

The Word Watcher

by Lorraine Loviglio

You, the Word Watcher

Browsing guiltily through a file of long-unanswered letters and messages from readers, I unearthed this nugget:

A previous study evaluated tenderness by both a consumer and a laboratory panel of lightweight pigs.

It had been sent to me by Eileen Schofield, senior editor in the Communications Department at Kansas State University, who wrote, “I thought this was asking too much of the test animals.” She also sent along this head scratcher:

RNA was extracted from frozen tissue taken from healthy cattle immediately after slaughter.

In my last column I mentioned that my readers are sometimes kind enough to share their prize bloopers with the Word Watcher. It has since occurred to me that the WW may have been somewhat laggard in sharing these pearls with the rest of you. Let’s fix that right now.

After being immersed in water for three days and baking in an oven at 300 degrees, we could observe no change in the material.

That account of scientific dedication came to me from Joanne Sprehe, managing editor emerita at the Optical Society, who elsewhere plucked this rose from among the thorns: “The signals were venerable to noise.”

In a column on “freight-car modifiers” (July-August 1997 issue), I asked readers to send me their own best (i.e., worst) examples. KSU’s Schofield sent several, among them this delicious title:

Trained Descriptive Apple Pie Flavor and Texture Profiling Panel

Another of her authors reported on his study of “net wrapped large round bale alfalfa hay storage losses”. And what did an economic study Schofield edited mean

when it referred to “the boom young and old operator cash flow coefficients”? You don’t want to know. Jennifer Macke, a freelance from Yorktown, Virginia, swears she lifted this eye-glazer from her brother-in-law’s résumé:

—Founded GISDATA as the GIS technology marketing and value added services solutions focused (integration, training, consulting, applications development, geographic databases development, software support) startup company.

Responding to a column on the ubiquitous use of *using* in passive constructions, causing participles to dangle and meaning to tangle, Sheila McNab forwarded two of her favorites from the University of Utrecht, in the Netherlands:

Reduced Cerebral Grey Matter Observed in Alcoholics Using Magnetic Resonance Imaging

Visit our bird hides and see the spring-time ducklings and goslings using our binoculars.

And Roy M Pitkin, editor of *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, had this delightful response to my repeated rants on the subject of *parameter*: “My favorite definition,” Pitkin wrote, “is Bryson’s (Bill Bryson, *A Dictionary of Troublesome Words*. Penguin: 1948): ‘If you need a word to describe the relationship between a diameter and its conjugate in a conic section, or the points on a crystal at which the axes intercept a given plane, or a neat way of describing an aggregation of curves that are constant in one case but are otherwise varied, then *parameter* is the very thing. In all other instances I would venture that you were merely trying to impress us. . . . If all you mean is a boundary or limit or perimeter, don’t use *parameter*.’”

I couldn’t have said it better myself. 🍷