

WORDS THAT ARE EASY TO MISUSE

A

ability/capacity

Ability is the human power to do. *Capacity* is the power to receive.

accept/except

Accept is a verb meaning "consent to," "agree to take," or "admit willingly." *Except* is normally a preposition meaning "other than" or "excluding."

adapt/adept/adopt

Adapt means to adjust to or to modify. *Adept* means skillful. *Adopt* means to embrace or accept.

adverse/averse

Adverse refers to acting against or in a contrary direction. *Averse* means having an active feeling of repugnance or distaste.

advice/advise

Advice is a noun meaning a recommendation that is given. *Advise* is a verb meaning an act of guidance.

aggravate/irritate

Aggravate means to make worse (a situation or condition). *Irritate* means to annoy or to make sore.

agree to/agree with

One *agrees to* a proposal, but *agrees with* a person.

all ready/already

All ready means all prepared, i.e., a state of readiness. *Already* is an adverb meaning previously.

all together/altogether

All together means a group as a whole. *Altogether* means completely.

allusion/delusion/illusion

Allusion means the act of alluding to or hinting at. *Delusion* is a false or irrational belief. *Illusion* means to be misled or deceived, deception.

alternate/alternative

Alternate means one after the other. *Alternative* means one or the other.

among/between

Use *among* when referring to three or more. Use *between* when referring to two or reciprocal relationships shared by two or more. For example, "between Wells A and B," and "unitization between the operators."

amount/number

Amount, except for money, is used when mentioning something that cannot be counted. *Number* is used for things that can be counted.

analysis/analyses

Analyses is the plural of *analysis*.

anxious/eager

Anxious means to have a degree of anxiety or fear. *Eager* means pleasant anticipation.

any one/anyone

Any one is used to refer to one of several things or persons. *Anyone* is a pronoun meaning any person.

apprise/appraise

Apprise means to give notice to, to tell. *Appraise* means to set a value of or estimate the amount of.

around/about

Around means encircling. *About* means approximately. Do not use *around* when you mean approximately.

as

Often imprecise when used as a subordinate conjunction indicating cause. Sometimes used to mean *while*, *when*, *because*, or *since*.

assure/ensure/insure

Assure means to encourage. *Ensure* means to make certain. Use *insure* when referring to underwriting a loss.

avenge/revenge

Avenge is used when there is a moral intention to right a wrong. *Revenge* is a desire to inflict a punishment for an insult or injury.

B

bad/badly

Bad is an adjective meaning disagreeable. *Badly* is an adverb meaning in a bad manner.

based on

The main noun in a sentence is *based on* the subordinate noun contained in the *based on* phrase.

beside/besides

Beside means by the side of. *Besides* means in addition to.

biannual/biennial

Biannual means occurring twice a year. *Biennial* means occurring, continuing or lasting for two years.

bimonthly/semi-monthly

Both can mean occurring twice a month. However, *bimonthly* also means occurring once in a two month period.

borrow/lend

Borrow means that the person is taking or wishes to take. *Lend* means to give or to let use.

C

can/may

Can means to be able or capable of doing something. *May* means to seek or give permission.

capital/capitol

Capital may refer either to financial assets or to the city that hosts the government of a state or a nation. *Capitol* refers to the buildings in which the state or national legislature meets.

commence/initiate

Use *begin* or *start*.

compare to/compare with

Compare to implies resemblance between essentially different ideas or things. *Compare with* implies contrasts between essentially similar ideas or things.

complement/compliment

Complement means (1) fill up or make complete; (2) the quantity required to complete something; or (3) one of two mutually completing parts. *Compliment* means praise or respect. *Complimentary* means without cost.

comprise

Comprise means to embrace or to include. The whole *comprises* its parts. *Comprised of* is incorrect.

connote/denote

Connote is to imply. *Denote* is to be explicit.

contiguous

Contiguous means being in actual contact, or touching along a boundary or at a point.

continual/continuous

Continual refers to something that occurs regularly, but with interruption. *Continuous* means something that occurs without pause.

counsel/council/consul

Counsel as a verb means to give advice; as a noun it means a lawyer or other person who gives advice. *Council* is a group of people who discuss and/or take action on various matters. *Consul* is a government official appointed to represent citizens of his country in a foreign country.

D

data/datum

The debate over whether *data* should be treated as a plural or a collective singular noun continues. In much business writing, *data* is considered a collective singular. In formal and scholarly writing, however, *data* is generally used as a plural, with *datum* as a singular form. Base your decision on whether your reader should consider the data as a single collection or as a group of individual facts. Whatever you decide, be sure that your pronouns and verbs agree in number with selected usage. For example, The *data are* voluminous. *They indicate* a link between high blood pressure and heart disease. The *data is* now ready for evaluation. *It is* in the mail.

different from/different than

In formal writing, the preposition *from* is used with *different*. For example: The fourth-generation computer is *different from* the third-generation computer. *Different than* is acceptable when it is

followed by a clause. For example: The job cost was *different than* we had estimated it.

due to/because of

Due to (meaning "caused by") is acceptable following a linking verb. *Due to* is not acceptable, however, when it is used with a nonlinking verb to replace *because of*.

Change: He went home *due to* illness.
To: He went home *because of* illness.

E

effect/affect

Effect used as a noun means result. When *effect* is used as a verb, it means to bring about. *Affect* means to influence.

e.g./i.e.

The abbreviation *e.g.* stands for the Latin *exempli gratia*, meaning "for example." The abbreviation *i.e.* stands for the Latin *id est*, meaning "that is." Avoid the usage of *e.g.* and *i.e.* in your writing. If you must use them, punctuate them correctly.

ensure/assure/insure

Ensure means to make certain. *Assure* means to encourage. Use *insure* when referring to underwriting a loss.

equable/equitable

Equable means marked by lack of variation or change, as in uniform. *Equitable* means having or exhibiting equity.

etc.

Etc. is an abbreviation for the Latin *et cetera*, meaning "and others" or "and so forth"; therefore, *etc.* should not be used with *and*.

explicit/implicit

Explicit means free from all vagueness. *Implicit* means capable of being understood from something else though unexpressed.

F

fact

Actual *fact* and true *fact* are redundant expressions. All facts are true and actual.

farther/further

Use *farther* when distance is implied. Use *further* when referring to time or quantity.

fewer/less

Use *fewer* for things that can be counted. Use *less* for things or ideas that cannot be counted.

G

good/well

Good is an adjective that describes something positive. *Well* is an adverb meaning in a proper manner; in a kindly or friendly manner. It is also used as an adjective to describe a state of health.

H

hopefully

Means with hope. Incorrectly used in "*Hopefully*, we can leave tomorrow." Correct use would be "'We should be able to leave tomorrow,' he said *hopefully*."

I

if/whether

If implies uncertainty. *Whether* implies an alternative.

imply/infer

These words are not interchangeable. If you *imply* something, you hint or suggest it. If you *infer* something, you reach a conclusion on the basis of evidence.

in order to

Simply use *to*.

in/into

In indicates that something is already at a place or location. *Into* indicates that someone or something is moving from the outside to the inside of a place.

ingenuous/ingenious

Ingenuous means showing innocent or childlike simplicity and candidness. *Ingenious* means intelligence, aptitude, or discernment.

input

Often used incorrectly as a verb; *enter* is a verb, and *input* is a noun.

irregardless/regardless

Irregardless is nonstandard English because it expresses a double negative. The word *regardless* is already negative, meaning, "unmindful." Always use *regardless* or *irrespective*.

its/it's

Be careful never to confuse these two words. *Its* is a possessive pronoun, whereas *it's* is a contraction of *it is*.

L

lay/lie

Lay means to put something down, to place something somewhere. The principal parts are *lay, laid (have, has, or had) laid*. *Lie* means to recline, to rest, or to remain in a reclining position. The principal parts are *lie, lay, (have, has, had) lain*. The verb *lie* is also the verb to use when speaking of inanimate objects that are in a reclining or in a *lying-down* position. Another verb *lie* means falsehood. Its principal parts are *lie, lied, lying*.

libel/liable/likely

The term *libel* refers to "anything circulated in writing or pictures that injures someone's good reputation." *Liable* means "legally subject to" or "responsible for." In business writing, *liable* should retain its legal meaning. Where a condition of probability is intended, use *likely*.

M

maybe/may be

Maybe (one word) is an adverb meaning "perhaps." *May be* (two words) is a verb phrase.

N

none

None may be considered either a singular or plural pronoun, depending on the context. For emphasis, substitute *no one* for *none* and use a singular verb.

nor/or

Nor always follows *neither* in sentences with continuing negation. *Or* follows *either* in sentences.

O

on/onto

On is normally a preposition meaning "supported by," "attached to," or "located at." *Onto* implies movement to a position on a movement up and on.

P

per

Per is a common business term that means "by means of," "through," or "on account of," and in these senses it is appropriate. When used to mean "according to" (*per* your request, *per* your order), the expression is business jargon

at its worst and should be avoided. Equally annoying is the phrase *as per*.

persons/people

When using *persons*, we usually refer to individual people thought of as separately. When we say *people*, we are identifying a large or anonymous group.

possibly/probably/most likely

Possibly means capable of happening or existing. *Probably* and *most likely* both describe what seems to be true, but is not certain. They are interchangeable.

practicable/practical

Practicable means possible to practice or perform, feasible. *Practical* means capable of being put to use.

precede/proceed

Precede means to come or go before someone or something. *Proceed* means to go on, usually after an interruption.

present/presently/current

Present means a moment in time perceptible as intermediate between past and future, the present tense. *Presently* and *currently* both mean now; now in progress. Unlike *currently*, *presently* can mean soon or by and by.

principal/principle

Principal is used as a noun or an adjective and means first or foremost. *Principle* is a noun meaning a basic truth or a determined course of action.

prior to

Use *before*.

proved/proven

Both *proved* and *proven* are acceptable past participles of *prove*, although *proved* is currently in wider use. *Proven* is more commonly used an adjective.

R

raise/rise

Raise means to lift or raise, it requires an object. *Rise* means to get up or go up. It requires no direct object.

S

set/sit

Set means to put something down or in a certain place, or to bring to a specified state or condition. *Sit* means to be seated.

shall/will

Use *shall* in the first person (I shall go) and *will* in the second (you will go) and third persons (he will go).

subsequent to

Use *after*.

T

that/which/who

That is the defining or restrictive pronoun; *which* is the nondefining or nonrestrictive pronoun. "The automobile *that* is out of gas is in the drive," tells which automobile. "The automobile, *which* is out of gas, is in the drive," adds a fact about the only automobile in question. *Who* refers to persons, whereas *that* and *which* refer to animals and things.

U

utilize

Utilize should not be used as a long variant of *use*, which is the general word for "employ for some purpose." When you are tempted to use this term, try to substitute *use*. It will almost always prove a clearer and less pretentious word.

V

verbal/oral

Verbal means relating to or involving words rather than meaning. *Oral* means uttered by the mouth, using speech or the lips especially in teaching the deaf.

via

Means *by way of* in a geographical sense, not *by means of*.

W

who's/whose

Who's is a contraction of *who is*. *Whose* is the possessive for *who* or *of which*.

Y

your/you're

You're is a contraction of *you are*. *Your* is a possessive adjective of or belonging to *you*.