

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01 8 JULY 2004

Oxford reveals spelling crisis

Do you ‘pour over a book’ or ‘pore over a book’; do you ‘toe the line’ or ‘tow the line’? Shocking new statistics from Oxford’s research show that up to 50 per cent of users are getting simple words and phrases confused with one another. Research for the new edition of the world’s favourite dictionary, the ***Concise Oxford English Dictionary***, reveals that there are alarming levels of confusion because so many words in English either look alike or sound alike but have different meanings.

Are you confused?

Based on real evidence of how people speak and write, the following phrases are examples of just how confused people are:

A coach can *diffuse* the situation by praising the players (50% incorrect)*

A taxi driver had free *reign* to charge whatever he liked (26% incorrect)*

Some pointed to his refusal to *tow* the line under Tony Blair (21% incorrect)*

He spent his evenings *pouring* over western art magazines (12% incorrect)*

* Correct versions are: ‘*defuse* the situation’; ‘free *rein*’; ‘*toe* the line’; ‘*poring* over’.

Judy Pearsall, Publishing Manager of English Dictionaries, says “*people are writing more than ever before, especially in less formal situations such as email, weblogs, and chatrooms, and it is here that we see the most confusion. Whether such mistakes will, in time, spill over into more formal types of writing is yet to be seen. The question is: does it matter if, in a generation’s time, people are writing about ‘pouring over magazines’ or ‘towing the line’?*”

The first edition of the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, published in 1911, was an Olympian achievement. This is the first new edition this century and it continues to carry the torch as the winning choice for people all over the world. Based on the largest amount of evidence ever—hundreds of millions of words—the *Concise* also offers more than double the help than ever before on tricky and controversial questions of English, giving you and your family advice on whether you should say *less* or *fewer*, a hotel or *an* hotel, and of course, how to use those pesky apostrophes. When it comes to new words, Oxford’s unique monitoring programme also ensures that it has no rivals.

Give your English VA-VA-VOOM!**

In 1911, when the first edition of the *Concise* was published *radio, television, cinema, and computer* didn't have a place in the dictionary. In 2004 the *Concise* includes nearly 2,000 new words, many of which reflect innovations in the fast-moving world of science and technology: **M-COMMERCE** (commercial transactions conducted electronically by mobile phone), **PLASMA SCREEN**, **CYBER WAR** (use of computers to disrupt activities of an enemy country), and **TAIKONAUT** (Chinese astronaut).

SEX UP your English with the new *Concise* and find all the words in the news: the latest additions include **CONGESTION CHARGE**, **GANGMASTER**, **SKY MARSHAL**, and **HEALTH TOURISM**. **POLE DANCING**, **BOOKCROSSING**, and **SPEED DATING** are the things that entertain us, and from the big screen we get **MINI-ME** (a person closely resembling a smaller or younger version of another) and **THREEQUEL** (a second sequel). **HANDBAGS** now means 'a minor confrontation' and **BUMSTERS** are popular with **MIDDLE YOUTH** and **METROSEXUALS**.

The *Concise* also says **CROESO** (welcome) to some Welsh words with **BORE DA** (good morning) and **IECHYD DA** (good health) joining thousands of words from forms of English from around the world: **DICKY** (car boot) and **BATCHMATE** (classmate) from India, **SPINNY** (mad, crazy) from Canada, **BLOVIATE** (talk at length, especially in an inflated or empty way) and **NOOGIE** (rubbing a person's head with one's knuckles to express affection) from America, and **NONI** (a tropical evergreen shrub) from Tahiti.

The winning choice for people all over the world, *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary* sets records, and where there is confusion, it sets the record straight.

****VA-VA-VOOM** = the quality of being exciting, vigorous, or sexually attractive.

The new 11th edition of the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* is published on 8 July, rrp £20.00.
If you would like more information, or to interview an editor, please contact
Sarah Kidd on 01865 353911 or email sarah.kidd@oup.com

A full list of the new words added to the dictionary can be found at www.askoxford.com/pressroom

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