

The Cambridge Guide to
English Usage

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Contents

Preface	<i>vii</i>
Overview of Contents and How to Access Them	<i>x</i>
A to Z Entries	<i>1–592</i>
Appendix I	International Phonetic Alphabet Symbols for English Sounds <i>593</i>
Appendix II	Geological Eras <i>594</i>
Appendix III	Perpetual Calendar 1901–2008 <i>595</i>
Appendix IV	International System of Units (SI Units) <i>596</i>
Appendix V	Interconversion Tables for Metric and Imperial Measures <i>597</i>
Appendix VI	Selected Proofreading Marks <i>598</i>
Appendix VII	Formats and Styles for Letters, Memos and E-mail <i>600</i>
Appendix VIII	Layout for Envelopes <i>602</i>
Appendix IX	Currencies of the World <i>603</i>
Bibliography	<i>604</i>

A

@

This is a symbol in search of a name. English-speakers call @ the “at sign,” which will do while it serves as the universal symbol of an e-mail address. Its shape is also used along with other *emoticons* to represent expressions of the human face (see **emoticons**). But its resemblance to animals emerges through ad hoc names in other languages. In Danish, it’s seen as the “elephant’s trunk,” and in Chinese as “little mouse.” Russian has it as “little dog,” Swedish as “cat’s foot,” and Dutch as “monkey’s tail.” The best consensus is for “snail,” which provides a name for @ in French, Italian, Hebrew and Korean.

◇ On quoting e-mail addresses, see under **URL**.

a or an

Which should it be?

a hotel	or	an hotel
a heroic effort	or	an heroic effort
a RAF training course	or	an RAF training course
a \$8 ticket	or	an \$8 ticket

A single rule resolves all such queries: **a** is used before words beginning with a consonant, and **an** before those beginning with a vowel. This is straightforwardly applied in *a doctor*; *a receptionist* and *an astronaut*, *an engineer*. But note that the rule depends on the sound not the spelling. We write *a union*, *a unique gift* and *a once-in-a-lifetime experience* because the words following the article actually begin with a consonant sound (the “y” sound in the first two cases, and the “w” sound in the third). The same principle makes it *an hour*; *an honor*; and *an honest man*. The word following the indefinite article begins with a vowel sound.

When writing abbreviations, the choice between **a** or **an** again depends on the pronunciation of the first letter. So a *US Marine* and a *Unesco project* are quite regular, as are *an MP* and *an HB pencil*. Any abbreviation beginning with F, L, H, M, N, R, S or X takes **an**, because of the way those letters are pronounced. The effect is exploited in advertising for a brand of beer, where the use of **A** (rather than **AN**) shows how to pronounce the ambiguous brandname:

**I CAN FEEL A XXXX COMING ON
AUSTRALIANS WOULDN’T GIVE A XXXX
FOR ANYTHING ELSE**

Preceded by **A**, the brandname must be read as “four ex” not as “exexexex.” It nudges readers away from the unprintable or socially unacceptable interpretation of the word, while no doubt capitalizing on it.

Similar principles hold for writing sums of money. Pronounce them and they select **a** for a *£12 shirt* and **an** for *an \$80m. loan*, taking the cue from the number (which is said first) rather than the currency symbol (which is written first).

Despite all that, certain words beginning with *h* are made exceptions by some writers and speakers. They

would preface *hotel* and *heroic* with **an** rather than **a**, despite pronouncing the *h* at the start of those words. Other polysyllabic words beginning with *h* will be given the same treatment, especially if their first syllable is unstressed. In both American and British English the words *historic*, *historical* and *historian* are the most frequent of these exceptional cases, but the tendency goes further in Britain, by the evidence of matching databases (LOB and Brown corpora). They show that British writers use **an** to preface adjectives such as *habitual*, *hereditary*, *heroic*, *horrific*, *hypothetical*, *hysterical* (and their adverbs) as well as the noun *hotel*. There are far fewer examples in the American data, and the only distinctive case is *herb*, which is commonly pronounced without *h* in the US (though not in the UK or elsewhere). The King James bible (1611) records the use of **an** with other monosyllabic words, as in *an host* and *an house*, though they are supposed to go with *h*-less pronunciations, formerly much more common.

Over the centuries *h* has been an uncertain quantity at the beginnings of words in many European languages. Most words beginning with *h* lost it as they passed from Latin into French and Italian. The Latin word *hora* meaning “hour” became French *heure* (pronounced “err,” with no *h* sound) and also the Italian *ora*, without an *h* even in the spelling. English retains an *h* in the spelling of *hour* but not in the pronunciation. The process also shows up in the contrasting pronunciations of *heir* (an early English loan from French) and *hereditary* (a Renaissance borrowing direct from Latin), which embody the same Latin stem. Spelling pronunciation has revived the *h* in some French loanwords like *heritage* and *historian* (those well used in English writing); while others such as *hour*; *heir*; *hono(u)r* are *h*-less, in keeping with French pronunciation. Classical loanwords (apart from *honorary*, *honorarium*, *honorific*) have settled on pronunciations with the *h* sounded; and they complement the many basic Anglo-Saxon words such as *here*, *how*, *him* and *hair*; *home*, *honey* in which *h* is pronounced. (See further under **h**.)

Nowadays the silent *h* persists in only a handful of French loanwords (*heir*; *honest*, *hono(u)r*; *hour* and their derivatives), and these need to be preceded by **an**. The *h* of other loans like *heroic*, *historical* and *hypothesis* may have been silent or varied in earlier times, leaving uncertainty as to whether **an** was required or not. But their pronunciation is no longer variable and provides no phonetic justification for **an**. Its use with them is a stylistic nicety, lending historical nuances to discourse in which tradition dies hard.

◇ For the grammar of **a** and **an**, see **articles**.

◇ For the presence/absence of **a/an** in (1) journalistic introductions, see **journalism and journalese**; and in (2) titles of books, periodicals, plays etc., see under **the**.

a-

The **a-** prefixed to ordinary English adjectives and adverbs comes from two different sources. In a few cases such as *afresh*, *akin* and *anew*, it represents the Old English preposition *of*, and so *anew* was once “of new.” In many more cases it was the Old English preposition *on*, as in:

<i>aback</i>	<i>ablaze</i>	<i>abroad</i>	<i>afloat</i>	<i>afoot</i>
<i>aglow</i>	<i>ahead</i>	<i>ajar</i>	<i>alive</i>	<i>around</i>
<i>ashore</i>	<i>aside</i>	<i>asleep</i>	<i>astray</i>	

Thus *ashore* was literally “on shore.”

In each set the two elements of the prepositional phrase have long since merged into one. But the past still shows through in the fact that as adjectives they are used only after the noun they qualify, either postpositively as in *the way ahead* or predicatively, i.e. as the complement of a verb, as in *Route 66 is ahead*. (See further under **adjectives**, section 1.) The adverbial functions of these words are also evident in collocations such as *taken aback*, *go astray* and *get ahead of* (see further at **ahold**). Others such as **around** are now both adverbs and prepositions.

Note the apparently similar *apart*, which consists of French elements (*à part*) rather than English ones. Its parity with *aside* is examined at **aside (from)**.

a-/an-

These are two forms of a negative prefix derived from Greek. In English its meaning is usually privative, i.e. “without” or “lacking.” It appears as the first component in some academic and technical words, such as:

<i>achromatic</i>	<i>analgesic</i>
<i>apathy, apathetic</i>	<i>anarchy, anarchic</i>
<i>aphasia, aphasic</i>	<i>anhydrous</i>
<i>atheism, atheist</i>	<i>anorexia</i>

As the two lists show, the form **an-** occurs before vowels and *h*, and **a-** before all other consonants. In most cases the prefix combines with Greek stems which do not exist independently in English. In just a few, such as *amoral*, *asexual*, *atypical*, the **a-** combines with a Latin stem that is also an ordinary English word. In the case of *amoral*, the prefix makes the vital difference between *amoral* (“lacking in moral values”) and *immoral* (“contrary to moral values,” where *im-* is a negative).

◇ For more about negative prefixes, see **de-**, **in-/im-**, **non-** and **un-**. See also **dis-**, and other privative affixes such as **-free** and **-less**.

-a

This suffix is really several suffixes. They come into English with loanwords from other languages, including Italian, Spanish, Latin and Greek, and may represent either singular or plural. In *gondola* (Italian), *siesta* (Spanish), *formula* (Latin) and *dogma* (Greek), the **-a** is a singular ending, whereas in *bacteria* (Latin) and *criteria* (Greek), it represents the plural.

Loanwords ending in singular **-a** are not to be taken for granted because their plurals may or may not go according to a foreign pattern, as discussed in the first section below. Loanwords which come with a plural **-a** ending pose other grammatical questions, to be dealt with in the second section.

1 Words with the singular -a mostly make their plurals in the usual English way, by adding an *s*. This is true for all the Italian and Spanish words, and many

of the Latin ones. So *gondola* becomes *gondolas*, *siesta* becomes *siestas*, and *aroma* becomes *aromas*. The numerous Latin names for plants, for example *mimosa*, *ponderosa*, *protea*, *sequoia*, all take English plurals. However, Latin loanwords which are strongly associated with an academic field usually have Latin plurals as well, thus *formulae* along with *formulas*, *retinae* and *retinas* etc. So plurals with **-ae** prevail in writing intended for scientists and scholars everywhere, though the forms ending in **-as** are also available and used in nonspecialized writing and conversation.

The major dictionaries differ over which words can take English plurals. *Webster's Third* (1986) indicates an English plural for all the words listed below – either explicitly, as first or second alternative, or by the lack of reference to the plural (this being the dictionary convention for regular inflections). The *Oxford Dictionary* (1989) allows either Latin or English plurals for those set in italics below, but Latin only plurals for those set in roman. Note also that while the *Oxford* presents the Latin plurals as ligatures, *Webster's* sets them as digraphs (see further under **ae/e**).

<i>abscissa</i>	<i>am(o)eba</i>	<i>antenna</i>	<i>aorta</i>
<i>aura</i>	<i>caesura</i>	<i>cicada</i>	<i>cornea</i>
<i>echidna</i>	<i>fibula</i>	<i>formula</i>	<i>hydra</i>
<i>lacuna</i>	lamina	larva	mora
nebula	nova	patella	penumbra
persona	piscina	placenta	pupa
retina	stoa	tibia	trachea
ulna	urethra	vagina	vertebra

An English plural is natural enough for those latinisms which are both common words and technical terms (e.g. *aura*, *cicada*, *cornea*, *retina*). For some (e.g. *aorta*, *urethra*), the occasions on which a plural might be needed are not very many, and, when it is, an ad hoc English plural is all the more likely. Note that for **antenna**, **patella** and **persona**, the two plurals are used in different fields (see under those headings). For the plural of *alumna*, see **alumni**.

Greek loanwords with singular **-a** can also have two plural forms. They bring with them their Greek plural suffix **-ta**, though they soon acquire English plurals with *s* as well. The Greek **-ta** plurals survive in scholarly, religious or scientific writing, while in other contexts the English *s* plurals are dominant. Compare the *traumas of everyday life* with the *traumata* which are the concerns of medicine and psychology. Other loanwords which use both English and Greek plurals are:

<i>dogma</i>	<i>lemma</i>	<i>magma</i>	<i>schema</i>	<i>stigma</i>
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For both *dogma* and *stigma*, the Greek plural is strongly associated with Catholic orthodoxy (see **stigma**). The Greek plural of *miasma* (*miasmata*) seems to have lapsed in C21 English (see **miasma**).

2 Words with plural -a from Latin are often collective in meaning, for example *bacteria*, *data* and *media*. There's no need to pluralize them, nor do we often need their singular forms, though they do exist: *bacterium*, *datum* etc. (For more information, see **-um**.) The grammatical status of words like *media* (whether to construe them as singular or plural) is still unsettled. Those who know Latin are inclined to insist on plural agreement, on the grounds that *data* and *media* (not to mention *candelabra*) “are plural.” Yet the argument depends on Latin rather than English grammar; and is undermined by other cases

such as *agenda* and *stamina*, which are also Latin plurals but now always used with singular verbs in English. The issues of singular/plural agreement are further discussed under **collective nouns** and **agreement** section 1; and at individual entries for **candelabra**, **data** and **media**.

◇ For Greek loanwords with a plural **-a**, such as *automata*, *criteria*, *ganglia*, *phenomena*, see **-on**.

a fortiori

This elliptical phrase, borrowed from Latin, means roughly “by way of something stronger.” Far from being an oblique reference to fetching the whisky, it’s used in formal discussion to mean “with yet stronger reason” and to introduce a second point which the speaker or writer feels will clinch the argument. Compare **a priori**.

à la

In contemporary English this versatile French tag is deployed on many of the frontiers of taste, apart from *haute cuisine*. It is still exploited on *à la carte* menus that offer you taste-tempting dishes *à la duchesse* or *à l’indienne*; and in counter-cuisine, it can be found in *fast foods à la McDonalds*. But beyond the restaurant business, *à la* can refer to a distinctive style in almost any domain, and the reference point is usually ad hoc, as in *makeup [used] to amuse, à la Mick Jagger*, or an *oversight committee à la New York in the 1970s*. As in those examples, the construction often turns on the proper names of persons or places, titles and institutions. It creates reference points in film – *à la “Casablanca”* – and fiction – *à la “Portnoy’s Complaint”* – not to mention health management: *whether to quarantine people with AIDS à la TB*. Increasingly *à la* is found with common nouns as well, as in *law à la modem*, and *seats covered with vinyl à la taxicab*, among the examples from CCAE.

A **la** is a clipped form of the French *à la mode (de)*, which explains the feminine form of the article (*la*). In English it works as a fixed phrase, rather like a compound preposition, and there’s no suggestion of adapting its grammatical gender from **à la** to *au* when the following name is masculine (see the Mick Jagger example above).

The grave accent is still often printed on **à la** in English, especially British English, though it is by no means a recent borrowing (first recorded in 1589). No doubt its use is often prompted by a taste for the exotic; and the accent – and the fact that the phrase still tends to be italicized – help to emphasize its foreignness. The *Oxford Dictionary* (1989) updates the entry on **à la** without registering the accentless form, whereas it appears as an alternative in *Webster’s Third* (1986).

à la carte

This is one of the many French expressions borrowed into English to cover gastronomic needs. Literally it means “according to the card.” At restaurants it gives you the freedom to choose from individually priced dishes – and the obligation to pay whatever the bill amounts to. The **à la carte** system contrasts with what has traditionally been known as *table d’hôte*, literally “the host’s table.” This implies partaking of whatever menu the restaurant has decided on, for a set price. The phrase goes back to earlier centuries, when the only public dining place for travelers was at the host’s/landlord’s table. But *table d’hôte* is what

most of us partake of when traveling as tourist-class passengers on aircraft. In restaurants more transparent phrases are used to show when the menu and its price are predetermined: *fixed price menu* (in the UK and US), or *prix fixe* (in France and francophone Canada). In Italy it’s *menu turistico*.

Though dictionaries such as *New Oxford* (1998) and *Merriam-Webster* (2000) continue to list **à la carte** and *table d’hôte* with their French accents, they are commonly seen without them in the English-speaking world.

a posteriori

Borrowed from Latin, this phrase means “by a later effect or instance.” It refers to arguments which reason from the effect to the cause, or those which work from a specific instance back to a generalization. *A posteriori arguments* are concerned with using empirical observations and induction as the basis of reasoning. They contrast with *a priori arguments*, on which see next entry.

a priori

This phrase, borrowed from Latin, means “from the prior [assumption].” It identifies an argument which reasons from cause to a presumed effect, or which works deductively from a general principle to the specific case. Because such reasoning relies on theory or presumption rather than empirical observation, an *a priori argument* is often judged negatively. It seems to make assertions before analyzing the evidence. Compare **a posteriori**.

abacus

What if there’s more than one of them? Technical uses of this word in classical architecture have no doubt helped to preserve its Latin plural *abaci*. This is the only plural recognized in the *Oxford Dictionary* (1989), and the one given priority in *Webster’s Third* (1986). But *Webster’s* also recognizes the English plural *abacuses*, which comes naturally when **abacus** the word refers to the low-tech, finger-powered calculator. See further under **-us**.

abbreviations

These are the standardized short forms of names or titles, and of certain common words and phrases. The term covers (i) *abbreviated words* such as *cont.* and *no.*, i.e. ones which are cut short or contracted in the middle; and (ii) *abbreviated phrases* such as *AIDS*, *RSI*, formed out of the first letters of words in a phrase. Both groups can be further divided (see under *contractions* section 1 for **abbreviations v. contractions**; and under *acronyms* for the distinction between *acronyms* and *initialisms*). The punctuation given to each group varies according to American and British style, and within them, as discussed below in section 2. However, there’s a consensus that most types of symbol should be left unpunctuated (see section 1 below).

Abbreviations of all kinds are now accepted in many kinds of functional and informative writing, as neat and clear representations of the full name or title. Certain **abbreviations** such as *EFT* or *ftp* are in fact better known than their full forms (*electronic funds transfer*, *file transfer protocol*). The idea that they are unacceptable in formal writing seems to derive from writing in the humanities, where they are less often

needed. **Abbreviations** may indeed look strange in the text of a novel or short story. Yet who can imagine a letter which does not carry **abbreviations** somewhere in referring to people and places? Business and technical reports could hardly do without them.

Provided they are not obscure to the reader, **abbreviations** communicate more with fewer letters. Writers have only to ensure that the abbreviations they use are too well known to need any introduction, or that they are introduced and explained on their first appearance. Once the reader knows that in a particular document *CBC* equals the *Children's Book Council* or the *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation* or the *Carpet Bowls Club*, as the case may be, the short form can be used from then on.

1 Abbreviations which are never punctuated. Certain special categories of symbol never appear with a stop/period, anywhere in the world. They include:

- symbols for SI units: *kg, ml* etc. (See **SI units**.)
- compass points: *N, NE, SW* etc.
- chemical symbols: *Mn, Ni* etc.
- symbols for currencies: *GB£, A\$* etc. (See **Appendix ix**.)

One other group of **abbreviations** which never take stops are *acronyms* like *laser, scuba* (i.e. those which are pronounced like words and written in lower case: see **acronyms**).

2 Abbreviations which may or may not be punctuated, according to regional editorial practice (all other groups of **abbreviations**, of titles, institutions, placename elements and ordinary words and phrases). The various practices and their applications are illustrated below, followed by a discussion of each:

a) using stops with any kind of **abbreviation** (= traditional American style)

G.A.T.T. U.K. Mr. Rev. mgr. incl. a.s.a.p.

b) using stops with **abbreviations** but not *contractions* (= traditional British style)

G.A.T.T. U.K. Mr. Rev. mgr. incl. a.s.a.p.

c) using stops for short forms with any lower case letters in them

i) GATT UK Mr. Rev. mgr. incl. a.s.a.p. (all **abbreviations**)

ii) GATT UK Mr. Rev. mgr. incl. a.s.a.p. (excluding *contractions*)

d) using stops for short forms consisting entirely of lower case letters:

GATT UK Mr. Rev. mgr. incl. a.s.a.p.

***Option (a)** is the easiest to implement, and has been the traditional practice in the US, though the *Chicago Manual* (1993) noted its erosion amid the worldwide trend to use less punctuation. Familiar **abbreviations** can be left unstopped because the reader needs no reminder that they are shortened words or phrases.

***Option (b)** turns on the distinction between **abbreviations** and *contractions*, and gives punctuation to the first group but not the second. In theory a contraction like *mgr* ("manager") is not a "true" abbreviation, but a telescoped word with its first and last letters intact. Compare *incl.* which is clearly a clipped form of "including," and in which the stop marks where it has been abbreviated. This distinction developed in C20 British style (see **contractions**, section 1) but has never been fully standardized (Ritter 2002), and is varied in particular fields (e.g. law) and by publishing houses. It never was part of American style. Canadian editors note the

distinction, though they call *contractions* "suspensions," in keeping with French editorial practice. However, the consistency of the traditional American style is appreciated when the two types of **abbreviation** are juxtaposed (*Editing Canadian English*, 2000). In New Zealand and Australia, the government *Style Manuals* (1997, 2002) have maintained the distinction, though the majority of Australian editors, writers and English teachers surveyed through Style Council in the 1990s (Peters, 1993c) begged to differ.

A particular conundrum for those who observe the distinction is what to do with pluralized abbreviations. Should the plural of *vol.* be *vols, vols.* or *vols.s*? Because the plural abbreviation preserves the final letter, there's an argument for treating it as a contraction and abandoning the stop, although it seems odd to have different punctuation for the singular and plural: *vol.* and *vols* respectively. The stopped alternatives are themselves anomalous. In *vols.s* the plural inflection is separated by a stop from the word it should be bound to; and in *vols.* the stop no longer marks the point at which the word has been clipped. *Vols.* is in fact the British choice (Butcher's *Copy-editing*, 1992, and Ritter, 2002) as well as the American, generally speaking. However, the *Chicago Manual* (1993) embeds the curiosity that Protestant scholars use *Pss.* for *Psalms*, where it's *Pss* for their Catholic counterparts in the *New American Bible*.

***Option (c)** According to this option, stops are dispensed with for abbreviations which consist of full capitals, but retained for those with just an initial capital, or consisting entirely of lower case. This is in line with style trends in many parts of the English-speaking world. Capitalized acronyms and initialisms like *OPEC, UNICEF, BBC* are normally left unstopped, as indeed they appear in the *Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors* (1981), and are now explicitly endorsed in the *Chicago Manual* (2003). This was the preferred practice of freelance editors in Canada (*Editing Canadian English*, 1987), and those surveyed in Australia via Style Council in 1992. Stopless acronyms/initialisms are normal in the world of computing, witness *ASCII, CD-ROM* etc. Standardized abbreviations for nation-states such as *NZ, SA, USA* usually appear without stops these days. They do contrast, however, with other national abbreviations such as *Can., Germ. and Mex.*, which are still to be punctuated, according to both British and American references. Within the US, the two-letter abbreviations used in revised zip codes are standardized without periods, whether they consist of one or two words. Compare *NY* and *WY* (*New York / Wyoming*); *RI* and *WI* (*Rhode Island / Wisconsin*). Despite this growing consensus on leaving stops out of capitalized acronyms and abbreviations, the distinction between abbreviations and *contractions* still divides British and American style on lower-cased short forms. Hence suboption (ii) involving *contractions*, which is British-preferred; and (i) the more fully regularized suboption, which accords with American traditional practice.

***Option (d)** builds on the trend described in (c). It takes its cue from the presence/absence of an initial capital letter, and applies stops only to those that begin with a lower case letter. The option brings abbreviations such as *Can* into line with *USA*, and

makes no attempt to distinguish between contractions and abbreviations in lower case. This gives it more appeal in America than Britain, because it would require stops to be put back in contractions such as *mgr*; which the British are accustomed to seeing in stopless form. For Americans it goes furthest in the direction of reducing the “fussiness” of word punctuation mentioned by the *Chicago Manual* (1993) – and is easily applied by printers and publishing technicians.

A fifth option, to use no stops in any kind of **abbreviation**, is not commonly seen on the printed page, but appears increasingly in digital style on the internet. It is easiest of all to implement, and would resolve the anomalies created by distinguishing contractions from **abbreviations** (options b, c (ii)). It would also break down the invisible barrier between **abbreviations** and symbols (section 1 above). Leaving all **abbreviations** unstopped is sometimes said to be a recipe for confusion between lower case abbreviations and ordinary words. Yet there are very few which could be mistaken. Those which are identical, such as *am*, *fig* and *no* are normally accompanied by numbers: *10 am*, *fig 13*, *no 2*, and there's no doubt as to what they are. The idea of leaving abbreviations totally without stops may seem too radical for the moment, but it would streamline the anomalies and divergences outlined in this entry.

International English selection: The third option (c (i)) for punctuating **abbreviations** – using periods/full stops for **abbreviations** containing one or more lower case letters – recommends itself as a reasonable compromise between American and British style. It is in keeping with the worldwide trend to reduce punctuation, without any commitment to different punctuation for *contractions* and **abbreviations**, and the anomalies that it creates. (That distinction is embedded in option c(ii), for those who wish to maintain it.)

3 Stopped abbreviations at the end of a sentence.

When an **abbreviation** with a stop/period is the last word in a sentence, no further stop needs to be added:

Remember to acknowledge all contributors – the producer, director, screenplay writer, cameramen etc.

In such cases, the “stronger” punctuation mark (the period / full stop that marks the end-of-sentence) covers for the lesser stop marking the **abbreviation**. This is in keeping with the normal convention (see **multiple punctuation**). By the same token, it masks the editorial decision as to whether the abbreviation should be stopped or not – which readers sometimes need to know. When necessary, it's best to remake the sentence so as to bring the abbreviation in from the end. This was done in discussing examples such as *vol* and *vols* in section (b) above.

◇ For the use of stops with the initials of a person's name, see under **names**.

◇ For the use of the stop/period in **Latin abbreviations**, see under that heading.

abide and abode

At the turn of the millennium, neither of these is much used. The verb **abide** appeared quite often in

the King James bible, translating an array of Hebrew and Greek verbs meaning “dwell,” “stay,” “continue,” “remain” and “endure” – senses which linger in the Victorian hymn “Abide with me,” often sung at funeral services. Otherwise it survives mostly in the phrase *abide by (a decision)*, and in the slightly colloquial idiom *can't/cannot abide* or *couldn't abide* [something or someone]. The participle *abiding* serves as adjective in combination with certain abstract ideals, for example *an abiding concern*, *his abiding faith in humanity*; and in the compound *law-abiding*. Yet shrinking usage overall leaves people unsure about the past tense. Is it the regular *abided* or **abode**, which was used consistently in the King James bible? The evidence of British and American dictionaries and corpora is that *abided* is preferred. As a noun, **abode** is mostly restricted to legal phrases such as *no fixed abode* and *right of abode*. Other uses, including the cliché *my humble abode*, and freely formed expressions such as *the abode of my forebears*, have an archaic ring to them.

-ability

This ending marks the conversion of adjectives with *-able* into abstract nouns, as when *respectable* becomes *respectability*. Adjectives with *-ible* are converted by the same process, so *flexible* becomes *flexibility*. The ending is not a simple suffix but a composite of:

- the conversion of *-ble* to a stressed syllable *-bil* and
- the addition of the suffix *-ity*. (See further under *-ity*.)

ablative

This grammatical case operates in Latin and some other languages, but not English. It marks a noun as having the meaning “by, with, or from” attached to it. For some Latin nouns, the **ablative** ending is *-a*, and so *ipso facto* means “by that fact.” (See further under **cases**.)

The *ablative absolute* is a grammatical construction found in Latin which allows a phrase (all inflected in the ablative) to stand apart from the syntax of the clause or sentence in which it appears. The Latin tag *deo volente* (“God willing”) is used in the same way in contemporary English.

able and able to

The use of (*be*) **able to** as a semi-auxiliary verb dates from C15, though it is not equally used in the US and the UK. The British make more of it, in the ratio of 3:2 according to the evidence of comparable C20 databases (**LOB** and **Brown**). It reflects the greater British use of modals and modalized verb phrases generally (see **modality**, and **auxiliary verbs**).

In both varieties of English, **able to** takes animate subjects much more often than inanimate ones, as in:

Thompson was able to smell a bargain a continent away.

As in that example, **able to** normally combines with an active verb (see further under **voice**). This was the pattern in hundreds of corpus examples, the only counter example with a passive verb being *the chapel was still able to be used* (from **LOB**). **Able to** seems to insist on being construed with animate, active participants, as if it still draws on the energy of the adjective **able**, expressed in *an able politician* and *able-bodied citizens*. **Able** appears much less often as an adjective than as an auxiliary verb in both British

and American data: in the ratio of 1:11 in LOB and 1:12 in the Brown corpus. It occurs mostly in nonfiction genres of writing, perhaps because the approval expressed in it seems detached rather than engaged with the subject.

-able/-ible

Which of these endings to use is a challenge even for the successful speller. They sound the same, and the choice between them often seems arbitrary. In fact the choice is usually fixed by the word's origins.

Unabridged British and American dictionaries – *Oxford* (1989) and *Webster's Third* (1986) – do allow that certain words may be spelled either way in contemporary English, although they diverge on which have the option, and only a handful of words are given alternative spellings in both:

<i>collapsible/collapsible</i>	<i>collectable/collectible</i>
<i>condensable/condensible</i>	<i>ignitable/ignitible</i>
<i>preventable/preventible</i>	

Those apart, the following are independently credited with alternative spellings by *Oxford* and *Webster's*, marked *O* and *W* accordingly:

<i>avertable/avertible (O)</i>
<i>confusable/confusable (O)</i>
<i>connectable/connectible (O)</i>
<i>contractable/contractible (O)</i>
<i>deductable/deductible (O)</i>
<i>detectable/detectible (O)</i>
<i>diffusible/diffusible (O)</i>
<i>discernable/discernible (W)</i>
<i>expressable/expressible (W)</i>
<i>extendable/extendible (W)</i>
<i>extractable/extractible (W)</i>
<i>impressable/impressible (W)</i>
<i>perfectable/perfectible (W)</i>
<i>suggestable/suggestible (O)</i>
<i>transfusible/transfusible (W)</i>

Others such as *digestable/digestible* and *resistable/resistible* could probably be added to that list, but for the fact that *Oxford* presently marks their **-able** spellings as cutting out in C19.

The **-able** suffix is the more widely used of the two in English at large, partly because it combines with any Anglo-Saxon or French verb (*believable*, *enjoyable*), as well as neo-Latin ones, as in *retractable* or *contactable*. Fresh formations based on neo-Latin can provide alternatives to the well-established loan from Latin, as with *contractable/contractible*, where the first (in the sense “able to be contracted”) is a modern word, whereas the second “able to contract” goes back to C16. Yet the opposite tendency is also to be found: *Oxford Dictionary* citations show that some start life with **-able**, as did *deductable* and *detectable*, and later acquired neo-Latin spellings with **-ible**. The forces of analogy compete with regular wordforming principles among these words, and because they are readily coined on the spur of the moment, the dictionary records are necessarily incomplete. Any word of this type not yet listed in the dictionary can legitimately be spelled **-able**, if it's based on a current English verb stem, simple or compound, e.g. *gazumpable*, *upgradable*. In fact the stem is often a useful clue for spelling the established words. Compare *dispensable* (whose stem is the same as the verb *dispense*) with *comprehensible*, for which there is no English verb “comprehens-.” Most words with **-ible** embody Latin stems with no independent verb role in

English. (This is also true of a very few **-able** words such as *educable* and *navigable*, derived from the Latin first conjugation, but with enough relatives in English such as *education*, *navigation*, to secure their spelling.) The **-ible** words often lack close relatives, and the rationale for the spelling is not obvious unless you know Latin conjugations. The table below lists the most important **-ible** words, though where there are both positive and negative forms (e.g. *credible* as well as *incredible*), it gives just one of them.

<i>accessible</i>	<i>adducible</i>	<i>admissible</i>
<i>audible</i>	<i>combustible</i>	<i>compatible</i>
<i>contemptible</i>	<i>credible</i>	<i>deducible</i>
<i>divisible</i>	<i>edible</i>	<i>eligible</i>
<i>feasible</i>	<i>flexible</i>	<i>incomprehensible</i>
<i>incontrovertible</i>	<i>incorrigible</i>	<i>incorruptible</i>
<i>indefensible</i>	<i>indelible</i>	<i>indestructible</i>
<i>infallible</i>	<i>intelligible</i>	<i>invincible</i>
<i>irascible</i>	<i>irrepressible</i>	<i>irresistible</i>
<i>legible</i>	<i>negligible</i>	<i>ostensible</i>
<i>perceptible</i>	<i>permissible</i>	<i>persuasive</i>
<i>plausible</i>	<i>possible</i>	<i>reducible</i>
<i>reprehensible</i>	<i>responsible</i>	<i>submersible</i>
<i>susceptible</i>	<i>tangible</i>	<i>terrible</i>
<i>transmissible</i>	<i>visible</i>	

The stems of **-ible** words come straight from Latin paradigms and are not normally usable as English verbs (*access* and *flex* are exceptions in so far as they now serve as verbs). Most **-ible** words express rather abstract senses, unlike those ending in **-able**, which typically build in the active sense of the verb: compare *defensible* and *defendable*. Note also that words ending in **-ible** take the negative prefix *in-* (as in *indefensible*), whereas those with **-able** and based on English verbs are usually negated with *un-* (e.g. *undefendable*). See further under **in-/un-**.

◇ For the choice between *drivable* and *driveable*, *likable* and *likeable* etc., see **-eable or -able**.

abled

See under **disabled and disability**.

abolition or abolishment

Though both terms are current, the Latin-derived **abolition** holds sway in British as well as American English. In the UK **abolition** is effectively the only term, in data from the BNC, whereas **abolishment** plays a minor part in the US, appearing in the ratio of about 1:17, in data from CCAE. We might expect more of **abolishment**, which is just as old (dating from C16) and has more direct connections with the verb *abolish*. Yet legal and institutional uses of **abolition** give it strong social and political connotations, in the discontinuance of slavery and the death penalty. The productivity of the word is also reflected in derivatives such as *abolitionist*.

Aboriginal and Aborigine

Since around 1800 the term **aboriginal** has been used as a generic reference to native peoples encountered by colonialists in (for them) remoter parts of the world. The capitalized form **Aboriginal** still serves as a collective reference to indigenous groups within the population, especially in Australia, but also in Canada, where it complements the use of *First People* / *First Nation*. In the US the general term is *Native American* or *American Indian*, and *Indian* is used by the peoples themselves. Use of the term

Amerindian for the North American Indian is mostly confined to linguistics and anthropology. In South Africa the indigenous people are referred to as *black South Africans*. No collective name is needed in New Zealand for the *Maori*, because they are ethnically homogeneous.

In current English, the noun **aborigine** is particularly associated with Australia, but always capitalized as **Aborigine/Aborigines**. Its status vis-à-vis using **Aboriginal** as a noun has been much debated on diplomatic and linguistic grounds. **Aborigine** was believed by some to be more pejorative than **Aboriginal** (though this view is not shared by the people themselves). Others argued that **Aborigine** was an illegitimate *backformation* from **Aborigines**, though few would now call it a linguistic crime (see **backformation**). Neither argument carries weight in terms of common usage. Australian sources on the internet return almost three times as many instances of **Aborigines** as of **Aboriginals** (Google 2002). Successive Australian government *Style Manuals* have swung from one paradigm to another (Peters 1995), and the sixth edition (2002) proposes **Aboriginal(s)** for the noun (singular and plural) as well as the adjective. So **Aborigine(s)** is currently ruled out of official documents, though other publications such as newspapers, magazines and monographs make free use of it.

For indigenous people themselves, generic terms are unsatisfactory whenever a more specific name can be found. Those preferred for particular regions of Australia are listed in the government *Style Manual* (2002), and for the First Nations of Canada in *Editing Canadian English* (2000). The names of federally recognized Native American tribes are listed on the internet at www.healing-arts.org/tribes.htm.

◇ For the use of **Black**, see under that heading.

about, about to, and not about to

The fluidity of its meaning makes **about** a word to watch. But as adverb/preposition, and as a semi-auxiliary in *be about to*, its uses are more generally accepted and more international than is sometimes thought.

About as preposition and/or adverb has several meanings which are widely used and current in both the US and the UK:

- 1) “close to”/“approximately” in time, as in “*come (at) about ten o'clock.*” The approximation is handy whether the writer is unsure of the time, or prefers not to put too fine a point on it (see **vague words**). Though often presented as the British counterpart to American use of *around*, the construction is just as familiar in the US, according to *Webster's English Usage* (1989). See further at **around**.
- 2) “close by,” “in the vicinity” (but not visible): “*George is about. Could you hold on?*” The adverbial use is conversational in tone, though it also appears in everyday writing, as in *seeing who is about*. This is sometimes said to be strictly for the British, because Americans prefer *around*. But the US preference is not so strong as to exclude **about**, by the evidence of the Brown corpus.
- 3) “concerning” or “concerned with,” as in *the letter is about reconciliation* (preposition); *that's what it's about* (adverb). The preposition has always been standard usage, and the adverb is freely used in a variety of everyday prose in British and American

databases. The emphatic form *that's what X is all about* is also alive and well, despite the view of *Webster's English Usage* (1989) that it was on the decline. There are hundreds of examples in data from CCAE and the BNC. Most involve impersonal subjects, as in *that's what art / life / free enterprise is all about*. But in American data there are a few examples with a personal subject, as in *that's what this candidate is all about and we know what we are all about*.

The most important use of **about** is in the collocation **be about to**, used as a semi-auxiliary verb to express future events or intentions (see **auxiliary verbs** section 3). Its shades of meaning vary with the grammar of the subject (first, second or third person): compare *I'm about to go home* (said with intent) and *The judge was about to pronounce the sentence* (future event). But the negative counterpart **not about to** seems to have developed its own strong sense of determination, irrespective of person. Intention and resolve are both expressed in *I'm not about to stop you* and *Fox was not about to risk waiting for her inside her room* (these examples from the BNC, showing its use in British English). The idiom **not about to** seems to have originated in the American South and South Midland, and it was being used in nationwide publications by the 1960s, and even by two American presidents (Truman and Johnson). Its potential ambiguity attracted the attention of usage commentators including Bernstein, writing in *The New York Times* (1968/9), but there's no hard evidence of confusion with ordinary uses of the semi-auxiliary. **Not about to** probably has some rhetorical value in its negative understatement. See under **figures of speech**.

about face or about turn

See under U-turn.

abridgement or abridgment

The *Oxford Dictionary* (1989) prefers the regular **abridgement**, and in British English it's way out in front of **abridgment**, by 34:1 in data from the BNC. In American English the difference is less marked. *Webster's Third* (1986) gives priority to **abridgment**, yet it's only slightly ahead of **abridgement** in data from CCAE. See further under **-ment**.

International English selection: The spelling **abridgement** recommends itself for the purposes of international English, given its regularity and substantial use in American English as well as British.

abscissa

The *Oxford Dictionary* (1989) gives only *abscissae* as the plural of this word, in keeping with its use in formal mathematical contexts. Compare *Webster's Third* (1986), where the absence of plural specifications implies that the regular English plural is to be expected. See further under **-a** section 1.

absent

A new prepositional role for this word has emerged from American legal usage since the 1940s. In examples like “*Absent any other facts, there arises an implied contract*” (from *Webster's English Usage*, 1989), it works like a Latin ablative absolute construction

absente (quo) “in the absence of (which).” (See further under **ablative**.) It provides a convenient hedge for a conclusion, and, not so surprisingly, has begun to appear in US academic and argumentative writing outside the law itself. There’s scant evidence of it in British English.

absolute

This uncompromising word has been put to various grammatical purposes, in reference to (1) adjectives, (2) pronouns, (3) verbs, (4) clauses. In essence it means that the word concerned stands alone in the sentence, without the usual grammatical connections to the phrase, clause or sentence being expressed. Some of the applications outlined below belong to traditional grammar, but collectively they show how freely the term has been applied. Overuse of the term **absolute** would explain why there are alternatives, also noted below.

1 Absolute adjectives. The term **absolute** is usually applied to parts of adjectives which by their grammar or meaning are not involved in comparison. Many grammarians use it to refer to the uninflected form of any adjective, e.g. *bright*, as opposed to *brighter*; *brightest*. (See further under **adjectives**, section 2). An alternative older name for this part of the adjective paradigm is the “positive” form.

The phrase *absolute adjective* is applied by usage commentators, e.g. *Webster’s English Usage* (1989), to adjectives whose meaning doesn’t permit comparison. They are also called “uncomparable adjectives,” by Garner (1998) and others. Either way the quality they refer to either is or is not, and there are no grades in between. They resist being modified by words such as *rather* and *very*, for the same reason. But the phrase *absolute adjective*, as applied to *unique* and others, suggests that they have only one meaning (see **unique** for its several meanings). The fact that a word may have both comparable and noncomparable senses seems to be overlooked. The lists of supposed *absolute adjectives* varies considerably from one authority to the next – itself a sign of the fuzziness of the category. Most include *complete* and *unique*, but there the similarities end. Among those sometimes included are:

<i>countless</i>	<i>eternal</i>	<i>fatal</i>	<i>first</i>
<i>impossible</i>	<i>infinite</i>	<i>last</i>	<i>paramount</i>
<i>perfect</i>	<i>permanent</i>	<i>previous</i>	<i>simultaneous</i>
<i>supreme</i>	<i>total</i>	<i>ultimate</i>	<i>universal</i>

Many of these are commonly modified by words such as *almost* or *nearly*, which Fowler (1926) allowed even for *unique*. You can posit approximations to an **absolute** state, if not gradations of it. That apart, comprehensive dictionaries show that such adjectives have both nongradable and gradable senses. The gradable sense is clearly being used in “a more complete account of events than ever before.” So the notion of *absoluteness* needs to be attached to the sense, not the whole word. If the term *absolute adjective* has any value, it would be to refer to *defining adjectives* (see under **adjectives**):

<i>auxiliary</i>	<i>classic</i>	<i>horizontal</i>	<i>ivory</i>
<i>second-hand</i>	<i>steel</i>		

With their categorial meanings, they cannot be compared. Fowler also used **absolute** to refer to adjectives that serve as the head of a noun phrase: as in *the underprivileged*, *the young*. In these generic phrases the adjective behaves like a noun, in that it

can be pre- or post-modified: *the very young*, *the young at heart* (*Comprehensive Grammar*, 1985). They are otherwise relatively fixed, always prefaced by *the*, and construed in the plural.

Absolute comparatives are expressions in which a comparative form of an adjective appears, but no real comparison is made. In fact comparisons are often implicit: they were explicit in only 25% of the examples in the Survey of English Usage, according to the *Comprehensive Grammar* (1985). But there could be no comparison at all in conventional or institutionalized expressions such as: *my better half*, *the finer things of life*, *Greater London*, *higher education*, *the younger generation*. We never imagine a starting point for them in “my good half,” “high education” etc., so they are *absolute comparatives*. This is not of course the case with the familiar advertising line: BRAND XXX WASHES WHITER – which invites consumers to conjure up the comparatively murky linen produced by an unnamed competitor, while avoiding any claims for libel.

Absolute superlatives embody the superlative form of an adjective without any specific comparison. Like *absolute comparatives* they are often conventional expressions, and often involve *best* as in: *best practice*, *best seller*, *all the best*, *put your best foot forward*. Others are *worst-case scenario*, *worst enemy*; *do one’s darndest*; *on/from the highest authority*. Freely formed examples like *the kindest person*, *the loveliest day* involve a kind of **hyperbole** (see under that heading).

2 Absolute pronouns. This is the term used by some grammarians (Huddleston, 1984) for possessive pronouns which stand as independent nouns, such as: *hers*, *ours*, *yours*, *theirs*. The *Comprehensive Grammar* (1985) calls them *independent pronouns*. See further under **possessive pronouns**.

3 Absolute verbs are those not complemented by the usual object or adjunct, as in *They ate*. (See further under **verb phrase** section 3.) This use of **absolute** is also at least as old as Fowler (1926), and appears in some older dictionaries.

4 Absolute constructions or clauses are grammatically independent phrases or nonfinite clauses, not integrated with the sentence in which they appear. Some are so conventional as to pass unnoticed, e.g. *that being so*, *all things considered*. Others created ad hoc by the writer may be censured as *dangling participles* or *unattached phrases*: see further under **dangling participles**.

abstract nouns

These words carry broad, generalized meanings that are not tied to the specific instance or a tangible, concrete item. The essential *abstract noun* is the name for an intangible such as *honesty*, *justice* or *knowledge*, though modern grammarians recognize many other kinds of words which refer to abstractions or to imputed entities such as *energy*, *luck* and *research*. Many **abstract nouns** are constructs of the language itself, built up out of other, more specific words. Thus abstractions such as *formality*, *graciousness*, *prevention* and *severance* are generated out of descriptive adjectives such as *formal*, *gracious*, and action verbs such as *prevent*, *sever*. Even ordinary and familiar words can take on abstract meanings in analytical writing. Think of *field* and *grain*. We usually imagine them in concrete terms, but in expressions like *field of study* and *grain of truth*, they

become detached and abstract. Broad cover terms such as *article*, *creature* and *vehicle* are also abstract until applied to a particular object. A *vehicle* may thus take shape as a car, tram, bus, truck, bicycle or perhaps even a skateboard or wheelbarrow. (For more on the distinction between *abstract* and *concrete nouns*, see **nouns**.)

Abstract nouns are a useful means of building ideas. They help writers to extend their arguments and develop theories. They can encapsulate remarkable insights, and summarize diffuse material under manageable headings. The downside is their too frequent appearance in academic and bureaucratic clichés. In his classic *Complete Plain Words* (1962), Gowers talks of the “lure of the abstract [word]” for British civil servants, and of the need to “choos[e] the precise word.” Most American students are familiar with the injunction of their “freshman composition” textbooks to “prefer the concrete to the abstract,” although the prevalence of the opposite in professional writing has been noted by researchers such as Lanham (1974) and Couture (1986). Computer software is able to identify some of the abstract language in a text, i.e. words ending in *-tion*, *-ness*, *-ity*, *-ance*, *-ancy*, *-ence* and *-ency* and other characteristic suffixes. It cannot identify ordinary words used in abstract senses, let alone decide whether they are appropriate for the subject. *Abstract words* are not necessarily reprehensible, but their cumulative effect on the weary reader needs to be factored in.

◇ For further discussion of related issues, see **gobbledygook** and **nominal**.

abstracts

An **abstract** is a distinctively structured summary, used especially in academic contexts. See under **summary**.

academia, academe and academy

The first of these words is both the most ancient in form and the most popular now, at the start of C21. *Academia* (*Akademeia*) was the name of the Athenian garden associated with the legendary Greek hero Akademos (in medieval times called **Academe**). Plato’s school of philosophy took its name from the garden, hence later references to “Plato’s Academy.”

The use of **academe** to mean “place of learning” is first recorded in Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, where it appears in the singular as well as plural (alongside “books”) as the source of “the true Promethean fire.” Fowler (1926) took Shakespeare to task for using **academe** in reference to an institution rather than a person, and would have liked even less its extended use to refer to the whole academic community and environment. *Merriam-Webster* (2000) embraces all these senses, whereas only the institutional ones appear in *New Oxford* (1998), *Canadian Oxford* (1998) and the Australian *Macquarie* (1997). In American and British usage, **academe** most commonly appears in sets like *arts, academe and the professions*. Otherwise it provides the context for many a work of fiction – apart from Mary McCarthy’s novel *The Groves of Academe* (1952), and Mark Stein’s play (c. 1980) of the same name. The phrase *groves of academe* now has more than a whiff of cliché about it, but at least it can be varied. Large databases such as the BNC and CCAE show a range of alternatives: *halls of academe* (hybridized with “halls of [higher]

learning”), *realms of academe*, *world of academe*, *ivory towers in academe*, and even *the ghetto of academe*.

Fowler’s criticism of using **academe** in the sense “academic world” could perhaps have prompted the rise of **academia** as an alternative term since World War II. In fact **academia** outnumbers **academe** by 4:1 in both the BNC and CCAE, and it collocates in much the same way with “halls,” “ivory towers,” “cloisters,” and “groves” itself. Like **academe**, it appears in sets like “labor, business and academia” to designate a sphere of activity and influence. No doubt its more transparent form (ending in the abstract suffix *-ia*) gives it an advantage over its competitor, which lacks formal analogues in English. (See further under **-ia**.)

The phrase *the academy* is very occasionally found as a synonym for **academia** and **academe**, but its usage is mostly worlds apart and has been much broader than either, especially in C19 and earlier C20. In the UK, **academy** served as the common term for an alternative type of school to the classically oriented grammar school; and in North America it was used in reference to private schools. It’s now more familiar as the key word in the names of various specialized institutes of the performing arts – *the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art*, *Franz Liszt Academy of Music* – as well as visual arts and sciences. In the US, the word **academy** is built into the names of defense force training centres such as the *West Point Academy*, not to mention the metropolitan *Police Academy*, immortalized through movies. The American *Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences* lends its name to the *Academy Awards*, and winners there enjoy professional esteem comparable to that of the *Academy exhibitor* among the British art establishment. These various institutions give a specialized meaning to **academy** that distinguishes it from **academe** and **academia**, yet it now lacks generic usages enough to guarantee it a long future. ◇ For the *Académie Française* and other *language academies*, see **language academy**.

accents and diacritics

In speech, an **accent** is a general style of pronunciation which strikes the listener as different, as in *a foreign accent*, *an Irish accent*. It may involve the stress patterns of words as well as the way sounds are pronounced. The **accents** of written language mostly relate to individual sounds. When superimposed on a particular letter of the alphabet, **accents** show that the pronunciation differs in some way from the unmarked letters. The English spelling system does without **accents**, except for the occasional foreign word (see below). Many other languages make systematic use of **accents** to indicate aspects of sound, stress and pitch. The technical term for *accent marks* is *diacritics*.

The most familiar **accents** are those of European languages, such as the French *acute* and the German *umlaut* which mark particular vowels, and the Spanish *tilde* and the Slavonic *háček*, used with particular consonants. Less well-known ones are the small circle used over *u* in Czech, and over *a* in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish, and the slash used with *l* in Polish and with *o* in Danish and Norwegian. (See further at individual entries on **acute**, **cedilla**, **circumflex**, **dieresis**, **grave**, **háček**, **tilde**, **umlaut**.) **Accents** are also used to mark the strongly stressed syllables of some words of Italian, Spanish and Irish.

Some Asian languages written in the Roman alphabet, such as Vietnamese, have **accents** to show the different tones or pitch that go with a particular word: rising, falling, level etc. The use of **accents** shows the limitations of the alphabet for writing the sounds of diverse modern languages. (See further under **alphabets**.)

Foreign accents/diacritics in English Accents may be included in the English spelling of loanwords, depending on whether the word is a common noun or proper name, and the context of communication.

a) **Loanwords which become English common nouns** tend to lose their **accents** in the course of time, witness French loans such as *crepe*, *debut*, *elite*, *facade*, and *role*. Their disappearance is helped by the fact that English typewriters and wordprocessors rarely have accents in their repertoire, neither does the internet. In fact there's no reason for **accents** to be retained in words such as *role* or *elite*, where the vowel letters themselves match the pronunciation. The **accents** would mostly be missed by francophones and those for whom it adds cachet or a hint of sophistication. In *Webster's Third* (1986) the unaccented form of all those words is given priority, whereas the opposite holds true for the *Oxford Dictionary* (1989). This difference probably correlates with divergent regional trends, as well as the fact that the original *Oxford* (1884–1928) was much more inclined to mark loanwords as “not naturalized,” with **accents** shown to correlate with their perceived foreignness. Though the “foreign” symbol has been removed from many of these loanwords in the second edition (1989), the **accents** remain and accentless alternatives are not yet recognized. *Copy-editing* (1992) suggests that if **accents** are to be marked, all those belonging to the word should be there, e.g. *protégé*, *résumé*. The more functional approach is to use whatever **accents** are essential to distinguish loanwords from their English homographs. Hence *résumé* with one **accent** to contrast with *resume*. (See further under **résumé**.) Even so, the context may provide all that's needed to identify them as noun and verb respectively, just as it does for *exposé* and *expose*. Only the first could appear in *an exposé of corruption* and the second in *the will to expose corruption*. The difference between *pique* and *piqué* is embedded in their particular collocations: *a fit of pique* v. *a pique table cloth*. When both are adjectives, readers may depend more on the accent to distinguish their attributive use, as in *a flamboyant lamé suit* and *a lame duck*. The accent is more crucial when the homographs work in the same grammatical slot.

b) **Well-known foreign names with accents/diacritics** generally lose them when reproduced in English. Thus *Dvorak* is usually written without the **háček**, *Zurich* without the **umlaut**, and *Montreal* without its **acute**. In some contexts of communication, however, retaining such **accents** assumes some strategic and diplomatic importance. This would be so for British or American authors writing for EU readerships; or for anglophone Canadians when writing French-Canadian names and titles into public documents, such as *Sept-Îles* and *Musée de Nouveau Brunswick*. Note also that **accents** are used on capital letters in Canadian French, though not regularly in Metropolitan French. For further details, see *Editing Canadian English* (2000).

acceptance or acception

At the start of C21, these two are scarcely interchangeable as the noun counterpart to the verb *accept*. The latinate **acceptation** could once be used to mean “a state of being accepted or acceptable,” but the last trace of it was around 1800, by which time the French-style **acceptance** had replaced it for all practical purposes. Just one application remains for **acceptation**: to refer to the interpretation or understanding of a word which is the focus of academic or legal discussion. American data from CCAE provides a single example in which a court found that “by common acception, the description [*white pine*] has acquired a secondary meaning as firmly anchored as the first.” On that one showing, and the two British instances in BNC, **acceptation** is close to extinction.

accessory or accessory

Accessory is now the all-purpose spelling for most contexts. **Accessory** used to be reserved for legal discourse, when talking about a person as the *accessory to a crime* or *an accessory after the fact*. But **accessory** is now used in those expressions too, as evidenced by data from very large corpora (BNC, CCAE). They contained no examples of **accessary** apart from a very dubious British example, in which the word was flanked by three misspelled words. Dictionaries which continue to present **accessary** as an alternative spelling are presumably justifying it from specialized legal documents, which perpetuate archaic writing conventions. Meanwhile the spelling **accessory** has always been preferred for the extra item(s) that go with any complex outfit, whether it is a set of clothes, a car or a computer.

accidentally or accidently

The second and shorter spelling is not as obsolete as the *Oxford Dictionary* (1989) claims. Databases show its currency, with a score of British examples in the BNC and almost 100 American ones in CCAE. These numbers suggest that **accidently** is somewhat commoner in American English, and its relative frequency vis-à-vis **accidentally** confirms it: about 1:15 in American data, whereas it's 1:28 in the British data. **Accidently** is sometimes regarded as a spelling mistake or malformation, but its pedigree is obscured by the fact that *accident* was once an adjective, from which it could be derived quite regularly. Common pronunciation of the word (with stress on the first syllable) also supports the shorter form. This is not to say we should prefer it to **accidentally**: rather that it cannot be dismissed as a solecism.

acclaim

Note that the associated noun is *acclamation*. See **-aim**.

accommodation, accomodation and accommodations

Accommodation, and the related verb *accommodate*, may well qualify as the most widely misspelled words in otherwise standard writing of the late C20. Yet “accomodate” was not uncommon in earlier centuries, as the *Oxford Dictionary* (1989) shows. Celebrated authors such as Defoe, Cowper and Jane Austen used it. The insistence on two *ms* thus seems to have firmed

up during the last 100 years. It is unquestionably in line with the etymology of the word (its root is the same as for *commodity* and *commodious*). But unless you know Latin, the reason for the two *ms* isn't obvious. One pair of doubled consonants (the *cs*) seems enough for some writers as if a kind of *dissimilation* sets in. (See **dissimilate** or **dissimulate**.)

Acomodation is still relatively rare in edited prose, however commonly seen in signs and advertisements. British data from the BNC has **accommodation** outnumbering **acomodation** by almost 100:1, and in American data from CCAE the ratio is still close to 70:1. Neither *Webster's Third* (1986) nor the *Oxford Dictionary* presents the single-*m* spellings as alternatives, though they allow consonant-reduced spellings of other words such as *guer(r)illa* and *millen(n)ium*, despite their etymology. The management of double and single consonants is a vexed issue for various groups of English words (see **single for double**).

Until recently, American English was distinctive in using the plural **accommodations** in reference to temporary lodgings or arrangements for lodgings, whereas British English preferred the singular. But the BNC provides evidence of **accommodations** being used now in the UK as well – in advertisements for *oceanfront accommodations*, as well as more abstract discussions describing how *each party is prepared to make substantial accommodations to the other*. Overall there are 45 instances in the BNC, as opposed to thousands in CCAE, but enough to show that the plural form is being recommissioned in Britain. The *Oxford Dictionary* shows earlier British citations up to about 1800.

accompanist or accompanist

Accompanist seems to have dropped out of favor, though still heard from time to time. Both spellings were evidenced in C19, and the *Oxford Dictionary* (1989), while preferring **accompanist**, actually had more citations (3:1) for **accompanist**. *Webster's Third* (1986) also presents the two spellings, putting **accompanist** first. But there's no recent evidence for **accompanist** in either BNC or CCAE – or anything to suggest that **accompanist** is a US alternative, as suggested by some dictionaries.

accusative

This is a grammatical name for the case of the direct object of a verb. In "The judge addressed the jury," *jury* is the direct object, and could therefore be said to be **accusative**. The term is regularly used in analyzing languages like German and Latin, because they have different forms for the direct and the indirect object (the latter is called the **dative**).

In English both direct and indirect objects have the same form, whether they are nouns or pronouns. Compare:

The judge addressed the jury / them (direct object)
The judge gave the jury / them his advice (indirect object)

Because the words *jury/ them* are the same for both roles, the term **objective case** is often used in English to cover both **accusative** and **dative**.

◇ For more about grammatical case, see **cases** and **object**.

◇ For the so-called "unaccusative," see **ergative** and **middle voice**.

ACE

This is an acronym for the Australian Corpus of English, a database of late C20 written Australian English, from which evidence has been drawn for entries in this book. For the composition of the corpus, see under **English language databases**.

-acious/-aceous

These endings have a spurious likeness, although they need never be confused. The words ending in **-aceous** are not everyday words except for the gardener or botanist. How recently did you see *herbaceous* or *rosaceous*, for example? *Farinaceous* comes closer to home in discussions of food or diet, yet all such words originate as scientific creations, referring to particular classes of plants.

By contrast, the words ending in **-acious** are unspecialized and used in many contexts. For example:

*audacious capacious loquacious pugnacious
 vivacious voracious*

Note that the *-ac-* in these words is actually part of the stem or root of the word (e.g. *audac-*), to which *-ious* has been added. For more about words formed in this way, see **-ious**.

acknowledgement or acknowledgment

Acknowledgment is given priority in both *Webster's Third* (1986) and the *Oxford Dictionary* (1989), perhaps because of its use by publishers in the front matter of books. Yet **acknowledgement** gets plenty of use in both the US and the UK. In American data from CCAE, the two are almost equally matched, while British evidence from the BNC has **acknowledgement** strongly preferred, by more than 5:1. The spelling which retains the *e* in the middle is more regular in terms of the larger conventions of English spelling (see **-e**). For other words ending in *-dg(e)ment*, see under **-ment**.

International English selection: Since **acknowledgement** is well established in both American and British English, and the more regular spelling, it's the one to prefer in international communication.

◇ For the location of *acknowledgements* at the front of a book, see **preface**.

acro-

This Greek element, meaning either "top" or "end," brings both kinds of meaning into English in loanwords. In words like *acrophobia* and *acropolis* (including the *Acropolis* in Athens) it means a "high position." In others, like *acronym* and *acrostic*, it means the "tip" or "extremity" of the words involved. The *acrobat* is literally "one who walks on tiptoe."

acronyms

An *acronym* is the word formed out of the initial letter or letters of a particular set of words. Thus an *acronym*, like an abbreviation, carries the meaning of a complex title or phrase:

ASCII (*American Standard Code for Information Interchange*)
NATO (*North Atlantic Treaty Organization*)

UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund)

WHO (World Health Organization)

Acronyms like these are written without stops, and may metamorphose further into words by shedding their capital letters, except for the first one. Thus *NATO* can also be written as *Nato*, and *UNICEF* as *Unicef*. When **acronyms** become common nouns, they are written entirely in lower case. For example:

laser (light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation)

radar (radio detection and ranging)

scuba (self-contained underwater breathing apparatus)

snag (sensitive new-age guy)

Not all **acronyms** are nouns. The adjective *posh* is believed to have begun as an **acronym**, standing for “port outward, starboard home” – unquestionably the choicer side of the ship, if you were a colonial journeying between Britain and India, and wanted to avoid the tropical sun. Another is the adverb *AWOL* (still usually capitalized) which in military parlance is “absent without official leave,” but used much more widely in the phrase *gone AWOL*, to cover an unexplained absence.

The desire to create **acronyms** which are both pronounceable and meaningful has exercised many an action group, such as:

ASH (Action on Smoking and Health)

CARS (Committee on Alcohol and Road Safety)

LIFE (Lay Institute for Evangelism)

MADD (Mothers against Drunk Driving)

SWAP (Students Work Abroad Program)

Strategically chosen **acronyms** can also provide a useful mnemonic, as in the *SWOT* analysis of business operations, under the headings of “strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats.”

Acronyms and initialisms. All the **acronyms** discussed so far comprise strings of letters which combine to form syllables, and can be pronounced as ordinary words. This is not, however, possible with abbreviations like *BBC* or *GNP* which have to be pronounced letter by letter. Technically they are **initialisms** rather than **acronyms**, although the term is not widely known. (The term *alphabetism* is still less common.) Yet *initialism* began as a nonce word just before 1900, according to the original *Oxford Dictionary* (1884–1928). Though absent from the 1976 Supplement *H–N*, it eventually made a full entry in the second edition (1989). Still it remains a technical term for professional editors and lexicographers, and hardly leaves any trace in large general databases. There are no occurrences of it in CCAE, and only one (in the plural) in the BNC. Data from both corpora show that **initialisms** such as *CBT* (computer-based training) and *FMFFV* (full motion / full frame video) are simply called **acronyms**. The distinction is in any case flawed, because (1) an abbreviation can embody both types, as does *MSDOS*; and (2) the same abbreviation can be pronounced in two ways. Think for example of *AKA* (“also known as”) and *UFO* (“unidentified flying object”), which are two-syllabled **acronyms** for some speakers, and three-syllabled **initialisms** for others. **Initialisms** generally keep their capital letters, even when they correspond to strings of lower case words.

active verbs

The term *active* is applied by grammarians to a verb whose action is performed by its own grammatical subject. A classical illustration is the statement: *I came, I saw, I conquered*.

Active verbs contrast with **passive verbs**, where the subject is acted upon by the verb's action. There are three passive verbs in the historical punishment for high treason – *He was hanged, drawn and quartered* – although only the first one is fully expressed with a subject and a part of the verb *be* (see **passive verbs**).

In written documents, **active verbs** are vital because they express action directly as an event, rather than making it a passive process. They are the natural way to keep a narrative moving vigorously along, and many books on good style recommend their use to ensure vigorous prose. Other things to avoid are discussed under **gobbledygook**, and **impersonal style**.

acuity or acuteness

The adjective *acute* has for centuries had two abstract nouns: the latinized **acuity** being first recorded in 1543, and the home-grown English **acuteness** in 1646.

Acuity is much more frequent than **acuteness** – by a factor of 4:1 in American English (CCA) and 5:1 in British data from the BNC. Despite unequal shares of usage, they coexist through some specialization in their uses. The corpus data has **acuity** typically referring to sharpness of vision, while **acuteness** is associated with poignancy of feeling, suffering and the symptoms of disease. Yet the BNC also shows some overlap, in that either may refer to sharpness of intellect and observation, where the mind's eye and the seeing eye coincide.

acute accents

The meaning of this mark depends on the language being written. In some European languages it marks a special vowel quality, as in French where it's used for a tense *e* (one pronounced with the tongue higher than for other kinds of *e*). In Czech and Hungarian the **acute accent** can be associated with any of the five vowels. Compare Polish, where it goes with the vowel *o*, and several consonants: *c, n, s* and *z*.

Other languages deploy the **acute accent** to mark prosodic aspects of words. In Greek and Spanish writing, **acute accents** are placed over vowels to show that the syllables they occur in are stressed. Spanish homophones are sometimes distinguished this way: thus *si* (“if”) and *sí* (“yes”). In Vietnamese writing, the **acute accent** represents a rising pitch for the syllable concerned.

Double **acute accents** are used in Hungarian on *o* and *u*, making different sounds from the same letters marked with umlauts. See further under **umlaut**.

ad or advert

In the snappy world of advertising, abbreviated forms of the key word are indispensable, though they made their first showing in print some decades before the industry took off. The *Oxford Dictionary*'s record begins in Victorian England, with two citations from mid-C19, and one from 1902 whose author finds it “a loathly little word,” yet such was its popularity in the 1920s that *admen* themselves campaigned against it,

fearing that it robbed their enterprise of dignity (Mencken's Supplement to *The American Language*, 1945). With only two letters, **ad** is an abnormally brief word for embodying content (see further under **words**), and British dictionaries including the *Oxford* label it "colloquial." American dictionaries such as *Webster's Third* (1986) leave it unlabeled, and American corpus evidence confirms that it's stylistically versatile, appearing in eight different categories of fiction and nonfiction in the Brown corpus, and in newspapers as well as monographs in the more recent CCAE. Reviewing its status, *Webster's English Usage* (1989) concludes that it is acceptable to a large majority of Americans. It also occurs freely in contemporary British English, with over 750 instances (singular and plural) in the BNC, found in many kinds of publication, and connected with various British institutions including Sainsbury's and Yorkshire TV.

Other signs that **ad** is established are the increasing range of compounds based on it. *Adman* originated in the first decade of C20, but CCAE contains many others, usually spaced, such as *ad agency*, *ad campaign*, *ad revenues* and *want-ads*. Note that in all but the last example, **ad** means "advertising" rather than "advertisement," though not all dictionaries recognize this.

Advert also originated in C19 (first recorded in 1860), but did not gain popularity until the 1950s. Large databases confirm that it's little used outside Britain. Though the BNC contains more than 800 examples (singular and plural) in BNC data, the tally from CCAE could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Its appearances in BNC texts – mostly the more interactive kinds of discourse – show that it's still "colloquial," as noted in the *Oxford Dictionary*. **Advert** as an abbreviation of "advertisement" keeps its distance from the identical latinized verb **advert** meaning "draw attention," which appears less than 10 times in the BNC, and only in rather formal style.

Both **ad** and **advert** are occasionally punctuated like abbreviations – **ad.**, **advert.** – and there are examples among the *Oxford Dictionary* citations, though they are not proposed as secondary forms. For most writers **ad** and **advert** are established short forms, like *exam* or *gym*, and there's no need to mark them as abbreviations of "advertisement" or "advertising." See further under **clipping**.

◇ For the choice between **advertisement** and **advertizement**, see further under that heading.

AD or A.D.

This abbreviation stands for the Latin *anno domini*, meaning "in the year of the Lord." It represents a date calculated within the calendar devised centuries ago by the Christian church, which is still the standard for the western world. In the Christian calendar, all years are dated as being either before the presumed year of Christ's birth (BC), or after it (AD).

According to a long-established principle of style, noted in Burchfield (1996) and the *Chicago Manual* (2003), **AD** should be written before the number in a date, as in *AD 405*, and *BC* after the number: *55 BC*. Yet there's increasing evidence that "it ain't necessarily so." *Webster's English Usage* (1989) presents counter examples alongside conventional ones; and *Webster's Style Manual* (1985) had earlier observed that, despite the convention, "many writers and editors place *AD* after the date" (as in *405 AD*). It observed that this

makes **AD** dates consistent with *BC* dates – and both then have the same order as when spoken. Database evidence from CCAE as well as the BNC confirms the trend in both the US and the UK, though it's closer to being an equal alternative in the American data. The *Cambridge International Dictionary* (1995) allows both placements.

The developing practice of placing **AD** after the year reference is supported by the now regular habit of having it follow the word *century*, as in *the fifth century AD*. This was the only location for it in many examples from the BNC and CCAE, and it's accepted even by usage authorities who object to placing **AD** after the year. Once again it reflects the order in which the phrase is said, but it was once objected to on the grounds that the word *anno* ("year") came awkwardly after "century." Those who read **AD** in its original Latin terms are however increasingly rare. For most it simply means "in the Christian era," and has a "purely conventional significance," as the *Chicago Manual* (1993) put it. Most scholars and scholarly editors, it says, have "long since withdrawn their objections."

The punctuation and typesetting of **AD** raise a few further questions. The font is usually roman rather than italic, in keeping with the bold feature style of this entry, rather than the italics used in examples. With full typesetting resources it can appear in *small capitals* (see **small caps**), but in wordprocessed text and on the internet it typically appears in full caps. The use/non-use of stops in **AD** is a matter of regional and/or individual policy for capitalized abbreviations (see **abbreviations**). American authorities cited in this entry tend to use periods/stops (**A.D.**) and the British ones not. They are united in leaving no space between the letters of the abbreviation, but setting space between it and the year.

◇ For more about the writing of dates, see **BC or BCE** and **dating systems**.

ad hoc, ad-hoc and adhoc

In Latin this phrase meant "to this" and by extension "for this matter." We use it in expressions like *ad hoc committee*, i.e. one set up for a specific and limited purpose, alongside the regular committee. In this precise context **ad(-)hoc** is neutral in meaning. In wider use it has come to mean "impromptu," and, more negatively, "lacking in forethought or circumspection." Decisions *made ad hoc* often seem arbitrary. These shifts in meaning, and the range of English derivatives (see below), show how thoroughly **ad(-)hoc** has been assimilated.

Ad hoc is still usually set with space, whether used as an attributive adjective, as in *ad hoc measures*, or predicatively (or adverbially) as in *Everything is very ad hoc* (see **adjectives** section 1). In American data from CCAE, the spaced form (**ad hoc**) outnumbered **ad-hoc** by more than 7:1, in keeping with the general American practice of avoiding *hyphens* (see under that heading). The difference is even greater in BNC data (closer to 15:1), though this may have more to do with British preference for preserving the identity of the Latin phrase. The BNC also provides a score of examples of **adhoc** (set solid). This form has yet to be recognized in either *New Oxford* (1998) or *Merriam-Webster* (2000), but it's the natural trend when the word is almost always an adjective rather than adverb, as the databases show. The fact that it has

several derivatives is further evidence of its ongoing assimilation.

The nouns derived from **ad(-)hoc** pose issues of spelling, illustrated in the alternative forms *adhoc(k)ing*, *ad hocism* / *ad hocism*, *adhoc(k)ery* and even *ad-hoc-ness*, all registered in the *Oxford Dictionary* (1989). The *Addenda* of *Webster's Third* (1986) adds *ad hocism*, a word which could be applied in many domains where *adhoc(k)ery* seems to rule. It conforms neatly to English spelling, and doesn't require any extra letter or hyphen to make it look like a real word. The *Oxford* variants *ad hocism* and *ad hoc-ery* show the persistent use of space to identify the Latin elements, though they highlight etymology at the expense of current meaning, and ignore the problems of suffixation (see further under **-c/-ck-** and **-e**). At any rate, consensus has yet to be achieved on how to spell these words, leaving writers free to select or construct the form which communicates best.

ad hominem

This phrase, borrowed from Latin, is part of the longer expression *argumentum ad hominem* "argument directed at the individual." It refers to diversionary tactics used in legal pleading and political rhetoric, either an appeal to the self-interest of the listener(s), or a personal attack on the opposition (the "mudslinging" of low-level parliamentary debate). Either way it diverts attention from the real issues, and jeopardizes proper debate and discussion. It suggests that the speaker is unable or unwilling to answer the points raised by the other side. (See further under **argument**.)

◇ See also **ad personam**.

ad infinitum

In Latin this phrase meant "to infinity" and was used literally in medieval scholasticism in theological and mathematical argument. But in modern usage **ad infinitum** is always a rhetorical exaggeration – applied to a process which seems to go drearily on and on.

ad lib, ad-lib or adlib

In shortened form, this is the late Latin phrase *ad libitum*, meaning "at one's pleasure," or "as you please." Musicians have known it for centuries as a directive to do as they like with the musical score: modify the tempo, add a few grace notes, omit a few bars of repetition. Only in C20 was the word extended to other kinds of performance (particularly acting and public speaking), in which the speaker may extemporize beyond the script. Often it implies a complete absence of scripting. These more general uses of the phrase have turned it into a colloquial verb, as in *having to ad-lib his way through a weather forecast*.

Both the *New Oxford Dictionary* (1998) and *Merriam-Webster* (2000) have the verb written as **ad-lib**, the last consonant of which is doubled when suffixes are added, as in *ad-libbed*, *ad-libbing* and *ad-libber*. The dictionaries propose the hyphenated form **ad-lib** for the noun (*an original ad-lib*) and adjective (*his ad-lib masterpiece*) as well, though *New Oxford* uses **ad lib** when illustrating the rather rare adverb. Yet data from the BNC show a mix of **ad-lib** and **ad lib** for verb, noun and adjective in edited texts,

and **ad lib** interchanging with **adlib** in broadcasting autocues (e.g. *Harriet adlib*), where its grammar is indeterminate. Data from CCAE have **ad lib** as often as **ad-lib** for noun, verb and adjective, in line with the greater reluctance of Americans to use a hyphen when spaced forms will do (see under **hyphens**). But **ad(-)lib** evidently varies in both the US and UK – which goes with the free-wheeling nature of the process it refers to.

ad personam

This Latin phrase (literally "to the person") has had two kinds of use in late C20 English:

- * to describe appointments which are made to suit the individual candidate, rather than by general criteria
- * as a nonsexist variant of *ad hominem*, on the mistaken assumptions that (a) the latter means "at the man" (male) rather than "at the human individual"; and (b) Latin *persona* can be used like "person" in English (see under **-person** and **persona**). Just what equal opportunity it provides for is unclear.

Neither usage is widespread. The second, noted by Bliss (1966), seems to predate affirmative action of the 1980s, while the first makes its appearance in *New Oxford* (1998). There's no sign of either in *Merriam-Webster* (2000).

ad rem

This Latin phrase means literally "to the matter." It is used to identify arguments which stick to the point at issue, and do not resort to diversionary tactics or argumentative tricks. (See further under **argument** and **fallacies**.)

adage

See under **aphorism**.

adaptation or adaption

These are both abstract nouns based on the verb *adapt*. **Adaptation** is older by far with an antecedent in late Latin, whereas **adaption** appears first in C18, apparently formed on the analogy of *adoption*.

Adaption has never been as popular as **adaptation**, to judge by the way it's cross-referenced to the longer word in both *Webster's Third* (1986) and the *Oxford Dictionary* (1989). In contemporary databases of British and American English, **adaption** is much less common than **adaptation**, in the ratio of about 1:20 in BNC and 1:40 in CCAE. What use it has in American English is typically in references to a literary work being adapted for another medium such as television or film. But occasionally it refers to the adapting of computer software for different platforms, of industries to changing market forces, and of humans to extreme stress. The last is the sole example in CCAE to support the indication of the *Random House Dictionary* (1987) that **adaption** belongs to sociology. Clearly the word is in wider use than its editors – or Fowler (1926) – were aware. **Adaption** is thus a viable alternative to **adaptation**, and goes almost anywhere the verb *adapt* itself can go.

adapter or adaptor

Some *-er/-or* pairs complement each other, one being used for the person and the other for the instrument

(as with *conveyer/conveyor*). But this is not so for **adapter/adaptor**, which are interchangeable in database evidence from both the US and the UK. The chief difference is that **adapter** is much more frequent than **adaptor** in American English, occurring more than four times as often in CCAE; whereas in British English the situation is reversed with **adaptor** occurring nearly four times as often as **adapter** in the BNC. In both databases, the words were used much more often in relation to mechanical, electrical or electronic devices than to people who adapt something such as a literary work. But the human sense was spelled as both **adapter** and **adaptor**, and there were instances of both *co-adapter* and *co-adaptor* in CCAE. ◇ For other kinds of complementation between **-er/-or** words, see under that heading.

addendum

For the plural of this word, see under **-um**.

addition or additive

Additives are of course **additions**, but **additions** are not necessarily **additives**. **Additive** has the much more restricted meaning of something added in a chemical process, as in photography, or in the processing of foods. But if you're extending your house or family, it will be an **addition**, not an **additive**.

addresses

In the last fifty years, the wording of **addresses** in letters and on envelopes has become increasingly streamlined. Current practice is to use minimal punctuation, and abbreviations for titles, generic elements of street names, and state or province codes. Zip codes / post codes are used in most English-speaking countries, placed after the name of the state in the US and Australia, after the city in the UK, and after the province in Canada. In European **addresses** the post code precedes the name of the city. Examples of each are set out in Appendixes VII and VIII.

◇ For the conventions of e-mail and internet **addresses**, see **URL**.

adherence or adhesion

These abstract words are both related to the verb *adhere*, meaning "stick to." They differ in that **adhesion** usually refers to the physical gluing or bonding of one substance to another, while **adherence** means a less tangible connection, such as the commitment to a religion, philosophy, code of behavior or international agreement. Yet there's some crossover between them, which is acknowledged in American and British dictionaries, and evidenced in the corpora.

The physical bonding expressed in **adhesion** can be chemical (as of household paint sticking to a surface), biochemical (as when bacteria attach themselves to cells) or mechanical (as of the grip of a tyre on the road or a shoe on the ground). In American English there is a further specialized legal use of the term in *contract of adhesion* (one which is attached to a job and cannot be negotiated by the employee). Among the crossover examples from CCAE, **adhesion** was also used in a few references to Christian affiliation (both conformist and nonconformist) and to political policy, in *adhesion to free trade*. These latter areas are the broad domain of **adherence**, which expresses

many kinds of religious affiliation (Christian and non-Christian), as well as political and social commitments (to Keynesian economics, the Berne copyright convention and the new corporate mentality). Some applications were closer to home, as in **adherence** to a low-fat diet, or to a dress code of suits, ties and jackets for legislators. Again there were a few crossover examples in both CCAE and BNC where **adherence** (rather than **adhesion**) was used to express chemical and biochemical bonding. The interplay between the two words shows that they are not quite as specialized in their applications as is sometimes said, although **adhesion** remains the one to which more technical senses are attached. **Adherence** still can be applied more freely, in many human and social situations. This helps to explain why it is much more common than **adhesion**, although the margin is greater in the US than the UK, judging by their relative frequency in data from CCAE and the BNC.

adieu

In several European languages, speakers seem to invoke the divinity when taking leave of each other: **Adieu** (French) and *adiós* (Spanish) both mean literally "to God"; and the English *goodbye*, originally "God be with you," spells it out a little more. *Goodbye* is now totally secularized, an all-purpose farewell, whereas **adieu** retains a certain divine melancholy, a sense of the significance of the parting that it marks. Contemporary English uses of **adieu** illustrated in the BNC are mostly to be found in literary fiction, in direct address ("Gentlemen, adieu"), and in narrative comment, usually collocated with the verb *bid* in the sense "declare" (see further at **bid**). When used in nonfictional contexts, *bidding adieu* attaches historic moment to historical departures, as when "bidding adieu to Soviet troops" is coupled with "working out new treaties of good neighbourliness with the Soviet Union."

Adieu appears only very rarely in the plural, leaving some doubt as to whether it should then be the English *adieux* or French *adieux*. The major dictionaries endorse the first rather than the second: *Webster's Third* (1986) does so explicitly, and the *Oxford Dictionary* (1989) implicitly, by the absence of plural specification. However the *-x* plural is still available for those who wish to emphasize the foreign origins of **adieu**, and it's needed of course in titles such as *Les Adieux*, given to one of Beethoven's sonatas.

adjacent, adjoining and adjunct

The first two words imply closeness in space, and both may indicate objects or areas juxtaposed to each other:

The company suffered a serious setback when fire gutted much of the adjacent warehouse.

The area ranges from full sun beyond the herb bed to deep shade adjoining the house.

Adjoining normally implies contiguity, though the common boundary often has to be deduced from context, and may be no more than a right-angle connection, as in *an alley adjoining the main road*, and *houses in adjoining streets*. The sense of contiguity in **adjoining** probably stems from its visible connections with the word *join*; whereas the etymology of **adjacent** ("lying near") is obscure to most. **Adjacent** doesn't require things to be hard up against each

other, though they may be, as in *adjacent angles* or the *adjacent organs* of anatomical descriptions. More often, **adjacent** seems to be used when the relative closeness of two objects is not so important, or not known. Consider its use in BNC examples such as *research with grant-maintained and other adjacent schools*, which leaves it open as to how many schools in a given district are covered by the study.

Adjacent is also used to refer to the position of an item immediately preceding or following in a sequence (*Webster's Third*, 1986), and the relationship begins to be a matter of time rather than space. Add this to its already wider range of applications, and it's no surprise to find that **adjacent** occurs more than twice as often as **adjoining** in both American and British English, from the evidence of CCAE and the BNC.

Adjunct is a good deal more abstract than either **adjacent** or **adjoining**, and quite rare as an adjective. Its uses are official, as in *adjunct professor*, meaning one appointed by special (non-tenured) attachment to an institution.

◇ For grammatical uses of the noun **adjunct**, see **adjuncts**.

adjectives

Often thought of as “descriptive words,” **adjectives** just as often serve to define or to evaluate something:

a big room a windowless room an awful room

The same **adjective** may describe and evaluate something, as in *a poky room*. Writers can of course use more than one **adjective** in the same string, to create a multifaceted image. Wine labels and wine commentaries are a rich source of them:

intense cool-climate fruit and smoky oak aromas very lively, fine, dry palate with a flinty edge and a long finish

a medium-bodied cabernet-style wine, matured in small French casks

Both simple and compound **adjectives** can go before the key noun, but the more elaborately phrased descriptors (“matured in...” etc.) need to go after it (in *postposition*). Theoretically there's no limit to the number of **adjectives** you can pile up in front of a noun – only the risk of losing the reader with too many. As those wine descriptions show, a set of three or four is plenty, especially if some of them are *compound adjectives* (on which see section 3 below).

Adjectives appear in a conventional order, the evaluative ones coming first, before the descriptive ones, which always precede the definitive ones. This explains the sequences in *smoky oak aromas* and *small French casks*. Note also that the **adjective** modified by *very* comes first in the string, as in *very lively, fine, dry palate*. The same holds for any gradable or comparable adjectives (see section 2 below). Last and next to the noun are the definitive or categorial adjectives, such as *French*, which are nongradable. A further point to note is that definitive adjectives are often nouns conscripted for *adjectival* service, like *oak* in *smoky oak aromas*. (On punctuating sets of adjectives, see **comma**, section 3.)

1 Attributive and predicative adjectives. When **adjectives** precede the nouns they qualify, as in the examples above, they are said to be *attributive*. But many also occur independently after a verb, particularly if they are evaluative or descriptive. Compare for example *small casks* with *The casks were*

small. In cases like the latter, adjectives are said to be *predicative*, because they form part of the predicate of the clause, complementing the verb and its subject (see further under **predicate**). Attributive and predicative uses yield different meanings in some cases: compare *an ill omen* with *She was ill*.

Some **adjectives** resist being used in predicative roles. Those such as *utter, mere* (and others when used as *emphasizers* e.g. *a firm friend, the real hero, sheer arrogance*) can only occur as *attributive adjectives*. The same is true of many which serve to define or categorize a noun (like *meeting* in the example *meeting room*), which could not be used predicatively in the same sense, if at all. Other **adjectives** are restricted to the predicative role, including those on the adjective/adverb boundary, such as:

aboard abroad aground ajar awry

We never say “the ajar door,” only *The door was ajar*. Whether *ajar* counts as an **adjective** or an adverb in that exemplary sentence is a conundrum, to be tested by syntactic criteria like those of the *Comprehensive Grammar* (1985). (See further under **a-** and **copular verbs**.)

2 Comparison of adjectives. The *adjective* system allows us to compare one thing with another, and to grade them on the same *adjectival* quality. There are however two systems of comparison, involving (a) suffixes or (b) *more* and *most*. Their application depends largely on how many syllables the **adjective** consists of.

***Adjectives of one syllable** are usually compared by means of the suffixes *-er* and *-est*, as in:

fine wine (absolute)
finer wine (comparative)
the finest wine (superlative)

The different forms of the **adjective** – *absolute* (or *positive*), the *comparative* and the *superlative* – make the regular *degrees of comparison* for most everyday English **adjectives**. *Good* and *bad* are the major exceptions with their irregular paradigms *good, better, best* and *bad, worse, worst*. Other exceptions are **adjectives** like *crushed* and *worn*, which have verb (past participle) suffixes embedded in them, and whose degrees of comparison are formed *periphrastically*, i.e. with the help of *more/most*. Idiomatically dictates an irregular form for a one-syllabled **adjective**, as in the phrase “a more just society.”

***Adjectives consisting of three or more syllables** almost always form their degrees of comparison *periphrastically*, i.e. by means of *adjectival phrases* formed with *more* and *most*:

an expensive wine
a more expensive wine
the most expensive wine

Exceptions among three-syllabled **adjectives** are those formed with *un-*, such as *unhappy* and *unhealthy*, whose comparatives and superlatives are as they would be without the prefix: *unhappier, unhealthiest*.

***Adjectives with two syllables** are less predictable in their forms of comparison than those shorter or longer. Many can be compared either way, such as:

gentle *lovely*
gentler / more gentle *lovelier / more lovely*
gentlest / most gentle *loveliest / most lovely*

The inflected forms are neat for attributive use, whereas phrasal comparisons are of course bulkier

and lend themselves to predicative use, especially for emphasis. Other factors such as the need to use matching forms of comparison for paired **adjectives**, as in *the most simple and straightforward solution*, have been found to explain some of the variation (Leech and Culpeper, 1997).

One large group of **adjectives** – those formed with *-y* – is more regular than the rest, using suffixes for the comparative/superlative suffixes almost always. The following are a token of the many:

angry easy empty funny happy
healthy heavy lofty merry noisy
pretty speedy tidy wealthy weighty

Ad hoc **adjectives** formed with *-y* are compared the same regular way:

craggy craggier craggiest
dishy dishier dishiest
foxy foxier foxiest

Compare **adjectives** ending in *-ly*, which are quite variable. Researchers have found that *early* always used suffixes for comparison, whereas *likely* was almost always compared with *more/most*. Others in the *-ly* group such as *costly*, *deadly*, *friendly*, *lively*, *lonely*, *lovely* can go either way. Some **adjectives** such as *costly*, *deadly*, *friendly* prefer the inflected form for the superlative, but use periphrasis for the comparative: *more costly*, *costliest* (Peters, 2000). Both patterns of comparison have been found with adjectives ending in *-le* (*feeble*, *humble*, *noble*, *simple* etc.), though they are more often inflected; and the same is true of those ending in *-ow* (*mellow*, *narrow*, *shallow*). Those ending in *-er* (*bitter*, *eager*, *proper*, *sober* etc.) tend the other way, making their comparisons with *more/most*. **Adjectives** with a derivational suffix, such as *-ful* (*hopeful*), *-less* (*graceless*), *-ive* (*active*), *-ous* (*famous*) are always compared phrasally, as are those formed with *-ed* (*excited*) or *-ing* (*boring*). But two-syllabled **adjectives** formed with the negative prefix *un-* (*unfair*, *unfit*, *unwise*) are compared by means of inflections, just like their positive counterparts. Beyond all those groups, there are individual **adjectives** which go their own sweet way: *quiet* is almost always inflected; *common*, *cruel*, *handsome*, *minute*, *polite*, *remote* appear in both inflected and phrasal comparisons.

Regional studies of the two types of comparison show that American English is slightly more inclined than British to use phrasal comparison with *-ly* **adjectives** (Lindquist, 1998). Some have thought that writers would be more inclined to use phrasal comparison than speakers, though research associated with the *Longman Grammar* (1999) showed the opposite: that the frequency of inflected **adjectives** was higher in all forms of writing (fiction, journalism, academic) than in conversation. Despite these tendencies, writers have some freedom of choice when comparing many everyday two-syllabled **adjectives**, to be exercised in the service of style, rhythm and rhetoric. The only caveat is to avoid using inflections as well as periphrasis in quick succession, as in “the most unkindest cut of all” (*Julius Caesar*, iii:2). Double superlatives like this were acceptable in Tudor English, but not nowadays.

***Uncomparable adjectives**. Many kinds of **adjective** don’t support any *degrees of comparison* – the quality they refer to cannot be graded. A definitive adjective like *French* (in *French cask*) either is or is not true. (*More French than the French* turns it ad hoc into a

gradable adjective.) Other **adjectives** which cannot be compared are those which refer to an absolute state, such as *first*, *double*, *last* and *dead*. Uncomparable **adjectives** like these are sometimes referred to as *absolute adjectives* (see **absolute** section 1).

3 Compound adjectives consist of two or more parts, and may or may not include an **adjective**. They are the staple of journalese, as in *the war-torn Middle East* or *power-hungry executives*, but are also used creatively by advertisers, and by authors and poets for artistic purposes. For more about the structure of *compound adjectives*, see **compounds**, and **hyphens** section 2c.

◇ For the grammar of *adjectival phrases* and clauses, see **phrases** and **clauses** section 4.

adjoining or adjacent

See **adjacent**.

adjuncts

Grammarians use this term in two different ways:

- * for a particular set of adverbs: see **adverbs**, section 1
- * for the *adverbial* component(s) of a clause: see **predicate**, section 1

administer or administrate

These come from French and Latin respectively, and as often the first has many more roles than the second. Dictionaries tend to cross-reference **administrate** to **administer** as if it could be freely substituted for it, yet **administrate** can scarcely take as its object things such as *justice*, *punishment*, *medicine*, *poison*, *a blow*, *an oath* or *the sacrament*, all of which collocate with **administer**. **Administer** has a distinctive intransitive use with *to* (once disputed, now dictionary-endorsed) which is found in examples such as *administering to the sick*, and this **administrate** cannot cover. The chief uses of **administrate** are close to the nouns *administration* and *administrator*, in the intransitive sense of “act as administrator” or transitively “manage the administration of” (usually a corporate structure or institution). Neither is common in British English, judging by the dearth of examples in the BNC, but there’s a sprinkling of them in American data from CCAE. Intransitive and transitive uses are almost equally represented (the latter involving objects such as “department,” “estate,” “the act,” “private lands”). **Administrate** clearly has a role to play, one that is distinct from **administer**.

admission or admittance

Though similar in age, these two abstract nouns for the verb *admit* have very unequal shares of the linguistic market. The latinate **admission** dominates the scene by about 40:1, according to BNC data. **Admission** scoops up the verb senses of confessing something or letting it slip, as in *an admission of guilt* or *by his own admission*, and **admittance** is only rarely found in such senses. Either word can be used when it’s a matter of entering or being allowed to enter (a controlled public place such as a stadium or exhibition), although **admission** is much more common, and the one built into compounds such as *admission price*. Hospitals institutionalize it in their nomenclature, **ADMISSIONS** being the section where patients are admitted for care. While **admission** invites entry, **admittance** is associated with denying

it, in the conventional sign NO ADMITTANCE. The sign addresses those not authorized to enter a given area because of potential dangers or privacy – not those who work there, who would not be denied access by it. In a more upfront way **admission** can also be associated with exclusive kinds of entry, for example membership of professional groups, as in *admission to the board of solicitors*, or *admission to the Bar*. These official uses of **admission** may nevertheless suggest that the word is to be avoided when the access route is less formal, hence BNC examples such as *admittance to Paradise* and *admittance to the afterlife* (no “admissions board” to control access there!). Unexpected uses of **admittance** may amount to no more than the fact that it seems closer to the verb *admit* than **admission** does, and comes naturally when thinking of the verbal process. The most distinctive application of **admittance** is as a technical term in electronics, where it complements *conductance*, *impedance* and *resistance* in the structure of electrical systems.

adopted or adoptive

Usage books often present these as reciprocal adjectives, the first representing the perspective of the *adopter*, the second that of the *adoptee*. So **adopted** is the word to expect from parents referring to the child they have taken in, and **adoptive** is the child’s word to describe the parents he or she has acquired in this way. This distinction is perhaps a reflex of the *Oxford Dictionary’s* (1989) note that **adopted** is used “especially of the child.” Yet its definition of **adoptive** allows either perspective: “an adoptive son, father etc.” and does not make the two words complementary. Whatever its basis, the “traditional distinction appears to be crumbling” says Burchfield (1996); and the BNC presents both regular and divergent examples, the latter including “adopted parent,” and “adopted family,” as well as “adoptive children” and even an “adoptive pup” in a veterinary report. In fact the selection of **adopted** or **adoptive** is immaterial because the following noun (“child” or “parent”) indicates the perspective.

advance, advanced and advancement

Subtle changes have taken place in the grammar and spelling of **advance** since it first appeared in C13 English. Its original form *avaunce* reflects its French origins, but in Tudor times it was remodeled as **advance**, in accordance with Latin spelling conventions, although it has no exact Latin ancestor. Originally a verb, by 1680 it was also used as a noun, as in *the enemy’s advance*, and attributively, as in *advance guard*.

The uses of **advance** as adjective and noun contrast with their grammatical counterparts **advanced** and **advancement**. **Advance** as adjective indicates priority in time and/or space, as in *advance notice*; whereas **advanced** implies being well down the track in terms of achievement or sophistication, as in *an advanced student* or *advanced thinking*. The two cannot substitute for each other. Compare the noun **advance** with **advancement**, where dictionaries suggest there’s some common ground in referring to progress in a particular field of endeavor. Yet **advance** can hardly replace the other word in the *American Association for the Advancement of Science*, not because it is an established title but because

advancement is an abstract concept, whereas any **advance** is specific and down-to-earth. *The advancement of civilization* would connote the heightening of cultural mores, whereas *the advance of civilization* could be a comment on the use of mobile phones in the Himalayas. The more abstract properties of **advancement** make it a useful euphemism for getting ahead in one’s career or profession, where **advance** is no substitute. Yet there are many more applications of **advance** for which **advancement** is unsuitable, and the first outnumbers the second by more than 9:1 in British English and 4:1 in American English, in comparable databases (LOB and Brown corpora).

adventurous or adventuresome

See **venturous**.

adverbs

Adverbs are the most varied class of English words, with a variety of syntactic roles. Some modify verbs, as the name **adverb** suggests. But many have other roles in sentences which are beginning to be recognized by individual names. The terms used to identify them below are those of the *Comprehensive Grammar* (1985).

1 Types of adverb. **Adverbs** which detail the circumstances of the verb are these days often called *adjuncts*, to indicate that they connect with the core of the clause without being part of it. Other types of **adverb** are *subjuncts*, which typically modify other **adverbs** or adjectives; *disjuncts*, which modify whole clauses or sentences; and *conjuncts*, which forge a semantic link between a sentence and the one before it.

***adjuncts** add detail to whatever action the verb itself describes. They may specify the time or place of the action, the manner in which it took place, or its extent.

(time)	<i>tonight</i>	<i>tomorrow</i>	<i>soon</i>
	<i>then</i>		
(place)	<i>abroad</i>	<i>downtown</i>	<i>indoors</i>
	<i>upstairs</i>		
(manner)	<i>well</i>	<i>quickly</i>	<i>energetically</i>
	<i>thoughtfully</i>		
(extent)	<i>largely</i>	<i>partly</i>	<i>thoroughly</i>
	<i>totally</i>		

***subjuncts** moderate the force of various kinds of word. Many such as *really*, *relatively*, *too*, *very*, modify adjectives and other **adverbs**, as in *very strong/strongly*. Some such as *almost*, *quite*, *rather* can modify verbs as well. *Subjuncts* of both kinds have the effect of either softening or intensifying the words they modify, hence the two major groups:

(downtoners)	<i>fairly</i>	<i>rather</i>	<i>somewhat</i>
(intensifiers)	<i>extremely</i>	<i>most</i>	<i>so</i>

Expletives like *bloody* are powerful intensifiers of other adjectives, as in: *a bloody good book* (see further under **intensifiers**). A special subgroup of *restrictive subjuncts* serve to spotlight others and to narrow the focus of the sentence. They include **adverbs** such as *especially*, *even*, *only*.

***disjuncts** affect the interpretation of the whole clause or sentence, either as judgements of the likelihood of something happening (*maybe*, *possibly*, *probably*, *surely*); or as expressions of attitude towards the event (*fortunately*, *mercifully*, *regrettably*, *worryingly*). They stand outside the core grammar of

the sentence, and can be moved around within it:

Fortunately the letter got there in time.

The letter fortunately got there in time.

The letter got there in time fortunately.

Disjuncts, like *subjuncts*, can be used for emphasis, and have a significant interpersonal role to play in a writing style: see under **interpersonal**.

***conjuncts are adverbs** which play a cohesive role between separate sentences, or clauses. They include words like *also*, *however*, *therefore*, and thus express logical relationships such as addition, contrast and causation. (See further under **conjunctions**.)

The same **adverb** can of course be used in more than one way. Thus *mostly* can be an *adjunct* or a *subjunct*, depending on whether it quantifies the extent of something, or simply serves to emphasize it. *Too* is an attitudinal *subjunct* in *too hot* and a *conjunct* in *I'm coming too*. *Yet* can be an *adjunct* of time as in *not yet here*, and a *contrastive conjunct*, as in *small yet tasty apricots*. More controversially, *hopefully* is these days a *disjunct* as well as an *adjunct* (see **hopefully**).

Note also that *not*, the *negative adverb*, is treated separately from other **adverbs** in modern English grammars. This is because of its affinity with negative words of other kinds, such as determiners and pronouns (*neither*, *no*, *none*). *Not* has wide-ranging powers within sentences, to modify a word (verb, adjective or another **adverb**), a phrase, or a whole clause. (See further under **not** and **negatives**.)

2 Adverbial structure and form. From all the examples above, it's clear that **adverbs** do not necessarily end in *-ly*. (See further under **-ly** and **zero adverbs**.) Many like *soon* and *well* consist of a single morpheme. There are also *compound adverbs*, for example *downtown* and *indoors*. (See further under **compounds**, and **hyphens** section 2b.) Many **adverbs** are phrases:

<i>straight away</i>	<i>to the bottom</i>
<i>in no way</i>	<i>a little bit</i>
<i>without a care in the world</i>	

Adverbial ideas can be expressed through several kinds of clause. See **clauses** section 4c.

3 Comparison of adverbs. Like many adjectives, **adverbs** allow degrees of comparison. Those consisting of one syllable, e.g. *fast*, *hard*, *soon*, make their comparative and superlative forms with inflections in the same way as adjectives: *sooner*, *soonest* etc. **Adverbs** formed with *-ly* enlist the help of *more* and *most*, as in *more energetically*, *most energetically*.

4 Position of adverbs in sentences. Many **adverbs** can appear at various points in a sentence, as noted above (section 1) for *disjuncts*. *Adjuncts* can also appear early, late or in the middle of a sentence:

Yesterday trading hit an all-time low.

Trading yesterday hit an all-time low.

Trading hit an all-time low yesterday.

Conjuncts are relatively mobile also. (Compare that last sentence with the one above the set of examples, and see further under **also**.) There are few restrictions on *conjuncts* such as *however*; despite notions to the contrary (see **however**). The position of **adverbs** can be used to alter the emphasis of a statement, and to control the focus. (See further under **information focus**.)

A very small group of **adverbs** (*hardly*, *never*, *scarcely*) require inversion of the normal word order when used at the beginning of a sentence. See under **inversion**.

adverse or averse

These words express different kinds of negative orientation: **adverse** relates to external circumstances, while **averse** gets inside the individual:

With such adverse judgements on his case, he was still averse to reconsidering the action.

Adverse is commonly applied to legal or official conditions that are hostile, or to threatening natural forces, as in *adverse weather conditions* or *an adverse reaction to a drug*. **Averse** expresses strong disinclination, though the idiom *not averse to* is used lightly or ironically, as in *not averse to a little whisky*. While **adverse** is mostly used attributively, **averse** is almost always predicative (see **adjectives** section 1). Grammar thus tends to keep them apart – but not entirely. In both the UK and the US, there's evidence of **adverse** being used predicatively, and when the subject is personal there may be some doubt about the writer's intention. See for example:

Courts have not been adverse to developing the common law.

Purity campaigners were not adverse to drawing on science to validate morality.

The use of *not* seems to neutralize the difference between the two words, although the first example is probably still within the legal pale. The second clearly shows the use of **adverse** where you might expect **averse** – except that it lacks the element of understatement which goes with *not averse to* (see under **figures of speech**). The ratio of *not adverse to* to *not averse to* is about 1:3 in American data from CCAE. This confirms the rapprochement of the two idioms noted by *Webster's Dictionary of Usage* (1989), though it has yet to be registered by *Merriam-Webster* (2000). *New Oxford* (1998) notes this use of *not adverse to* as an error, and usage data from the BNC makes it less common in British English as a substitute for *not averse to*, appearing in the ratio of about 1:11.

Despite some convergence between **adverse** and **averse** in common usage, they contrast sharply in botanical descriptions. Leaves *adverse to* the stem turn towards it, while those *averse to* it turn away. These are the literal senses of the two words in Latin, but lost to contemporary English.

advertisement or advertizement

The first spelling **advertisement** is given preference in dictionaries everywhere, including North America. This is as it should be, because there's no evidence of **advertizement** in data from either CCAE or the BNC. Perhaps its currency depends on signs and unedited texts which are not included in those databases. The fact that **advertizement** gets dictionary recognition everywhere is curious, based perhaps on the preferred American pronunciation which according to *Webster's Third* (1986) stresses the third (rather than the second) syllable. It may also represent the assumption that the *-ise* spelling would naturally give way to *-ize* in the US (see further under **-ize/-ise**). But the two instances of the verb **advertize** in CCAE are totally eclipsed by over 1100 instances of **advertise**.

International English selection: The dearth of evidence for the spelling **advertizement** (or even **advertize**) makes the *-ise* forms preferable anywhere in the world.

adviser or advisor

Both these spellings are in current use, though **adviser** is the dominant spelling in both the US and the UK. The ratio in American data from CCAE is 20:1 and in British data from the BNC it's 6:1. Curiously, **advisor** is sometimes said to be “the American spelling.” The *Oxford Dictionary* (1989) notes the frequency of the **-or** spelling in the titles of persons who give advice “especially in the US,” and this quasi-official usage has no doubt helped to make people aware of it. Yet the *Oxford* lists **advisor** only as a variant of **adviser**, with no independent headword even for cross-referencing. The spelling **adviser** is consistent with the majority of agent words formed in English (see **-er/-or**), and it goes back to C17, according to *Oxford* citations, whereas **advisor** is first recorded just before 1900. Whether it is simply a respelling of **adviser** or a backformation from **advisory** is a matter of debate. But whatever its past, **advisor** is registered alongside **adviser** in major British, American, Canadian and Australian dictionaries.

ae/e

In words like *anaemic* and *orthopaedic* the **ae** spellings present the classical Latin digraph **ae**, which became a ligature (**æ**) or just **e** in medieval times. The ligature is still used in the *Oxford Dictionary* (1989), but the digraph appears in abridged and smaller versions, notably the 1993 edition of the *Shorter Oxford* and *New Oxford* (1998). Other British dictionaries such as those of Chambers, Collins and Longman, have always used the **ae** digraph, either because of Fowler's (1926) support for it, or the lack of typographic options. But American dictionaries like *Webster's Third* (1986) make use of simple **e** spellings in most such words, e.g. *anemic*, *hemorrhage*, *orthopedic*, instead of the ligature or digraph. The **e** spellings are standard in American English, except for *(a)esthetic* and *arch(a)eology*, where they are in the minority (in data from CCAE the digraphic spellings prevailed by more than 5:1). Canadians too use **e** rather than **ae** spellings, according to the *Canadian Oxford* (1998).

In British English, there's increasing variability in spelling the largish set of classical loanwords including **ae/e**:

<i>(a)eon</i>	<i>(a)esthetic</i>	<i>(a)etiology</i>
<i>an(a)emia</i>	<i>an(a)esthetic</i>	<i>arch(a)eology</i>
<i>arch(a)eopterix</i>	<i>c(a)esura</i>	<i>di(a)eresis</i>
<i>encyclop(a)edia</i>	<i>f(a)eces</i>	<i>gyn(a)ecology</i>
<i>h(a)ematite</i>	<i>h(a)emoglobin</i>	<i>h(a)emophilia</i>
<i>h(a)emorrhage</i>	<i>h(a)emorrhoids</i>	<i>leuk(a)emia</i>
<i>medi(a)eval</i>	<i>orthop(a)edic</i>	<i>p(a)ediatric</i>
<i>p(a)edophile</i>	<i>pal(a)eography</i>	<i>pal(a)eolithic</i>
<i>prim(a)eval</i>	<i>septic(a)emia</i>	<i>tox(a)emia</i>

Some of the most familiar **ae** words appear quite commonly now with just **e** – even in the UK. Data from the BNC confirms it for words such as *medi(a)eval* and *encyclop(a)edia*, and to a lesser extent for *pal(a)eolithic*, *leuk(a)emia* and *orthop(a)edic*. They constitute a scale, from words where **e** spellings are in the majority or close to it, to those linked up with medical or other kinds of technical usage, where specialists tend to preserve the **ae** (Peters, 2001a). The 1998–2001 Langscape survey showed that at least 25% of British respondents would use **e** spellings in *archeology*, *leukemia*, *paleolithic*, *septicemia*. These words and others such as *orthopedic*, *pedophile* were

endorsed by 29–50% of respondents from Australia, where **ae** spellings have prevailed in the past. More remarkable still was the higher endorsement by second-language users of English, in Europe as well as Asia. Their support for **e** spellings was almost without exception higher than the British; and a majority of Continental respondents (often 70%+) voted for **e** spellings, except for *aesthetic* and *anaesthetic* – where they stood at 48% and 50% respectively.

Apart from usage data, there are linguistic arguments in favor of the **e** forms. The **ae** digraph is awkward as a vowel sequence with no roots in common English spelling. It makes the ligature bulk too large, and sits strangely alongside other vowels in words like *diaeresis*, *palaeolithic* and others with the *pal(a)eo-* prefix. In words like *septic(a)emia*, the use of **ae** runs counter to the more general spelling principle that **c** followed by an “a,” “o” or “u” carries a “k” sound. (See further under **-ce/-ge**.)

The use of **ae** is sometimes defended on grounds of etymology: that it helps readers to recognize the meanings of the classical loanwords. But **ae** is not so etymological, when it's a Latin transcription of the Greek diphthong *ai*. The Greek root *paid-* meaning “child” is the one at stake in *encyclop(a)edia* and *orthop(a)edic*, as well as *p(a)ediatrics* and *p(a)edophilia*. Millions of readers without Greek recognize these words as wholes, not through the syllable in which *paid-* is embedded. We no longer look for the **ae** in *pedagogue*, *pedagogy* and *pederast*; and *p(a)edophile* and *p(a)edophilia* may be expected to go the same way. In nonspecialist usage, *p(a)ediatrician* could also join the group, though it's protected by doctors in some parts of the world (see **pediatrician** or **paediatrician**). The specialists' tendency to preserve **ae** in those words goes hand in hand with their greater use of **ae** plurals (rather than **-as** ones) for Latin words ending in **-a** (see **-a** section 1). They therefore deal more frequently with words embodying the digraph, and its distribution is more significant for them. Yet specialists looking to a wider readership outside the UK, e.g. on the internet, might take note of the various terms in this entry where the **a** of the **ae** digraph is bracketed, as a reminder that in linguistic terms it is unnecessary. Much of the world works without the **ae** digraph.

International English selection: Spellings with **e** rather than the **ae** digraph are to be preferred on linguistic grounds as well as their wider distribution, throughout North America and increasingly in Continental Europe, Australia and elsewhere. In the UK it would streamline the currently uneven situation, whereby some words are already being spelled with **e**, and others vacillating over going that way.

Final notes on ae/e

- 1 For use of the **ae** in Latin plurals, see **-a** section 1.
- 2 The **ae** digraph still substitutes for the ligature in classical proper names such as *Aeneas*, *Caesar*, as well as Anglo-Saxon ones such as *Aelfric* and *Caedmon*.
- 3 The **ae** at the beginning of words like *aerial* and *aerobic* is never reduced to **e**. In words like those it is part of the combining element *aer(o)-* (“air”), where **a** and **e** are separate syllables. See **aer(o)-**.