

AUSTRALIAN STYLE

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Standard Australian English

Susan Butler is publisher of the Macquarie Dictionary. The following is adapted from a talk she gave to a colloquium on learning Standard Australian English at the Australian Linguistic Society conference (July 2010).

I would like to discuss what is meant by “Standard Australian English”, in particular in relation to aspects of lexicon, usage and pronunciation, which I will draw from the *Macquarie Dictionary*. The attempt to pin down the meaning will reveal that ‘standard’ is code for a prestige form of Australian English which is accepted in certain social situations. While the acceptance of the reality of Australian English is good, and the desire to produce students with complete competency in Australian English is also good, the use of ‘standard’ in this context creates unnecessary confusion.

Singlish and Strine

In Singapore it is very clear what people mean when talking about a standard and a non-standard form of English. This is the difference between Singapore English and Singlish. The confusion there is that Singaporeans equate Singaporean Standard English with British Standard English in much the same way that Australians equated Australian English with British English before *Macquarie Dictionary* was published.

It is harder to determine what is meant by Standard Australian English because the boundaries are not so sharp between the standard and the non-standard. The clearest boundary is between Australian English and Aboriginal English.

Educational goals

But if we put these distinctions to one side, what can we identify as a non-standard dialect of Australian

English. Quite often it seems that it amounts to a set of quite specific errors which mark the speech or writing of the people who are deemed to be uneducated. There is a fair degree of snobbery in this assessment. The criteria for unacceptability shift from one generation to another and often come down to the particular likes and dislikes of the teacher in the classroom.

So what is meant by setting up Standard Australian English as an educational goal?

I think it comes back to the long-established and very worthy desire that teachers have to protect their students against solecism so that they pass the exam they want to pass, they get the job they want to have, they achieve the lifetime of honour and distinction which they want to achieve.

To this end they caution their students not to use *brung* or *brang* instead of *brought*, not to indulge in double negatives, and definitely not to use *youse*.

Non-standard examples in the Macquarie Dictionary

There are a number of items in the dictionary which are described as non-standard:

- *Ain't* as in *I ain't seen it*.
- *Learn* instead of *teach*.
- *Them* instead of *those* as in *Take them things away*.
- *Hardly* with a negative as in *I can't hardly wait*.
- *But* at the end of a sentence. *It's pretty hot but*.

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There are some things that will pass in speech but won't do at all in writing, such as:

- *A lend* instead of a *loan*.
- *Had've* for *had have*

For example, *if only they had've realised we were there*, a form common in spoken English, is better written as *If only they had realised we were there*.

- *Us* in constructions like *Give us the book*, or *It will do for us kids*.
- *Me* as in *You and me will do the dishes*.

And, having railed against that, the teachers now have to cope with the hypercorrection – *It will be good for you and I*, or *It is between you and I*.

There are some modern additions to the list of solecisms. A good example is the way in which *literally* is incorrectly used.

literally

adverb **1.** in a literal manner; word for word: *to translate literally*.

2. in the literal sense: *parachutists dropping in, literally*.

3. (an intensifier)

a. (applied to a literal meaning): *literally screaming with excitement*.

b. (applied to a figurative meaning):

**AMANDA VANSTONE: But I can assure you we are literally bending over backwards to take into account the concerns raised by colleagues* –ABC ONLINE, 2006

Then there are pronunciations. We still don't like people to say *film* instead of *filum*.

The pronunciations which are in a state of flux are a worry. Is *dic-tion-ary* considered standard AE now or does it still have to be *dic-tion-ry*?

Similarly spellings in a state of flux

are a nightmare.

We now allow *alright* and *all right* – they are both *alright*. But *alot* spelled as one word?

The use of the apostrophe in plural forms – good luck to the teachers on that one.

There there is the category of words which are often confused – *affect* and *effect*, *flaunt* and *flout*. There is a long list of these.

And then there are the non-standard forms which become entrenched. Take *verse* as in *Our team is versing your team this Saturday*. It is nice to see a non-standard form dressed up in a fine array of formal inflections. And new derived forms like *agreeance* as in *I'm in agreeance with you*.

One oddity that I noticed as I looked at the material in the dictionary is the set of jocular non-standard forms. The more educated you are the more you are likely to say in an attempt at humour:

- *Don't be obstropolous*.
- *That'll larn ya*.
- *Give me that there book*.
- *I don't know nuthin*.
- *Eyetalian* for *Italian*.

Which makes life difficult for our well-intentioned teachers.

Final thoughts

My final definition of Standard Australian English is, therefore, that it is the English that you produce when you avoid all the things that your teachers will mark as wrong, wrong, wrong. The list of those items is a mix of old and new and dependent on the pet hates of the particular teacher. 'Twas ever thus. □

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Word focus

This edition of *Australian Style* looks at two very different words that have featured recently in Australian politics. The piece on psephology was written by Pam Peters, and on ranga by Adam Smith. Versions of these articles were first published in *Campus Review* on 31.08.10 and 20.7.10 respectively

Psephology

With the election over, Australians can breathe a sigh of relief from both combative candidates and the attendant *psephologists*, i.e. those who make it their business to study election trends and analyse election results.

Psephologist was first used in 1952 as a self-deprecating joke by a British political scientist, David Butler, in his introduction to an analysis of the 1945 General Election. The word's curious root *pseph-* is the Greek word for "pebble", which was in

fact used in the voting system of ancient Greece. Voters declared their support for a decree with a white pebble, and their dissatisfaction with a black pebble. A decree which was supported by the majority became a *psephisma*.

Psephology thus has honorable connections with earliest form of democracy, though its contemporary uses do not feel much like the rule of the people, for the people, by the people... Instead we seem to have "the rule of the ballot-box or

psephocracy", in the words of the *New Statesman* 1966. What we most seem to need now is the *psephograph*, a word coined back in 1906 for a machine designed to automatically record votes and prevent fraud at the ballot box.

Ranga

Since Julia Gillard's ascendancy to the Prime Ministership, there has been some curious media coverage. Headlines like: "On the cusp of a Julia ranga-lution" (*The West Australian*, 13.7.10), make her status as Australia's first female leader pale into insignificance compared to the fact that she has red hair.

The popularity of baiting red-headed people is attested by the number of slang terms to describe them: *Ginger*, *blood nut*, *carrot top*, *coppernob*, *bluey* etc. *Ranga* seems to be

quite new to Australia – it appeared in the *Macquarie Dictionary* for the first time in its latest edition (2009).

In Scotland redheads have been called *wranglers* for some time (possibly related to the Scottish spelling *wrang* for *wrong*, although this seems strange given the large proportion of redheaded Scots). The spelling *ranga* associates the word closely with the red-haired ape, the orangutan, which suggests its use can be quite offensive (although the *Macquarie* only labels it "mildly derogatory").

Certainly in the TV series that popularised the word in Australia, *Summer Heights High* (2007), *ranga* was meant to offend: "A Ranga sir. Cause he's got red hair. Orangutang, that's what we call him". Gillard's new role may turn out to be as important for rectifying hair bias as it is for evening up gender inequality.

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Not with a bang but a twitter

Dr Neil James is executive director of the Plain English Foundation and the author of Writing at Work. A version of this article first appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald, May 17 2010.

BTW, I was trying to hashtag an RT, but I fat-fingered the text and ended up detweeting instead. Not exactly ROTFL.

If reading that text just induced alarm for the future of English, you aren't alone. The e-language of instant messaging, mobile text, email and Twitter has no shortage of detractors.

The textual revolution is blamed for a wide range of evils, from destroying the beauty of English and dumbing down public debate to dampening the brain development of our young. But when we sift through the rhetoric of panic, there is little evidence to justify these claims.

New verbs

Let's start with the obvious. As with all new technology, e-media has generated its own world of words. Its very brand names are hardwired into e-language, to the point that we *google* and *tweet* as verbs. This alone is enough for the preservers of English purity to suspect the revolution is at the door.

What mostly gets the purists going is text language – the short forms used in instant messaging (IM) and short message services (SMS). The most prominent textual targets are the abbreviations used for the physical convenience of the fingers, like GR8, cu l8r, or LOL. Punctuation emoticons such as ;-) or :- (are particularly maligned.

Then there are the acronyms. Some of them are for teenage convenience, like PAW (parents are watching), but they also include the whimsical ROTFL (rolling on the floor laughing), the polite PMFJIB (pardon me for jumping in but), and the expressive MUSM (miss you so much).

Fact or fiction?

But do these forms really represent a textual insurrection? It seems that when it comes to shortened forms of the language, when adults do it we call them initialisms and they are a sensible part of officialese. But when young people do it on mobile phones, it's called texting and it's the end of the English language as we know it.

This is just one of the myths about e-language that we need to move past. Linguist David Crystal debunked most of them in his 2008 book *Texting: The Gr8 Db8*. Crystal argued that there is nothing particularly new in text language and it is not the province of the young. More than 80 per cent of texts are actually sent by adults. And fewer than 10 per cent of the words used in instant messaging are terms such as LOL or PAW.

Eroding standards

There's also no definitive evidence that texting or social media have lowered the standard of written English. A few years ago, Britain's Royal Mail surveyed the public about the writing it received from businesses through the post. It discovered that poor expression, spelling and grammar mistakes were costing British businesses up to £41 billion (\$68 million) a year in lost trade.

So if we do have a problem with spelling and grammar, it predates the textual revolution. It might be better to look to common underlying causes, such as the way we tossed grammar out of the school system, rather than blaming the new channels of communication.

Shorter attention span or wider participation?

The next accusation against e-language is a more serious one: that the physical constraints of the new media will inevitably diminish our appetite for sustained text and thought. Emails are shorter than formal documents. Phone screens are even more restrictive. And now there's Twitter, the apotheosis of concision at just 140 characters a post.

The neuroscientist Baroness Susan

Greenfield attracted worldwide coverage last year when she claimed that new media might be shortening our attention spans and affecting our brains. "If a person uses their phone at the expense of all other forms of expression, there will be a resulting imbalance in their development," she said.

This followed the assertion in the US by the Librarian of Congress, James Billington, that we are in danger of losing the English sentence altogether. "We are moving toward the language used by computer programmers and air traffic controllers," he told *The Washington Post*.

Such dire warnings are usually based on anecdotal evidence. They might have something to them if the qualification Greenfield acknowledges were true: that social media are used at the expense of all other forms. In other words, if the electronic uprising excludes other writing completely, we probably would be left thinking in short snatches. But this is akin to saying that if the only sport we played was rugby league, then no one would be good at tennis. That's a big and unlikely "if".

New media, new panic

These arguments remind me of the moral panic that has beset every new form of communication. People claimed the printing press was the devil's tool because it could disseminate lies. The telephone was going to cause family breakdown because we would stop talking to each other in person.

There is no credible evidence to support this assumption that social media will atrophy our brains. Schools still require essays. Workplaces still produce reports. Universities still award degrees for theses. Writers still publish books.

Writing in the new media is not a replacement but an addition to traditional genres. Much of it is a hybrid form somewhere between speech and formal writing. It means our children are, in fact, doing a lot more writing and mastering a much wider range of styles.



The new media are, in fact, proving something of a boon to educators. Universities are finding sites such as Twitter can lift the quality of out-of-classroom interaction and improve the learning environment.

Studies have documented the positive impact of email on learning. One found email helped remedial writing students become more active and motivated learners than those who received classroom instruction alone.

And the social benefits extend well beyond education. The Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine reported how patient satisfaction increased significantly when they were able to communicate with their doctor through email as well as face-to-face. Their doctors agreed that email improved both communication and quality of care.

Of course, to realise these benefits, we must be prepared to break down some longstanding barriers between doctors and patients, teachers and students, speakers and audiences, writers and readers.

The real revolution

This is where the real revolution is occurring: not in the surface features of the language that the purists like to parody but in the way that audiences of all kinds will take a more active part in our public conversations.

The journalist Sarah Lacy found this out the hard way when she interviewed Facebook chief executive officer Mark Zuckerberg during the keynote address at a Texas conference.

The well-informed audience did not warm to her interview style or her questions. Initially they sat in polite silence, then they started to tweet their discontent. A backchannel conversation began as the interview unfolded, with some 500 users posting more than 1800 messages. It wasn't long before the backchannel erupted in the real auditorium. Lacy lost control and had to cede the interviewing to the audience.

This is the future. Increasingly, the public will expect to take an active part in a more meaningful dialogue, whether as students or patients, customers or clients. Already, academic and industry conferences are running a Twitter backchannel through their

events so participants can share comments and resources more widely. It is the kind of application that has made adults – not teens – the most prolific adopters of Twitter.

The next step

The debate now is whether we should start publishing these backchannel conversations on a “frontchannel” screen in real time while speakers are presenting. This goes a step further than the existing online backchannel of posting responses to a blog or article.

The ABC's *Q&A* program, which publishes viewer comments on screen during the discussion, is an indication of what is to come.

Understandably, not everyone is comfortable with this kind of scrutiny. And it raises some thorny questions about editing the backchannel to weed out the libellous, the frivolous and the plain banal.

However, if a defining feature of democracy is the ability of citizens to participate in open debate, then the new media will inevitably strengthen and diversify our public conversations rather than dumb them down.

Full steam ahead

The scale of participation is now beyond anything we've previously experienced. Most of the world's 1.8 billion internet users have email. We text from five billion mobile phones. Facebook already has 400 million users. Nearly all of Australia's 17 million mobiles send text and 70 per cent of our net users are on social networking sites. That's 10 million Australians spending seven hours a month updating their status, poking their friends and tweeting their thoughts.

As for the language that might emerge from this growing electronic exchange, can it really get any worse than what we already experience in the paper world? For example, when General Motors announced it was filing for bankruptcy last year, it described the move as “an expedited, court-supervised process to accelerate the reinvention of our company”.

Corporate and political spin doctors may be less likely to resort to this kind of doublespeak if they face an overwhelming barrage of backchannel. Our language and our democracy can only be the better for it. □



Language researcher Irene Poinkin summarises recent discussions at SCOSE, the ABC Standing Committee on Spoken English.

May/might

As some research shows, the word *may* is nowadays often used instead of *might*. But a recent news report was an occasion where using *might* would have resolved some ambiguity. The report said a Chubb security guard had been shot and that “having body armour may have saved his life”. Alas, he didn’t survive (nor was he wearing body armour) – he was taken to hospital where he later died. Using the word *may* suggested that the guard had body armour and that perhaps it saved his life. But using *might* in this context would have made it clear that he was not wearing body armour and that, if he had been, it would possibly have saved his life.

May and *might* are more or less interchangeable (with some subtleties) when referring to possible future events, but for past events they introduce this ambiguity between what we don’t know about what happened and what we know didn’t happen but could have. Since reporting is mostly about past events, the distinction remains important.

Commas

I sometimes think it’s unfortunate that the importance of understanding the difference between a restrictive and a nonrestrictive clause is downplayed these days, because despite the general trend towards lighter punctuation journalists often use a comma before a relative pronoun that’s clearly meant to be part of a restrictive clause:

The war crimes court in the Hague has heard testimony from the model Naomi Campbell, which contradicts evidence given by the actress Mia Farrow.

With the errant comma this says that Mia Farrow’s evidence implies that Naomi Campbell never gave this testimony. Without the comma the sentence simply says that Campbell’s testimony contradicts Farrow’s evidence.

The researchers say [Vitamin D] could help to protect certain nerve cells, which are essential to a variety of brain functions.

The words after the comma make the banal observation that nerve cells are essential to certain brain functions. Remove the comma and they form a restrictive clause specifying which brain cells are protected (by an intake of Vit D) – the ones that are essential to ...

Establishing usage

It’s surprising how often listeners will object to an established usage – either because they have been unaware of it or because they consider it to be faulty in some way. It highlights the importance of using a good, up-to-date dictionary and having a healthy appreciation of the productive nature of English. A few genuine examples will illustrate my point.

Asserts one listener: “Will you please advise your colleagues that the word *unviable* does not exist. The correct form in *nonviable*.”

But the listener is mistaken. The fact that *unviable* has made it into the *Macquarie Dictionary* means it has become a part of standard English. The dictionary has definitions for two separate senses of the word.

Let’s be wary of being too literal-minded. A listener suggested that the expression *speaking live* was foolish because no-one can speak when they’re dead. However, *speaking live* is not the opposite of speaking when dead. It is the opposite of pre-recorded speech.

We need to be reminded occasionally that natural language is messier and much more fluid than they may realise, and that dictionaries can take some time to catch up with new usages.





From the Editor

First of all apologies for the delay in publishing this edition of Australian Style. Technical and timing issues have conspired to make this the only edition of 2010, but we hope to produce two editions, as normal, next year. In this issue we have Susan Butler, editor of the Macquarie Dictionary, writing about what is Standard Australian English. Neil James of the Plain English Foundation tackles the burgeoning twittersphere, in a topic that was the subject of a forum at this year's Sydney Writer's Festival.

Regular features include the word column, featuring two words from diverse registers that have cropped up in the political sphere of late, SCOSE notes by Irene Poinkin, a review of the lighthearted book on commonly confused words *How much can a koala bear?*, cartoons by Judy Dunn, and David Astle finds time in between his tv appearances (see Letters and Numbers, week-nights on SBS) to provide us with another Rubicon.

You may notice that the Feedback questionnaire, on pronunciation, is now in a new format – one which hopefully will be more user-friendly to fill in online. Readers also have the option to fill out the questionnaire in hardcopy from the printable pdf of the newsletter. The Feedback report compares some usage issues, numerical and otherwise, from the most recent Feedback with some from earlier surveys. A complete record of these is now available in the Archive section, which has now been updated to include pdfs of Australian Style going back to the very first edition in 1993.

Many of our readers are editors who may be interested in the professional qualifications offered by Macquarie University – see advertisement on the homepage. To all of you, editors or not, we hope that you continued to enjoy Australian Style, and we welcome your feedback and contributions on all matters concerned with English in Australia.

Continued from previous page

“I hope that *snuck* is not an ‘approved’ word on the ABC”, said one listener who read in

an article about the bashing of Carl Williams that another prisoner had “snuck” up behind Williams and hit him on the head. Approved or not, *snuck* now has a firm place in colloquial Australian English. Journalists should use their judgement of style when deciding whether to use the informal *snuck* or the regular past tense *sneaked*. Readers may be interested to know that the *New Oxford Dictionary of English* says, in a usage note in its entry for *sneak*, that in the US *snuck* ‘is now regarded as a standard alternative to *sneaked* in all but

the most formal contexts’ and “In the Oxford Reading Programme, there are now more US citations for *snuck* than there are for *sneaked*, and there is evidence of *snuck* gaining ground in British English also”.

When it was reported that an Australian skier at the Vancouver Paralympics “did not believe he was a chance of medalling”, a listener wrote to say:

“I wish to complain about the use of made-up words in today’s News ... There is no such word as *medalling*.”

In a sense all words are “made-up” words. The verb (*to*) *medal* is a proper word and by no means new

– it has been used in sports contexts for a long time. Australian listeners are familiar with it and it is listed in the *Macquarie Dictionary*:

Lastly, one from my in-tray:

“I was interested to learn that the Macquarie Dictionary had replaced both Daniel Jones and/or the Oxford Dictionary as the arbiter of English language pronunciation but I can’t help but wonder when, and by whom, that decision was made.”

The people of Australia, who as far back as the nineteenth century had established their own identity and distinctive variety of English, in effect made that decision decades ago. □





Book Notes

How much can a koala bear?

Pam Peters reviews How Much can a Koala Bear? A guide to commonly confused words. By Pamela Thorne Viva Books 2010 rrp \$24.95

The playful title of this book on “commonly confused words” comes from the 1983 “Australiana” album of the comedian/songwriter Austen Tayshus. His name or rather pseudonym rode on the back of “Gloria Soames” and other creations of Afferbeck Lauder, author of *Let Stalk Strine* (1965), a publication which celebrated the assimilated pronunciations of stereotypical phrases in Australian English.

Written rather than spoken communication is the focus of *How Much can a Koala Bear* by business communication trainer Pamela Thorne. The book is structured like a dictionary, with each letter of the alphabet prefaced by a quotation on good writing from celebrated authors. Some of them (e.g. Aristotle, Horace, Pascal, Flaubert) wrote in languages other than English, and as those names suggest they cover a vast span of time. But they show the persistent concern of great writers with the choice of words. This is underscored at the letter A (with Mark Twain’s comment the “The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter. It’s like the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.” And again at the letter Z, with Hemingway’s crafted statement: “All our words from loose using have lost their edge”.

The book includes a substantial number of entries (over 900) on pairs or sets of words commonly confused by their spelling or other aspects of their form or meaning. The author distinguishes them by simple definitions (e.g. *bite* is “a mouthful of food”, *byte* is “unit of

measurement of computer information storage”. These brief definitions suffice to show the different contexts to which the words belong, and help to warn writers off the word which doesn’t fit the scenario they are working in. The entries also provide an example of each word’s use within a short phrase, which shows the most common collocation and helps to pin down the meaning without resorting to the traditional (often rather wordy) dictionary style. The entries are concise and clearly worded. Many of the words presented as pairs and sets are crossreferenced from elsewhere in the alphabetical list – though not all. For example the choice between *hazard* and *risk* is only listed under the letter H, not under R. Perhaps the danger of confusion arises mostly from the first rather than the second word. But for some writers it may be a matter of looking up whichever of the confusable words they can spell. This is the problem encapsulated in the ironic quotation from Gracian at the start of the letter B: “A synonym is a word you use when you can’t spell the other one.”

The koala bear of the title features at the start of the dictionary as a bespectacled writer complete with pens and old-fashioned typewriter, and as the leisured reader at the end, lying in a hammock complete with paperback and cocktail in hand. There are decorative line drawings of gum leaves in twos and threes and fours scattered through the book, suggesting perhaps the difficult choices that the literate koala has to make. Yet as the third national animal (after the emu and the kangaroo), the koala is not quite the archetypal Australian (compare the kiwi’s status in New Zealand), and the book’s emphasis on Australian English is muted, although flagged in the introduction. Just a sprinkling of entries focus on differences between Australian and American English,

e.g. *extrovert or introvert?*, *jewellery or jewelry?*, *learned or learnt?*, *Labor or labour?* *practice or practise?*. In fact most of the book’s discriminations between confusable words apply to English almost anywhere in the English-speaking world — even if the picky koala is most at home in Australia.

How Much can a Koala Bear is a helpful ready reference for readers/writers who pause on a word which needs disentangling from others with a similar spelling or meaning. They will probably need to consult a full dictionary of usage guide to extend their knowledge. But this book will serve its purpose by alerting them to the issues, and encouraging them to seek out the *mot juste* in their own writing. □





LINKING /R/

Many Australians use an /r/ sound to bridge the gap between words when one ends in a vowel sound and the next one begins with a vowel sound. The phrases listed below are ones in which this could happen.

Listen carefully to your own pronunciation on each of them, and insert an equals sign (=) between the two words if you do use a linking /r/ when saying them.

- 1. here [] or there
2. her [] allowance
3. for [] ever
4. more [] open
5. law [] and order
6. stir [] it
7. far [] out
8. near [] other people
9. more [] apparent
10. for [] about ten days
11. her [] uncle
12. far [] above
13. stir [] over heat
14. thaw [] out
15. Mr [] Allan
17. fair [] enough
18. upper [] atmosphere

Would you please indicate your age bracket and sex:

10-24 25-44 45-64 65+ F/M
your place of residence:
ACT NSW NT QLD SA TAS VIC WA Outside Australia

your place of education (all or most of it):

ACT NSW NT QLD SA TAS VIC WA Outside Australia



FEED BACK Report

21st century dates

Feedback 32 revisited some numerical issues from earlier Feedbacks. The questions about what to call 21st-century dates were first posed at the turn of the millennium in Feedback 13 (AS 7.1, May 1999). It was interesting to observe whether the nomenclature had now firmed up, at the end of the first decade. While we only had half as many responses in our most recent survey as to the 1999 questionnaire, it's still revealing to compare some trends (see below, Table 1). "The two thousands" was the strongly preferred option in both instances, although the addition of "the noughties" as an option reduced the vote for the two thousands from 75% to 60% overall.

Thanks to those of you who participated in Feedback 32 on dates, numbers and quantities. We received a total of 139 responses to the questionnaire, both online and in hard copy, with 44 responses in Age group 4 (65+), 56 in Age group 3 (45-64), 20 in Age group 2 (25-44), and 19 in Age group 1 (10-24). In the results presented below, Age groups 1 and 2 have been put together, so as to create a reasonable base for comparison. Special thanks go to students in the Diploma of Professional Writing & Editing course at the University of Ballarat (32), and the Sunset Coast Literati, WA (4) who sent in multiple feedbacks.[AS]

For the particular year, the wordy "two thousand and" was preferred to "twenty O" in both surveys, but in a reversal from 1999, the more succinct twenty tens is now preferred to the two thousand and tens for the decade (1999 – 40%, 60%; 2010 – 68%, 32%). This reversal was particularly evident in the youngest age group, 62% of which chose the two thousand and tens in 1999, while 76% went for the twenty tens in 2010. There was also a slight overall preference for the shorter form for the individual date twenty fifteen (55%) rather than two thousand and fifteen (45%) in our most recent survey, but this was not tested in Feedback 13.

AD/BC

Several other numerical issues covered in Feedback 32 followed up on Feedback 14 "Spaced Out", (AS 7.2, December 1999). Another dating issue, covered by both of these surveys, is the use of the abbreviations BC (Before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini). BC has traditionally appeared after the date, and Feedback 14 and 32 both support this convention, with the percentage choosing this option increasing in the later survey (from 84% to 97% overall). Conversely, in academic circles at least, AD has tended to be placed before the date. Feedback 14 acknowledged this possibility with a split of 73% after to 27% before. Feedback 32 suggested that the split

Table 1

Feedback 32	Total (139)	Age 1+2 (39)	Age3 (56)	Age 4 (44)
1. the twenty Os	9%	3%	8%	16%
the two thousands	60%	62%	56%	66%
the noughties	31%	35%	36%	18%
2. two thousand and five	86%	100%	93%	70%
twenty O five	12%	0%	7%	26%
two double O five	1%	0%	0%	5%
3. the two thousand and tens	32%	24%	37%	33%
the twenty tens	68%	76%	63%	67%
Feedback 13	Total (279)	Age 1+2 (95)	Age3 (93)	Age 4 (88)
1. the twenty Os	10%	9%	11%	12%
the two thousands	75%	75%	75%	75%
the twenty hundreds	15%	16%	14%	13%
2. two thousand and two	81%	88%	77%	73%
twenty O two	16%	10%	19%	25%
two double O two	13%	2%	4%	2%
3. the two thousand and tens	60%	62%	58%	59%
the twenty tens	40%	38%	42%	41%



convention is disappearing, with a stronger preference for placing AD after the date (90%), bringing it close to the figures for BC. There was very little support for the use of the alternative abbreviations BCE (Before Common Era) and CE (Common Era), with 81% of respondents to Feedback 32 saying they would never use them.

Mobile phone numbers

There's no doubt that mobile phones are more ubiquitous now than a decade ago, so it's hardly surprising that the conventions for expressing mobile numbers seem to have hardened. In Feedback 14, the choice appeared to vary by age: the youngest narrowly preferring the pattern 4 digits + 2 + 4 (0406 66 4666), and the oldest going for the equivalent of the old country telephone number: 3 + 3 + 4 (040 666 4666). The pattern that has established itself as favourite across all ages is 4+3+3 (0406 664 666), with 79% approval from Age1+2, 89% from Age 3 and 90% from Age 4. Curiously, it is the youngest age group that retains a penchant for the 3 + 3 + 4 (21%) pattern, with 4 + 2 + 4 having fallen completely out of favour.

Spaced out

The other comparison of results that can be made between Feedback 14 and 32 is over the choice of using a space between a figure and a unit – in the earlier survey the example is am/pm, and in the latest it is kg. The *Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers* (6th ed., 2002), recommend that am/pm follow the same convention as IS units such as km/kg by having a space between the number and the unit. The results for am/pm showed an almost equal balance of preferences (52% no space. 48% space) with the first three age groups voting for no space by a proportion of 3:2, and the oldest group preferring a space by the same margin (see Table 2). The preference for no space is much stronger with kg – 78% overall against 22% for space, with a massive 96% of the youngest age group opting for it. The oldest group again prefers the spaced version, but by a slightly smaller margin than with am/pm (54% to 46%). This divergence might indicate a general belief that there should be no space between numbers and units, with the status of kg as part of the Interna-

Table 2

Feedback32	Total (139)		Age 1+2 (39)		Age3 (56)		Age 4 (44)	
10kg	39	78%	23	96%	10	77%	6	46%
10 kg	11	22%	1	4%	3	23%	7	54%
Feedback14	Total (290)		Age 1+2 (51)		Age 3 (129)		Age 4 (109)	
10pm	143	52%	30	60%	70	57%	43	43%
10 pm	131	48%	20	40%	53	43%	58	57%

tional System of units giving it stronger support.

The 65+ age group appears to be more aware of the convention described in the *Style Manual*. What this space should be called – a hard space, non-breaking or unbreakable space – elicited few responses when applied to the example of five digit numbers. Hard space had a slight preference amongst those that expressed an opinion.

Gb/GB

Another question about symbols involved the capitalisation of 'b' in the abbreviation for gigabyte: Gb/GB. The overall preference (60% to 40%) was for GB, which tallies with the *Style Manual* recommendation to use this to maintain the technical distinction between the unit 'bit' – usually symbolised by a lowercase 'b' – and a 'byte' which is a multiple of a 'bit'.

Number spans

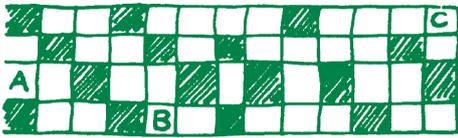
Australian *Style* readers didn't completely agree with the *Style Manual* on number spans. The recommendation is to use the minimal amount of characters necessary for clarity, e.g. 11-12 not 11-2, but 125-7 not 125-27. Our respondents uniformly preferred the simpler 105-7 to 105-07, and the less ambiguous 115-17 to 115-7. However, they still went for the longer form when there was less chance of confusion, choosing 125-27 and 1345-47 rather than 125-7 and 1345-7 by a ratio of 3:2 overall.

Midday/midnight

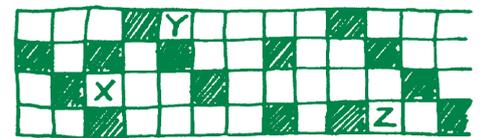
Finally, while there was almost no argument that half-past midnight is 12.30 am, and half-past midday 12.30 pm, there still appears to be some resistance to the use of the 24 hour clock to mark this distinction.

Remarkably, a preference for 00.30 to express midnight increased with age, only 16% of those aged 44 and under choosing it, as opposed to 28% for the age range 45-64, and 44% of those 65 years and above.

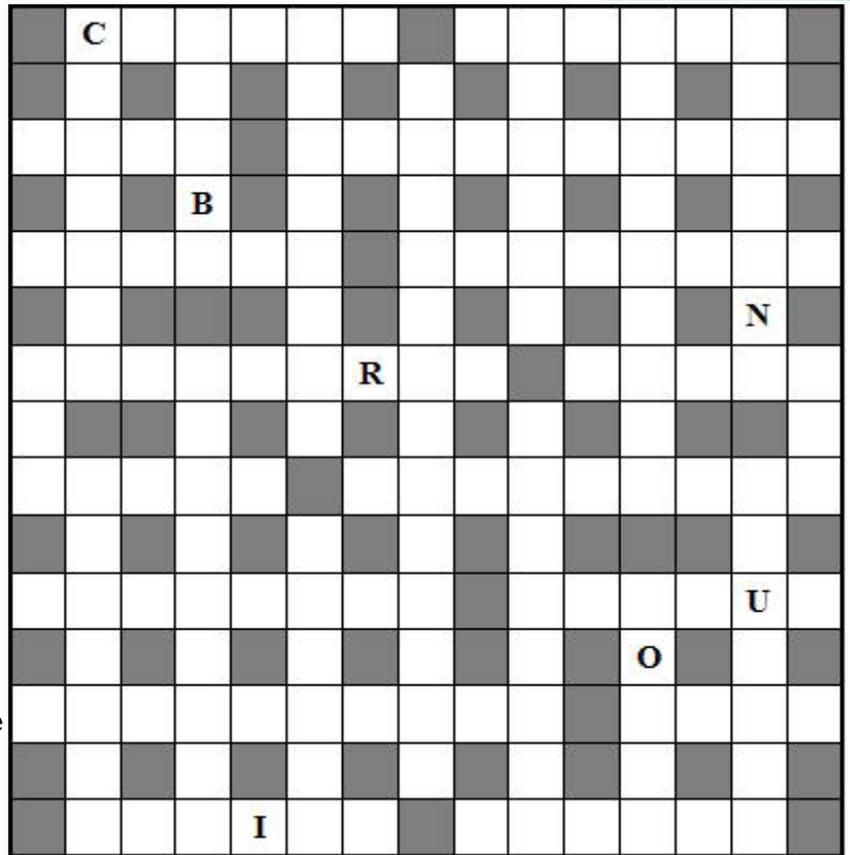




RUBICON



RUBICON, devised by David Astle, is a hybrid of crossword, jigsaw and acrostic. First, solve as many clues as you can and begin to fit the answers inside the grid. (The scattered letters of RUBICON should give you a toehold.) When the grid is completed, arrange the clues from the first Across to the last Down – their 31 initial letters will hint at a rare quality that only six of your solution words possess.



- Permanent marker (4-6,3)
- Gets suspicious (6,1,3)
- Typically, property or stocks (10)
- Assure (9)
- Move into an elevated state (9)
- Relax, you can talk about a Prohibition bar (9)
- Roman restaurant (9)
- Date or name entered to unlock a site (8)
- Errol Flynn's state of birth (8)
- First cousin of the elephant? (8)
- It's not true that outsiders love a high voice (8)
- Line of communication; TV station (7)
- Staying power (7)
- Tad in recipe terms (7)
- Tends to have more bats in the belfry (7)
- Emulated a boobook (6)
- Envenom (6)
- Frantic howl is boobook-like (6)
- 'Greed' for sex (6)
- Ruses; evades (6)
- Snobby (2-2-2)
- Suppress (6)
- Tropical in humidity (6)

- One's cover story (5)
- Orca's playground (5)
- Reward from the pay office (5)
- Watt's source of inventive energy, ironically (5)
- Indian dress (4)
- Ostrich's prominent feature (4)
- A tango quorum (3)
- Fifth month (3)

Solution to Rubicon in last issue
 EVERY FINGER OF BOTH
 TYPING HANDS: septimal,
 Native American, outspeak,
 impresario, pralines, biplanes

S	Y	R	U	P	Y		S	E	P	T	I	M	A	L
H		A		R			X		H		I		O	
O	R	D	E	A	L		S	T	E	W	A	R	D	S
E		I		L		P		E		A		A		I
	N	A	T	I	V	E	A	M	E	R	I	C	A	N
I		N		N		R		P		T		L		G
M	O	T	H	E	R	S	B	O	Y		L	E	A	F
P				S		O		R		B				A
R	I	C	E		A	N	T	I	B	I	O	T	I	C
E		O		H		A		S		P		E		E
S	I	N	K	I	N	G	F	E	E	L	I	N	G	
A		V		C		R		D		A		D		S
R	A	I	N	C	O	A	T		A	N	D	R	E	W
I		C		U		T				E		I		I
O	U	T	S	P	E	A	K		A	S	Y	L	U	M

