

ASK *Cosmo*



Dear Cosmo,

My girlfriend is graduating this year but I have to take summer school. I can graduate in the fall if I pass the class I need. The worst part is that she is from Germany and I am from Philly, and the class I flunked is English. How stupid is that. She passed her English requirements freshman year, and now she may not wait for me. If somebody from Europe can learn English, why is it so hard for somebody born here. Its just not fair. Maybe the Germans are just better at learning big words. I'd appreciate any ideas you can come up with. Thanks. Signed, Ich bin einen dummkopf.

Dear Dummkopf, das glaube ich gern (Dummy, I quite believe it),

Well, study up on it. By the by, you left out two question marks, an apostrophe, and you ended a sentence with a preposition. Hardcore English weenies never abide this. Winston Churchill once quipped, "This is the type of nonsense, up with which I shall not put." That little drop-down menu under "tools" might help with some of the less

geeky grammar and spelling stuff.

When they were trying to housebreak your language, maybe you never encountered the rules...or you forgot them shortly after you heard them, or you didn't pay attention that much in the first place, and now they're rubbing your nose in it. Does it matter if you don't go on the paper? I guess it does when it's the list of who receives diplomas!

Use of big words is no measure of intelligence. The tiny ones can be the hardest to get. People who have always spoken English probably don't even think about it, but for first-time English speakers, yikes.

You're graduating from University Park, or "UP." Let's start up the discussion on this little downer. That little two-letter preposition can be used all kinds of different ways, and a lot of times it gets used with a second preposition. Students might not be up for the task, what barriers they might be up against, or see

whether they should study up on a subject. They might be up among the top percentage of upstarts who get up at dawn, just to keep up with studies so no details sneak up behind them that might put them up against the wall and cause them to be placed up before a tribunal of word weenies. What's up with that?

When you were coming up through secondary school, they came up with Outcome Based Educational Standards to make sure that kids are all schooled up on their grammar skills up through twelfth grade. It helps ensure that they don't wind up being screw-ups who pronounce the word "nuclear" as "nuke-you-lur."

No means no, but "on" has dozens of uses. If you're not on fire about your studies, the smart money is on the likelihood you won't remain on top of them. There's an off chance you'd wind up on the money, but more likely you'd wind up on probation, on suspension, on the skids or on drugs for all I know.

I could go on and on to clue you in on the onus of itsy bitsy words. If you ipso facto don't graduate because of poor grammar skills, then even a so-so lecture like this one is on the up and up.

It might be good advice not to run before you can crawl. Your German needs some work too. First, all German nouns, such as

the masculine noun, "der Dummkopf," take a capital letter if they aren't at the beginning of a sentence. Second, the correct phrase would be, "Ich bin einer Dummkopf," not "eineN Dummkopf." You see, "bin" is the first person singular conjugation of the verb "sein," meaning "to be," and all forms of the verb "to be" take a predicate nominative. Accordingly, the adjective ending on the indefinite article "ein" takes the nominative case ending "-er" rather than an accusative case ending for the masculine noun "Kopf." Now if you had chosen to use a transitive verb-one that takes an object-then the indefinite pronouns and all subsequent adjectival modifiers would take the masculine accusative adjectival ending "-en." For example, "Ich habe einen gehaltlosen Kopf," would be the correct declension in case, number and gender (and perhaps point) for the phrase, "I have an empty head."

Come to think of it, I'm using a lot of English grammar to explain German, and you've said you're no Rhodes Scholar. Maybe you should take a foreign language class to learn some English parts of speech. Then you wouldn't have to listen to some wiener dog. But don't let it get you down. People like to make fun of rednecks until their car is broken. Word.

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