From the ERRORS of Others

How to avoid embarrassing mistakes in writing and speaking

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Excerpts

Whenever I hear someone pronounce *ask* with an X instead of an SK sound, I imagine Lizzie Borden saying, "Papa, may I go to Abigail's party?" That's when he says—wait for it— "Go axe your mother."

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Remember that software companies are not always right, even the biggest ones. Now you know the rule about these compound words. If you see the rule violated on a computer screen, don't doubt yourself.

When software directions tell you to *startup*, *login*, *strikeover*, *backup*, *signout*, or *shutdown* (as actions), you can feel smug knowing that each should be two words, not one. It might ease the pain of not buying their software stock back when it was a bargain.

And if you're the scumbag who decided to **break up** with a girl by email, I hope karma deals you a **knockout** punch.

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One shows a vintage drawing of an 1890s woman with this text:

All spring and summer she was a gentile Southern lady. Then football season started …

So what's wrong with that? Let me count the ways. *Gentile*, when used correctly, is capitalized and its very definition is exclusionary. The **hilarious** postcard quote literally says the lady was not Jewish. The word they should have used here is *genteel.* Even in the south, religion has nothing to do with one's manners or enthusiasm for football. Picture a Jewish woman in a Florida State jersey asking, "So what am I—chopped liver?"