I've committed to stop smiling

The advancement of electronic communication beyond talking on the phone has ultimately led to a new language. As it evolves, the language becomes increasingly truncated, not only creating new words but crimping existing ones to a single letter or inventing a whole vocabulary simply based on acronyms, usually the first letter of the words in a short phrase, such as "FYI" (for your information) and "BRB" (be right back). In the ultimate irony, those were called TLA's (three letter acronyms).

As if that mangling of diction wasn't sufficient, the commonplace insertion of random characters to simulate feelings began to overwhelm the actual message. This became so prevalent that modern word processing software recognizes the attempt and converts the characters automatically. The ☐ or ;p ultimately evolved into a complex and nearly endless supply of "emoticons", graphic pictures to simulate or emphasize a particular emotion.

I don't intend for this to be a rant on the modern shorthand of communication, I'm not that elitist. I feel the need to admit that I have used (and overused) the "smiley" or ☐ symbol (although, as a lefty, I craftily do it (:, which is not recognized by word processors, proving that all programmers must be righty).

I have scrupulously avoided any form of emoticon or character based emotion objects in my blog. I felt it was lazy for a writer to use shortcuts when conveying my thoughts and emotions to you. The reason why it is lazy is that it's a crutch.

I've posted before on the difficulties in writing humor. No

visual or audible cues are offered from the page, so the reader is left to his own personal sense of humor to decide if I'm being funny or serious. Sarcasm is the most difficult play of all, for it can come off as mean-spirited or rude without the proper mindset.

I had fallen into the trap in many emails of using the ☐ to "let people know" that I was just joking. I've come to the opinion that this is no different than telling a joke and laughing at it yourself. That's fine if everyone else is laughing, but if you're the only one….

Therefore, I am committed to no more "smiling" in my written communications. If I am confident in the humor of my words, that should be enough. If I feel uncertain you will know to laugh, I probably should rewrite it or, more likely, get it out of there.

I was always a little put-off by laugh tracks on TV. Did the producers feel I wasn't smart enough to know when something was funny, so they had to let me know (wink, wink, nudge, nudge)? I can't decide if that's insulting or just dumb. My sense of humor is different than someone else and possibly different than the writer or producer of the show. Multiply that by millions and a laugh track seems pointless, if not distracting. It also tended to expose the writing more. How funny was it when the laugh track was going and I didn't find the dialog funny?

I have concluded "smileys" are the written version of a laugh track. Since I have no wish to (further) insult anyone, they are now being removed from my writing "vocabulary".

While I don't think this will make me funnier in the future, it should at least make it more difficult for you to tell when I'm not.