

Onward to Online?

A colleague and I have been arguing over the spelling of *online/on-line/on line*. He says that when the term is used as an adjective, it should be hyphenated (*on-line*); when used as an adverb, it should be two words (*on line*). Anything else is, in his opinion, ungrammatical and un-English.

I say *online* (solid) has become a de facto adverb, like *onstage* and *onward*, meaning electronically or Internet-accessible. I cite America Online and *Science Online*, neither of which moves him.

My colleague says we editors should be guardians of the Queen's English, not followers of a (to him) deplorable trend toward neologisms without regard to a

word's function in a sentence. I say our language is dynamic and we should be open to new constructions when they are universally understood and unambiguous.

I would appreciate your publishing this letter to invite the opinion of readers of *Science Editor*. Responses can be submitted to the Editor at b-gastel@tamu.edu, specifying "Letter 2000.5" in the subject line.

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