


istockphoto: RapidEye

# Ms. Particular Presents: Need

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These brief “lessons” are designed to address common mistakes in English usage and to administer instruction in small doses.

## Inanimate objects don't "need" anything\*

Replace *need* with *require* or *must have* or *should have* every time you write it

The dial ~~*needs to*~~ must be set at "0" prior to turning on the high voltage power supply.

(The dial doesn't really care...)

The desired emittance would ~~*need*~~ require approximately seven damping intervals.

\*The fancy term for this rhetorical flaw is "anthropomorphism"—the attribution of human qualities to non-living things

Assigning human traits or abilities to animals or inanimate objects is known as anthropomorphism and is considered a flaw in scientific writing.

Here is another example of anthropomorphism:

"The substrate *tells* the YBCO how to align during growth."

What's going on here is really much more complicated than this simple sentence implies, and good scientific writing should communicate *exactly* what is happening, not some parable that substitutes for the facts.

While such simplification might be acceptable when writing a popular article for a general audience, it has no place in most scientific writing.

## **They don't "feel" anything either**

**At the snap-off separation where the meniscus disappears, the tip *feels* a significant entropic force at high saturation.**

**At the snap-off separation where the meniscus disappears, a significant entropic force is exerted on the tip at high saturation.**