

Getting the next-to-last word

Written by 'Grammar Guy' By Curtis Honeycutt Guest Columnist
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The tools and tips I share are meant to be used for good; please don't gloat your grammar greatness over anyone; instead, use it to lift everyone up. I'm about to share a word to make everyone at the white-tie optional gala assume you're the king or queen of some distant, exotic land. Use this word, and upper-crusters will consult you before ordering their newest monocle. They'll picture you eating peeled champagne grapes while you brush the golden mane of your award-winning miniature pony, Lord Anponio.

I'm talking about the word "penultimate." Although this sounds like a million-dollar word, it simply means "next to last" or "second to last." It's as simple as that. So, if you ate the "penultimate Oreo," that would mean you ate the next to last Oreo in the package.

If you are reading the nineteenth chapter in a twenty-chapter book, you are reading the book's penultimate chapter. If you use the penultimate square of toilet paper, it's time to install a new roll so the next person isn't stuck with one lonely square.

Allow me to put on my horn-rimmed grammar nerd glasses for a second. The term "penult" is a noun that means the next to last syllable in a word. The penult in the word "automobile" is "mo." Now you know that!

How about antepenultimate? Antepenultimate refers to the third-to-last item in a series or the next-to-next-to-last thing. Returning to our twenty-chapter book: If chapter nineteen is the penultimate chapter, chapter eighteen is the antepenultimate chapter.

If we break down the Latin meanings for each part of the word, we will get "before" (ante), "almost" (pen) and "last" (ultimate). Antepenultimate is the thing that comes before the almost

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last thing.

Drop any of these words into casual conversation and "Horse & Hound" magazine (my favorite magazine about both dogs and horses) will call to request an in-depth interview about your dressage training techniques.

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