

Grammar Rules Change—Are You Up to Date?

By Dianna Booher

Like food, fashion, and fitness, language changes. To acknowledge change is not to discount grammar rules. Grammatical errors muddy your message and mar your image. But as long as the language is still spoken, new words move into our language to convey new concepts. Worn-out words fall into disfavor and become archaic.

Some changes, however, create confusion for writers. For example, they see a word hyphenated at an organization. Then they move to another company, and people there write the same concept as two words. More perplexing still, their client writes the same idea as a single word.

What's going on here? Words enter our language as separate entities: pipe and line. Then they are gradually hyphenated: pipe-line. When they are commonly put together, the hyphen disappears: pipeline.

Other examples: Make up, make-up, makeup. Note book, note-book, notebook. Feed back, feed-back, feedback. On line, on-line, online.

What's a person to do? Stay up to date. Use current references and style guides. When grammar and common usage clash, common usage always wins over the course of time.

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187 words

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For more on business writing, see Booher's Rules of Business Grammar: 101 Fast and Easy Ways to Correct the Most Common Errors (McGraw-Hill) by Dianna Booher.