

At any rate, fair guess for a cliché

bernstein on words

By Theodore M. Bernstein

Another cliché. Among questions asked by Donald K. Fenstermacher of Collingwood, N.J., is one concerning the meaning or logic of the phrase at any rate. The words following this expression, he notes, usually have nothing to do with speed, time, etc.

The meaning of the phrase is clear to everyone: anyhow, in any case, at all events. Dictionaries tell you that, but they do not tell you the expression's origin.

Therefore we shall guess. One meaning of rate is the amount of a charge. With that as a clue we could deduce that at any rate means, or once meant, regardless of the charge, no matter what the cost. At any rate, that seems like a fair guess.

More acronyms. At the rate which words formed from

the initials of organizations or movements are appearing, there is an overabundance of acronyms. Here are some that have appeared in the press fairly recently:

PRIME—Productivity Improvement by Managers and **ACRONYM**—Allied Citizens Representing Other New York Minorities.

C.H.I.P.—Community Housing Improvement Program. **COYOTE**—Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics.

SCAMP—Senior Citizens Activities and Meals Program. **SWAT**—Special Weapons and Tactics.

V.I.T.A.L.—Volunteers to Improve Third Avenue and Lexington.

To which we might add: **APPALLING**—Acronym Production, Particularly At Lavish Level, Is No Good.

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