

Shortcut words: lazy or efficient?

Written by 'Grammar Guy' By Curtis Honeycutt Guest Columnist
Friday, 18 August 2023 04:29



Americans like being the best at things. We're the best at baseball, jazz, freedom, national parks—pretty much anything Ken Burns has already covered. Yes, living in the Land of Opportunity is glorious. Now, I'd like to award us (and, by us, I mean U.S.) a super-sized gold medal for smashing words together more efficiently than anyone else in the world.

Because Americans value efficiency, we combine multiple words into one super word. One way we do this is through contractions.

Don't worry—I'm not talking about the kind of contractions that lead to babies. I'm talking about combining two words to make one short word. These words include don't (do not), we've (we have), and can't (can not). Yes, contractions increase our efficiency so we have more time to manage our burgeoning stock portfolios while refilling our Big Gulps (for free).

But some contractions can be tricky.

Have you ever been tripped up by "should've?" Should've is a contraction for "should have." For example: I should've worn sunscreen when we were at the zoo.

This is a truism for me even on cloudy days. I can get a sunburn through a t-shirt during a solar eclipse.

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What about “should of”? As Americans, sometimes we talk so quickly, we say things like “shoulda,” which is an even shorter way of saying “should’ve.” Many people mistakenly think this phrase is “should of.”

“Should of” is incorrect and should never be spoken, typed, or otherwise communicated. The same rule applies for “must’ve” (not must of), “could’ve” (not could of), and “would’ve” (not would of).

If someone you care about uses “should of,” wait until you have some one-on-one time with them, calmly sit them down, and then gently correct them. Please don’t correct them in public; that’s the quickest way to lose friends and end up with a house full of cats (I believe the politically correct term is “fur babies”).

In general, contractions like “should’ve” are still regarded as informal speech, so, if you’re writing your doctoral dissertation or cover letter to be hired as a lawyer, avoid these shortcut words. However, in everyday conversations, feel free to contract away. After all, the first amendment grants us free speech—and—since it’s the first one, that probably means that it’s the best.

What do you think? Are shortcut words like these lazy, efficient or a mixture of both?

— ***Curtis Honeycutt is an award-winning syndicated humor columnist. Connect with him on Twitter ([@curtishoneycutt](https://twitter.com/curtishoneycutt)) or at [curtishoneycutt.com](https://www.curtishoneycutt.com) .***

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