

# Metric Metaphors

- Ethan Dunleavy

“Five thousand two hundred and eighty feet to a mile, now what kind of unit is that? Is that even useful? Wouldn't that just make things more confusing and complicated?” These are the kinds of questions that race through my head whenever I have to deal with the English measurement system. Unfortunately, I am surrounded by this horrible excuse for a way to measure things and I constantly find myself asking these questions. Simple, convenient, logical metric system! Oh how I long to use you in all aspects of my life.

Once upon a time, the United States had the chance to become metric. During the founding of our nation, we threw off the chains of oppression, but left on the ugly coat of the English measurement system, metaphorically speaking. Now we get odd looks from almost every other country on the planet that are all wearing the sleek, stylish parka that is the metric system. This wonderful outdoor coat gets its smooth features from the fact that it is structured in a decimal fashion. This means that a unit can seamlessly be changed into fractions and smaller units with the simple movement of a decimal point. Let's say I want to know how many inches make up a quarter of a mile. This 5,280 would have to be multiplied by twelve then divided by four; that's not exactly easy math to do in one's head. As for centimeters in a kilometer, it's a simple matter of dividing ten by four and carrying a few decimals.

Not only is this jacket smooth, it is also convenient, using universal prefixes to describe how big or small things are. There's your mega pocket that can fit objects up to the size of an umbrella, your kilo pocket for a wallet or phone, your regular pocket for the crumpled up dollars and the occasional knick-knack, your milli pocket for loose change and that button you find that you can never find the shirt it goes to and even a nano pocket, the smallest and rarest of the pockets for who knows what. Those drab English measurement rags have their pockets, but they come in rods, fathoms, feet, leagues, knots, miles, chains, and yards. These units bear almost no relation to each other and are a hassle to convert from one to the other, not to mention the fact that they come from arbitrary and completely ridiculous lengths like how big the king's foot was in the Middle Ages.

You may think, “Converting units, bah, who needs that?” Well, guess who needs it. That's right, you do. Imagine this, you're in Marshalls, and of course you know that they import their clothes directly from designers, and you need to know what size the button is that you kept in your milli pocket for the last, brand new, designer shirt that just happens to be missing a button. So, being fashionably savvy wearing your metric coat, you take out from your convenient and useful nano pocket, a cube of water weighing exactly one gram. It just so happens that, when wearing the metric coat, one gram of water in a cube has the exact same dimensions as one milliliter of water and it gets even better; one milliliter of water matches up perfectly with a cubic centimeter. Inter-dimensional correlation! Is it possible to get more logical? Since water is essential for life, of course the metric system would base things off of it. Without water, there is no life. Without water, there is no metric system. So, logically, life and the metric system are meant to be together! Would you want to break up such a wonderful relationship? No, you

wouldn't. Anyway, back to Marshalls. Now, you've used the side of your cube of water to measure how big the buttons are on this new shirt, they match up, and voila! You just nabbed yourself a stunning new shirt (which happens to go together superbly with your coat).

You've accomplished wonders wearing the official coat of the metric system, but here we are in America, stuck in this odd-looking, misshapen ruin, not accomplishing wonders. I know I want to be doing great things, don't you? If so, the metric system is the way to go!

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