

Greetings!

We're All Grown Up

Hello readers! Welcome to the latest edition of *KB CommEntary*, the voice of (newly incorporated!) KB COMM LLC. You'll find in subsequent editions more references to coffee and donuts, as we'll be putting all our new tax breaks to proper use. In this issue, we provide tips for correctly using *that*, *which*, *affect*, and *effect*.

What's Up at KB COMM?

At KB COMM, we provide mission-critical communication and learning services to clients in a variety of industries. Thanks to our established and new clients for keeping us fully engaged. Recent and ongoing projects include:

- Creating and revising job descriptions for the Careers website of a high-tech manufacturer
- Writing and editing numerous information products for a healthcare diagnostics manufacturer, including communications to employees from the CEO and executive leadership team, customer letters, press releases, and an employee newsletter
- Writing, formatting, and performing quality control reviews of large, complex chemical residue studies intended for regulatory submission on behalf of a federally funded, cooperative research organization
- Writing supplements and formatting modules of electronic submissions to FDA for a pharmaceutical manufacturing company
- Performing document assessment and mapping activities, rewriting SOPs and work instructions, creating templates, and developing writing guidelines to simplify and improve Quality System documentation for the IT department of a healthcare products company

KB COMM LLC is a certified Women's Business Enterprise. We are officially qualified to participate in corporations' woman- and minority-owned vendor programs.

Please keep us in mind for your communication or training projects.

Tips and Tales

That Which Confuses Us, or How the Effects of Proper Word Choice Affect Us

This time we tackle some word choices that plague everyone from elementary schoolchildren all the way up to silver-haired executives, who presumably spend more time worrying about business than placating the grammar gods. Often there are several grammatically correct ways to convey an idea, but in these cases only one word will do.

That vs. Which

Who cares? They're obviously interchangeable, right? Actually, no. The grizzled gurus of grammar have decreed that *that* and *which* serve specific grammatical roles. So let's humor them!

Incorrectly substituting which for that is one of the most common grammatical errors we encounter. There's something aristocratically British about it: "Oh, I say! The Bentley which is parked by the Queen's belongs to me!"

Perhaps we should get over ourselves, OK?

The technical truth is that *which* introduces non-restrictive or parenthetical clauses, and *that* comes before restrictive clauses. If you know what those are, great; you can move on. But if you're still scratching your head, here are some tips for telling them apart.

Important concept #1—a restrictive clause is essential to the primary meaning or message of the sentence. For example:

I dislike typing on keyboards *that aren't mechanical*.

In this example, the italicized section is the restrictive clause, correctly introduced by *that*. Note that if the italicized clause is left out, the entire meaning of the sentence changes—it now indicates that I dislike typing on all keyboards, not just on those that are not mechanical. Big difference, eh?

Always use *that* to introduce restrictive clauses. Always! Don't even think about using *which*. Also note that our example contains no commas—do not use commas to set off restrictive clauses.

Important concept #2—a non-restrictive clause is an idea that isn't essential or integral to the primary meaning of the sentence. It always begins with *which*. For example:

My keyboard, *which I keep slightly off-center relative to my monitor*, is not ergonomic.

In this example, the italicized section beginning with *which* is the non-restrictive clause—it has absolutely no bearing on the primary message that my keyboard is not ergonomic. Yes, it contains additional, fascinating information about my computer setup, but we can all agree that positioning one's keyboard to the left (or even the right) of the monitor has nothing to do with the keyboard's inherent ergonomic virtues or lack thereof.

Keen-eyed readers will note that commas set off the clause in our example. These commas are another clue that we're dealing with a non-restrictive clause. They visibly separate the secondary information from the primary message of the sentence. You should always precede *which* with a comma when constructing a non-restrictive clause. A second comma may or may not be necessary, depending on the sentence.

Affect vs. Effect

Using these two words correctly is frankly more compelling than for our previous pair, because A) you probably spent some late nights in grade school wondering which to use in that big essay on wheat production in South Dakota (relive the angst!), and B) the words are entirely different parts of speech, so misusing them will make you look much more hopeless.

Fortunately, it isn't that difficult.

First, *affect* is a verb.* Verbs convey action. *Affect* and action both start with a. Affect=action=verb. What a great mnemonic!

Because *affect* is a verb, it has to have a subject and an object (e.g., *the weather affected our journey*), and it can have several endings (e.g., *affected, affecting, affects*). Also because it's a verb, you can't precede *affect* with an article (e.g., *the, this, her*) or adjective (e.g., *big, fast, loud*); if you do, you have selected the wrong word, and you should use the other word—*effect*—instead.

Effect is a noun.* It can have only two forms—singular (i.e., *effect*) and plural (i.e., *effects*). Sorry, but we have no great mnemonic for *effect*. If you come up with one, please share!

Here are some examples of the correct use of each word:

The new data affected the trial's results.

Shocked by the effect, he backed away.

The hardware affects the overall performance of the system.

You may be affected by one or more side effects.

*In the interest of full disclosure, you can use *affect* as a noun and *effect* as a verb in very specific situations (e.g., legal documents) that are far beyond the realm of normal human communication. Now forget you ever heard us say this.

So that's that! When confronted with issues of word choice (especially those we've just discussed), we hope you choose wisely, because there's nothing worse than firing off a missive and having the recipient chuckle at your expense. So go forth, new initiates of the inner vernacular circle, and spread the modest wisdom of proper patois!

And please remember, *when it has to be right*, KB COMM is here to help.

Sincerely,

Kathy

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