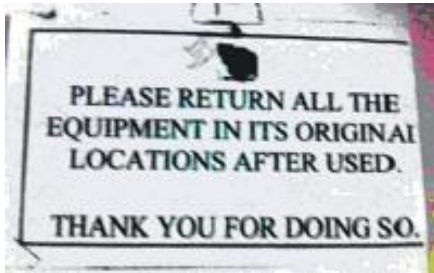


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The right preposition

THIS sign was spotted at a sports hall by one of our colleagues. We thought it was a good reminder of the importance of prepositions.

A preposition expresses a relation between two entities. This may be a relationship of place (at, in), direction (to, across), time (before, after), purpose (for), etc.

In the sign above, the request should be for the equipment to be returned 'to' the original locations since the relationship is one of direction. However, the request still sounds awkward because while the writer is correct in using the singular form 'its' after 'equipment' (a collective noun that is plural in meaning but singular in form), 'its' doesn't seem to agree with 'locations'. To avoid any confusion, we can simply say, 'Please return all equipment after use'.

It should be 'use' rather than 'used' because here the sentence is referring to the use of the equipment.

Don't be caught with your pants down!

AS PROMISED, we'll look at some differences between American and British use of certain words this week.

You may or may not be aware that 'gas' and 'elevator' are terms more commonly used by the Americans while the British prefer 'petrol' and 'lift' respectively. In these cases, it doesn't seem to matter much which word is used as long as the other party knows what is being referred to. But a friend of ours shared how she learnt the hard way that cultural variations can lead to very embarrassing situations!

As an undergraduate in England, she and some friends had spent the night at a classmate's place. At lecture the next day, she suddenly remembered that she had forgotten to pack her trousers into her bag. Without thinking, she exclaimed to her friend

who sat a couple of rows away in the lecture theatre, 'Hey, I left my pants at your place!' That immediately triggered sniggers and laughter all around. She was still in the dark as to what the joke was, until she found out that in the UK, the word 'pants' usually refers to one's underwear! While we use the word 'pants' almost synonymously with 'trousers' here in Singapore, and in the US as well, the British apparently don't.

End of discussion. Period or full-stop?

IT JUST seemed appropriate to end this week's column with this.

This was also a query from a reader who had heard people using the word 'period' in what he felt was a peculiar way, as in, 'No more discussion, you have to go tomorrow. Period.'

Most of us are familiar with the use of 'period' to refer to a particular length of time, or to a woman's monthly cycle. However, in American English, a 'period' is also a full stop, and the example cited by our reader above is an extension of this.

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