**TROUBLE WITH WORDS**

(Handout #3)

**Assume:** If you assume something you have nothing to point to, no evidence.

**Presume:** If you presume something, you have something you can point to for your belief.

**Libel:** A damaging public statement in print.

**Slander:** A damaging public statement made orally.

**Lie:** To lie down (and take a nap)

**Lay:** To set something down

**Proactive**: Acting in advance to deal with an expected difficulty. I would use “initiative” – it is better to say you took the initiative.

**Impact**: The striking of one body against another, or making a strong, immediate impression. Use impact only as a noun or a transitive verb (e.g. a missile impacts on or in a target area.)

**Material and materiel**: The pronunciation is nearly the same, but the meanings are very different. The first has a broad meaning: The substance or substances of which things are made; tool or apparatus used for performing a physical task; and something such as an idea or sketch, to be refined and incorporated into a finished effort. The second has a more narrow, specific meaning – the equipment and supplies, such as guns and ammunition, of a military force. It can also mean an organization’s equipment and supplies. (Materi**e**l: Think equipment.)

**Majority and plurality**: Avoid these terms if they are not supported by data. The first means more than 50 percent. The second means a group or an individual among three or more who gets the most votes, but still less than 50 percent.

**Parameter and perimeter**: Mathematicians and scientists use the word parameter. Other writers use dimensions or characteristics instead. Perimeter means a boundary around something or limits.

**Precipitate, precipitately, precipitant, precipitous**: The first two terms apply to rash or hasty actions. The third is similar, but with a connotation of rushing or falling headlong. Precipitous refers to a physical steepness.

I**njuries and casualties**: Injuries and casualties are suffered or sustained, not received or taken.

**Momentarily**: This word means a fleeting instant; it does not mean at any moment.

**And, but**: These words are connectives (or conjunctions) and can be used to start a sentence if emphasis is desired.

**Escalate, accelerate, and intensify**: Escalate means to increase by successive stages. Do not use the term to indicate accelerate (increase the speed of) or intensify (to make more extreme in degree, size, or strength).

**Flammable, inflammable**: Flammable is preferred for describing a combustible substance. A situation or a temperament may be inflammable.

**Discreet, discrete**: Discreet means prudent or judicious. Discrete means separate, individual, distinct. (In “discrete” the “e’s” are separated by the “t”)

**Additionally**: Additionally should never be used as a transitional expression. Instead, use in addition, moreover, furthermore, besides.