

Greetings!

Sub-Zero Salutations!

Welcome to a frigid 2014! Winter has been a doozy here in southeastern PA, but all of us at KB COMM are beating the cold by snuggling up with style guides, document revisions, and marketing materials. We're looking forward to another great year of scientific and technical writing, and the fresh beginning has made us kind of pensive: How have things changed over all these years? With that question in mind, this edition of *KB CommEntary* is all about quirks of etymology.

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 busy. Recent and ongoing projects include:

- Formatting and revising periodically reviewed manufacturing standard operating procedures and work instructions for a pharmaceutical company
- Developing technical documentation for a provider of web-based transaction-processing products and services
- Writing and editing numerous information products for a healthcare diagnostics manufacturer, including communications to employees from the CEO and executive leadership team, customer presentations and letters, product marketing brochures and data sheets, and training materials
- Writing customer case studies for an IT consulting firm
- Reviewing and editing for consistency and accuracy response documents and associated modules for electronic submission to health authorities on behalf of a medical device manufacturing 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

The Good Word

Etymology is the study of words, with specific focuses on their histories and evolutions. Spellings, meanings, and appropriate forms of use are constantly changing, and, on top of that, new words are penned and old ones dropped from the common lexicon. Imagine trying to explain to a nineteenth-century English baron that "tweet" can refer to more than the sound a bird makes!

For etymologists great and small, the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) is where all the good stuff is. It's the largest printed dictionary in any language: The 1989 second edition was published in twenty volumes, and the whole thing can be accessed online with a subscription. The OED has all the word definitions one would expect from any dictionary, but it also contains insanely detailed etymological histories. We've combed the OED for some of our favorite business words:

Innovation dates back to the mid-1500s, from the Latin *innovare*. Though the word has always meant "introduction of change," it once referred to much more inflammatory novelties: Political uprisings were frequently called "innovations" until the nineteenth century, when the term was more commonly applied to scientific or technological advances.

Ballpark, as in "estimate" or "general area," is a much newer word. In non-sporting contexts, it was first used colloquially by the Air Force to refer to a segment of the ocean in which it was thought a satellite capsule could be counted on to land. More general use of the term quickly followed.

Framework is an older word than one might expect, dating back to at least the 1600s. Originally it was used to refer to physical frames, including scaffolds and skeletons, but even as early as the mid-1700s it had taken on a more abstract meaning that could be applied to ideas, groups, governments, and ways of thinking.

Content is a bit of a tricky one. Originally the word evolved from an adjective synonymous with "contained," but it soon came to refer to the physical things inside any kind of vessel—the "contents" of a train, a plot of land, an essay, or one's pockets. That definition still works, but we all know that "content" can also be used as jargon for "business stuff that's written down." Novelists write "books" or "prose," but web developers and marketing strategists produce "content." The OED doesn't yet have an entry for this aspect of the word, reflecting that the lords and ladies of Oxford U are constantly trying to catch up with a changing language.

Studying etymology reminds us that English is flexible, and that there is no absolute authority that dictates how words must be used. For all its grandness, the OED does not contain linguistic law, and it is certainly not the only dictionary available. Different situations call for different spellings, meanings, and ways of communicating.

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

Sincerely,

Kathy

Kathy Breuninger

KB COMM

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