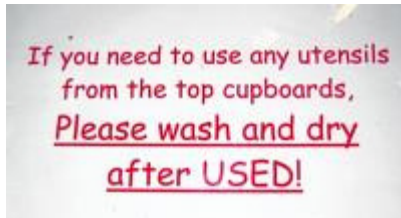


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Correct usage

REMEMBER the sign we featured previously in this column which touched on 'returning all equipment after use'? Well, if you do, the practice from that would make spotting the error in this sign a breeze - not to mention that it is screaming for attention with the underlining.

The message here is also awkwardly phrased.

Indeed, the conditional 'if' in the first clause of the sign suggests that something has to be done prior to the utensils being used. It would thus have made more sense to follow the first clause with 'please wash them before use'.

But the intended message of the sign is to remind users of the utensils to wash and dry them after use. For clarity and brevity, we would go with: 'Please wash and dry the utensils in the top cupboards after use.'

Just a point of clarification: 'Cupboard' refers to a piece of furniture with doors and sometimes shelves inside it. 'Shelf' and 'cupboard' cannot be used interchangeably.

Confusing pairs

REMEMBER our column last week on confusing pairs of words? Well, here are other pairs of words that are often used incorrectly:

- practice/practise
- prophecy/prophesy
- advice/advise

The first word of each pair is a noun while the second is a verb. So a person with strong lungs could have a three-hour practice session with the choir, but still practise singing at home.

Having said that, American English uses 'practice' both as a noun and a verb.

It may be useful to note that while the first pair of words is pronounced in the same way, a 'prophecy' (as in the inspired utterance of a prophet) is pronounced 'pro-fur-see' while the verb 'prophesy' is pronounced 'pro-fur-sigh'. Similarly, you give advice (ad-vaiz) to someone about a healthy diet but advise (ad-vaiz) a student not to misbehave in class.

Tell or ask?

IS THERE a difference between 'I'm going to tell him to do something' and 'I'm going to ask him to do something'? Definitely so in Standard English, although it is a distinction that Singapore English speakers apparently do not make.

In Standard English, the use of 'tell' in the above example would imply that the speaker has authority over the listener. The former is instructing the latter to do something, and the listener would have no option but to do as ordered. On the other hand, 'ask' in Standard English is akin to 'request'.

Hence, if you were to ask someone to do something, you are making a request of the person who has the option of turning you down. The difference thus lies in the power relationship suggested between the speaker and listener.

You might just want to bear in mind this difference before you next tell your boss to do something!

HOW TO SEND IN YOUR QUERIES

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