Summary of Grammar Hotline Calls
Prepared by Mamie Hixon, Hotline Director
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UWF Grammar Hotline Phone Number (850) 474-2129
Online Hotline: writelab@uwf.edu

Since its establishment by Writing Lab Director Mamie Webb Hixon in 1986 -- then the only one in Florida -- the UWF Grammar Hotline has responded to nearly ten thousand callers' inquiries about grammar, syntax, diction, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, pronunciation, documentation, and usage. The Hotline has attracted local, out-of-state, and even international attention with callers ranging as far away as Alaska and Japan. The hotline is currently listed with at least forty other college campus and community hotlines in the National Grammar Hotline Directory published by Tidewater Community College in Tidewater, Virginia. This issue of The Write Advice newsletter contains some of the most common and unusual questions from the UWF Grammar Hotline log.

UNUSUAL QUESTIONS

1. What's the symbol for medicine called? CADUCEUS
2. Is 12:00 P.M., midnight or noon? (From the Post Office) NOON
3. Is sprinkled a word? NO
4. Can a drink be described as delicious, or should only food be described as delicious? BOTH
5. Is this preposition correct at the end of this sentence: Where are you originally from? YES
6. Is this headline in the "Life" section of the News Journal correct: They Are You and I? YES
7. How do I write a novel? THERE'S NO RECIPE.
8. Isn't regardless a word? It's in the dictionary! NO, the Usage Note in the dictionary explains that regardless is nonstandard for regardless.
9. What's the publisher's symbol at the bottom of a page in a magazine called? COLOPHON
10. How does one file a legal brief in the circuit court of Atlanta, GA? REFERRED CALLER TO POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT
11. How do you address two doctors in a letter? DEAR DRs. SMITH AND WESSION
12. How do you address a husband/wife team if the wife holds the doctorate degree? MR. AND DR. SMITH-Remember, however, that academic titles are not relevant in some social settings.
13. What's the singular form for clothes and clothing? NONE
14. What is the spelling of visqueen, a type of plastic? VISQUINE

JEOPARDY QUESTIONS -- I'll give you a definition; you give me a word

1. Words spelled differently but sound alike HOMOPHONES
2. Created words NEOLOGISMS/NONCE WORDS (e.g., racialism)
3. Devices for remembering MNEMONIC (such as "HOMES" for the Great Lakes)
4. Word meaning it doesn't matter or it makes no difference INCONSEQUENTIAL
5. The origin and roots of words ETYMOLOGY
6. A brief overview of something SYNOPSIS or SUMMARY

UNUSUAL REQUESTS

1. Analyze this handwriting.
2. Recommend a good grammar handbook.
3. Listen to an eight-page paper.
STUMP THE LABBIES/HOTLINE OPERATORS, OR ARE YOU QUALIFIED TO ANSWER HOTLINE QUESTIONS

1. What's cherries in a bowl of cherries? What about bowl? Both are nouns. Cherries is the object of the preposition of. 
2. Is had transitive or intransitive? TRANSLATIVE
3. What's a pronominal adjective? A WORD LIKE HER
4. What's a copulative verb? SAME AS A LINKING VERB
5. What's the difference between ironic and ironic? NONE
6. What's the other word that ends in -gry? Hungry and angry are two of them. SYNDICATED COLUMNIST RICHARD LEDERER SAYS THE OTHER -GRY WORDS ARE OBSOLETE.
7. What's the third word that ends in -shion? Cushion and fashion are the other two.
8. Is there a plural for correspondence? YES
9. What are the perfect tenses of understood? NONE
10. Can the word clothes ever be singular? ( Caller was looking for the word clothing.)
11. Definitions of devout, pious, anecdot and devoted.
12. What determines the case of a pronoun—its position in the sentence or within the dependent clause? POSITION IN THE CLAUSE
13. One such character is Macbeth. Is this a sentence? YES
14. Can a verbal noun subject have a verbal predicate adjective? YES (Seeing is believing.)
15. How does a secretary indicate blind copy? TYPE BLIND COPY ON COPY TO BE SENT
16. Where does one place the certified letter number on a business letter? BOTTOM OF LETTER
17. Do you always place a comma before and in a compound sentence? YES
18. Which is correct: I feel bad or I feel badly? ( Caller had made a bet.) BAD
19. Is there any punctuation for the heading, inside address, and salutation in the open form for business letters? NO
20. My professor said that we should never start a sentence with however. Is he correct? NO
21. What's the meaning of member-at-large? NONDESIGNATED MEMBER
22. Is enriching a word? YES
23. What's the difference between who and whoever? The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English states that who means "that one" and whoever means "anybody." 
24. What's the difference between continually and continuously?
25. If bigger is the comparative and biggest is the superlative, what's big? POSITIVE
26. Does one leave a towel lying or laying around? LYING

THE STRANGEST QUESTIONS

1. A senior citizen wanted to know what a nerd is.
2. A lawyer's secretary asked how to spell a word her boss had dictated to her: ararity. When I asked her to read the sentence, she said "It's a rarity to find...."
3. Spell chores.

THE 'EVERYTHING ELSE BUT GRAMMAR' HOTLINE

1. FRENCH HOTLINE: What does pour vous mean? FOR YOU
2. BIOLOGY HOTLINE: What's the difference between an amphibian and a reptile?
3. SPANISH HOTLINE: Pronunciation of the Spanish word puede

4. BABY NAMING HOTLINE: A mother called from the hospital and wanted us to pronounce her new born daughter's name D'Yani Ahshyah

WE LEARN STUFF TOO

1. Graffiti is the plural form of graffito.
2. Debres is the plural of debris.
3. Spelling of shishkebab
4. Spelling of numchucks -- nunchaku
5. accoutrement not accouterment - DEPENDS

SPELLING

camaraderie
abbreviation of Florida FL
acerbic or aseptic? acerbic
terrestrial
resell or resell the product resell
Kissimmee
hors d'oeuvres
Houdini
tennis plural of appendix appendices
plural of census censuses
two-by-four
Alzheimer's disease
Jacuzzi
Is there another spelling for chauffeur besides shofar? A word for troublesomeornery
innuendo
Capistrano
avry
Styrofoam
sincere
itinerary
leniency
cruelty
Phoenix
spelling of South American country Colombia
heart murmur
pharmacological
discretionary
rallies (From the Texas House of Representatives in Austin)
500 people or 500 persons people - large group; persons - specific, relatively small group
The Smiths OR The Smith's THE SMITHS
Caller needed spelling of what he spelled quaquulate coagulate
Caller was naming a van the Mariah and needed the spelling Vita or vitae at the top of a resume? VITA

WE'RE NEEDED

On a resume, do I put rung up or rang up transactions? RANG UP

DEFINITION

e pluribus unum one of many
What does copicedic mean? Copacetic or copsesic is slang for "dandy, fine, very interesting."
PRONUNCIATION

pe-kon or pe-koon

UNNECESSARY NONCE WORDS

recruitment
administered
compels

HELP!!! WE HAD TO CALL ALTERNATIVE SOURCES

nunchaku a martial arts studio whose employee found spelling in a catalog
abbreviation of Florida State Board of Education School Board
Jucuzzi phone book
colophon Playboy, Inc., Communication Arts Department, News Journal

MOST COMMON QUESTIONS

1. a or an university a or an historical occasion a or an harmonious group a or an RN an
2. Is it correct to use myself with between? NO
3. Salutation for two men Messrs.
4. Capitalization: Olympic Gold Medal, Olympic gold medalist/torch
5. Are periods and commas placed inside or outside the closing quotation marks? ALWAYS INSIDE
6. Is dues singular or plural? PLURAL
7. Are seasons capitalized? NO
8. The criteria is or are? ARE
9. On behalf of John and me or myself? ME
10. When to use who, which, and that WHO FOR PEOPLE, WHICH FOR PLACES AND THINGS, THAT FOR ALL OF THE ABOVE
11. I could or couldn’t care less? COULDN’T
12. Is data singular or plural? PLURAL
13. Is media singular or plural? PLURAL
14. Is a person hanged or hung? hanged
15. Can you ever use alright? NO, use all right
16. Is time frame one or two words? TWO timesheet? ONE
17. Is an additional period needed at the end of a sentence that ends with a standard abbreviation like Washington D.C.? NO
18. Which is correct -- It is I or It is me? I
19. Are Spanish mackerel and king mackerel capitalized? NO
20. Are Jr. and III separated from a person’s name with a comma? Jr. usually is but may be written without the comma; Roman numeral designations are never separated from names with commas (Queen Elizabeth I, for example)
21. What’s the best way to avoid using the masculine pronoun to refer to a word of dual gender? Use his or her or change the antecedent to a plural noun.

OFFICE-TYPE QUESTIONS

1. Are personnel and staff singular or plural? DEPENDS
2. Is State of Florida capitalized? SOMETIMES
3. Is a one-sentence paragraph in a business letter appropriate? YES
4. Do you add an s to Martinez’ name since it ends in z? NO
5. Is the apostrophe before or after the s in Citizens Assistance Programs? AFTER
6. Standard abbreviation for Florida State Board of Education NONE - DOE only
7. For additional information, please contact Mr. Jones and me or myself? ME
8. FLORIDA LOTTERY DEPARTMENT: Should figures or words be used with a one-dollar ticket? WORDS
9. Is City of Five Flags capitalized? What about City of Brotherly Love? YES

POSSESSIVES

one year’s pay
one week’s vacation
the boss’s desk
Parents’ Night
the Jonases
bachelor’s and master’s degrees
Speakers’ Bureau
21 years’ experience
Morris Marx’s inauguration
Season’s Greetings
Punctuation of the James Dean look or the Kenny Rogers look

Callers was writing a recipe and wanted to put All Grandmas Are Made of Gold. Caller wanted to know if grandmas needed an apostrophe.

CALLERS QUESTIONING THE ‘EXPERTS’

Is the verb in this sentence from a Time magazine cover correct? This is one of the 18 million Americans who have a drinking problem.

HIXON’S PERSONAL FAVORITES FROM JUST CONCERNED CITIZENS

Q: Could you tell me the meaning of “[so-and-so] called me out of my name”?  

Grammar Music Lover

A: Calling someone out of his or her name refers to addressing that person by some other name, usually an epithet or some other offensive term.

Here’s additional information from the book Black Talk - Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner by Geneva Smitherman, published in 2000:
CALL SOMEBODY OUTA THEY NAME: To insult someone; to talk about a person in a negative way, especially to call someone a name or to hurl an accusation at that person. "She come talkin' bout I stole her ring. I don't appreciate nobody callin' me outa my name" (i.e. callin' her a thief).

Q: I'm teaching a Writing & Grammar course at Okaloosa-Walton College, and a question has come up that has stumped my class, me, and several other English instructors here.

Here's the sentence: In the middle of the fourth period, a quarter of the fans walked out.

Is "walked out" a phrasal verb or just a verb followed by an adverb?

Our department is divided on this question, and list fights are breaking out. What do you think?

A: "Walked out" has the form of a phrasal verb (verb plus preposition) and can be substituted for a single verb ("left"), so I'd choose phrasal verb, though I think an argument could be made for verb plus adverb, with "out" being the adverb, of course. I'd ask the question, "Does 'out' have the same meaning (it's in the same grammatical position, but does it have the same meaning) as say an adverbial prepositional phrase such as 'to the store' or another single adverb such as 'in' or an adverbial noun such as 'home'?

Q: In the phrase "all day, every day," is "every day" one or two words?

Piccadilly Cashier

A: Two words. According to several dictionaries (Webster's Universal College, American Heritage College, and Oxford Illustrated), "everyday" is one word when used as an adjective. A reasonable synonym to replace this adjective form would be "commonplace." In the case of this saying, however, "every day" is being used as an adverb to describe the manner in which a thing is done.

Q: Is the saying "learn by hard" or "learn by heart," and what are the origins of this saying?

Piccadilly Server

A: Learn by heart. When a student "learns by rote," he or she may be able to recite the words but might not necessarily understand what the words mean. A student who learns something by heart understands the concept of the lesson. The lesson is internalized and becomes part of the person's knowledge. Mr. Hendrickson applies this explanation to the phrase; "The ancient Greeks believed that the heart, the most noticeable internal organ, was the seat of intelligence and memory as well as emotion. This belief was passed down through the ages and became the basis for the English expression 'learn by heart,' which is used by Chaucer (1374) and must have been proverbial long before that. 'To record' reminds us again of this ancient belief in the heart as the seat of the mind. When writing wasn't a simple act, things had to be memorized; thus we have the word 'record,' formed from the Latin 're,' 'again,' and 'cor,' 'heart,' which means exactly the same as 'learn by heart.'" From Encyclopedia of Word and Phrase Origins by Robert Hendrickson (Facts on File, New York, 1997).


Q: I saw this on the menu at Steak 'n Ale: the best steak you will have ever had. Is this correct?

Post Office Clerk

A: YES. This ad slogan is written in future perfect tense – the auxiliary will have or shall have with the past participle of a verb; this tense is used to describe an action that will have been completed at a specified future time.

EXAMPLES:

By the end of the semester, five hundred students will have used the Writing Lab.

After I graduate, I shall have written over 50,000 words.