the spell-checker won't help with homonyms, words that sound alike but have different spellings and meanings. Some words that can cause trouble are listed below.

- **their** (possessive form of *they*)
- **there** (*in that place*)
- **they're** (contraction of *they are*)
- **accept** (a verb, meaning *to receive* or *to admit to a group*)
- **except** (usually a preposition, meaning *but* or *only*)
- **who's** (contraction of *who is* or *who has*)
- **whose** (possessive form of who)
- **its** (possessive form of *it*)
- **it's** (contraction of *it is* or *it has*)
- **your** (possessive form of *you*)
- **you're** (contraction of *you are*)
- **affect** (usually a verb, meaning *to influence*)
- **effect** (usually a noun, meaning result)
- **than** (used in comparison)
- **then** (refers to a time in the past)
- **were** (form of the verb *to be*)
- **we're** (contraction of *we are*)
- **where** (related to location or place)

Punctuation

Commas

1. Use a comma to signal a pause between the **introductory element** of a sentence and the main part of the sentence.

- **Frankly,** the committee's decision baffled us.
- **Though I gave him detailed advice for revising,** his draft only became worse.

2. Use a comma when you join two independent sentences with a **conjunction** (*for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, *so*).

- Meredith wore jeans to the hotel**, but** she changed before the wedding.

3. Use a comma to signal the presence of a **nonrestrictive element**, that is, a word, phrase, or clause that gives additional information about the preceding part of the sentence, but which can be deleted without changing the basic meaning of the sentence. If the element is in the middle of the sentence, use a comma before and after the element.

- Marina**, who was the president of the club,** was the first to speak.
- Puerto Rico was a Spanish colony until 1898, **when it was ceded to the U.S.**

4. Do NOT use a comma with a **restrictive element**, that is, a word, phrase, or clause that restricts the meaning of the word or phrase it modifies. A restrictive element cannot be deleted without changing the sentence's basic meaning.

Wrong: I'll return the sweater, that I borrowed, after I wear it tonight
Right: I'll return the sweater **that I borrowed** after I wear it tonight.

Wrong: The people, who vandalized the school, were never caught.
Right: The people **who vandalized the school** were never caught.

To see why these are restrictive elements, try eliminating them from the sentence. Once you do so, you see that the first sentence implies that there is only one sweater, while the second implies that all the people were never caught.

5. Traditionally, commas separate all the **items in a series** (three or more words, phrases, or clauses that appear consecutively in a sentence). Some instructors don't require a comma before the *and* or *or* between the last two items. Check your teacher's preference, and be consistent in either using or omitting this comma.

- Sharks eat **squid, shrimp, crabs, and fish.**

Apostrophes

1. To show that one thing belongs to another, either an apostrophe and an *s* or an apostrophe alone is added to the word representing the thing that possesses the other. An apostrophe and an *s* are used for **singular nouns, indefinite pronouns** *(anybody, everyone, nobody, somebody)*, and for plural nouns that do not end in *s*. When **plural nouns end in *s*** only the apostrophe is used.

- Overambitious parents can be harmful to a **child's** well-being.
- The accident was **nobody's** fault.
- Both **drivers'** cars were damaged in the accident.

2. The word ***its***, spelled without an apostrophe, is the possessive form of *it*, meaning of ***it*** or ***belonging to it.*** The word ***it's***, spelled with an apostrophe, is a contraction of ***it is*** or ***it has***. Even though with nouns an apostrophe usually indicates possessive form, the possessive in this case is the one without the apostrophe.

- The car is lying on **its** side in the ditch. **It's** a white 1986 Buick.

Periods

1. A **comma splice** occurs when two or more clauses that could each stand alone as a sentence are written with only a comma between them. To correct this error, **separate the clauses with a period or semicolon, connect the clauses with a word like *and, for, because,* or *although*, or combine them into one clause.**

Wrong: The ship was huge**,** its mast stood thirty feet high.
Right: The ship was huge**; its** mast stood thirty feet high.
Right: The ship was huge**, and its** mast stood thirty feet high.
Right: The mast of the huge ship stood thirty feet high.

2. **Fused sentences** are created when two or more groups of words that could each be written as an independent sentence are written without any punctuation between them. To eliminate a fused sentence, **divide the groups of words into separate sentences, or join them in a way that shows their relationship.**

Wrong: Our fiscal policy is not well defined it confuses many people.
Right: Our fiscal policy is not well defined**. It** confuses many people.
Right: Our fiscal policy is not well defined**, and it** confuses many people.

Verbs

Active and Passive Verbs

1. Verbs can be in either active or passive voice. In active voice, the subject of the sentence **performs** the action of the verb; in passive voice, the subject **receives** the action of the verb. Readers typically find active voice sentences more vigorous and clearer; for these reasons, writers usually prefer active voice.

Passive: **The ball *was kicked by*** the boy.
Active: **The boy *kicked*** the ball.

Passive: **A decision *was reached*** by the committee.
Active: **The committee *reached*** a decision.

Passive: **Many arguments *are offered*** against abortion.
Active: **Religious leaders *offer*** many arguments against abortion.

Notice that in the passive voice examples, the doer of the action is either at the end of the sentence in a prepositional phrase or, in the third example, is missing entirely from the sentence. In each active voice example, however, the doer of the action is in the subject position at the beginning of the sentence.

2. On some occasions, however, you might have a good reason for choosing a passive construction; for example, you might choose the passive if you want to emphasize the receiver of the action or minimize the importance of the actor.

Appropriate passive: The medical records were destroyed in the fire.
Appropriate passive: The experiment was performed successfully.

Passive voice verbs always include a form of the verb *to be*, such as *am*, *are*, *was*, *is being*, and so on. To check for active versus passive voice, look for sentences that contain a form of this verb, and see whether in these sentences the subject of the sentence performs the action of the verb.

Shifting Verb Tense

1. If you shift verb tense (for example, from past to present tense) in a sentence or passage without a good reason, you may confuse your reader.

Wrong: After he **joined** the union, Sam **appears** at a rally and **makes** a speech.
Right: After he **joined** the union, Sam **appeared** at a rally and **made** a speech.

To proofread for verb tense errors, circle all verbs in your writing. Look at the verbs in sequence and check that you haven't changed tense unintentionally.

Subject-Verb Agreement

1. Make sure that the **subject** and **verb** of each clause or sentence agree—that is, that a singular subject has a singular verb, and a plural subject a plural verb. When other words come between subject and verb, you may mistake the noun nearest to the verb—before or after—for the verb's real subject.

Wrong: A central **part** of my life goals **have been** to go to law school.
Right: A central **part** of my life goals **has been** to go to law school.

Wrong: The **profits** earned by the cosmetic industry **is** not high enough.
Right: The **profits** earned by the cosmetic industry **are** not high enough.

2. Be particularly careful that your **subject** and **verb** agree when your subject is made up of two or more parts joined by *and* or *or*; when your subject is a word like *committee* or *jury*, which can take either a singular or a plural verb depending on whether it is treated as a unit or as a group of individuals; or when your subject is a word like *mathematics* or *measles*, which looks plural but is singular in meaning.

Wrong: My **brother** and his **friend *commutes*** every day from Louisville.
Right: My **brother** and his **friend *commute*** every day from Louisville.

Wrong: The **committee *was taking*** all the responsibility themselves.
Right: The **committee *were taking*** all the responsibility themselves.
(Note that the use of the word *themselves* shows that *committee* is being treated as a group of individuals, not as a unit.)

Wrong: **Measles *have become*** less common in the United States.
Right: **Measles *has become*** less common in the United States.

To proofread for subject-verb agreement, circle the subject and verb in each sentence and be sure they agree.

Pronouns

1. A pronoun (like *I*, *it*, *you*, *him*, *her*, *this*, *themselves*, *someone*, *who*, *which*) is used to replace another word—its antecedent—so the antecedent does not have to be repeated. Check each **pronoun** to make sure that it agrees with its **antecedent** in gender and number. Remember that words like *each*, *either*, *neither*, and *one* are singular; when they are used as antecedents,

they take singular pronouns. Antecedents made up of two or more parts joined by *or* or *nor* take pronouns that agree with the nearest antecedent. Collective-noun antecedents (audience, team) can be singular or plural depending on whether they refer to a single unit or a group of individuals.

Wrong: Every **one** of the puppies thrived in **their** new home.
Right: Every **one** of the puppies thrived in **its** new home.

Wrong: **Neither Jane nor Susan** felt that **they** had been treated fairly.
Right: **Neither Jane nor Susan** felt that **she** had been treated fairly.

Wrong: The **team** frequently changed **its** positions to get varied experience.
Right: The **team** frequently changed **their** positions to get varied experience.

To proofread for agreement of pronouns and antecedents, circle each pronoun, identify its antecedent, and make sure that they agree in gender and number.

2. As noted above, most indefinite pronouns (like *each*, *either*, *neither*, or *one*) are singular; therefore, they take singular verbs. A relative pronoun, like *who*, *which*, or *that*, takes a verb that agrees with the pronoun's antecedent.

Wrong: **Each** of the items in these designs **coordinate** with the others.
Right: **Each** of the items in these designs **coordinates** with the others.

Wrong: He is one of the **employees** who **works** overtime regularly.
Right: He is one of the **employees** who **work** overtime regularly.
(In this example, the antecedent of *who* is *employees*, and therefore the verb should be plural.)

3. A vague pronoun reference occurs when readers cannot be sure of a pronoun's antecedent. If a **pronoun** could refer to more than one **antecedent**, or if the antecedent is implied but not explicitly stated, revise the sentence to make the antecedent clear.

Wrong: Before Mary assaulted Mrs. Turpin, **she** was a judgmental woman.
Right: Before Mary assaulted Mrs. Turpin, **the latter** was a judgmental woman.
(In the first sentence, *she* could refer to either Mary or Mrs. Turpin.)

Wrong: They believe that an egg is as important as a human being, but **it** can't be proved.
Right: They believe that an egg is as important as a human being, but **such an assertion** can't be proved.
(In the first sentence, the antecedent of *it* is unclear.)

Other Grammatical Errors

Sentence Fragments

1. The sentence fragment is an incomplete sentence punctuated as a sentence. To make it a complete sentence, **join it to the main clause or rewrite it.**

Wrong: She is a good friend. A person whom I trust and admire.
Right: She is a good friend, **a** person whom I trust and admire.

Wrong: In the workshop, we learned the value of discipline. Also how to take good notes.
Right: In the workshop, we learned the value of discipline. We **also learned** how to take good notes.

Wrong: The old aluminum boat sitting on its trailer.
Right: The old aluminum boat **was sitting** on its trailer.

To proofread for sentence fragments, check all sentences for a subject, a verb, and at least one clause that does not begin with a subordinating word like *as*, *although*, *if*, *when*, *that*, *since*, or *who*.

Misplaced or Dangling Modifiers

1. Misplaced or dangling modifiers are words, phrases, or clauses not clearly connected to the word they modify. Move a misplaced modifier closer to the word it describes, or revise a sentence to give a dangling modifier a word to modify.

Wrong: **They** could see the eagles swooping and diving **with binoculars**.
Right: **With binoculars, they** could see the eagles swooping and diving.

Wrong: **Nixon** told reporters that he planned to get out of politics **after he lost the 1962 gubernatorial race.**
Right: **After he lost the 1962 gubernatorial race, Nixon** told reporters that he planned to get out of politics.

Wrong: A rabbit's teeth are never used for defense even **when cornered.**
Right: **Even when cornered, a rabbit** never uses its teeth for defense.

Wrong: **As a young boy**, his grandmother told stories of her years as a country schoolteacher.
Right: **As a young boy, he** heard his grandmother tell stories of her years as a country schoolteacher.

To proofread for misplaced or dangling modifiers, circle all modifiers and draw a line to the word they describe; be sure they can't mistakenly modify some other word.

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Idioms

- The ball **is in your court**. This means it is up to you to make the next decision or step.
- It's **in the ballpark**. This means within an acceptable or similar range.
- To **take your ball and go home**. This means to cease participating in an activity that has turned to one's disadvantage.
- I'm going **back to the drawing board**. This means when an attempt fails and you have to start all over.
- To **kill two birds with one stone**. This means to solve two problems at one time with a single action.
- They are **pulling my leg**. This means they are teasing me by telling me something untrue.
- To **beat around the bush**. This means to avoid doing something, to stall, to waste time.
- It's my **cup of tea**. This means one's choice or preference.
- the **squeaky wheel gets the grease**. This means people who complain the most will get attention or what they want.
- You **are on the ball**. This means you have qualities, such as competence, skill, or knowledge, that are necessary for success.
- That's **water under the bridge**, It's **spilled milk**, To **burn your bridges**. This means a past occurrence, especially something unfortunate, that cannot be undone or rectified.
- I'll **drop** you **a line**. This means to send a message or start a telecommunicated conversation.
- To **get the ball rolling**, To set **the wheels in motion**. This means to get a process started.
- To **kick the bucket**, They are going **to croak**. This means to die.
- To **tighten up** something. This means to make something more disciplined.
- They are a **knock out**, They are **hot**. This means that the person a is a very good-looking man or woman.
- To **beat a dead horse**. This means to waste time doing something that has already been unsuccessfully attempted.
- Be glad to **see the back of**. This means to be happy when a person leaves.
- That **one size fits all**. This means is what considered acceptable for one person or situation is considered to be suitable for a wide range of people or situations.
- You should **keep an eye out for** that. This means to maintain awareness of it as it occurs.
- To **put words into someone else's mouth**. This means to interpret what someone said so that the words mean what you want and not what the speaker wanted.
- You need to **pull up your socks**. This means you need to make an effort to improve your work or behaviour because it is not good enough.

COMMONLY USED WORDS

Analyse: consider the various components of the whole and try to describe the inter-relationships between them.

Compare: examine the characteristics of the objects in question with a view to demonstrating their similarities and their differences.

Contrast: examine the characteristics of the objects in question for the purpose of demonstrating differences.

Define: give a definition or state terms of reference.

Describe: give an account of.

Discuss: present the different aspects of a question or problem.

Enumerate: give a listing.

Evaluate: examine the various sides of a question and try to reach a judgement.

Illustrate: give an example, explain, draw a figure.

Prove: demonstrate or show by logical argument.

Summarise: examine the main points briefly.

Alternative definitions and additional terms can be found on the next page.

Task word	Meaning
analyse	examine closely; examine something in terms of its parts and how they are related to each other
argue	present a case for and/or against something
assess	decide the value of something
compare	discuss two or more things in terms of their similarities and differences
contrast	discuss two or more things, emphasizing their differences
criticise	give a judgment about the value of something and support that judgment with evidence
define	make clear what is meant by something; or use a definition or definitions to explore a concept.
describe	present a detailed account of something
discuss	consider and offer some interpretation or evaluation of something; present and give a judgment on the value of arguments for and against something
enumerate	give an item by item account of something
evaluate	attempt to form a judgment about something
examine	inspect something in detail and investigate the implications
explain	make clear the details of something; show the reason for, or underlying cause of, or the means by which something occurs
illustrate	offer an example or examples to show how or that something happens; or make concrete a concept by giving examples.
interpret	make clear the meaning of something and its implications
justify	give reasons why certain decisions should be made, or certain conclusions reached
outline	go through and identify briefly the main features of something
prove	show by logical argument
review	report the chief facts about something; or offer a criticism of something.
summarise	describe something concisely
trace	identify and describe the development or history of something from some point, or from its origin.

Adapted from:

Marshall, L & Rowland, F 1993, 2nd edn, *A guide to learning independently,* Longman Cheshire, Milton, Old.
Peters, P 1985, *Strategies for student writers,* Wiley & Sons, Melbourne.

Notes:

1. See "Analysing questions" on the Learning Connection website.
2. See the resources on referencing and avoiding plagiarism on the Learning Connection.

Actually, I don't like these bad habits

GRUMPY OLD MAN

STUART INNES

"LIKE, it's actually, like, you know."

For some people, that is a complete, spoken sentence. It's got me beaten what it means, yet others nod as though they've got it.

Speech habits, bad habits, are very annoying for an old grumpy.

How did this word, like, come to be so overused by young people today? Not only is the word used for "similar to" but it also is employed instead of "said."

Here's an example: "He's, like, all angry and he's like 'You didn't, did you?' and I'm like 'Yeah, I did', like; like he just doesn't get it, like he's, like, nuts and I'm like 'Leave me alone', like."

Sorry but I don't like that, to use the word in its proper sense. But young people can speak to each other for hours like this.

Meanwhile, making a come-back after overuse in the 1970s is "you know", when the speaker is too lazy to articulate a clear, correct description. "It's, you know, much better to have this, well, you know." Sorry, but I don't know. It's just, you know, sort of, too you know.

And how about the "yeah-no" answers from sports people when they're asked a contentious question by the media in an interview. Are they trained to say "yeah-no" so they can't be pinned down either way?

Interviewer: "So, Pete you had a great game today." Interviewee: "Yeah, no, the team did well."

Advanced classes in sports media interviews throw in a "look" now and again: "Yeah, no, look, the team did well", which is a bit better than "Yeah, no, look, you know."

I can never figure why footballers speak in this vague way yet car race drivers seem so much more articulate.

Then there's the er, um people, who can't string together the right words quickly enough yet want to keep their speech going by slipping in the odd er or um. I, er, just, um, want to, er, give them a good, um, slap in the, er, in the, er, um, ear.

And even in the written word, rarely is the word "both" needed, yet it's everywhere. It can even bring ambiguity, such as "Both men and women will attend." Does that mean that two men will attend as well as women? Why not say "Men and women will attend."?

But my all-time biggest dislike in speech is the word "actually".

Rarely, if ever, are there cases that if you removed the word "actually" from a sentence it would not mean exactly the same. Yet some people pack two or three actuallys into a sentence. I'm sure they're not aware they're saying it so much.

"Actually," they start, then pause to make sure they have the hearer's attention, "It's actually a good idea to go there because it will actually be a lot cooler than here." Take out the actuallys and it says the same thing. Trust me.

A mate was the president of a society I was a member of and he had this habit, so we counted once when he gave his end-of-year speech. We got up to about 55 in the first few minutes before we got the giggles and embarrassed ourselves.

Yes, individuals sometimes have their favourite words that they then overuse. State Government Minister Jane Lomax-Smith loves to say "stellar" but at least they're individuals' style.

Actually, yeah, no, like, what I don't, like, you know, is, look, um, too many many people like actually saying these, er, same, um, you know, words, er, like others are, um, going to, like, actually understand them, like. Even over a mobile phone.

Mobile phones? Don't get me going.

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