

# POST OFFICIALESE

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During my years of service with the New Zealand Post Office I made a point of jotting down any unusual words used in official correspondence, memoranda, or departmental publications. Here are a dozen of the most interesting terms, together with the context in which they appeared.

agreeance (we are in agreeance with the proposal)  
 automatized (when the telephone exchange is automatized)  
 beeperless (beeperless remote control)  
 interpretate (to interpretate the instructions)  
 leasee (the leasee of a telephone)  
 markee (the markee can then go over the test paper)  
 prioritize (to prioritize a job)  
 releasal (releasal of staff at Christmas)  
 sortation (mail sortation in the Postal Section)  
 trialling (the trialling of a new position)  
 waivure (the authority covers waivure of charges)  
 zeroize (zeroize the vehicle's speedometer)

How many of these words can be located in the dictionary? Firstly, on checking the Concise Oxford, we find only the verb AUTOMATIZE, to make automatic, subject to automation. The more comprehensive Shorter Oxford also lists AUTOMATIZE, as well as INTERPRETATE, a rare or obsolete synonym for 'interpret'.

So much for abridged references. Let's see what turns up in the 17-volume Oxford English Dictionary. AUTOMATIZED (in the Supplement) and INTERPRETATE are both listed, together with AGREEANCE, an obsolete synonym for 'agreement' last recorded in 1714, LEASEE, a 16-17th century form of 'lessee', PRIORITIZE (in the Supplement), to give priority to, SORTATION, the action or process of arranging or sorting, WAIVURE, an 18th century form of 'waiver' the action of waiving, and ZEROIZE (in the Supplement), to adjust an instrument or device to give a zero reading. MARKEE is also shown, but only as an obsolete variant of 'marquee'. So we still have four words unaccounted for: BEEPERLESS, MARKEE, RELEASAL, and TRIALLING.

What about checking some other dictionaries? Chambers Twentieth Century gives INTERPRETATE and SORTATION, Webster's Second Edition has AGREEANCE, AUTOMATIZE, INTERPRETATE, SORTATION, and ZEROIZE, while Webster's Third Edition lists AUTOMATIZE, INTERPRETATE, MARKEE (variant of 'marquee'), SORTATION, and ZEROIZE. It is now time to summarize our findings and consider the merits of these twelve terms.

- AGREEANCE: There is no need to resurrect this obsolete word; 'agreement' is quite satisfactory
- AUTOMATIZED The word is used correctly, but 'automated' would probably do the job just as well
- BEEPERLESS An acceptable term in the context
- INTERPRETATE besides being 'rare or obsolete', this back-formation from 'interpretation' sounds far too pompous
- LEASEE Another obsolete term, although it is easy to see how it could be mistakenly used in place of the modern 'lessee'
- MARKEE Quite a reasonable coinage which may one day make it into the dictionary defined as 'one who has been marked' (in an examination, etc.)
- PRIORITIZE The Oxford editor notes 'a word that at present sits uneasily in the language'
- RELEASAL Someone obviously thought 'release' wasn't fancy enough so they made this one up
- SORTATION Used in its correct context, but surely 'sorting' would suffice
- TRIALING The verb 'trial', to test something, is very common in New Zealand, as is the noun 'trailing'. The only dictionary I know which gives 'trial' as a verb is the Heinemann New Zealand Dictionary
- WAIVURE Sounds impressive, but the correct modern term would be 'waiver' or 'waiving'
- ZEROIZE A delightful word beginning and ending with the 'ze' bigram, which could be worked into more official correspondence, e.g., the aim is to zeroize any ambiguity

It seems that bureaucratic jargon thrives in all parts of the world. Here in New Zealand, we are doing our bit to maintain the tradition of verbosity and obfuscation.

### A CALL FOR HELP

*Michael Weinberg of Los Angeles is collecting alphabet songs and backwards alphabet songs, number and calendar rhymes, color rhymes, and similar list-learning (mnemonic) devices, especially ones in languages other than English. For example, the editor remembers a German alphabet song he learned many years ago. Phonetically rendered:*

*ah, bay, tsay, day, eh, eff, gay  
 ha, ee, yut, kah, ell-em-en-oh-pay  
 coo, air, ess, tay, oo, fow, vay  
 ix, ipsilon, tset - oh, weh,  
 das is das Deutsche ah-bay-tsay*

*He writes "If children are humanity's treasure, then Mother Goose and primary-learning songs are their rightful inheritance and the real key to world understanding." Can **Word Ways** readers supply him with additional material? Send examples to the editor.*