

THE WORDS WE USE... AND MISUSE

Two of my favorite reference books are *The Writer's Art* (1985) and *Fine Print: Reflections on the Writing Art*, both written by James J. Kilpatrick (1920-2010). A long-time political commentator, Kilpatrick was an excellent writer who understood that countless Americans really cared about the English language and the manner in which it was used. In each of the aforementioned books, there is a chapter entitled "My Crotchets and Your Crotchets" in which, with humor, he notes common abuses, style preferences and misunderstandings in writing or in speech, and we have excerpted liberally from these sources over the years. Here are a few more Kilpatrick "crotchets" about proper word selection taken from *Fine Print* (with one noted exception) for your information and enjoyment.

IMPLY/INFER These distinctive and quite different verbs ought not to puzzle writers, but evidently they do. Every commentator on English usage deals at length with the matter. To *infer* is to deduce; to *imply* is to insinuate. In 99 cases out of 100, that is all there is to it

FLAUNT/FLOUT *Flaunt* and *flout* are wholly different words. To *flaunt* is to boast. To *flout* is to scorn. *Flaunt* is rooted in an Old Norse word meaning "to rush around." It means to brandish boldly or ostentatiously, to wave aloft, to display arrogantly. A rich woman flaunts her diamonds; the chairman of a congressional committee flaunts his authority. *Flout* is something else. It means to scorn, to trample underfoot, to treat with contemptuous disregard.

FARTHER/FURTHER Old guidelines still govern the usage. Use *farther* for distance that actually or metaphorically may be measured. Use *further* in matters of degree. Thus, "It is farther from Houston to Chicago than it is from Houston to Charleston." "The candidates will move farther along the campaign trail after Super Tuesday." But, "Upon further examination, the bill appears to be a turkey." "Before we further amend the bill, we should hear additional witnesses."

INGENUOUS/INGENIUS *Ingenuous* (pronounced in-JEN-YOO-us) is not to be confused with *ingenious*, the more common word, meaning "inventive or resourceful." Though both originate in the same Latin verb, *ingignere* (to produce), *ingenuous* comes directly from the Latin *ingenuus*, which meant "freeborn, noble or frank." In English it has come to mean, "candid, frank, straightforward, or naïve."

AMEND/EMEND Here is a small distinction. I suppose we should preserve it, though I'm not sure quite why. Except for politicians and proofreaders, nobody greatly cares. To *amend* is to change; to *emend* is to correct. Thus the House may *amend* a bill, adding something to the bill or taking something out. Before it becomes a Public Law, the bill is further *emended*, in order to catch wrong numbering or typographical errors.