

READERS' ENQUIRIES

Received from Captain C.H. Short, Johannesburg:

In your next booklet would you please put in a par correcting what is a growing menace to the correctness of our speech (already in a depressing state, unfortunately!).

As I see it a KILOMETRE (KIL-o-meeter) is a measure of distance, being 1000 lengths of a metre; a KILOMETER (kil-OM-eter) is an instrument for measuring the number of kilometres in a given length.

It would be unnerving for the mispronouncers to extend their fantasy to thermo-meter, speedo-meter, gaso-meter, baro-meter et al. The cause is initially ... ignorance but when a responsible doctor broadcasts kilometer for kilometre I feel it is time to protest – he does have such a large audience that accepts his erudition and is prepared to defend it against criticism.

Answer:

Metre: is the unit of measurement;

Meter: is an instrument for measuring.

The correct pronunciation of 'kilometre' is KIL-o-meeter.

In none of the dictionaries at our disposal is 'kilometer' recorded as an instrument for measuring; it is simply the American alternative spelling for 'kilometre', and is unacceptable in South Africa.

Received from Mr A. van Aardt, Naboomspruit:

I badly want to know what the correct plural words are for rand, litre, metre? I notice some newspapers use rands, others rand; what is the rule and how should one form plurals?

Answer:

The plural of 'rand' (the money unit) is 'rands' (with the 'a' as in 'hands') or 'rand' (with 'and' pronounced as 'ont' as in 'pont').

Plurals are usually formed by adding 's' or by altering the vowel, e.g. 'man' becomes 'men'.

The plural of litre is litres, and of metre it is metres. But note that no 's' is added to the abbreviated form; hence: 7 litres, but 7ℓ; 8 metres, but 8m.

D.R.B.