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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.**

A reader sent this sign which stumped him momentarily as he drove into the bay. The one who did the sign appears to have taken the cue from the way the 'Hump Ahead' sign is usually painted on the road.

While both signs are painted on the road, the 'Hump Ahead' sign has a space of 10m in between. A motorist on the road would first encounter the word 'Hump' and 10m later, 'Ahead'. He would read it as 'Hump Ahead'.

But in this instance, the words are so close together that a motorist is more likely to read the sign as 'Bay Up Pick' when it is supposed to be 'Pick Up Bay'.

One would have to relook the sign.

### Hanged or hung?

Complete the following sentences with the past tense of 'hang':

1. She wore a ragged fur coat that \_\_\_\_\_ to her calves.
2. They \_\_\_\_\_ banners at every entrance of the building.
3. He was drawn to her long golden hair that \_\_\_\_\_ loose about her shoulders.
4. The walls were \_\_\_\_\_ with huge modern paintings.
5. A haze of expensive perfume \_\_\_\_\_ around her.
6. A question mark \_\_\_\_\_ over many of their futures.
7. Ousted despot Saddam Hussein was \_\_\_\_\_ inside one of his former torture centres yesterday (The Straits Times).

### Answers:

1. hung
2. hung
3. hung
4. hung

5.hung

6.hung

7.hanged

The word 'hang' has two past tense forms - 'hung' and 'hanged'. However, the two words are not used interchangeably. If someone were killed, usually as a punishment, by having a rope tied around his/her neck and the support taken away from under the feet, 'hanged' would be the word to use. For all other meanings of 'hang', 'hung' would be the past tense form to use.

Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary adds that 'hanged' is most appropriate for official executions, but 'hung' is also used, though more appropriate for less formal hangings. An example to illustrate this is 'By morning, I'll be hung in effigy'.

As an aside, it is interesting to note that 'hung' is also used as an adjective. A hung parliament, jury or council consists of different groups of people who have different opinions, but none forms a majority, and so often, no clear decisions can be made.

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