

Etiquette tip of the week: Father knows best

Callista Gould, For the Register 11:19 a.m. CDT June 17, 2016



(Photo: Special to the Register)

My father once had a cardiac episode at home, and paramedics were called. As the paramedics were moving him onto a stretcher, one said, "Lay down." My father replied, "I think you mean, 'lie.'"

"What did he say?" asked the paramedic.

"Never mind," said my sister the nurse, who was helping prepare him for the ambulance.

My father was a doctor, a scholar and a motorcycle hill-climbing enthusiast. But foremost, he was a grammarian. If you said, "I am going to lay down," he would say, "Then I expect there to be eggs when you get up."

He regularly peppered his children with grammar questions. Coming home from college, before you dropped your bag, he would say, "Tell me the difference between 'lie' {to recline} and 'lay' {to put something down}."

Today, I lie down. (present tense)

Yesterday, I lay down. (past)

In the past, I have lain down. (past participle)

Today, I lay the book down. (present)

Yesterday, I laid the book down. (past)

In the past, I have laid the book down. (past participle)

Studying grammar was a lifelong practice for my father, because he knew grammar determines one's station in life.

If two candidates are up for a promotion and one's speaking or writing is full of grammatical errors, the other one will go forward. Employers regularly pigeonhole resumes and cover letters full of grammatical errors. What kind of errors would they make if hired?

Grammar is about credibility. Would you invest with financial planners who say, "Me and her have a financial plan for you if yours ain't producing real good returns?"

To improve your grammar, do so by increments. Grammar books are not meant to be read like novels. Pick one topic or one chapter a week and study it.

Here are a few good references:

"The Elements of Style" by E.B. White ("Charlotte's Web" author) and William Strunk Jr.

"Booher's Rules of Business Grammar" by Dianna Booher

Associated Press Style Book or Chicago Style Book

Online:

[Purdue University Online Writing Lab \(https://owl.english.purdue.edu/\)](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/) (OWL)

[Grammar for Dummies online \(http://www.dummies.com/how-to/content/english-grammar-for-dummies-cheat-sheet0.html\)](http://www.dummies.com/how-to/content/english-grammar-for-dummies-cheat-sheet0.html)

Thanks to the knowledge and professionalism of the paramedics, my father didn't leave us that day. He lasted several years more. The legacy he left us was that our grammar education didn't end in the sixth grade. It's a life-long practice.

Callista Gould is a certified etiquette instructor, award-winning speaker and founder of the Culture and Manners Institute. She can be reached at cgould@cultureandmanners.com or on Twitter @MannersThatMove.

Read or Share this story: <http://dmreg.co/24W3geg>