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Oops!

Do I Do That?

Rebut
vs.
RefuteRebut: Argue a
contrary opinionRefute: Win an
argument("Refute" and "rebut"
are frequently used -
incorrectly - to mean
the same thing.)

YES:

"Candidate A may now
rebut Candidate B's
point."

NO:

"The candidate refutes
all charges but lacks
any evidence."

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The Floating "S"

Many people have a hard time trying to write because they want their writing to be in a different "voice" than the one they use while speaking. Authors inherently know that how they speak is not always how they should write.

While this, of course, could be a topic for a much larger discussion, it brings up an interesting problem seen in many texts: what I am choosing to call the "floating 's.'" While the terms listed below are frequently spoken and written with an "s" added on, their preferred forms (in any medium) are without this addition.

- afterward (*not* afterwards)
- anyway (*not* anyways)
- backward (*not* backwards)
- toward (*not* towards)

Using "Only" Properly

The word "only" should be placed as closely as possible to the word you want it to limit.

- "Grammar checkers only catch some spelling errors" means they don't catch anything other than spelling errors.
- "Grammar checkers catch only some spelling errors" means they don't catch all spelling errors.

Nifty Word of the Month

Most people are familiar with the term "emeritus," which is often given to retirees who no longer work full-time but still hold respect, power, and possibly some responsibilities with a company, organization, or university. However, this term is frequently used incorrectly for retiring women.

Emerita, *adjective*:

Of a female former office-holder; retired but allowed to retain her title as an honor.

(Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, Sixth Edition)

Why You Need an Editor

Electronic grammar and spelling checkers, such as the one built into Microsoft Word, are often the only editing resources used by writers. However, such programs are far from reliable. Electronic grammar checkers:

- Rarely flag missing or misused commas
- Miss about twice as many errors as they find with irregular verbs
- Flag omitted verbs only half the time
- Often miss needed helping verbs
- Do not flag problems with pronoun-antecedent agreement
- Do not flag problems with faulty pronoun reference
- Miss more incorrect pronouns than they catch
- Catch misuses of "who" and "whom" only about half the time
- Don't alert you to misplaced modifiers or dangling modifiers

(**Hint: You may also need an editor if you're not sure what any of this means, other than your grammar checker isn't nearly as good as you thought it was.)

Data taken from *A Writer's Reference* (Sixth Edition) by Diana Hacker.

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