

# A Dictionary of Modern Engineering Usages

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Even in these stubbornly serious pages there exists an occasional opportunity for a laugh or two, or maybe only a little chuckle. We enjoyed it, and we hope you will too.

**U**SAGE AND LOGIC are old sparring partners, which, like Heredity and Environment, have the peculiar power to force all people into rigorous partisanship; the possibility that both could jointly influence the fate of a word is universally intolerable. We ourselves take the middle view that both exert influence, but observe that usage progresses faster than logic, and that in a rapidly changing world it holds the upper hand.

In the interest of greater clarity in engineering reports, technical manuals and sales brochures, we have compiled a little lexicon of recently acquired terms, which we feel will be of value to the more discriminating engineers and writers throughout the field.

**AUTOMATION:** Automatization. It's all in knowing when to add syllables and when to drop them. The *-ize* that was dropped here has been added to *final-* (which see).

**CONCEPT:** This has replaced the more commonplace word *idea*, through its power to suggest *idea* on a higher psychological level.

**CONFIGURATION:** An amount; e.g., 3. In Personnel, a salary. So, *configuration image*, salary expected.

**COMPLEX, MISSILE LAUNCHING:** A missile launching complex is a means of launching missiles, not a compulsion to do so.

**COMPONENT:** adj., as in *component part*. A component part differs from an ordinary part in the sense that it is part of a whole consisting of other parts, or other component parts, that is, it is part of a component whole; or, that is—oh the hell with it!

**COUNTDOWN:** The act of counting up.

**DRAMATIC:** Applicable to anything, but most commonly to prices. *Don't miss these dramatic values*, etc. This is wrong. Prices are often comic, more often tragic, but they are never dramatic. The term is best restricted to particular components, as in a recent advertisement of hi-fi equipment: *a new electronic tuning bar is dramatically framed in the massive body of the tuning escutcheon*.

**FACILITY:** More elegant than setup. The rule is to use the more abstract term where there is a choice. Thus, *production facility*, not *production setup*; *medical facility*, not *medical room*. Likewise, *mathematical discipline*, not *branch of mathematics*.

**FEASIBLE:** Literal: able to be feasted; free:

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having the approval of the chief engineer.

**FINALIZE:** It's *finalized* means it isn't finished but the hell with it. *Finalize* takes up. (*Finalized up* is not exactly synonymous with *fouled up*, but in most applications the distinction may be neglected.)

**GEOMETRITION:** Distinct from ordinary geometry only with respect to terms. *Triangle* becomes *triangulation*, *circle* becomes *circulation*, *convex* becomes *convexation*. Likewise, *algebratist*, *calculization*, *triggernomenclature*, *arithmetabolism*, etc.

**HI-FI:** Having the capacity to emit sound.

**INITIALIZE:** To start thinking about. *Initialize* takes out; *finalize* takes up. Example: The project must be finalized up research-wise before it can be initialized out production-wise. Translation: We must finish the research before we can start production.

**MEANINGFUL:** Not a very meaningful word, especially in such applications as *meaningful life tests*. A life test has no deeper significance; it merely tells how long it takes for something to blow up.

**MODERATOR:** In a panel discussion, or stuttering bee, one whose function it is to see that the argument doesn't reach a conclusion.

**MOMENTARILY:** When a radio announcer says *I'll be back momentarily*, don't let your hopes soar; he means *in a moment*, not the conventional *for a moment*. He may be back *in a moment* and talk for an hour, and still be within the nunciatorial usage of the word.

**NOTATION:** The word originally meant a system of notes, as in *music notation*, *color notation*, etc., but now means *note*. If things go right we may be able to say *notationize* instead of the verb *to note*.

**OBSOLETEZED:** Preferred to *obsoleted*. The simple form *obsoleted* has been obsoletezied.

**OPTIMIZATION:** Finding the hardest way to do something. So, *optimiz-er, or; not optimist, optometrist, or opportunist*.

**PERSUASION:** More elegant than *belief* or *profession*; preferred whether one has been persuaded to his profession or just drifted into it against his better judgment. Thus: *His background is of an electronics persuasion*. But, *The draperies were of a blue-green persuasion*, is overdoing it.

**PHASE IN:** In Engineering Personnel, to hire. Example: *We are not phasing in any electronic engineers at the moment*. So, *phase out*, to fire. Since a hiree and a firee are 180 deg. apart, one's employment status can be considered as a func-

tion of his phase angle and may be expressed in radians.

**PICTURE, STORY, SCENE, THEATRE, AREA, ARENA, CLIMATE:** They mean the same thing, so must not be confused. No rule can be established; a reference table of usages is here supplied: weather *picture*, weather *story*, but not weather *scene*, and certainly not weather *climate*; industrial *scene*, industrial *picture*; political *climate*, *scene*, *arena*; war *theatre*, *arena*; cultural *area*, *scene*, *climate*; American *Scene*, Philadelphia *Story*, European *Theatre*, etc.

**PHILOSOPHY:** The word is rapidly replacing *statement*, and *idea*; it is more elegant and has two more syllables. Examples: *computer philosophy*, *sales philosophy*, *go no-go philosophies*; but *sales metaphysic* is not used by the discriminating.

**PROGRAMMING:** In radio broadcasting, a program is for people who wear suits and shirts; a programming is for people who wear suitings and shirtings.

**ROADABLE:** Attaching the suffix *-able* to a noun as well as to a verb is a charming innovation, but *roadizable* would be more consonant with the best engineering usage, and would have the advantage of an additional syllable.

**TYPE:** A word used to bridge the gap between an adjective and a noun. Its omission denotes unfamiliarity with engineering practice. Examples: *paper type capacitor*, *Hartley type oscillator*, *chicken type checker*, *striped type pajamas*, *filter type pipe*, *movable type type*, etc. However, by pushing the noun and the adjective closer together the problem can be alleviated: *paper capacitor*, *Hartley oscillator*, etc.

**TOTALIZE:** It doesn't mean the same as *add*. In addition, we get a sum; in totalization, we get a total.

Example:

addition:	2	totalization:	2
	2		2
	—		—
	4 sum		5 total

So, *totaliz-er, or; not totalitarian*.

**-WISE:** May mean *like*, *ways*, or *with respect to*, depending on which it means. In *clockwise* it means *like*, in *otherwise* it means *ways*, in *money-wise* it means *with respect to*. May be used with or without a hyphen or a space, depending on how it is used. May be used after a noun, verb, adjective or other adverb, indiscriminately. A valuable word because of its extreme flexibility. May not be used in AUDIO in any editorial matter whatsoever—only in the advertisements, over which the editors have no control as to good English usage. **Æ**