

## BEST QUOTES ON LANGUAGE

Perhaps of all the creations of man language is the most astonishing.

--Lytton Strachey

Slang is a language that rolls up its sleeves, spits on its hands and goes to work.

--Carl Sandburg

Language is the most defining feature of human intelligence.

--William Calvin

The test of your command of language is whether you can describe a spiral staircase or a bathing beauty without using your hands.

--Unknown

'A picture is worth ten thousand words,' goes the time worn Chinese maxim. But one writer tartly said, 'It takes words to say that.'

--Leo Rosten

They sing. They hurt. They teach. They sanctify. They were man's first, immeasurable feat of magic. They liberated us from ignorance and our barbarous past, for without these marvelous scribbles which build letters into words, words into sentences, sentences into systems and sciences and creeds, man would be forever confined to the self-isolated prison of the scuttle fish or the chimpanzee.

--Leo Rosten

The limits of my language are the limits of my mind. All I know is what I have words for.

--Ludwig Wittgenstein

I used to think my vocabulary was good. But then I got a thesaurus...Now I think my vocabulary is exemplary.

—Matt Maran

All words are pegs to hang ideas on.

--Henry Ward Beecher

Destroy language and, with it, all things and concepts. The rest is silence.

--Master Ekkehart

The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightening and the lightening bug.

--Mark Twain

If you scoff at language study...how, save in terms of language, will you scoff?

--Mario Pei

Language is the dress of thought.

--Samuel Johnson

Can we talk about the word 'queue'? How many of those letter are really necessary? I count one.

—*The Chive*

We tend to believe, incorrectly, that dictionaries dictate language usage rather than reflect it.

--Jen Doll

Words should be an intense pleasure just as leather should be to a shoemaker.

--Evelyn Waugh

Shakespeare teaches us that the music of language matters. What you have to say is important, but if you want it to have impact, how you say it makes all the difference. There are only three original plots in all of Shakespeare's plays, but his distillation of human experience into lyrical verse and prose is why his work endures. 'The play's the thing,' but it's crafted from the 'words, words, words.'

--Christopher Moore

In my youth there were words you couldn't say in front of a girl; now you can't say 'girl.'

—Tom Lehrer

Thanks to the teachers who instilled in me such a love of English that I'm perpetually mortified when reading the Internet.

—[someecards.com](http://someecards.com)

An Englishman's way of speaking absolutely classifies him.

—Alan Jay Lerner

Incomprehensible jargon is the hallmark of a profession.

—Kingman Brewster, Jr.

Words are undervalued as a means of expression. Pictures tend to trivialize experience.

--Arthur Miller

Euphemisms are unpleasant truths wearing diplomatic cologne.

--Quentin Crisp

Slang is the vengeance of the anonymous masses for the linguistic thralldom imposed on them by the educated classes.

--Mario Pei

English spelling is unusual because our language is a rich verbal tapestry woven together from the tongues of the Greeks, the Latins, the Angles, the Klaxtons, the Celtics, the 76'ers, and many other ancient peoples, all of whom had drinking problems.

--Dave Barry

In order to appreciate the English language one has to have a certain contempt for logic.

--Lin Yutang

When we Americans are through with the English language, it will look as if it'd been run over by a musical comedy.

--Finley Peter Dunne

Words have a power beyond their meaning. I remember the stories of my childhood, but I remember the single words that shone out of fairy stories—milk and buns, a flask of wine, a cabbage cut fresh from the garden. I see the whiteness, feel the sticky brown, marvel at the beads of moisture on thin, cold glass, hear the knife click through the stem and touch the dew along the ribbed leaves. I would read again stories that frightened me, for the sake of such perceptions. They seem to echo an older life, beyond my knowing.

--Pamela Brown

An artificial stretching of vocabulary is not to be urged....Nor may students exult when they have found a hard word to express their thoughts. For, in the first place, hard words make hard reading. Beneath their weight a sentence staggers like a man with a bag of coal. It is usually a pattern of easy words that gives a sentence grace, and any octosyllabic explosion blows the thought quite off its track. But secondly, and of more importance, hard words have mostly been coined for a special use and their meaning is narrow and scientific. They stiffen a paragraph to a formula. They smell unpleasantly of the laboratory and the schoolroom.

--Charles S. Brooks

Her vocabulary was as bad, as, like, whatever.

--Unknown

Our language is not the special preserve of grammarians, language police, teachers, writers or the intellectual elite. English is, and always has been, the tongue of the common man. Think of how much powerful idiomatic English has come from poker players, cowboys and jazz musicians. Now it is arising from computer hackers, rap artists and even Valley Girls. Some words may be thought beautiful and some ugly; some may live and some may die. But it is all English, and it has always belonged to everyone.

--Robert MacNeil

No dictionary of a living tongue ever can be perfect, since while it is hastening to publication, some words are budding and some falling away.

--Samuel Johnson

Profanity is an evidence of the lack of a sufficient vocabulary—and brains.

--Unknown

Words and phrases make up the glue that holds civilization together. Like persons who shape and use them, the raw materials of communication are flexible and fluid. Every word has both a personality and a history. It is rooted in the past, but stretches forward toward the future.

--Webb Garrison

Stability in language is synonymous with rigor mortis.

--Ernest Weekley

The limits of my language stand for the limits of my world.

--Ludwig Wittgenstein

Slang is a poor-man's poetry.

--John Moore

A word is not a crystal, transparent and unchanged; it is the skin of a living thought and may vary greatly in color and content according to the circumstances and time in which it is used.

--Oliver Wendell  
Holmes, Jr.

Human cooperation depends on common knowledge of arbitrary norms, which can suddenly unravel. If the norms of language were truly regulated by an authority, this would be a concern. In fact, they emerge by a self-adjusting consensus.

--Steven Pinker

A poet is, before anything else, a person who is passionately in love with language.

--W. H. Auden

Language is the light of the mind.

--John Stuart Mill

Words fascinate me. They always have. For me, browsing in a dictionary is like being turned loose in a bank.

--Eddie Cantor

Colors fade, temples crumble, empires fall, but wise words endure.

--Edward Thorndike

Why care for grammar as long as we are good?

--Artemus Ward

A writer who can't write in a grammatical manner better shut up shop.

--Artemus Ward

English usage is sometimes more than mere taste, judgment, and education—sometimes it's sheer luck, like getting across a street.

--E. B. White

Language is the archives of history.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

The important thing about any word is how you understand it.

--Publius Syrus

The word is half his that speaks and half his that hears it.

--Montaigne

A blow with a word strikes deeper than a blow with a sword.

--Robert Burton

Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind.

--Rudyard Kipling

Language may die at the hands of the schoolmen: it is regenerated by the poets.  
--Emmanuel Mounier

Words form the thread on which we string our experiences.  
--Aldous Huxley

Man does not live by words alone, despite the fact that sometimes he has to eat them.  
--Adlai Stevenson

You can stroke people with words.  
--Francis Scott Fitzgerald

The words in our aging vocabularies are like very sick people.  
Some may be able to survive, others are incurable.  
--Arthur Adamov

The right word spoken at the right time sometimes achieves miracles.  
--Josef Goebbels

Language is a city to the building of which every human being brought a stone.  
--Ralph Waldo Emerson

How forcible are right words!  
--*Job 6:25*

Who climbs the Grammar-Tree, distinctly knows  
Where Noun, and Verb, and Participle grows.  
--Juvenal

Words are the only things that last forever.  
—William Hazlitt

Words are the dress of thoughts; which should no more be presented in rags, tatters, and dirt, than your person should.  
--Lord Chesterfield

Soft words win hard hearts.  
--W. G. Benham

Smooth words make smooth ways.  
--W. G. Benham

Religion, freedom, vengeance, what you will—  
A word's enough to raise mankind to kill.

—Lord Byron

It is as easy to recall a stone thrown violently from the hand as a word which has  
left your tongue.

--Menander

Language is fossil poetry.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

I am always sorry when any language is lost, because languages are the pedigree of  
nations.

--Samuel Johnson

Proper words in proper places, make the true definition of style.

--Jonathan Swift

Words are like leaves; and where they most abound  
Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.

--Alexander Pope

Grammar, which knows how to control even kings.

--Moliere

To change your language you must change your life.

--Derek Walcott

As sheer casual reading matter, I still find the English dictionary the most interest-  
ing book in our language.

--Albert Jay Nock

The English Bible—a book which if everything else in our language should perish,  
would alone suffice to show the whole extent of its beauty and power.

--Thomas Babington  
Macaulay

Language gradually varies, and with it fade away the writings of authors who have  
flourished their allotted time.

--Washington Irving

High thoughts must have high language.

--Aristophanes

Beware of language, for it is often a great cheat.

--Peter Mere Latham

We shall never understand each other until we reduce the language to seven words.

--Kahlil Gibran

Every vital development in language is a development of feeling as well.

--Thomas Stearns Eliot

In the world of words, the imagination is one of the forces of nature.

--Wallace Stevens

A powerful agent is the right word. Whenever we come upon one of those intensely right words in a book or a newspaper the resulting effect is physical as well as spiritual, and electrically prompt.

--Mark Twain

It is not of so much consequence what you say, as how you say it. Memorable sentences are memorable on account of some single irradiating word.

--Alexander Smith

There is a weird power in a spoken word....And a word carries far—very far—deals destruction through time as the bullets go flying through space.

--Joseph Conrad

Apt words have power to suage  
The tumors of a troubled mind.

--John Milton

Language is not an abstract construction of the learned, or of dictionary-makers, but is something arising out of the work, needs, ties, joys, affections, tastes, of long generations of humanity, and has its bases broad and low, close to the ground.

—Noah Webster

Words are treated so often as trifles when in reality they can be more devastating than rifles.

--O. A. Battista

Slang is just language stripped down to get more speed with less horsepower.

--E. C. McKenzie



A synonym is a word you use in place of one you can't spell.

--E. C. McKenzie

Some people use language to express thought, some to conceal thought, and others instead of thought.

--E. C. McKenzie

People may doubt what you say, but they will always believe what you do.

--E. C. McKenzie

One great use of words is to hide our thoughts.

--Voltaire

Say what you will about the American language. It is, next to kissing, the most exciting form of communication that man has evolved.

--Oren Arnold

Language develops by the felicitous misapplication of words.

--J. B. Greenough

Many a treasure besides Ali Baba's is unlocked with a verbal key.

--Henry Van Dyke

With words we govern men.

—Benjamin Disraeli

A very great part of the mischiefs that vex this world arises from words.

--Edmund Burke

Be not the slave of Words.

--Thomas Carlyle

Without knowing the force of words, it is impossible to know men.

--Confucius

Good words are worth much, and cost little.

--George Herbert

As pines  
keep the shape of the wind  
even when the wind has fled and is no longer there,  
so words  
guard the shape of man  
even when man has fled and is no longer there.

--George Seferis

Words have a longer life than deeds.

--Pindar

Words ought to be a little wild for they are the assault of thoughts on the unthinking.

--John Maynard Keynes

Grammar is a necessity for boys, a source of enjoyment for old men, the sweet companion of the solitary; and, almost alone among every type of study it possesses more usefulness than vulgar ostentation.

--Quintilian

Our vocabulary is derived from the nation's language; and the vocabulary provides a very good indication of the nation's knowledge: by comparing a nation's vocabulary at different times, we can get a pretty good idea of that nation's progress.

--Denis Diderot

Language builds bridges in unexplored territories.

--Adolf Hitler

Knowledge of languages is the gateway to wisdom.

--Roger Bacon

As language is the instrument of our thought, so a horse is the instrument of a soldier, and as the best horses are suited to the best soldiers, so the best language will, as has been said, be suited to the best thoughts.

--Dante

I love my human language, passed down through the generations to me; I love its stern freedom and sinuous laws.

--Vladislav Khodasevich

The most important book of a nation is the dictionary of its language.

--Constantin comte  
de Volney

Who does not know another language, does not know his own.

--Johanne von Goethe

It is as interesting and as difficult to say a thing well as to paint it. There is the art of lines and colours, but the art of words exists too, and will never be less important.

--Vincent van Gogh

Beautiful words are, in a real and special sense, the light of thought.

--Longinus

The world created by words exists neither in space nor time though it has semblances of both, it is eternal and indestructible, and yet its action is no stronger than a flower: it is adamant, yet it is also what one of its practitioners thought it to be, namely, the shadow of a shadow....Imagination is our only guide into the world created by words.

--E. M. Forster

Language, far from serving merely to report facts, is a collective instrument of thought that enters experience itself, shaping and molding the whole apprehension of phenomena (such as color and luster, e.g.) in a certain way, and, who knows, giving to them just that subtle bias which makes all the difference.

--Friedrich Waismann

Words strain,  
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,  
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,  
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,  
Will not stay still.

--T. S. Eliot

Grammar satisfies a rational curiosity about the structure and origin of our own and other languages, and teaches us to take an interest in what we hear and utter every day of our lives....Language and grammar are concerned not with form and meaning separately, but with the connexions between them, there being the real phenomena of language.

--Henry Sweet

Almost any sort of noise that the human vocal apparatus can produce is used in some way in some language.

--H. A. Gleason

Language was made before grammar, not grammar before language.

--Thomas Hardy

For words cannot, and should not attempt to 'hand over sensations bodily;' they have very much more important work to do...language, well used, is a completion and does what the institutions of sensation by themselves cannot do. Words are the meeting points at which regions of experience which can never combine in sensations or intuition, come together. They are the occasion and means of that growth which is the mind's endless endeavor to order itself. That is why we have language. It is no mere signaling system. It is the instrument of all our distinctively human development, of everything in which we go beyond the other animals.

--I. A. Richards

Words and the meanings of words are not matters merely for the academic amusement of linguists and logicians, or for the aesthetic delight of poets; they are matters of the profoundest ethical significance to every human being.

--Aldous Huxley

The sacredness of words is necessary to the existence of any social order.

--Malinowski

Word-wisdom is not a matter of diction or logic. It is magic in its uncorrupted sense. It confers meaning on our universe.

--Geoffrey Wagner

Language,—human language,—after all, is but little better than the croak and cackle of fowls, and other utterances of brute nature,—sometimes not so adequate.

--Nathaniel Hawthorne

Words vary in the stability of the meaning we assign them....With time, most words acquire a greater range and variety of meaning....The Oxford Dictionary records and illustrates from our literature 14,070 separate meanings for the 500 most commonly used words in the English language.

--Irving J. Lee

It's a damn poor mind that can think of only one way to spell a word!

--Andrew Jackson

By words, the mind is excited and the spirit elated.

--Aristophanes

To be interested in language is to be interested in what makes us human.

--Roderick A. Jacobs

As every writer knows, there's no such thing as 'only a word.' Words have the power to make us laugh, cry, shriek in outrage. They can persuade or seduce. In your search for the 'just right' word or phrase or expression, you may strike your readers with the effect of lightening.

--Eileen Rose-Busby

The spoken word is the foundation of all language.

--Linguaphone Motto

The minimum grammar is no grammar at all.

--Guiseppe Peano

Language exists only when it is listened to as well as spoken. The hearer is an indispensable partner.

--John Dewey

Quotations can function in any number of effective ways in the English classroom, and because of their brevity, the effect of the message, and their general usefulness, teachers should consider quotations as a staple of the unit lesson plan.

—Dan L. Miller

All slang is metaphor, and all metaphor is poetry.

--G. K. Chesterton

Of all the words of witch's doom  
There's none so bad as which and whom.  
The man who kills both which and whom  
Will be enshrined in our Who's Whom.

--Fletcher Knebel

Language is a steed that carries one into a far country.

--Arab Proverb

Without reprieve, adjudged to death  
For want of well pronouncing shibboleth.

--John Milton

Language is as much an art and as sure a refuge as painting or music or literature.

--Jane Ellen Harrison

The man who knows no foreign language knows nothing of his mother tongue.

--Goethe

No man fully capable of his own language ever masters another.

--George Bernard Shaw

A world language is more important for mankind at the present moment than any conceivable advance in television or telephony.

--Lewis Mumford

About adjectives: all fine prose is based on the verbs carrying the sentences. They make sentences move. Probably the finest technical poem in English is Keats's *Eve of Saint Agnes*. A line like:

The hare limped trembling through the frozen grass,

is so alive that you race through it, scarcely noticing it, yet it has colored the whole poem with its movement—the limping, trembling, and freezing is going on before your eyes.

--F. Scott Fitzgerald

To use language is the mark of a man; to understand language, in the deepest sense, is the mark of an educated man.

--Wallace Anderson &  
Norman Stageberg

God wove a web of loveliness,  
Of clouds and stars and birds,  
But made not anything at all  
So beautiful as words.

--Anna Hempstead  
Branch

And the words slide into the slots ordained by syntax, and glitter as with atmospheric dust, with those impurities which we call meaning.

--Anthony Burgess

We live by words: LOVE, TRUTH, GOD. We fight for words: FREEDOM, COUNTRY, FAME. We die for words: LIBERTY, GLORY, HONOR. They bestow the priceless gift of articulacy on our minds and hearts—from 'mama' to 'infinity.' And the men who truly shape our destiny, the giants who teach us, inspire us, lead us to deeds of immortality are those who use words with clarity, grandeur and passion: Socrates, Jesus, Luther, Lincoln, Churchill.

--Leo Rosten

A conjunction is not varied but it has a force that need not make any one feel that they are dull.

--Gertrude Stein

Words are merely sound waves that vibrate membranes of our ears, or black marks that are reflected by light waves to our eyes. Words are symbols that we endorse with meaning. We should not confuse the symbol with the 'thing' nor should we act toward the symbol as if meaning were inherent in it.

--James H. McBurney

The ten most frequently used words in the English language (making up about one-fourth of all our reading) are: the, of, and, a, to, in, is, I, that, it.

--Mark C. Blazek

A word is a concept made flesh....The eternal presented as noise.

--William H. Gass

Though we may never fully learn  
to use them as we ought,  
words are nets in which to catch  
the falling stars of thought.

--John D. Engle

A cliché is a bright new original thought with tenure.

--Robert Orben

Somehow very early I got the idea that language was some kind of private, secretive means of travel, a way of living beyond your own life.

--Jayne Anne Phillips

Think like a duchess, act like a duchess, talk like a duchess; curbstoep English keeps you in the gutter.

--George Bernard Shaw

Don't use a big vocabulary, either general or technical. SESQUIPEDALIANISM OBFUSCATES PELLUCIDITY. If you get my drift.

--David Viscott

The word I most like to hear is a sort of low throaty moan. I've no idea how to spell it, and no intention of explaining why I like it.

--Lawrence Block

The center of gravity for the English language is no longer Britain. American English is the greatest influence on English everywhere.

--Robert Burchfield

Words for doodads and thingamajigs give us power.

--Doug Cumming

Pictures will not do; they will never do. Television is fun to watch, but it is utterly and entirely dependent on the spoken and written word. The proof is this: darken the image into invisibility but leave the sound on, and you will still have a crude sense of what is going on. Turn off the sound, however, and exclude the appearance of written words, and though you leave the image as bright as ever, you will find you understand nothing of what is going on unless you are watching the most mindless slapstick. To put it even more simply: radio had no images at all and managed, but the silent movies found subtitles essential.

There is the fundamental rule, then.

--Isaac Asimov

The word is immortal. And it follows from this that just as we had the writer as soon as writing was invented 5,000 years ago, so we will have the writer, of necessity, for as long as civilization continues to exist. He may write with other tools and in different forms, but he will write.

--Isaac Asimov

A word is dead  
When it is said,  
Some say.  
I say it just  
Begins to live  
That day.

--Emily Dickinson

Words bring us to our senses and give us authority.

--Doug Cumming

We can transmit information in sign language, by semaphore, by blinking lights, by Morse code, by telephone, by electronic devices, by laser beams, or by techniques yet unborn—and in every case, we are transmitting words.

--Isaac Asimov



The power of the word is far greater than the power at the heart of the atom—which is why we have a chance of keeping our world at all—and all of us here are responsible for how we use that power.

--Madeleine L'Engle

Usage is a matter of taste....No encompassing agreement exists among even the most discriminating writers concerning usages that are beyond the pale. What one condemns and shuns, another will employ freely and without apparent awareness that it has been criticized—or, sometimes, with deliberate disregard for what he considers pedantry or superstition. Announced principles are more conservative than practice—even the practice of the severest critics.

--Roy H. Copperud

The point at which a new usage wins acceptance is a matter of opinion. Decisions about it are useful only if the one making them is reasonably receptive to change and is not resolved to die with the notions he acquired in grammar school. The unyielding man who lives long enough will cut himself off entirely from communication with his fellows. Insistence on going against usage that has widespread acceptance on a cultivated level often results in failure to convey exactly what is intended, and sometimes in misunderstanding.

--Roy H. Copperud

There has never been a time when the understanding and use of words was more important than today; never before, perhaps, as much. I doubt if there has ever been a time when there was so much careless use of them, or a period in which they were so rapidly debased. Like money, they are counters of exchange, but with the difference that words are living tissue, sensitive organisms that require the most careful handling. When they are shoved in the slot like tokens on a bus, as if they were all stamped in the same mold, or when they are used, as they so often are in an age of universal and insistent propaganda, to act like the inky effluvia of the squid, they become obscuring and destructive forces of great potency.

--J. Donald Adams

Strict grammatical form must always be subordinated to meaning. Nonetheless, language is a convention from which one strays too far at his peril.

--Robert Elegant

The exchange of language is the sharing of experience. If we regard as the highest mark of civilization an ability to project ourselves into the mental and physical world of others, to share their thoughts, feelings, and visions, to sense their angers and encounter the same walls that shut them in and the same escapes to freedom, we must ask how language is to be used if we are to be civilized.

--Dwight Bolinger

A maddening obstacle to job satisfaction among professors of English language and literature is what I have come to think of as the 'cult of inarticulateness' which continues to flourish like a tropical fungus, often among the otherwise brightest and best of our students. I first observed these symptoms about twenty years ago, usually in the form of a fashionable Oxford stammer, or in cascades of disjointed phrases punctuated by 'you know,' or painfully wrenched-out fragments of sentences with...tortured gestures. More recently the arcane language of the cult has borrowed from jive talk the stunted lexicon of all-purpose expressions which may possibly communicate something about folk music or drug experience, but are clumsy tools for literary criticism....For many it appears that the word 'like' has replaced 'you know' as vocalized pause and verbal tic.

--Bruce Dearing

All cliches were once respectable expressions, precisely formulated thoughts committed to paper by very serious writers. Through abuse and familiarity they lost the beauty of their surprise (or is it the surprise of their beauty?). At the point when they are no longer strong enough to retain meaning, they turn into sheer nonsense.

--Walter Sorell

The hard-won decencies of our culture...will not survive our ability to think, speak and write clearly, or to judge the quality and significance of official statements. If the next generation continues its wordless descent into mere inarticulate feeling, it will soon be politically helpless.

--J. Mitchell Morse

In matters of usage there are two extremes. At the extreme right are the purists, the standpatters, the rigid traditionalists who brook little or no change and who go by the rules—as many rules as they can recall or invent. They may not speak or write brilliantly, but they are grammatically unassailable—except when they forget some rule or misinterpret one....At the extreme left are the permissivists, the heretics who argue that there is no such thing as 'correct' usage. They maintain that usage is what people say, but they neglect to disclose what people they are talking about--most people in general or most intelligent people or most educated people or most writing people or what. Oddly enough, despite the loose approach of the permissivists, who have made some headway in the schools, there is evidence that people do crave authority in matters of language, they do ask for rules and rulings. They do not seem to appreciate the freedom that the permissivists are so eager to bestow upon them. They do seem to want a middle way. And, of course, they are right. As in so many other endeavors in life, in the use of English an avoidance of extremes is the way to achievement and excellence.

--Theodore M. Bernstein

Every language is alive and, like everything that lives, changes all the time. This constant change is to be blamed for all cliches and platitudes.

--Walter Sorell

In our communication-numbered society we are buffeted and drowned in a flood of language, but it is a language that is debased with the make-do word taking the place of the right word. Worse, even, language is used as merely a convenient way of pointing. It becomes bleached out, not a thing expressive in itself. It is no longer a part of experience and an index of the speaker's own reality; and of the reader's or the listener's, too, as he senses the ripple of language in the throat, the deep and complex bodily response.

--Robert Penn Warren

Words can kill and words can make alive. Every shade and degree of power between these two extremes is within the capacity of words.

--Norma R. Youngberg

There is nothing intrinsically bad about words as such, and by excluding another man's forms of speech we exclude him.

--Dwight Bolinger

Language is the most public of all public domains, to be kept free at all costs of claims that would turn any part of it into the property of some exclusive club, whether of scientists, artisans, or the socially elect. The virtue of language is in being ordinary.

--Dwight Bolinger

What language should The Times speak: stuffy and square or groovy and with it? The answer is neither. We certainly should not speak in forbidding and ponderous tones, alien to the modern world. But neither should we seize upon every latest bit of slang, every new misuse of words, every solecistic locution, and imagine that thereby we are being up to the minute and communicating better with today's restless generation....There can be no doubt that written English is more informal now than at any time in the past and that the pace of change has quickened. When new words or new meanings of words prove needful—'in,' 'moonlighting,' 'kickback,' 'blast-off,' 'sit-in,' 'crack-down,' and many more—the language enriches itself by welcoming them. Nor can there be any doubt that the light touch, the breezy touch, makes for interesting reading. But lightness or breeziness does not require slang, erroneous use of words or faulty grammar.

--*The New York Times*

Words cannot be weighed or measured or added up, nor can their precise effect be calculated. Language is not a property or a machine but an expression of man's thought and experience in terms understandable to other men. It is an art.

--J. Mitchell

The taboo word, which encompasses a variety of expressions on the lower levels of slang, reflects man's perception of irrational or inexplicable forces within himself and in the world outside. It is a means whereby human beings can incite one another to sudden passion, fear, anger or disgust. Taboo words comprise a small proportion of the total lexicon of any language and they vary in degree of revulsion they cause on their use in public. They belong to a limited subject area—invocation of the supernatural, reference to excretory functions, and reference to the sexual organs and sexual activities are among the most common....Although taboo words have their purposes, their effectiveness is in inverse proportion to how often they are used. Excessive use of them generally reflects a pathological urge to release tension rather than a need to carry on communication.

--William F. Marquardt

Concern for the comma ought to include its use before the and in a series. Careful writers know that its omission tends to pair the last two elements in a series, whereas they should be separated to preserve the parallelism of all the elements that compose the series. Some years ago Time, that exemplar of slick and sardonic prose, described a woman editor who 'talks fast, enjoys displaying her many jewels, smokes and likes Scotch whiskey.' What shall the instructor's marginal comment be in a case like this? 'How do you smoke Scotch whiskey?' Or 'If you have found a way to smoke it, how can you possibly like it?' or 'Watch your commas!'

--H. Alan Wycherley

Nothing will bring back the preeminence of the written word in an age of spectacles and movies, but words will persist in the need we feel to possess the visual experience fully. On the evidence submitted, this will prove to be the written word.

--Wright Morris

Our language is enormously rich and getting richer by the hour. And it's being used by people whose native language is not English. It's being used by people who work as musicians and other such inventive groups, people who are playing with language, who invent new words and new uses....And when the language is being impinged on in that way, by so many different types, it's bound to change.

--Eugene Ehrlich

A definition is the enclosing a wilderness of idea within a wall of words.

--Samuel Butler

You are fortunate because your language is English. English is a great language; among the world's languages it is perhaps the one that gives the individual the greatest freedom. It is poetic and practical at the same time; it is tremendously rich; it's a sort of all-purpose language....

You are doubly fortunate because your language is American English. English is wonderfully free; American is even freer. It has more scope and more vitality; and it has more of just the thing I am talking about here: elbowroom for the individual speaker and writer.

--Rudolf Flesch

Misspelled words mar a page. They're as noticeable and as unfortunate as a run in a pair of nylons or a fumble on the football field....When you take the trouble to write something, you do so because you feel it's worth reading....But misspelling undermines your purpose....Good spelling, on the other hand, seems clear and easy to read. It's good form. In short, good spelling communicates.

--Edna G. Furness

Few of us fully realize our tremendous good fortune in having what is called English as our mother tongue. It is a language of extraordinary flexibility and richness...constantly fed and replenished by other languages...English possesses its historical richness and suppleness because the writers who have used it have always written in the language spoken by the people.

--Edward Fenton

It is clear that to define a word, as a dictionary does, is simply to explain the word with more words. To be thorough about defining we should next have to define the words used in the definition, then define the words used in defining the words used in the definition...and so on. Defining words with more words, in short, gets us at once into what mathematicians call an 'infinite regress.'

--S. I. Hayakawa

Words remain one of the most living things of man's creation; indeed, one might argue that they have more vitality than anything else we have fashioned. What else is there that seems to lead an independent life? Words do; they acquire strength and lose it; they may, like people, become transformed in character; like certain persons, they may gather evil about them, or, like others, prod our wits or lift our hearts. Like ourselves, some of them suffer from hardening of the arteries. They seem to pursue their own ends with a dogged intention, and when, utterly spent and cast out from the common tongue, they fall into obsolescence, not all the lexicographers and etymologists together can revive them.

--J. Donald Adams

Slang is...vigorous and apt. Probably most of our vital words were once slang; one by one timidly made sacrosanct in spite of ecclesiastical and other wraths.

--John Galsworthy

We live at the mercy of a malevolent word. A sound, a mere disturbance of the air, sinks into our very soul sometimes.

--Joseph Conrad

Language was invented to ask questions. Answers may be given by grunts and gestures, but questions must be spoken. Humanness came of age when man asked the first question.

--Eric Hoffer

Nothing in language is immutably fixed: the best writers are constantly changing it. Absolute government by dictionary would mean the arrest of this healthy process of change and growth.

--C. E. Montague

When I feel inclined to read poetry I take down my Dictionary. The poetry of words is quite as beautiful as that of sentences. The author may arrange the gems effectively, but their shape and lustre have been given by the attrition of ages.

--Oliver Wendell  
Holmes, Sr.

Dialect tempered with slang is an admirable medium of communication between persons who have nothing to say and persons who would not care for anything properly said.

--Thomas Bailey

By its very looseness, by its way of evolving rather than defining, suggesting rather than saying, English is a magnificent vehicle for emotional poetry.

--Max Beerbohm

All choice of words is slang. It marks a class. There is correct English: that is not slang. I beg your pardon: correct English is the slang of prigs who write history and essays. And the strongest slang of all is the slang of poets.

--George Eliot

The sum of human wisdom is not contained in any one language, and no single language is CAPABLE of expressing all forms and degrees of human comprehension.

--Ezra Pound

Where shall we look for standard English, but to the words of a standard man?  
--Henry David Thoreau

When 'whom' is correct, use some other formulation.  
--William Safire

I often think how much easier life would have been for me and how much time I would have saved if I had known the alphabet. I can never tell where I and J stand without saying G, H to myself first. I don't know whether P comes before R or after, and where T comes in has to this day remained something that I have never been able to get into my head.  
--W. Somerset Maugham

Words are loaded pistols.  
--Jean-Paul Sartre

Words are the supreme objects. They are minded things.  
--William Gass

Words have basic inalienable meanings, departure from which is either conscious metaphor or inexcusable vulgarity.  
--Evelyn Waugh

Usage is the only test. I prefer a phrase that is easy and unaffected to a phrase that is grammatical.  
--W. Somerset Maugham

Words are the physicians of a mind diseased.  
--Aeschylus

The chief merit of language is clearness, and we know that nothing detracts so much from this as do unfamiliar terms.  
--Galen

When a man uses profanity to support an argument, it indicates that either the man or the argument is weak—probably both.  
--Unknown

Profanity is a means of escape for the person who runs out of ideas.  
--Unknown

Profanity is the use of strong words by weak people.

--Unknown

Profanity is the crutch of a conversational cripple.

—Jay Alexander

All the fun's in how you say a thing.

--Robert Frost

A huge vocabulary is not always an advantage. Simple language...can be more effective than complex language, which can lead to stiltedness or suggest dishonesty or faulty education.

--John Gardner

Among writers, an addiction to big words is worse than addiction to alcohol. No cure is known to exist. Once the young writer succumbs to arcane polysyllables, he remains syntactically stewed. His rhetorical bibulousness can no longer be restrained. He cannot get enough. He begins to invent words.

--Edward M. Yoder

Words ought to be a little wild for they are the assault of thoughts on the unthinking.

--John Maynard Keynes

Prefer geniality to grammar.

--Francis George Fowler

HACKNEYED PHRASES....The purpose with which these phrases are introduced is for the most part that of giving a fillip to a passage that might be humdrum without them...but their true use when they come into the writer's mind is as danger signals; he should take warning that when they suggest themselves it is because what he is writing is bad stuff, or it would not need such help; let him see to the substance of his cake instead of decorating with sugarplums.

--Francis George Fowler

Short words are best and the old words when short are best of all.

--Sir Winston Churchill

A word or a form of speech is not good because it is in the dictionary; it is in the dictionary because it was good before it was put there.

--Francesco Maria  
Zanotti



The responsibility of a dictionary is to record the language, not set its style.

--Philip Gove

As our alphabet now stands, the bad spelling, or what is called so, is generally the best, as conforming to the sound of the letters and of the words.

--Benjamin Franklin

They spell it Vinci and pronounce it Vinchy; foreigners always spell better than they pronounce.

--Mark Twain

The English-speaking world may be divided into (1) those who neither know nor care what a split infinitive is; (2) those who do not know, but care very much; (3) those who know & condemn; (4) those who know & approve; & (5) those who know and distinguish. Those who neither know nor care are the vast majority, & are a happy folk, to be envied by most of the minority classes.

--H. W. Fowler

Language is the amber in which a thousand precious thoughts have been safely embedded and preserved. It has arrested ten thousand lightning-flashes of genius, which, unless thus fixed and arrested, might have been as bright, but would have also been as quickly passing and perishing as the lightning.

--Trench

Words convey the mental treasure of one period to the generations that follow; and laden with this, their precious freight, they sail safely across gulfs of time in which empires have suffered shipwreck, and the languages of common life have sunk into oblivion.

--Trench

A good catchword can obscure analysis for fifty years.

--Wendell L. Wilkie

Slogans are apt to petrify man's thinking...every slogan, every word almost, that is used by the socialist, the communist, the capitalist. People hardly think nowadays. They throw words at each other.

--Jawaharlal Nehru

Unless one understands the power of words, he will never understand men.

--Confucius

The word 'good' has many meanings. For example, if a man were to shoot his grandmother at a range of five hundred yards, I should call him a good shot, but not necessarily a good man.

--G. K. Chesterton

Through the picture, I see reality. Through the word, I understand it.

--Sven Lidman

Words embolden. Words help us with future conquests. Words enlarge our spirit.

--Carl Rowan

The English language is the sea which receives tributaries from every region under heaven.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

## **THE CRAZIEST LANGUAGE**

We'll begin with a box and the plural is boxes;  
But the plural of ox should be oxen not oxes.  
Then one fowl is a goose, but two are called geese,  
Yet the plural of moose should never be meese.  
You may find a lone mouse or a nest full of mice;  
Yet the plural of house is houses, not hice.  
If the plural of man is always called men,  
Why shouldn't the plural of pan be called pen?  
If I spoke of my food and show you my feet,  
And I give you a boot, would a pair be called beet?  
If one is a tooth and a whole set are teeth,  
Why shouldn't the plural of booth be called beeth?  
Then one may be that, and three would be those,  
Yet hat in the plural would never be hose.  
And the plural of cat is cats, not cose.  
We speak of a brother and also of brethren,  
But though we say mother, we never say methren.  
Then the masculine pronouns are he, his and him,  
But imagine the feminine, she, shis and shim.  
So English I fancy you will agree,  
Is the craziest language you ever did see.

--Unknown

Words not only affect us temporarily; they change us, they socialize or unsocialize us.

--David Riesman

Words are one of our chief means of adjusting to all the situations of life. The better control we have over words, the more successful our adjustment is likely to be.

--Bergen Evans

The musician who strikes a C augmented 11th chord with a raised ninth is doing something musically unusual, but its aim is absolutely conventional: to convey delight to the listener. So the unusual word—if it fits exactly the meaning you want, if it is comfortably in rhythm with what comes before and after—repays the thought you gave to learning it by giving you pleasure, and by pleasing the person who hears it.

--William F. Buckley, Jr.

People tend to invent all sorts of nouns and verbs and make words that shouldn't be. I think we have to be a bit careful; otherwise the whole thing can get rather a mess. We must act now to insure that English—and that, to my way of thinking, means English English—maintains its position as the world language well into the next century.

--Prince Charles

The scientist asks only for the accepted, literal meaning of each word. The artist asks further: What is its history? What company has it kept? If it once bore a bad character, but has reformed, how long since it was received in good society? Does it sometimes forget its new surroundings, and, so to speak, wear its hat in the parlor? If the word has thoroughly reformed, or always borne a good character, what are its present tendencies? In its many different uses, are there any degrading or trivial offices which it performs? By all this interrogation, I mean that the artist considers the history, associations, and affinities of a word as truly as its simple, dictionary meaning.

--Albert H. Tolman

We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives.

--Toni Morrison

Careful and correct use of language is a powerful aid to straight thinking, for putting into words precisely what we mean necessitates getting our own minds quite clear on what we mean.

--William I. B. Beveridge

The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns as if it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish squirting out ink.

--George Orwell

I have always suspected that correctness is the last refuge of those who have nothing to say.

--Friedrich Wasiman

Language most shows a man; speak, that I may see thee.

--Ben Jonson

Even if language is a living evolving organism, we don't have to embrace all the changes that occur during our lifetimes. If language is so alive, it can get sick.

--Christopher

Lehmann-Haupt

Our language, one of our most precious natural resources, deserves at least as much protection as our woodlands, streams and whooping cranes.

--James Lipton

Change is legitimate and inevitable, for our language is a mighty river, picking up silt and flotsam here and discarding it there, but growing ever-wider and richer.

--Robert MacNeil

Every utterance is an event, and no two events are precisely alike. The extreme view, therefore, is that no word ever means the same thing twice.

--Louis B. Saloman

It is with words as with sunbeams. The more they are condensed, the deeper they burn.

--Robert Southey

The adjective is the banana peel of the parts of speech.

--Clifton Fadiman

Words are the small change of thought.

--Jules Renard

Words should be weighed and not counted.

--Yiddish Proverb

Since the concepts people live by are derived only from perceptions and from language and since the perceptions are received and interpreted only in light of earlier concepts, man comes pretty close to living in a house that language built.

--Russell R. W. Smith

Language is to the mind more than light is to the eye.

--William Gibson

'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.'

'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you can make words mean so many different things.'

'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master—that's all.'

--Lewis Carroll

Some words are like the old Roman galleys; large-scaled and ponderous. They sit low in the water even when their cargo is light.

--William Jovanovich

Language is the Rubicon that divides man from beast.

--Max Müller

Wars are not fought for territory, but for words. Man's deadliest weapon is language. He is as susceptible to being hypnotized by slogans as he is to infectious diseases. And where there is an epidemic, the groupmind takes over.

--Arthur Koestler

Gobbledygook: Talk or writing which is long, pompous, vague, involved, usually with Latinized words. It is also talk or writing which is merely long, even though the words are fairly simple, with repetition over and over again, all of which could have been said in a few words.

--Maury Maverick

## **A RHYMING WORD**

I take it you already know  
Of tough and bough and cough and dough!

Others may stumble, but not you  
On hiccough, thorough, bough, and through.  
And cork and work and card and ward,  
And font and front and word and sword.

Well done! And now, if you wish, perhaps,  
To learn of less familiar traps?

Reward of heard, and dreadful word—  
That looks like beard and sounds like bird.  
    And dead: it's said like bed, not bead—  
For goodness sake don't call it 'deed.'  
Watch out for meat and great and threat.  
(They rhyme with suite and straight and debt.).  
    A moth is not a moth in mother.  
Nor both in bother, broth in brother.

And here is not a match for there.  
Nor dear and fear for bear and peer;  
    And then there's drowse and rose and lose—  
Just look them up—and goose and choose.  
And cork and work and card and ward,  
And do and go: then thwart and cart.

Come, come, I've hardly made a start!  
A dreadful language? Man alive,  
I'd mastered it when I was five!

*--Manchester Guardian*

I hit him in the eye yesterday.  
When the word only is added in any of the eight possible positions, the sentence takes on eight entirely different meanings:

    Only I hit him in the eye yesterday.  
    I only hit him in the eye yesterday.  
    I hit only him in the eye yesterday.  
    I hit him only in the eye yesterday.  
    I hit him in only the eye yesterday.  
    I hit him in the only eye yesterday.  
    I hit him in the eye only yesterday.  
    I hit him in the eye yesterday only.

*--Dr. Ernst Brennecke*

(Multiple meanings for the simple little word fast:)  
A person is fast when he can run rapidly.  
But he is also fast when he is tied down and cannot run at all.  
And colors are fast when they do not run.  
One is fast when he moves in suspect company.  
But it is not quite the same as playing fast and loose.  
A racetrack is fast when it is in good running condition.  
A friend is fast when he is loyal.

A watch is fast when it is ahead of time.  
To be fast asleep is to be deep in sleep.  
To be fast by is to be near.  
To fast is to refrain from eating.  
A fast may be a period of non-eating—or a ship's mooring line.  
Photographic film is fast when it is sensitive (to light).  
But bacteria are fast when they are insensitive (to antiseptics).

--William V. Haney

If thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought. A bad usage can spread by tradition and initiation, even among people who should and do know better....Phrases like a not unustifiable assumption, leaves much to be desired, would serve no good purpose, a consideration which we should do well to bear in mind, are a continuous temptation, a packet of aspirins always at one's elbow.

--George Orwell

Simplicity of language is not only reputable, but perhaps even sacred. The Bible opens with a sentence well within the writing skills of a lively fourteen-year-old: 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.'

--Kurt Vonnegut

Grammar made me more trouble than any other study. Somehow I never could learn grammar, and it always made me angry when I tried. My parents and teachers told me that I could never write or speak unless I learned grammar, and so I tried and tried, but even now I can hardly tell an adverb from an adjective, and I do not know that I care. When a little boy, I used to think that if I really had anything to tell I could make myself understood; and I think so still. The longer I live the surer I am that the chief trouble of writers and speakers is the lack of interesting thoughts, and not of proper words.

--Clarence Darrow

Where strictness of grammar does not weaken expression, it should be attended to in complaisance to the purists of New England. But where by a small grammatical negligence, the energy of an idea is condensed, or a word stand for a sentence, I hold grammatical rigor in contempt.

--Thomas Jefferson

Words—so innocent and powerless as they are, as standing in a dictionary, how potent for good and evil they become, in the hands of one who knows how to combine them!

--Nathaniel Hawthorne

The language is no longer lived; it is merely spoken.

--George Steiner

The principal design of a Grammar in any Language is to teach us to express ourselves with propriety in that Language, and enable us to judge of every phrase and form of construction whether it be right or wrong. The plain way of doing this, is to lay down rules, and to illustrate them by examples. But, besides shewing what is right, the matter may be further explained by pointing out what is wrong.

--Robert Lowth

English spelling is weird...or is it wierd?

--Irwin Hill

The prevalence of 'Y'know' is one of the most far-reaching and depressing developments of our time.

--Edwin Newman

Woe is me...because less than 3 percent of you people read books! Because less than 15 percent of you read newspapers! Because the only truth you know is what you get over this tube.

--Peter Finch as Howard Beale, in *Network*

Many words in every language are generally thought to be synonymous; but those who study the language attentively will find that there is no such thing; they will discover some little difference, some distinction between all those words that are vulgarly called synonymous; one hath always more energy, extent, or delicacy than another.

--Lord Chesterfield

Words can sometimes, in moments of grace, attain the quality of deeds.

--Elie Wiesel

Language grows out of life, out of its needs and experiences...Language and knowledge are indissolubly connected; they are interdependent. Good work in language presupposes and depends on a real knowledge of things.

--Anne Sullivan

Language is not an abstract construction of the learned, or of dictionary-makers, but is something arising out of the work, needs, ties, joys, affections, tastes...

—Noah Webster



Animals which are traditionally referred to as female include the cow, sow, bitch and cat—all derogatory words in our language when they are applied to human beings. English does not use gender extensively, but its linguistic sexism is intact because sexism is intact.

--Arlene Raven

Words are tools which automatically carve concepts out of experience.

-- Julian Sorrell Huxley

Language is only the instrument of science, and words are but the signs of ideas.

--Samuel Johnson

Language is a city to the building of which every human being brought a stone.

--Ralph Ralph Waldo  
Emerson

Language is the blood of the soul into which thoughts run and out of which they grow.

--Oliver Wendell Holmes

Think like a wise man but communicate in the language of the people.

--William Butler Yeats

Spoken language is merely a series of squeaks.

--Alfred North Whitehead

Because everyone uses language to talk, everyone thinks he can talk about language.

--Johann Wolfgang von  
Goethe

Language is the armory of the human mind, and at once contains the trophies of its past and the weapons of its future conquests.

--Samuel Taylor  
Coleridge

Thought is the blossom; language the bud; action the fruit behind it.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Language has always moved toward greater simplicity, like a river seeking the easiest way through a landscape.

--Morris Freedman

Words are a lens to focus one's mind.

--Ayn Rand

Women are the simple, and poets the superior artisans of language...the intervention of grammarians is almost always bad.

--Remy de Gourmount

Every individual or national degeneration is immediately revealed by a directly proportional degradation in language.

--Joseph-Marie de  
Maistre

Words, like eyeglasses, blur everything that they do not make more clear.

--Joseph Joubert

The investigation of the meaning of words is the beginning of education.

--Antisthenes

The students could diagram and understand sentences and point out the various parts of speech with great facility, repeating the rules of grammar applicable in each case, yet they were unable to put this theoretical knowledge to any practical use, as they showed when called upon to write an ordinary letter in English.

--Francis Wayland  
Parker (1892)

Vocabulary changes. Two little boys playing and talking. One said, 'I found a contraceptive device under the veranda.' The other little boy said, 'Really! What's a veranda?'

--Katie Dusenberry

Few high school students look upon the language which they speak and write as an art. Yet it is, or ought to be, the noblest of all the arts, looked upon with respect, even with reverence, and used always with care, courtesy, and the deepest respect.

--Mary Ellen Chase

I personally think we developed language because of our deep inner need to complain.

--Jane Wagner

We live at the level of our language. Whatever, we can articulate we can imagine or understand or explore.

--Ellen Gilchrist

I never taught language for the purpose of teaching it; but invariably used language as a medium for the communication of thought; thus the learning of language was coincident with the acquisition of knowledge.

--Annie Sullivan

English spelling would seem to have been designed chiefly as a disguise for pronunciation. It is a clever idea, calculated to check presumption on the part of the foreigner.

--Jerome K. Jerome

God preserve us from the destructive power of words! There are words which can separate hearts sooner than sharp swords. There are words whose sting can remain through a whole life.

--Mary Botham Howitt

There is nothing more beautiful, I think, than the evanescent fleeting images and sentiments presented by a language one is just becoming familiar with—ideas that flit across the mental sky, shaped and tinted by capricious fancy.

--Helen Keller

Language is our body and our breath, our world and our thought, our perception and even our unconscious.

--Philippe Sollers

Next in criminality to him who violates the laws of his country is he who violates the language.

--Walter Savage Landor

Words have weight, sound and appearance; it is only by considering these that you can write a sentence that is good to look at and good to listen to.

--W. Somerset Maugham

Words are really a mask. They rarely express the true meaning; in fact, they tend to hide it.

--Hermann Hesse

Slogans are both exciting and comforting but some of mankind's most terrible misdeeds have been committed under the spell of certain magic words and phrases.

--James Bryant Conant

Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind.

--Rudyard Kipling

An image is a bridge between evoked emotion and conscious knowledge; words are the cables that hold up the bridge. Images are more direct, more immediate than words, and closer to the unconscious. Picture language precedes thinking in words; the metaphorical mind precedes analytical consciousness.

--Gloria Anzaldúa

The cheap contractions and revised spellings of the advertising world which have made the beauty of the written word almost unrecognizable—surely any society that permits the substitution of ‘kwik’ for ‘quick’ and ‘e.z.’ for ‘easy’ does not deserve Shakespeare, Eliot or Michener.

--Russell Baker

In our language rhyme is a barrel. A barrel of dynamite. The line is a fuse. The line smolders to the end and explodes; and the town is blown sky-high in a stanza.

--Vladimir Mayakovksy

Kingdoms rise and fall based on words.

--Rev. Herb Daughtry

Black people need to work on their speaking and writing skills to avoid the pitfalls of exploitation, exclusion, and economic illiteracy. Knowing the language of power and finance is gaining clout, not selling out.

--Gerrard McClendon

Words mean not only what you want them to mean. Words mean what they mean to the people who understand them.

--Unknown

Language used correctly. . . expands the brain, increases one’s knowledge bank, enlarges the world, and challenges the vision of those who may not have a vision.

--Haki Madhubuti

Bad language brings bad problems.

--Ugandan Proverb

Therefore, it is a political act to keep people ignorant. We can see that it is not by accident that Black people in the United States watch more television than any other ethnic group and that more of our own children can be seen carrying radios and cassettes to school than books. The point is that it is just about impossible to make a positive contribution to the world if one cannot read, write, compute, think, and articulate one’s thoughts. The major instrument for bringing out the genius of any people is the productive, creative, and stimulating use and creation of language.

--Haki Madhubuti

Words are chameleons, which reflect the color of their environment.

--Learned Hand

Words are the voice of the heart.

--Confucius

Although words exist for the most part for the transmission of ideas, there are some which produce such violent disturbance in our feelings that the role they play in the transmission of ideas is lost in the background.

--Albert Einstein

The power of words is immense. A well-chosen word has often sufficed to stop a flying army, to change defeat into victory, and to save an empire.

--Emile De Girardin

England and America are two countries separated by the same language.

--Bernard Shaw

The cure for mixed metaphors, I have always found, is for the patient to be obliged to draw a picture of the result.

--Bernard Levin

We have good reason to believe that memories of early childhood do not persist in consciousness because of the absence or fragmentary character of language covering this period. Words serve as fixatives for mental images....Even at the end of the second year of life when word tags exist for a number of objects in the child's life, these words are discrete and do not yet bind together the parts of an experience or organize them in a way that can produce a coherent memory.

--Selma H. Fraiberg

The basis of most of the world's troubles are matters of grammar.

--Montaigne

Damn the subjunctive!—it brings all our writers to shame.

--Mark Twain

The language of the street is always strong: what can describe the folly and emptiness of scolding like the word jawing?

--Emerson

Words should be only the clothes, carefully custom-made to fit the thought.

--Jules Renard

The most verbal nation (France) on the face of the earth, where language is the Muzak of the mind.

--Joseph Morgenstern

Procrastination is the thief of time, and so is every other big word.

--Unknown

There are three races—men, women and children. And none of them speaks the same language.

--*Kaiser News*

Slang is a poor man's poetry.

--John Moore

Scientific jargon is superior slang.

--Sandra Raphael

You can taste a word.

--Pearl Bailey

The words you know and I mean are strewn like loose gravel through ordinary conversation, causing slippage in meaning.

--Norman Cousins

Words do wonderful things. They sound, purr. They can urge, they can wheedle, whip, whine. They can sing, sass, singe. They can churn, check, channelize. They can be a hup 2, 3, 4.

--Gwendolyn Brooks

Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind.

--Rudyard Kipling

Some words clink  
As ice in a drink.  
Some move with grace  
A dance, a lace.  
Some sound thin:  
Wail, scream and pin.  
Some words are squat:  
a mug, a pot.

--Mary O'Neill

Just think of the words they make up—‘tub’ and ‘stopper’ and ‘string’ and words like that. Where they get them from, nobody knows. But a wonderful word like ‘spink,’ they don’t bother to invent.

--Astrid Lindgren

Words have a magical power. They can bring either the greatest happiness or deepest despair; they can transfer knowledge from teacher to student; words enable the orator to sway his audience and dictate its decision. Words are capable of arousing the strongest emotions and prompting all men’s actions.

--Sigmund Freud

Never make fun of someone if they mispronounce a word. It means they learned it by reading.

—Unknown

We take English for granted. But if we explore its paradoxes, we find that quicksand can work slowly, boxing rings are square, and a guinea pig is neither from Guinea or is a pig.

--*www.teachingtips.com*

Let’s face it. English is a crazy language. There is no egg in eggplant nor ham in hamburger; neither apple nor pine in pineapple. English muffins weren’t invented in England or French fries in France. Sweetmeats are candies while sweetbreads, which aren’t sweet, are meat.

--*www.teachingtips.com*

I feel bad for the man who can’t spell a word more than one way.

--Mark Twain

English is a strange language. In English, a fat chance and a slim chance mean the same thing.

--Wit & Humor,  
*Supervision  
Magazine*

Grammar is not a set of rules; it is something inherent in the language, and language cannot exist without it. It can be discovered, but not invented.

--Charlton Laird

By words we learn thoughts, and by thoughts we learn life.

--Jean Baptiste Girard

Learn your language well and command it well, and you will have the first component to life.

--Edward R. Murrow

Words are tools, and mastered words are power tools.

--J. Weston Walch

The downtrodden are the great creators of slang.

--Anthony Burgess

When ideas fail, words come in very handy

--Johann Wolfgang von  
Goethe

Words not only affect us temporarily; they change us, they socialize or unsocialize us.

--David Riesman

If the English language made any sense, lackadaisical would have something to do with a shortage of flowers.

—Doug Larson

Language springs out of the inmost parts of us. No glass renders a man's likeness so true as his speech.

--Ben Jonson

fi yuo cna raed tihs, yuo hvae a sgtrane mnid too.  
Cna yuo raed tihs? Olny 55 plepoe ! out of 100 can.

i cdnuolt blveiee taht I cluod aulacly uesdnatnrd  
waht I was rdanieg. The phaonmneal pweor of the  
hmuan mnid, aoccdrnig to a rscheearch at Cmabrigde  
Uinervtisy, it dseno't mtaetr in waht oerdr the  
ltteres in a wrod are, the olny iproamtnt tihng is  
taht the frsit and lsat ltteer be  
in the rghit pclae. The rset can be a taotl mses and  
you can sitll raed it whotuit a pboerlm. Tihs is  
bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by  
istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe. Azanmig huh? yaeh  
and I awlyas tghuhot slpeling was ipmorantt !

--Unknown



A synonym is a word you use when you can't spell the other one

—Baltasar Gracián

Mere words are cheap and plenty enough, but ideas that rouse and set multitudes thinking come as gold from the mines.

--A. Owen Penny

What's another word for Thesaurus?

--Steven Wright

People who cannot distinguish between good and bad language, or who regard the distinction as unimportant, are unlikely to think carefully about anything else.

--B. R. Meyers

Decline of language is the decline of the life of the people who use it.

--Ian Robinson

The right word may be effective, but no word was ever as effective as a rightly timed pause.

--Mark Twain

It's a strange world of language in which skating on thin ice can get you into hot water.

--Franklin P. Jones

No one has a finer command of language than the person who keeps his mouth shut.

--Sam Rayburn

American English is diversified by immigration, of course, but also people's creative license and the resilient nature of local dialects. We have dozens of ways to refer to a remote place, for instance, including the boonies, the sticks, the tules, the pucker-brush, and the willywags.

--Joan Houston Hall

Words not only affect us temporarily; they change us, they socialize or unsocialize us.

--David Riesman

Even if you do learn to speak correct English, whom are you going to speak it to?

--Clarence Darrow

Americans make an inordinate fuss about correct grammar, while Englishmen believe that correct English is what good writers write.

--Bertrand Russell

There are no bad words, only bad uses of words.

--George Carlin

A picture is worth a thousand words, but try to say that in a picture.

--Millôr Fernandes

Whom...is doomed. As Mignon Fogarty...told me: 'I'd put my money on whom being mostly gone in 50 to 100 years.' But why? One explanation is that the word has outlived its ability to fulfill the most important function of language: to clarify and specify. Another is that its subject/object distinction can be confusing to the point of frustrating. The most immediate reason, though, is that whom simply costs language users more than it benefits them. Correctness is significantly less appealing when its price is the appearance of being—as an editor at The Guardian wrote—a 'pompous twerp.'

--Megan Garber

The best rule for dealing with who vs. whom is this: Whenever whom is required, recast the sentence.

--William Safire

Few of us still use whom in speech, and we've adopted that practice in our writing, particularly in more casual forms (e-mails, texts, IMs). What scholars refer to as 'secondary orality,' the tendency of written language to adopt the characteristics of speech, is for many of us the new linguistic reality.

--Megan Garber

Whom is unnecessary—indeed, it's out of place—where a conversational tone is sought. We type with our telephones and we chat with our keyboards and we write, increasingly, as we talk. And—to whom it may concern—our words rise, and fall, accordingly.

--Stan Carey

Everyday words are inherently imprecise. They work well enough in everyday life that you don't notice. Words seem to work, just as Newtonian physics seems to. But you can always make them break if you push them far enough.

--Paul Graham

I have never developed indigestion from eating my words.

--Winston Churchill

Most dictionaries intend to delimit our language—not to contain the entire history of English but instead to represent our living, breathing semantic reality.

--Jen Doll

A word to the wise is not sufficient if it doesn't make sense.

--James Thurber

Imagery is the primary medium of our time, a potentially powerful host for good change and authentic understanding. But in its shadow, we have gotten lazy in our appropriation of the correct words to assuage or understand or to seek the common humanity that is in all of us. Today, throwing barbs and brickbats into the Great Din of the Internet has become as second nature as breathing, and one can do it so ubiquitously that words have become devoid of any meaningful consequence. The Great Din requires no forethought, no real calculation of purpose or result, no contemplative brake, no need to seek angles or views beyond those that reaffirm or reassure what we think right now. The best photographers still work patiently and incessantly for the right angles, the right lighting, the right moments to tell the story most truthfully and honestly. Would that more writers do likewise.

--Chuck Raasch

Words can have no single fixed meaning. Like wayward electrons, they can spin away from their initial orbit and enter a wider magnetic field. No one owns them or has a proprietary right to dictate how they will be used.

--David Lehman

Reading Shakespeare gives you a visceral experience of how expansive the imaginative possibilities of language can be. But at the same time, the precision of the language is as remarkable as the range, amplitude and inventiveness. I think what's commonly referred to as Shakespeare's universality comes down to how the element of precision—linguistic and psychological—centers the verbal virtuosity.

--Yu Jin Ko

There are words which are worth as much as the best actions, for they contain the germ of them all.

--Anne Sophie Swetchine

'Careful with fire' is good advice we know.

'Careful with words' is ten times doubly so.

--William Carleton

It is still not enough for language to have clarity and content... it must also have a goal and an imperative. Otherwise from language we descend to chatter, from chatter to babble and from babble to confusion.

--Rene Daumal

When I read some of the rules for speaking and writing the English language correctly...I think—Any fool can make a rule And every fool will mind it.

--Henry David Thoreau

A man only curses because he doesn't know the words to express what is on his mind.

--Malcolm X

There are tones of voices that mean more than words.

--Robert Frost

We have become a nation of promiscuous punctuators. In a paper published in 2006 in the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Carol Waseleski noted that exclamation points 'rarely function as markers of excitability'; instead, they may function as 'markers of friendly interaction.' When a single point denotes basic human warmth, more points are needed to convey enthusiasm (!!), even more to convey excitement (!!!), and more still to convey giddiness (Prime Rib Saturday!!!!). The same holds for question marks and even ellipses: more marks are required to add emotional coloring to words rendered in black and white.

--Megan Garber

Words, like glasses, obscure everything which they do not make clear.

--Joseph Joubert

It's important to be precise about words, because of the thought value of them—they frame and shape so much of the way we understand things.

--Michael Nesmith

In a way things were more perfect when you couldn't describe anything...Once you locked into language, all you could do was shuffle the greasy pack of a few thousand words that millions of people had used before.

--Edward St. Aubyn

Texting is actually kind of like another language teens have developed. It's more about being expressive than lazy.

--Scott Campbell

The finest language is mostly made up of simple unimposing words.

--George Eliot

Political language—and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists—is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.

--George Orwell

Words are not just their meanings; they are sounds. There is poetry in all effective language, even if it is not organized on the page to look like a poem. As sounds, words can have the emotional power of music. I believe that neuroscience will one day explain what poets know, that words arranged with full use of their musical qualities allow us to think and feel simultaneously in a unique way.

—Temma Ehrenfeld

Language is not simply a reporting device for experience but a defining framework for it.

—Benjamin Whorf

Mechanical difficulties with language are the outcome of internal difficulties with thought.

—Elizabeth Bowen

Words to me were magic. You could say a word and it could conjure up all kinds of images or feelings or a chilly sensation or whatever. It was amazing to me that words had this power.

—Amy Tan

The University of Pennsylvania linguist Mark Liberman reported that, according to his analysis of transcribed phone conversations, women say ‘um’ 22 percent more frequently than men do, while men say ‘uh’ more than twice as often as women do.

—Michael Erard

The Northeast tends to be the most linguistically formal area of the U.S.—for example, northeasterners use contractions less frequently than do other Americans.

—Jack Grieve

Word - that invisible dagger.

—Emile M. Cioran

One does, after all, take on many of the givens of a society when one takes on its language.

—Alma Guillermoprieto

In the word 'scent' is the C or the S silent?

—*The Chive*

Where Standard English cheerfully makes do with single terms—sexual intercourse, drunk, stupid—slang offers respectively 1,750, 2,500, and 1,000 variations.

—Jonathon Green

Whereas Standard English speaks for authority, slang gives voice to the margins. Its original in crowd was criminal. The cops, who didn't know the words, were excluded. Modern slang's great constituency is the young; parents and teachers have replaced cops as the outsiders.

—Jonathon Green

Slang words replace themselves regularly. If one person has a secret, another will betray it. And when a piece of slang escapes into the wider world, it leaves a gap that must be filled. So while the slang of the 16th century has mainly vanished, its descendants march on. We lose wap and get bumbaste, lose that and get trounce, lose that and get strum. And on it goes, until we have 1,750 terms for sex.

—Jonathon Green

When a thought takes one's breath away, a grammar lesson seems an impertinence.

—Thomas W. Higginson

A few apt words trawled from their depths can sprinkle star dust on an otherwise pedestrian offering.

—Malcolm E. Brown

Poets preserve the English language. As long as we make these little cages called poems or prose, there's a place where the language is still getting to play at its full potential, and even managing to expand those perimeters and those boundaries.

—Tony Hoagland

Language is not only the vehicle of thought, it is a great and efficient instrument in thinking.

—Humphry Davy

Words are the passkeys to our souls. Without them, we can't really share the enormity of our lives.

—Diane Ackerman

The quality of our thoughts is bordered on all sides by our facility with language.

—J. Michael Straczynski

Riot is the language of the unheard.

—Martin Luther  
King, Jr.

You can stroke people with words.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald

Would I had phrases that are not known, utterances that are strange, in new language that has not been used, free from repetition, not an utterance which has grown stale, which men of old have spoken.

—Egyptian Inscription  
Recorded at the  
Time of the  
Invention of  
Writing

So avoid using the word ‘very’ because it’s lazy. A man is not very tired, he is exhausted. Don’t use very sad, use morose. Language was invented for one reason, boys—to woo women—and, in that endeavor, laziness will not do.

—John Keating, *Dead  
Poet’s Society*

As societies grow decadent, the language grows decadent, too. Words are used to disguise, not to illuminate, action: you liberate a city by destroying it. Words are to confuse, so that at election time people will solemnly vote against their own interests.

—Gore Vidal

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society.

—Edward Sapir

Language is our shell and our antennae;...It protects us against others and informs us about them; it is a prolongation of our senses.

—Jean-Paul Sartre

Language taken as a whole, becomes the gateway to a new world. All progress here opens a new perspective and widens and enriches our concrete experiences.

—Ernst Cassirer

Words, as is well known, are the great foes of reality.

—Joseph Conrad

Different words are like different tools in the toolbox. As there is no one use which is the essential use of all tools, there is no one essential use for words and sentences.

—Justus Hartnack

(The beauty of the words) disposes the passions of the reader without his being aware and orders them like the mass, like music, like the dance.

—Jean-Paul Sartre

The writer shares his medium with all who use the language. The words he uses are the same as those used in everyday discourse. He is, in fact, confined to the words and to the meanings of each that native speakers in his time have agreed upon. There is no literary vocabulary; there are no 'poetic' words. The writer simply makes ordinary words behave in extraordinary ways. He exploits their several literal meanings, their connotations, their image potential, their symbol values, their sounds, their rhythms. He extends vocabulary by creating new words....And the writer gives surprising, fresh contexts to familiar words....The writer turns to his account all the dimensions words have to offer.

—Geraldine Murphy

If the English language made any sense, a catastrophe would be an apostrophe with fur.

—Doug Larson

I don't always correct grammar and spelling. But when I do, it's because you're an idiot.

—*The Chive*

I believe the primary function of language is, in a word, survival—and not simply survival in a social sense. I mean survival as the biologists use the term.

—Owen Thomas

The production of language begins when a child reacts to an experience in the environment and begins to think about it (conceptualization) and, in turn, to talk about it (verbalization).

—Virginia Baldwin

To use language, as language, is to be human; to use it with kindness, grace, and dignity is to be humane.

—Albert Upton



The knowledge of words is the gate to scholarship.

—Woodrow Wilson

The word makes men free. Whoever cannot express himself is a slave. Speaking is an act of freedom; the word is freedom itself.

—Ludwig Feuerbach

We have room but for one Language here and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans of American nationality and not as dwellers in a polyglot boardinghouse.

—Theodore Roosevelt

In richness, good sense, and terse convenience, no other of the living languages may be put beside English.

—Jakob Grimm

That language is the best which, at every single point, is easiest to the greatest possible number of human beings.

—Otto Jespersen

Here you have a very carefully wrought plan for an international language, capable of very wide transactions of practical business and interchange of ideas.

—Winston Churchill  
(Speech advocating  
Basic English as a  
world tongue,  
September 7, 1943)

A world language is more important for mankind at the present moment than any conceivable advance in television or telephony.

—Lewis Mumford

There are masked words abroad, I say, which nobody understands.

—John Ruskin

There are trivial ways of studying language which have no connection with life, and these we need to clear out of our schools. But a deeper and more thorough study of our use of words is at every point a study of our ways of living. It touches all the modes of interpretive activity—in techniques, and in social intercourse—upon which civilization depends.

—I. A. Richards

—except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air.

—*I Corinthians* 14:9

I don't know the rules of grammar... If you're trying to persuade people to do something, or buy something, it seems to me you should use their language, the language they use every day, the language in which they think. We try to write in the vernacular.

—David Ogilvy

Language contains the inner, living history of man's soul.

—Owen Barfield

Why punctuation matters. Some people find inspiration in cooking their families and their dogs. Others find inspiration in cooking, their families, and their dogs.

—Unknown

You can be a little ungrammatical if you come from the right part of the country.

—Robert Frost

That is a long word: forever!

—Georg Buchner

There are words which sever hearts more than sharp swords; there are words the point of which sting the heart through the course of a whole life.

—Frederika Bremer

According to the *Oxford Dictionaries*, you only need to know 10 words to understand 25% of what native [English] speakers say and write. You need to know 100 words to understand 50% of what native speakers say & write, and 1000 words to understand 75% of all the words used in common, every day English.

—Beth Buczynski

Language should be an ever developing procedure and not an isolated occurrence.

—Robert Smithson

Words are the leaves of the tree of language, of which, if some fall away, a new succession takes their place.

—Field Marshall John  
French

I hate spelling errors. You mix up two letters and your whole post is urined.

—Andrew Gardner

I still find 'Negro' a word of wonders, glorious and terrible. A word for runaway slave posters and civil rights proclamations; for social constructs and street corner flaunts. A tonal-language word whose meaning shifts as setting and context shift, as history twists, lurches, advances, and stagnates. As capital letters appear to enhance its dignity, as other nomenclatures arise to challenge its primacy.... 'Negro' dominated our history for so long; because I lived with its meanings and intimations for so long; because they were essential to my first discoveries of what race meant, or, as we now say, how race was constructed.

—Margo Jefferson

When the poet makes his perfect selection of a word, he is endowing the word with life.

—John Drinkwater

I'm fairly certain that the person who put the first r in February also decided how to spell Wednesday.

—*GrammarlyCards*

Clutter is the disease of American writing. We are a society strangling in unnecessary words, circular constructions, pompous frills and meaningless jargon.

—William Zinsser

Words are also seeds, and when dropped into the invisible spiritual substance, they grow and bring forth after their kind.

—Charles Fillmore

The truest writers are those who see language not as a linguistic process but as a living element.

—Derek Walcott

One of the things I've done as a writer is to learn more words. I do that by reading widely and in all disciplines. I read art criticism. I read science. I read psychology. As I have done that over a lifetime, I know more and more words. One of my anxieties when I first started writing was that my language seemed too plain to address subjects that were complicated. As I have been able to learn more words, it's easier to paint a scene that might seduce the reader into watching that scene, and then more words for the speaker to speak so that the psychology becomes more nuanced.

—Alicia Anstead

Language is malleable, and we can pound it and twist it into whatever shape we desire to make it fit our needs.

—Jim Baumann

People say that profanity is a crutch for those who don't have an extensive enough vocabulary, but I prefer to say that people who don't use profanity are missing out on a lot of amazing words. Consider the 'f' word. It's a verb, an exclamation, a way of commiserating or yelling in anger or expressing fear. It's one of the most dynamic words in our language, and I take full fucking advantage of it.

—Jenny Lawson

In the 20th century, the most prominent invented languages were made for fictional worlds. J. R. R. Tolkien, who was equal parts fantasist and philologist, spent decades developing Quenya and Sindarin and all the other languages of Middle Earth; he wrote *The Lord of the Rings* as their vessel. 'Nobody believes me when I say that my long book is an attempt to create a world in which a form of language agreeable to my personal aesthetic might seem real. But it is true.'

—William Brennan

The English of one time is not like the English of another. Words are born and die and, to make matters more complicated, the meaning of a word may change from one period to another.

—Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

English is the easiest language to speak badly.

—George Bernhard Shaw

I have nothing but contempt for anyone who can spell a word only one way.

—Thomas Jefferson

Language exists only on the surface of our consciousness. The great human struggles are played out in silence and in the ability to express oneself.

—Franz Xavier Kroetz

But words are things; and a small drop of ink,  
Falling, like dew, upon a thought, produces  
That which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think.

—Lord Byron

Grammar is not just a pain in the ass; it's the pole you grab to get your thoughts up on their feet and walking.

—Stephen King

When the English language gets in my way, I walk over it.

—William A. Sunday

If you want to refurbish your grammar, go to your local used-book store and find a copy of *Warriner's English Grammar and Composition*—the same book most of us took home and dutifully covered with brown paper shopping-bags when we were sophomores and juniors in high school. You'll be relieved and delighted, I think, to find that almost all you need is summarized on the front and back endpapers of the book.

—Stephen King

Language does not always have to wear a tie and lace-up shoes. The object of fiction isn't grammatical correctness but to make the reader welcome and then tell a story.

—Stephen King

Into this wild ocean of words Shakespeare plunged head over heels, and disported himself in it with a wild dolphin joy. He collected words from everywhere, from rustic speech and dialect (he no doubt spoke the Warwickshire dialect all his life), from Chaucer and the old books, from translators of the classics, from lawyers and grave theologians, from traveled young gallants. He was, moreover, perhaps the greatest word-creator the world has ever known, and has probably added more new words to our vocabulary than all the other English poets put together. He made up his language as he went along—'crashing', as he has been described, 'through the forest of words like a thunderbolt, crushing them out of shape if they don't fit in, melting moods and tenses, and leaving people to gape at the transformation.'

—Logan Pearsall Smith

Words can sometimes be used to confuse, but it's up to the practitioners of the study of language to apply them for good and not for evil. It is just like fire; fire can heat your house or burn it down.

—Frank Luntz

Don't use a big word when a singularly unloquacious and diminutive linguistic expression will satisfactorily accomplish the contemporary necessity.

—Unknown

American education will never realize its potential as an engine of opportunity and economic growth until a writing revolution puts the power of language and communication in their proper place in the classroom. Writing is how students connect the dots in their knowledge.

--Bob Kerrey

Watch your thoughts; they become words. Watch your words; they become actions. Watch your actions; they become habits. Watch your habits; they become character. Watch your character; it becomes your destiny.

—Patrick Overton

To write or even speak English is not a science but an art. There are no reliable words. Whoever writes English is involved in a struggle that never lets up even for a sentence. He is struggling against vagueness, against obscurity, against the lure of the decorative adjective, against the encroachment of Latin and Greek, and, above all, against the wornout phrases and dead metaphors with which the language is cluttered up.

—George Orwell

Another segment of society that has constructed a language of its own is business. People in business say that toner cartridges are in short supply, that they have updated the next shipment of these cartridges, and that they will finalize their recommendations at the next meeting of the board. They are speaking a language familiar and dear to them. Its portentous nouns and verbs invest ordinary events with high adventure; executives walk among toner cartridges, caparisoned like knights. We should tolerate them--every person of spirit wants to ride a white horse.

—William Strunk Jr.

Increase your word power. Words are the raw material of our craft. The greater your vocabulary the more effective your writing. We who write in English are fortunate to have the richest and most versatile language in the world. Respect it.

—P. D. James

My life is a constant battle between wanting to correct grammar and wanting to have friends.

—Internet Meme

Old English, the heart and soul of the old regime at Oxford, ceased to be a required course only as of 2002.

—Philip Zaleski

The past, present & future walk into a bar. It was tense.

—Internet Meme

She was fascinated with words. To her, words were things of beauty, each like a magical powder or potion that could be combined with other words to create powerful spells.

—Dean Koontz

A multitude of words is probably the most formidable means of blurring and obscuring thought. There is no thought, however momentous, that cannot be expressed lucidly in 200 words.

--Eric Hoffer

The *North York Women Teachers' Association*, based in a Toronto suburb, has put out a pamphlet encouraging its members to avoid violent images in their everyday language. Instead of 'There's more than one way to skin a cat,' students might be advised that 'There are different ways to solve a problem.'

'Don't shoot yourself in the foot' would be replaced by 'Don't undermine your own position.'

Instead of killing two birds with one stone,' take a cue from the retail industry and 'Get two for the price of one.' Don't hit computer keys; tap them instead.

Critics charge that the group is trying to murder the English language and leave it to the 'poetically challenged.'

—*Wall Street Journal*

In political language, plainness is powerful. 'Of the people, by the people, for the people.' 'Ask not what your country can do for you.' 'I have a dream.' This is especially so for language designed to be heard, like speeches and debate exchanges, rather than read from a page. People absorb and retain information in smaller increments through the ear than through the eye. Thus the classic intonations of every major religion have the simple, repetitive cadence also found in the best political speeches. 'In the beginning.' 'And it was good.' 'Let us pray.'

—James Fallows

The Edwardians were preoccupied with the concept of progress, which they defined as measurable, scientific, and technical. But what doubt a word to describe progress in areas that defy any meaningful metric, such as love or elegance or amusement or mercy?

—Denis Boyles

Grammar is credulity. If you're not taking care of the small things, people assume you're not taking care of the big things.

--Amanda Sturgill

Nothing is more common than for men to think that because they are familiar with words, they understand the ideas they stand for.

--Cardinal John Newman

It is related of Noah Webster that his wife, coming suddenly into the pantry one day, caught him in the act of embracing the chambermaid. 'Mr. Webster,' she said. 'I'm surprised.'

The great lexicographer gazed upon her in mild reproof. 'No, my pet,' he replied. 'You are amazed. It is we who are surprised.'

—*Speaker's Idea File*

Human language appears to be a unique phenomenon, without significant analogue in the animal world.

—Noam Chomsky

Let's eat Grandma. Let's eat, Grandma.—Commas save lives.

—Internet Meme

An English professor wrote the words: 'A woman without her man is nothing' on the chalkboard. He asked the students to punctuate it correctly. All of the males in the class wrote: 'A woman, without her man, is nothing.' All of the females in the class wrote: 'A woman: without her, man is nothing.'  
Punctuation is powerful.

—Steven Atcheson

Without our being especially conscious of the transition, the word 'parent' has gradually come to be used as much as a verb as a noun. Whereas we formerly thought mainly about 'being a parent,' we now find ourselves talking about learning how 'to parent.'...It suggests that we may now be concentrating on action rather than status, on what we do rather than what or who we are.

—Bettye M. Caldwell

Language has created the word loneliness to express the pain of being alone, and the word solitude to express the glory of being alone.

—Paul Tillich

A wife who loses a husband is called a widow. A husband who loses a wife is called a widower. A child who loses his parents is called an orphan. But...there is no word for a parent who loses a child, that's how awful the loss is!

—Jay Neugeboren

What does a thesaurus eat for breakfast?—A synonym roll.

—Unknown

The thing that's depressing is teaching graduate students today and discovering that they don't know simple elemental facts of grammar. They really do not know how to scan a line; they've never been taught to scan a line. Many of them don't know the difference between 'lie' and 'lay,' let alone 'its' and 'it's.' And they're in graduate school!

—Maxine Kumin

There is orphan, widow, and widower—but no word for a parent who has lost a child, or a word for that child (unless it was stillborn).

—Frank DiSalle



‘Stupid English.’

‘English isn’t stupid,’ I say.

‘Well, my English teacher is.’ He makes a face. ‘Mr. Franklin assigned an essay about our favorite subject, and I wanted to write about lunch, but he won’t let me.’

‘Why not?’

‘He says lunch isn’t a subject.’

I glance at him. ‘It isn’t.’

‘Well,’ Jacob says, ‘it’s not a predicate, either. Shouldn’t he know that?’

—Jodi Picoult

We desperately need grown-up equivalents for the words girlfriend and boyfriend. Beau? Lady friend? Too old. Bae? Too young. Lover? Ick!

—Heather Woodford

The students could diagram and understand sentences and point out the various parts of speech with great facility, repeating the rules of grammar applicable in each case, yet they were unable to put this theoretical knowledge to any practical use, as they showed when called upon to write an ordinary letter in English.

--Francis Wayland  
Parker (1892)

We are students of words: we are shut up in schools, and colleges, and recitation-rooms, for ten or fifteen years, and come out at last with a bag of wind, a memory of words, and do not know a thing.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Pity the poor in spirit who know neither the enchantment nor the beauty of language.

—Muriel Barbery

‘Will I have to use a dictionary to read your book?’ asked Mrs. Dodypol. ‘It depends,’ says I, ‘how much you used the dictionary before you read it.’

—Alexander Theroux

Words are sacred. They deserve respect. If you get the right ones, in the right order, you can nudge the world a little.

—Tom Stoppard

Speech is not an attribute but an artifact, a tool crafted by humans that is now so mighty it makes them stronger than any other species....speech constitutes a kingdom all its own—beyond that of animals.

—Tom Wolfe

Man owns or controls...every animal that exists, thanks to his superpower: speech.

—Tom Wolfe

There is something about words. In expert hands, manipulated deftly, they take you prisoner. Wind themselves around your limbs like spider silk, and when you are so enthralled you cannot move, they pierce your skin, enter your blood, numb your thoughts. Inside you they work their magic.

—Diane Setterfield

I know nothing in the world that has as much power as a word. Sometimes I write one, and I look at it, until it begins to shine.

—Emily Dickinson

She was fascinated with words. To her, words were things of beauty, each like a magical powder or potion that could be combined with other words to create powerful spells.

—Dean Koontz

If the word doesn't exist, invent it; but first be sure it doesn't exist.

—Charles Baudelaire

Language exists less to record the actual than to liberate the imagination.

—Anthony Burgess

To enjoy and learn from what you read you must understand the meanings of the words a writer uses. You do yourself a grave disservice if you read around words you don't know, or worse, merely guess at what they mean without bothering to look them up.

For me, reading has always been not only a quest for pleasure and enlightenment but also a word-hunting expedition, a lexical safari.

—Charles Harrington  
Elster

I have a prejudice against people who print things in a foreign language and add no translation. When I am the reader, and the author considers me able to do the translating myself, he pays me quite a nice compliment—but if he would do the translating for me I would try to get along without the compliment.

--Mark Twain

To read Dickens is to be caught up in a tumble of words—and in language juicy with the flux of life.

--Simon Schama

Shakespeare's language models precision and efficiency. Consider the terse expressiveness of the Duke of York's rebuke of a flattering nephew: 'Uncle me no uncles!' In addition to such snappy dialogue, Shakespeare teaches us that a kind of music occurs when long, Latinate words are set next to short, hard Anglo-Saxon ones, as when Hamlet speaks of his father's 'canonized bones.' Long to short, abstract to earthy, spirit to bone. That's Shakespeare's rhythm.

--Grace Tiffany

*Sidewalk* resonates because Silverstein wrote for the ear. Purposeful rhythm. Calculated pace. Challenging riffs. Delightful melodies. Words selected as much for their sound as their meaning. Sound becomes meaning.

—Jack Hamann

Words and language conventions are all a writer has to use to express his ideas., feelings, vision. He can only choose and order words in certain ways. If he so organizes language that his work evokes a perception of pattern, an ordered experience, in those readers who respond to the words as they direct, then his work is a work of literature.

—Geraldine Murphy

In more mature literature, drawings disappear from the pages, and the writer assumes the role of illustrator. Language must be the author's brush and palette.

—Rebekah Caplan

The literary term for describing in words what you see in a picture is *ekphrasis*. The practice can be traced back to Plato and Aristotle, through the Renaissance and the works of the Romantic poets, all the way into literature of the 19th century. Typically, the word *ekphrastic* is applied to poetry. Consider Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn,' Homer's vivid descriptions in the *Illiad*, or W. H. Auden's retelling of Homer's story in his own poem 'The Shield of Achilles.'

—Donna Baier Stein

I have read like a man on fire my whole life because the genius of English teachers touched me with the dazzling beauty of language.

—Pat Conroy

There's a specificity of language that's required in Shakespeare that most drama students in England deal with—a specificity of language that is somehow not as clear in a lot of American schools.

—James Avery

Since language is the only tool with which writers can reflect and shape a culture, it must be transformed into art. Language is not a limitation on the art of literature; it is a glorification. It has been the scaffolding inside which nations and philosophies have been built, and the language of literature has added the ornamental pediment by which the culture is remembered.

—E. L. Konigsburg

The finest words in the world are only vain sounds, if you cannot comprehend them.

--Anatole France

The research is clear. Students who read 1 million words a year every year will develop fluency in their reading. And fluency is critical to comprehension. We learn most of the words we know through reading.

--Sally Mentor Hay

The beginning of education lies in the exploration of the meaning of words.

—Antisthenes

There is a wonder in reading Braille that the sighted will never know: to touch words and have them touch you back.

—Jim Fiebig

He liked the mere act of reading, the magic of turning scratches on a page into words inside his head.

—John Green

There's something special about people who are interested in the printed word. They are a species all their own—learned, kind, knowledgeable and human.

--Nathan Pine

Your daily speech is imperfect iambic pentameter, or five-foot lines. While some of your friends may assume poetry is too esoteric for them, were you to record their conversations and scan them, you could demonstrate a ragged iambic pattern emerging. And there would be five iambs to the line that would regularly re-create itself. Such is the natural rhythmical pattern of the English language, and, as a result, more English and American poetry is written in this meter than in any other.

--Thomas E. Sanders

The poet elevates the language. He does everything any other writer does, but he concentrates upon using these things more completely—he wrings everything he can out of every word: denotation, connotation, sound, association, stress, imagery, and so on and on. He handles and forms the language as a potter handles and shapes clay; he molds language into an art object. That is to say, poetry is not to be defined in terms of a particular mode, such as prose or verse, but rather in terms of intensity of concentration on mode, on language of whatever species.

--Lewis Turco

Keep reading the dictionary. Sometimes an entire poem emerges from discovery of what one word really means.

--Winfield Townley Scott

Poetry is the language that is spoken—only better.

--John Frederick Nims

Poetry is the renewal of words, setting them free, and that's what a poet is doing: loosening the words.

--Robert Frost

More can be learned about how to write poetry from Dante than from any English poet....The language of each great English poet is his own language; the language of Dante is the perfection of a common language.

--T. S. Eliot

Poetry is the music of thought, conveyed to us in the music of language.

--Paul Chatfield

The poet marries the language, and out of this marriage the poem is born.

--W. H. Auden

It is the discipline of poetry that most attracts me. And it is from poetry that I draw both my inspiration, to a large extent, and my understanding of language. I admire what is concise, and I admire each word in its right place, with no other words that are unnecessary.

--Jeanette Winterson

When you read excellent poetry, you see how precise language can be; you see words being used with great respect.

--William Boyd

Poets are soldiers that liberate words from the steadfast possession of definition.

—Eli Khamarov

The first poem...ever written...was probably carved...on a cold damp cave...by a physically unendowed cave man...who wanted to make a good impression...on a physically endowed...cave woman...But maybe not...Maybe it was she...trying to gain the notice...of a hunk...who was in demand...Or perhaps...it was simply someone...who admired the motion...of a sabertooth tiger...and wanting to capture the beauty...picked up a sharpened rock...to draw...We know so very little...about the origin of the written word...let alone the language...that all conjecture deserves some consideration.

--Nikki Giovanni

Poetry teaches an exceptional love for words, their special properties and ability to signify beyond the literal....such that the experience of reading is not merely one-dimensional, but a full-fledged affair in which multiple of ourselves seem stimulated, our physical body as well as our intellect.

—Major Jackson

Poetry is above all a concentration of the power of language, which is the power of our ultimate relationship to everything in the universe.

—Adrienne Rich

We have to know something of the language a poet is using before we can appreciate his poem—before we can see how the poem came to be. This applies not only to poems in foreign languages but also to poems in our own tongue. The English of one time is not like the English of another. Words are born and die and, to make matters more complicated, the meaning of a word may change from one period to another. Furthermore, the poet himself may twist and wrench the language he uses so that words get new meanings.

—Cleanth Brooks and  
Robert Penn  
Warren

When it is poetically organized, the English language appears to tend toward rising rhythms; that is, the main instinct in English prosody is for iambic or occasionally anapaestic movements rather than for trochaic or dactylic.

—Paul Fussell, Jr.

For freedom, for brevity, and for vigour, Elizabethan is superior to modern English. Many of the words employed by Shakespeare and his contemporaries were the recent inventions of the age; hence they are used with a freshness and an exactness to which we are strangers. Again, the spoken English so far predominated over the grammatical English that it materially influenced the rhythm of the verse, the construction of the sentence, and sometimes the spelling of the words. hence sprung an artless and unlaboured harmony which seems the natural heritage of the Eliza-

bethan poets, whereas such harmony as is attained by modern authors frequently betrays a painful excess of art. Lastly, the use of some few still remaining inflections (the subjunctive in particular), the lingering sense of many other inflections that had passed away leaving behind something of the old versatility and audacity in the arrangement of the sentence, the stern subordination of grammar to terseness and clearness, and the consequent directness and naturalness of expression, all conspire to give a liveliness and wakefulness to Shakesperian English which are wanting in the grammatical monotony of the present day. We may perhaps claim some superiority in completeness and perspicuity for modern English, but if we were to appeal on this ground to the shade of Shakespeare in the words of Antonio in the *Tempest*,—

Do you not hear us speak?

we might fairly be crushed with the reply of Sebastian—

I do; and surely  
It is a sleepy language.

—E. A. Abbott

The finest command of language is often shown by saying nothing.

—Roger Babson

Only the suppressed word is dangerous.

--Ludwig Börne

Words are like golf strokes: the fewer you use, the higher they score.

--Greg Henry Quinn

Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with shades of deeper meaning.

--Maya Angelou

I have a spelling checker,  
It came with my PC.  
It plainly marks four my revue  
Mistakes I cannot sea.  
I've run this poem write through it,  
I'm shore your pleas too no  
It's letter perfect in it's weigh,  
My checker tolled me sew!

--*New York Times*

If a word in the dictionary were misspelled, how would we know?

—Steven Wright

### **REASONS WHY THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IS HARD TO LEARN:**

1. The bandage was wound around the wound.
2. The farm was used to produce produce.
3. The dump was so full that it had to refuse more refuse.
4. We must polish the Polish furniture.
5. He could lead if he would get the lead out.
6. The soldier decided to desert his dessert in the desert.
7. Since there is no time like the present, he thought it was time to present the present.
8. A bass was painted on the head of the bass drum.
9. When shot at, the dove dove into the bushes.
10. I did not object to the object.
11. The insurance was invalid for the invalid.
12. There was a row among the oarsmen about how to row.
13. They were too close to the door to close it.
14. The buck does funny things when the does are present.
15. A seamstress and a sewer fell down into a sewer line.
16. To help with planting, the farmer taught his sow to sow.
17. The wind was too strong to wind the sail.
18. After a number of injections my jaw got number.
19. Upon seeing the tear in the painting, I shed a tear.
20. I had to subject the subject to a series of tests.
21. How can I intimate this to my most intimate friend?

— Richard Lederer

### **REASONS WHY THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IS HARD TO LEARN:**

Let's face it - English is a crazy language:

There is no egg in eggplant, nor ham in hamburger; neither apple or pine in pineapple.

English muffins weren't invented in England, and French fries aren't French.

Sweetmeats are candies while sweetbreads, which aren't sweet, are meat.

Quicksand can work slowly, boxing rings are square, and a guinea pig is neither from Guinea, nor is it a pig.

And why is it that writers write, but fingers don't fing, grocers don't groce, and hammers don't ham?

If the plural of tooth is teeth, why isn't the plural of booth beeth?

One goose, two geese; so, one moose, two meese? One index, two indices?

Doesn't it seem crazy that you can make amends, but not one amend?



If you have a bunch of odds and ends, and get rid of all but one of them, what do you call it?

If teachers taught, why didn't preachers praught?

If a vegetarian eats vegetables, what does a humanitarian eat?

Sometimes I think all the English speakers should be committed to an asylum for the verbally insane. In what language do people recite at a play, and play at a recital? Ship by truck and send cargo by ship? Have noses that run and feet that smell? How can a slim chance and a fat chance be the same, while a wise man and a wise guy are opposites?

You have to marvel at the unique lunacy of a language in which your house can burn up as it burns down, in which you fill in a form by filling it out, and in which an alarm goes off by going on. English was invented by people, not computers, and it reflects the creativity of the human race which, of course, isn't a race at all.

— Richard Lederer

Easterners (no, Westerners) talk funny. Here are some of the variations between the two sides of the Mississippi:

EAST

WEST

Sneakers

Tennis Shoes

Yard Sale

Garage Sale

Skillet

Frying Pan

Scrap Paper

Scratch Paper

Scallions

Green Onions

Highway

Freeway

Lightning Bugs

Fireflies

—Josh Katz

Language is a cracked kettle on which we beat out tunes for bears to dance to, while all the time we long to move the stars to pity.

—Gustave Flaubert

I would like to nominate a man who is honest and courageous. I'd like to, but this party doesn't have one of those kind of people. My candidate does not know the meaning of the word 'compromise,' does not know the meaning of the word 'appeasement', 'does not know the meaning of the word 'cowardice'—and has done quite well despite his lousy vocabulary.'

—Vaughn Meader

Our business is infested with idiots who try to impress by using pretentious jargon.

—David Ogilvy

Women are less compelled to be traditional and conservative in their modes of expression. They can often be at the forefront of linguistic shifts.

—Alexandra King

Language is the means of getting an idea from my brain into yours without surgery.

—Mark Amidon

It is possible...for a culture to be overwhelmed physically but not culturally. That is what has happened to the American Indian. It is a strange kind of conquest over the white conquerors. Almost half the states have names borrowed from Indian lore, and so do thousands of cities, rivers, towns, lakes, and mountain ranges. Americans drink hooch, meet in a caucus, bury the hatchet, have clambakes, run the gauntlet, smoke the peace pipe, hold powwows, and enjoy Indian summer. Today's highways, a triumph of American technology, are concrete tracings of trails Indians pioneered and trod for tens of thousands of years.

--Jamake Highwater

I have always been offended by the song that says, 'Everything is beautiful in its own way.' If everything is beautiful, then the word 'beautiful' has no meaning. If everything were purple, there would be no word 'purple' in the language because it would not distinguish one thing from another.

—Thomas Sowell

If you really want to hurt me, talk badly about my language.

--Gloria Anzaldúa

'(On the word 'fuck')

'Oh, come on, Mum,' I sighed at her protest. 'It's just an old Anglo-Saxon word for the female organ which has been adopted by an inherently misogynist language as a negative epithet. It's the same as 'fuck', it basically means the same as copulate, but the latter is perfectly acceptable. Why? Because copulate has its roots in Latin and Latin reminds us that we are a sophisticated, learned species, not the rutting animals that these prehistoric grunts would have us appear to be, and isn't that really the issue here? We don't want to admit that we are essentially animals? We want to distinguish ourselves from the fauna with grand conceits and elaborate language; become angels worthy of salvation, not dumb creatures consigned to an earthly, terminal end. It's just a word, Mum; a sound meaning a thing; and your disgust is just denial of a greater horror: that our consciousness is not an indication of our specialness but the terrifying key to knowing how truly insignificant we are.

She told me to go fuck myself.

—Simon Pegg

Logic is nothing more than a knowledge of words.

--Charles Lamb

There is no tracing the connection of ancient nations but by language; therefore I am always sorry when any language is lost, for languages are the pedigree of nations.

--Samuel Johnson

Obviously no language is innate. Take any kid from any race, bring them up in any culture and they will learn the language equally quickly. So no particular language is in the genes. But what might be in the genes is the ability to acquire language.

—Steven Pinker

To rescue from oblivion even a fragment of a language which men have used and which is in danger of being lost—that is to say, one of the elements, whether good or bad, which have shaped and complicated civilization—is to extend the scope of social observation and to serve civilization.

—Victor Hugo

The English language is like London: proudly barbaric yet deeply civilised, too, common yet royal, vulgar yet processional, sacred yet profane. Each sentence we produce, whether we know it or not, is a mongrel mouthful of Chaucerian, Shakespearean, Miltonic, Johnsonian, Dickensian and American. Military, naval, legal, corporate, criminal, jazz, rap and ghetto discourses are mingled at every turn. The French language, like Paris, has attempted, through its Academy, to retain its purity, to fight the advancing tides of Franglais and international prefabrication. English, by comparison, is a shameless whore.

—Stephen Fry

Because of language, the thoughts we record today might reach into the future to influence the thinking of people not yet born.

—Laura A. Freberg

If you care about being thought credible and intelligent, do not use complex language where simpler language will do. My Princeton colleague Danny Oppenheimer refuted a myth prevalent among undergraduates about the vocabulary that professors find most impressive. In an article titled 'Consequences of Erudite Vernacular Utilized Irrespective of Necessity: Problems with Using Long Words Needlessly,' he showed that couching familiar ideas in pretentious language is taken as a sign of poor intelligence and low credibility.

—Daniel Kahneman

Certainly, words can be as abusive as any blow....When a three-year-old yells, 'You're so stupid! What a dummy!' it doesn't carry the same weight as when a mother yells those words to a child....Even if you don't physically abuse young children, you can still drive them nuts with your words.

--Mary Kay Blakely

Studies find top 3 most stressful moments in people's lives: death, divorce, and properly pronouncing 'Worcestershire sauce.'

—Tony Hsieh

I've used the letter x more in math than I ever have in English.

—*The Chive*

Neither cough, rough, though and through rhyme, but pony and bologna do.

—*The Chive*

A popular admonition goes 'Don't judge a book by its cover.' Yet we do it all the time. We ascribe qualities of character to people based on their physical characteristics. And our language takes shape to reflect that attitude.

—Anu Garg

Procrastination is the thief of time, and so is every other big word.

--Unknown

No fish ever discovered water and no monolingual speaker ever understood the unique qualities of his own language.

—John H. Fisher

Language is the mirror of the mind.

—James A. Brussel

Schools are language-saturated institutions. They are places where books are thumbed, summarized, and 'revised'; notes are dictated, made, kept, and learned; essays are prepared, written, marked; examination questions are composed, and the attendant judgments made. Teachers explain, lecture, question, exhort, reprimand. Pupils listen, reply, make observations, call out, mutter, whisper, and make jokes. Small knots gather over books, lathes, easels or do nothing in classrooms, laboratories, workshops, craftrooms, corridors, and toilets to chatter, discuss, argue, plan, plot, and teach one another.

—Douglas Barnes

Typefaces are to the written word what different dialects are to different languages.

—Steven Heller

Competence in the use of language—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—is the basis for all other learning. A subject is not fully known until the learner can talk or write about it in his or her own words. A principal cause of failure of college students or young people in the workplace is inability to handle language effectively...It follows that all teachers of all subjects have a major responsibility to foster growth in language skills...[and] Studies have shown that, outside of English classes, most teachers are not fulfilling their responsibility to foster growth in language skill.

—*National Council of  
Teachers of  
English*

What must be done about the current state of conservation? Not of animals, though we should, of course, conserve them, rather I refer to language conservation. Nobody, aside from linguists, seems to care that thousands of languages are in danger of going extinct. And aside from irregularities like Cornish and Hebrew, extinct languages don't come back to life. They're dead...Language conservation won't save lives, or benefit the world economy, but knowledge will be lost....There are about 7,000 languages on this globe, most of which have fewer than 3,000 speakers. The current trends predict that half of those tongues will be silenced by the end of the century: at least 3,500 language lost forever, dead as the dodo. Imagine if half the biodiversity of an ecosystem was lost. Life would survive. Life has a habit of doing that. The human race will survive mass language extinction. But an opportunity for learning will be lost.

—Terrence Ulm

Yes, English can be weird. It can be understood through tough thorough thought, though.

—Unknown

More has been screwed up on the battlefield and misunderstood in the Pentagon because of a lack of understanding of the English language than any other single factor.

—John W. Vessey, Jr.

Propaganda is a soft weapon; hold it in your hands too long, and it will move about like a snake, and strike the other way.

--Jean Anouilh

Words are the weak support of cold indifference; love has no language to be heard.

--William Congreve

The Eskimo has fifty-two names for snow because it is important to them; there ought to be as many for love.

--Margaret Atwood

Stop using the word 'Negro.' The word is a misnomer from every point of view. It does not represent a country or anything else....I am an African-American....I am not ashamed of my African descent....After people have been freed, it is a cruel injustice to call them by the same name they bore as slaves.

--Mary Church Terrell,  
(1949)

We've been brainwashed. Everything good is supposed to be white. We look at Jesus, and we see a white with blond hair and blue eyes. We look at all the angels; we see white with blond hair and blue eyes. Now, I'm sure there's a heaven in the sky an it colored folks die and go to heaven. Where are the colored angels? They must be in the kitchen preparing milk and honey. We look at Miss America, we see white. We look at Miss World, we see white. We look at Miss Universe, we see white. Even Tarzan, the king of the jungle in black Africa, he's white. White Owl Cigars. White Swan soap, White Cloud tissue paper, White Rain hair rinse, White Tornado floor wax. All the good cowboys ride the white horses and wear white hats. Angel food cake is the white cake, but the devils food cake is chocolate. When are we going to wake up as a people and end the lie that white is better than black?

--Muhammad Ali

We will never feel psychologically whole until we're able to call ourselves Africans. To call Africans in America 'blacks' is like calling Asians in America 'yellows.'

--Nathan Hare and Julia  
Hare

It's always seemed to me that black people's grace has been with what they do with language.

--Toni Morrison

How smooth must be the language of the whites, when they can make right look like wrong, and wrong like right.

—Black Hawk  
(1767-1838)

Keep your language. Love its sounds, its modulation, its rhythm. But try to march together with men of different languages, remote from your own, who wish like you for a more just and human world.

--Hélder Câmara

Puns are like inside jokes of a language.

—Internet Meme

The 3 A's in Australia are all pronounced differently.

—*The Chive*

Truthiness: Now, I'm sure some of the word police, the 'wordinistas' over at Webster's, are gonna say, 'Hey, that's not a word!' Well, anybody who knows me knows that I am no fan of dictionaries or reference books. They're elitist. Constantly telling us what is or isn't true. Or what did or didn't happen. Who's Britannica to tell me the Panama Canal was finished in 1914? If I wanna say it happened in 1941, that's my right. I don't trust books—they're all fact, no heart... Face it, folks, we are a divided nation... divided between those who think with their head and those who know with their heart... Because that's where the truth comes from, ladies and gentlemen—the gut.

—Stephen Colbert

...the 'Groans of the Britons' letter, sent circa 450 A.D. by ancient Britons appealing for Roman help in resisting invaders. When no help came, the Britons asked the Germanic mercenaries to come to their assistance—leading to the Germanic takeover of Britain. This was affectively the start of the English language.

—Stephen Jarvis

How words like 'turnt,' 'fleek' and 'bae' are now universally understood but people still don't know how to use 'you're' & 'your,' 'there' or 'their' in a sentence?

—Internet Meme

Do you speak circus? Yes, you do! Ever ordered jumbo fries? Those are named for the plus-sized zoo elephant bought and made famous by P.T. Barnum in 1882. Called someone a geek? That's a sideshow freak. Gotten the show on the road or jumped on the bandwagon? Or—my personal favorite—been ditched? If so, the circus didn't bother to formerly fire you—it just left you standing beside the tracks after the train deviously pulled out of the station early.

—Holly Millea

Flappers bantered in breezy new coinages—anything that pleased them was 'the berries,' 'the cats pajamas' or even 'the frogs eyebrows'—and codified their racy lifestyle. Movie theaters were 'petting pantries,' a boyfriend was a 'highjohn' or 'high-boy,' the taxicab was a 'dimbox' and a divorced demand was 'out on parole.'

—Paul O'Donnell

The complexity and wit and energy expressed by the phrase ‘jump the shark’ was then and is now a living, breathing thing, a big idea in three small syllables. It means to have passed the peak moment of your greatness and through some absurd act, some bad choice, begun your inevitable decline. That the phrase persists is a tribute to the vigor and dynamism of colloquial American English and clear, uncluttered language; to the perfections of brevity; to the power of metaphor; to the beauty of slang, which lies not only in its artistry but in its utility.

—Jeff MacGregor

You may choose your words like a connoisseur,  
And polish it up with art,  
But the word that sways, and stirs, and stays,  
Is the word that comes from the heart.

—Ella Wheeler Wilcox

One of the glories of English simplicity is the possibility of using the same word as noun and verb.

—Edward Sapir

Names have become traditional for Santa’s reindeer. One hangover from the Germanic past is ‘Donder and Blitzen,’ which means ‘thunder and lightning.’ All the names are suggestive of liveliness and speed (even Cupid is a winged god) except for Vixen, which is the word for a female fox, or, by extension, that for a shrewish female human being. It seems the one inappropriate name, but Moore needed a rhyme or near-rhyme for Blitzen, we might suppose.

—Isaac Asimov

## **THE EIGHT PARTS OF SPEECH POEM**

All names of persons, places, things are NOUNS as Caesar, Rome and Kings.  
PRONOUNS are use in place of nouns: I think, She sings, They work, He frowns.  
When the kind you wish to state, Use an ADJECTIVE as Great.  
But if manner you would tell, use ADVERBS such as: slowly, well.  
To find an ADVERB this test try, Ask How? Or When? Or Where? Or Why?  
PREPOSITIONS show relation as: With respect, or In our nation.  
CONJUNCTIONS as their name implies are joining words: they are the ties that bind together day And night, calm Or cold, dull Or bright.  
Next, we have the VERBS which tell of action, being and state as well; To work, achieve, succeed, and curb: each one of these is called a VERB.  
The INTERJECTIONS show surprise, as: Oh! Alas! Oh me! How wise!  
Thus briefly does this jingle state the parts of speech which total eight.

— Estelle B. Hunter



## THE NINE PARTS OF SPEECH POEM

Three little words you often see, are articles- a, an, and the.  
A noun's the name of anything as school, garden, hoop, or swing.  
An adjective tells the kind of noun, as in great, small, pretty, white, or brown.  
Instead of nouns the pronouns stand, Jack's head, his face, your arm, my hand.  
Verbs tell of something to be done, to read, sing, jump, or run.  
How things are done the adverbs tell, as slowly, quickly, ill, or well.  
Conjunctions join words together, as men and women, wind or weather.  
The prepositions stands before a noun, as at, or through the door.  
The interjection shows surprise, as ah! How pretty- Oh how wise!  
The whole are called nine parts of speech,  
Which reading, writing, speaking teach.

—*playingwithgrammar.weebly.com* /

## THE PARTS OF SPEECH POEM

Every name is called a noun,  
As field and fountain, street and town.  
In place of noun the pronoun stands,  
As he and she can clap their hands.  
The adjective describes a thing.  
As magic wand or bridal ring.  
The verb means action, something done.  
As read and write and jump and run.  
How things are done the adverbs tell,  
As quickly, slowly, badly, well.  
The preposition shows relation,  
As in the street or at the station.  
Conjunctions join, in many ways,  
Sentences, words or phrases and phrase.  
The interjection cries out, 'Hark!  
I need an exclamation mark!'

—Janet Carr

I control the world so long as I can name it. Which is why children must chase  
language before they do anything else, tame the wilderness by describing it.

--Penelope Lively

Words are instruments, they are tools that, in their different ways, are as effective  
as any sharp edge or violate chemical. They are, like coins, items of great value, but  
they represent a currency that, well spent, returns ever greater riches.

--Tim Radford

The kernels of wheat entered the aperture virtually in single file, as if passing between a thumb and an index finger. To mill any faster risked overheating the stone, which in turn risked damaging the flour. In this fact, Dave explained, lies the origin of the phrase ‘nose to the grindstone’: a scrupulous miller leans in frequently to smell his grindstone for signs of flour beginning to overheat. (So the saying does not signify hard work as much as attentiveness.) A wooden spout at the bottom of the mill emitted a gentle breeze of warm, tan flour that slowly accumulated in a white cloth bag. I leaned in close for a whiff. Freshly milled whole-grain flour is powerfully fragrant, redolent of hazelnuts and flowers. For the first time I appreciated what I’d read about the etymology of the word ‘flour’—that it is the flower, or best part, of the wheat seed. Indeed. White flour has little aroma to speak of; this flour smelled delicious.

--Michael Pollan

I know that to me words are things, almost immaterial but actual and real things, and that I like them. I like their most material aspect: the sound of them, heard in the mind or spoken by voice. And right along with that, inseparably, I like the dances of meaning words do with one another, the endless changes and complexities of their interrelationships in sentence or text, by which imaginary worlds are built and shared.

—Ursula K. Le Guin

It has often been observed that the repercussion of poetic language on prose language can be considered a decisive cut of a whip.

—Eugenio Montale

In crimes of ideology, it’s rarely the crime itself that sends people to ruination, but the cover-up. Watergate ended a presidency, and ever since, -gate has been stuck to political crimes like an STD.

—Peter Landesman

i before e

Except when your foreign neighbor Keith receives eight counterfeit beige sleighs from feisty caffeinated weightlifters.

Weird.

—Internet Meme

If we seek the pleasures of love, passion should be occasional, and common sense continual.

—Robertson Davies

It's too late to be studying Hebrew; it's more important to understand even the slang of today.

--Henry David Thoreau

Literature destabilizes thought by breaking open language and smuggling in sound, rhythm, and image—an invasion of aesthetics. More easily than analytic writing, poetry can emancipate itself from the standard definitions of words, enabling a breakthrough to new (and perhaps wayward or even nonsensical) meaning, which can then develop after the fact—different at each new reading. Literary language is presumptuous. It dips into the unknown in order to get nearer to a truth different from that of the superficially visible. As the poet Franz Josef Czernin described it, it is as though one step after another into emptiness could become a ladder. Literary writing can take the writers themselves by surprise; it can disturb and disappoint them—for stirring up turmoil is inherent in metaphor. Thus with every flash of understanding that comes from hearing or reading a poem, the fundamental work of thinking is taken up anew.

--Marie Luise Knott

Literature is the aesthetic exploitation of language.

--Anthony Burgess

The *Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* more than nods at Twain's interest—or, rather more appropriately, his concern—about race. In this novel Twain turns on its proverbial ear the misconception of racial inferiority as evidenced through language acquisition. Roxy, a slave woman who gives birth to a child sired by the slave master, switches her baby with that of the slave master's wife to avoid having her son sold down South. Through the strength of Roxy's character and the results of her actions, Twain makes clear that racial inferiority is not inherent (as many in his time believed) and that voice and language can be acquired by anyone who is put in the right environmental circumstances.

—Jocelyn Chadwick

Language is political. That's why you and me, my Brother and Sister, that's why we supposed to choke our natural self into the weird, lying, barbarous, unreal, white speech and writing habits that the schools lay down like holy law.

—June Jordan

Words are but symbols for the relations of things to one another and to us; nowhere do they touch upon absolute truth.

—Friedrich Nietzsche

When, in a famous GOPAC memo, Mr. [Newt] Gingrich advised Republican candidates to characterize Democrats with the words ‘decay,’ ‘sick,’ ‘pathetic,’ ‘stagnation,’ ‘corrupt,’ ‘waste,’ and ‘traitors,’ and Republicans with the words ‘share,’ ‘change,’ ‘truth,’ ‘moral,’ ‘courage,’ ‘family,’ ‘peace,’ and ‘duty,’ each word had been tested and oiled in focus groups to function in what the memo called ‘Language, A Key Mechanism of Control.’

—Joan Didion

Walter Winchell added these now more-or-less familiar expressions to the American language: making whoopee; shafts (for legs); veddy (for very); welded, sealed, merged, and middle-aisled (for married); on the verge, phffft, and curdled for blasted romance; that way (about someone); infanticipating; debutramp; moompitcher; Park Rowgue (for newspaperman); and The Hardened Artery (for Broadway).

—H. L. Mencken

A London newspaper asked a noted British novelist and an equally distinguished American poet to record their choices of the ten most beautiful words in English language.

The British selection was: carnation, azure, peril, moon, forlorn, heart, silence, shadow, April, and apricot.

The American choice was: dawn, Hush, lullaby, murmuring, tranquil, mist, luminous, chimes, golden, and melody.

—Bennett Cerf

Shakespeare may have ruined more writers than any other writer. In his centuries atop the literary pantheon, the Bard has defined ‘good’ writing as long, intricate flourishes of language that seem drawn from the celestial spheres. As such, it’s extremely common for new writers to ape his style, language, and voice.

Trouble is, Shakespeare is dead, very dead, and his voice seems as out of place in today’s modern media as a chamber pot in the bedroom. Instead, today’s writers speak with the voice of today—raw, short, punchy, and conversational.

—Mike Dunphy

Teacher: Glenn, how do you spell ‘crocodile?’

Glenn: K-R-O-K-O-D-I-A-L

Teacher: No, that’s wrong.

Glenn: Maybe it is wrong, but you asked me how I spell it.

—Internet Meme

In less than a century the word ‘tension’ grew from signifying a literal electric charge to a metaphor for emotional stress between two people.

--Philip Zaleski

Computer culture is reflected in the language of technology, which often has violent or military connotations. We give the computer a ‘command.’ If the system fails, we say it ‘crashed.’ Many IBM-type computers are programmed to ask if we want to ‘abort.’ On the Macintosh, the symbol for a crashed program is a bomb.

—Ellen Tarlin

Dialect [plays] a significant and unrecognized role in the reading achievement of millions of children—and very likely contribute[s] to the persistence of the black-white gap in test scores....Like speakers of any nonstandard dialectic, from the Swiss German to Cypriot Greek, most speakers of African-American English do learn to code-switch naturally, some starting in kindergarten, then we see a big wave at the end of first grade and another at the end of second. Then you get to third grade and it’s over. At that point, about a third of them still can’t speak the standard dialect, and the code-switching isn’t going to happen unless you teach it. We know these kids will have trouble. By the end of fourth grade, switching students—that is, students who are proficient in both their home dialect and standard English—score at least a full academic year ahead of their non-switching classmates in reading.

—William Brennan

### **5 DEADLY TERMS USED BY A WOMAN:**

- 1) ‘Fine’ – This is the word women use to end an argument when she knows she is right and you need to shut up.
- 2) ‘Nothing’ – means ‘Something’ and you need to be worried.
- 3) ‘Go Ahead’ – this is a dare, not permission, don’t do it.
- 4) ‘Whatever’ – A women’s way of saying screw you.
- 5) ‘That’s Ok’ – She is thinking long and hard on how and when you will pay for your mistake.

Bonus Word: ‘Wow!’—This is not a compliment; she’s amazed that one person could be so stupid.

—Unknown

Once, BBC television had echoed BBC radio in being a haven for standard English pronunciation. Then regional accents came in: a democratic plus. Then slipshod usage came in: an egalitarian minus. By now slovenly grammar is even more rife on the BBC channels than on ITV. In this regard a decline can be clearly charted... If the BBC, once the guardian of the English language, has now become its most implacable enemy, let us at least be grateful when the massacre is carried out with style.

--Clive James

Words can be like X-rays if you use them properly—they'll go through anything.  
You read and you're pierced.

—Aldous Huxley

The Englishman went to hospital while the American went to the hospital.

—M. Thomas  
Gammarino

The 'e' in 'the' is usually a schwa sound, represented in the International Phonetic Alphabet by the symbol 'ə.' This is the most common vowel sound in English, even if we tend to drop it when it appears in the middle of words like 'chocolate' and 'separate.' Once in a while, however, we might make the e long by way of emphasis, as in 'Your friend James Brown isn't the James Brown, by chance?'

—M. Thomas  
Gammarino

English distinguishes between the definite article 'the,' the indefinite article 'a,' and the demonstratives 'this' and 'that.' Some languages have no articles. Japanese is one such language. It has three demonstratives, however, corresponding to 'this here,' 'that over there near you,' and 'that over there near neither of us.'...My wife's first language is Japanese. She has been speaking English since she was a child, but she still occasionally misses a 'the' or inserts one where a native speaker would know it doesn't belong, e.g., 'Shall we hike the Diamond Head?'

—M. Thomas  
Gammarino

Barbara Anne, a freshman at Wellesley, came home to her tiny hometown for Christmas, and hastened to tell her father who was waiting at the station to bundle her her into the family station wagon, 'Paw, there's something you might as well know right off. I ain't a good girl any more.' Paw clapped one hand to his forehead and cried out, 'Twenty years your maw and I have made sacrifices so's you could go to a smart Eastern college, and what happens? You come home after three full months there—and you're still saying 'ain't!'

—Bennett Cerf

Anybody who ever hobnobbed with a bronc-snapping, bush whacking, line-riding, leather-pounding, range-bumming windmill monkey (cowboy to you) ought to know what is meant by (1) a shakedown, (2) a muley, (3) a juniper, (4) a puncture lady, (5) a zorilla. Puzzled? One is a bed; two is a harmless cow; three is the Westerner's equivalent of a hayseed; four is a woman who sits and gossips at a dance, putting a knife into someone's reputation; five is a type of black cattle of the early longhorn breed

—Bennett Cerf

In the English language, it all comes down to this: Twenty-six letters, when combined correctly, can create magic. Twenty-six letters form the foundation of a free, informed society.

--John Grogan

Like other Romance languages, French has two definite articles, le (masculine) and la (feminine), as well as les for plurals. Some words change meaning entirely if gender-swapped; Compare le barde (poet) and la barde (bacon wrapped around meat), le boum (explosion) and la boum (party), le mari (husband) and la mari (marijuana), le merci (thanks) and la merci (mercy), le souris (smile) and la souris (mouse.).

—M. Thomas  
Gammarino

Here's what I mean by the miracle of language. When you're falling into a good book, exactly as you might fall into a dream, a little conduit opens, a passageway between a reader's heart and a writer's, a connection that transcends the barriers of continents and generations and even death ... And here's the magic. You're different. You can never go back to being exactly the same person you were before you disappeared into that book.

—Anthony Doerr

It is really hard to be lonely very long in a world of words. Even if you don't have friends somewhere, you still have language, and it will find you and wrap its little syllables around you and suddenly there will be a story to live in.

--Naomi Shihab Nye

Read a thousand books, and your words will flow like a river.

--Lisa See

Language exerts hidden power, like a moon on the tides.

—Rita Mae Brown

Abuse of words has been the great instrument of sophistry and chicanery, of party, faction, and division of society.

—John Adams

Everything in writing begins with language. Language begins with listening.

—Jeanette Winterson

Commas in the *New Yorker* fall with the precision of knives in a circus act, outlining the victim.

—E. B. White

Child-development experts have different names for the dyadic signaling system between adult and child, which builds the basic architecture of the brain. Jack P. Shonkoff, a pediatrician and the director of *Harvard's Center on the Developing Child*, calls it the 'serve and return' style of communication; the psychologists Kathy Hirsh-Pasek and Robert Michnick Golinkoff describe a 'conversational duet.' The vocal patterns parents everywhere tend to adopt during exchanges with infants and toddlers are marked by a higher-pitched tone, simplified grammar, and engaged, exaggerated enthusiasm. Though this talk is cloying to adult observers, babies can't get enough of it. Not only that: One study shows that infants exposed to this interactive, emotionally responsive speech style at 11 months and 14 months knew twice as many words at age 2 as one who weren't expose to it.

Child development is relational, which is why, in one experiment, nine-month-old babies who received a few hours of Mandarin instruction from a live human could isolate specific phonetic elements in the language while another group of babies who received the exact same instruction via video could not.

—Erika Christakis

Language is the single best predictor of school achievement, and the key to strong language skills are those back-and-forth fluent conversations between young children and adults.

—Kathy Hirsh-Pasek

I certainly don't want to hear the old remark when I get back home that the British haven't any humor. They got a lot of humor. Where some of our people have got that idea is because they have come over here and tried to spring a lot of slang expressions. Well, slang is not humor and never will be. Naturally they didn't get it. They could do the same with us. They have just as much slang as we have, and naturally we don't get theirs either.

—Will Rogers

We have an obligation to use the language. To push ourselves: to find out what words mean and how to deploy them, to communicate clearly, to say what we mean. We must not attempt to freeze language, or to pretend it is a dead thing that must be revered. But we should use it as a living thing, that flows, that borrows words, that allows meaning and pronunciations to change with time.

—Neil Gaiman

From the beginning, men have known that words and things, words and actions, words and feelings, go together, and that they can go together in thousands of different ways, according to who is using them. Some ways go shallow, and some go deep.

—James Dickey



With so much reading ahead of you, the temptation might be to speed up. But in fact it's essential to slow down and read every word. Because one important thing that can be learned by reading slowly is the seemingly obvious but oddly under-appreciated fact that language is the medium we use in much the same way a composer uses notes, the way a painter uses paint. I realize it may seem obvious, but it's surprising how easily we lose sight of the fact that words are the raw material out of which literature is crafted.

—Francine Prose

Language is where dullness or liveliness resides.

—Lynne Sharon  
Schwartz

How scary and wonderful it is that words can change our lives simply by being next to each other.

—Kamand Kojouri

I dream of lost vocabularies that might express some of what we no longer can.

—Jack Gilbert

A tough life needs a tough language—and that is what poetry is. That is what literature offers—a language powerful enough to say how it is.

—Jeanette Winterson

I stalk certain words... I catch them in mid-flight, as they buzz past, I trap them, clean them, peel them, I set myself in front of the dish, they have a crystalline texture to me, vibrant, ivory, vegetable, oily, like fruit, like algae, like agates, like olives... I stir them, I shake them, I drink them, I gulp them down, I mash them, I garnish them... I leave them in my poem like stalactites, like slivers of polished wood, like coals, like pickings from a shipwreck, gifts from the waves... Everything exists in the word.

—Pablo Neruda

What wretched poverty of language! To compare stars to diamonds!

—Gustave Flaubert

Words are power. The more words you know and can recognize, use, define, understand, the more power you will have as a human being... The more language you know, the more likely it is that no one can get over on you.

—Quraysh Ali Lansana  
& Georgia A.  
Popoff

Words  
are powerful  
forces of nature.

they are destruction.  
they are nourishment.  
they are flesh.  
they are water.  
they are flowers  
and bone.

they burn. they cleanse  
they erase. they etch.

they can either  
leave you  
feeling  
homeless

or brimming  
with home.

—Sanober Khan

I have a visceral reaction when I hear the word ‘Hispanic,’ a term that came down on us during the Nixon administration. It’s a term I’ve always had difficulty accepting, because it seemed to me a catch-all, false term to group us together—a group with diverse histories and relationships with one another. Lumping us all together as ‘Hispanics,’ whether it’s someone who just arrived from Spain or someone whose family was in Texas before Texas was even a state, seems to me a lack of awareness of who I am and the history of my people.

I used to define myself as *Chicana*—which means someone of Mexican descent—and *Latina*. Not anymore. Now I say I’m *estadounidense* (‘from the U.S.’) with Mexican roots, or Mexican with U.S. roots. Or simply, assembled in the U.S. from Mexican parts. There’s complexity in our situation. We shouldn’t define ourselves simply by borders.

—Sandra Cisneros

If words allow themselves to be handled, it is with the help of infinite carefulness. One has to welcome them, listen to them, before asking any service of them. Words are living things closely involved with human life.

—Paul Nougé

I value words like I value kisses  
A sober one, a closer one penetrates the heart.

—Criss Jami

English is a great language, and you never realize how great a language it is until you leave it behind and you try to write in another. A number of my Paraguayan friends who are poets and write in Spanish are very conscious of this, because the official dictionary of the Spanish Academy is really very small when compared, say, to the *New English Dictionary*. Spanish is a language which is not very rich in words, but in that respect, English is a tremendous language. There are almost 500,000 words in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, which demonstrates that English is absolutely unsurpassable. There isn't a language in the world that has the lexical riches that English has, but you would never know it by the way many people behave with it. They act as if it were a national patrimony to be locked up in Fort Knox, and the only two words you can withdraw at one time are 'like' and 'I mean.' And all those other millions of words sitting in there, gathering dust.

—Bruce Cutler

There's one major thing that separates us from the rest of the animal kingdom, and that's language. It's language that allows us not only to share our thoughts and ideas and stories with others, but also allows us to process information. I doubt Einstein would have been able to come up with the theory of relativity without language. [Not because] he needs to talk to anyone; he could've been in a box by himself. But it is unimaginable, to me, that that kind of thinking could be done without language. We can go beyond communication and storytelling and family relationships and look at what really would happen: Our humanity would be taken away.

—Christina Dalcher

When Samuel Johnson, in 1755, wrote his dictionary, a woman came up to him and said, 'I'm so pleased that you have omitted the naughty words.' 'Madam,' Johnson replied, 'I find that you have been looking them up.'

—Peter Sokolowski

Of the 250 known alphabets in the history of written language, only 50 are still alive today. And half of those are being used in India.

—Roger Matile

Mathematicians may flatter themselves that they possess new ideas which mere human language is as yet unable to express.

—James C. Maxwell

Language is highly ambiguous. It requires conversational context, geographical context.

—Rohit Prasad

The gift of a common tongue is a priceless inheritance and it may well someday become the foundation of a common citizenship. I like to think of British and Americans moving about freely over each other's wide estates with hardly a sense of being foreigners to one another.

—Winston Churchill

My three favorite things are eating my family and not using commas.

—Internet Meme

Language can never live up to life once and for all. Nor should it. Language can never 'pin down' slavery, genocide, war. Nor should it yearn for the arrogance to be able to do so. Its force, its felicity is in its reach toward the ineffable.

—Toni Morrison

Being 'rather unique' is no more possible than being 'rather pregnant.'

—William Zinsser

Without language we have no past, the present is unquantifiable, and we lack a means to recognize and express the paradoxical future challenges of humanity. In absence of a shared language, we cannot understand prior generation's conflicts, desires, and achievements, nor can we communicate with future generations our essential values and the wisdom we garner through undergoing our own socioeconomic crises.

—Kilroy J. Oldster

The study of vocabulary can be enhanced by presenting selected words in quotations and explaining connotations and denotations. Consider, for example the multiple uses of the word *golden* in the following:

The *golden* age, which a blind tradition has hitherto placed in the past, is before us. (C. H. Saint-Simon)

Jerusalem the *golden*, with milk and honey blest,  
Beneath thy contemplation sink heart and voice oppressed. (John  
Mason Neale)

Silence is *golden*. (Swiss Proverb)

—Dan L. Miller

Language is the gateway of the mind and a bridge that connects us to other human beings. Language enables a person to share their clandestine inner world with other human beings and to learn about other people's mysterious world of logical thoughts and poetic sentiments.

—Kilroy J. Oldster

No one means all he says, and yet very few say all they mean, for words are slippery and thought is viscous.

—Henry Brooks Adams

Human language may be polite and powerless in itself, uplifted with difficulty into expression by the high thoughts it utters, or it may in itself become so saturated with warm life and delicious association that every sentence shall palpitate and thrill with the mere fascination of the syllables.... There may be phrases which shall be palaces to dwell in, treasure-houses to explore; a single word may be a window from which one may perceive all the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them. Oftentimes a word shall speak what accumulated volumes have labored in vain to utter: there may be years of crowded passion in a word, and half a life in a sentence.

—Thomas Wentworth  
Higginson

When I am writing, I am trying to find out who I am, who we are, what we're capable of, how we feel, how we lose and stand up, and go on from darkness into darkness. I'm trying for that. But I'm also trying for the language. I'm trying to see how it can really sound. I really love language. I love it for what it does for us, how it allows us to explain the pain and the glory, the nuances and delicacies of our existence. And then it allows us to laugh, allows us to show wit. Real wit is shown in language. We need language.

—Maya Angelou

To those who care about punctuation, a sentence such as 'Thank God its Friday' (without the apostrophe) rouses feelings not only of despair but of violence. The confusion of the possessive 'its' (no apostrophe) with the contractive 'it's' (with apostrophe) is an unequivocal signal of illiteracy and sets off a Pavlovian 'kill' response in the average stickler.

—Lynne Truss

Romanticism is the abuse of adjectives.

—Alfred De Musset

Language is the mother, not the handmaiden, of thought; words will tell you things you never thought or felt before.

—W. H. Auden

I love the sound of words, the feel of them, the flow of them. I love the challenge of finding just that perfect combination of words to describe a curl of the lip, a tilt of the chin, a change in the atmosphere. Done well, novel-writing can combine lyricism with practicality in a way that makes one think of grand tapestries, both functional and beautiful. Fifty years from now, I imagine I'll still be questing after just that right combination of words.

—Lauren Willig

It's up to the artist to use language that can be understood, not hide it in some private code. Most of these jokers don't even want to use language you and I know or can learn . . . they would rather sneer at us and be smug, because we 'fail' to see what they are driving at. If indeed they are driving at anything—obscurity is usually the refuge of incompetence.

—Robert A. Heinlein

We cannot control the way people interpret our ideas or thoughts, but we can control the words and tones we choose to convey them. Peace is built on understanding, and wars are built on misunderstandings. Never underestimate the power of a single word, and never recklessly throw around words. One wrong word, or misinterpreted word, can change the meaning of an entire sentence and start a war. And one right word, or one kind word, can grant you the heavens and open doors.

—Suzy Kassem

Language imparts identity, meaning, and perspective to our human condition.

—Mary Pipher

[My Welsh language] was a wild, breathy, passionate, powerful tongue. I once heard Shakespeare's *Macbeth* recited in Welsh, and it shook me to the core.

—Richard Burton

About 4,000 years ago someone scrawled a smiling face on a clay pitcher. When it was unearthed in Turkey in 2017, an archaeologist called it 'the oldest smiley emoji,' reminding us that silly cartoon symbols were around long before their first pixelated appearance on a cellphone screen 20 years ago. Today 90 percent of people online speak emoji—with curious local dialects....Could emojis become our universal language? Probably not. Studies show that men and women use this limited 2,823-symbol vocabulary differently, as do people of different ages and cultures.

—April White

Words are one of the most powerful things given to human beings. In the hands of artists who can use them properly they are like weapons of mass construction.

—Eric T. Benoit

In the matter of war, the American language creates its own fog. We speak not only of wars, but also of armed conflicts, military engagements, combat operations, expeditions, policing actions, raids, airstrikes and shows of force. And even with so many labels, we use the term 'war' pretty loosely. Does the Honey War really count? The 1836 Missouri-Iowa border dispute—named for the chief on-the-ground casualty, three beehives—was settled at the Supreme Court. The Aroostook War? It was another 19th-century border dispute, in Maine, which the United States and England settled bloodlessly.

—*smithsonian.com*

The word 'queer'...has emerged as an acceptable term for any kind of alternative sexuality or sexual orientation. LGBT, which stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, is the clunky yet useful initialism that surfaced in the 1990s. The addition of Q, meaning queer, includes pretty much any sexual/gender variation, including intersexual, asexual and cross-dressing.

—Elizabeth Sims

I hate it when people don't know the difference between 'your' and 'you're.' There so stupid.

—Internet Meme

OBSOLETE, adj. No longer used by the timid. Said chiefly of words. A word which some lexicographer has marked obsolete is ever thereafter an object of dread and loathing to the fool writer, but if it is a good word and has no exact modern equivalent equally good, it is good enough for the good writer. Indeed, a writer's attitude toward 'obsolete' words is as true a measure of his literary ability as anything except the character of his work. A dictionary of obsolete and obsolescent words would not only be singularly rich in strong and sweet parts of speech; it would add large possessions to the vocabulary of every competent writer who might not happen to be a competent reader.

—Ambrose Bierce

There is something about words. In expert hands, manipulated deftly, they take you prisoner. Wind themselves around your limbs like spider silk, and when you are so enthralled you cannot move, they pierce your skin, enter your blood, numb your thoughts. Inside you they work their magic.

—Diane Setterfield

Among educated citizens, especially those who become afflicted by ‘professional’ languages, the demon ‘jargon’ afflicts the written word with what appears to be an incurable disease. One only needs to pick up professional journals in such areas as education, sociology, and law to realize the unintelligibility of much of the written prose as vended by presumably educated people.

—William Goldstein

One sentence can take on eight meanings, simply by moving the word ‘only’:

Only I hit him in the eye yesterday.  
I only hit him in the eye yesterday.  
I hit only him in the eye yesterday.  
I hit him only in the eye yesterday.  
I hit him in only the eye yesterday.  
I hit him in the only eye yesterday.  
I hit him in the eye only yesterday.  
I hit him in the eye yesterday only.

—Ernest Brennecke

Keep it simple. As for your use of language: Remember that two great masters of language, William Shakespeare and James Joyce, wrote sentences which were almost childlike when their subjects were most profound. ‘To be or not to be?’ Asks Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. The longest word is three letters long. Joyce, when he was frisky, could put together a sentence as intricate and as glittering as a necklace for Cleopatra, but my favorite sentence is his short story ‘Eveline’ is this one: ‘She was tired.’ At that point in the story, no other word could break the heart of a reader as those three words do.

Simplicity of language is not only reputable, but perhaps even sacred. The *Bible* opens with a sentence well within the writing skills of a lively fourteen-year-old: ‘In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.’

—Kurt Vonnegut

Lucky indeed is the writer who has grown up in Ireland, for the English spoken there is so amusing and musical.

—Kurt Vonnegut

When my daughter was in eighth grade, her teacher told her that a sentence needed a noun and a verb. ‘Really?’ She asked skeptically.

‘Yes,’ the teacher responded.

‘Huh,’ my daughter replied.

‘That’s an exception.’

‘Oh. OK.’

—Steven James



Stop worrying about ending sentences with a preposition. It's not something readers care about. (If that last sentence was written formally, it would have read, 'It's not something about which readers care,' and that sounds awkward.)

—Steven James

Good writers are those who keep the language efficient. That is to say, keep it accurate, keep it clear. It doesn't matter whether the good writer wants to be useful, or whether the good writer wants to be harm.

— Ezra Pound

Hardly a day goes by when you don't either hear or quote a poetic phrase. It might not even sound like verse—take 'getting and spending,' coined by William Wordsworth, or 'in one ear and out the other,' by Chaucer. You may associate poetry with metaphors and symbols, such as Eliot's *Wasteland* or Poe's croaking raven. But more often cited are the everyday truths well said, elegant yet direct: 'truth is stranger than fiction' (Lord Byron), 'fools rush in where angels fear to tread' (Alexander Pope), or 'thing fall apart' (W. B. Yeats). It should be no surprise poetry has lent the English language hundreds of quotable phrases. Poets, after all, are experts in saying things well.

—Michael Macrone

Unlike musical notation, paint or clay, language is inside every one of us. For free. We are all proficient at it. We already have the palette, the paints and the instruments. We don't have to go and buy any reserved materials. Poetry is made of the same stuff you are reading now, the same stuff you use to order pizza over the phone, the same stuff you yell at your parents and children, whisper in your lover's ear and shove into an e-mail, text or birthday card. It is common to us all. Is that why we resent being told that there is a technique to its highest expression, poetry? I cannot ski, so I would like to be shown how to. I cannot paint, so I would value some lessons. But I can speak and write, so do not waste my time telling me that I need lessons in poetry, which is, after all, no more than emotional writing, with or without the odd rhyme. Isn't it?

—Stephen Fry

Most activities worth pursuing come with their own jargon, their private language and technical vocabulary. In music you would be learning about fifths and relative majors, in yachting it would be boom-spankers, tacking into the wind and spin-nakers.

—Stephen Fry

The presence of an adverb simply means that you haven't yet chosen the most appropriate verb.

—Steven James

The language doesn't care about making words rhyme:

Cough

Rough

Though

Through

Why don't these words rhyme?

But for some Godforsaken reason pony and bologna do.

—Kat Angus

Sometimes the English language seems like a really, really elaborate prank:

Word: Queue

Pronunciation: Kyoo

Write down five letters. Only pronounce the first letter.

—Kat Angus

There was no such thing as proper spelling in English before the early 17th century, when the first English dictionaries emerged....By the mid-18th century, spelling competitions were common; Benjamin Franklin recommended their use in a 1750 proposal for a school. Recreational spelling challenges were fashionable in the 19th century for both adults and children. The Hoosier Schoolmaster, a best-selling novel in 1871, includes a hero who falls in love with a woman he is facing in a 'spelling-match,' and Mark Twain mentions 'spelling fights' in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. It wasn't until the mid-1870s that the term 'bee'—which referred to a community social event with a common goal, such as a quilting bee—came into use, but the stakes in these competitions were high no matter what they were called.

—Rebecca Sealton

Of all the germs kids are exposed to on the playground, there's one they freak out about more than any other: cooties.

The word first appeared during World War I as soldiers' slang for the painful body lice that infested the trenches. It went mainstream in 1919 when a Chicago company incorporated the pest into the Cootie Game, in which a player maneuvered colored 'cootie' capsules across a painted battlefield into a cage. The cooties concept has been evolving ever since.

The most familiar incarnation has features of a real infectious disease even as it says a good deal about what 6-year-olds think of the opposite sex. Every little girl knows that boys have cooties, and vice versa. One catches cooties by—eww!—touching. Shrieking games of cooties tag transmit the contagion rapidly.

—Jane C. Hu

Hobo slang can be intuitive, or impenetrable, but it's always colorful. For example, the 'jungle' is just the communal hobo camp, usually near the railroad yard. Your 'bindle' is your bedroll. Your 'poke' is your wallet. 'Hundred on a plate' is a can of beans, and the jungle kitchen is run by the 'Crumb Boss.' The 'bulls' are the railroad police. 'Flyers' and 'hotshots' and 'redballs' are all fast freights. 'Catching out' means hopping the train. To die is to 'catch the westbound.' And understand this, above all else: a 'hobo' is an itinerant worker; someone who travels and finds work. A 'tramp' travels, but mostly does not work. A 'bum' neither travels nor works.

—Jeff Macgregor

[D-Day] While the expression is indelibly linked with the allied invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944, it actually comes from U.S. Army terminology that was first used in World War I and is still used today. Generally, 'D' refers to the first day of an operation or attack; it serves as a place holder in the planning phase, and even after an exact time is set, soldiers continue to use the term to prevent unauthorized disclosure. 'D-2' and 'D+2' refer to two days before and two days after an action is scheduled to begin. 'H' refers to hours, as in 'H+7,' or seven hours into an operation.

—Frank Blazich

Code is the world's most dominant language.

—Kathy Einhorn and  
Clark Merkley

Examples of kidspeak are everywhere, once you start to look. Take our newfangled use of the word because, as seen in sentences such as I believe in climate change because science and You're reading this article because procrastination. Even 10 years ago, such constructions would have sounded like a clear grammatical error from someone still learning to speak English; today, they have become so widespread that the American Dialect Society crowned because 2013's Word of the Year. The rhetorical appeal is easy to see: Stripped of its of, because transforms from a way of elucidating one's case to a puckish refusal to do so. It helps its speaker hide behind the authority of the x—and avoid all the messiness of actual argument. In many ways, it channels the stubbornness of the little boy who asserts nothing more than 'Because!' when he's asked why he scribbled on the wallpaper with a Sharpie.

—John McWhorter

Women usually introduce new constructions into a language. Before long, research shows, men tend to catch on.

—John McWhorter

Young people are the primary drivers of language change.

—John McWhorter

The 1920s gave rise to the bee's knees, know your onions, and be yourself! (meaning 'calm down')—phrases that were less childish than jaunty, cocky, pert. The 1930s and '40s brought 'hep' slang like reet for 'right' and chops for 'ability.' In the 1990s, veggies jumped from the lips of mothers spoon-feeding their infants to the menus of pricey organic restaurants.

Perhaps no era's slang more closely resembles the kidspeak of today than then that of 1970s America—a time of linguistically jolly childishness that gave us words and phrases like to boogie, warm fuzzies, space cadet, and far out.

—John McWhorter

The situation of poetry matters to the entire intellectual community....Poetry is the art of using words charged with their utmost meaning. A society whose intellectual leaders lose the skill to shape, appreciate, and understand the power of language will become the slaves of those who retain it—be they politicians, preachers, copywriters, or newscasters. The public responsibility of poetry has been pointed out repeatedly by modern writers. Even the archsymbolist Stephane Mallarme praised the poet's central mission to 'purify the words of the tribe.' And Ezra Pound warned that 'Good writers are those who keep the language efficient. That is to say, keep it accurate, keep it clean. It doesn't matter whether a good writer wants to be useful, or whether the bad writer wants to do harm....If a nation's literature declines, the nation atrophies and decays.'

—Mark Edmundson

Words guard the shape of man, even when man has fled and is no longer there.

—George Seferis

Words have energy and power with the ability to help, to heal, to hinder, to hurt, to harm, to humiliate, and to humble.

—Yehuda Berg

Words can make magic. Skillfully put together into sentences, words can transfer ideas and images from a writer's mind into the minds of readers—that, by itself, is powerful verbal magic. When we exploit the musical characteristics of language, we can make another kind of magic with our words: Through their sounds and rhythms, our words can 'sing' to readers and move them in the way music does.

—Barbara Baig

Some of the best words literally ever:

Bamboozled

Flabbergasted

Discombobulated

Shenanigans

Cattywampus  
Lollygag  
Malarkey  
Kerfuffle  
Brouhaha  
Nincompoop  
Skedaddle  
Pumpernickel

—Internet Meme