**Diction: The Terrible Three and the Terrible Twenty-seven**

**The Terrible Three**

1. **The *-wise*suffix-** Someday, the barbarian who started the fashion of adding *-wise* to the end of words will be identified, run to earth, and suitably punished, preferably by being forced to spend the rest of his life reading the compositions written by students who have followed in his footsteps. That would probably be best, justice-wise. . . .
   * The use of *-wise* as a suffix has become so prevalent that no word in the language seems to be safe from it. In the course of an average day, you are likely to hear that the cafeteria is serving some great desserts, pie-wise, that a girl is attractive clothes-wise, hair-wise, or face-wise, or that the weekend ahead looks pretty busy, study-wise.
   * It’s enough to drive you crazy, style-wise.
   * Fortunately, the constant use of -wise is becoming a kind of national joke, generally recognized as an expression reserved for the hopelessly square. In a few years, it may be laughed out of existence. But it’s a good idea to avoid it like poison, meantime-wise.
2. **The “type” and “type of” habit-** Throw these words out along with *-wise*. It is particularly barbarous to use *type* as an adjective: I have the type father who loses his temper. Even with an “of” added (I have the type of father who . . .), the expression is an assault to the ear of the discriminating reader.

Its use is bad because its meaning is nearly always subtly askew (usually the reader means "sort” or “kind” rather than “type”), but it is objectionable primarily because it has been overused to the point of nausea. Likewise, it has become the hallmark of the amateur, the inarticulate, the square. You can always change it for the better by omitting it altogether. If you can’t quite omit some needed shade of qualification that you think it adds, try one of the changes suggested below:

* + NOT: I have the type father who loses his temper.
  + BUT: I have a father who loses his temper.
  + OR: My father has a quick temper.
  + NOT: She wasn’t that type of girl.
  + BUT: She wasn’t that kind of girl.
  + NOT: She wore a Spanish-type costume.
  + BUT: She wore a Spanish costume.
  + OR: Her costume had a Spanish look.
  + NOT: He was a Charles Chaplin-type actor.
  + BUT: His acting was Chaplinesque.
  + OR: Like Charles Chaplin, he . . .
  + NOT: Guerilla-type warfare
  + BUT: Guerilla warfare

1. **“Manner” and “nature” phrases:** *Manner* and *nature*are the pet words of the pompous, the long-winded, and the empty-headed. They are nearly always redundant. “In a polite manner” means “politely.” “Comprehensive in nature” or “of a comprehensive nature” means “comprehensively.”

To use *manner* and *nature*in phrases like those above is to indicate one of two things: you are deliberately padding a sentence, or you have deluded yourself into thinking such phrases sound dignified. In either case, the effect is annoying. All redundancies are annoying, manner and nature especially so because they seem to have a special aura of priggishness all their own. Put the words in dialogue, and you can hear the priggishness:

HE: Do you like jazz?  
SHE: I find it very exciting in nature.

And that attitude should be enough to nip a beautiful friendship in the bud. (Of course, it could be worse. She might have said, “I think that type playing is very exciting in nature, music-wise.” But that’s really too depressing to think about.) Drop these stilted, unnecessary manner and nature phrases altogether. In fact, it might be a good idea to drop these words altogether. Pretend they don’t exist. You can get along without them perfectly well; and if they aren’t in your vocabulary, you will never be tempted to use them in a phrase.

Drop all of the Terrible Three. Put them behind you forever. Then you can devote your energies to locating and cleaning out the remaining twenty-seven of the thirty abominations. They are listed below. Read them over carefully. Sensitize yourself to them. Become aware. That awareness is half the battle.

**The Troublesome Twenty-Seven**

1. **As far as-** *As far as*must be followed by*is concerned*, or it is meaningless.
   * As far as studying is concerned, I’ve worked hard.
   * NOT: As far as studying, I’ve worked hard.
2. **Center around-** Not possible. You can only center on.
3. **Different**- Things are different from each other. Don’t write “different than.” It makes no sense, just as it would make no sense to write “I want my books kept separate than the others.” Different FROM, FROM, FROM...
4. **Disinterested/uninterested-** The two words mean two different things, and the distinction is valuable. Preserve it. To be disinterested is to be impartial. If you are disinterested, you are interested, but your emotions are not involved. If you take no interest, you are uninterested.
5. **Due to**- A graceless phrase, even when used correctly, and it is almost never used correctly. Avoid it altogether.
6. **Enthuse-** A word reserved strictly for gushy girls thirteen and under. Don’t use it.
7. **Fabulous-** A word ruined by overuse. It means “imaginary, mythical, legendary.” You probably hear daily of fabulous cars, fabulous neckties, fabulous meatballs. Unless you want to sound like a movie ad-writer or a professional teenager, drop the word from your vocabulary.
8. **Feel bad-** If you are sick or unhappy, you feel bad, not badly. Feeling badly indicates a malfunction in your nerves of sensation.
9. **Fewer/less-** *Fewer* refers to numbers, *less*to amounts. Don’t use *less* in reference to anything you can count: fewer students, less time; fewer problems, less trouble.
10. **Imply/infer**- To imply means to suggest or indicate: “Are you implying that he can’t be trusted?” (Are you suggesting that . . . ?) To infer means to draw a conclusion from: “I didn’t say that; you inferred it.” (That’s what you drew from my statement.)
11. **Indefinite pronouns (each, everyone, everybody, either, neither, nobody)-**All these pronouns are singular and must be treated consistently as singular. You wouldn’t write “Everybody is taking their own lunch” or “Everybody are taking their own lunch.” Their is plural. The sentence should be read as follows: Everybody is taking his own lunch.
12. **Irregardless-** *Irregardless* is never to be used, regardless of how many times you hear it said by people who should know better. The word is *regardless*. The*ir-* is redundant; it means the same thing as the *-less*on the end of the word. Saying*irregardless* is rather like saying*irreckless* or *irruthless*: obviously *irridiculousless.*
13. **Like/as-** Don’t use like when you mean *as*or *as if.* “Smudgies taste good like a cigarette should” is part of the new television illiteracy. You can avoid wrong usage if you substitute *as though, as, as if,* or*in the way* wherever one of these words will make sense in place of*like.*
    * She acts like a queen.
    * (No substitute is possible here, so “like” is used correctly.)
    * She acts like she thinks she’s a queen.
    * (A substitute is possible here, so use it: She acts as though she thinks she is a queen.)
    * She acts like a queen would act.
    * (Use another substitute: She acts in the way a queen would act.)

Never use*like* if one of the substitute phrases will work. Test every *like* in this way, and you can’t be trapped into the wrong usage.

1. **Mixed Metaphor-** Don’t mix one metaphor with another. The result may be unintentionally comic.

He climbed the ladder of success across a sea of troubles and left his footprint on the face of time.

You’ve buttered your bread; now lie in it.

1. **Off-** Always “off,” never “off of”
2. **Perfect/unique**- If a thing is perfect, it’s perfect. If it’s unique, it’s unique. It can’t be more perfect (the Founding Fathers notwithstanding) or more unique. Perfection and uniqueness are absolutes, therefore beyond comparison. Never use *more* or *most* with them.
3. **Plus-** Do not use in place of *and.* Don’t say “He was hungry, plus he was penniless.” Save *plus* for problems in addition.
4. **Redundancies-** Cut out any word that repeats a meaning or that pads without adding anything. Each of the italicized phrases below is redundant:
   * a distance of ten yards
   * future prospects
   * advanced forward
   * in addition, he also
   * an actual fact
   * inside of
   * another one
   * outside of
   * at the present time
   * past history
   * equally as good as
   * retreat back
   * false illusion
   * small in size
   * few in number
   * usual custom
   * free gift
   * young teenager

These are only a few of the redundancies that clutter English usage. Look for others in your own writing, and avoid them.

1. **Regarding-** The word is often misused. “Regarding meals, the cafeteria will be open at noon.” (The cafeteria seems to be regarding the meals.) The easiest way to avoid this error is to avoid the word “regarding” altogether. Even correctly used, it tends to sound like committee language.
2. **Similar to-** If you mean “like,” say “like.” Why beat around the bush?
3. **Slang**- Avoid it like the plague. Some students use it in the mistaken notion that it will make their writing sound informal. It won’t. It will merely make it sound juvenile, or “cute.” Nothing is more repulsive in writing than cuteness.
4. **So-** Don’t use it as a substitute for*very*or *terribly* or any other intensifier, as in “Exercise is so exhausting.” You can get by with this usage in speech, but not in writing. A reader expects a *so* in this position to be followed by*that*: “Exercise is so exhausting that . . .”
5. **Split Infinitive-** Don’t put an adverb between the two parts of an infinitive: “to really think,” to positively believe,” “to suddenly stop.” Put the adverb before or after the infinitive. Better yet, leave it out altogether or recast the sentence.
6. **The Reason Is-** Never say “the reason is because . . .” And don’t be fooled if other words come in between: “The reason for all these delays is because . . .” Instead, write:
   * The reason is that . . .
   * The reason for all these delays is that . . .
   * Or leave out the word “reason” and let “because” do the work:
     + This happened. That happened. Because of these delays . . .
7. **Trite Expressions-** Avoid the stale, ready-made expressions that have become over-familiar and tiresome through constant use by second-rate speakers and third-rate writers. The following list is far from exhaustive, but it’s representative:
   * acid test
   * green with envy
   * as luck would have it
   * last but not least
   * better late than never
   * Mother Nature
   * bitter end
   * needless to say
   * busy as a bee
   * rich and varied experience
   * depths of despair
   * ripe old age
   * easier said than done
   * sadder but wiser
   * festive occasion
   * slow but sure
   * few and far between
   * untold agony
   * finer things in life words cannot express
8. **Try-** Don’t use*try*and *when* you mean *try to*. “I will try and be there” means two things--that you’re going to try and you’re going to be there. You probably mean “I will try to be there.”
9. **While-** One of the most misused words in the student vocabulary. It means “time” or “at the time.” Never use it as a substitute for *and, but,* or *although*.
   * Tolstoy was a Russian writer, while Hemingway was an American writer. (Not possible. Tolstoy died when Hemingway was twelve years old. The writer means “Tolstoy was a Russian writer, and Hemingway was an American writer.”)

Use *while* only if you can pull it out and substitute *at the time* in its place. Then you can’t go wrong.