

A Pox on *Prior To*



References

Theodore M. Bernstein, *The Careful Writer* 346 (1972): *Prior to* is a “faddish affectation for *before*. Would you say *posterior to* in place of *after*?”

Roy H. Copperud, *American Usage and Style: The Consensus* 305 (1980): *Prior to* is “pompous in the sense *before*.”

Bryan A. Garner, *A Dictionary of Modern Legal Usage* 692 (2d ed. 1995): “*Prior to* is a terribly overworked lawyerism. Only in rare contexts is it not much inferior to *before*.”

Sir Ernest Gowers, *The Complete Plain Words* 110 (Sydney Greenbaum & Janet Whitcut eds., rev. ed. 1986): “There is no good reason to use *prior to* as a preposition instead of *before*. *Before* is simpler, better known and more natural, and therefore preferable.”

Joseph Kimble, *A Modest Wish List for Legal Writing*, 79 Mich. B.J. 1574, 1577 (2000): “*Prior to* takes the booby prize for the most common inflated phrase in legal and official writing. Why would

anyone prefer it to *before*? Try to think of a single literary title or line that uses *prior to*. . . . By itself, *prior to* may seem insignificant. But it often leads to clumsy, indirect constructions. . . . More important, a fondness for *prior to* may indicate a fondness for jargon—and a blind resistance to using plain words. That resistance, that cast of mind, is in large part responsible for the state of legal writing.” ◆

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