

Origins

By Jeff Ives

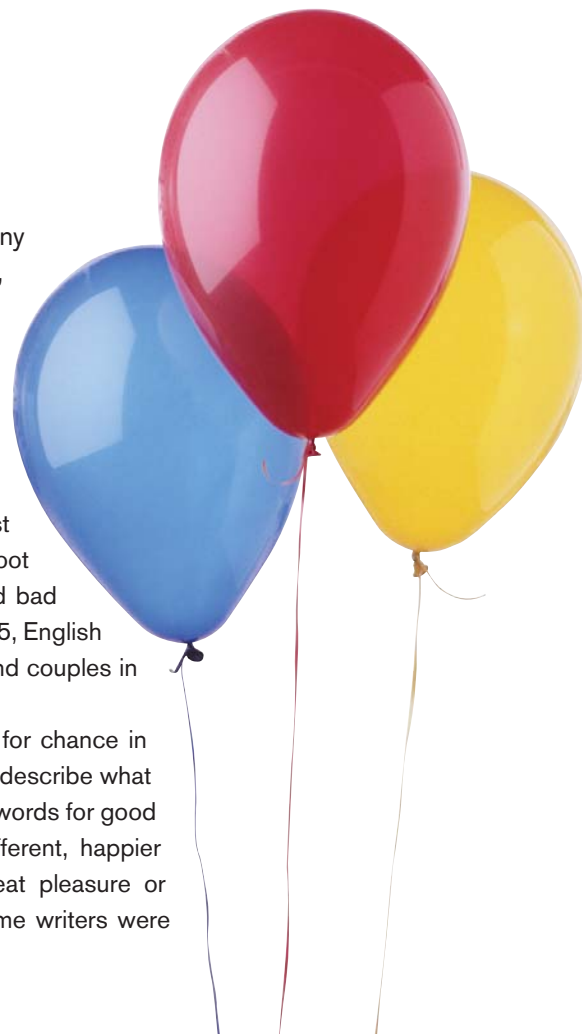
There are more than 500,000 words in the English language, many of which are derived from tongues as diverse as Latin, Greek, French, and Arabic. This month, *Writing* gives you the scoop on the word *happy*.

Get Happy!

Are you feeling *happy*? Well? Are you?! Seven hundred years ago, people weren't *lucky*—they were *happy*. Happy was the earliest English word for “good fortune.” It came from the Old Danish root *happe*, meaning to chance, happen, or occur. There are good and bad occurrences, but we all prefer good occurrences, don't we? By 1375, English speakers were using *happy* to describe successful businessmen and couples in love. Then gambling came along. ...

In the late 15th century, English shortened the Germanic word for chance in gambling, *gelücke*, to *lukke* and started using it at the card table to describe what separated the winners from the losers. For a while, English had two words for good fortune, but *luck* became the favorite while *happy* took on a different, happier meaning. By 1525, *happy* had come to mean “a feeling of great pleasure or content.” *Happy* was such a positive word that in about 1787, some writers were using *happy land* as a name for heaven.

Not bad for a word that started out completely neutral!!



Be Glad to Be Sad!

From 1000 until 1400, being sad wasn't a bad thing. At that time, *sad* meant “dignified, grave, learned, mature, strong, orderly, trustworthy, steadfast,” and “having had one's fill.” In the late 14th century, people started to use the word *sad* to mean “full of sorrow.” At about the time *happy* became a really positive word, *sad* took a nosedive. By the 18th century, it had become a synonym for *bad*, as in “a *sad* situation.” So when you're down in the dumps, remember the upside of feeling low. There literally is strength in sadness.

Sticky Situations By Jeff Ives

Check out my lucky rabbit's foot.



It wasn't too lucky for the rabbit.



Word Web Head Games!

Different words throughout history can be connected to a common root word. Each word in this web can be traced to the French word *chef*. Below each word is the date of its earliest recorded use and its definition.

Root: French *chef*

mishap	→ hap	→ happy	→ happen	→ hapless	→ haphazard	→ happenstance
1220: accident	1340: chance	1375: lucky; contented and pleased	1375: occur	1568: without luck	1575: by chance	1897: an occurrence

Source: *Oxford English Dictionary*

Say It, Don't **SCREAM** It!!!!!!

Exclamation Point Overuse and Abuse

By Debbie Nevins

ATTENTION!!! We interrupt this magazine to bring you an important bulletin from the Union of United Punctuation Marks! One of our most esteemed members, the **exclamation point** (which also goes by the symbol **!**), has filed a grievance. According to the complaint, the **!** charges that it is being **overworked, overused, and overexclaimed!!!**

According to attorneys representing the **!**, the job description for the exclamation point reads as follows: "The **!** is to be used sparingly, at the end of an exclamatory statement expressing **strong emotion, shouting, or surprise.**"

Easy Does It

Please note the phrase "to be used sparingly." Extreme overuse of the **!**, the point's attorneys charge, has diminished their client's value. Everyday statements are being written in a fevered pitch. E-mail and instant messaging are especially guilty of promoting such hyperexclamatory excesses. (Exhibit 1: "Hey!!! This article is so boring!!!!!! I'm falling asleep just reading it!!!!!!") If everything is exciting, then nothing is exciting, and simply adding more and more exclamation points gets silly.

The Rules of Exclaim

To settle the grievance, the exhausted **!** demands that its use be limited according to the following guidelines.

1. Never use the **!** in academic, formal, or journalistic writing. Exclamation points are not appropriate for the reporting of facts, even if the facts themselves are shocking or surprising. In formal writing, they are unseemly.
2. Use the **!** sparingly in all other forms of writing, including fiction. Less is more. Simply adding this mark won't make weak writing strong. Strengthen sentences with powerful verbs, and trot out the **!** only when it's really needed.

Example:

Weak: The boy ran after the bus! "Stop!" he yelled.

Stronger: Flailing his arms and gasping, the boy chased the bus.
"Stop!" he yelled.

3. Never use the **!** in multiples. Just like the cheese, the **!** stands alone.

Case closed. Next we have a complaint from the semicolon; it is feeling despised and misunderstood. But that's another story.

