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## In re Words: Can You Gauge My Morale?

By Juliette Gillespie

Oh, what a difference an “e” makes! It turns *moral*, with emphasis on the first syllable, into *morale*, with emphasis on the second syllable.

It’s like choral, and chorale. *Choral* sounds like *coral*, as in a coral reef, the marine invertebrate. (Corals are animals. Weird, right?) Whereas *chorale* is pronounced like *corral*, which is a pen or enclosure for livestock.

That little “e” on the end not only changes the pronunciation, but also the meaning of the word, of course.

We all know what “moral” means (hopefully).

The noun “morale” means spirit or attitude, the mental or emotional state of a person or group involved in an activity. In business, it often comes up with regard to *employee morale*. “Low morale increases work errors and sick days.” “I don’t think we’re going to solve our morale issue with a few sandwiches.”

So, imagine my dismay, as an employee and an editor, when I read this in a recent submission: “Inclusion promotes goodwill, good publicity and *good corporate moral*.”

I have seen this more than once, and it upsets me. Please put the “e” on *morale*, when you’re talking about morale. I’ll say it—it’s good for my morale.

As for the word “gauge,” it does not look like it would be pronounced “gage.” It looks like gauze, which is pronounced “gawz.” So gauge should be “gawj” (as in “You look gaw-geous!”). But it’s not. *Gauge* is pronounced “gage.”

Like a lot of English spelling vs. pronunciation, it doesn’t make sense. You just have to *know*. However, I do believe that most people who care at all about spelling have the inside scoop on “gauge.”

As a noun, a gauge is an instrument or device for measuring the magnitude, amount or contents of something, typically with a visual display of such information. For example, your car has a *fuel gauge* to tell you how much gas is in your tank.

The term “gauge” can also refer to the measurement itself—the thickness, size or capacity of something, especially as a standard measure. Some of you may be firearms enthusiasts, familiar with the term “gauge” because of its common use in reference to shotguns (e.g., a *20-gauge* or *12-gauge*). In that context, it is the unit of measurement used to express the inner diameter of the barrel. But it’s not a linear measurement. Twelve-gauge, for example, means you can make 12 lead balls, each of equal diameter to the gun barrel, out of one pound of lead.

Not being a big fan of firearms myself, I had to look that up. And I don't think I will ever need that particular piece of information again, but, I learned something today. Maybe it will come up in a trivia game.

"Gauge" can also act as a verb, of course. To gauge is to estimate or determine the magnitude, amount or volume of something. For example, one can gauge temperature by using a thermometer.

"Gauging" can be making a judgment about something, usually people's feelings, as in: "A poll was taken to gauge consumers' attitudes," or "It's difficult to gauge how they will react."

These are not far-fetched uses of some obscure word.

But then, a lawyer writes this: "The requirement that jurors wear face masks during both voir dire and trial, making it more difficult for a defense attorney to *gage* their reactions, was not a constitutional violation."

And this: "The court should not have dismissed his case without first *gaging* his competency."

I don't care if you're a gun owner, a car owner, or just a person with a thermometer, we should all know how to spell "gauge."

Some sources say that *gage* is a "less common" spelling of gauge, and that *gauge* is "by far the preferred spelling." I think that's just a nice way of (not) saying it's *wrong*. This makes me think of children's sports where everyone gets a participation trophy. (As a mom, I'm not totally against this, but I'm making a point here.) Why do we have to dumb everything down and make it easy? What's the point in even learning how to spell? Why don't we just write everything phonetically?

I realize that this is already happening with text messaging. Who even needs vowels? Srsly! Or complete words? IDK LOL

Can you gauge my morale at this point? It's low. Am I snarky and judgy? Perhaps. But I am loath to forgo expressing my concerns, for I am on a mission to save the English language! OK, not really. But I do enjoy discussing these things (reach me at [jgillespie@alm.com](mailto:jgillespie@alm.com) with comments or suggestions). Thank you for letting me share. ■

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