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Ms. Particular Presents: Principal vs. Principle

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

“Principal” is almost always an adjective*

Mnemonic #1: If you can substitute “primary” (think “A principal works at a primary school”), use “principal”

Mnemonic #2: “Principal” is almost always an adjective

Example: “We identified longitudinal acoustic phonons as the principal cause of intensity damping of optically driven Rabi rotations in InAS/GaAs quantum dots.”

A.J. Ramsay, et al., *Phys. Rev. Lett.* **105**, 177402 (2010).

*The only time it is used as a noun is as the name of the head of a school.

“Principle” is always a noun

Mnemonic #1: If you can substitute “law” (think “legal”), use “le”

Example: “Prospects include high precision tests of the weak equivalence le, the detection of gravitational waves, and future experiments in space.”

N. Poli, et al., *Phys. Rev. Lett.* **106**, 038501 (2011).

It’s always “in le,” and “from first les”