

A Question of Dialect

Solutions

Regarding the question on differences between the verbs *to quantify*, *to quantitate*, and *to measure*: In general terms, our authors seem to use *to measure* in the meaning of “take a measurement of something” and *to quantify* in the sense of “determine, express, or measure the quantity of something”, which makes it more specific. *To quantitate*, if used as a verb, seems to be more in the sense of “expressed in quantitative terms” (as in quantitative analysis). We tend to leave the term the author used. Also worth noting is that *quantitative data* is a statistical term, which means “data in numerical qualities such as continuous data or counts” (definition per *American Medical Association Manual of Style*, 9th ed, p 565).

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Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (11th ed) does not indicate a difference in meaning between *quantify* and *quantitate*. The newer entry *quantitate* (1927 vs 1840) is a backformation from the adjective *quantitative*. Some, but not all, backformations should be avoided. Robert Day (*Scientific English*) prefers *measure* to *quantify*. He does not mention *quantitate*. Edie Schwager (*Medical English Usage and Abusage*) prefers *measure* or *determine* to *quantify* and *quantitate*. I change *quantitate* (and *orientate*) to *quantify* or *measure* (and *orient*). Why use 10 letters when eight (or seven) will do?

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The three phrases *to quantitate*, *to quantify*, and *to measure* are synonymous. *To quantitate* is *to measure*, so these two clearly have identical meanings. *To quantify* means to express or describe as a numerical quantity, that is, *to quantitate*. A story may illustrate. A child

asked her father whether she was tall, and the father responded: “Well, yes you are.” The child asked: “How tall?” Father responded: “I will *measure*, and then we can assign an exact *quantity* to your height.” “Oh good”, replied the daughter. “Let’s see, according to my estimate with this measuring stick, your height is 4 feet, 4 inches. Tomorrow you can tell your science teacher that your height has been *quantitated* approximately.”

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We have sections on biological physics in two of our journals, and our editors (and copyeditors) will accept usage that is not a variant but is in *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. *Quantitate* is all right by this criterion, although it is used more in Great Britain than here. We do, however, change British spellings (of words like *colour*) to the US form. One of our editors does recall questioning and then approving the use of *quantitate*.

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New Question: A Question of Volume

A managing editor is asked to research how editing rates vary by discipline, by publisher or journal, and by level of editing. The question put to several sources is whether, for example, an average of five manuscript pages per hour or 20 pages per day for copyeditors is reasonable. What might this rate be for heavy text editing? What might it be for graphics development from text? What might it be for text and graphics development from original data (commissioned writing)?

As a physical scientist who for many years has been editor of an interdisciplinary journal, contributed to and read by biologists, medical people, engineers, and others, I have had to accommodate the various disciplines' dialects of scientific writing and to distinguish between differences in style and poor English. One such unsolved puzzle, which I hope my colleagues can help me solve, is to identify the differences in meaning, if any, between the verb *quantitate*, as used by many biologists, and the older verbs *quantify* and *measure*. What are your thoughts regarding possible distinctions? [Contributed by an editor in bioelectromagnetics.]