

By ANNE DONNELL

I have a little question for you, and don't laugh! I am capable of confusing "than" and "then." Do you have some magic Ask Anne dust to solve this? Or maybe just a simple, easy to understand rule? -A Good Buddy

I like good buddies. Bad buddies, about whom I was warned in yore by parents and teachers, really can be risky. Speaking of risky, yore, which refers to a long distant past, is generally used with of not in.* I thought it might be a refreshing twist (sounds like a commercial for lemons) to use yore with another preposition. In yore and about yore. Yoring! Say that the way adolescents say boring – yor-ring.

Well, I won't say this is a misery-loves-company situation, but our cheerful QP of T (Question Person of Today) has plenty of company. So says the website Karlonia.com (April 12, 2008) "English Lesson 5."

Here's some rule-filled commentary from the same source: "First of all, the word than has three major definitions and uses: 1. Comparison of one entity or quality to another...2. Indication of a preference...3. Used to suggest something beyond a specific amount or a certain point.

"Meanwhile, then also has three basic meanings: 1. Reference to the past or a previous time period in comparison with the present; at another point in time... 2. The next item in a sequence...3. Denotes a logical conclusion; often used in computer programming code in the form 'If X Then Y Else Z..."

If I did have a container of magic Ask Anne dust, I should probably put all of it on those last paragraphs! **Here's the simplest I can say it: Use than in comparisons. Use then when**

time's involved (or, less frequently, yields).

Not perfect, but sufficient for most days, similar to your mother's summation of your hair style after your seventh grade self had spent long morning minutes in front of the bathroom mirror.

ONLINE DEPARTMENT. "Murder at Costco" (Thanks, J. A.) Tired of constantly being broke and stuck in an unhappy marriage, a young husband decided to solve both problems by taking out a large insurance policy on his wife with himself as the beneficiary and then arranging to have her killed. A "friend of a friend" put him in touch with a nefarious underworld figure who went by the name of Artie. Artie explained to the husband that his going price for snuffing out a spouse was \$10,000. The husband said he was willing to pay that amount, but that he wouldn't have any cash on hand until he could collect his wife's insurance money. Artie insisted on being paid at least something up front, so the man opened his wallet, displaying the single dollar bill that rested inside. Artie sighed, rolled his eyes, and reluctantly agreed to accept the dollar as down payment for the dirty deed. A few days later, Artie followed the man's wife to the local Costco Supermarket. There, he surprised her in the produce department and proceeded to strangle her with his gloved hands. As the poor unsuspecting woman drew her last breath and slumped to the floor, the manager of the produce department stumbled unexpectedly onto the murder scene. Unwilling to leave any living witnesses behind, Artie had no choice but to strangle the produce manager as well. However, unknown to Artie, the entire proceedings were captured by the hidden security cameras and observed by the shop's security guard, who immediately called the police. Artie was caught and arrested before he could even leave the premises. Under intense questioning at the police station, Artie revealed the whole sordid plan, including his unusual financial arrangements with the hapless husband who was also quickly arrested. The next day in the newspaper, the headline declared "ARTIE CHOKES 2 FOR \$1.00 AT COSTCO."

BW (Bigtime Word) accipitrine – referring to a hawk. I think one could get by with referring to someone else's nose as "accipitrine." That person would probably consider it complimentary. It's worth trying.

*Ended that sentence with a preposition, and it felt good.