

Who Would Have Thunk It?

With 50 online comments, dozens of emails and 52 Facebook recommendations, Donna Lynn Rhodes' March 3 story, "Why Doesn't Anyone Right Write" really got people talking. So please take your seats for her next fun lesson.

By DONNA LYNN RHODES (Open Post)

March 24, 2011 | P

Share



20 Comments



You brung me so many new questions, I don't know where to begin.

Yes I do. We'll start with "bring" and "brung."

The past tense of "bring" is brought. Don't ever use "brung."

Do I have to continually remind you not to use the word "brung"?

Oh, wait.

Is it "continually" remind you or "continuously" remind you?

In this case it would be "continually" remind you because I give it a rest once in a while and go on to something else. So here's how you can remember: "Continuously" indicates duration without interruption.

"If you leave the keys in the ignition and open the door, you will continuously hear beeping." As opposed to "My neighbor's new car continually makes weird noises."

There you go. They're easy to remember once you learn their meanings.

There, they're and their.

To this day, my BFF Vicki has no idea that there's any difference.

Fill in the blank using "there," "their" or "they're":

It's _____ fault that I don't know how to talk.

_____ always on my case about doing my homework.

I know _____ has to be a reason I didn't pay attention in class.

If you answered "their," "They're" and "there," you get a gold star. If not, go back and see if you can understand what you missed. If you still don't know the difference, see me after class and we'll go over it.

There. Do you feel better?

Which brings us to "well" and "good."

Well, well, let's see.

I don't want to throw you off my using the "A" word (adjective), but I have to. Stay with me here because I'm going to make this really easy. An adjective is a word that describes something. Some of my favorite adjectives are "fabulous," "delicious" and "hilarious." The word "good" is an adjective because it describes something: Diane Sawyer is a good reporter. This cake Lisa made is delicious. Chandler Bing is hilarious.

You wouldn't say, "The cake is well." You'd use the adjective "good." However, you would say, "I ate so much cake I'm not feeling well." Why? Because "well" can be an adverb telling how something is done, or an adjective meaning "in good health." In the sentence in question, "well" is a stand-in for "in good health." Did I do a good job? "She did a well job," doesn't even sound right.

If you're describing a feeling, then use the word "well." If you're describing an object or something tangible (cake, a job) then use "good."

Good job. Let's move on.

Are you surprised at how well you're doing? Notice I have "your" and "you're." Another one Vicki hasn't a clue about. "You're" means "you are" so if you can substitute the words "you are" in the sentence, then "you're" is correct. If you can't, it's not.

"Is your family surprised at how well you're (you are) doing?" I'm not. "Your" is a possessive form of the pronoun and "you're" is a contraction. They are not interchangeable – even though you're such a good friend.

Am I supposed to remember all this? Or am I suppose to remember all this?

"Supposed" and "supposed to" means required, permitted or expected.

So, "Am I supposed to remember all this," is correct. If you took out the word "supposed" and inserted "expected to," you would be correct.

"Suppose" on the other hand means presume.

I suppose I should tell you that I didn't know the difference between suppose and supposed either until a reader asked me to explain it.

That's the truth. I didn't. But would that make it a capital offense? Or a capitol offense?

It would be capital and the way to remember this is simple. Everything is pretty much capital with an "a" except for the building. The Capitol is in Washington, D.C., and has a rotunda in the middle. A rotunda is round and an "o" is round and a capitol has an "o." So unless you're George Stephanopoulos reporting from The Hill, you can be reasonably sure the word you want is "capital" with an "a."

Do you understand?

Me either. Or is it me neither?

This one is a little tricky.

"Either" refers to one or the other of two options. Think of "either or" – if you can insert "either or" in the sentence then "either" is the right choice. "Either" also links two statements together, as in "Either eat your vegetables or you're not getting dessert." On the other hand, "neither" means not one or the other. Think of "neither nor" – if you can insert "neither nor" in the sentence then it is the right word. In the sentence, "Neither of us was able to get him to eat his vegetables," the word "neither" is correct because you are referring to you and

someone else. You could have said, "Neither my husband nor I could get him to eat his vegetables."

As I said, that one's a little tricky and if I have it wrong or there's a better way to explain it, I can count on a Patch reader letting me know.

Which brings us to the next question a Patch reader asked: "When do you use 'bring' and when do you use 'take?'"

"Bring" is used when people bring things to where we are and in relation to a destination. "Don't forget to bring something for Friday's pot luck." Or, "Please bring me a glass of water when you come back."

Take on the other hand is used when we are at a starting point and moving forward. "I'm going to take my leftovers to the potluck." Or, "Please take that glass of water away before it spills all over the place."

It's easy.

"It's" stands for "it is." It is different than "its." "It" has no possessive, so no apostrophe. Just remember, "It's a bird! It's a plane!" And, "Has the jury reached its verdict?" If you can't replace "it's" with "it is," then use "its" counterpart!

I probably could have given you less examples. Or is it fewer examples?

We all know the sign at the grocery store check stand that says "15 Items or Less." Well, unless your name happens to be Less, that lane's not for you. The sign is incorrect. It should say, "Fewer than 16 items." Why? Because if you can count something, you use "fewer"; if you can't actually count the amount you're talking about, you should use "less."

"There are fewer stories in today's paper than there were yesterday." And, "There are fewer choices of yogurt at this shop than the one downtown." Fewer is correct because you can count the number of stories in the paper or the number of yogurt flavors offered.

However, "There is less news today than yesterday." Or, "There is less chocolate in this yogurt brand than in the other." "Less" is correct because you can't count more general concepts such as news or the perceived amount of chocolate.

Do you have over 15 items? Or do you have more than 15 items.

This one confused a lot of Patch readers, so here goes: Unless you are writing for publication, there really isn't a hard and fast rule. Publishing style guides suggest that you use "more than" before a number and "over" when you are discussing a more general amount. "I have been a writer more than 35 years." Or, "I am over the hill but I'm still writing."

Still not sure. Here's an easy one.

"If I look over the fence I can see a cool putting green with more than three holes."

As I said, this one is more of a style guide issue but it's the principle of the thing.

Wait. Principle or principal?

You probably remember your teacher saying, "The principal of the school is your pal." So principal with "pal" at the end means, yes, the head of a school. It can also refer to a primary or leading factor or cause in a situation: "The principal cause of tardiness is traffic."

Principle with an 'e' means the rules, the law or a way of doing something.

"The principal at our school prides himself on following the principles behind the Golden Rule."

So how did you do? Did you know more than you thought you knew?

"More than" or "more then?" It's "more than." Readers asked me to explain when to use "then" and when to use "than." Then by all means, let me say, "This one's easier than you thought!"

"Than" is used in a comparison. "Bill Gates is wealthier than I am." Or, "A Mac costs more than most PCs."

If you are not comparing something, then use "then," related to time or sequence of events. See, told you it was easy.

There's the bell so I think that's all for today. If you would like to earn extra credit, try using as many of the new words we learned today in your comments below.

Bring it on.