

Write It Right PDF (Limited Copy)

Jan Freeman



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Write It Right Summary

Write It Right Audiobook

Empowering Clarity: Precise Guidance for Modern Writing
Challenges

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About the book

In a world where language is constantly evolving and grammar rules are often subject to heated debates, **Write It Right** by Jan Freeman emerges as a compelling guide for both the linguistic enthusiast and the everyday writer. This book not only shines a light on the intricacies of the English language but also challenges the reader to reflect on the traditions and habits that shape our written communication. With wit and wisdom, Freeman demystifies grammar conundrums and advises on practical writing tips that honor clarity and creativity. As you page through this engaging exploration of language, you'll find yourself questioning longstanding conventions, considering diverse viewpoints, and gaining newfound appreciation for the craft of writing. Dispelled myths, surprising revelations, and humorous anecdotes await in a narrative that is as informative as it is entertaining. Let **Write It Right** inspire your linguistic journey and empower you to wield your words with confidence and precision.

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About the author

Jan Freeman is a seasoned guardian of language and a well-respected voice in the discourse of linguistic evolution. Known for her sharp wit and insightful analysis, Freeman has dedicated herself to exploring the intricate tapestry of the English language, weaving threads between historical usage and modern adaptation. With a career spanning decades, she has contributed to numerous publications, including her popular "The Word" column for the Boston Globe, which delved into the fascinating quirks and developments in the English lexicon. As an author, her works reflect a deep understanding of language history, change, and the many debates that arise therein, positioning her as a thoughtful and critical analyst who bridges the gap between traditional grammar and contemporary usage. In "Write It Right," Freeman continues to display her passion for language, offering readers a compelling exploration of linguistic correctness and the evolution of language norms.

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Chapter 1 Summary: 1

The chapter "Aims and the Plan" centers around the author's primary goal, which is to instill precision in writing. The central idea posited is that good writing essentially represents clear thinking made visible, and precision is crucial for conveying thoughts accurately. This precision is achieved by selecting words that exactly express the writer's intentions and excluding those that might lead to ambiguity. Quintilian, a classical rhetorician, is referenced to emphasize the necessity for writing to be understood inevitably by the reader.

The author critiques dictionaries for often including multiple meanings that might not be practically useful for writers. Thus, the guide focuses on the most literal and practical meanings of words, steering clear of using narrow academic etymologies or misguided colloquial expressions. The approach in the book is more illustrative than expository, avoiding heavy reliance on technical jargon in favor of clear examples. Such examples help guide the reader in applying the principles of effective communication broadly despite not all terms or expressions listed in the book being deemed universally unacceptable. While some slang or colloquial language can serve certain purposes in light literature or casual contexts, the book warns that even these should be used cautiously.

Beyond precision, the book discusses taste in writing—a concept with no

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firm standards—acknowledging its subjective nature and reflecting only the author's taste. The author humbly admits to personal writing flaws but believes in teaching clarity through examples. This connects to the idea that even experienced writers succumb to common language errors.

The subsequent section presents "The Blacklist," a compilation of frequently misused words and expressions, offering corrections and enhancing readers' command of precise language usage. For instance, proper usage of articles ("an" for "a" when preceding a silent 'h' as in "an hour"), differentiating 'act' from 'action,' and avoiding colloquialisms like "bet" for "betted" or "backwards" for "backward," clarifies proper language application.

The guide stresses the importance of recognizing subtle differences between terms that may seem interchangeable to ensure that writing remains unambiguous and concise, thus meeting the purpose of clear communication, which benefits both the writer's intent and the reader's understanding.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Precision in Writing

Critical Interpretation: Imagine the impact of choosing words so precisely that each sentence you write becomes a mirror reflecting your exact thoughts. In life, this discipline of precise communication can revolutionize how you express your ideas and emotions. Just like a skilled craftsman fine-tunes every detail of their work, embracing precision encourages you to be intentional about the language you use daily. This can lead to fewer misunderstandings, stronger connections with others, and a deeper confidence in your ability to convey your message effectively. Moreover, the practice of precision encourages mindfulness, inviting you to reflect on the purpose and potential impact of your words before you speak or write. By making clarity and accuracy your habitual goals, you enhance both your own understanding and that of those around you, fostering an environment where ideas can be shared with appreciation and clarity.

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Chapter 2 Summary: 2

The provided text appears to be a collection of suggested usage corrections for common English language mistakes or slang expressions. This advice is foundational for promoting clarity and precision in writing and speech. Let me offer an organized summary, reflecting the key insights aimed at enhancing accuracy and avoiding language pitfalls:

- 1. Slang and Incorrect Expressions:** The text delineates several colloquial and often incorrect terms, urging avoidance. For instance, words like “bogus,” “brainy,” and “can” (used instead of “may”) are discussed as improper slang or misuse, emphasizing a preference for more precise or traditional language.
- 2. Misplaced Usage:** It highlights phrases that are often used erroneously, such as "both alike" or "continually and continuously," and guides on their correct application, greatly emphasizing subtle differences in meaning that affect understanding.
- 3. Alternative Suggestions:** When words like "calculated," "claim," and "compare with" are used inappropriately, suggestions are provided: preferring "likely," "affirm," and proper comparative language, respectively.
- 4. Avoiding Euphemisms and Misleading Terms** Excessive politeness or

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inaccuracy in word choice, such as using "casket" instead of "coffin," or "dilapidated" to describe non-stone structures, is discouraged.

5. Clarification of Subtle Distinctions: The guide explains subtle distinctions between similar words, like using "capacity" vs. "ability," "capable" vs. "susceptible," and "distinctly" vs. "distinctively," illustrating how word choice impacts meaning.

6. Social & Contextual Appropriateness: It addresses culturally specific use of words, such as "chivalrous" in the Southern states, pointing out regional linguistic peculiarities that might not resonate universally.

7. Recommendations Against Verbose Usage: The guide critiques verbose or archaic expressions, advising against using terms like "commit suicide" and "commence" for conversational simplicity.

8. Precision in Language for Professional Titles: Clear advice is presented on the correct use of professional titles, insisting these be employed accurately and only when appropriate.

In essence, the text suggests elevating language standards by favoring clarity and correctness, thus fostering a more precise and universally understandable form of communication. The guidance serves as a resource for anyone looking to refine their written and spoken English in both formal

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and informal contexts.

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Chapter 3 Summary: 3

In this chapter, the author addresses common language misunderstandings and provides clarification on certain expressions and word usage in English. The goal is to improve clarity and precision in communication. Here's a summarized and organized description:

1. Word Usage and Meaning Clarifications

- Certain words are often used incorrectly, such as using "donate for" instead of "give," or misusing "empty" instead of "vacant" when referring to a space meant for occupation, like a house. Similarly, "employee" should be used instead of the French "employe" to refer to someone employed by another.

2. Grammatical Precision:

- Adverbial misuse is highlighted, like using "doubtlessly" which is redundant; similar issues arise with constructions like "equally as" which should simply be "equally."

- Errors in applying plural logic to phrases, such as "each other" versus "one another," where the former is used for two people and the latter for more than two, are corrected.

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3. Etymological and Idiomatic Corrections:

- Words like "edify" are wrongly used to mean please or entertain, though it actually implies moral or spiritual improvement. Similarly, "episode" is often incorrectly used for any occurrence rather than as a narrative within another narrative.

- "Electrocution" and words derived from incorrect Latin interpretations are critiqued for their dissonance with established language logic.

4. Precision in Context and Connotation:

- The author advises against using "endorse" for approval in a non-commercial context, providing "approve" as the correct alternative for ideas or policies.

- Misconceptions such as using "genuine" for "authentic" when referring to documents, or "essential" in place of necessary are addressed, reinforcing the need to accurately reflect the meanings of words used.

5. Common Redundancies and Misuses:

- Tautologies like "funeral obsequies" should simply be "obsequies," as the word inherently implies a funeral context.

- Avoid phrases like "got married" which should be simply "married," and "gotten" which is outdated for "got."

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6. Phrases and Colloquialism:

- Phrases like "got better for would better" reveal an inherent error in restoring contracted forms improperly.

- Problems with colloquial maritime expressions like using "hail from" instead of "come from" are brought to light.

7. Avoiding Vulgarity and Overused Terms

- Words like "gent" for gentleman are marked as vulgar, while "gubernatorial," often used for show over substance, is suggested to be avoided.

Through the review and clarification of these language points, this chapter aims to elevate the level of discourse and ensure correctness in the use of English words and phrases, focusing on their etymology, proper context, and intended meanings.

Topic	Description
Word Usage and Meaning Clarifications	Misused words like "donate for" vs. "give," "empty" vs. "vacant." Prefer "employee" over "employe."

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Topic	Description
Grammatical Precision	<p>Redundant adverbs: "doubtlessly." Phrases like "equally as" vs. "equally." Correct use of "each other" vs. "one another."</p>
Etymological and Idiomatic Corrections	<p>"Edify" should imply moral or spiritual improvement. Correct usage of "episode" within narratives. Addressing words with incorrect Latin derivations.</p>
Precision in Context and Connotation	<p>Use "approve" instead of "endorse" for non-commercial contexts. "Genuine" vs. "authentic" in the context of documents. "Essential" vs. "necessary."</p>
Common Redundancies and Misuses	<p>Tautologies like "funeral obsequies" vs. "obsequies." Simplifying "got married" to "married." "Gotten" is outdated for "got."</p>
Phrases and Colloquialism	<p>Errors in restoring contracted forms: "got better" vs. "would better." Colloquial maritime expressions: "hail from" vs. "come from."</p>

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Topic	Description
Avoiding Vulgarity and Overused Terms	Vulgarity in terms: "gent" for gentleman. Avoid "gubernatorial" used for show over substance.
Overall Theme	Focus on elevating discourse by ensuring correctness in English by reviewing etymology, context, and meanings.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Precision in context and connotation

Critical Interpretation: Enhancing your choice of words and understanding their rightful contexts can greatly impact your communication skills. Imagine how this newfound precision empowers you: your words become sharp tools, conveying your thoughts clearly and effectively. By using 'approve' rather than 'endorse' in non-commercial conversations, you're not just finding the right word but also ensuring your intentions are unmistakably understood. In life, this attention to language aligns your spoken and written expressions with your true thoughts, demonstrating respect for your audience's perception and engagement. Your relationships can deepen as misunderstandings diminish, turning speech and dialogue into a genuine reflection of clarity and mutual understanding.

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Chapter 4: 4

In "Head over Heels," and similar sections of the text, the author provides an exploration of common misuses and misunderstandings in the English language with surprising wit and insight into semantics. These reflections reveal often humorous discrepancies in popular usage versus literal meanings or correct usages, offering readers an opportunity to refine their linguistic skills.

"Head over Heels" refers to the incorrect usage of the phrase, which should more accurately be "heels over head." This mirrors a common linguistic slip where the expression fails to capture the intended image and insists that the phrase means a state of confusion or disorder.

"Healthy for Wholesome" highlights the misuse of the term "healthy" for things that aren't living, such as climates or occupations, which should be described as "wholesome."

In "Helpmeet for Helpmate," the discussion revolves around the misinterpretation of the biblical phrasing in Genesis regarding Adam's wife as a "help meet" for him, a distortion leading to the creation of the erroneous word "helpmeet."

The words "Hereafter for Henceforth" are explained to differentiate future

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promises versus ongoing conduct, emphasizing the specificity each word holds.

Similarly, each term explored, such as "Honeymoon," "Horseflesh for Horses," or "Humans as a Noun," seeks to correct a common misconception or misuse, providing readers with the proper context and usage.

For instance, "Honeymoon" discusses the original meaning of "moon" as a month, revealing the inaccuracy in referring to shorter or longer periods with this term.

The text also advises proper usage of words like "Hung for Hanged," reminding readers of the distinction in usage when referring to objects versus people, hinting at societal values influencing language preservation.

"Jeopardize for Imperil, or Endanger" introduces a more direct correction replacing the erroneous or inflated usage of "jeopardize" with the simpler "jeopard."

The text is an engaging exploration of language from etymology to grammatical precision, suggesting alternatives for erroneous or unclear expressions while distilling the nuances of English language semantics and correct usage. Each section is a lesson in itself, focusing on clarity, tradition, and accuracy to refine the reader's understanding and practice of

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Chapter 5 Summary: 5

In this chapter, we encounter a guide on language usage that advocates for precision and clarity in expression by discarding common misuses and overly casual language choices. The author emphasizes the importance of choosing the right words that reflect intended meanings more accurately.

For instance, the phrase "lots of things" or "a lot of talk" should be replaced by more specific quantifiers like "much" or "many" to avoid vague expressions. The emotional weight carried by "love" should be reserved for profound feelings, distinguishing it from lighter sentiments expressed by "like."

The author criticizes the casual use of words like "mad" instead of "angry," noting that while "mad" can denote insanity, it is often improperly used by Americans to describe anger. Similarly, saying someone "maintained" a point should mean they have proven it, rather than simply asserted it.

In elections, the distinction between "majority" (over half the votes) and "plurality" (more votes than any other candidate, but not necessarily a majority) is crucial for understanding electoral outcomes. The text also points out that using "make" to describe earning money confuses a production process with acquiring income.

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The nuanced differences between "mend" (typically used for personal items like clothing) and "repair" (applied to infrastructure like roads) are highlighted to improve clarity. Similarly, the use of "meet" should be restricted to social or sports gatherings, not merely a chance encounter.

Syntax errors such as using "neither – or" instead of "neither – nor" are underscored to correct grammatical constructions. The overuse of "nice" in the place of more specific adjectives like "good" or "agreeable" is discouraged to preserve the former's subtle meaning of being carefully discerning.

Furthermore, the text advises against colloquial expressions such as "the family moved," favoring "the family removed" to avoid banality. It discusses the purpose of symbolic words and encourages the use of precise alternatives, like "novel" for realistic fiction and "romance" for more imaginative narratives.

The use of "numerous" to mean many is critiqued, suggesting it should solely pertain to numerical form ("numerous verses"). The chapter also covers the correct uses of "people" and "persons," encouraging precision. Commercial vernacular like "pay attention" is replaced with more descriptive language to avoid reducing concepts to financial transactions.

In conclusion, this chapter serves as an instruction on choosing words

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thoughtfully and maintaining linguistic integrity for clearer communication. It calls for an awareness of subtle distinctions and encourages language users to match their expressions with the intended nuance of meaning and context.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The power of choosing the right words.

Critical Interpretation: Imagine communicating with a precision that transcends the ordinary, allowing you to not only convey your thoughts but also to resonate with clarity and meaning. You are challenged to sharpen your verbal toolkit by discarding vague and casual expressions, replacing them with language that truly reflects the depth of your intentions. In your everyday interactions, this conscious choice of words could transform mere conversation into impactful dialogue, fostering a deeper connection and understanding. By replacing phrases like 'lots of things' with more precise quantifiers, or distinguishing between emotional intensities with 'like' and 'love,' you're practicing a discipline that enhances every exchange. This inspires you to be more deliberate with your words, understanding that clarity in expression is a gateway to authenticity and effectiveness, both in personal affairs and broader communications.

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Chapter 6 Summary: 6

In this collection of linguistic observations and corrections, the focus is on clarifying common English language misusages and providing more precise alternatives. The discussion draws attention to various words and phrases that are often used incorrectly due to misunderstood meanings or lazy conventions. The key points and clarifications include:

1. **Perpetual vs. Continual:** Something done "perpetually" suggests an eternal or constant occurrence, whereas "continually" implies ongoing but not necessarily eternal repetition.
2. **Phenomenal vs. Extraordinary:** Everything encountered is a phenomenon (an observable event), but not everything is extraordinary or surprising.
3. **Plead vs. Pleaded:** "Plead" should be pronounced as "pled" but is more properly used as "pleaded" in past-tense situations.
4. **Plenty vs. Plentiful:** "Plenty" as an adjective is best replaced by "plentiful," which conveys abundance more clearly.
5. **Poetess:** A dated and unnecessary term for a female poet, much like "authoress."

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6. **Poetry vs. Verse:** Not all structured verse qualifies as poetry. The subtlety of expression makes the difference, with "verse" being a meter-based composition.
7. **Point Blank:** Refers to where a projectile's trajectory directly crosses a sightline rather than implying proximity in firing.
8. **Poisonous vs. Venomous:** Deadly substances are poisonous, while creatures that inject toxins are venomous.
9. **Politics:** Although ending with an 's', "politics" is singular and refers to activities related to governance.
10. **Possess vs. Have:** "Possess" implies ownership with a deeper emphasis than simply "having" something.
11. **Practically vs. Virtually:** Misused in contexts where "virtually" (meaning almost entirely) is more appropriate.
12. **Predicate vs. Found:** To "predicate" means to affirm properties of something, whereas "founding" or "basing" is built on supporting evidence.
13. **Prejudice vs. Prepossession:** While both imply preconceived notions,

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"prejudice" often carries a negative connotation while "prepossession" can be neutral or favorable.

14. **Preparedness vs. Readiness:** "Preparedness" unnecessarily complicates discussions, especially in national defense contexts, where "readiness" suffices.

15. **Preside:** Used awkwardly when describing someone overseeing an activity, suggesting exaggerated formality.

16. **Pretend vs. Profess:** "Pretend" implies deceit, while "profess" is a genuine declaration.

17. **Preventative vs. Preventive:** The correct term is "preventive."

18. **Previous vs. Previously:** "Previously" is a more grammatically accurate adverb form.

19. **Prior to vs. Before:** "Before" is a simpler choice.

20. **Propose vs. Intend:** "Propose" involves offering a definite plan, while "intend" merely suggests planning.

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21. **Proposition vs. Proposal:** In slang, "proposition" is overly broad.

22. **Proportions vs. Dimensions:** "Proportions" refers to relational sizes, while "dimensions" indicate actual measurements.

23. **Proven vs. Proved:** Although "proven" is found in Scots English, in standard English, "proved" is more appropriate.

24. **Proverbial vs. Familiar:** The term "proverbial" describes something widely recognized from a proverb.

25. **Quit vs. Cease/Stop:** "Quit" is informal and less precise.

26. **Raise vs. Bring up/Grow/Breed:** "Raise" is a multi-purpose word often misapplied to processes like child-rearing (bring up) and agriculture (grow).

27. **Real vs. Really/Very:** Commonly used to intensify meaning, "real" should be replaced by "really" or "very".

28. **Realize vs. Conceive/Comprehend:** Use "realize" for making

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something actual, while "conceive" or "comprehend" refers to mental understanding.

29. **Recollect vs. Remember:** "Recollect" requires a conscious effort, whereas to "remember" does not.

30. **Redeem vs. Retrieve:** "Redeem" implies buyback or restoration, while "retrieve" is simply recovering.

31. **Refused:** Properly redirected, it's the object denied to someone, rather than the person refused.

32. **Regular vs. Natural/Customary:** "Regular" implies adherence to a rule, while "natural" or "customary" reflect organic or habitual behavior.

33. **Reliable vs. Trustworthy:** Although contested, "reliable" has a strong usage history.

34. **Remit vs. Send:** "Remit" involves returning or canceling, while "send" speaks of dispatching.

35. **Rendition vs. Interpretation:** Properly, "rendition" refers to surrender or return, whereas "interpretation" fits a performance description.

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36. **Reportorial**: A mocked derivative formed from the Americanized "reporter".

37. **Repudiate vs. Deny**: "Repudiate" carries a stronger disavowal.

38. **Reside vs. Live**: "Reside" is formal compared to the simple "live."

39. **Residence vs. Dwelling/House**: "Residence" implies grandeur, whereas "house" suffices in common speech.

40. **Respect for Way/Matter**: Avoids the lexical mangling of "respects"; use appropriately expanded sentences instead.

41. **Respective**: Use "several" when referring to different things among subjects.

42. **Responsible**: Personifying abstract concepts unnecessarily burdens them with accountability that belongs to people.

43. **Restive vs. Restless**: They are opposites—restive means stubbornly resistant to control.

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44. **Retire vs. Go to Bed:** The formal "retire" can unnecessarily elevate simple actions.
45. **Rev. vs. The Rev:** Reverends in formal address should use "The Rev." for fidelity.
46. **Reverence vs. Revere:** Demonstrates the need for precision between nouns and verbs.
47. **Ride vs. Drive:** Profits from English distinction—ride on horseback, drive in vehicles.
48. **Roomer vs. Lodger:** "Roomer" isn't standard where "lodger" is.
49. **Round vs. About:** An advocacy against regional colloquialisms creeping into wider use.
50. **Ruination vs. Ruin:** Questions the necessity of an awkwardly formed word.
51. **Run vs. Manage/Conduct:** An informal usage overshadowed by more precise terms.

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52. **Say vs. Voice:** A corrected area where "voice" conveys involvement more adequately.

53. **Scholar vs. Student/Pupil:** Asserts the term "scholar" for those recognized in their learning rather than in pursuit of it.

54. **Score vs. Win/Obtain:** To "score" is to record not achieve.

55. **Second-handed vs. Second-hand:** Refutes an incorrect term.

56. **Secure vs. Procure:** Clarifies that "secure" involves safeguarding.

57. **Seldom ever:** Highlights a nonsensical phrase.

58. **Self-confessed:** "Self" as redundant since one's personal confession is inherently personal.

59. **Sensation vs. Emotion:** Calls to better distinguish between physical and emotional stimuli.

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60. **Sense vs. Smell:** Avoids Americanisms that veer from traditional parlance.

61. **Set vs. Sit:** Sits misplaced within a grammatical mix-up regarding action and object receiving action.

62. **Settee vs. Settle:** Focuses on vernacular refinement in speaking.

63. **Settle vs. Pay:** Differentiates between resolution and financial transactions.

Thus, the compilation pushes for language purity by steering users back into clarity and correctness intricately reflective of both written and oral traditions recognized in finer English dialog.

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Chapter 7 Summary: 7

The text you provided appears to be a critical analysis or guide on the proper usage of English, focusing on various word choices, idiomatic expressions, and common errors. Each entry addresses a phrase or word debate, offering corrections or suggestions aiming for linguistic precision and clarity. Here's a condensed summary:

- 1. Word Misuse and Clarity:** The text critiques the misuse of words such as "shade" for "opportunity," emphasizing clear language by suggesting alternatives like "chance." It also touches on misused expressions and encourages linguistic accuracy.
- 2. Americanisms and Evolving Language:** Critiques include American idioms like "sideburns" from "Burnsides," suggesting these expressions are unnecessary deviations from standard usage. Terms like "smart" for "able," once popular, are declining, showing language evolution.
- 3. Semantic Precision:** Extensive guidance is given on the correct context for words like "substantiate" versus "prove," reinforcing the need for choosing words that precisely convey meaning. Issues like using "sick" to mean "ill" and "snap" for a period of time are questioned for their precision.
- 4. Colloquial Language:** The piece reviews colloquial shortfalls, such as

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using "so" for "true" and "soon" for "willingly," preferring more explicit alternatives. The analysis portrays colloquial expressions as potentially weakening the clarity of communication.

5. **Misused Phrases:** The guide addresses incorrect constructions like "those kind" instead of "that kind" or using "subsequent" unnecessarily. It advocates for traditional grammar rules, urging adherence to proper syntax for clarity and brevity.

6. **Modify Expressions for Clarity:** It discusses correcting idioms and expressions for better understanding, such as "he suicided" to "he took his own life," highlighting linguistic traditions in which some words don't fit grammatically.

7. **Words with Subtle Meanings:** Certain terms are better used with attention to their connotations and historical usage. For instance, "ugly" is explained as relevant to temperament, not physical description, aiming to uphold nuanced language.

8. **Avoid Redundancies and Slang:** The text warns against redundant words like "still continue" and slang, urging for phrases that deliver messages unambiguously and without unnecessary repetition.

9. **Literary Examples:** Some uses are tolerated in literary contexts, but

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advice is conservative for formal writing, preserving integrity in documentation or analysis.

10. Constructing Clean Sentences: Issues with sentence structuring, such as split infinitives and misplacement of words like "to," are highlighted, with advocates for properly aligned sentences to uphold grammar.

In its entirety, the text serves as a guide and reminder for using the English language with precision, advocating for clear and correct usage while cautioning against the degradation of language through slang, colloquialisms, and misuse.

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