

Burying the lede for a new year

Written by gallupsun
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It's resolution time, which means your local gym's treadmills will be in high demand while they glisten with other people's sweat (until roughly the end of February). You've probably set some goals for yourself and defined ways you'd like to be more awesome in 2024. Allow me to suggest an additional resolution: to win at life with better grammar.

We can start right now. Since it's time to lead off a new year, let's examine the words lead and led, which often trip us up (just like that treadmill you set at a slightly too ambitious speed).

Lead is an example of a heteronym. Heteronyms are homographs that are spelled the same, have different meanings and sound different. "Lead" is not only a heavy metal with a short e vowel sound, but it is also when someone is in charge, or ahead of something (as a verb) or a position of advantage in a competition (as a noun) and has a long e vowel sound.

Where "lead" gets tricky is when people incorrectly use the word "led" in its place. When you were in first place, you were in the lead; you led the race for 19 laps. Use "led" as the past tense for the verb "lead" (the one that rhymes with bead).

The confusion, of course, is when "lead" (like the metal) and "led" (the past tense verb) go head-to-head. These words are homophones, which are homonyms (words that sound the same) with different spellings. Homophones trick us, kind of like the small print in the gym membership stating we can, under no circumstance, quit the gym, under penalty of 20 sets of burpees.

This paragraph is a lightning round to clear up any other lead/led-related words. Leed (with a long e vowel sound) is a Scottish word for language or speech. Led Zeppelin (with a short e vowel sound) was an English rock band that, ironically, was one of the pioneering bands in the genre of heavy metal music (not pioneers in lead, the literal heavy metal). One of their favorite venues was Leeds University (pronounced with a long e vowel sound).

So, if you'd like to get the lead out on 2024, I suggest you lead the way by working out with Led Zeppelin blaring in your wireless earbuds. And wipe down the treadmill before and after you use it.

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