

### English Corner 3: due to and owing to

The phrases **due to** and **owing to** are often used interchangeably, and making any distinction between the two is considered by some to be pointless. Confusion about the use of these phrases is compounded by the other grammatical functions that each word has on its own. **Due** can be an **adverb** meaning *directly, exactly* (Travel **due** North), a **noun** meaning *that which is owed* (Give the man his **due**) and an **adjective** meaning *payable* (The bill is now **due**); **owing** is an **adjective** meaning *due to be paid* (Your subscription is still **owing**).

#### **Due to and owing to have different meanings**

- When **due** and **owing** are coupled to prepositions the phrases have different grammatical functions; **due to** is an **adjective** meaning *attributable to, caused by, resulting from* [His infertility was **due to** his high scrotal temperature] whereas **owing to** is a **prepositional phrase** meaning *as a result of, because of, on account of* [He was infertile **owing to** his high scrotal temperature].
- Maintaining a distinction between the phrases is useful because **due to** (as an **adjective**) can describe **nouns, pronouns** and **noun phrases** (but not **verbs**) whereas **owing to** (a **prepositional phrase**) can describe **verbs**.
- Because of this grammatical reality, in [The seminar **was cancelled due to** a transport strike], **due to** does not describe the verb (as presumably intended by the writer) but as an adjective can only describe the nearest **noun**, which is **seminar**. This gives the meaning that the **seminar** was caused by the transport strike, when in reality it was the **cancellation** of the seminar that was.
- As **prepositional phrases** can describe **verbs** (here **was cancelled**), the use of **owing to** here is correct [The seminar **was cancelled owing to** a transport strike]. An alternative way of writing this, which retains the phrase **due to**, is to provide a **noun** for this **adjective** to define [The **cancellation** of the seminar was **due to** a transport strike].

#### **Due to following a passive verb**

- The tell-tale sign of incorrect usage is when **due to** immediately follows a **verb**, which an adjective cannot define. In [She was sacked **due to** incompetence], the only noun available for **due to** to modify is **she**, but **she** was not **caused by** incompetence, it was **her incompetence** that made her unfit for the job. In other words, her sacking was **as a result of**, or **because of**, her incompetence and so using a **prepositional phrase** is correct [She was sacked **owing to** incompetence].

#### **Unintended duplication**

- A rare error stems from the use of words that are implied in the phrase used. Because **due to** means **caused by** it is good to avoid the use of **cause** in the same sentence. [The cause of the fault was **due to** over-heating] introduces **tautology** (the use of an unnecessary word whose meaning is repeated in a different word in the same phrase) because this means [The **cause** of the fault was **caused by** over-heating]. This can be avoided by using one of the meanings, not both: either [The **cause** of the fault was over-heating] or [The fault was **due to** over-heating].

**Using alternative phrases**

- The use of **due to** and **owing to** is not compulsory, and it is worth considering using their synonyms, which sometimes sound better [His infertility was **caused by** his high scrotal temperature. The cancellation of the seminar was **caused by** a transport strike. The seminar was cancelled **because of** a transport strike. She was sacked **because of** incompetence].
- Sometimes they are not necessary at all [He was cured **because of** the medicines he took] is shorter and equally explanatory when **because of** is omitted [He was cured **by** the medicines he took].

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