

Plain Words (Part 2)

By Joseph Kimble

Last month I offered, with some qualifications, a list of inflated words. This month I offer two lists of wordy phrases and a list of lawyerisms.

The first two lists overlap: the second one includes many compound prepositions (also called complex or phrasal prepositions)—that is, prepositions consisting of more than one word. In the second list, which groups phrases with similar meanings, I checkmarked the groups of compound prepositions. Exactly 75 years ago, writing about compound prepositions in his classic *Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, Fowler said that, while some are worse than others, “taken as whole, they are among the worst element in modern English, stuffing up what is written with a compost of nouny abstractions.”

The cure is at hand. You should rarely have to use any of the wordy phrases in these first two lists.

Compound Prepositions	Shorter, Simpler
as a means of	to
as to	on, for, about, of
by means of	by, with
by reason of	because of
by virtue of	by, under, because of
during the period from	from
for a period of	for
from the point of view of	from, for
in addition to	besides
in back of	behind
in connection with	with, about, concerning, for
in excess of	more than, over
in favor of	for
in lieu of	instead of, rather than
[be] in receipt of	have
in terms of	in, for, about
in the absence of	without
in the amount of	for
in the case of	in, with (or cut it)
in the nature of	like
in the neighborhood of	about, roughly
on behalf of	for
on the basis of	by, from, because of
on the occasion of	on
on the part of	by

Compound Prepositions
under the provisions of
with the exception of

Other Wordy Phrases

- ✓as regards
- in reference to
- in regard to
- in relation to
- with reference to
- with regard to
- with respect to
- concerning the matter of
- in the event that
- in a situation where
- under circumstances in which
- due to the fact that
- because of the fact that
- in view of the fact that
- for the reason that
- inasmuch as
- despite the fact that
- notwithstanding the fact that

Shorter, Simpler
under
except for

Shorter, Simpler
about, concerning,
on, for

if, when

because, since,
given that

although, even though

because of, from

before

after

while

during

- ✓as a consequence of
- as a result of
- ✓prior to
- previous to
- antecedent to
- anterior to
- ✓subsequent to
- posterior to
- during such time as
- during the time that
- ✓in the course of
- during the course of

Other Wordy Phrases
at present
at the present time
at this point in time

at an early date
in the near future
at the time that
at such time as
at the place where
in the place in which
until such time as

✓in proximity to
in the vicinity of
there is a need for
it is [necessary, important] that

has discretion to
is permitted to
is authorized to

is able to
is in a position to
has the ability to

✓for the purpose of
in order to
with a view to
with the object of

there is no doubt but that
this is a [topic, subject] that

the question as to whether

it would appear that
it is probable that

in a [negligent, precise] manner

on a daily basis
a large [number, percentage] of
the majority of

sufficient number of
adequate number of

excessive number of
have a negative impact

no later than June 30
on or before June 30

Shorter, Simpler
now, currently

soon

when

where

until

close to, near

must, should

may

can

to, for

doubtless,
no doubt

this topic

whether,
the question whether

apparently

probably

negligently,
precisely

daily, every day

many

most

enough

too many

hurt, harm

before July 1

“Plain Language” is a regular feature of the *Michigan Bar Journal*, edited by Joseph Kimble for the State Bar’s Plain English Committee. The assistant editor is George Hathaway, chair of the committee. The committee seeks to improve the clarity of legal writing and the public opinion of lawyers by eliminating legalese. Want to contribute a plain English article? Contact Prof. Kimble at Thomas Cooley Law School, P.O. Box 13038, Lansing, MI 48901. For information about the Plain English Committee, see our website—www.michbar.org/committees/penglish/pengcom.html.



We come finally to the lawyerisms—words that give legal writing its musty smell. They should be completely avoided. Total abstinence. Either cut the word entirely or find a plain, modern-day equivalent.

This is not a complete list, but it includes many of the most common offenders.

ab initio	said (for <i>the, that,</i>
above-mentioned	or <i>those</i>)
ad idem	same (for <i>it</i> or <i>them</i>)
aforementioned	ss.
aforesaid	sub judice
anent	such (for <i>the,</i>
arguendo	<i>that,</i> etc.)
before-mentioned	thenceforth
below-mentioned	thereafter
case at bar	thereat
ex contractu	therefor
ex delicto	therein
foregoing	thereof
henceforth	thereunto
hereafter	therewith
hereby	to wit
herein	unto
hereinafter	vel non
hereinbefore	viz.
hereof	whatsoever
heretofore	whenever
hereunto	whereat
herewith	wherefore
instant case,	wherein
matter, etc.	whereof
instanter	wheresoever
inter alia	whosoever
inter se	within-named
premises (in the sense	witnesseth
of “matters already	(and other verbs
referred to”)	ending in <i>-eth</i>)

Go forth and simplify. ◆



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