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Ms. Particular Presents: *Optimal vs. Optimum*

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

Strictly speaking, “optimum” is a noun

- 😊 “An increase in Reynolds number shifts the optimum toward larger collection diameters.”

The adjective is “optimal”

- 😞 “For optimum delays between the driving and injection laser pulses, the wakefields driven by the two pulses add coherently.”
- 😞 “This optimum viscosity contrast promotes rapid creation of interfacial area.”
- 😞 “For the optimum value of γ the round trip efficiency attains its highest possible value.”

In an admittedly unscientific sampling, Ms. Particular found “optimum” used incorrectly for “optimal” about three-quarters of the time, as represented in the examples. <sigh>

The missing introductory comma in the fourth example will be dealt with separately.