

Urban Grammar

:: Quick Fixes ::



What You
Should
Say
and Why



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Introduction

Some years ago, I stood in line at a *Wendy's* counter preparing to order my favorite meal: a plain baked potato, a small chili and a junior bacon cheeseburger. (Yes, my stomach and arteries were much younger then.) Instead of readily taking my order after the last customer, the cashier turned to the shift manager in back of her and said, "When is you gone send somebody up herre foe-I-kin take my break?"

I was absolutely stunned. As an English instructor, I was amazed and appalled, because I had never heard the English language twisted in quite this manner. My English teacher sensibilities took a few seconds to fully process what the young lady had just said. When I replayed the brief exchange in my mind, she had indeed said, **"When is you gone send somebody up herre foe-I-kin take my break?"**

What she should have said was, **"When will you send somebody up here so that I can take my break?"** For me, this moment marked the birth of **urban grammar**: the pervasive non-standard usage of the English language - popularized and satirized in the media - versus the knowledge and good practice of standard English grammar rules.

After recounting this story several times over the years as an example of the challenges and failures of public school education regarding Black and minority students, I decided to note the amusingly bad English people are actually speaking (and blogging) to provide much needed corrections instead of resorting to elitist '*grammar shaming*'.

Oh, yes. People now use writing and grammar skills to demean or dismiss others with conflicting opinions by portraying them as uneducated or unworthy of earnest consideration based on their use or abuse of standard English, especially on social media. However, those perpetrating the shaming know little more about correct grammar usage than those they attempt to chastise.

The bottom line is that good grammar still matters in the workplace, school, social media or any public forum in which you want to be

properly acknowledged or assisted. The way you speak and write determine how well people respond to you. For example, you cannot end a job interview with "When *isammo* hear back about this job?" and expect to get a call back. But unfortunately, people speak this way all the time, because they honestly have not been taught any other way. All English teachers are not created equal, and people have a tendency to adapt to their surroundings, so if parents and everyone in the neighborhood speak this way...guess what? Granted, all kinds of factors contribute to the demise of proper grammar in our society and educational systems, but arguing about those issues is not the purpose of this book.

The purpose of this book is two-fold: **1.** to highlight commonly misused, misinterpreted, mispronounced or misspelled words and phrases that pervade popular culture and the media. **2.** to provide reliable corrections and explanations according to standard English grammar rules and customs.

Essentially, many people truly do not know the correct way to express themselves properly in speech or in writing for various reasons. In our politically correct society, few people are bold enough to correct non-standard English for fear of being perceived as racist or elitist. So, I wrote this book to allow for self-correction without shame or criticism.

Good communication skills are integral to success in the workplace, the classroom and everyday life. Despite all the catchy song lyrics that destroy the '*King's English*' or the prevalence of million dollar athletes, rappers and singers who cannot string two clear sentences together in their interviews, good grammar still matters in the '**real**' world where competition for jobs is high and tolerance for uneducated workers is low.

To further improve your grammar and writing skills, order my grammar books, *Student Success Grammar Skills*, *Adult Leaner Grammar Essentials* or *Everyday Vocabulary*.

For ordering information, see **www.arhampton.com**.

Happy Learning!

1

“a custom to”

accustomed to

Example: • I can get **a custom to** limousine car service.

Correction: • I can get **accustomed to** limousine car service.

Explanation: The word **accustomed** is one word that means to **get adjusted to** in the above example. This is an idiomatic expression, which means it is always written **accustomed to**, not **accustomed with** or any other version of this phrase.

2

“alot”

a lot

Example: • Rob gained **alot** of weight after the breakup.

Correction: • Rob gained **a lot** of weight after the breakup.

Explanation: Always spell **a lot** as two words. Most spell checkers and eagle-eyed English teachers will count it as an error if you spell this expression as one word. Remember, **allot**, which has similar letters as **alot** and **a lot**, is a different word that means to divide, assign or hand something out according to a certain amount.