



Dear Reader,

It's mid-autumn, and the scariest time of this year is at hand. No, not Hallowe'en – U.S. Election Day! Canada had its own federal election on October 14, confirming Stephen Harper as the minority Prime Minister the majority of people prefer. We'll soon learn which of the two candidates in the U.S. presidential election will emerge victorious.

In this issue, we look at what linguist Arnold Zwicky calls “zombie rules” – so-called grammar rules that strangle the life out of language. We also tackle the most grating election buzzwords.

Speaking of buzzwords, we're preparing our year-end issue of readers' pet peeves, so send in your favourites – or *least* favourites.



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### Three Zombie Rules That Should Be Laid to Rest

1. **Don't start a sentence with *and* or *but*.**  
This zombie rule used to be strongly enforced by pedantic English teachers, who insisted that *and* and *but* should be used only as conjunctions. Today it's quite acceptable to use this device in moderation, so long as *and* or *but* are followed by a complete sentence rather than a fragment. And it can be quite effective. But not too often.
2. **Don't use passive voice.**  
A generation of writers seems to have been scared off by the admonitions of Microsoft® *Word's* grammar checker. Using the passive voice is not technically wrong, it's just not as lively as the active voice. However, it can be useful if you want to play up the action while playing down the person(s) who did the acting, as in the oft-heard admission “Mistakes were made.”
3. **Don't end a sentence with a preposition.**  
Grammarians often argue that ending a sentence with a preposition is wrong on the basis that it's a *preposition*, not a *postposition*. But the practice is perfectly acceptable and usually results in a sentence that is less strained than the supposedly correct alternative. As Winston Churchill famously pointed out to an overzealous editor, “This is the sort of English up with which I will not put.”

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### Buzz Off : Election Edition

The 2008 U.S. presidential election has thrown up a few buzzwords we'd gladly elect to send into political exile. Any perceived political bias is purely circumstantial!

1. **Maverick.** Though one candidate has played up his image as a maverick who plays by his own rules but get results, it bears reminding that the word originally applied to unbranded cattle belonging to Texas rancher Sam Maverick – and the Maverick family have always been staunch Democrats.
2. **Joe [fill in the blank].** We'd be happy never to hear about *Joe* again, whether it's *Joe the Plumber* or *Joe Six-Pack*. Turns out that the “Joe” who started it all isn't even a licensed plumber. So, say it ain't Joe.
3. **My friends,...** Chances are, someone who repeatedly suggests everyone is a friend isn't your friend at all. He just wants something from you – your vote, for example.
4. **Eloquent.** Candidates are sometimes branded with insults that should really be regarded as compliments. When speaking about issues that affect much of the world, a little eloquence can hardly be a bad thing. Of course, you must also have the sincerity thing.
5. **Elitist.** When you need a brain tumour removed, you want a neurosurgeon on the job. When you need a space shuttle built, you call in an aerospace engineer. So, while being President may not be rocket surgery, is it wrong to want the best and brightest to serve in the highest office in the land? This isn't a job for Joe Six-Pack, after all.

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Which buzzword is your pet peeve? Send your suggestion to [writer@ecwriting.com](mailto:writer@ecwriting.com), and we'll do our best to send it packing in a future issue.

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### Parting Words

“There is no more sovereign eloquence than the truth in indignation.”

– Victor Hugo, French author (1802-1885)