

Craig Rondinone  
Way Out

I remember my first time riding the Underground in London. I was so excited to experience England's mode of subway-like transportation after spending countless hours on trains thanks to the Jersey Shore-to-Jersey City commute I had endured for a decade for work. The Underground, or "The Tube" as the Brits nickname it, did not look much different than the subways I rode between New Jersey and New York. There were more red circles and white paint on the walls by the tracks, and definitely more cockney in the accents of the passengers and conductors, but for the most part the Underground was just another transit system.

Except for one glaring difference. After the pack I was vacationing with and I had purchased our tickets and glided inside the train station, there was a large square sign hanging over one of the passageways that said "Entrance." That led to the track where our train was waiting for us --- doors open, seats empty, poles with no fingers wrapped around them. Our party climbed aboard and took a 15-minute trip to the Leicester Square station three stops away. At the conclusion of our short sojourn, our group shuffled out of the train and hoofed through the tunnels towards the nearest escape to the outside world. The six of us kept close as we sidestepped musicians playing for money and commuters clogging the walkways. We wedged ourselves through the torrential throng that was travelling in all different directions. Our faction reached our destination after a few turns and twists, but we could not believe what our eyes were seeing when we arrived.

"Entrance" is not the hardest word to spell or understand. While it is no "cat", "dog", or "egg" in terms of the length of letters or the determining of the definition, a sixth-grade student should be able to write it correctly on a piece of paper and discern its meaning. The word's foil — "exit" — has a greater chance of being lumped into the slush pile that cat, dog and egg belong in. So it came as a monumental shock that "exit" was not the word used when we discovered the passage that was tied to the streets and cafes of Leicester Square. Entrance/exit is just like stop/go, black/white, flim/flam and Yankees/Red Sox. But as our group raised their collective eyes to read the word above the tunnel that brought railriders out to the light, the word used was not "exit."

The sign said "Way Out."

My mind needed a few seconds to digest the words hanging above me. It did not help my brain indigestion. If "entrance" was used by the train station, why wouldn't "exit" be used in turn instead of the kindergarten-quality "way out"? Or why wasn't the equally elementary "way in" used in concert with "way out"? How come the transportation authority went with one apple and one orange instead of two of the same fruit? This made about as much sense as voting for a Republican for president when you are pro-abortion and pro-gun control. I knew England had its quirks as a country --- Oasis is revered as an amazing rock band, soccer is called "football", they think violence on television is terrible but think showing

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sex is quite all right, and they have about as much color in their architecture as albinos have in their faces. But this quirk took not only the cake, it took the blood pudding, too!

My traveling party and I did not spend much time at the station fixating on the sign. We had dates with Leicester Square, the Tower of London and a double decker bus that we did not want to be late for. So we walked under the sign, walked through the tunnel and broke out into the busyness of the city streets without further fanfare. Yet for the remainder of our vacation, countless jokes were made at the expense of the Underground's "Way Out" sign. A couple hours did not go by without a sarcastic question — *is this the WAY OUT?* — or a flippant comment that had something directly or indirectly to do with those infamous words. The next time a sign stuck with me as much was when the "Just Married" banner was strewn across the back of my trolley on the day of my wedding.