

Greetings!

Forward March

Spring is upon us! Jackets are getting slimmer, Mardi Gras is a distant memory, and baseball pros are putting away spring training gear in preparation for the real thing. We're doing our usual technical-writing hustle here at KB COMM, but we had such a good time getting our etymological feet wet in January's newsletter that we're doing a reprise this month. So, for spring's debut, it's a look at etymological myths and fallacies.

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:

- 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
- Formatting and revising periodically reviewed manufacturing standard operating procedures and work instructions for a pharmaceutical company
- Writing manufacturing reports for a pharmaceutical company
- Developing technical documentation for a provider of web-based transaction-processing products and services
- 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

Where Did They Go? When Did They Come From?

As you remember from our last newsletter, etymology is the study of words, with specific focuses on their histories and evolutions. It's a complex and rewarding science, rich with those moments where you sit back for a second and think "that's so cool!" But it's easy for etymology to go astray, and for popular myth to get in the way of linguistic fact. This month, we'll look at some common (but false) word origins, and try to sort out where tricky terms really came from.

Crap, for a vulgar start, does *not* derive from the name of Thomas Crapper, a nineteenth-century plumber. It actually comes from the medieval Latin word *crappa*, meaning "chaff" or "fodder." Thomas Crapper, who helped to popularize the use of flush toilets, may have inadvertently connected the word to bathroom-specific imagery, but his name is not where the term was born.

Strangely, **duct tape** was once actually called *duck tape*, which is now a common misinterpretation of the name. The first "tapes" were more like gauze, made from fabric and coated on one side with adhesive. Early tape users called the material "duck" or "duck tape," as most of it was made of cotton duck. The shiny stuff we now call duct tape was first manufactured in the 1950s as a type of "duck tape" made specifically for wrapping air ducts.

Ye was never used to mean "the" by medieval English speakers (as in "Ye Olde Tavern"). The Middle English alphabet contained a letter called thorn (þ) that represented the "th" sound, and on some printing presses the character resembled a y, leading later readers to see "ye" where they should have seen "þe."

Then there are "backronyms," false etymologies in which it is argued that short words are actually abbreviations of longer phrases. As a general rule, most backronyms are incorrect, but we've picked out some of the more common ones:

Golf is not an acronym for "gentlemen only, ladies forbidden." The true origin of the word is unknown, but it was used as early as the 1400s by the Scottish, who did not begin using acronyms until centuries later.

Wharf is not an acronym for "warehouse at riverfront." The word actually derives from the Old English *hwearf* and was used as early as 1060, some 300 years before the appearance of the word "warehouse."

News is not an acronym for "north, east, west, south." Early spellings of the word varied significantly, from *nues* to *nevis*. *News* is simply the plural of *new*, used to refer to novel information.

Cop is a slang term, rendering its origins somewhat murky, but it probably does not stem from the phrase "constable on patrol." Rather, it is more likely a shortening of "copper," which was a common nineteenth-century nickname for police officers based on their carrying of copper nightsticks, or a derivation of the verb "to cop," a slang word meaning "capture" or "nab."

With all these false etymologies floating around, maybe we should assure you of a true one: KB COMM is a shortening of Kathy Breuninger Communications, as you've almost certainly guessed. But it's a bizarre world out there, and we just want to make sure.

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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