

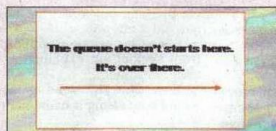
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ENGLISH AS IT IS BROKEN

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.



WITH snake-like queues forming at many shopping centres over the past few weeks, signs like the one above have been popping up as reminders to not jump the queue.

There is a grammatical error in the phrase "doesn't starts". It should read "doesn't start". The positive version of the sentence is: "The queue starts here."

To turn the sentence into the negative form, you put "does" after the subject, followed by "not" or "-n't", then by the base form of the main verb. For example: "The queue does not start here."

May I borrow it? Yes I'll lend it to you

OCCASIONALLY, we hear Singaporeans use the word "lend" in this way: "I lend your MP3 player, can?" What they really mean to say is: "Can I borrow your MP3 player?"

"Borrow" and "lend" are mistakenly used interchangeably by some people.

Broadly speaking, "borrowing" is like "taking". One borrows something from somebody. On the other hand, "lending" is like "giving". The verb can be used with two objects, as in: "Lend me your brush please."

A pair of: Singular or plural?

THERE was an error in last week's column and we are glad some of you eagle-eyed readers spotted it.

The sentence "Hence, each of the following pairs of sentences are equally correct" should have come with the verb form "is", rather than "are".

When you use "a pair of" with a noun in the plural form, the verb is singular if it is in the same clause. For instance: "A pair of new shoes awaits him at the door."

However, if the verb is in a following relative clause, it is usually plural: "He wore a pair of earphones, which were plugged into a tape-recorder."

Goodbye, we bid you a fond farewell

A FRIEND'S son recently said he was corrected for using the word "farewell" in a conversation with his classmates.

It was not because he had used it inaccurately, but probably because "farewell" is considered an archaic and more formal expression. "Goodbye" would have more currency.

Still, we don't think a child who has a flair for literary language should be admonished for using "farewell".

That aside, it seems appropriate to end our last instalment of the column with a short explanation of other uses of "farewell".

The word has its origins in Middle English. Besides an acknowledgement or expression of good will at parting, it refers to the act of departing, as in: "He disliked long farewells."

It also refers to a formal occasion honouring a person about to leave or retire, as in: "A farewell was organised for him."

"Farewell" can also be used as an adjective to describe events like "a farewell party" or a speech expressing leave-taking. So we hear of Ronald Reagan's "farewell address".

Well, that's all from us. While the English As It Is Broken column continues, we are taking a break. Thank you all for your support and encouraging feedback.

As Jonathan Livingston Seagull's author Richard Bach once said: "Don't be dismayed at goodbyes. A farewell is necessary before you can meet again."

HOW TO SEND IN YOUR QUERIES

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OUR LANGUAGE TEACHERS are (from left): Ms Connie Seng, Mrs Joy Lee, Ms Jeyalaxmy Ayaduray and Mrs Regina Davamoni. 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