

Publication :	Straits Times Interactive
Date :	28 January 2007
Headline:	English as it is broken

Jan 28, 2007

## 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.**

WITH fires often occurring as a result of negligence, the importance of fire safety cannot be overemphasised. A clear message is important.

In the second sentence of the first paragraph, the reference is to 'basic fire safety'. Hence, the definite article 'the' should not be used.

The other error lies in the phrase 'some of the basic fire safety', which is incomplete. Since what follows is a list of fire safety precautions, the sentence should read: 'Some basic fire safety precautions are...'

When we get rid of something, we 'dispose of' it. The preposition 'of' has been omitted from (1). 'Not disposing' in (1) and 'not to overload' in (2) are also incorrect.

As for the last piece of advice given, surely the writer's intention is to caution residents against leaving a lighted stove unattended.

We suggest rewriting the sign this way:

To prevent fire accidents, some basic fire-safety precautions to observe are:

1. Do not dispose of lighted items or cigarette butts in the refuse chute.
2. Do not overload the electrical system in your home.
3. Do not leave stoves and heated appliances unattended.

The recent refuse chute fire was probably caused by lighted cigarette butts thrown into the chute.

### **epidemic/endemic/pandemic**

LET'S have you complete these sentences:

1. The Aids \_\_\_ has highlighted many deficiencies in public health care throughout the world.
2. Polio was then \_\_\_ among children my age.
3. A flu \_\_\_ swept through that country last year.

### **Answers:**

1. pandemic

2. endemic

3. epidemic

Can 'pandemic' and 'epidemic' be used synonymously for (1) and (3)? Apparently not. While these words are usually used in the context of diseases, there are subtle differences in meaning.

An epidemic refers to an occurrence of a disease which affects a large number of people in one area and spreads quickly to other people.

A pandemic is a disease that affects a large number of people over a very large area or even the whole world.

So the difference between 'epidemic' and 'pandemic' appears to be a matter of scale.

Britannica explains the difference thus: 'A pandemic is an epidemic that occurs over a wide geographical area.'

If a disease or illness is endemic in a place, it is found frequently among people who live there.

---

#### **HOW TO SEND IN YOUR QUERIES**

Please use the keyword SMS/MMS: 75557

Email: 75557@stomp.com.sg