

Rex Jaeschke's Blog Postings from
Tales from the Man who would be King
Volume 04 – Dec 2012 through Nov 2013

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Introduction

When I decided to start a blog, I wrote the first three installments and let them “bake” awhile before I posted them and announced the creation of the blog. I wanted to get past the romantic aspect of dreaming something up, jumping in and doing it, and then, later, finding out it wasn't sustainable. Now, more than 11 years later, looking back, not only was I able to deliver a substantive posting each month for 132 months, I have 16 of the 24 postings for the next two years already written, and ideas for the remaining eight mapped out!

On a semi-regular basis, over a home-made [café-au-lait](#), I read an old posting, and I'm very happy to say that *I'm not embarrassed by any of them!* It surely has become a labor of love!

Over the years, a number of regular readers have suggested that I publish the postings in some sort of printed book form. Having written numerous technical books, many articles for technical journals, and a newspaper column, I am well aware of the formal publishing process, and the work involved in getting what I might consider to be a perfectly good manuscript into a shape that a publisher would accept. Regarding writing books, my financial return was probably far less than the minimum wage! Of course, I could self-publish, and, in fact, I have access to a facility to do just that at a very reasonable cost. After serious consideration and putting my ego aside, I decided that I would indeed re-publish the first 11-years-worth of installments, but in an electronic book form, [PDF](#). And I would do so, 12 installments (that is, one year's-worth) per Volume.

To make it worth having these Volumes available for downloading instead of readers simply going to the website for installments one at a time, I've added some small value to the Volumes. Here are the enhancement and/or changes I've made:

- Did some light editing: corrected spelling mistakes, improved punctuation, and tweaked some grammatical constructs
- Corrected factual errors
- Updated outdated information
- Added an occasional bit of extra relevant information as an aside
- Added *many* more links, primarily to [Wikipedia](#) and [Wiktionary](#)
- Added a few photos. [I write installments using MS Word, which easily allows me to arrange embedded photos. However, when I export the result to my blog (which is hosted by the freely available BlogEngine.NET), the result is far from pleasing. As such, after some early experimentation, I have included very few photos.]
- Added forward pointers to relevant installments that came later

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- Regarding links to other installments, links to destinations that are in the same Volume resolve to the corresponding chapter in that Volume; otherwise, they resolve to the blog web site.

Lastly, a very big “Thank You!” to my reviewers, good friends John Tew and Tom Plum, who have been with me from the beginning. Now I say “good” friends. There is a saying, “Friends help you move, but good friends help you move bodies!” I have not yet asked either to help in such a manner, but for now, I’ll give them the benefit of the doubt.

Happy reading,

Rex Jaeschke, April 2021.

1. December 2012, “Symbols and Marks”

We live in a world of symbols. Everywhere we go, we're surrounded by signs containing pictures. Now, many of us know that the symbol © means *copyright*, and that a faucet (tap, that is) marked red dispenses hot water while one marked blue gives cold water. Road signs indicate we should turn left or that a railroad crossing is ahead. Green traffic lights tell us to “go;” red lights tell us to maybe perhaps think about slowing down sometime soon; and yellow lights indicate “please ignore me; I'm just a holdover from the old days when drivers were responsible!”

According to Wiktionary, a symbol is “A character or glyph representing an idea, concept or object.” Now who's to say which symbols represent what ideas, concepts, or objects? Of course, the mapping of symbols to meanings is simply a convention. In some cases, the symbol directly represents the object (as in a T-junction-ahead road sign) while in other cases there appears to be no such connection (think 8-sided Stop sign).

Of course, five different groups of reasonable people could easily come up with five different conventions for the same set of ideas or concepts. One obvious example of this is the diversity of writing systems. As to how one might write the English vowel sounds in other writing systems varies considerably, but no one approach is right; they are all just different conventions. Even the symbols used to represent the digits 0–9 are conventions and vary from one counting system to the next.

Many common signs truly are international. One such set is that containing a picture of a common object painted in black, on a white background, and inside a red circle with a red slash through it, which indicates that the indicated object or action is forbidden. Examples include, *No Smoking Here*, *No Cameras Allowed*, and *No U-Turns Allowed*. Now another common sign indicates *No Parking*, and although I know it as having an uppercase P in the center, I learned a valuable lesson about normal when I started travelling to Latin America. There, I kept seeing all these “forbidding” signs with an uppercase E. In that part of the world, the Spanish reflexive verb *estacionarse* means “to park.” Hence the E instead of P. Another sign I see all over the world is WC (an abbreviation for water closet), to indicate a toilet.

In this essay, I'll discuss the non-alphanumeric symbol keys common to most typewriter and computer keyboards, I'll look at some symbols not available on a keyboard but needed in word processing, and I'll mention a few fields of learning having extensive sets of symbols. As usual, I'll be working in a USA-English context.

1.1 The QWERTY Keyboard

These days, the most common keyboard layout used in the English-speaking world is QWERTY, whose name comes from the first six letters in the top left corner, read left-to-right. [A far less common layout is Dvorak.] Let's look at the symbol keys on my PC's keyboard, going left-to-right and top-to-bottom, all of which have formal names, as shown:

- Tilde ~ — Not commonly used in general writing, although it can mean *approximately*. Used by certain programming languages.

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- Grave Accent ` — Not common everyday use. Used by certain programming and text markup languages.
- Exclamation Mark ! — Also known as an *exclamation point* or *bang*. A common punctuation character, as in, “I did not have s*x with that woman!” [Prior to the introduction of domain addresses, email addresses contained *bangs*.] Used by certain programming languages.
- Commercial At @ — In days of yore, this was used when writing detailed receipts, as in “Three French Hens @ \$4.25 each, Four Calling Birds @ \$3.75 each, ...”. Nowadays, it’s an integral part of any email address. However, almost every time I try to type it on a non-English keyboard, I have to figure out which three keys to press! [If you are truly desperate for something to do, following the link and read the section “Names in other languages.”]
- Number Sign # — Also known as pound sign (US), hash (British Commonwealth), and octothorpe. For example, “I hugged a stranger on the #5 bus today.” Unless you have had too much alcohol to drink, it really *doesn't* look like the musical sharp sign. On UK keyboards, this key usually has the pounds sterling symbol £; however, that is *not* why the US calls it a pound sign. Used by certain programming languages.
- Dollar Sign \$ — Used primarily with dollar or peso currencies, and by certain programming languages.
- Percent Sign % — Indicates a percentage, as in, “2.5% of serial killers have programmed in the language C.” Used by certain programming languages.
- Circumflex Accent ^ — Not common everyday use. Used by certain programming languages.
- Ampersand & — An abbreviated form of the word *and*, as in “The Duke & Duchess of Huckleberry are invited to a Royal Beheading at the Tower on Saturday; BYO”. Used by certain programming languages.
- Asterisk * — Sometimes used to add emphasis to a word in email, as in, “You should ****not**** do that!”, used as a replacement for some letters in offensive words, as in, “He’s a R*p*bl*c*n”, and used as a crude form of a bullet starting an item in a list. Used by certain programming languages to indicate multiplication. [Not to be confused with Asterix, “a French comic book series about ancient Gauls.”]
- Left and Right Parenthesis () — Common punctuation characters, used in pairs to indicate an aside, and in arithmetic to group operations, as in $(50 + 33) / (22 - 15)$. Used heavily by numerous programming languages.
- Low Line _ — Also known as an *underscore*. Used to underline words and phrases in the days of typewriters, as in, “The tooth fairy is not real”, before bold, italic, and other highlighting facilities were available.
- Hyphen-Minus - — Its name says it all although when typeset, minus signs are often wider. See this link as well.
- Plus Sign + — Used to mean the obvious *plus* or *as well as*. (See example immediately below.)
- Equals Sign = — The mathematical symbol for *equality*, as in, “Obama + 4-more-years = Wonderful”. Used heavily by numerous programming languages.
- Left and Right Square Bracket [] — Punctuation characters, used in pairs to indicate supplementary information. [Reviewer John is still working hard to educate me on the “correct” use of () and [].] Used heavily by certain programming languages.

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- Left and Right Curly Bracket {} — Sometimes called *braces* (US) or *squiggly brackets* (UK). Not common in everyday use, but used heavily by certain programming languages.
- Vertical Line | — Also known as a *vertical bar*. Not common in everyday use, but used a lot in mathematics and computer science.
- Reverse Solidus \ — Better known as a *backslash*. Used in various internet contexts, and by certain programming languages.
- Colon : — A common punctuation character that introduces a list, as in, “The Model T Ford comes in any color you like, black, black, or black!” Also, can introduce an appositive. (Yes, really, I read it in Wikipedia!) Formats times (as in 10:30 am). Used by certain programming languages. Not to be confused with a *cucumber*, which is a long, green vegetable, parts of which when eaten may well pass through your (other) colon.
- Semicolon ; — A punctuation character that most writers use incorrectly or not at all. Used heavily by certain programming languages.
- Quotation Mark " — Also known as a *double quote*. A common punctuation character used in pairs to show dialog or verbatim quotations, as in, “I have it on good authority that she is not better than she ought to be!” Down Under, we called them *inverted commas*. Used heavily by certain programming languages.
- Apostrophe ' — A common punctuation character often used to indicate the possessive case, as in “The President's ~~shorts~~ ratings were sagging”. When used as one of a pair, also known as a *single quote*. Allows one quotation inside another. Used heavily by certain programming languages.
- Less-Than Sign < — Its name says it all. Used heavily by certain programming languages.
- Greater-Than Sign > — Say no more! Used heavily by certain programming languages.
- Comma , — A common punctuation character that most writers (including *moi*) use in the wrong places. Always keep a box of them handy when writing, and sprinkle them liberally into your text, so the copy editors have something to do. Used heavily by certain programming languages.
- Full Stop . — Called that throughout much of the British Commonwealth, but in God's own country it's called a *period*. Used heavily by certain programming languages where it is sometimes called a *dot*.
- Question Mark ? — A common punctuation character that ends a question, as in, “Did you know that the Pope was a homosapien?” And who in the world dreamed up the alias eroteme?
- Solidus / — Say what? It's a *slash*, damn it! In the absence of a true division symbol (÷), it's sometimes used to mean division. Also used in fractions, in various internet contexts, and by numerous programming languages. Also, a little-known Roman emperor who had the nasty habit of *leaning on people*. (Yes, I made up that last one!)

[As astute reviewer John pointed out this may be confusing or misleading, if not incorrect. Here is my response: The Unicode Standard (see below) formally calls this keyboard character Solidus, and that character is used in everyday word processing and in writing computer programs in the manner that I mentioned. However, from a strict typesetting perspective, a slash (/) is different from the Fraction Slash (⁄) and the Division Slash (∕) symbols for which Unicode provides different representations, and which are not on keyboards. By the way, Unicode considers Solidus to be the same as virgule and the shilling mark, even though other

conventions may disagree. If you click on the hyperlink at the beginning of this bullet, you'll see far more information about the use of slash-like characters than you probably care to know.] I've noticed that some Western-European keyboards have a [Currency Sign ¤](#) key. This is used as a generic currency symbol, typically when the actual one is not available. Also, Spanish keyboards have an [Inverted Exclamation Mark ¡](#) (to start an exclamation), and an [Inverted Question Mark ¿](#) (to start a question). What will they think of next?

1.2 The World of Word-Processing

In my December 2011 essay, "[Making Good-Looking Documents](#) — Some tips on how to take advantage of a word processing program," I introduced some useful characters that are not ordinarily available on a keyboard. Some of these, and more, are discussed below:

- [Em Dash —](#) and [En Dash –](#) — Used to surround an aside and to separate a range of values, respectively.
- [Copyright Sign ©](#) — The name says it all.
- [Section Sign §](#) — Simpler to read/write than the longer form "Section", "Chapter", or "Clause". Used in forward references, such as "(see §2.5)".
- [Pilcrow ¶](#) — This copy-editing mark indicates a new paragraph. And since you asked, yes, there is a reverse pilcrow, which is, well, a pilcrow drawn in reverse!
- [Degree Sign °](#) — Used to write temperatures and angular measures. A specific instance of the more general superscript (and subscript) notation.
- [Horizontal Ellipses ...](#) — Meaning "etc.", "so forth and so on."
- [Vulgar Fractions ¼, ½, ¾](#) — The name says it all.
- [Currency Symbols £, ¥, €, Rs, ₩, etc.](#) — The name says it all.
- [Greek Letters α, β, θ, μ, π, etc.](#) — Often used when writing about mathematics and physics.
- [Dagger †](#) and [Double Dagger ‡](#) — Often used to mark footnotes to text or entries in tables.
- [Per Mille Sign ‰](#) — Percent's sibling, whose units are one tenth of one percent; that is, 1/1000.
- [Infinity ∞](#) — Used in mathematics and other fields, or to indicate how much money the US can borrow from China!

1.3 Emoticons

If you use email or instant messaging, the chances are high that you'll have seen and possibly used one or more [emoticons](#) (short for *emotional icon*). You know, those smiley faces, frowns, and other facial expressions. Now, some of these have been immortalized as standard symbols ([see more here](#)).

1.4 Other Fields having Symbols

The worlds of Mathematics and Logic have a large number of symbols. Another set is proofreaders' marks. Then topographic and [cadastral map](#) makers use marks to indicate contours, elevations, latitude and longitude, borders, rivers, roads, railways, bridges, dams, churches, ruins, parks, and so on. Your basic house plan uses symbols to indicate doors, windows, stovetop, sink, stairs, light fixtures, and power outlets, among other things. In my November 2012 essay, "[English – Part 2: Pronunciation](#)," I introduced some marks used to indicate pronunciation in English. And the list of fields goes on and

on, including religion, the occult, astronomy, alchemy, chemistry, electrical, engineering, music, and hazard and safety.

1.5 The Unicode Standard

As personal computers became fixtures in everyday business and personal lives, a consortium was formed to define a set of glyphs that encompassed all the written symbols that are significant in modern business and communication, as well as in academia, including ancient Greek, and Egyptian hieroglyphics. The result was Unicode, which initially had a capacity of 65,535 unique values, and included lots of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean glyphs. Since then, that system has been extended to handle more than 1,000,000.

You name it, and that symbol is likely to be in Unicode, although I don't believe written Klingon made it despite attempts to include it. And despite its common use, a raised-middle finger doesn't seem to have made it either. Well to H**I with them if they can't take a joke! ;)

A list of Unicode characters is available here. However, a more manageable approach (complete with visual examples) is available here.

1.6 Conclusion

The web site www.symbols.com claims to be "The World's Largest Online Encyclopedia of Western Signs and Ideograms." As of this writing, this site "contains more than 1,600 articles about 2,500 Western signs, arranged into 54 groups according to their graphic characteristics." If you find yourself stuck indoors on a rainy day, take a look at some of these.

The mark ✓ is well known. Having been raised in Australia (which is part of the British Commonwealth) I called this a tick, until, that is, I moved to the US, where I now call it a check or check mark. If you follow the link, you will learn that this mark has different meanings in different places including meaning NO!

If you have too much time on your hands, take a look at your word processor to see if it supports a Dingbats font. If so, take a look at the symbols available via that.

By the way, if you really want to end your sentence in style, do so with an interrobang.

I'll leave you with the following sign, which can be found on the mirror in my guest bathroom:



2. January 2013, “Starting Your Own Non-Profit”

Once I moved to the US in the late 70's, it took a few years for me to get myself financially established there, but after that, I started thinking about what I might be able to do for some less-fortunate folks. Around that time, a major weekly newsmagazine ran an article comparing the top 50 or so well-known charities showing how much of each dollar actually went to an organization's projects. [It truly was stunning how big a percentage of total disposable assets the overhead was for some of them—to the point that their charitable projects seemed almost secondary!] One of them provided “more bang for the buck” than the others, and I started supporting that charity. Twenty-five years later, I still am, and in a much bigger way.

I've lived 16 years in rural Australia, 10 years in suburban Australia, 32 years in suburban America, and recently I moved to rural America. Australia and America both have good standards of living although my guess is that due to its extensive social safety net Australia doesn't really have an underclass. The US certainly does!

We are all shaped by the influences of our environment, and I grew up in a small-town rural community, made up of farmers, fruit growers, a few professional people, and lots of working-class people. In general, the State and Federal Governments were expected to take care of those who needed help. That said my state has many towns with strong community organizations and branches of national and international service organizations. In my home region, the hotel (having drinks, meals, and accommodation) in each town is owned by that community and run as a non-profit venture with proceeds going back into the town's development. The projects involve town beautification, campgrounds, picnic areas, riverfront development, and the like.

From about the time I turned 16, I started playing a game, “What would I do with a spare \$100?” As my own situation improved, the value of the amount went to \$1,000, then \$10,000, \$100,000, and so on, with it now being in the millions and billions. [I've always thought it would be awfully embarrassing to win the lottery, but not have a plan for what to do with the money!]

Fast-forward to 2006. After a trans-Atlantic daytime flight to London, I lay awake jet-lagged in my hotel bed for many hours during which I had an epiphany. Instead of just dreaming and talking about all the good I might do should I ever have more than *enough* money, I thought, “Why not start out small, get the experience of setting up a non-profit and working with small projects, and actually do something real now instead of *maybe* later?” And so, I did, and on a shoestring budget too. Now, nearly seven years later, my little charity is well, it has done good work, and I've learned a lot.

In this essay, I'm going to talk about my experiences in creating a non-profit organization (which I'll abbreviate as NPO), but without getting into the details of my foundation except to say that it works primarily with underprivileged kids here in the US. [As I've discovered repeatedly, unfortunately, the Third World is “right around the corner.”] As I've done this in the United States, issues of a legal or tax nature will necessarily be US- and, in some cases, US state-specific.

2.1 Why Not Just Give as You Go?

For the vast majority of people, this is just fine. Perhaps you give to one or more favorite projects on a regular basis, and it comes out of your pay before you get it. And maybe you have a little extra from time to time to give to various groups especially around major holidays.

For many people, they live paycheck to paycheck, so they are too busy trying to keep their own situation afloat to be thinking about helping others financially. But for those of us with some discretionary income, can we do more? As for me, not only did I want to do something, I wanted to be involved in deciding where the money actually went, and in seeing that the overhead was kept as small as possible. I was certain I did *not* want to be an armchair philanthropist. (A lot of people feel good about writing out a check for the “needy,” but they never actually met those in need. That is, except for the buzz they get by giving, they are otherwise unaffected by that need.)

2.2 But I Don't have That Kind of Money!

Mention the term *Non-Profit Organization* or *charity*, and many people think of the multinational groups like International Red Cross, Doctors without Borders, and Save the Children, or the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. After all, they are ones we hear about in the news. But, of course, the vast majority of NPOs are small, local-run affairs that don't have the time, budget, energy, or need to blow their own horn, so you never hear about them unless you go looking.

Don't you have to be super rich to start your own NPO? In a word, NO; I started mine with \$1,600. To be sure it has a lot bigger asset base now, but nothing too big. [I'm reminded of a lawyer in the DC area who works with people who want to start their own NPO. She said that it wasn't worth doing unless one had \$10 million to start with. Once I learned of her consulting fees, I understood why her clients needed that kind of money.]

Don't you have to have a big ego to start your own NPO? I can't attest to the size of the ego one might need, but the question suggests that having a largish ego is a bad thing. In fact, show me a repeatedly successful person and I'll show you someone with a sizeable ego.

To be sure, starting an NPO takes some serious thought, effort, and commitment. After all, it's a business! Once you have it going, you have to keep it going; otherwise, you defeat your original purpose. For that reason, most people would shy away from going that route. If they fall on lean times, they can simply reduce their contributions or simply not give to their usual charities. But even if you have your own NPO, you don't have to donate to it on a regular basis. Rather, you give when you can and have most of the assets invested for later disbursement (see later below).

If you start something, you are much more likely to keep it going. And once the vehicle exists, it's much easier to “get in the philanthropic mood.” Until you do that, the dream of starting something is exactly that, an untested dream. (See my essay “Talk is Cheap. Write it Down” from February 2011.)

One of the reasons to start something formal is to involve the whole family, thereby training the next generation in basic business practices as well as philanthropy. And consider having them inherit responsibility instead of (or as well as) monetary assets.

2.3 Public vs. Private Charity

One basic question is whether your NPO will be funded just by you/your family, or whether it will raise money from the public at large. The US taxman sees the former as a *private charity* and the latter as a *public charity*. That said there is nothing stopping a private charity from accepting donations from outside the founding group. In either case, the founders can control the board of directors and run operations as they wish. Of course, if they stray from their stated aims, they risk their donor base drying up.

From a personal tax point of view, an individual can claim up to 30% of her adjusted gross income (AGI) a year as donations to a private charity, whereas the limit is 50% for a public charity. If one gives more than those limits, the excess is rolled over to future tax years until it is used up, which means that the donor actually pays tax on all that excess in the year she donates it, and then gets the deductions in subsequent years.

[An interesting thing here is that you cannot escape the taxman. Say you win a million dollars in the lottery and you give it all to some public charity. As you can only claim half of that in the first year, you still have to pay taxes on the other \$500,000, and you probably don't have that kind of money lying around. Then you get deductions over future years at 50% of your then AGI, which means you might never get the full benefit of the claim especially as the deduction is lost after some years. That is, "Use it or lose it!" Frankly, if you want to give the potentially large winnings of a lottery to a charity, buy the ticket in the charity's name instead.]

2.4 Operating vs. Non-Operating

The next basic question involves the level of control you want over the way in which your disbursements are spent. An *operating NPO* runs its own projects while a *non-operating NPO* partners with one or more other groups that do operate their own projects. Clearly running projects takes administration and bodies, and this is not for most family foundations including mine. That said there's nothing to stop a non-operating NPO from being *involved* in the projects it sponsors.

2.5 Going the 501(c)(3) Route

The US tax code has a subsection whose number really is 501(c)(3)! (There are other related sections worth knowing about, but for most NPOs this is the one to understand.) Most local NPOs do not have 501(c)(3) certification, which means that donations one gives to them—even by the founders of a private NPO— are not tax deductible.

Having this certification takes extra work (such as filing state and federal tax returns), but clearly it has benefits.

2.6 Making Disbursements

I mentioned earlier about the concern you might have with an uneven income. If I start an NPO, what if I can't donate the same amount of money every year or any at all? It's very important to understand the (very big) difference between the two main kinds of charitable fund raising:

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- Each year, giving away everything you raise in that year
- Each year, giving away at least the legal minimum and investing the rest

Most community NPOs (think Parent-Teacher-Associations and local chapters of veterans and service organizations, such as [Rotary](#) and [Lions](#)) are in the first category. Perhaps they save some money for long-term/large projects, but for the most part, they disburse what they raise. That is, the amount they raise and give away is directly proportional to the skills of their fundraisers in that year.

According to US federal law, a 501(c)(3)-certified NPO is required to give away at least slightly less than 5% of its assets each year. The big win here is that an NPO can invest its income and disburse its assets over many years. Have a \$100,000 windfall in appreciation of real estate or stocks? You can claim the tax deduction when you donate it, but the NPO can give away \$5,000/year for at least the next 20 years (and more assuming the money is invested at a profit).

In this poor economic climate, the problem with investing an NPO's assets is the tradeoff between safety and return on investment. In my case, I worked hard for the money I donated, so I'm darn sure I do *not* want my NPO to risk it in some speculative way. As such, the assets go in Federal Government-secured instruments. However, the problem with that is they don't pay anywhere near 5% interest, which is what is needed to keep the NPO going "in perpetuity" without new funding. A second consideration is that the highest rates require locking in the investment for longer periods, perhaps up to five years. How then does the NPO pay for its 5%-minimum disbursements each year? The simplest formula is for the NPO to raise 5% in new donations each year, to cover those disbursements, but that can be problematic for a small, private NPO. That is, it requires an on-going donation stream. Of course, by staggering the maturity dates of investments, so funds become available for disbursement, this can be avoided.

By the way, here's an annoying thing I learned about US bank Certificates of Deposit (CDs). When you buy one, say \$5,000 for five years, the bank never asks you how often you want interest paid. And in many cases, it seems that the buyer has no control. My NPO has had CDs that received interest every 1, 3, 6, 10, 11, or 12 months. The problem here is that a 501(c)(3) has to maintain a record of the average-monthly balance of its assets, and that is complicated if you have to find out the interest in a series of investments every month, and update your records. Having to do so once each year is best, but that might result in a slightly lower effective interest rate.

2.7 The Organizational Requirements

In my case, here are things I needed to do/create:

- **Articles of Incorporation:** An NPO is a legal entity that is a non-profit corporation in the state in which it will be based. To create a company, one needs these articles, which take only a page of text to describe. The articles contain things like a simple statement of the NPO's purpose, the initial corporate officers, the name and address of the corporation's *registered agent*, and what will happen to the assets of the corporation if it is disbanded. This gets your NPO a state corporate ID number, which you use to open bank accounts and such.

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- A Charter: This has as much as you like to define the mission of the NPO. It can be a challenge to write, and it's most important if you are to convince others to donate to your cause. It's for the NPO's own use and is not a legal requirement.
- Bylaws: These detail the rules by which the NPO will operate. Who can be members of the corporation? What are the officer positions and how long can they serve? Can the board of directors charter a private jet to meet at a resort in the Caribbean? How are decisions made? It's for the NPO's own use and is not a legal requirement.
- Corporate Officers: You need at least a President and a Treasurer, who are different people.
- Board Members: You'll want a chair and at least one other director. [Board members can also be corporate officers.]
- 501(c)(3) Certification: This is optional.

It turns out that each of these things is not difficult or complicated even for small NPOs. But again, you are creating a business.

The startup costs involve less than a few hundred dollars, mostly in registration fees. Most importantly, you do *not* need to hire a lawyer or accountant to do the work.

2.8 Expenses and Tax Considerations

Regarding expenses, my NPO pays a state company registration fee and a tax preparation fee. [Eventually, I plan to prepare the 13-page tax return myself.] The few other costs (such as postage, computers, internet usage, and phone) are very small and are covered by me personally or via my consulting business.

While federal tax is payable on all income, donations are *not* considered income. As such, the only income my NPO has is interest on its investments, and the tax rate on that is quite low. No state income tax is payable in my state, Virginia. The county in which my NPO resides requires a business license whose fee is based on income. But as it also excludes interest income from that, the income is zero and so the tax is zero. The county also levies a personal property tax on furniture, equipment, and automobiles owned or leased by businesses, but as my NPO has no such property, it pays no such tax.

In my location, if an NPO invests some of its asset base in a business (such as real estate, a farm or ranch, or some other profit-generating scheme) rather than so-called cash investments, it would pay tax on the profits from those just like an ordinary company.

One of the rules imposed on a 501(c)(3) is that it must make available on demand by any member of the public a copy of its federal tax return for each of its last few years. That said, the names of donors need not be included in that copy.

2.9 On-Going Administration

In my NPO, we perform the following tasks:

1. Operate a checking account into which donations and interest are deposited and from which disbursements are made. However, on average, I keep no more than \$500 there, as it is a non-

interest-bearing account. (Yes, I could have an interest-bearing account, but that would require a much higher balance and all kinds of other rules and restrictions.)

2. Maintain in Quicken that checking account and various investment accounts.
3. Maintain a spreadsheet that tracks the average monthly asset balance (checking, savings, and investments).
4. Maintain a project activity log in a spreadsheet. This tracks all activities and events in chronological order and gives each a category from 5–6 options.
5. Produce board meeting minutes.

I mentioned earlier the possible need to get investment interest information on a regular basis. Another twist is that in the US, a company can declare its tax year to be any 12-month period that starts on the first day of some month. In my NPO's case, its business year does not match the calendar year. But all of the institutions in which the asset base is invested appear to be incapable of issuing annual statements for other than a calendar year! So, when they send their statements to the taxman, of course they report a different amount of interest income than my NPO does on its tax return. *C'est la vie!*

2.10 Choosing Projects

It is all well and good to want to help some less fortunate person or group, but what is your process for deciding on who the recipients will be? If a friend/neighbor's house burns down, can/should your family-run NPO give him \$X,000 to cover immediate basic costs? Maybe. But what if another friend/neighbor has an emergency and they hear about your previous donation? Are you obliged to help them as well?

Be careful to write a clear statement in advance as to the kinds of events and activities you will consider for disbursement and the criteria you will use if you have more applicants than you can service. For example, if you give away scholarships or support for overseas travel, it will look suspicious if only your children or grandchildren are eligible. For competitive awards, it is better to have an independent group of experts select the winners from among the applicants.

My NPO requires that for the most part, each director have a hands-on involvement in their projects. We also require status reports from recipient groups, so we can monitor things.

In the first few years, I had trouble giving away time and money. Most groups I contacted had no way to deal with someone phoning them offering resources. Either they were disorganized, or the front line of contact was so remote from the founders' vision they simply were lost in the bureaucracy! It was quite sad. Eventually, I found a couple of projects that were not only worthy, but the people with whom I spoke were welcoming and came up with lists of ways in which to help in advance of our first face-to-face meeting.

I've rejected far more projects than I've accepted, and I'm a great believer in "tough love." In general, we're in the business of giving *hand-ups*, not *hand-outs*!

Here's an excerpt from my NPO's charter:

The Foundation is a private, family-directed, non-profit organization that provides funding to deserving individuals, organizations, and programs, while allowing recipients to maintain their dignity. Areas in which The Foundation may be involved include, but are not limited to, the following:

- *<list deliberately removed>*

Support for the following cannot or will not be considered:

- Any individual religion or religious organization's non-secular activities. [This is prohibited by the Articles of Incorporation.]
- Any political party, politician, or political candidate, holding or running for any local, state, or national elected office. [This is prohibited by the IRS and is explicitly stated in the Articles of Incorporation.]
- Any organization or individual that receives non-trivial funding from organized casino-style gambling games (such as slot machines, roulette wheels, and games involving cards or dice), that are run directly by, or directly for, that organization or individual. [However, organizations or individuals receiving trivial funding from small-scale social gaming such as Bingo, raffles, and the like, are not excluded by the above clause.]

2.11 Lessening the Administrative Burden

A lot of local NPOs simply spend what they raise each year, and they don't have board members with the interest and/or expertise in managing a business. They are also not 501(c)(3)-certified. It so happens, that a niche-market has grown up in the US that involves 501(c)(3)-certified NPOs that exist *solely* to provide a business umbrella for those local NPOs. For example, an NPO raises money and sends that along to its umbrella parent, which invests it. Usually, the NPOs disburse all their money at the end of their business year, so the parent has to write out checks only once each year. Depending on the amount of money involved, the only fee the parent charges might be the interest on the money raised. And the parent may take care of most, if not all, of the federal, state, and local government paperwork. There are also entities called Donor-Advised Funds (DAFs).

2.12 Conclusion

If by the end of reading this essay, you are convinced that starting an NPO is *not* for you that's just fine with me. But at least I hope it has given you something to think about and some ideas on focusing your efforts. In particular, hopefully you can see that organized philanthropy is not just for the very rich. Whichever way you want to get involved in helping others, just do it, and thank you. Oh, and remember that you have to take good and long-lasting care of yourself before you can effectively take good and long-lasting care of others!

3. February 2013, “The Big Move”

My guess is that most of us probably live in relatively few different places during our lives. In my case, I left home soon after my 16th birthday, by which time I'd lived at five different addresses. Since then, I've lived at 10 more. Overall, I've averaged fewer than four years/house. And, *NO*, I'm not in the Witness Protection Program!

I started accumulating stuff soon after I left home and as finances allowed. I was 18 years old when I “set up house” with two friends. Seven years later, I traveled more than halfway around the world to take up a job for at least a year. Putting my life into two suitcases was quite a challenge and required ruthlessness. So, when the travel plans changed drastically only weeks before departure, and I was limited to only one case, halving my “treasures” turned out to be quite easy. Who needs two sets of socks and underwear anyway? [By the way, regarding socks, you can get five days from a pair: wear them, turn them inside out, swap feet, turn them inside out again, and go without! This is a well-known fact exploited around the world by young men who have left home and who have to do their own laundry.] I should mention that some years later, once it was clear that I was staying abroad, I did ship a container of stuff that had been in storage.

Apart from having a limited baggage allowance, moving abroad requires one to evaluate one's life from a number of perspectives. Can I do without all my favorite things, my familiar environment, and my friends? So much so, that if one stays in the same environment for a long time, beyond a certain point, moving across town—forget about moving to another city, state, or country—can be a very intimidating prospect for all those people who get very settled in their ways. “How will I make friends?” “Will I have good neighbors?” “Will there be room for darling Tricky Woo to run and play?” “I'll have to start from scratch.” “I can't bear to think about it.” “That settled it; I'm **not** moving!”

In 1984, I moved to a townhouse. A month later, my son was born, and he lived there until he completed his first four years of university. I lived there a total of 28 years. Often when I went down into the basement, I'd look around at all the stuff I had in storage—indeed had around the house in general—just waiting to be used perhaps, maybe, one day! From arriving in the US in 1979 with one suitcase and a briefcase, I'd progressed to a 1-, 2-, then 3-bedroom apartment, and then to a 3-level, 3-bedroom townhouse. Where did *need* end and *want* start? Having traveled to the third world and seen whole families living in one or two small rooms, I was pretty sure I could live with less in a smaller space without any unnecessary hardship. I was very interested in downsizing not only my living space, but my life as well.

This essay outlines the process I used to prepare and sell that townhouse, to determine what sort of place I'd like to live in next, and to find and move to that place.

3.1 It's All in the Planning

I started out by following my own advice, and making a written plan. (See my essay from May 2011, “Planning for Success”. Over several months, it was revised and expanded. One of my golden rules is, “If something is worth doing, it's worth doing right!” Besides, buying and/or selling a house is about the biggest financial transaction most of us will ever carry out.

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The goal was to sell my townhouse and, hopefully, to downsize, which meant getting the house ready for sale, selling it, finding a new place to live, and moving. Very quickly, I recognized that selling one place and buying another were both big tasks on their own, and combining them would complicate things especially if I could find a new place, but not sell the old one. After all, there was a big housing slump here in the US, and I wasn't going to sell at a low price. Besides, there was one big question: In what area did I really want to live? In reality, I could live within an hour of any major airport in the world in any place that had a decent internet connection. However, not only doesn't that help narrow the problem it expands it hugely!

Having owned one residence or another pretty much continuously for 36 years, and having lived in societies in which home ownership is the pinnacle of personal financial achievement, I thought only of owning the next place. However, somewhere along the way I had an epiphany. To separate completely the selling and buying stages, why not rent for a year in between, during which time I'd figure out "what next and where next?" And if I didn't have an answer, I could rent for another year! So, the plan became to sell my house, to then rent it back from the new owner while I looked for a new place, and then to move. Then a year or so later, I'd look to buy another place. Yes, it would involve moving twice, but that just meant I'd have two chances to get rid of stuff and to re-evaluate my downsizing plan. (Something good really does come from everything.) And most importantly, buying the new place would *not* be contingent on selling the old place.

To begin, on the selling side, I identified two real estate agents who both came highly recommended. I met with each separately and explained my plan. I asked for their advice on how to prepare my townhouse, and I wanted to know the best times of the year to have a place on the market. In fact, I had a whole list of questions, which I refined as I went. With the advent of the internet and electronic property-access lock-box cards, things had changed quite a lot since I last bought or sold a property. I made no commitment to either of them regarding using them for the sale, and rightly, they considered it an investment in a future possible relationship. We made a thorough inspection of the house and I made notes about all the suggestions they each made regarding renovation, cleaning, and other preparation. Prior to their visits, I'd made a detailed list of all the things I thought might be factors, based simply on common sense (which, unfortunately, doesn't appear to be so common), and I was very happy to find it covered the vast majority of things. I then wrote a detailed renovation plan with a timeline.

In parallel, on the renting/moving side, I started to make notes about my requirements. There was just me, I wanted to rent for at least a year, and I was happy to get rid of a lot of stuff. Besides, I was going to repaint the inside of my old house and replace the carpet before the house went on the market, so why move everything out temporarily only to move it back again, and then move it permanently when I leave? Better just to get rid of stuff during the renovation stage. [Many people I know can't bear to think about being separated from their stuff. "I can't decide what to get rid of, so I'll just pack it and take it to my new place. I can sort through it there. Sure!" I can say with absolute certainty that that is *not* a plan for success! By the way, I highly recommend listening to George Carlin's take on stuff.]

Regarding my next, or at least a future, style of living, I explored the idea of having a really small, permanent home base and traveling in a camper van, a travel trailer (called a *caravan* by some), or a

Motor Home/Recreational Vehicle (RV). I also considered buying land and buying a prefabricated, transportable home, or building a log cabin from a kit.

Finally, I “bit the bullet” and decided I’d buy a mobile phone to help me in locating the rental property. Now don’t fall out of your chair just yet. Rex with a mobile? Yes! However, as you’ll read later, I still haven’t violated my principles from my November 2010 essay, “Technology, Unplugged – Part 1”.

3.2 The Renovations and Preparation

The main renovation tasks were as follows:

- Replace the vanity cabinets, sinks, faucets, towel rails, and lighting in two full bathrooms, a half bathroom, and a vanity area in the master bedroom. [The bathrooms themselves had been renovated some years earlier.]
- Remove all window treatments and brackets from all walls and ceilings, repair the drywall, remove all wallpaper, and paint all inside walls and ceilings.
- Repair and paint all exposed wood outdoors.
- Replace all carpet.

Minor tasks included pressure washing the deck, landscaping both front and rear yards, trimming ivy growing up the front walls, and cleaning.

On the purging and preparation-to-move front, I dealt with the following:

- Disposed of most of my professional library. (I retained “visiting” rights, however!)
- Donated bookcases, loads of office supplies and equipment, and many personal things to thrift shops and Non-Profit organizations.
- Gave away tools and personal stuff to friends and acquaintances. [In the end, anyone who came to visit had to take something home with them when they left!]
- Made numerous runs to the recycling center, disposing of many hundreds of books and the shredded remains of 25 years of personal records (after I’d scanned copies to my computer).
- Recycled or donated 20 years-worth of old personal computers and equipment.
- Disposed of all hazardous waste (e.g., paint and chemicals)

This all took place over an 8-month period, at my own (controlled) pace. By the time it was all done, the place looked so good I thought perhaps that I should stay in it. And, in fact, if I didn’t get a decent offer, that’s exactly what I planned to do!

3.3 On the Market We Go

I decided to have the house ready for sale by mid-January, and although mid-winter might seem a bad time to sell, I was assured that it was one of the three best times. While there might not be many buyers, neither are there many properties. Besides, when it comes down to it, you only need one, the right one.



When the first open house was held, I had my feet up on a Caribbean island where it was 80 degrees F (27C) *with wind chill!* After that, I was in-town for subsequent open houses, but was asked to “vacate the premises.” Each time I came home, I had to locate certain things that I’d left out, but which the selling agent had hidden from public view “lest they upset the karma of a possible sale.” How dare I leave a clean skillet on the stovetop? Oh, and thou shalt not put any blue tablets in the toilet water tank while the house is on the market. Apparently, although prospective buyers may well have blue water in their toilets,

they are not allowed to see it in a house that’s for sale. Say what!

Apart from open houses, buyer agents came by during the week to look. All of them actually called ahead and made an appointment, but just in case they didn’t I had to actually keep the place in tip-top condition all the time, as in *make the bed every morning and do the dishes after every meal*. Oh, the games people play!

During open house, every light in the place had to be on and all the blinds had to be open. But with its being winter, that was hardly energy-efficient, but, hey, it’s not the agent’s money!

3.4 The Serious Offer and Negotiations

A couple of weeks after the house had gone on the market, I received an offer that was so low, I considered it an insult, and to the buyer’s dismay, I completely disregarded it. Then came that one buyer I wanted. She and her agent spent no more than 10 minutes looking through, and a few days later submitted an offer, which was low, but not insultingly so. I countered by dropping my price just a few thousand and I re-presented the long list of renovation and replacement work. Her next offer went up almost all the difference, and we soon made a deal. That was five weeks after the place had gone on the market.

As it happens, having a signed contract at a given price is just the start, as that was subject to several inspections. One inspector found a faulty power outlet and broken seals on two windows, one large one small. So, I repaired/replaced those. He claimed the chimney needed to be cleaned, but as it had never ever been used, I refused. He claimed that the roof needed replacing, to which I countered that it was done 10 years before and had a life of at least 25 years. He tried to save face by insisting it be cleaned. I refused, but my wimpy agent offered the buyer money from his commission towards that. The house failed the radon test. \$1,000 later, that problem was fixed (although it resulted in the installation of an exhaust fan that would run 24-hours a day forever).

Finally, we agreed we were done, but as neither party was in a hurry, we delayed settlement for several months. During that time, I had the buyer over several times for afternoon tea, so she could measure things and plan her own move. I also prepared a detailed list of things regarding maintenance as well as a list of local businesses she might care to know about, as she was moving from out-of-state.

3.5 The Settlement

The buyer and her agent, and my agent and I met in a conference room at a title company. After signing lots of sheets of papers, we shook hands and went our separate ways. There were no last-minute snags, and the proceeds were transferred to my bank within 24 hours. The sales contract gave me a 5-week rent-back during which time I had to keep the place “in good repair.”

3.6 The Search for a Place to Rent

Over a number of months, I'd been driving around several neighboring, rural counties getting a feel for the geography and kinds of places available. Along the way, I was refining my criteria. Then, as soon as the settlement check cleared, I started my search in earnest.

- Using an online search facility, I identified 12 potential places and spent a weekend planning an efficient order in which to view each from the outside and without an agent. (I discovered that nowadays, a buyer also needs an agent, unless it's a private sale.)
- I bought a prepaid-card mobile phone, so I could interact with renting agents as I was driving around reading their advertising signs.
- I set my alarm for quite early on a Monday morning. The weather out was miserable, I hadn't slept well, and I had a raging headache. Then as I pumped gas in my car, I locked the keys inside. Things went downhill from there!
- The first house was very nice, in a quiet neighborhood, in the largest town of the neighboring county, but it had three levels, which meant stairs. It, or something like it, would be my safe option if I failed to find “the right thing” in my rent-back period.
- Then came some truly forgettable places, some truly awful locations, sometimes along bad or unfinished local roads.
- Then I found a split-level house on an acre of land with many large, evergreen trees. It looked very good and it came with great neighbors. I called the agent listed on the sign to find that someone had submitted an application the previous day. Bugger!
- After more bad weather, more crappy places, crappy locations, and bad roads, I followed a sealed road along the tallest hill in the area in heavy fog. Forget getting in and out on the steep roads in that area.
- I eventually found a very nice, small stone cottage way out in the country, but it had stairs, and I probably couldn't get large furniture up the narrow staircase.
- By 7 pm, I was back home, dejected. But, of course, it was only Day 1 and the 5-week countdown clock had hardly moved.
- At 7:30 pm, I phoned the agent I'd spoken to earlier that day and suggested we submit a second offer. She said that wasn't worth the effort; however, a new place had just gone on the market that afternoon and she suggested I look at it online. I did, and despite the outrageously high monthly rental, I fell in love with it. After looking at all the photos, reading the detailed description, finding the location on a map, and considering the cost, I called her back that evening and asked her to set up a viewing the next day. (Instead of thinking about how much money it cost, I thought in terms of how many days a month I'd have to bill clients to pay the

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rent. When that came up to a very low number, it was a no-brainer decision. Besides, the place was on five acres with a 4-acre forest. In fact, it really was a botanic garden with a house in it!)

- On the Tuesday, I inspected the place and filled out an application.
- I was approved on the Wednesday.
- On Friday, I signed a 1-year lease and got the keys.
- On Saturday, I started moving in.

So, one day after I started looking, I found my dream house, and I made only one call on my mobile.

3.7 The Rent-Back

I had negotiated five weeks rent back, which I figured was sufficient time to find a place to rent. I moved all my stuff out in a week, so the only thing I needed to do in the remaining four weeks was to clean a place that had been painted and had new carpet. It was not a difficult task. On one of the final visits I made to it I thought, "I lived here for 28 years, but I am so much in love with my new place and the whole idea of moving to a new life that I have absolutely no separation anxiety whatsoever. After all, it was just a house! *Home* is where I currently live."

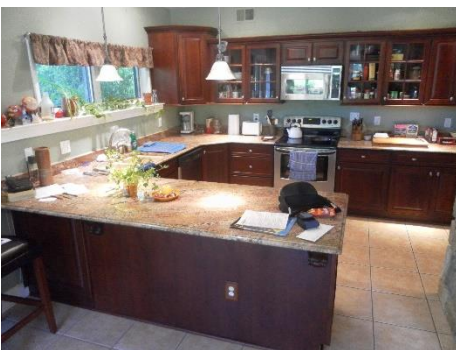
3.8 The Move

I moved a lot of stuff by myself in a minivan from which I had removed the seats. On several days, I had an assistant who helped with some of the mid-size stuff. I unpacked boxes as I moved, so I could reuse them and to see the progress I'd made.

For the last two days, my son came to visit, and we moved all the big/heavy stuff using a pickup truck. There was only one door into the new house that could accommodate large things, and even that had to be removed to get the sofa through. Although it rained a little that week, it didn't while we were driving between houses.

After a number of sports injuries and subsequent knee surgeries, I pretty much avoid certain physical activities. However, I'm a 110%-effort guy, so I pushed hard, which resulted in my left knee swelling considerably. Fortunately, that was temporary, but it took 10 days to recover fully.

3.9 Life in Paradise



I'd abandoned pay-tv several years earlier, and I very quickly found I had no real TV reception via an antenna. Thirty seconds after discovering that, I viewed that as a positive thing. After all, I wanted to spend more time reading, writing, entertaining, and watching videos. Also, the internet service was slow, but it was adequate. I really didn't need much speed for email and casual internet browsing.

The kitchen was a delight, and as I like cooking and entertaining, I set about making full use of that.



The property came with a John Deere tractor with which I had to cut the grass. That brought out the farmer in me (as you can see from the accompanying photo at left). The outdoor deck and entertaining area were wonderful, and I ate outdoors as often as possible. I also sat there late at night and watched the stars. And the forest was complete with deer, rabbits, and lots of birds. Even a large turtle came to visit one day. There were no streetlights glaring in my windows and the constant noise of a city was a fading memory.

There were a few adjustments, but nothing major: no pizza delivery; I couldn't just walk to the store; there was no town trash/recycling pickup; I had a 150-foot drive to shovel if there was snow; I had a well (no power=no water) and a septic tank. I did, however, have no stairs (YES!)

and a window over the kitchen sink (and YES! again). I had a great landlord and some nice neighbors. And I had a 2-car garage, my first ever cover for a car.

3.10 The Postmortem Results

Despite the national downturn in home sales, I got a good price for my house. It helped that my city, Reston, is always in demand and that a subway line is coming to the area in the next year. The fact that I didn't have to sell by any given date made it a calmer process. My detailed plans all held up and there were no unpleasant surprises.

Regarding downsizing, my new place is slightly smaller including a 2-car garage, but not that much so. However, by downsizing all my stuff, I'm well positioned for the next move at which time I expect I'll get rid of quite a few more things. Along the way, I reinforced my dislike for the real estate business.

I used the move as an opportunity to change all sorts of things; basically, it allowed a complete attitude change in many respects.

3.11 What's Next?

Since my move, I constantly notice which of my things I'm actually using. Of all the things I kept during the big purge, I still don't use 90% of them on any regular basis or at all!

Having scouted out the area to which I moved, I've decided to buy something small, and I've refined my selection criteria and figured an upper price limit. My plan is to buy 2–3 months before my rental agreement expires, so I'll have plenty of time to do renovations and repairs. I'm quite prepared to redo completely a kitchen and bathroom, to paint inside and out, and to replace all the floor coverings. All those things are cosmetic and can easily be changed. All that said, if I don't find the right place, I'm quite willing to rent again, but definitely something smaller and much cheaper.

3.12 Conclusion

I firmly believe that one can and should plan for success, but one should leave room for the nice, fortuitous surprises that can come along. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. I've also reconfirmed that

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it's good practice to re-evaluate one's lifestyle occasionally and to expand one's horizons. I consider the whole move to be an adventure with a safety net.

If I hadn't called back that rental agent, I never would have found my dream rental house! Our lives are defined by the actions we take and, just as importantly, by the ones we don't take.

Now I mentioned earlier that I'd finally bought a mobile phone. It's a nifty Samsung unit that cost only \$10, and I subscribed to the [Tracfone](#) pay-as-you-go plan. The phone came with double-minutes and after I had it for a couple of months, I bought a 2-year card that gave me 1,000 minutes. The total cost is slightly less than \$8/month. The thing is I don't use it unless it's absolutely necessary or very convenient, and only a couple of people have my number. I am so disciplined that in six months, I've used it to make fewer than a dozen calls. Besides, I have unlimited calling on my home phone, so why pay for calls that I can make at home for free? I haven't even activated the message-answering option, and I *don't* do texting or email on it. Unlike many people, I have a very full life without having to play with my phone every spare moment.

4. March 2013, “What is Normal - Part 6: Weights and Measures”

I was raised in Australia in the 1950s and '60s, where the Imperial System of units was used. In 1970, I started working in chemistry where everything was metric. Then, in the early 1970's, Australia adopted the Metric System. In 1979, I moved to the US, which has a modified version of the Imperial System. However, I still travel regularly to countries that use the metric system. As a result of these varied experiences, I can easily switch from feet to meters, from miles to kilometers, and from pounds to kilograms.

The Imperial System, or variants thereof, is sometimes referred to as the *foot-pounds-second (FPS) system*. At times, the metric system was referred to as the *centimeter-gram-second (CGS) system*. Later, there was the *meter-kilogram-second (MKS) system*, but that was replaced by the *International System of Units (SI)*. Of course, it is perfectly normal that there are other systems as well, including the tongue-in-check *FFF* system.

4.1 The Imperial System

I well remember being in a group of students marching around the yard in elementary school reciting various weights and measure values, such as the following: 12 inches in a foot, 3 feet in a yard, 1,760 yards in a mile, 5,280 feet in a mile, 63,360 inches in a mile, and so on. [I remember doing likewise with multiplication tables!]

Add to those numbers, things like 16 ounces in a pound, 2,240 pounds in a ton, 2 pints in a quart, 4 quarts in a gallon, 640 acres in a square mile, and water freezes at 32 degrees Fahrenheit and boils at 212 degrees F, and you soon see the problem. There is neither rhyme nor reason with respect to the multiplier; you simply have to learn these by rote!

It's right about now that I'm reminded of one of my most often-cited quotes: “Nothing is a complete waste; it can always serve as a bad example!” [Anon]

4.2 The Metric System

Compared to the Imperial System the metric system is infinitely simpler to teach, learn, and remember. For a given category of measurement such as length/distance there is a single base name, the *meter* (for which I'll use the US spelling). The quantity is expressed using one of a small family of optional universal prefixes resulting in things like millimeter, centimeter, and kilometer. Here are the basic prefixes:

Prefix	Meaning	Common Usage Example
<u>milli</u>	One thousandth	milliliter, milligram, millimeter
<u>centi</u>	One hundredth	centiliter, centimeter

<u>deci</u>	One tenth	<i>Note that <u>decibel</u> is not an example</i>
<none>	<base unit>	liter, gram, meter
<u>deca</u> (or deka)	Ten	decagram
<u>hecto</u> (or hecta)	Hundred	hectare
<u>kilo</u>	Thousand	kilogram, kilometer, kilobyte

Other commonly used prefixes are mega- (megabyte, megahertz, megapixel, megaliter), giga- (gigabyte, gigahertz), tera- (terabyte), micro- (microsecond), and nano- (nanosecond, nanometer). For the complete set click [here](#).

Note that in the world of computer science 1KB (one kilobyte) is often understood to be 2^{10} bytes, which is 1,024 bytes, a number slightly more than 1,000.

By the way, a milliliter (ml) is the same thing as a cubic centimeter (cc).

4.3 Differences between the US and Imperial Systems

According to Wikipedia, "United States customary units are a system of measurements commonly used in the United States. Many U.S. units are virtually identical to their imperial counterparts, but the U.S. customary system developed from English units used in the British Empire before the system of imperial units was standardized in 1824. Several numerical differences from the imperial system are present."

About 20 years ago, I was visiting friends here in the US when their son and I got talking about what he'd been learning at boy scouts. He told me that a gallon of water weighed 8 pounds, to which I replied that that didn't sound right. As far as I knew, a gallon weighed 10 pounds. It turns out we were both right when you took into account the contexts in which we each had learned our measures, he in the US and me in Australia. At approximately 4.5 liters, an Imperial gallon is about 20% bigger than a US gallon (which is about 3.8 liters). Correspondingly, an Imperial pint is 20 fluid ounces while a US pint is only 16.

Back in the early 1970's, when asked how much I weighed, I replied, "12 stone 8 pounds." However, the US does not use the stone. As a stone is 14 pounds, for Americans, the equivalent weight would be 176 pounds.

The US also has *short* versions of several weight units. For example, the US uses the short ton, which has 2,000 pounds, while the long ton used by Imperial unit folks has 2,240 pounds. The Imperial hundredweight has 112 pounds, whereas a US hundredweight is only 100 pounds. Do not confuse a short or long ton with a metric ton (or *tonne*).

There have been various attempts to have the US "go metric"; however, none has succeeded on any grand scale. In any event, the fact that the US does not require imports to conform to the US system,

combined with the influx of products from countries that do use the metric system means that a mixture of measures exists. For example, one can buy a car with 350 cubic-inch engine or a 5-liter V8.

America's immediate neighbors, Canada and Mexico, use the metric system, and as one gets close to those borders, one sees distance signposts in both miles and kilometers.

4.4 Abstract systems

If you cook with recipes, you will be familiar with measures such as cup, teaspoon, and tablespoon. And while these have formal definitions, we tend not to think of them as such. For me, I know that to cook white rice, I simply need put 1 cup of rice in 2 cups of cold water, and boil. (Of course, I could just as easily substitute a drinking glass or a bucket for the cup; the proportions stay the same.)

Some years ago, I stayed with a family in Japan, and I asked if I could cook a Mexican meal for them and their neighbors. They were delighted not only to try Mexican, but also to see a man in the kitchen, something that is apparently quite rare in that country except for chefs in restaurants. (It was a challenge to find all the ingredients to make tacos.) The problem arose when the three women pulled out their notepads and were ready to write copious notes on how to prepare the food. I started cooking the ground beef. "How long do you cook it?" I replied, "Until done!" "At what temperature?", they asked. "Adjust the heat as you like", I replied. Of course, when it came to adding spices, I simply said, "Add sufficient to taste." This so frustrated the onlookers that they put away their notepads; it was clear they needed strict rules to cook, and I almost always "fly by the seat of my pants."

4.5 Dealing with Conversions

It is likely that relatively few people will experience a change in their weights and measures systems unless they emigrate, or their country adopts the metric system. However, for those of us who travel internationally on a semi-regular basis, we do have to change contexts if we are to understand our local environment. Just how much does gasoline cost in Country X? Seeing a price of 1.73 Euros/liter on a pump gives you no clue as to how many US\$/gallon that is, and vice versa. And although the signpost says that its 23 miles to the next exit, just how far is that in kilometers? Another example is tire pressure. In the US/Imperial world, we measure the number of pounds-per-square-inch (psi); however, in the metric world, they use kilopascals. And as for fuel efficiency, the familiar miles-per-gallon (mpg) becomes liters/100 km, which employs a reversed ratio. Fortunately, many cars sold in the US today have speedometers in both US and metric units, so drivers can tell just how much over the speed limit they really are driving when they cross into Canada or Mexico.

From my Aussie experience, I remember my mother having trouble with sugar. Previously, it came in 4-lb (pound) bags, and for a whole host of things she made in bulk—think preserving fruit in jars—she knew how many bags to buy/use. However, when the metric system was adopted, the bags were now 2kg, which at about 4.4lbs is more than just a little bit larger. A major adjustment was needed. Similarly, she needed to convert the degrees C in recipes on printed packaging to her degrees F, as she wasn't about to replace her old oven "just because some fool in government changed the measurement system."

A common thing to buy for lunch was a 1-pint carton of flavored milk; however, the metric equivalent was 600 ml, which is significantly larger. Basically, certain assumptions that had been proven correct for years were no longer true, and some manufacturers took advantage of that by downsizing their product yet keeping the price the same. How would the average consumer tell the difference? [I recall that this kind of thing was widespread when various countries converted to the Euro.]

4.6 Length, Distance, and Thickness

Depending on the size of the thing being measured, we use different units, for example: A thou (a US mil) is a thousandth of an inch. Although it's used in various contexts in engineering and manufacturing, I first came across it when checking/setting the gap in an automobile's sparkplug, using a feeler gauge. Metric versions measure in hundredths of a millimeter.

Regarding altitude and ocean depth, we talk in thousands of feet (or meters). Occasionally, we use miles—as in Denver, Colorado, the mile-high city—and in near-earth space.

When it comes to human hair and cells, we use micron, which is a synonym for micrometer. And as the name implies, nanotechnology is measured in nanometers.

Most of us raised in the British Commonwealth learned that the length of the pitch for the game of cricket is exactly 22 yards long; that is, one chain, and that there are 10 chains in a furlong and 80 chains in a mile. A chain is 100 links or 4 rods (or 4 poles or 4 perches). (The length of horse races is often stated in furlongs.)

The term mile is shorthand for statute mile, and is 5,280 feet (1,609 meters). The latter term is used to distinguish it from the nautical mile, which at 6,076.1 feet (1,852 meters) is longer. A nautical mile is approximately one minute of arc of longitude at the equator. An international treaty defines territorial waters as a 12 nautical-mile strip along a coastal at the average low-tide mark.

The fathom is a non-metric unit equaling 6 feet. It is mostly used in the context of water depth. Initially, it was the distance between an average man's outstretched arms. According to Wikipedia, "It is customary, when burying the dead, to inter the corpse at a fathom's depth, or six feet under. A burial at sea (where the body is weighted to force it to the bottom) requires a minimum of six fathoms of water. This is the origin of the phrase 'to deep six' as meaning to discard, or dispose of."

Another nautical measure is the cable, which is one tenth of a nautical mile.

Many of us know that Jules Verne wrote a popular book called 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, and that some characters in European fairy tales wore seven-league boots. But just how much is a league? Its three miles. Originally, the term referred to the distance a person or a horse could walk in an hour.

By the way, back in the good old days, the meter was defined as "one-quarter of one ten-millionth of the circumference of the Earth (along the great circle coincident with the meridian of longitude passing through Paris)"; however, nowadays, it's based on the speed of light. [Why can't they just leave things alone?]

4.7 Speed

Yes, we all know about vehicle speeds of miles/hour (and kilometers/hour), but what about stuff that goes really fast? How do we measure that? The fastest thing we know of is the speed at which light travels in a vacuum. At 186,282 miles/second (299,792,458 meters/second), that's pretty darned fast. [The second fastest thing I know of was my 8-year-old son when spitting out a slice of dill pickle—which he knew in advance that he didn't like—that I had bet him a dollar he wouldn't eat!]

Now we think of seeing things instantaneously; however, with the earth being approximately 93 million miles from the sun, at the speed of light a sunray takes about 500 seconds (that is, 8 1/3 minutes) to reach us. This distance from the Earth to the sun is one astronomical unit. [By the way, sunlight reflected by the moon takes only about 1.2 seconds to reach Earth.] As such, looking very long distances—such as with a space telescope—we see light that has traveled a very long way and thus gives us a picture of what *used* to be there. We currently have *no* way to see what is actually there now! A earthlier example is in communicating voice via a satellite link; there is a short delay. And the time it takes to send a message between Earth and Mars takes about 5–20 minutes depending on those planets' positions.

For those of you who have a lot of time on your hands, there is the light year, which is the distance that light travels in a vacuum in one Julian year (that is, in 365.25 days). That's 6 trillion miles (10 trillion kms). [Of course, if you worked in astrometry, you'd prefer the parsec instead.]

For all of you budding interstellar space travelers, after the sun, our nearest known star is Proxima Centauri, which is about 4.22 light-years away. As that is some 32 trillion miles (42 trillion kms) away, you'll need to get an early start.

Compared to light, sound travels v-e-r-y s-l-o-w-l-y, at a mere 1,126 feet/second (343.2 meters/second). According to Wikipedia, "The speed of an object ... divided by the speed of sound ... is called the Mach number. Objects moving at speeds greater than Mach 1 are traveling at supersonic speeds." (By my calculation, my subcompact car tops out around 0.08 Mach; don't blink or you'll miss me as I race on by!) One application of this knowledge is in figuring out how far away a storm is. When the lightning flashes, it reaches an observer more or less instantaneously; however, the accompanying thunder takes 5 seconds to travel each mile (3 seconds each km), so each second delay between seeing the lightning and hearing the thunder is 1/5 of a mile (0.32 km).

To all you "Sesame Street" sailors, today is brought to you by the letter arrrr (as pronounced like a pirate), and a knot is one nautical mile (1.85 km) per hour, which is about 15% faster than 1 statute mile/hour. And yes, the name comes from counting the number of knots in a line.

4.8 Area

In the metric system, smaller areas—including a house lot—are measured in square meters, while a farm would be measured in hectares, with a hectare being about 2.5 acres. Every so often, I meet a farmer in my area here in rural Northern Virginia. When I ask him how much land he has, he typically replies, "About 75 acres." To which I reply, "That's not a farm! In Australia, my sheep dog had a yard bigger than that!" [The farm on which I was raised had 4,000 acres, and the average size farm in my

hometown area these days is 6,000 acres.] Now if you go into the Aussie outback to visit a sheep or cattle station, you're talking property sizes in the hundreds of square miles, and where people commute by light aircraft. There are 640 acres in a square mile.

In Australia during the Imperial days, the floor space of a house was measured in squares where a square was 10x10 feet. An average-size house in my hometown area was 12–13 squares. The 3-storey townhouse I lived in for many years here in the US was 26 squares, and many McMansions in the area I now live are 50+ squares and sit on 5 acres: what a country!

If you are looking to measure teeny, tiny things, check out the unit barn.

4.9 Temperature

The two most common temperature scales are Fahrenheit, written as °F, and Celsius (also known as *Centigrade*), written as °C. Water freezes as 32 °F (0 °C) and boils at 212 °F (100 °C). And just in case you don't know the conversion formulas, here they are:

$$^{\circ}\text{F} = ((^{\circ}\text{C} \times 9) \div 5) + 32$$

$$^{\circ}\text{C} = ((^{\circ}\text{F} - 32) \times 5) \div 9$$

Trivia question: Which temperature is exactly the same number in both °F and °C? Answer: –40. Don't believe me; use the conversion formulas above.

Now it's worth noting that the boiling temperature mentioned above is not *universal*. This is because it is defined in terms of one standard atmospheric pressure. Specifically, the boiling point of water is lower at lower pressure and higher at higher pressure. For example, go up 1,000 feet (≈300 meters) and the atmospheric pressure decreases by about 4%. So, when cooking in the mile-high city of Denver, Colorado, for example, you'll need to reinterpret some of your recipes.

As you well know, some people have way too much time on their hands, and so the Kelvin scale was born. The starting point for this is absolute zero (OK is –273.15 °C and –459.67 °F), the temperature at which all thermal motion ceases. [For me, I'm certain that 70 °F (21 °C) is already too cold. In any event, in the Australian vernacular, absolute zero is known as *Bloody cold* or *Colder than a witch's tit!*] The Kelvin scale simply is the Celsius scale with 273.15 subtracted. Not to be outdone, some scientists not of the metric faith and with idle hands came up with the Rankine scale, which also represents absolute zero, but with a value of 0 °R. This scale simply is the Fahrenheit scale with 459.67 subtracted.

Here are some numbers you might find interesting:

- The normal human body temperature when taken orally is approximately 98 °F (37 °C).
- The hottest temperature ever recorded on earth was 134 °F (56.7 °C) in 1913 in Death Valley, California
- The surface temperature of the sun is about 9,941 °F (5,505 °C), which as Icarus discovered to his own peril, was a little too hot for high flying especially when his feathered wings were held together with wax.

- At an altitude of 34,000 feet (10,460 meters), the temperature outside my plane while flying recently over remote Canada on my way to Japan was -63°F (-52.8°C). As a result, I kept my window wound up tight!

4.10 Odds and Ends

Here is a pot-pourri of other units:

According to Wikipedia, a span “is the distance measured by a human hand, from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the little finger. In ancient times, a span was considered to be half a cubit.” Do you know how long your hand’s span is? I find that useful when I’m buying something whose size I’d like to check, yet I don’t have a tape measure handy.

If you want to measure the height of your horse, you’d do so in hands, one of which is 4 inches long. When it comes to fractions, this is a rather interesting unit. Specifically, the “decimal” places use a number in base 4 rather than base 10 (decimal). For example, consider a horse 58 inches high, which is $14\frac{1}{2}$ hands. This is written as 14.2 hands, not as 14.5, as you might expect. A horse an inch taller would be 14.3 hands, and one another inch taller would be 15 hands (not 14.4)! [To learn more about number bases, see my August, 2012 essay, “What is Normal – Part 5: Numbers and Counting Systems”.]

Now that I’ve moved to a house in the country and I have a potbelly stove, I’m considering buying some firewood. In the US (and Canada), that comes by the cord. A cord of wood occupies a volume of 128 cubic feet (3.62 cubic meters), or a stack about 4x4x8 feet. The metric folks use the stere. In the UK, the term fathom can be used to measure a quantity of wood. Now, I ask you, “Is that normal?”

We’ve all heard about gemstones having “x-carats,” but just what is a carat? It’s a unit of weight equal to 0.007055 ounces (200 mg). A carat is subdivided into 100 points.

If you do enough crossword puzzles or play enough Scrabble games, you’ll come across the printers’ measures em and en. Some of their siblings are pica and point.

If after reading this you still have free time, check out bushel, dram, grain, pennyweight, and scruple, plus avoirdupois weight, troy weight, and apothecaries' weight.

4.11 Conclusion

For more information than you probably will ever want to know about units of measure, click here.

In 1972, in the week following Australia’s implementation of the metric system, I was at my neighborhood deli. An elderly gentleman ahead of me said that he wanted two kilograms of milk, at which the owner looked over at me and smiled, and served the man two liters. Yes, it was amusing, but at least the customer was trying to get with the program.

During the changeover Down Under, there was a national debate on the pronunciation of the word *kilometer*, and even the then Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, got into the debate. Was it ki-lo-me-ter or ki-lom-eter? The best response I can make is that we don’t say ki-log-ram or ki-lol-i-ter. [Regarding

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Gough, the joke goes that he had a sure-fired way of shortening the unemployment lines; simply ask the people to stand closer together!]

In the 1970's, the band [10CC](#) had quite a few hit songs. If you follow the hyperlink and read carefully the section titled "Original line-up, 1972–76" you'll see that the band's name refers to a volume of a certain body fluid emitted from a male's nether regions. After that, the name *The Beatles* seems almost banal!

By the way, did you hear about the one-armed fisherman? He caught a fish this long! (Holds up one hand.) Now that joke hardly measures up, does it?

5. April 2013, “Standards – The Secret Life of a Language Lawyer”

On a very regular basis, many of us plug an electric appliance into a wall outlet. Not only do we expect the plug to fit, but we also expect the appliance to work, probably without even thinking about it. Yet that can be so only if all the suppliers of electric sockets and plugs serving a given region follow the same socket-and-plug design, and the corresponding electrical conventions. And as you might have experienced, while you can take a device with a US plug and use it directly in Japan, you cannot do so in Germany, and vice versa; at the very least, you'll need an adaptor. [I have several: one is a single piece that allows selected prongs to protrude; the other provides a series of convertors that stack on one another. Both handle US, European, UK, and Australasian inputs and outputs. See my January 2015 essay, “[Sockets, Plugs, and Cables](#)”.]

Since December 1984, I've worked on a number of US and international standards in the Information Technology area. I won't bore you with the esoteric details of that work, but, later on, I will mention a couple of projects with which you might relate. For the most part, I'll focus on other, every-day examples of standards and conventions.

Regardless of how, why, or by whom a standard is created, it needs to be written as a clear specification, so people can build products and provide services to comply with that standard. The person in charge of writing such a specification is often called a *project editor* or *redactor*. [For the past 12 years, that has been my main role in standards-related work, hence the title of this essay. From a standard's writer's perspective *shall* is a very strong word whereas *can*, *might*, *could*, and *should*, are weak words. And *may* is strong if its means “having permission” rather than “might.”]

5.1 Standard or Convention?

There are two main kinds of standards:

- Mandatory/Regulatory (defined by local, national, or international public health and safety officials, for example)
- Optional/Industry initiatives (to allow interoperability and preservation of investment in equipment and training)

Sometimes, a vendor or consortium of vendors so dominates a market that its products became a de facto standard.

5.2 Standards We Use Regularly

Often when I put gasoline into my car, I see a sticker on the pump saying something like, “This pump has been calibrated and tested by the local/state Department of Weights and Measures on <test-date>.” How do we know we're getting exactly two gallons of gas or that the 1-kg packet of meat we're paying for weighs exactly one kilo? Of course, it's not practical to measure everything we buy/use; we simply have to trust someone to have “done it correctly.” Behind the scenes, a lot of people work to make that the case, and if they do their job properly, you'll never know or even think about them.

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Regarding environment and health, there are standards for water quality, air quality, and automobile exhaust emissions. We have standards for seat belts and airbags. And given the growing use of the term organic with respect to food, we have an evolving—but not universal—set of definitions. However, read the fine print; there are *always* marketers trying to stretch the truth. [By the way, when people talk about organic produce, I joke that it really does taste much better than that inorganic stuff!]

When it comes to utilities and appliances there are a whole host of standards, many of which vary considerably from one country to another:

- Electricity: In the US, we use 110 volts and 60 Hertz with the plug having two vertical, flat blades and an optional circular ground (earth) pin. And even then, on some plugs one of the flat blades is taller than the other. [100 years ago, a lot of power generated in the US was 40 Hertz. In my original country, Australia, it is 240 volts, 50 Hertz, with two, flat blades at an angle to each other and an optional third flat blade as the ground.] For a lot of information about different plug/socket conventions, click [here](#).
- Telephone: For those of us in the US still having a landline, we very likely plug our phone into an [RJ11 jack](#). However, that wasn't always the case. When I lived in Chicago in 1979, my phone's wall socket had four pins equally spaced around a large, circular plug. [20+ years ago, when I started traveling internationally with a laptop computer using dial-up internet access, I bought a large set of adaptors that converted an RJ11 plug into pretty much every local phone socket type that existed.] Of course, now we have wireless mobile phones, but they use a myriad of incompatible conventions, and phone vendors can put locks on their handsets. There is also a standard for international telephone numbers, having the general form

+ <country-code> <area-code> <local-number>

For example, +1 703 555 1212 is in the US (country code 1) with area code 703, which is in northern Virginia.

- Radio: It still amazes me that I can stick a stationary antenna up in the air and use it to listen to news and music. And to be able to do that in a car moving at 50 mph or on a jet flying at 600 mph, is truly amazing. Beyond that, we need some standard transmission bands, such as [AM](#), [FM](#), [XM](#), and [short wave](#).
- Television: The US (and other countries) had [NTSC](#) (jokingly referred to as “Never Twice the Same Color” or “Not The Same Color twice”), the Germans and Aussies (and many other countries) had [PAL](#), and France and its territories, and Russia (among others) had [SECAM](#). Then, of course, we had the [VHS](#) vs. [Betamax](#) videotape format war. And just to make it interesting, the audio on a PAL VHS tape can be heard on an NTSC VHS player, but the video cannot be seen due to the different number of lines per frame.
- Audio/Video: If you are like most people, you have a *rat's nest* of cables behind your stereo/TV cabinet. Currently, I have [RCA](#), [composite](#), [S-Video](#), [component](#), and [HDMI](#) cables. They're all standards; they just need entirely different (and sometimes expensive) cables. For a lot of information about different audio and video interfaces and connectors, click [here](#).

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- CD: After all the shakeout with videotape formats, the audio CD folks got it right. An audio CD can be played on any player anywhere in the world. What a concept! Of course, that was too sensible, and more complexity was needed; we had audio CD, CD-ROM, CD-R, CD-RW, Video Compact Discs (VCD), Super Video Compact Discs (SVCD), PhotoCD, PictureCD, CD-i, and Enhanced CD. (Did I miss any?)
- DVD and Blu-ray: When this media arrived, piracy of intellectual property was a growing problem, so while your average garden-variety digital video is the same around the world, the notion of DVD region codes was introduced. Australia uses a region code of 4 while the US uses a code of 1. So, when a friend from Down Under brought me a prerecorded video, it wouldn't play on any of my video players. And while it would play in my Windows-based PC, the player software warned me that it would only play a "foreign" code-based DVD 10 times after which it would permanently switch the code of my DVD drive to that foreign code only. I am happy to report that when I burn a DVD with my home-movie maker software, it uses the universal region code 0. Of course, DVDs come in a number of flavors: DVD, DVD-ROM, DVD-R, DVD+R, DVD-RW, DVD+RW, and DVD-RAM, with Dual-Layer being added to the mix.
- Digital Photo: While there are numerous formats for these, the camera industry seems to have settled on JPEG.

Most of us drive a car or use public transportation. Doing so involves a whole host of standards. For example:

- Nuts and bolts: The size and threading
- Tires: Diameter, width, and quality
- Batteries: Voltage and quality
- Fuel and Oil: This may include fuel efficiency standards
- Windows: Safety glass specifications
- Traffic lights: This simple, but very important, invention is pretty much universal. However, some countries still pass through yellow when going from red to green, while most do not. Also, in some countries the set of lights is arranged horizontally while in others it is vertical.
- Highway Signs and Traffic Rules: In the US, at most intersections controlled by lights, drivers can turn right on red after stopping.

The financial world employs numerous standards, which include:

- Credit, Debit, and ATM/Cash Machine Cards: The size of the card, the format of the number, and the magnetic stripe encoding
- Electronic Funds Transfers: These use an international Bank routing number and account number

In the world of personal computers, there literally are dozens of standards:

- Floppy Disk: There have been a number of popular sizes and formats.
- Network Cables: The world finally settled on the RJ45 Ethernet cable.
- Device Cables: We've had serial, parallel, and SCSI ports and cables. Now, everything seems to be USB with some FireWire.
- Surfing the Internet: Web pages have to be organized in some known fashion, and web browsers like Chrome, Firefox, Internet Explorer, and Safari need to understand that

organization. If you have ever sent email to a person in another country, the chances are their address ended in a 2-letter country code, such as “.uk”, “.jp”, or “fr”.

A few other standards we use on a regular basis are, as follows:

- Postal Service: Postal codes and standard envelope sizes.
- Barcodes: Used by most large supermarkets and department stores. According to Wikipedia, “The very first scanning of the now ubiquitous Universal Product Code (UPC) barcode was on a pack of Wrigley Company chewing gum in June 1974.” Other popular codes are QR and RFID.
- Time Zones and Daylight Savings Time

5.3 Who Develops Standards?

On the regulatory front, boards are often convened at the local, state, or federal level, with input solicited from the public.

In the more formal standards world, we have Standards Development Organizations (SDOs). Some examples are:

- International: IEEE, ISO, IEC, and ITU
- National: The US has ANSI, the UK has BSI, Germany has DIN, and France has AFNOR, for example
- Government: US Food and Drug Administration, US Environmental Protection Agency
- Consortia: Ecma International, OASIS, W3C

In short, anyone or any organization can establish a specification. Unless it involves an area needing government regulation, it's mostly a matter of marketplace relevance as to whether that specification becomes a de facto or formal standard. And just because a standard is produced by a recognized SDO doesn't mean it will succeed. Unfortunately, the world is full of failed standards!

In the case of commercial enterprises, to avoid being seen as pursuing antitrust activities, there usually needs to be at least two competing groups working together using an open development process.

5.4 Compliance Testing

In many cases, a product or service that claims to conform to a standard must be verified by testing, with a certificate being issued before conformance can be claimed legally. For certain products, governments might require such conformance before a vendor can qualify for procurement consideration.

In the computing world, we have what are called *validation suites*. These are used to test an implementation to see if it conforms to a given specification.

I have seen many products (mostly electrical in nature) with the label *UL*. According to Wikipedia, “UL (Underwriters Laboratories) is a safety consulting and certification company headquartered in Northbrook, Illinois. It maintains offices in 46 countries. UL was established in 1894 and has participated in the safety analysis of many of the last century's new technologies, most notably the

public adoption of electricity and the drafting of safety standards for electrical devices and components.”

5.5 Maintenance of Standards

I can easily imagine that the entire specification for the US 110-volt plug-and-socket standard takes up no more than a few pages of text, diagrams, and tables. As such, once all interested parties have proofed this, there is a very good chance it can be frozen for a very long time, possibly forever. On the other hand, a standard for a computer programming language might run 1,000 pages, and because its basic building blocks can be combined in an infinite number of ways, it can be difficult, time consuming, or even impossible to prove that its specification is not incomplete or self-contradictory in some way. In any event, as technology evolves, such languages need to be extended. This requires there to be a process by which the public can submit questions about a specification or to point out possible errors or shortcomings. [The largest and most complex specification I've worked on contains 6,500 pages. The committee responsible for maintaining that meets face-to-face three times a year for three days and by teleconference for two hours each month.]

5.6 Some of My Regulatory and Standards Work

Back in the early 1970's, I worked for an Australian state government Department of Chemistry, in the pesticide residues section of the Food and Drugs division. On a regular basis, I checked samples from the egg, milk, and fresh vegetable markets. Pesticides can enter the food chain through chemical sprays on food fed to farm animals and poultry. However, farmers are prohibited from spraying crops too close to harvest, so this doesn't happen.

One day, I took delivery of 20 dozen bottles of red wine. Over a several-week period, I had to test each one for artificial coloring, which was banned. Day after day, I found nothing, and I tested my control method continuously. Then finally, in the last few bottles, one failed the test. It was with great excitement that I hollered out the window to my boss—who was getting in his car to go home—that “I'd found one.” He hurried back and watched me test it again, and, YES, it was indeed positive! [The German word *shadenfreude* comes to mind.]

At that same time, some of my colleagues were testing for mercury in fish. It was also the heady days of all those nasty things like 2,4-D (a major ingredient in Agent Orange), 2,4,5-T, and chloropicrin.

After leaving Chemistry, I went into the field of computing working for a state highways authority. Every truckload of concrete delivered to every jobsite had a sample taken. Three days later, that sample was crushed with all kinds of information being recorded. I implemented a system to process the results. [By the way, if a batch failed the tests, the contractor had to rip up all the concrete from that batch at their own expense!]

If you have used Microsoft Word for some time, you may well have noticed that with the 2007 edition, the files created changed from type DOC to type DOCX. The former was a format proprietary to Microsoft, and was wildly popular. However, some US state and foreign governments wanted office software that read and wrote files that could be understood by any vendor. The result was IS 29500, a 4-Part standard involving some 6,500 pages. Not only does this cover Word's “DOCX” format, but it

also covers the formats for Excel and PowerPoint. As a result, Apple uses this format for the office tools on its platforms, as do other vendors (such as Google).

In the past 25 years, I've also been involved in writing specifications for software that needs to support culturally diverse audiences by dealing with such things as name, address, and telephone number formats; a variety of date and time formats; a large variation in alphabets and writing systems; and so on. If you think for a moment what might be involved in making the exact same program (MS Word, for example) work in US English, British English, Swiss German, Russian, Japanese, and Arabic modes, you'll have some idea why standards can be very important.

5.7 Conclusion

As I travel around the world, I sometimes come across commercial or industrial developments with large banners or signs outside saying ISO 9000-Compliant. According to Wikipedia, "The ISO 9000 family of standards is related to quality management systems and designed to help organizations ensure that they meet the needs of customers and other stakeholders while meeting statutory and regulatory requirements related to the product."

Every area of life is affected by standards, which can be as diverse as welding for pipelines; oil and gas exploration; how to cook the perfect pasta; how to make the perfect cup of tea; how to taste wine; toothbrushes, acoustics and hearing; and musical instrument tuning. There is even Irish Standard I.S 417:1988. Specification for Irish Coffee, which outlines the ingredients used, the minimum quantity of Irish Whiskey, the depth and quality of cream, and the temperature, among other things. Whatever will they think of next?

6. May 2013, “A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 1”

[With this series, I've added some photos. There are many hyperlinks through which you can find more information on people, places, events, and things, and many of those lead to photos as well.]

Having been born and raised in Australia where the masses are rumored to have all the sophistication of Crocodile Dundee, I've given this essay a tongue-in-cheek title. In Australia, *Kulcha* is slang for culture, and I use this term rather loosely. As I've often joked, “The biggest cultural attraction Down Under is the National Beer Can Museum.” Now, Aussies more sophisticated than moi might take offence at that statement, to which I concede, “Okay, the National Beer Bottle Museum is pretty impressive too!”

I was raised in a working-class family in rural Australia where dry-land farming and irrigated fruit growing dominated the area. I was the youngest of five children, and, for most of my formative years, I lived outside any town. Much of my early education took place in schools having seven grades taught in the same room by the same teacher, simultaneously. The libraries were very small, and half the books were rotated out every few months. At home, I had a few books of fiction, some comics, an atlas, and a set of encyclopedias. There was a radio; a record player; a weekly, local newspaper; and much later, a black-and-white television with two or three rather snowy channels. Entertainment was limited to monthly dances after regional sporting events, card evenings, school plays, and an occasional traveling concert. I doubt I knew an adult who had a library card, and people who listened to classical music or opera, or had any understanding of art, were way outside the norm, as were adults over 40 who had attended high school. [In 1969, I was the first in my family to complete 12 years of formal education.]

In my home state of South Australia, apart from the capital, Adelaide, almost all towns had fewer than 5,000 residents, so the main centers of higher learning and associated museums and galleries were



located in that city. Up until the end of high school, my guess is I'd visited the capital—which was 160 miles away—only five or six times and then mostly on day trips. The only cultural event I recall from that era was a visit to the state Museum of Natural History and the zoo. Once I moved to Adelaide, I had access to all sorts of “cultured” places and events. However, while that often required having the price of admission, it also required the desire to not only participate in such activities, but also an investment in learning to appreciate them. And I had no background to do that. As such, I grew up a Philistine, at least in terms of fine art appreciation. [The photo at left is my Aussie version of the classic

painting, American Gothic.]

This multipart essay is not about culture, per se, but rather about the places and events of a cultural nature that I have visited or experienced in my 34 years of (mostly international) travel. And even though I lived in Australia for 25 years prior to that, most of my travel experiences there are from later on as a tourist traveling from my adopted country, the United States. Hopefully, you'll be inspired to click on some of the hyperlinks to learn more, as well as to think about, and hopefully visit, some of these places in person.

6.1 Ancient Civilizations and Old Sites

One of my first experiences in this category was a biggie, the “lost” Incan city of [Machu Picchu](#), near Cuzco, in the Andes of Peru. Constructing a place like this without modern machinery must have been a huge task, especially given that the quarries where the stones appear to have come from are nowhere near the building site. The stones were cut so precisely that no mortar was needed in the joints. I had the privilege of staying at the site overnight, which meant that after the day trippers left on the afternoon train and before they returned the next morning, we few overnight guests had the place to ourselves. [I went there after a week in a base jungle camp and then a primitive camp on the [Amazon River](#) downstream from [Iquitos](#), Peru.]

Next up were the earthen, step-pyramids in [Puebla](#), Mexico, from the Aztec era.

On my first visit to Costa Rica, I shared a hostel room with a Norwegian who'd just arrived from the old city of [Antigua](#) in Guatemala. Up to that time, I had no knowledge of nor interest in Guatemala, but a year later, there was I. After two weeks of private Spanish lessons and some touring to [Lago de Atitlán](#) and [Chichicastenango](#), I spent time at the Mayan pyramids at [Tikal](#). Some are half exposed with large trees growing up and over them. Without a vantage point, there was no way to see these seemingly man-made points reaching above the surrounding jungle, so they remained unknown to the modern world for many years.

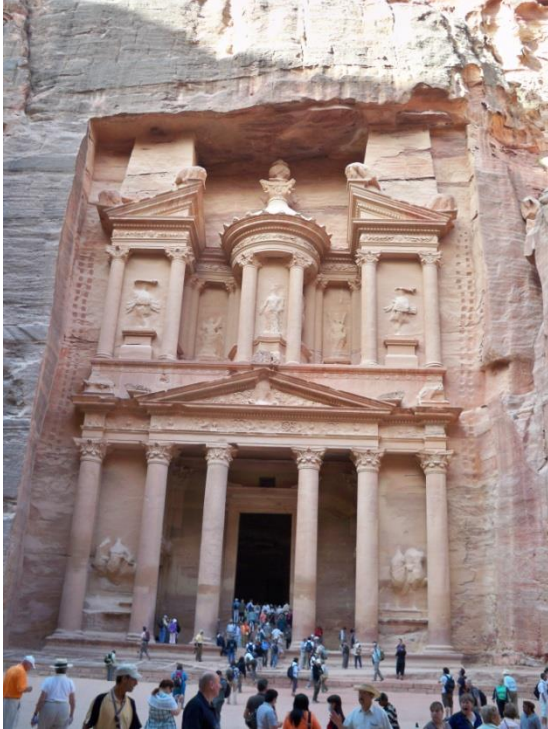
One northern winter, I spent two great weeks in the northeast part of the [Yucatán Peninsula](#) of Mexico that was formerly occupied by the Maya. I started at [Tulum](#), a well-preserved seaside town. From there I visited the pyramid and sprawling city at [Coba](#) before going on to stay at [Valladolid](#), the location of several impressive [cenotes](#) (sinkholes). I saved the best, the [Chichen Itza](#) complex, till last. (See photo at right.) The Mayan's knowledge of astronomy and mathematics truly is impressive as is the internationally recognizable pyramid (which, fortunately, tourists can no longer climb).



The first time I went to [Stonehenge](#), visitors could walk right among the stones and touch them. It truly was a great experience to be there and to think about the purpose of the place and the impressive feat of dragging those stones from a far-away place. It really was incomprehensible that only 100 years earlier, a visitor there could rent a hammer from the local blacksmith to break off a piece of stone as a souvenir, and that farmers were crushing some of the [lintels](#) for use as gravel.

Although the English went through a more modern period of not taking baths, the Roman site of [Bath](#) is impressive as is the city now surrounding it.

A few years ago, I made my first trip to the Middle East, where I spent all my free time in Jordan. I was based in the capital, [Amman](#), and made day trips in and around that city. Highlights included the well-preserved Roman city of [Jerash](#) (complete with arena for chariot racing, and a beautifully restored semicircular theater with uniformed musicians playing bagpipes), the ancient amphitheater downtown,



and a walking tour with two young Palestinian women who were graduate students. While there, I learned that Amman was formerly known as *Philadelphia*. To be sure, the highlight of the trip was three days and two nights in Petra, the capital city of the Nabataeans built around 300 BC. [The Treasury building carved in the rock face was made world-famous by the first Indiana Jones movie; see photo at left.]

My visit to mainland China involved two weeks in Beijing, one of which was spent playing tourist. The highlights included Tiananmen Square, the Forbidden City, the Summer Palace, the Temple of Heaven, the Great Wall (see photo below), and the much more recent 2008 Summer Olympics' Bird's Nest stadium. Unfortunately, I was there in December when the wind howled, and the temperature did not get above freezing! I highly recommend going at a warmer time.

My first visit to Rome was for three days in 1979, and it was my first stop in Europe. To say that the city is an outdoor museum would be an understatement. I went back for four days in 2005. The highlights were the Coliseum and the Pantheon.

The Neolithic monument of New Grange is in the Boyne Valley of Ireland. Like a number of other sites, it is built so that the sun's light enters at noon on the midwinter's solstice. It was built 1,000 years before Egypt's pyramids.

6.2 Religious Places and Artifacts

The UK is full of religious sites, many of which are ruins from the time when Henry VIII dissolved the Catholic monasteries. The joke among people who visit such sites on one of the numerous bus tours is that "We're going on an ABC Tour, Another Bloody Cathedral!" In England, if a town has a cathedral, it's a city, which makes Ely one of the smallest English cities. Other places of note in England are Westminster Abbey (especially for all you royal wedding buffs and Da Vinci Code fans) and St. Paul's Cathedral.





Rome boasts the [Vatican City](#); France has [Notre Dame](#) and [Mont Saint-Michelle](#) (see photo at left); Leipzig, Germany, has [St. Thomas Church](#), the final resting place of [Bach](#); and [Lutherstadt Wittenberg](#), Germany, has the church on whose door [Martin Luther](#) posted his theses.

After traveling for 2½ weeks in South East Asia, I was pretty much overdosed with [Buddhas](#); they were sitting, standing, reclining, made of gold, and so on. However, after a suitable break, I've since been to see a lot more Buddhist temples (and Shinto shrines) on [Jeju Island](#) of South Korea; Beijing and [Hong Kong](#), China; and [Nara](#), [Kyoto](#), [Tokyo](#), [Sapporo](#), [Miyajima](#) (perhaps my all-time favorite, especially when the tide is in), and [Kamakura](#), all in Japan.



On Todos Santos ([All Saints Day](#) and [Halloween](#)), I've let off firecrackers and cleared around graves in Mexico, and watched the annual religious parade in [Chichicastenango](#), Guatemala.

On numerous trips throughout Europe, I've attended lunchtime and/or evening organ and choir concerts in a variety of churches and cathedrals. One particular event—a woman soloist singing [Ave Maria](#) in a large church in [Budapest](#), Hungary—sticks in my mind.

During several trips to Norway, I saw some wonderful [Stave Churches](#), medieval wooden buildings with slate roofs. And during my two weeks in [Saint Petersburg, Russia](#), I saw quite a few impressive [Orthodox churches](#).

In Helsinki, Finland, the Orthodox [Uspenski Cathedral](#) and the underground Lutheran [Temppeliaukio Church](#) (in the photo at right) are worth a visit.

For an interesting and rather scathing take on religious relics, see [Mark Twain's](#) book [Innocents Abroad](#), the first ever travel guide.



7. June 2013, “A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 2”

In [Part 1](#), we covered *Ancient Civilizations and Old Sites* and *Religious Places and Artifacts*.

7.1 Royal Hangouts

Let's begin with England. Yes, it has [Buckingham Palace](#), [Windsor Castle](#) (see photo at right), and many other fine royal residences, but, for my money, the place to spend your time is [Hampton Court Palace](#). [In the summer season, ride at least one way on the Thames River.] Famous residents included [Henry VIII](#) and [William and Mary](#). Don't miss the astronomical clock. I also highly recommend a visit to [Dover Castle](#). Some 20 years ago, lots of more modern history has become public with the declassification of former secrets. [Think evacuation of [Dunkirk](#) in WWII.] Of course, the [Tower of London](#) is worth a stop as well. Scotland has its [Holyrood Palace](#) and [Edinburgh Castle](#).



In Denmark, it was my great pleasure, several times, to tour [Frederiksborg Castle](#), in Hillerød. Built on a small island in a lake, it gave me some great ideas for my next country home. In recent years, extensive restoration of gardens nearby was carried out. [Hamlet's Castle](#) in Helsingør is also worth a look.

In the Netherlands, I spent a great half-day at the palace of [Het Loo](#). What really impressed me there were the gardens and extensive fountain and irrigation system.

On various trips to Asia, I spent time in a variety of royal places in Japan ([Tokyo](#), [Nara](#), and [Kyoto](#), especially) and China (Beijing, the [Imperial City](#)). The long-reigning royal family of [Thailand](#) is very popular; every cab and every shop had a picture of the King and Queen.

Supposedly, when Walt Disney toured Bavaria, Germany, the sight of [Neuschwanstein](#) gave him the idea for [Cinderella's Castle](#) at Disneyland. If you read up a bit on the man who had this castle built, [King Ludwig II](#), you'll find him rather interesting, not to mention eccentric! Another stunning residence of his is [Linderhof](#). In the old Prussian Capital, Potsdam, the summer palace of Frederick II (The Great), [Sanssoucci](#)—*without care*—is definitely worth of a visit. The first time I visited the castle in [Heidelberg](#) I couldn't help but think how it has been crumbling longer than the Europeans had been in North America. (The length of history is relative, I guess.) This [baroque](#) town is well known as the setting for the operetta, [The Student Prince](#). In 2000, when one of Europe's Culture Capitals was [Weimar](#), I had the pleasure of visiting the palace of [Duchess Anna Amalia](#). She introduced the guitar to Germany, and, as a result, her palace is now an internationally acclaimed guitar school, complete with concerts. The [old library](#) in town, named for her, is world famous. The palace of her son, [Duke Carl August](#), is right in town.

If you are in the [Czech Republic](#), do visit [Prague Castle](#) and also take the 30-minute train ride out to see [Karlštejn Castle](#); however, don't go on the one day each week that it's closed (he says from experience).

In France, I stayed in Caen, Normandy, where William the Conqueror was based (and is buried). He built some fine churches there. [I must say that when I saw his tombstone, I was quite surprised to see that his name really wasn't William at all, but rather, Guillaume. In fact, I've seen it stated that the English name *William* didn't even exist back then. Anyway, while I stood by his graveside, I filled him in on how things had gone downhill in England since 1066. "Bill, you just wouldn't recognize the place!"] Although I've walked around the Palace of Versailles and toured the extensive gardens, I've yet to go inside.

During a 2-week stay in St. Petersburg, Russia, I dropped by the Winter Palace, to see how the Tsar used to live before his unfortunate "accident." (You might know his humble abode as The Hermitage Museum.)

The Hungarian capital, Budapest, really is a combination of the two cities, Buda and Pest, one each side of the River Danube (called *Duna* in Hungarian). Pretty tricky, hey! The impressive Buda Castle complex was home to the Hungarian kings.

Vienna, Austria, has too many beautiful royal buildings to name. I looked around a number of them as well as visiting the Lipizzaner Stallions' home, the Spanish Riding School, at Hofburg Palace.

The royal highlight along Croatia's Dalmatian Coast is the retirement palace complex of Roman Emperor Diocletian in Split.

7.2 Military-Related Places and Things

The fall of Singapore to the Japanese in World War II is depicted on Sentosa Island, the site of a British fortress, reachable from the mainland by cable car. [While the harbor was well defended, the Japanese had the audacity to attack overland!]

My first military museum was in Geneva, Switzerland, and had an impressive collection of crossbows, pikes, and such.



When I visited England's Windsor Castle with my 4-year-old son, he was stunned to not only find the moat without water, but it had a garden growing in it! As a result, he felt compelled to inform one of the uniformed attendants of the dangers of this oversight. The gentleman thanked him, but said that he was fairly sure an invasion was not imminent. In a basement of Edinburgh Castle (see photo at left) stands the formidable cannon, Mons Meg. And outside, there is a guard-dog cemetery. If you have a half day to kill in London, drop by the Cabinet War Rooms to see where Churchill managed his end of

WWII and where he sometimes slept.

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I was visiting [Brussels, Belgium](#), for the first time when I discovered that the famous battlefield, [Waterloo](#), was just outside the city, so I went to have a look and climbed the [Lion's Mound](#).

On a trip through England's [County Kent](#), I decided to visit the location of the [Battle of Hastings](#), where William the Conqueror hopped on over from Normandy in 1066 with a few of his close friends for some fun and games. I discovered that the battle did not actually take place in Hastings (which is on the coast), but some distance inland near the present-day town of Battle (hence [Battle Abbey](#)). The battlefield has remained undeveloped since 1066, and I toured it while listening to an audio guide, which reported on the battle from the perspectives of three different people: a Saxon soldier, a Norman Knight, and [King Harold's](#) wife who was supporting the medical people of her husband's army. On a separate trip, to Normandy, I saw the [Bayeux Tapestry](#), which depicts the events leading up to the battle.

The [Canadian War Museum](#) in that country's capital, Ottawa, is rather new, tastefully done, and very informative.

On a motorhome trip around [South Dakota](#), I dropped in at [Ellsworth Air Force Base](#). At the time, it was an active [Strategic Air Command](#) (SAC) base for B52s and B1Bs. On a separate trip, to Arizona, I toured a (deactivated) [Titan II missile silo near Tucson](#). Once the operators fired their missile, they had food, water, and air for 30 days in the underground bunker. While in [Baton Rouge, Louisiana](#), I toured a naval ship next to one of [Claire Chennault's Flying Tiger](#) fighter planes. A tour of [Honolulu, Hawaii's Pearl Harbor](#) is sobering especially when one looks down at the [USS Arizona](#) from which oil is still bubbling up some 70 years after the attack. Aircraft carrier floating museums are berthed in [San Diego](#) and [New York City](#), a [US submarine is at Fisherman's Wharf](#), San Francisco, and a German U-Boat is in the [Museum of Science and Industry](#) in Chicago. [Fredericksburg, Texas](#), was the home of Fleet Admiral [Chester William Nimitz](#), and it houses an extensive collection of WWII Pacific War museums. [Gettysburg, Pennsylvania](#), is the location of the infamous [American Civil War](#) battle by the same name. [Harpers Ferry, West Virginia](#), was the staging ground for [John Brown's](#) failed raid. And finally, the [Little Big Horn](#) battlefield was where the Native Americans gave [General Custer](#) and his troops a lesson.

One of the most moving experiences I've ever had was a visit to the [Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park](#) where the first atomic bomb was detonated several hundred feet off the ground, for maximum effect. The blast occurred directly above [Hiroshima Peace Memorial](#) (commonly called the A-Bomb Dome). The ironic thing is that not only was this dome one of only a few buildings in the area that was not completely destroyed, much money and effort has been spent since trying to keep it in its "half-destroyed" state for the tourists to look at. At the main museum ticket booth, as well as giving discounts to children, students, and pensioners, survivors of the blast were admitted free! Some compensation, huh?

My first visit to Berlin, Germany, was in 1999, and ever since then I have found it impossible to imagine what the city was like when it was divided. I've seen pieces of the [Berlin Wall](#) and walked or driven around stretches of where the wall ran. [Checkpoint Charlie](#) especially lacks the "real feel" as it's just a tourist attraction now. A few years ago, I toured a series of underground bunkers used by locals during WWII.

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After WWI, the French decided to build a barrier to stop the Germans from invading in the future. The result was the very impressive—not to mention too expensive—[Maginot Line](#), which, unfortunately, was never completed. In any event, The Germans made an end-run around it during WWII. C'est la vie! I stopped by to look at one of the tunnel sections on my way from [Alsace](#) to Mainz.

The harbor of Helsinki, Finland, is an impressive area. Until the Russian Revolution took place in 1917, Finland did not exist as a country. Prior to that, control of it alternated between Sweden and Russia. The islands just offshore were the home of a large, former military complex, [Suomenlinna](#), complete with dry dock. A small military museum covers, among other things, the little-known [Winter War](#) with the Soviet Union in 1939–1940. A German submarine (part of German aid to Finland at that time) is open for tours.

Speak of naval disasters and you can probably think of any number of sea battles. The one to which I refer here is the (peacetime) sinking of the [Vasa](#). According to Wikipedia, this exotic “Swedish warship [was] built 1626–1628. The ship foundered and sank after sailing less than a nautical mile into its maiden voyage on 10 August 1628.” It has since been recovered and is preserved in its own museum in Stockholm. To be sure, it's an impressive ship. Too bad it had major design flaws.



While visiting a friend in northeast Germany, she took me on a daytrip to Usedom, the Baltic Sea island shared with Poland. This is the site of [Peenemünde](#), where in WWII the [V-2 rocket](#) was developed and tested. (See photo of a V-1 at left.) The factory was mothballed by the Soviets when they invaded, so when it was opened as a museum many years later, it was pretty much as it had existed when it was active.

Drive around various parts of Western Europe and, eventually, you'll come across an American tank parked in a town square or roundabout, as a memorial to the Allied invasion of WWII. Two such places come to mind: [Wiltz](#), Luxembourg, from the *Battle of the Bulge*, and [Avranches](#), France, where Gen. George S. Patton rolled through.

Last, and certainly not least, are some war cemeteries. I've made frequent visits to [Arlington National Cemetery](#) here in Washington DC. It started as a place to bury Union soldiers during the Civil War, on land confiscated from Gen. Robert E. Lee, who just happened to be commander of the Southern Armies. Two Presidents are buried there, [John F. Kennedy](#) (along with his wife, Jackie, and two infant children, and his brothers, Bobby and Teddy) and [William Howard Taft](#), as is one of America's most decorated war heroes, [Audie Murphy](#). The [American Battle Monuments Commission](#) is responsible for operating and maintaining permanent American military burial grounds in foreign countries. The first of these I visited was [Luxembourg American Cemetery and Memorial](#) where [Gen. George S. Patton](#) is buried. The second was the [Netherlands American Cemetery](#), east of Maastricht. My third was [Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial](#), which overlooks Omaha Beach, site of one of the American landing beaches in the D-Day invasion of WWII.

8. July 2013, “English – Part 3: Nouns”

For most of us, I suspect that while we vaguely recall being taught the grammar of our native language, for the most part, we don't remember or care what the formal rules are. We just “know” how to speak in an acceptable way even if it might not be quite correct. When someone says to me, “We done that yesterday.” I know that they really meant, “We did that yesterday.” From a practical viewpoint, language is more about communicating than correct usage. That said, it doesn't hurt to know how to—and to intentionally—speak and write correctly. People *will* judge you by the way you speak and write. [For a tongue-in-cheek look at my thoughts about grammar, see “[Rex on English and Writing](#)”.]

In contemporary English, there are eight parts of speech: *noun*, *pronoun*, *verb*, *adjective*, *adverb*, *conjunction*, *preposition*, and *interjection* (sometimes called an *exclamation*). In this and subsequent essays, we'll look at each. Note though, there will *not* be a test at the end!

Note that not only did I write, “In English ...”, I wrote, “In contemporary English, ...”. The rules may differ between languages, and may even have changed during a particular language's evolution. And then there are different conventions for different dialects.

Many words can be used as more than one part of speech, for example:

- “I bought a drink.” (noun) / “I drink coffee.” (verb)
- “The early bird catches the worm!” (adjective) / “The plane arrived a few minutes early.” (adverb)
- “All children are admitted free.” (adjective) / “They gave their all.” (noun) / “That's for all of us.” (pronoun) / “The instructions were all wrong.” (adverb)

Although this series of essays is about English parts of speech, in the spirit of *normal*, I'll make occasional comments about interesting differences with other languages. Besides, if you ever try to learn another language, sooner or later you'll run into concepts and conventions, some of which are quite different from those in English, and which might not even have an English counterpart.

For many years, many American university students were encouraged—indeed required—to buy a copy of William Strunk, Jr. and E.B White's *The Elements of Style*. For anyone interested in a more current and eminently readable alternative, I suggest Patricia T. O'Conner's *Woe is I*. From that book, you can learn something practical each time you open it over a cup of coffee, even if you read only a few sentences or paragraphs at a sitting. [Thanks much Scott for that book, a gift that keeps right on giving!]

8.1 Getting Started

As far back as I can recall a *noun* (abbrev. n) has been the name of a person (e.g., *man* and *Mary*), place (e.g., *street* and *Paris*), or thing (e.g., *car* and *Parliament House*). We can extend that definition to include other concrete things such as actions (e.g., *swimming*), as well as abstract things such as ideas (e.g., *joy*) and qualities (e.g., *honesty*).

Nouns can be classified as either *proper* or *common*. A proper noun refers to something unique, and, typically, it is capitalized. Examples are *John Lennon*, *Amsterdam*, the *Earth*, *Google*, the *Pacific Ocean*,

and the *Pyramids of Egypt*. All non-proper nouns are common, including *earth* when it refers to the soil rather than the planet. Pets usually have names, and they are often considered members of the family. As a result, we treat their names as proper nouns too. And while racehorses are generally not considered pets, they too have proper-noun names. [Some would argue that a proper noun may consist of a single word only; they refer to multi-word proper nouns as *proper names*. Using that model, examples are the *White House*, the *Kingdom of Norway*, and *Doctors without Borders*.] Proper nouns and names that identify people may take on titles, as in “Dr. Livingston, I presume” and “Sir Richard Francis Burton”. In English, the days of the week and the months of the year are proper nouns, so are capitalized. [This is not the case in Spanish or French.] Interestingly, the season names—such as *summer* and *spring*—are proper nouns, yet that are typically not capitalized. Also, while the *United States of America* (often abbreviated as *America*) is a proper noun, a person from that country, an *American* [spelled with a leading capital letter], is not, since it doesn't refer to a unique thing.

8.2 Verbal and Adjectival Nouns

Many nouns have their root in a corresponding verb. For example, *swim* leads to the verbal nouns *swimming* and *swimmer*, and *organize* leads to *organization* and *organizer*. Some nouns have their root in a corresponding adjective. For example, *lonely* leads to *loneliness*, *likely* leads to *likelihood*, and *absurd* leads to *absurdity*.

8.3 Countable Nouns

Another form of classification for nouns is countable vs. uncountable. A countable noun can occur in the plural form, can be combined with numbers, and can be used with an indefinite article (see later below). For example, *dog* allows *dogs*, *three dogs*, *a dog*, *several dogs*, and *every dog*. An uncountable noun is, well, a noun that isn't countable! An instance of the countable noun *computer* belongs to the family having the uncountable noun name, *equipment*. We cannot say *equipments*, *each equipment*, or use numbers with that word.

A common mistake in regard to countable vs. uncountable nouns is with the use of the comparatives *less* and *fewer*. One can have *less ice* (uncountable) and *fewer ice cubes* (countable), but one cannot have *less ice cubes*. One has *less time*, but *fewer hours*. Interestingly, the opposite comparative for both words, *more*, can be used for both countable and uncountable nouns. Can a noun be used in both countable and uncountable contexts? Absolutely! For example, “I eat *fruits*”, and “Some *fruits* are tropical”.

8.4 Noun Phrases and Clauses

Simply put, a noun phrase is a phrase that can serve as a noun. For example, “The big black bear attacked the hive of angry honeybees.” Likewise, a noun clause is a clause that can serve as a noun. For example, “I know that the flight time to London is five hours.”

8.5 Collective Nouns

A collective noun is a singular noun that names a group of two or more things. For example, “A committee might have many members” and “She bought a set of wine glasses.” Now, when it comes to

the names of collections of birds and animals, without a doubt, English has a very large and exotic set. Yes, we all know about a flock of sheep and a school of fish, but what about a congregation of alligators, a bellowing of bullfinches, a gulp of cormorants, an escargatoire of snails, a chattering of starlings, and a gam of whales? To see a long list, [click here](#). [A pet peeve of mine occurs in sports reports in the British Commonwealth. Take the game of cricket (PLEASE!). Sentences like, “England were all out for 95 runs,” abound. Now the last time I looked, England was a singular place—it’s not multiplying is it? Eek!—so I believe it should be, “England was ...”. The thing that does exist in the plural is the players on the English team; in which case, “The players on the English team were ...” is what was really intended.]

8.6 Noun Adjuncts

A noun can modify another noun, in which case, it is a noun adjunct. Examples are oak tree, fruit salad, door key, and chicken noodle soup.

8.7 Plural Forms

We’ve seen examples of both singular and plural nouns, but what are the rules for turning the former into the latter? I remember well when I first read through my introductory German book, which said, “There are eight common ways to form a plural.” That seemed unnecessarily complicated, until I started looking at the idiosyncrasies of plurals in English. Yes, there are the obvious ones, adding an *s* (*cat/cats*) or *es* (*peach/peaches*). But then there are all those “little” exceptions, of which English is so fond: *baby/babies*, *shelf/shelves*, *man/men*, *child/children*, *goose/geese*, *mouse/mice*, *person/people*, *criterion/criteria*, and on ad infinitum! And *sheep* and *deer* serve in both roles. (So does *fish*, but *fishes* does exist.) And then there are nouns retaining their foreign origins. For example, *cactus/cacti*, *forum/fora*, *opus/opera*, and *chateau/chateaux*. However, if you look in an American-English dictionary, don’t be surprised if you find the following: *cactus/cactuses*, *forum/forums*, *opus/opuses* or *opera/operas*, and *chateau/chateaus*. [Sacrebleu!](#)

Some nouns exist only in the plural form, such as *eyeglasses*, *scissors*, *shorts*, and *trousers*. Now these all come in “pairs,” even though they each represent a single object. Yet we use them in countable contexts, as in “I want to buy some shorts”, even if we intend to buy only one pair. However, when it comes to using articles or numbers, we really need to say “a pair of shorts” or “three pairs of eyeglasses,” for example.

Quite a few nouns are hyphenated, and care must be taken when forming plurals. For example, *three-year-olds* and *six-packs* both have the *s* at the very end. However, *brothers-in-law*, *commanders-in-chief*, and *attorneys-general* all have the *s* after the first word.

When multiple nouns are involved, more than one word can have plural forms: for example, *gentleman farmer/gentlemen farmers*.

Regarding plurals, I’ll leave you with the factoid that Japanese doesn’t have them! Of course, if that were the end of that story, that would be way too easy, so they invented the concept of *counters*, which go along with the actual count, and describe some fundamental aspect of the object. For

example, in English we might say, "I have three books;" the Japanese equivalent is something like, "I have three flat/bound-thingy book." The word *book* stays in the singular.

8.8 Articles

English has articles: the indefinite articles *a* and *an*, and the definite article *the*. Articles go before nouns or noun phrases to indicate any one non-specific thing or one or more specific thing(s). Examples are "a woman," "an apple," and "the men on horseback."

Fortunately, when one learns a new noun in English, one needn't attach an article to it. Okay, but why mention this? Well, more than a few languages classify their nouns as having grammatical gender. For example, in Spanish, which has two genders—masculine and feminine—one learns *el señor* (the man) rather than just *señor*, to reflect that a man has masculine gender. You might say, "That's obvious; of course, a man is masculine!", but note that, similarly, one learns *la casa* (the house) instead of simply *casa*, because a house has feminine gender. All nouns in Spanish have one or the other gender; that's just something to which you have to get used. [At least the gender of a great many Spanish nouns can be determined by the noun's ending, something not true in German. German has three genders: masculine, feminine, and neuter, and of course, each has its own set of articles. Sigh! My favorite example is *der Mann* (the man), *die Frau* (the woman), and *das Mädchen* (the girl). For some reason, German boys are considered masculine while German girls are neuter! See American writer, Mark Twain's, humorous essay called, "Die Schreckliche Deutsche Sprache" ("The Awful German Language"), in which he put the worst possible spin on that language, but in an entertaining way. And as you might have noticed, in German, all nouns are capitalized.] By the way, Old English nouns had gender!

For the most part, articles are quite straightforward; however, the choice between the two indefinite articles is worth a mention. Simply stated, "Use *a* when the following noun [phrase] starts with a vowel sound; otherwise use *an*." Note carefully, that I wrote "vowel sound," *not* "vowel." Not all vowels are pronounced as vowel sounds. For example, regarding nouns with a leading vowel:

- an apple
- an egg but a ewe and a eucalypt tree
- an Indian
- an orange but a one-way street
- an umbrella but a union

And for nouns with a leading consonant:

- a house but an honest man and an heir, as in the latter two cases, the *h* is silent.

In American English, the *h* in *herb* is generally silent whereas in British English it is not, resulting in an (h)erb and a herb, respectively.

In older, period-English dialog, one often comes across "an hotel". Considering the word's French origin, *hôtel*, where the *h* is silent, one can see why a supposedly sophisticated English person might drop the *h*.

Actually, the rule stated above assumes the article is followed directly by the noun [phrase]. However, while “an orange” is correct, so too is “a big orange.” So, it's the sound of the first syllable of the word following the article that really matters.

As it happens, an article is **not**, in fact, one of the eight parts of English speech. So, what is it then? I've searched numerous on-line places and comprehensive paper dictionaries, and not one of them actually answers that question. All they say is that *a* and *an* are indefinite articles and *the* is a definite article! As best as I have been able to figure out, articles are used as adjectives. That said I have seen example of these words used as adverbs. [As it happens, a ninth of part of speech has been defined, determiner, and that's where articles are categorized.]

Although not a grammatical gender issue, due to political correctness, gender-specific nouns like *actor/actress* are being used less often with the masculine form being used instead for both. On the other hand, with more woman running things, some people classify committee leaders as *chairmen/chairwomen*, or they simply use *chair*. However, my experience has been that more and more words ending in *-man* (such as *chairman*) are being used for woman as well as men. [The politically correct *chairperson* didn't appear to get much traction.]

8.9 Conclusion

If you have made it this far, no doubt you'll have found that the humble noun is much more interesting that it first seemed, right? No? Surely, the list of animal-group names alone was worth the read!

Stayed tuned for more than you want to know about pronouns and other exciting parts of speech. Now, about that test ...

9. August 2013, “A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 3”

In [Part 1](#), we covered Ancient Civilizations and Old Sites and Religious Places and Artifacts. In [Part 2](#), we covered *Royal Hangouts* and *Military-Related Places and Things*.

9.1 Museums and Art Galleries

I've long had a saying, “If you don't understand it, it must be art!” And that certainly has proven true when I've looked at many paintings and sculptures. Without a doubt, there are times when I'm sure that my taste is entirely within my mouth! In any event, I've seen so many museums and art galleries that it's hard to know where to begin, so I'll charge right in going by country in no particular order.

After seven or eight trips to Denmark, I finally got to visit the [Louisiana Museum of Modern Art](#). It stays open one night each week when the restaurant serves a fine dinner. I enjoyed the exhibits and the food, as well as looking at the Danish-made “practical/wearable art” on sale. On a separate trip, I dropped by the [Viking Ship Museum](#) in Roskilde, and as it was a slow day, a curator invited me for a behind-the-scenes tour where staff were restoring a ship. It's hard to imagine one taking such a small craft across an ocean.

Mainz, Germany, is a state capital, and was home to [Guttenberg and his printing press](#). In fact, in 2000, he was named Man of the Millennium. The [museum](#) dedicated to him is worth a visit. [By the way, Mainz is just a short train ride from Frankfurt airport, if you should ever have a long layover there. However, should you ride there by train, be sure to keep in the half of the train that goes to Mainz rather than Wiesbaden, another state capital just across the river (he says from experience).]

Canada is home to some interesting collections. If you are in the Hull/Ottawa area, go see the (quite new and beautiful) [Canadian Museum of Civilization](#). The greater Vancouver area has plenty of things to see, including: [Vancouver Maritime Museum](#) and its [St. Roch](#), the first ship to completely circumnavigate North America; [Queen Elizabeth Park](#) with its geodesic dome; and the extensive collection at the [Museum of Anthropology](#) at the University of British Columbia, which covers all the Pacific Island nations as well as New Zealand's Maoris and Australia's Aborigines.

In the US, the greater Detroit, Michigan, area hosts the [Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village](#), the former being the Holy Grail for transportation enthusiasts. The latter contains the original buildings or homes of some famous Americans. [The Rodin Collection](#) at Stanford University is worth a look as are the campus grounds. During my first year in the US I lived in Chicago, so I just had to make a pilgrimage to the [Chicago Art Institute](#) to see [Andy Warhol's](#) famous soup cans. [Dale Chihuly](#) is an American glass



sculptor. I first became aware of his work during a visit to the [Missouri Botanical Garden](#) in St. Louis, where his sculptures were placed throughout the garden (see the photo to the left with the blue and orange sculpture). Fairbanks, Alaska, has the [University of Alaska Museum of the North](#). Seattle's [Museum of Flight](#) is definitely worth a visit as is [Boeing's tour](#) of the B747, 767, 777, and 787 assembly lines. On a visit to Santa Fe, the state capital of New Mexico, I dropped by the [Georgia O'Keefe Museum](#). This often-misunderstood artist was well ahead of her time. New York

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City boasts many cultural centers: Ones that immediately come to mind are The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA); American Museum of Natural History (which includes the Hayden Planetarium); the Ellis Island Museum, which shows how the millions of immigrants arriving there were processed and often given Anglicized names; the Guggenheim; and Intrepid Sea-Air-Space Museum. The National Gallery of Art is on the Mall in downtown Washington DC. During the summer, the fountain water runs down the outside walls of the underground cafeteria. I especially love the outdoor sculpture garden next door, whose very large fountain becomes an ice-skating rink in winter. On a motorhome trip through South Dakota, I stumbled on the Mammoth Site museum near Hot Springs, build over a dig with partially exposed, complete skeletons of numerous mammoths. One of the best known, most visited, and free museum and gallery complexes is Washington DC's Smithsonian Institution. [The donation of the original funding is most interesting.] Opened in 1976 for the Bicentennial, the Air and Space Museum is the most-visited museum in the world, complete with touchable piece of moon rock and magnificent movie theater. The nicely renovated Museum of Natural History is also impressive.

The Hermitage in St. Petersburg, Russia, is world-famous. (My Russian guide asked me to keep quiet as we bought tickets, as foreigners were charged ten times the price of Russians!) I have never been a fan of gold or gilded anything, and this place was "over-the-top" in this regard.



During various trips to beautiful Oslo, Norway, I visited Norsk Folkemuseum, the Viking Ship Museum, the Kon-Tiki Museum, the Nobel Peace Center, and Holmenkollbakken, an impressive ski jump (pictured at the left).

Dublin, Ireland has plenty of culture, which includes museums with peat-bog mummies, and the Book of Kells ("an illuminated manuscript Gospel book in Latin") and harp (the symbol of Ireland) in Trinity College. The bridges over the River Liffey are especially worth a look. The new Samuel Beckett Bridge is built to look like a harp, complete with numerous cables as strings.

The UK has loads of places for art and old stuff. For me, the Number 1 place has to be the British Museum where I always visit the Rosetta Stone, which allowed scholars to first understand Egyptian hieroglyphics. Outdoors, along the Embankment (an area on the north side of the Thames River), I like to visit the Cleopatra's Needle obelisk and its adjacent sphinxes. There is a shrapnel hole in one sphinx that resulted from a bomb dropped during WWI. Prior to last year, I'd never visited any of the Tate galleries. However, during a vacation in the county of Cornwall, I stopped off at the Tate St. Ives. (It's not often that pieces in galleries grab me, but two did there: a piece of paper covered in tea stains around the image of a teacup base, with colored ribbons stitched around the stain's edge; and a long cloak covered in used tea bags. You probably have to see them to understand.) A companion gallery is The Barbara Hepworth Museum and Sculpture Garden. (I can safely say that nothing of that acclaimed artist's work interested me, but I was very impressed with all the large and complex spider webs in shrubs in the garden, most with working spiders!)

If you are ever in Tokyo, Japan, the place for museums is Ueno Park. Standing there in front of the National Museum of Western Art is one of Rodin's Thinker sculptures.

To visit all the biggies in Vienna, Austria, would take much more time than most visitors can spare. Highlights for me included [Schloss Schönbrunn](#), the former summer residence of the Habsburgs (the [Palm House](#) indoor garden was especially impressive); [Hofburg Palace](#), a sprawling complex of buildings and grounds where the Vienna Boys' Choir performs, the President and Chancellor have their offices, and there are numerous museums and the national library; [Hundertwasserhaus](#), "a fairytale-like house with onion spires, green roof [as in trees and gardens growing on it], and a multicolored façade is one of the city's most frequently visited landmarks (It was designed by flamboyant Austrian artist Friedensreich Hundertwasser as a playful take on usually dull council housing);" the Upper Belvedere Palace built in Baroque style with extensive gardens (there are three floors of paintings with many works by Gustav Klimt including his famous [The Kiss](#), along with masterpieces by other notable painters); and the world-famous [Spanish Riding School](#). [The horses were originally brought from Spain, hence the name. Later, many came from a stud in Lipica (spelled Lipizza in Italian), in modern-day Slovenia, hence the name [Lipizzaner](#).



Like many European capitals, Paris, France, is "right up to here" with art and museums, far too numerous to enumerate here. To me, for its small size, the [Musée d'Orsay](#) is hard to beat. Built in a former railway station, the building is as interesting as its contents. (See photo at left). Then there's the [Musée du Louvre](#). I freely admit that before I first saw the [Mona Lisa](#), I was expecting it to take up a whole wall it was so "big" in story. But, in reality, it's really quite small and when there is a crowd around it, it can be hard to see! One exhibit there that interested me greatly was [Hammurabi's Code](#), a "well-preserved Babylonian law code, dating back to about 1772 BC" carved in stone. [Americans are

often portrayed as "being in a hurry", and a very funny cartoon along those lines shows an American tourist telling his taxi driver, who has just dropped him at the entrance to the Louvre, to "Keep the engine running, I won't be long."]

During one trip to Milano, Italia, (he pronounces with appropriate hand gestures) I dropped in to see [DaVinci's Last Supper](#). [I recall a very funny sketch on US TV's Saturday Night Live in which [Father Guido Sarducci](#), a comedian dressed as a Catholic priest, shows the host a copy of the bill for said supper, which he'd bought at a flea market in New York City.]

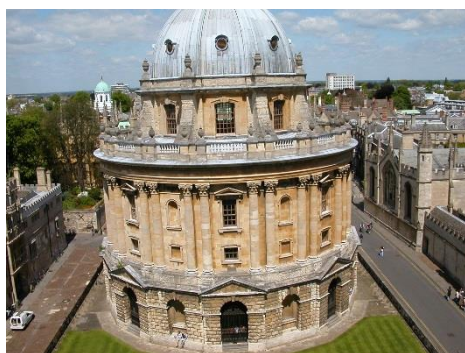
9.2 Libraries

Okay, I admit it; I'm a non-recovering bookaholic, so let's start with the Grand Daddy of them all, the [Library of Congress](#) in Washington DC. It was started when the US Congress bought Thomas Jefferson's entire personal collection, in 1815. According to Wikipedia, "The collections ... include more than 32 million cataloged books and other print materials in 470 languages; more than 61 million manuscripts; the largest rare book collection in North America, including the rough draft of the Declaration of Independence, a Gutenberg Bible (one of only four perfect vellum copies known to

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exist); over 1 million US government publications; 1 million issues of world newspapers spanning the past three centuries; 33,000 bound newspaper volumes; 500,000 microfilm reels; over 6,000 comic book titles; films; 5.3 million maps; 6 million works of sheet music; 3 million sound recordings; more than 14.7 million prints and photographic images including fine and popular art pieces and architectural drawings; the Betts Stradivarius; and the Cassavetti Stradivarius." And unlike most libraries, one can't ordinarily borrow books, as they are there for research purposes. In my numerous visits there, I have never actually looked at any of the regular collection. What impresses me are the extensive murals and tile work, and the view of the main reading room and statuary from the overlook halfway up the dome.

The [British Library](#) "is the national library of the United Kingdom. It's a major research library, holding over 150 million items from many countries, in many languages and in many formats, both print and digital: books, manuscripts, journals, newspapers, magazines, sound and music recordings, videos, play-scripts, patents, databases, maps, stamps, prints, drawings. The Library's collections include around 14 million books, along with substantial holdings of manuscripts and historical items dating back as far as 2000 BC." Originally part of the British Museum, it moved to its own, new home in 1973, right next door to the beautifully restored [St. Pancras](#) railway station. The huge bronze sculpture, NEWTON, in the courtyard is worth some study. For me, the highlight was a sort of National Treasures



room that housed manuscripts from Beowulf, various Gospels, a Gutenberg Bible, Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, copies of pages from the [Magna Carta](#), some very beautiful Korans, and the lyrics of a Beatle's song hand-written on an airline napkin. In one room, I paged through a digital version of some of Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks. [He wrote left-handed, and back-to-front, so a reader needed a mirror! I ask you, is that normal?] During one visit, I got to go on a behind-the-scenes tour of the restoration area where I watched someone restoring a 1,500-year-old Japanese scroll. The [Radcliffe Camera](#) in [Oxford](#) is a most striking building; it houses

the Radcliffe Science Library. (See photo above.)

Dublin, Ireland boasts the [Trinity College Library](#), which I mentioned in Part 1 with respect to the Book of Kells. Not far from there is the [Chester Beatty Library](#), which holds the Islamic and Asian works collected by the American mining magnate.

Weimar, Germany, is home to [Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek](#) (Duchess Anna Amalia Library). The original building is something to see although quite a bit of it and its collection was destroyed by fire just weeks before the contents were to be moved to the new building across the plaza.

I have a particular interest in US Presidential history, and have visited two US presidential libraries: [Richard Nixon's](#) in California and [LBJ's](#) in Texas.

9.3 Aquariums

Once you've seen some really spectacular ones, all others pale by comparison. Monterey, California, is home to [Monterey Bay Aquarium](#); Orlando, Florida, has the EPCOT Center's [The Seas](#); Chicago, Illinois, has the [Shedd Aquarium](#); and Bergen, Norway, has an impressive [aquarium](#).

9.4 Conclusion

In [Part 4](#), we'll look at *Gardens, Theme Parks, Parliament Houses and Capitals, National Parks and Historic Places*, and a few *Odds and Ends*.

10. September 2013, “A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 4”

In [Part 1](#), we covered *Ancient Civilizations and Old Sites* and *Religious Places and Artifacts*. In [Part 2](#), we covered *Royal Hangouts* and *Military-Related Places and Things*. In [Part 3](#), we covered *Museums and Art Galleries, Libraries, and Aquariums*.

10.1 Gardens

When I think of an impressive garden, I immediately think of [Het Loo Palace](#), in The Netherlands. During Napoleon's occupation, the gardens were buried under rubble and used as a horse parade ground. Fortunately, when restoration work was started, the original plans were discovered, and the beds and their ingenious irrigation system were rebuilt.



For many people with *green thumbs*, Britain's [Kew Gardens](#) (or, more formally, the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew) is the Holy Grail. In 2012, while visiting the southwest English counties Cornwall and Devon for the first time, one of my main stopovers was the [Eden Project](#) (see left), a huge, reclaimed clay pit with extensive outdoor gardens and two enormous controlled-climate, geodesic dome structures. Amusingly, the brochure claims they have “the largest rainforest in captivity.”

With 140 acres, the [Desert Botanical Garden](#) in Phoenix, Arizona is worth a visit. I happened to do it late on a Sunday morning where brunch was served to the sounds of a string quartet. That certainly aided the digestion.

While not built as a garden, per se, nonetheless, Tucson, Arizona's [Biosphere 2](#) is impressive. This self-contained living system was an experiment in building colonies on the moon or on some other planet.

I've seen many cultivated gardens, but when it comes right down to it, it's hard to beat nature. For that, I'll take the rain forest in Central or South America, or a big patch of desert with saguaro cactus such as that around the Wild-West movie studio [Old Tucson](#) in Arizona.

10.2 Theme Parks

In the US, we have [Disneyland](#) (in Los Angeles, California), and [Disneyworld](#) and [EPCOT Center](#) (in Orlando, Florida). These definitely are for kids of all ages. [Universal Studios](#) has a number of parks as does the Busch beer group with its [Busch Gardens](#). Just north of San Diego, California, in Escondido, there is a fantastic [wild-animal park](#) in a several thousand-acre setting that approximates each animal's native environment. On the backside of the main island of Oahu, Hawaii, is the [Polynesian Cultural Center](#).

Copenhagen, Denmark, boasts its [Tivoli Gardens](#), and on the Jutland Peninsular, there is the original [LEGOLAND](#), with its very own airport just across the road, really! The 1:25 scale model of Dutch life at [Madurodam](#) is near The Hague, and is definitely worth a visit, even if you don't have kids with you.

10.3 Parliament Houses and Capitals

In 2000, my son and I sat in on interesting debates at the [House of Commons](#) and the [House of Lords](#) in London. More recently, I toured [Canada's Houses of Parliament](#) in Ottawa. I've also toured the Senate and House chambers of the [US Capitol](#), and listened to a debate in the House of Representatives.

On my travels around the US, I've visited many of the state capitols. While in [Carson City, Nevada](#), I got to sit behind a bulletproof glass wall to watch one of the chambers in full debate. That state's legislature sits for no more than 120 days every two years, but members only get paid for the first 60 of those days. [Wags suggest it might be better if they met for two days every 120 years!] Apparently,



during several sessions, business ran right up until midnight on the 120th day, at which time the members voted to stop the clock or to adopt more than 24 hours in that day. [Sacramento, California's Capitol](#) (see left) certainly is impressive. While Arnold Schwarzenegger was governor, I dropped by his office and got one of his business cards. [A visit to the old [Governor's Mansion](#) nearby is worth the effort. It was last occupied by Governor and Mrs. Ronald Reagan.]

During one visit back to my own state capital, Adelaide, South Australia, I dropped in to the [lower house](#) to hear a debate in which everyone was in agreement, and it wasn't about pay raises for members either!

To me, one of the most impressive parliamentary buildings is Germany's [Reichstag](#) in Berlin. Although its dome was destroyed, the building has been beautifully restored to its former glory with a clear-glass dome. The tour to the rooftop is worth the effort. And the large vertical sculpture-like sail inside the dome is actually an enormous set of mirrors that tracks the sun and channels its light down into the main chamber.

10.4 National Parks and Historic Places

While hiking the [Thames Path](#), I rested for a few days in/near Oxford where I visited the [Duke of Marlborough's](#) home, [Blenheim Palace](#). (See photo at right.) [Winston Churchill](#) was born there, and he and his darling Clementine are buried with numerous relatives at the Bladen cemetery nearby. [Oxford](#) is indescribably beautiful; just go visit it! Twice I've visited [Runnymede](#), to see where the Barons forced King John to sign the [Magna Carta](#). While touring Scotland, by sheer accident, my family and I got off the train to find that we were in a village near the famed [Loch Lomond](#). We spent several great days there.



Odense, Denmark, on the large island of Fyn, is home to [Hans Christian Andersen's](#) House. On a 3-day layover in [Iceland](#), I got to see an enormous [geyser](#) erupt, right next to me. It sure is a pristine country. While crossing the [Patagonia](#) in Chile and Argentina I got to see several [glaciers](#) up close, as well as a large iceberg that had broken off and run aground way downstream in the desert. If you'd like to tour a very comfortable 100-room castle, Toronto, Canada's, [Casa Loma](#), is a good place to start.

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In a word, the national, state, and local parks systems in the US are fantastic! To name a few, I've been to [Yellowstone](#), [Yosemite](#), [The Badlands](#), [The Black Hills](#), [Luray Caverns](#), [Wind Cave](#), [Western Grand Canyon](#), and [Mt. Rushmore](#). The bison herds in [Custer State Park](#), South Dakota, and on [Ted Turner's](#) ranch in Montana are worth a look. [Niagara Falls](#) is pretty impressive as well.

A visit to [Hearst Castle](#) in Southern California will show you how to build a nice "little" country place, which, at one time, had the world's largest private zoo. Not to be outdone, the Vanderbilts constructed their country estate, [Biltmore](#), in North Carolina. Much smaller, but nonetheless impressive, homes include [Mount Vernon](#) (George Washington) and [Monticello](#) (Thomas Jefferson).

To see the [OK Corral](#) where that famous wild-west gunfight took place, and [Boot Hill](#) cemetery, go to [Tombstone](#), Arizona. The oldest European settlement in North America can be seen at [St. Augustine](#) in Florida.

And last, but by no means least, Texas has [The Alamo](#), near San Antonio; [Judge Roy Bean's](#) famous bar and sometime courthouse in Langtree; and the [Texas School Book Depository](#), from where Lee Harvey Oswald supposedly assassinated President Kennedy.

10.5 Odds and Ends

If you like heights, check out the [Tokyo Tower](#) (see left), Paris's [Eiffel Tower](#), and Toronto's [CN Tower](#). [You can also walk out in the open across the top of the Sydney Harbor Bridge while tethered to a safety rail, something I have yet to do.]



Yes, the Amazon River is impressive, and yes, it has piranhas, Cayman alligators, and leaky dugout canoes. (I know, because I was the one bailing out the water!) Some butterflies I saw were the size of a dinner plate! I also encountered a friendly, and quite large, [tapir](#).

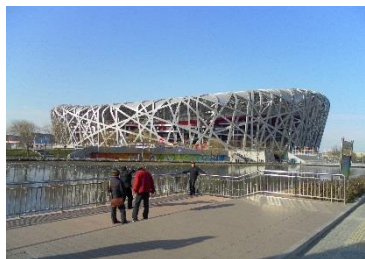
At 1,000 meters, [Angel Falls](#) near Canaima, Venezuela, is the world's tallest waterfall. It definitely is impressive especially when viewed from the window of the 727 aircraft that took me up the valley. [For some interesting information about that area, read Arthur Conan Doyle's [Lost World](#), and watch the movies [Arachnophobia](#) and [Up](#).]

Two instantly recognizable mountains are Japan's [Mt. Fuji](#) (Fujiyama or Fuji-san) and Seattle's, [Mt. Rainier](#). In the former case, there is a mailbox at the top for climbers to post letters! [So, let me get this right. Someone climbs up there to post a letter, and then someone else climbs up there and retrieves it to take it down to the post office. Hmm.]

If you are in the mood to visit a prison as a tourist, [Alcatraz](#) and [Folsom](#) are worth the effort. While the former is no longer in operation, the latter is, and you can take photos or video, so long as you don't include any guards or prisoners in your shots. Really! And, yes, [Johnny Cash](#) did perform there.

If one was very wealthy, fed up with English society, heard voices in one's head telling one to get away from it all, one could do like [Edward James](#), and go to a remote jungle in Mexico and [build huge](#),

surreal sculptures and a Gothic-style mansion. [I spent a couple nights in his mansion, which was being converted into a hotel.]



Olympic Stadia/Villages are worth a visit. I've seen those in Montreal, Canada; Helsinki, Finland; and Beijing, China's, famous "Birds Nest" (see left). The Beijing Water Cube swimming center certainly is impressive.

The Cape Canaveral space base in Florida is something to see. [I always wanted to go watch a shuttle launch, but never made it. I did, however, get to see up close a shuttle atop its Boeing 747 *Mother Ship*.]

10.6 Conclusion

There is an old saying that goes something like, "Those who can, do, while those who can't, teach!" While I have great respect for most schoolteachers, I certainly would apply a modified version of this adage to art (and book and music) critics. Frankly, I never have been interested in hearing what the critic thought the artist "must have been thinking," when they executed some particular work, or whether they were "on or off their medications."

I started Part 1 with a mildly disrespectful attitude toward Kulcha from an Aussie's perspective. Such attitudes were hardly discouraged when in 1973 the Australian Government paid a princely sum for Jackson Pollock's painting Blue Poles. "Trust us; it's a national investment," they said of the abstract painting, despite that the average person in the street thought their kindergartner had done something better. Soon after its purchase, paint started to peel, and it needed substantial restoration work. C'est la vie!

So, what's still on my bucket list? The Pyramids and Sphinx in Egypt; Canberra, the capital city of my native country, Australia; actually going inside the White House; Vancouver Island, Canada; the island of Bornholm in Denmark; hiking hut-to-hut in the Swiss Alps; certain parts of Greece and Turkey; Andalusia, Spain; Morocco; New Zealand; Slovenia; Yorkshire, England; going the full length of the Danube River on a working barge; and some driving trips in the US to visit various Presidential Libraries.

So, after visiting all these places and seeing all these things, am I more sophisticated? Probably, but I still get confused when there is more than one knife and fork at my table setting!

I hope this series has helped improve your Kulcha Quotient.

11. October 2013, “Last Writes”

Most of us have assets and liabilities. We pay bills on a regular basis. We pay rent or a house mortgage. We have one or more bank accounts and credit cards. We file tax returns. We have insurance policies to cover a variety of things. However, much of what we do in these regards is in our heads, possibly with a few things marked on a calendar (possibly using our own particular shorthand). What happens then if we are temporarily or permanently unable to do those things? How will someone else figure out how to do these things on our behalf?

A common situation is one in which a person is one of a couple and various housekeeping and record-keeping chores are divided between the two. If one partner were unable to do any of the things he normally does, could the other do them instead? If a person lives alone, who will do these tasks for them? If you are the executor of an aging parent's estate, where will you begin to sort out their lives when they die? And if an estate is paying its executor, it's easy to see how a large chunk of that estate could be spent in figuring this out.

If you have any sort of footprint on this planet at all, you will benefit from having some sort of written—preferably recorded electronically—instructions describing the myriad of things one would need to know to perform the personal administrative things you do on a regular basis.

I created such a document as part of my estate planning, and it is intended to serve as an aid to my estate's executor and to those who hold Power-of-Attorney rights if I am unable to make my own healthcare or other decisions prior to death. I update this document every six months, and send a revised copy to my executor and to those who hold various Powers of Attorney. I keep printed copies in my home safe and my bank safe-deposit box. The master copy resides on my main computer, and I might update that more frequently than twice-per-year, in which case, it's important that the most up-to-date version actually be used.

So, not long after you have been given your last rites, someone will be looking for your *last writes*! Do they exist and, if so, how will anyone find them? This essay proposes a series of things you would do well to document for your own situation.

11.1 Getting Started

At least the following items are needed to get the other information and things one might need in dealing with another person's business and personal interests:

1. Access to their house and/or office
2. Access to their computer(s)
3. Access to their home safe
4. Access to their safe-deposit box

11.2 Personal Data

1. Legal name: also common names, if they are different. (Lots of people have nicknames that they use every day.)

2. Place and date of birth
3. Citizenship(s), passport number(s), and expiration dates
4. Any Federal or official personal identification number (such as the US's Social Security Number [SSN])

11.3 Contacts

Having all personal and/or business contact information available in one place, which is maintained by a computer program, is best, especially if it is searchable. However, this requires considerable discipline to maintain, and probably doesn't exist for many (most?) people. (Clearly, this assumes that the executor has access to the computer skills needed to do this.)

The more organized such a contact list is, the less that has to be put in the Last Writes document. That document simply needs mention some key names that can be used as indirect pointers into the computerized contact database.

[I maintain my contact database in Microsoft Office's Outlook program. I use categories to group contacts having connections, as such "legal," "medical," "banking," "insurance," "auto repairs," and "house repairs."]

11.4 Calendar/Appointments

Like Contacts, a calendar is best maintained by a computer program. However, this requires considerable discipline to maintain, and probably doesn't exist for many (most?) people.

[I maintain my calendar in Microsoft Office's Outlook program. Not only does it keep track of my personal and business activities, but I also use its recurring-event facility for reminders of things that have to be done on a weekly, quarterly, or annual basis, for example. And I use it to raise alarms up to two weeks in advance of an event.]

11.5 Close Relatives and Family Information

1. Name of spouse/partner and date and location of marriage/union/divorce
2. Names of parents and siblings
3. Names of children

11.6 Close Friends

The people on this list would be notified in case of death or serious/long-term disability.

11.7 Main Employer/Employee and Business Contacts

The people on this list would be notified in case of death or serious/long-term disability.

11.8 Landlord (if renting)

1. Owner name and contact information

2. If applicable, property manager name and contact information
3. Amount of rent, rent frequency, and payment date
4. Method of payment (perhaps it's automatically debited from a bank account)
5. Amount of security deposit
6. Length of lease
7. Location of lease document

11.9 Mortgage (if buying)

1. Mortgage company name and contact information
2. Amount of payment, payment frequency, and payment date
3. Method of payment (perhaps it's automatically debited from a bank account)
4. Location of loan documents and title

11.10 Will

1. Name(s) of legal contact(s) and executor
2. Date when the most recent will and all current codicils were drawn up
3. Location of copies of the most recent will and all current codicils

11.11 Powers of Attorney (PoA)

1. Name of durable medical PoA
2. Name of durable general purposes PoA
3. It would be useful to provide extra guidelines with respect to being in a long-term coma and the use of "Heroic measures"

11.12 Financial Accounts (Joint and Separate)

1. Checking account(s)
2. Savings account(s)
3. Retirement account(s)
4. Non-Retirement investments
5. Credit Card account(s)
6. Location of any computer files used to track financial accounts
7. Location of any computer files used to track invoices/accounts payable
8. Details of any unsecured loans made to family, friends, own business

11.13 Computer Systems and Backups

Many people own a desktop computer as well as a laptop or tablet computer. They might also use their phone for email and messaging. These tools all have usernames and passwords. Some people also have their own domain names and websites. Such facilities require their own hosting companies, usernames, and passwords.

Most email facilities allow copies of all messages sent and received to be retained and possibly archived somehow.

[I own the domain RexJaeschke.com and have the website www.RexJaeschke.com. I maintain my email accounts on my own computer using Microsoft Office's Outlook program. At the end of each month, I permanently delete all personal mail messages from my *Sent Items* and *Deleted Items* folders that are more than 30 days old. Of the remaining messages, each of those having attachments totaling 1MB or more are inspected. All such attachments that are transient in nature or for which a copy was stored separately on a hard disk, are removed and the parent message re-saved without them. I then use the Archive option of Outlook to save all messages that are older than 30 days. This results in one archive file per year stored on a hard disk. The current email database and archived mail files are backed-up as part of the monthly computer backup.]

A similar situation may exist for Instant Message (IM) accounts.

It has been my experience that too few owners of computers have an adequate, if any, backup strategy. [I backup all my data every month with copies going onto three big disks that are stored in my office, in my fire safe, and my safe-deposit box. For more information on this topic, see my December 2010 essay, "[Technology, Unplugged – Part 2.](#)".

11.14 Income Tax Records

1. Name of tax preparer
2. Location of copies of past tax returns and correspondence
3. It's a good idea to scan past returns and correspondence into computer files, so the paper copies can be shredded

11.15 Safe-Deposit Box (at bank)

1. Location and number of box, and location of key/combination
2. Copy of will
3. Birth certificate
4. Marriage/divorce documents
5. Title(s) for vehicle(s) and house(s)
6. Off-site computer data backup disk(s)
7. Other valuable things (such as coins and family heirlooms)

11.16 Fire Safe (at home/office)

1. Location of safe and key/combination
2. Copies of various papers, including will and codicils
3. Passport(s)
4. Copy of Title(s) for vehicle(s) and house(s)
5. Computer systems usernames and passwords
6. On-site computer data backup disk(s)
7. Bank ATM/Cash Machine and credit card ID numbers

8. Emergency cash

11.17 Business Assets

1. Computer systems
2. Software
3. Technical/reference Books
4. Furniture
5. Intellectual property

11.18 Assets

1. Real Estate
2. Vehicle(s)
3. Cash and investments
4. Checking account
5. Savings accounts
6. Retirement accounts
7. House contents
8. Accounts receivable

11.19 Liabilities

1. Home mortgage(s)
2. Vehicle loan(s)
3. Personal loan(s)
4. College tuition loan(s)
5. Credit card accounts not paid in full each month
6. Home Equity line of credit
7. Any big-ticket item being financed (such as furniture or appliance purchases)
8. Major monthly bills
9. Any loans or other liabilities where you are a co-signer or guarantor

11.20 Insurance

1. Medical and Prescription
2. Dental
3. Optical
4. Life
5. Automobile
6. Disability
7. General Liability
8. House contents
9. Renter's coverage
10. Computer hardware and software loss coverage
11. Business liability (plus Errors and Omissions coverage)

11.21 Memorandum re Asset Distribution

Generally, a won't cover everything, just the main things. As such, it's good to have more documentation about who gets what with regard to the more personal stuff.

1. Computer backup disk(s)
2. Computers, other hardware, and software
3. Books (technical, reference and fiction)
4. Music/video (audio tapes, CDs, and DVDs)
5. Travel diaries (audio, hard-copy bound books, and electronic versions stored on a computer)
6. Home movie recordings
7. Family Photographs
8. Family tree books and hometown history books
9. Collections (such as stamps and coins)

11.22 Miscellaneous Notes

1. Organ donation
2. Funeral arrangements
3. For cremation, location where ashes should be buried/scattered
4. What to do with any website or blog

11.23 Conclusion

The more someone's Last Writes document contains the better. And while it won't help the person who has passed on, those left with the task of winding up an estate will be most grateful.

12. November 2013, “English – Part 4: Pronouns”

In [Part 3](#), we looked at nouns. This time, we look at pronouns. A pronoun (abbrev. pron. or pr.) is a word that can be used in place of a noun or noun phrase.

12.1 Subject Pronouns

Let's start with the most common kind of pronouns, those that indicate who or what is doing something; that is, the personal pronouns used as the subject of a sentence or a clause:

Subject Pronouns		
	Singular	Plural
1st Person	I	we
2st Person	you	you
3st Person	he, she, it	they

Some examples are:

- “I love ice cream!”
- “You may go to the movies tonight.”
- “She is busy right now.”
- “It was already broken.”
- “They were late.”

In most cases, we must first establish the noun being replaced before we can use the abbreviated, pronoun form. For example, in the sentences above, to whom or what do *you*, *he*, *she*, *it*, *we*, and *they* refer? And in the case of *you*, is it one person or more than one? However, once the noun is established, a pronoun can make things much simpler. For example, “The President came on stage. He thanked everyone for coming; he gave a great speech; and then he received a standing ovation.” As we see, once the subject noun is established, all subsequent pronouns that could possibly replace that subject, do so. Consider the following: “John came to the picnic. Bob came too. However, he was late.” Presumably, Bob arrived late. If, in fact, it was John, we'd need to use *John* instead of *he*. However, if we replace *Bob* with *Mary*, the *he* would now refer to John.

English had the archaic second person *thou* (singular) and *ye* (plural). The word *thou* is still seen in literary and Biblical contexts, as in “Thou art my God.”

While *I* is always capitalized, the other subject pronouns usually are not. But, of course, English is full of exceptions. For example, “He was married to She Who Must be Obeyed!”, and “I know that He is the Chosen One!”

When a noun phrase includes multiple subject pronouns or such a pronoun and a noun, and the pronoun is *I*, that pronoun goes at the end of the list. For example, "You and I have been invited to the party." And "My parents and I went to the movies."

You might have heard *we* used in an unusual manner. For example, Her Majesty might ask one of her subjects, "And how are we today?" (In fact, your family doctor might say the same thing.) Of course, the correct reply is, "We is fine, you foxy Mama!" Apparently, such uses are known as the *patronizing "we."* Then there is the *royal "we"* (or *Majestic plural*), the *editorial "we,"* the *author's "we,"* and the *non-confrontative "we,"* all of which you can read about [here](#).

12.2 Object Pronouns

Many sentences contain a predicate having a direct and/or indirect object. The personal pronouns used as objects are:

Object Pronouns		
	Singular	Plural
1 st Person	me	us
2 st Person	you	you
3 st Person	him, her, it	them

Some examples are:

- "We saw them at the theater."
- "Mary gave it to me."
- "The man helped her to find us."
- "I last spoke to you on Friday."

Like most subject pronouns, we must first establish the noun being replaced before we can use the abbreviated, object pronoun form.

English had the archaic second person *thee* (singular) and *ye* (plural). The word *thee* is still seen in literary and Biblical contexts, as in "With this ring, I thee wed." When referring to God, for example, Thee is capitalized.

When a noun phrase includes multiple object pronouns or such a pronoun and a noun, and the pronoun is *me*, that pronoun goes at the end of the list. For example, "Father gave the tickets to you and me." and "Uncle Jack gave my parents and me a ride home."

Here are some common, but very wrong, examples:

- "Me and Jimmy went hunting." Correct form: "Jimmy and I went hunting." because the pronoun is in the subject.

- “Him and me each shot a deer.” Correct form: “He and I each shot a deer.” because the pronouns are in the subject. [We could say, “The deer were shot by him and me.” or more simply, “The deer were shot by us.” but that doesn’t say clearly that we each shot one. Perhaps we both shot all of them, 25 times, after drinking a case of beer; BURP!]

12.3 Reflexive Pronouns

When an object is the same as the subject, we have a reflexive situation, and as the object will be a pronoun, its reflexive form must be used. The reflexive pronouns are:

Reflexive Pronouns		
	Singular	Plural
1 st Person	myself	ourselves
2 st Person	yourself	yourselves
3 st Person	himself, herself, itself	themselves

The Royal “we” equivalent is *ourselves*, and the indefinite version is *oneself*. For example, “One can always improve oneself.”

Some examples are:

- “I appointed myself arbitrator.”
- “He patted himself on the back for a job well done.”
- “They voted themselves out of office.”

The reflexive form of *thou* and *thee* is *thyself*.

It is not uncommon to hear people mistakenly use a reflexive pronoun with an unrelated subject. For example, “Please send a copy to Mary and myself.” The correct pronoun is *me*. On the other hand, the opposite mistake can be made; “I’m gonna catch me a wascaly wabbit!” Of course, the correct pronoun is *myself*, but who are we to argue with the dialog of a Bugs Bunny cartoon? [For that matter, many country (and other) music songs introduce such mistakes intentionally to get the words to rhyme.]

The reflexive pronouns can all be used as corresponding intensive pronouns to add emphasis. For example, “I did all the work myself!” The difference here is that the pronoun can be omitted without losing any meaning, whereas in a reflexive context it cannot.

12.4 Reciprocal Pronouns

The terms *one another* and *each other* are reciprocal pronouns in which members of a set perform a reciprocal action on other members of that set. Examples are, "They helped each other put on their armor." and "They competed with one another for the prize."

12.5 Dummy Pronouns

A dummy pronoun is one used where a noun or noun phrase is required syntactically, yet none is needed or even exists. For example:

- "It is hot."
- "It is clear that ..."
- "It rained itself out!"

12.6 Possessive Pronouns

Conveniently, possessive pronouns indicate possession. These pronouns are:

Possessive Pronouns		
	Singular	Plural
1 st Person	mine	ours
2 st Person	yours	yours
3 st Person	his, hers, its	theirs

For example:

- "The blue car is mine." "Mine is green."
- "Which containers are yours?" "Hers have her name on them."
- I believe this is theirs." "No, theirs was the red one."

The archaic version is *thine*.

12.7 Demonstrative Pronouns

Demonstrative pronouns are used to distinguish one or more things from a set. For example:

- "This is my hat."
- "Are these your gloves?"
- "She goes out in public in that?"
- "Are those clean?"
- "Please pass me that one."

12.8 Indefinite Pronouns

There are numerous indefinite pronouns; these refer to unspecified things. Examples include *one*; *no one*, *everyone*, *someone*, and *anyone* (and their *-thing* equivalents), and *none*, *some*, *neither*, and *both*.

12.9 Relative Pronouns

The relative pronouns are *which*, *that*, and *who*. For example:

- “He arrived late, which was rude.”
- “The DVD that I bought yesterday was on sale.”
- “The man who left early was a retired military officer.”

There has been, and continues to be, a debate about the use of *that* vs. *which*. Here is the rule I use: If the pronoun and whatever immediately follows it is necessary to qualify the noun to which it is being applied, use *that* without a comma; otherwise, use a comma, followed by *which*. For example, in the following:

- “Painting Number 10, which the artist painted while drunk, sold for \$1 million.”
could just as easily have been written instead as:

- “Painting Number 10 (which the artist painted while drunk) sold for \$1 million.”

or

- “Painting Number 10—which the artist painted while drunk—sold for \$1 million.”

The fact that the artist was drunk at the time has no bearing on the intended meaning. Removing that clause is just fine.

On the other hand, in “The car that is standing at the curb is mine.”, the qualifier is needed.

12.10 Interrogative Pronouns

Finally, we look at interrogative pronouns, words used to ask a question. Examples include:

- “What is today’s lunch special?”
- “Since when?”
- “Who stole my cheese?”
- “To whom shall I address the letter?”

The word *who* is a subject pronoun while *whom* is its equivalent object version.

12.11 Conclusion

I’m reminded of the old joke in which the English teacher asks an inattentive student, “Give me two pronouns.” Caught unawares, the student replied, “Who? Me?”

Over the years, I’ve recommended highly Patricia T. O’Conner’s book *Woe is I*. Should the title of a book on English grammar contain an incorrect pronoun? Of course, like so many other examples in that easy-to-read book, this one is a pun on the very subject it covers.

Annex A. Cumulative Index for Volumes 1–11

A.1 Postings in Reverse Chronological Order

Here are the essays posted thus far, with the most recent listed first:

A.1.1 Volume 11

- #132 November 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 22](#) — Switzerland
- #131 October 2020: [School Days: Part 2](#)
- #130 September 2020: [Travel – Memories of Russia](#)
- #129 August 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 21](#) — the Northern Neck of Virginia, USA
- #128 July 2020: [School Days: Part 1](#)
- #127 June 2020: [Travel – Memories of Chile](#)
- #126 May 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 20](#) — Edinburgh, Scotland; London, England; Beijing, China; and more
- #125 April 2020: [The REALLY BIG Picture](#)
- #124 March 2020: [Travel – Memories of the US Desert Southwest](#)
- #123 February 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 19](#) — Edinburgh, Scotland
- #122 January 2020: [Football, Aussie Style](#)
- #121 December 2019: [Travel – Memories of Yorkshire](#)

A.1.2 Volume 10

- #120 November 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 18](#) — Japan
- #119 October 2019: [Washington D.C.](#)
- #118 September 2019: [Travel – Memories of New Mexico](#)
- #117 August 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 17](#) — Texas and Utah
- #116 July 2019: [My Experience with Airbnb](#)
- #115 June 2019: [Travel – From Adelaide to Washington DC](#)
- #114 May 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 16](#) — St. Croix
- #113 April 2019: [Law Enforcement in the US](#)
- #112 March 2019: [Travel – Memories of Abu Dhabi, UAE](#)
- #111 February 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 15](#) — Norway
- #110 January 2019: [My Time in Maine](#)
- #109 December 2018: [Travel – Memories of Prague, Salzburg, and-Munchen](#)

A.1.3 Volume 9

- #108 November 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 14](#) — Croatia, Slovenia, and Italy.
- #107 October 2018: [Living in Chicago](#)
- #106 September 2018: [Travel – Memories of Puerto Rico](#)
- #105 August 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 13](#) — Croatia.
- #104 July 2018: [A Little Bit of Religion](#)
- #103 June 2018: [Travel – Memories of Sacramento, Tahoe, Reno, & Napa Valley](#)
- #102 May 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 12](#) — Vienna, Austria, and Seoul, Korea.

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- #101 April 2018: [These United States](#)
- #100 March 2018: [Travel – Memories of The Dalmatian Coast](#)
- #99 February 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 11](#) — US states of Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana, and Korea and Japan
- #98 January 2018: [Having a Plan B](#)
- #97 December 2017: [Travel – Memories of The Hill Country, Texas, Y'all](#)

A.1.4 Volume 8

- #96 November 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 10](#) — Hawaii
- #95 October 2017: [English – Part 7: Adverbs](#)
- #94 September 2017: [Travel – Memories of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao](#)
- #93 August 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 9](#) — Barcelona, Spain
- #92 July 2017: [What is Normal – Part 10. Automobiles and Driving](#)
- #91 June 2017: [Travel – Memories of Jordan](#)
- #90 May 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 8](#) — France, Finland, California, Croatia, England, Korea, and Washington State
- #89 April 2017: [Oh, the Things that I have Eaten](#)
- #88 March 2017: [Travel – Memories of Southeast England](#)
- #87 February 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 7](#) — Italy, Jordan, and France
- #86 January 2017: [Travel – Airports](#)
- #85 December 2016: [Travel – Memories of Cornwall and Devon](#)

A.1.5 Volume 7

- #84 November 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 6](#) — Various countries
- #83 October 2016: [A Little Bit of Astronomy: The Moon](#)
- #82 September 2016: [Travel – Memories of Poland](#)
- #81 August 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 5](#) — Various countries
- #80 July 2016: [It's all Greek to Me](#)
- #79 June 2016: [Travel – Memories of South America](#)
- #78 May 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 4](#) — Australia
- #77 April 2016: [English – Part 6: Verbs](#)
- #76 March 2016: [Travel – Memories of Switzerland](#)
- #75 February 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 3](#) — London and Yorkshire
- #74 January 2016: [Accidents and Incidents](#)
- #73 December 2015: [Travel – Memories of Germany](#)

A.1.6 Volume 6

- #72 November 2015: [Signs of Life: Part 2](#) — London and Yorkshire
- #71 October 2015: [What is Normal – Part 9. An American in Australia](#)
- #70 September 2015: [Travel – Memories of Austria](#)
- #69 August 2015: [Signs of Life: Part 1](#) — London and Yorkshire
- #68 July 2015: [Confessions of a Canine Companion](#)
- #67 June 2015: [Travel – Memories of Mexico and Central America](#)

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- #66 May 2015: [What is Normal – Part 8: Public Holidays](#)
- #65 April 2015: [Travel – Memories of Asia](#)
- #64 March 2015: [A Little Bit of Royalty](#)
- #63 February 2015: [Travel – Memories of the Eastern Bloc](#)
- #62 January 2015: [Sockets, Plugs, and Cables](#)
- #61 December 2014: [Travel – Oh the Places I have Stayed](#)

A.1.7 Volume 5

- #60 November 2014: [English – Part 5: Adjectives](#)
- #59 October 2014: [Travel – Memories of the Benelux Countries](#)
- #58 September 2014: [Abbreviations and Acronyms](#)
- #57 August 2014: [Travel – Memories of Japan](#)
- #56 July 2014: [Technology, Revisited](#)
- #55 June 2014: [Travel – Memories of Australia](#)
- #54 May 2014: [What is Normal – Part 7: What's in a Name?](#)
- #53 April 2014: [Travel – Memories of Ireland and the UK](#)
- #52 March 2014: [A Little Bit of Mathematics](#)
- #51 February 2014: [Travel – Memories of Scandinavia](#)
- #50 January 2014: [The Cost of Bad Weather and Natural Disasters](#)
- #49 December 2013: [Travel – Memories of Italy](#)

A.1.8 Volume 4

- #48 November 2013: [English – Part 4: Pronouns](#)
- #47 October 2013: [Last Writes](#) — Leaving an audit trail for your executor and/or loved ones
- #46 September 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 4](#) — Gardens, Theme Parks, Parliament Houses and Capitals, National Parks and Historic Places, and some Odds and Ends
- #45 August 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 3](#) — Museums and Art Galleries, Libraries, and Aquariums
- #44 July 2013: [English – Part 3: Nouns](#)
- #43 June 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 2](#) — Royal Hangouts and Military-Related Places and Things
- #42 May 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 1](#) — Ancient Civilizations and Old Sites, and Religious Places and Artifacts
- #41 April 2013: [Standards – The Secret Life of a Language Lawyer](#) — A look at some everyday standards and conventions
- #40 March 2013: [What is Normal – Part 6: Weights and Measures](#)
- #39 February 2013: [The Big Move](#) — preparing and selling a house, finding another one, and moving.
- #38 January 2013: [Starting your Own Non-Profit](#)
- #37 December 2012: [Symbols and Marks](#)

A.1.9 Volume 3

- #36 November 2012: [English – Part 2: Pronunciation](#)

Rex Jaeschke's Blog Postings: Volume 04 – December 2012 through November 2013

- #35 October 2012: [A Little Bit More American Civics](#) — The Congress, Presidential Succession, The Supreme Court, and the Flag
- #34 September 2012: [A Little Bit of American Civics](#) — The Constitution, Presidency, Vice Presidency, and Cabinet
- #33 August 2012: [What is Normal – Part 5: Numbers and Counting Systems](#)
- #32 July 2012: [Are You Getting Enough Vacation?](#)
- #31 June 2012: [English – Part 1: A Potpourri](#)
- #30 May 2012: [Shooting and Editing Home Video](#)
- #29 April 2012: [Electronic Mail Etiquette](#) — Some of my pet peeves and observations about people who use email
- #28 March 2012: [How Committees Work](#) — My take on 40 years of committee participation, and how successful committees can and should work.
- #27 February 2012: [Living in Utopia](#) — Life in a planned American city.
- #26 January 2012: [Travel – Packing and Preparing](#)
- #25 December 2011: [Making Good-Looking Documents](#) — Some tips on how to take advantage of a word processing program.

A.1.10 Volume 2

- #24 November 2011: [A Little Foreign Language Goes a Long Way](#) — The advantages of having some basic foreign language skills when traveling.
- #23 October 2011: [Starting Your Own Business](#)
- #22 September 2011: [What is Normal – Part 4: Dates and Times](#)
- #21 August 2011: [Teaching English as a Second Language](#)
- #20 July 2011: [A Walk along the River](#) — A look back at my 187-mile hike along the Thames Path in England.
- #19 June 2011: [Just Me and MiniMe: Traveling with Technology](#)
- #18 May 2011: [Planning for Success](#)
- #17 April 2011: [Travel – FAQs](#)
- #16 March 2011: [What is Normal – Part 3: Money](#)
- #15 February 2011: [Talk is Cheap. Write it Down](#) — I explore what I perceive to be the four stages of turning a dream into reality and why many people don't have what it takes to go beyond the first one or two stages.
- #14 January 2011: [Waiting My Turn](#) — A look back at all those times I'd stood in line or taken a number and waited my turn.
- #13 December 2010: [Technology, Unplugged – Part 2](#) — I discuss automobiles, still and video cameras, the written word, a digital data preservation strategy, and my right-hand gadget.

A.1.11 Volume 1

- #12 November 2010: [Technology, Unplugged – Part 1](#) — I discuss the telephone, television, the internet, and recorded music.
- #11 October 2010: [Books by My Bed](#) — My love of books.
- #10 September 2010: [Making Allowances](#) — My experiences in setting up an allowance for my son.

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- #9 August 2010: [Confessions of an Obama Volunteer](#) — My involvement in the 2008 US Presidential election.
- #8 July 2010: [What is Normal? – Part 2: Writing Systems](#)
- #7 June 2010: [Australia and the U.S. – A Contrast](#) — A comparison of the following: politics and government, law enforcement, taxation, education, and changing light bulbs.
- #6 May 2010: [Travel – Fly Me to the Moon](#) — My flight log after 40 years of air travel.
- #5 April 2010: [The Road to US Citizenship](#)
- #4 March 2010: [What is Normal? – Part 1: Getting Started](#)
- #3 February 2010: [Where's My Damn Gold Watch?](#) — A look back at my first 40 years in the workforce.
- #2 January 2010: [Travel – Home Stays](#)
- #1 December 2009: [Hi Ho, Hi Ho, it's Off to Blog We Go](#) — The introduction to my blog.

A.2 Series: Travel

- #130 September 2020: [Travel – Memories of Russia](#)
- #127 June 2020: [Travel – Memories of Chile](#)
- #124 March 2020: [Travel – Memories of the US Desert Southwest](#)
- #121 December 2019: [Travel – Memories of Yorkshire](#)
- #118 September 2019: [Travel – Memories of New Mexico](#)
- #115 June 2019: [Travel – From Adelaide to Washington DC](#)
- #112 March 2019: [Travel – Memories of Abu Dhabi, UAE](#)
- #109 December 2018: [Travel – Memories of Prague, Salzburg, and-Munchen](#)
- #106 September 2018: [Travel – Memories of Puerto Rico](#)
- #103 June 2018: [Travel – Memories of Sacramento, Tahoe, Reno, & Napa Valley](#)
- #100 March 2018: [Travel – Memories of The Dalmatian Coast](#)
- #97 December 2017: [Travel – Memories of The Hill Country, Texas, Y'all](#)
- #94 September 2017: [Travel – Memories of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao](#)
- #91 June 2017: [Travel – Memories of Jordan](#)
- #88 March 2017: [Travel – Memories of Southeast England](#)
- #86 January 2017: [Travel – Airports](#)
- #85 December 2016: [Travel – Memories of Cornwall and Devon](#)
- #82 September 2016: [Travel – Memories of Poland](#)
- #79 June 2016: [Travel – Memories of South America](#)
- #76 March 2016: [Travel – Memories of Switzerland](#)
- #73 December 2015: [Travel – Memories of Germany](#)
- #70 September 2015: [Travel – Memories of Austria](#)
- #67 June 2015: [Travel – Memories of Mexico and Central America](#)
- #65 April 2015: [Travel – Memories of Asia](#)
- #63 February 2015: [Travel – Memories of the Eastern Bloc](#)
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- #57 August 2014: [Travel – Memories of Japan](#)

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- #55 June 2014: [Travel – Memories of Australia](#)
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- #51 February 2014: [Travel – Memories of Scandinavia](#)
- #49 December 2013: [Travel – Memories of Italy](#)
- #26 January 2012: [Travel – Packing and Preparing](#)
- #17 April 2011: [Travel – FAQs](#)
- #6 May 2010: [Travel – Fly Me to the Moon](#) — My flight log after 40 years of air travel.
- #2 January 2010: [Travel – Home Stays](#)

A.3 Series: What is Normal

- #92 July 2017: [What is Normal – Part 10. Automobiles and Driving](#)
- #71 October 2015: [What is Normal – Part 9. An American in Australia](#)
- #66 May 2015: [What is Normal – Part 8: Public Holidays](#)
- #54 May 2014: [What is Normal – Part 7: What's in a Name?](#)
- #40 March 2013: [What is Normal – Part 6: Weights and Measures](#)
- #33 August 2012: [What is Normal – Part 5: Numbers and Counting Systems](#)
- #22 September 2011: [What is Normal – Part 4: Dates and Times](#)
- #16 March 2011: [What is Normal – Part 3: Money](#)
- #8 July 2010: [What is Normal? – Part 2: Writing Systems](#)
- #4 March 2010: [What is Normal? – Part 1: Getting Started](#)

A.4 Series: English

- #95 October 2017: [English – Part 7: Adverbs](#)
- #77 April 2016: [English – Part 6: Verbs](#)
- #60 November 2014: [English – Part 5: Adjectives](#)
- #48 November 2013: [English – Part 4: Pronouns](#)
- #44 July 2013: [English – Part 3: Nouns](#)
- #36 November 2012: [English – Part 2: Pronunciation](#)
- #31 June 2012: [English – Part 1: A Potpourri](#)

A.5 Series: A Little Bit of ...

- #104 July 2018: [A Little Bit of Religion](#)
- #83 October 2016: [A Little Bit of Astronomy: The Moon](#)
- #64 March 2015: [A Little Bit of Royalty](#)
- #52 March 2014: [A Little Bit of Mathematics](#)
- #46 September 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 4](#) — Gardens, Theme Parks, Parliament Houses and Capitals, National Parks and Historic Places, and some Odds and Ends
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- #42 May 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 1](#) — Ancient Civilizations and Old Sites, and Religious Places and Artifacts
- #35 October 2012: [A Little Bit More American Civics](#) — The Congress, Presidential Succession, The Supreme Court, and the Flag
- #34 September 2012: [A Little Bit of American Civics](#) — The Constitution, Presidency, Vice Presidency, and Cabinet

A.6 Series: Autobiographic Essays

- #131 October 2020: [School Days: Part 2](#)
- #128 July 2020: [School Days: Part 1](#)
- #122 January 2020: [Football, Aussie Style](#)
- #110 January 2019: [My Time in Maine](#)
- #107 October 2018: [Living in Chicago](#)
- #89 April 2017: [Oh, the Things that I have Eaten](#)
- #74 January 2016: [Accidents and Incidents](#)
- #68 July 2015: [Confessions of a Canine Companion](#)
- #41 April 2013: [Standards – The Secret Life of a Language Lawyer](#) — A look at some everyday standards and conventions
- #39 February 2013: [The Big Move](#) — preparing and selling a house, finding another one, and moving.
- #27 February 2012: [Living in Utopia](#) — Life in a planned American city.
- #14 January 2011: [Waiting My Turn](#) — A look back at all those times I'd stood in line or taken a number and waited my turn.
- #13 December 2010: [Technology, Unplugged – Part 2](#) — I discuss automobiles, still and video cameras, the written word, a digital data preservation strategy, and my right-hand gadget.
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- #9 August 2010: [Confessions of an Obama Volunteer](#) — My involvement in the 2008 US Presidential election.
- #5 April 2010: [The Road to US Citizenship](#)
- #3 February 2010: [Where's My Damn Gold Watch?](#) — A look back at my first 40 years in the workforce.

A.7 Series: Signs of Life

- #129 August 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 21](#) — the Northern Neck of Virginia, USA
- #126 May 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 20](#) — Edinburgh, Scotland; London, England; Beijing, China; and more
- #123 February 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 19](#) — Edinburgh, Scotland
- #120 November 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 18](#) — Japan

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- #117 August 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 17](#) — Texas and Utah
- #114 May 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 16](#) — St. Croix
- #111 February 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 15](#) — Norway
- #108 November 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 14](#) — Croatia, Slovenia, and Italy.
- #105 August 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 13](#) — Croatia.
- #102 May 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 12](#) — Vienna, Austria, and Seoul, Korea.
- #99 February 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 11](#) — US states of Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana, and Korea and Japan
- #96 November 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 10](#) — Hawaii
- #93 August 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 9](#) — Barcelona, Spain
- #90 May 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 8](#) — France, Finland, California, Croatia, England, Korea, and Washington State
- #87 February 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 7](#) — Italy, Jordan, and France
- #84 November 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 6](#) — Various countries
- #81 August 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 5](#) — Various countries
- #78 May 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 4](#) — Australia
- #75 February 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 3](#) — London and Yorkshire
- #72 November 2015: [Signs of Life: Part 2](#) — London and Yorkshire
- #69 August 2015: [Signs of Life: Part 1](#) — London and Yorkshire