



ALWAYS WRITE THE RIGHT WORD!

You are about to graduate from high school. It is time to eliminate, for the rest of your life, any of the following errors.

affect vs. effect (this one's tricky)

“Affect” is usually a verb which means “to have an influence.”

* *Try not to let your emotions affect your decision.*

“Effect” is usually a noun which means “the result.”

* *In certain parts of the world, the effects of global warming are already obvious.*

* *Severe drowsiness is a serious side effect of my allergy medicine.*

...So, when something affects you, it has an effect on you! Kind of confusing—especially since we tend to pronounce them the same—but just remember that one is a verb and the other a noun.

But wait! Sometimes “effect” *can* be a verb: it means to bring about, make happen, or create.

* *In order to effect a change in our political system, citizens and elected officials alike must overcome selfish party interests and build coalitions to work toward shared goals.*

a lot vs. alot (this one's easy!)

The word “alot” does not exist. Period. Always use two words: “a lot.”

* *Donald Trump has a lot of money.*

allusion vs. illusion

An allusion is an indirect reference to something. An illusion is a misleading appearance.

* *Flanney O'Connor's stories are full of allusions to the Bible.*

* *Did I see an angel, or was it just an illusion?*

all ready vs. already

“All ready” means completely prepared.

* *I'll be all ready to go as soon as I brush my teeth.*

“Already” refers to something that has happened by now.

* *I've already done my homework, so I've got the night off.*

all right vs. alright

“Alright” is not a word. Ever. Only use “all right.”

* *It's all right with me if it's all right with you.*

altogether vs. all together

“Altogether means “completely.”

* *I was altogether disgusted by the movie.*

“All together” means in a group.

* *They were gathered all together in the parking lot.*

between vs. among

General rule: “between” refers to only two items; “among” refers to more than two.

* *The money was divided between Larry and David.*

* *The money was divided among the four relatives.*

Exception: Use “between” if you are comparing more than two items *if each item is being compared individually to each of the others.*

* *Do you know the difference between a simile, a metaphor, and an analogy?*

capital vs. capitol

As a noun, “capital” means the city or town that is the seat of a government.

* *Montgomery is the capital of Alabama.*

“Capitol” refers to the actual government *building*.

* *On our trip to Montgomery, we got to go inside the capitol.*

Other uses: “Capital” can also be used as an adjective; “capitol” can’t. As an adjective, “capital” means “punishable by death” or “of major importance.”

* *In many states, murder is a capital offense.*

* *What a capital idea!*

* *It is of capital importance that we drive to Alabama’s capital so that we may stand on the steps of the capitol and protest capital punishment!*

Finally, “capital” can be used to signify monetary wealth or gain:

* *The manager stayed up all night calculating his store’s capital gain for the month.*

cliché vs. clichéd

The word “cliché” is a noun; “clichéd” is never an adjective. The adjective you want is “clichéd.” In other words, you can say, “That is such a cliché,” and you can say, “That is so clichéd,” *but never say, “That is so cliché.”*

* *I used to love that movie, but now it just seems clichéd.* (adjective)

* *Have you noticed that everything that comes out of her mouth is a cliché?* (noun)

* *Have you noticed that everything that comes out of her mouth is clichéd?* (adjective)

complement vs. compliment

When you are saying something nice to someone, you’re complimenting them.

* *Be sure to compliment Maria on her new shirt.*

To complement something is to complete something, make it perfect, or add a missing piece.

* *Her lipstick shade complements the color of her dress perfectly.*

Note that both “compliment” and “complement” can be used as verbs (as in the above examples) or as nouns:

* *Her voice is the perfect complement for his guitar.*

* *Thanks for the sweet compliment.*

could of vs. could have

Never write “could of.” It is always “could have.” (We just pronounce it like a contraction, “could’ve”; it *sounds* like “could of,” but always *write* “could have.”)

* *I could have been a rock star if I had been more dedicated.*

The same rule applies for “should have” and “would have.” It’s never “of”!

faith vs. fate

“Faith” refers to belief and trust in God, or to belief and trust in a person or idea.

“Fate” means destiny; it can also be a force which predetermines and controls our destinies.

* *I have faith in a higher being which controls my fate.*

its vs. it’s

“Its” is the possessive form of “it.” “It’s” is the contraction of “it is” or “it has.”

* *Win or lose, the team always does its best.*

* *It’s [it is] beginning to look a lot like Christmas.*

* *What a long, strange trip it’s [it has] been.*

regardless vs. irregardless

“Irregardless” is not a word. Always use “regardless.”

* *I will do what I want regardless of your warnings.*

suppose to vs. supposed to; use to vs. used to

It’s “supposed to,” not “suppose to.” Similarly, it’s “used to,” not “use to.”

Incorrect: *We’re suppose to be there at six.* **Correct:** *We’re supposed to be there at six.*

Incorrect: *I use to love Sesame Street.* **Correct:** *I used to love Sesame Street.*

than vs. then

“Than” is used to compare things.

* *He may be richer than me, but I have more real friends than he ever will.*

* *Other than that, I have nothing to say.*

* *More often than not, I am the last one to finish.*

* *Rather than wait all night for a ride, I decided to ride my bike.*

“Then” marks a place in time.

* *If you eat your broccoli, then you can have some dessert.*

* *Things were so much easier back then.*

their vs. they’re vs. there

“Their” is a possessive form of “they.”

* *Jeff and Roxanne are visiting their cousins.*

“They’re” is the contraction “they are.”

* *They’re coming over for dinner.*

“There” is the most multipurpose of these three homonyms. It can mean “at that place.”

* *I will be there as soon as I can.*

“There,” used with the verb “to be” (is, are, was, etc.), often introduces a sentence or clause.

* *There will be a hot time in the old town tonight. There is a man going around taking names. There are stars in southern skies. There is no place like home...*

* *Jeff and Roxanne are driving to Kansas. They’re going there to visit their family. There will be a big reunion.*

to, too, and two – come on now – you should know these triplets!

to – infinitive or preposition (*I am walking to the park.*)

too – adverb that means also/in excess (*Are you going down town too?*)

two – number (*Did Winston have **two** reasons **to** go to Miniluv with Julia **too**?*)

try and vs. try to

In written language, “Try to” is always right. “Try and,” although acceptable in spoken English, is always wrong on paper.

* *Try to understand—he’s a magic man!*

Wear =where=were –

A person wears garments!

Where is a location? (*Where is my Beowulf book?*)

Were – past plural for was/a “to be” verb! (*There **were** 25 people at the meeting **where** we discussed what to **wear** at the dance.*)

Finally, you don’t take something “for granite.” Granite is a rock. The expression is “for granted.”

If I have learned one thing from life, it’s this: take nothing for granted.

In conclusion:

Always follow these rules and you will cut down on the little, easily-fixed mistakes that can make your writing look weak. Spell check *won’t* always catch these errors; you have to catch them yourself. Writing the right word will make you look and feel smarter, will get you a job, will enhance your health and happiness, and will probably improve your love life. Why wait? It is time to master these rules.