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Oops!

Do I Do That?

Peek vs. Peak vs. Pique

Peek means a quick glance; *peak* means the pointed end of something; *pique* means a feeling of wounded vanity (noun) and to excite or arouse (verb).

NO:

That interview really peaked my interest about Lincoln!

YES:

Were you able to sneak a peek of her wedding dress?

YES:

The hikers are supposed to reach the peak around sundown.

YES:

I had no idea her program would pique such a strong interest in student activism.

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Obama and Me – Er, I Mean, Obama and I

An op-ed piece that ran in The New York Times on February 23 discussed Obama's frequent mix-up of *me* and *I* when he mentions his actions with another person (e.g., *Michelle and me* versus *Michelle and I*). While quite a few naysayers are mocking him for the error, even more people make the mistake themselves.

The article gives a great explanation about the history of choosing between *me* and *I* in these situations, including some background on Shakespeare's use of the terms. However, the piece concludes with the most common advice given on the topic: if you're not sure, just take the other person or thing out of the sentence to determine whether *me* or *I* is correct.

I am going to Chicago.
Michelle and I are going to Chicago.

The tickets are for me.
The tickets are for Michelle and me.

Speaking of Style ...

The standard stylebook used for most disciplines (law and the sciences being notable exceptions) is the Chicago Manual of Style. Although only paid subscribers may browse the full manual, the CMS site still provides answers to the most common questions about proper grammar, punctuation, and usage.

It's bookmark worthy!

<http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org>

Nifty Word of the Month

apotheosis, *noun*:

elevation to divine status; the perfect example.

(Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, Feb. 27, 2009)

James's Peachor James' Peach. Which Is Correct?

A common question – and error – that comes across the kelcilynn.com proofreading desk is the use of apostrophes with plurals and proper nouns (names). Not sure why it's so confusing? Try this on for size:

- Associated Press (AP) style and the Chicago Manual of Style (CMS) advise 's in most cases: *the dog's house*.
- For words that are plural in form but singular in meaning, AP and CMS recommend s': *mathematics' rules*.
- For plural words ending in s, AP and CMS recommend s': *girls' dresses*.
- For proper nouns ending in s, CMS recommends 's (*James's peach*) – unless they end in an eez sound (*Euripides' works*).
- AP recommends using 's for singular common nouns – unless the next word begins with an s (*the witness's actions* versus *the witness' story*).
- CMS recommends that, when using for ... sake, writers omit the s when the noun ends in an s or an s sound (*for Jesus' sake* versus *Jesus's contemporaries*).

There are many other exceptions and restrictions about how to use apostrophes in these kinds of situations. How can you know which to choose without having to consult ten pages of explanation in a style manual?

Even the CMS admits that all of these guidelines can be confusing. In fact, they advise that "those uncomfortable with the rules, exceptions, and options ... may prefer the system ... of simply omitting the possessive s on all words ending in s." Some people find this system awkward since it doesn't always reflect speech patterns, but it's a good rule to use if you struggle with understanding all of the restrictions and want consistency in your writing.