

Springing to Mind

Like the clock jumping forward, the crocuses shooting from the grass, or the mercury climbing in the thermostat, a new issue of *KB Commentary* is here to usher in the springtime.

For this issue, we were inspired by the phrase "spring has sprung," which got us thinking about tricky past tense usage pitfalls. Why *sprung* and not *sprang*? Read on to find out.

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 employee communications, customer presentations and letters, product marketing brochures and data sheets, and training materials
- Formatting and revising technical reports and manufacturing standard operating procedures, work instructions, forms, logbooks, and batch records for a pharmaceutical company
- Revising and maintaining GMP facility drawings
- Drafting, reviewing, and editing for consistency and accuracy response documents and associated modules for electronic submission to health authorities on behalf of pharmaceutical companies

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.

Past Tension

We all know that time is split between past, present, and future. Simple, right?

Well, in language, no. We use three main verb tenses that correspond to the past, present, and future uses of words. These are called the *simple past*, *simple present*, and *simple future*. "I travelled to Europe" is a phrase in *simple past* tense; it contains a subject (*I*), verb (*traveled*), and prepositional phrase (*to Europe*).

But there are additional forms of past, present, and future tense that further modify meaning. "I have travelled to Europe before," or "I had travelled to Europe, but..." are more complex phrases that require modification of the verb travel, which gets us into these additional tense forms. They can have funny names like *past continuous* and *future perfect*, but we can leave that alone for now.

Meanwhile: a *past participle* is the version of a verb that is used in conjunction with the verb *have* (/has/had). We use past participles to create the *present perfect* and *past perfect* tenses, or sometimes as adjectives.

For example, "sliced" is the past participle of the verb "slice":

"I have sliced the tomatoes" is a phrase using the past participle "sliced" with the word "have" to create the present perfect tense. The present perfect is used when an action occurred at an indefinite or unspecified time (like the example above), or when an action began in the past but continues into the present.

"I had sliced the envelope before I realized it wasn't addressed to me" is a phrase using the past participle "sliced" with the word "had" to create the past perfect tense. The past perfect is used when one action in the past (*sliced*) relates to the timing of another action in the past (*realized*).

"Sliced bread" is an example of a past participle being used as an adjective.

Most past participles are easy to spot because they add *-ed* (or *-d*) to the end of the root verb. But that's not the case for *irregular* verbs, which take on new spellings when they're modified.

Sprang vs. Sprung

So, are we correct when we say "spring has sprung?" And when should we use "sprang" instead?

Sprung is the past participle of the verb *spring*. So you should use it when creating the present perfect and past perfect tenses, or as an adjective when applicable.

Sprang is the simple past version of the verb *spring*. So you would use it when creating the simple past tense, but not otherwise.

However, *sprung* is often used (and is recognized by most dictionaries) as an alternative spelling of *sprang*, so you can get away with using either word in the simple past tense. (Bonus tidbit: in centuries past, "sprong" was an additional accepted spelling.)

For example...

A phrase in present perfect tense: "The tire has sprung a leak."

- Use of the past participle *sprung* is correct.
- Use of the simple past verb form *sprang* would be incorrect.

A phrase in the simple past tense: "The frog sprang out of the pond."

- Use of the simple past verb form *sprang* is correct.
- Because *sprung* is accepted as an alternative spelling of *sprang*, use of *sprung* would also be correct.

Hopefully this helped (a much easier past participle to remember) you better understand a complicated corner of the English language. Now, back to that springtime weather!

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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