Usage Under Review

Use context and reference evidence to resolve disputed language choices.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.1b "Resolve issues of complex or contested usage, consulting references (e.g., Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage, Garner's Modern American Usage) as needed."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline every word or phrase in the passage that could require a usage reference. In the margin, write the meaning or audience detail that would help an editor make each choice.

Labels for an Earthquake Exhibit

1 At Harbor City Museum, a student team is preparing labels for an exhibit about the 1906 earthquake. Their draft must be clear to visitors, but several sentences have sparked debate. One label says, "The archive comprises more than 300 photographs, maps, and letters." Another describes a volunteer who will review entries without favoring any donor as "disinterested." A teammate prefers "uninterested," arguing that visitors may read the word differently. The group does not settle the issue by voting. Instead, it records the audience, the intended meaning, and the wording each label needs.

2 A chart caption presents another choice: "The data from the damage survey is available at the kiosk." The survey contains individual reports from residents, and the team expects historians as well as tourists to read the caption. In a separate label, the writers describe a storage room that holds "less artifacts than the east wing." The museum's house style does not answer every question, so the team checks a current usage guide and a dictionary that includes usage notes. The editors compare the guidance, then decide whether the setting calls for a formal, general, or conversational choice.

3 Before printing, the team places a small source note in its editorial file, not on the gallery wall. It lists the entries consulted, the date, and the reason for each decision. The file also notes that reputable references sometimes describe a preference rather than an absolute rule. For example, an older guide may favor one form while a newer dictionary labels another form standard. The team chooses language that matches the exhibit's precise historical purpose and avoids changing a sentence merely because one editor remembers a rule. Their final labels must be consistent, readable, and defensible.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Using a usage reference, which word is more precise for the volunteer who will not favor any donor, “disinterested” or “uninterested”? Explain your choice using the context.

2. Revise the verb in the data sentence if the caption emphasizes the survey's individual resident reports. Why does that revision fit this context?

3. Revise “less artifacts” for a formal museum label. What usage principle supports your revision?

4. If an older guide favors one form but a newer dictionary calls another form standard, what should the team do before deciding?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a two-sentence museum label that includes one complex or disputed usage choice. Then add an editorial note naming a usage reference you would consult, stating the choice you made, and explaining why it fits your label's meaning and audience.

ANSWER KEY

Usage Under Review

HIGH SCHOOL · L.11-12.1b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline every word or phrase in the passage that could require a usage reference. In the margin, write the meaning or audience detail that would help an editor make each choice. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Using a usage reference, which word is more precise for the volunteer who will not favor any donor, "disinterested" or "uninterested"? Explain your choice using the context.	**Disinterested. The volunteer is expected to be impartial, not merely lacking interest.**
2	Revise the verb in the data sentence if the caption emphasizes the survey's individual resident reports. Why does that revision fit this context?	**Change "is" to "are." Here, data refers to multiple individual reports.**
3	Revise "less artifacts" for a formal museum label. What usage principle supports your revision?	**Use "fewer artifacts." Fewer is the conventional choice with countable plural nouns.**
4	If an older guide favors one form but a newer dictionary calls another form standard, what should the team do before deciding?	**Treat the difference as a preference rather than an automatic error, compare the guidance, consider the exhibit's purpose and audience, and document the reason for the choice.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Label: "None of the original field notebooks is available for handling, but visitors can examine digital scans." Editorial note: "I would consult Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage under 'none.' Because the label treats not one notebook as available, I chose singular 'is'; the reference recognizes singular agreement as standard in this sense."

Accept other defensible revisions when students identify the intended meaning, audience, and relevant reference guidance. In the open task, accept a different contested issue if the student names a plausible reference and gives a context-based rationale.