

# OUR LANGUAGE

by Jeffrey McQuain

Try trenchant for something especially sharp or keen. When you're criticizing somebody, you can sharpen your language by using a word that's trenchant.

To admit or confess, own up. Ordinarily you own up to something, but you may sometimes use own up on its own.

Q. I have a cousin that uses hisself. That's not correct, is it?

A. You'll find hisself in some dictionaries, but it's marked as nonstandard English for the pronoun himself. In terms of usage, I've heard hisself more often than I've seen it written. You may, of course, use his and self when they're separated by other words, as in "his own true self."

Input refers to data being entered into a computer. Even if computerese bothers you, don't feel put out about input.

Someone plucky shows courage or spirit. Plucky spellers never have trouble with this adjective, because most of this word is lucky.

Q. My brother-in-law and I disagreed on this one — "She inferred to me that he had promised to marry her." Is inferred used correctly here?

A. Most usage guides prefer implied in this instance. Here's the difference: a speaker implies or suggests; a listener infers or concludes from what is

said. Some books list imply and infer as synonyms — but don't infer that I'm implying I agree.

For a child or descendant, try the noun scion. It rhymes with lion, but the pronunciation of scion begins with a sigh.

Censure finds fault with or blames. The word ends in sure, and you should always be sure of the facts before you censure.

OUR LANGUAGE AD-VICE: A sports publication takes the latest Advice Award. "Keep up with snowboarding in the winter, this year has been warm," reports the publication. The comma after winter causes a comma splice — the error of using a comma to connect two sentences. Change that comma into a period and you'll give each sentence a sporting chance.

When pronouncing library, never forget the first r. Think of rare books, and you should remember the rare in saying the word library.

Something recondite is difficult to know or understand. Once you're familiar with this adjective, though, its meaning shouldn't be recondite.

Q. Our local theater is 50 years old this month. Do we call this its half-centennial?

A. For the half-century mark, use the term semicentennial (semi-means "half," as in semiannual and semicircle). Movie fans, for example, are now celebrating the semicentennial of such 1939 treasures as "Gone With the Wind" and "The Wizard of Oz." (Any parties to honor these films should be semiformal.)

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