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## Hopefully, Change Won't Be Difficult

I was taught that the word *hopefully* means “in a hopeful manner” or “full of hope.” Authors who start a sentence with the word *hopefully* usually mean “I (we) hope” or “it is hoped” — which is an incorrect usage of the word.

In *The Elements of Style*, Strunk and White make this point quite adamantly: “This once-useful adverb meaning ‘with hope’ has been distorted and is now widely used to mean ‘I hope’ or ‘it is to be hoped.’ Such use is not merely wrong, it is silly. To say, ‘Hopefully I’ll leave on the noon plane’ is to talk nonsense. Do you mean you’ll leave on the noon plane in a hopeful frame of mind? Or do you mean you hope you’ll leave on the noon plane? Whichever you mean, you haven’t said it clearly. Although the word in its new, free-floating capacity may be pleasurable and even useful to many, it offends the ear of many others, who do not like to see words dulled or eroded, particularly when the erosion leads to ambiguity, softness, or nonsense.”

Likewise, the 2011 print edition of *The Associated Press Stylebook* says about the word: “Do not use it to mean it is hoped, let us hope, or we hope.”

Imagine my shock when I received the latest update to the *AP Stylebook Online*: “The traditional meaning is in a hopeful manner. Also acceptable is the modern usage: it’s hoped, we hope.”

Modern usage? The words that came to my mind were blasphemy and bastardization, as well as the slang OMG. After researching the matter, though, I realize that I might be a bit behind the times. A few centuries ago, people began using the word “hopefully” as a sentence adverb.

The online *Oxford Dictionaries* ([www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com)) defines a sentence adverb as “an adverb or adverbial phrase that expresses a writer’s or speaker’s attitude to the content of the sentence in which it occurs (such as *frankly*, *obviously*), or places the sentence in a particular context (such as *technically*, *politically*).” *Oxford* goes on to state that “traditionalists take the view that the use of sentence adverbs is inherently suspect and that they should always be paraphrased ... A particular objection is raised to the sentence adverbs *hopefully* and *thankfully*, since they cannot even be paraphrased in the usual way ... Nevertheless, there is overwhelming evidence that such usages are well established and widely accepted in everyday speech and writing.”

In their book *Origins of the Specious: Myths and Misconceptions of the English Language*, Patricia T. O’Conner and Stewart Kellerman explain that in the early 1960s, the use of “hopefully” as a sentence adverb suddenly took off. “All hell broke loose in 1965, when the *Saturday Review*, *The New Yorker*, and *The New York Times* denounced this terrible new menace ... Thus began what the lexicographer R. W. Burchfield has called ‘one of the most bitterly contested of all the linguistic battles fought out in the last decades of the 20th century.’

“On one side were the traditionalists who condemned the practice. On the other side were nearly all the people who actually used the language. Over the years, most usage manuals and style guides have come to believe that it’s illogical to condemn the use of ‘hopefully’ as a sentence adverb, but they still warn writers against the practice because of all the naysayers out there.” They believe that “hopefully” has earned the right to be a sentence adverb because no other word does the job quite as well.

For several years, I have tried to keep this sentence adverb out of *CEP*. Hopefully, I’ll be able to let go of what some would call my traditionalist, illogical, naysaying attitude and accept this evolution of the English language.

Cynthia F. Mascone, Editor-in-Chief

