

CORRECT WORD USAGE

Affect/Effect

Definitions:

Affect—to influence (verb)

Effect—an influence (noun)

Effective—producing a desired effect (adjective)

Three ways to remember these differences are:

- 1) Affect begins with “a” for action word—verb.
- 2) Cause and effect are both nouns.
- 3) Since effective is an adjective, and adjectives describe nouns, then effect must be a noun.

Therefore, use affect as a verb and effect as a subject or an object.

Afterward/Afterwards

Backward/Backwards

Downward/Downwards

Forward/Forwards

Toward/Towards

Upward/Upwards

In general American usage, we drop the “s” for the above words.

In British usage, the “s” remains.

All Ready/Already

All ready indicates an amount of preparation, that is, all is ready, such as:

Are you all ready to go?

Already refers to a time in the past, for example: The movie has already started.

Any Time/Anytime

Use two words, any time, if “at” comes before the words, such as:

I’m available at any time.

Use one word, anytime, to mean at any time, similar to the above example without the word “at”:

I am available anytime.

Also use any time if you are specifically discussing a time used as a noun, for example:

I only have an hour or so this week, but next week I am available any time.

Any here is used as an adjective to describe “time,” and a noun does not follow any time.

When in doubt, separate the words.

Appraise/Apprise

Appraise means to put a value on something. For example:

Mickey is having his office building appraised to find out if the building is worth selling.

Apprise means to inform or to notify.

“Keep me apprised of how well the new toy line is selling,” Mickey told Donald.

Between/Among

Between is used for two persons or items.

Among is used for more than two people or items.

Between you and me, Goofy is a little looney.

How many among all the students are going to work for Mickey?

Biweekly/Semiweekly/Bimonthly/Semimonthly

Biweekly means either every two weeks (the preferred definition) or twice a week.

Semiweekly means twice a week.

Bimonthly means either once every two months (the preferred definition) or twice a month.

Semimonthly means twice a month.

These words are too confusing. A suggestion is to use twice a week, twice a month, once every two weeks, or once every two months instead.

Capital/Capitol

Capital indicates the city holding the main governing body of the state, for example:

Richmond is the capital of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Capitol refers to a building, such as, the capitol is undergoing repairs.

If you mean the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C., where the United States Congress meets, use a capital “C” for Capitol.

Cite/Site/Sight

Cite is an abbreviation for citation, which is a source of information.

A site is a place or location.

Sight is your vision or a view.

Due to the fact that

Please—use “because” instead. You’ll shorten your writing by four words.

Few/Many/Several—used with Countable Nouns

Less/Little/ Much—used with Uncountable Nouns

Few is used with countable and plural nouns.

Very few students are here in class today.

Many is used with countable and plural nouns.

Many of the dogs are very cute.

Several means more than two but not many, in other words, a few.

Several is used with countable nouns and plural nouns.

Several students are going to eat at the cafeteria.

Less is used with singular and uncountable nouns.
Less fat is always good.

Little is used with uncountable nouns.
Little of the information was relevant.
Much is used with uncountable nouns.
Fred, the dog, drank much of the beer.

First/Firstly

First, second, third, fourth, etc., are, in fact, the ordinal numbers.
“Firstly” means “the first.” Just use “first” instead.
Do not use firstly, secondly, thirdly, etc., in your college papers to indicate an ordered set of items.

Go/Come

I go to You come from

I am going to Europe on vacation.
My cousin is coming from Czechoslovakia to visit me.

Sometimes a form of “I come from” is appropriate, for example: I just came home from school.

Imply/Infer

Imply means to suggest. Infer means to make an educated guess.
The writer implies. The reader infers.
I infer from what these notes to the financial statements imply is that this company is going out of business soon.

In/Into

In has many definitions, including inside.
For example, “I found my paper in my book.”

Into suggests a movement from the outside to the inside.
For example, “She walked into the house.”

Insure/Ensure/Assure

Assure means to give confidence to or to reassure.
Ensure means to make sure something will happen.
Insure means to take out or issue insurance.

For example:

“I assure you that the package will get delivered to you this afternoon,” the UPS representative told Mickey.

“I will personally ensure that the delivery person makes the delivery on time.”

“Does the package have insurance on it?” Mickey asked. “The toys are very valuable.” “Sure does,” the UPS representative said.

It's/Its

It's is the contraction meaning “it is,” for example, It's cold outside.

Its is the possessive (shows ownership) for “it,” as in, Its stock has soared during these past six months.

Lay/Lie

Of course “to lie” means not to tell the truth. The following is a discussion on lying down or laying an object down.

Present Tense	Past Tense	Progressive Tense
lie	lay	lying
lay	laid	laying

Present Tense

Definitions:

Lie—to be in or to put oneself in a resting position

Lay—to put an object in a resting position

Examples:

Do you mind if I just lie down for a minute before we go out?

Where did I lay my keys down?

One way to remember the difference is: people lie (not tell the truth), therefore, people also lie down.

Past Tense

Now comes the difficult part—the past tense of lie is lay, which is confusing.

However, the past tense of “lay” is “laid.” We can remember laid with this trick:

With the help of (aid from) me, this object was laid down.

Examples:

I lay in bed all morning.

I laid my keys down here on this table.

Progressive Tense (Progressive, or continuous, tense is used if something is happening continuously over a certain period of time.)

Progressive Tense is easy (except for the minor spelling issue with lying)—use “ing.”

Examples:

I’m just lying around. What are you doing?

The workers are laying the carpet down in Mickey’s office tomorrow afternoon.

Lose/Loose

Lose is the opposite of win or gain.

How much did the CEO lose on his company’s stock shares with this large dip in the stock price?

Loose means not tight, for example:

Look how loose his pants are.

Many/Much

(See above for a full discussion.)

Many is used with countable nouns, such as:

Many students love this teacher.

Much is used with uncountable nouns. Much of Mickey’s business comes from college students.

Medium/Media

In terms of communication, medium is a means of communication that reaches the general public.

Media is the plural of medium.

No/None/Not

No is the opposite of yes. For example, "I said no."

None means zero. For example, "None of my classmates are going to the party."

Not is an adverb that describes verbs. For example, "I am not going to that party."

Passed/Past

Passed means to have moved by something or to have succeeded at an exam or class (verb).

Past means a previous time (noun or adjective) or beyond (preposition).

Examples:

We passed the store one exit ago.

We drove past the store one exit ago.

Notice "past" is after an active verb and means "beyond," a preposition.

Here is the trick to remember:

If you want an active verb, use pass (for the present) or passed (for the past).

If you already have an active verb, and you want to indicate where (beyond), use "past."

I passed the test with an A+!

"Passed" here is easy—we know when we pass or fail an exam.

In the past, he traveled a great deal. ("Past" is used as a noun to indicate history.)

In the past few months, stock prices have soared. ("Past" is used as an adjective and describes previous months.")

If you are discussing history, use "past."

Principal/Principle

A principal is the head of a school.

A principle is a law, rule, or theory upon which others are based.

Since a principal is the leader of a school—use an "a," the first letter of the alphabet, as in the ending of the word: "pal."

Regard/Regards

In regard to/In regards to

In regard to is the proper phrase.

Other options include: regarding, concerning, about, given, in discussing, and with regard to.

Says/States

Says is informal and implies oral conversation.

States is used more for writing, especially formal college papers, as in:

The author states, "_____."

Than/Then

Than is used for comparisons.

Company A has a higher return on assets than Company B does.

Then means “at that time,” “next,” or “therefore.”

Company A began in 1960. Then [at that time] it had only two employees who worked out of a garage. Then [next] the company moved to a space behind a grocery store. Since the company had such humble beginnings, its owners, then, [therefore] allow employees to dress in jeans.

There/Their/They're

There refers to a place.

Their is the possessive (shows ownership) for “they.”

They're means they are.

Over there [place] is their [possessive] sailboat, which they're [they are] looking forward to sailing in this weekend.

Where

Where generally refers to a place. Usually “that,” “which,” “in which,” or “for which” are preferred replacements for “where” if a place is not indicated.

Example:

The management team where Huey works consists of very few employees—just himself and his brothers, Huey and Dewey. Preferably, just use “where” to mean “place.” “Team” is not a place.

A better sentence: The company for which Huey works has very few employees on its management team . . .

Who/Whom

Refer to the following table:

word that works	then use	part of speech
he, she	who	subject
him, her	whom	object

Rearrange words in the sentence to determine whether he/she or him/her works.

For example:

Minnie made a cake for her boyfriend, Mickey, _____ is really cute.

Does “he is really cute” or “him is really cute” work?

“He” does. “He is really cute” is a good sentence.

Choose “who,” which is next to “he” in the table.

Now we know the subject, “who,” works in this sentence.

Another example:

I gave a book on magic tricks to _____ because he really likes entertaining people.

Does “he” or “him” work in this sentence? Does “to he” work? No. Does “to him” work? Yes.

Looking at the table, we choose “whom” next to “him.”

“Whom” is an object. “I gave a book on magic tricks to him . . .”

Yet another example:

The person _____ Daisy Duck looks up to most is Minnie Mouse.

Does “she” or “her” work in this sentence? Let’s rearrange the words to form:

“Daisy Duck looks up to she?” No, that does not work.

“Daisy Duck looks up to her?” Yes, that works. We then select “whom” next to her.

“The person whom Daisy Duck looks up to . . .”

“Whom” is an object.

Note: “whom” is generally used after a preposition, such as to whom or by whom.

Who’s/Whose

Who’s is the contraction meaning “who is,” for example, “Who’s at the door?”

Whose is the possessive (shows ownership) for “who,” as in, “Whose book is this?”

You’re/Your

You’re is the contraction meaning “you are,” for example, “You are very cute.”

Your is possessive (shows ownership) for “you,” such as, “Your car is awesome” (although the word “awesome” is a little informal for college papers).

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