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Today's grammar lesson for seniors who wish to remain relevant involves the Latin word, sic.

Sic is often used in newspapers and magazines, and most people have not a clue what it means. There are probably a few of you out there who do employ it recklessly on occasion just to be snooty, to impress others with your command of a dead language; well, maybe not truly dead in that the Vatican employs Latin on a regular basis to help [sic] extinguish itself from other religions that prefer the vernacular.



Younger people busy texting one another up to 500 times per month might misuse sic as in the following communication to a friend with whom they have shared an extra-large pizza: “ruok? I’m sic.”

People who have dogs with nasty tempers might also misuse the term. For example, there's a group of teenagers who regularly smoke cigarettes while walking down our street, and invariably, they dispose of their butts on my lawn. By butts, I refer to cigarettes not derrieres. If I were more curmudgeonly than normal and if I had a dog with a nasty temper, when those teenagers might come by, I might say, “Fido, go sic em!” This, of course, is mere conjecture as I do not own a dog, but if I did possess one, I certainly would not name it Fido. A friend of mine named his dog “hey you,” which was quite funny when they took walks in the park at night, and he shouted out his dog's name. People would suddenly emerge from behind trees and other foliage, often in a state of...let's say disrepair so as to not offend anyone who might have been thus surprised.

But let's get back to our main topic as we do often display a decided tendency to wander aimlessly about. Precisely, what does sic mean? Sic in square brackets is an editing term used often with quotations or excerpts. Basically, it means “this is how it actually appears in the original.” Sometimes, it is used to dramatize a grammatical error, perhaps a misspelling such as “distinguish” or even a misstatement of fact. Also the unconventional spelling of a name. As an example, I might use sic in this fashion: I read in the paper that [sic]The Toronto Maple Laughs might be happy that the lockout will shorten their season because they will thus have a good chance to finish the season with a [sic] dramatically reduced number of loses, thus making them finish [sic] higher in the standings. If you are sadly into hockey, this also might be construed as a sic joke. Now, I have created a pun, but again, let's not drift off so much; forget the lame pun and return to our main thesis.

I studied Latin many years ago, and the benefits of such study continue to plague me. For example, my eldest daughter who did not study Latin (nor grammar) thanks to the [sic] Mystery of Education (is it Ministry?) has no idea how I can figure out the meaning of words that I have never learned before, simply by using my Latin. Using trusty prefixes and suffixes, it becomes alimentary my dear Watson.

To finally get to the point, sic is the Latin word for “thus,” or “such.” You have probably heard the phrase, “sic transit gloria mundi.” This does not mean that it will be a happy day when the bus arrives. In fact, it has nothing to do with public transit. Rather, it means – so much for world



fame – which applies to every Canadian, yes even Conrad Black (if re-instated), with only one possible exception, and that would be Paul Henderson whose famous goal against the Russians is celebrated in this land more often than Thanksgiving! (Really, are you not getting sic of it?) Also, if you read the wonderful poem, Ozymandias, a sonnet by Percy Bysshe Shelley, published in 1818 and probably [sic] his most famous short poem, you will come to a much better appreciation of this Latin phrase.