

The Red Letter



I Give You My Words

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Let's Hear It For Looney Language

English is crazy. For the truth of that, look no further than the facts that eggplant has no egg, hamburger is devoid of ham, and pineapple contains neither apple nor pine.

Since people invented English, it reflects the creativity of the human race, which, of course, is not a race at all. Even so, it often seems to be a sprint toward lunacy. How else could a slim chance and a fat chance be the same, while a wise man and a wise guy are opposites?

Writers write but fingers don't fing, grocers don't groce and hammers don't ham. Retired teachers taught but preachers didn't praught. The plural of tooth is teeth, but beeth is not the plural of booth. One goose, two geese, but definitely not one moose, two meese. Your house can burn up as it burns down, you fill in a form by filling it out, and an alarm goes off by going on. One can make amends but cannot one amend make.

If you have a bunch of odds and ends and get rid of all but one, is it an odd or an end? If a vegetarian eats vegetables, what does a humanitarian eat? Why do our noses run while our feet smell? And how can stars be visible when they're out while lights that are out are invisible? Why is something that works so slowly called quicksand? And why is a boxing ring square?

English muffins weren't invented in England nor French fries in France. A guinea pig is neither from Guinea nor is it a pig. While sweetmeats are candies, sweetbreads, which aren't sweet at all, are meat. And that, as they say, is getting to the meat of it. Crazy.

Adapted from "So You Think English Is Easy?" currently circulating on the Internet and posted on various Websites, author unknown. For more Looney Language, click on "Weekly Communication Tip" on the FredComm website.

Proposals: Clarity Rules

The British Telecom Group recently asked 120 senior purchasing professionals to rank proposal characteristics based on what is most important to them in making their purchase decisions. The top responses were:

- Clarity, brevity – 55 percent
- Proof of innovation and differentiation – 30 percent
- Low price – 10 percent
- Detailed and highly technical information – 5 percent

Set yourself apart, explain clearly and with concrete examples how your service will be better and more valuable, and do it briefly.

Source: Dr. Tom Sant, Hyde Park Partners, San Luis Obispo, Calif.



The root function of language is to control the universe by describing it.

—James A. Baldwin

The Good Word

Consider This a Challenge

No one ever gives something "passive consideration."

Think about it. The very act of considering something is an active endeavor, so "active consideration" is redundant.

The phrase "...is giving active consideration to" is just a bigheaded way of saying "...is thinking about" or "is considering."

If you find yourself writing something like, "The council is actively considering a ½-cent sales tax hike," or saying,

"I'm actively considering a career change," STOP!

One either considers something or doesn't. Use "actively considering," and you won't be considered a good writer, and you just might need that change of career, after all.