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ENGLISH AS IT IS BROKEN

Not sure what is good English and what is not? Write to The Sunday Times and we will get master teachers to answer your queries. This is a weekly series in support of the Speak Good English Movement.

Info Bar
 024 STAR SPORTS Tue 24 Oct 10:34 AM
 EPL: Aston Villa vs Fulham
 10:00AM - 12:00PM
 BACK INFO OK

THIS was sent in by an eagle-eyed reader, an Aston Villa fan maybe?
 Admittedly, this isn't the usual kind of error we feature in this column – the error in the name was most likely due to carelessness – but we thought it was worth highlighting as the omission or addition of even a single letter can sometimes lead to embarrassing results. It may not make much difference in some cases like “fulfil” and “fulfill”, but just think of the disaster if we dropped our “h” and said that the haze was a “treat” instead of “threat” to our health.

Confusing pairs

- ▶ Complement/compliment
- ▶ Stationery/stationary
- ▶ Principal/principle

THERE is often confusion over the use of these words. See if you can pick the right word for each of the sentences below.

- Some believe that traditional medicine can be a viable alternative to Western medicine, not just a useful _____.
- He paid her the highest _____ when he compared her beauty to that of Helen of Troy.
- The _____ vehicle in the middle of the expressway obstructed traffic and caused a massive jam.
- Candidates are required to bring their own _____ for the examination.
- As the _____ of the school, she has the final say in the matter.
- Margaret was elated to be made the _____ dancer of the Royal Ballet.

Answers:
 1. complement
 2. compliment
 3. stationary
 4. stationery
 5. principal
 6. principal

Were you tricked by the last one? “Principal” is often used to refer to the head of a school, but it can also be used to describe the leading performer in a play or concert. “Principle”, on the other hand, refers to a universal law or code of conduct.

More confusion

SOMETIMES, confusion arises from the use of different prefixes. Let's look at two words – "interested" and "moral". When do we use "uninterested" and when do we use "disinterested"? The same with "amoral" and "immoral".

Many people use "disinterested" interchangeably with "uninterested" to mean that they are not interested in something. In fact, "disinterested" should only be used to describe parties who are not involved in a particular situation and are thus more likely to act in an impartial way.

There is also a fine distinction between being "amoral" and being "immoral". While an immoral person actually commits acts that are morally wrong, an amoral person is one who does not care whether what he does is right or wrong.

HOW TO SEND IN YOUR QUERIES

Please use the keywords
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OUR LANGUAGE TEACHERS are (from left): Ms Connie Seng, Mrs Joy Lee, Ms Jeyalaxmy Ayadurai and Mrs Regina Davamani. All four are master teachers in English language – experts who help teachers develop good teaching practices and programmes.

► More questions answered in the online edition of English As It Is Broken at www.stomp.com.sg