

A Glossary of Usage

This glossary is an alphabetical guide to words that often cause problems for writers. Some entries are labeled “colloquial,” and some “nonstandard.” A *colloquialism* is a word or phrase more appropriate to informal speech than to writing. Although colloquialisms are not grammatically incorrect, they should be avoided in formal writing, and even in informal writing they should be used sparingly. A *nonstandard* word or phrase is avoided at all times by careful speakers and writers. It is the kind of error sometimes labeled “incorrect” or “illiterate.”

If you want to know more about the words in this glossary, consult *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*, a modern college-level dictionary, or a reliable online dictionary.

accept, except *Accept* is a verb meaning “to receive,” and *except* is a preposition meaning “but” or a verb meaning “to exclude or leave out.” “I will *accept* your invitation.” “Everyone *except* Henry went to Chicago.” “We voted to *except* the new members from the requirements.”

advice, advise *Advice* is “an opinion you offer”; *advise* means “to recommend.” “Her *advice* was always helpful.” “The counselor will *advise* you concerning the requirements for that course.”

affect, effect *To affect* is “to change or modify”; *to effect* is “to bring about something”; an *effect* is “the result.” “The drought will *affect* the crop production.” “I hope the treatment will *effect* an improvement in his condition.” “The *effect* should be noticeable.”

aggravate, annoy These two are often confused. *To aggravate* is “to make a condition worse.” “The treatment only *aggravated* his asthmatic attacks.” *To annoy* is “to irritate.” “The ticking clock *annoyed* Dean as he read.”

agree to, agree with You *agree to* a thing or plan. “Mexico and the United States *agree to* the border treaty.” You *agree with* a person. “Laura *agreed with* Herb about the price of the computer.”

ain’t Although *ain’t* is in the dictionary, it is a nonstandard word never used by educated or careful speakers except to achieve a deliberate humorous effect. The word should be avoided.

all ready, already *All ready* is an adjective phrase meaning “prepared” or “set to go.” “The car had been tuned up and was *all ready* to go.” *Already*, an adverb, means “before” or “previously.” “The car had *already* been tuned up.”

- all right, alright** The correct spelling is *all right*; *alright* is not standard English.
- allusion, illusion** An *allusion* is “an indirect reference to something.” “He made an *allusion* to his parents’ wealth.” An *illusion* is a “false image or impression.” “It is an *illusion* to think that I will soon be a millionaire.”
- among, between** Use *between* for two objects and *among* for more than two. “The hummingbird darted *among* the flowers.” “I sat *between* my parents.”
- amount, number** *Amount* refers to quantity or to things in the aggregate; *number* refers to countable objects. “A large *amount* of work remains to be done.” “A *number* of jobs were still unfilled.”
- anyone, any one** *Anyone* means “any person at all.” “I will talk to *anyone* who answers the telephone.” *Any one* means a single person. “*Any one* of those players can teach you the game in a few minutes.”
- anyways, anywhere** These are nonstandard for *anyway* and *anywhere*, and they should be avoided.
- awful** Don’t use *awful* as a synonym for *very*. It is inappropriate to say or write “The scores of the two teams were *awful* close.” It is better to say or write “The scores of the two teams were *very* close.”
- bad, badly** *Bad* is an adjective; *badly* is an adverb. Use *bad* before nouns and after linking verbs; use the adverb *badly* to modify verbs or adjectives. “Her pride was hurt *badly* (not *bad*).” “She feels *bad* (not *badly*).
- bare, bear** *Bare* is an adjective meaning “naked” or “undisguised.” “The baby wiggled out of its diaper and was completely *bare*.” *Bear* as a verb means “to carry or support.” “The bridge was too weak to *bear* the weight of the trucks.”
- because of, due to** Use *due to* after a linking verb. “His embarrassment was *due to* his inability to speak their language.” Use *because of* in other situations. It is awkward to say or write “The boat struck the buoy in the harbor *due to* the fog.” It is better to say or write “The boat struck the buoy in the harbor *because of* the fog.”
- being as, being that** These are nonstandard forms and should be avoided. Use *since* or *because*.
- beside, besides** *Beside* is a preposition meaning “by the side of.” “The doctor sat *beside* the bed talking to his patient.” *Besides* may be a preposition or adverb meaning “in addition to” or “also.” “*Besides* my homework, I have some letters to write.”
- between you and I** A common mistake. Use *between you and me*.
- breath, breathe** *Breath* is the noun. “He tried to conceal the smell of alcohol on his *breath*.” *Breathe* is the verb. “The air we *breathe* is often contaminated with pollutants.”
- can, may** *Can* refers to ability; *may* refers to permission. “After taking only a few lessons, Tom *can* play the trumpet beautifully. Because of the neighbors’ complaints, however, he *may* play only in the afternoon.”
- can’t hardly, can’t barely** These are double negatives and are to be avoided. Use *can hardly* and *can barely*.
- capital, capitol** *Capital* is “the leading city of a state,” “wealth,” or “chief in importance.” “The *capital* of Nicaragua is Managua.” “Lorena lives on the interest from her accumulated

capital.” “The low interest rate was of *capital* importance in holding down inflation.” *Capitol* is the building in which lawmakers sit. “The flag of surrender flew over the *capitol*.”

complement, compliment *To complement* is “to balance or complete.” “Kareem’s new tie *complements* his suit.” *To compliment* is to flatter. As a noun, *compliment* means “an expression of praise.” “When anyone *compliments* Bernice, she blushes, because she is unaccustomed to *compliments*.”

conscience, conscious A *conscience* is a “sense of right or wrong.” “His *conscience* wouldn’t allow him to cheat on the exam.” *To be conscious* is “to be aware.” “I was not *conscious* of the noise in the background.”

consul, council, counsel A *consul* is a “government official stationed in another country.” “The American *consul* in Paris helped the stranded New Yorkers locate their family.” A *council* is a “body of people acting in an official capacity.” “The city *council* passed a zoning regulation.” *Counsel* as a noun means “an advisor” or “advocate”; as a verb it means “to advise.” “The defendant’s *counsel* objected to the question.” “The *counsel* he gave her was based on his many years of experience.” “Saul *counseled* me on my decision.”

continual, continuous *Continual* means “repeated frequently,” as in “We heard a series of *continual* beeps of an automobile horn.” *Continuous* means “without interruption.” “I was lulled to sleep by the *continuous* hum of the motor in the deck below.”

different from, different than One thing is different *from* another, not different *than*.

discreet, discrete *Discreet* means “tactful” (“*discreet* remarks”); *discrete* means “separate” or “individual” (“*discrete* objects”). “Henry was *discreet* about the source of his funds. He said that he had several *discrete* bank accounts.”

disinterested, uninterested *To be disinterested* is “to be impartial.” “The judge was a *disinterested* participant in the case.” *To be uninterested* is “to lack interest.” “It was obvious that Jack was *uninterested* in the lecture because he dozed off several times.”

double negatives Unacceptable in formal writing and in most informal situations except for humorous effect. Double negatives range from such obvious errors as “I don’t have no paper” to more subtle violations (“I can’t scarcely” and “It isn’t hardly”). Avoid them.

eminent, imminent *Eminent* means “distinguished” or “famous”; *imminent* describes something about to happen. “The arrival of the *eminent* preacher is *imminent*.”

enormity, enormousness *Enormity* means “atrociousness”; *enormousness* means “of great size.” “The *enormity* of the crime shocked the hardened crime reporters.” “Because of the *enormousness* of the ship, it could not be docked in the local harbor.”

enthused Nonstandard. Use *enthusiastic*. (“He was *enthusiastic* about our plans for next summer.”)

farther, further Use *farther* for physical distance (“They live *farther* from town than we do”) and *further* for degree or quantity (“Their proposal was a *further* attempt to reach an agreement”).

fewer, less Use *fewer* for items that can be counted and *less* for quantity. “*Fewer* jobs are available for young people this summer.” “He paid *less* for that car than I paid for mine.”

finalize Avoid this term; use *finish*.

- flaunt, flout** *Flaunt* means “to show off.” “To *flaunt* his strength, Carl picked up the coffee table.” *Flout* means “to disregard or show contempt for.” “*Flouting* the sign posted in front of the store, Mr. Burkett parked in the ‘No Parking’ zone.”
- good, well** *Good* is an adjective, never an adverb. “She performs *well* (not *good*) in that role.” *Well* is an adverb and an adjective; in the latter case it means “in a state of good health.” “I am *well* now, although last week I didn’t feel very *good*.”
- hanged, hung** Criminals are *hanged*; pictures are *hung*.
- hissself** Nonstandard. Use *himself*.
- if, whether** Use *if* to introduce a clause implying a condition. “If you go to summer school, you can graduate early.” Use *whether* to introduce a clause implying a choice. “I’m not sure *whether* I will go to summer school.”
- imminent, eminent** See *eminent, imminent*.
- imply, infer** *To imply* is “to hint strongly”; *to infer* is “to derive the meaning from someone’s statement by deduction.” You *infer* the meaning of a passage when you read or hear it; the writer or speaker *implies* it.
- irregardless** Nonstandard. Use *regardless*.
- is when, is where** Avoid these expressions to introduce definitions. It is awkward to write (or say) “A sonnet is *when* you have fourteen lines of iambic pentameter in a prescribed rhyme scheme.” It is better to write (or say) “A sonnet is a poem with fourteen lines of iambic pentameter in a prescribed rhyme scheme.”
- its, it’s** *Its* is a possessive pronoun meaning “belonging to it.” *It’s* is a contraction for *it is* or *it has*. See Chapter 6.
- kind of, sort of** These are colloquial expressions acceptable in informal speech but not in writing. Use *somewhat* or *rather* instead.
- leave, let** *Leave* means “to go away,” and *let* means “to allow.” Do not use *leave* for *let*. “Please *let* (not *leave*) me go.”
- liable, likely, apt** *Liable* means “legally responsible” or “susceptible to”; *likely* means “probably”; and *apt* refers to a talent or a tendency. “He is *liable* for the damage he caused.” “Those rain clouds indicate it’s *likely* to rain this afternoon.” “She is an *apt* tennis player.”
- like** *Like* is a noun, verb, adjective, and preposition; do not use it as a conjunction. “He acted as if (not *like*) he wanted to go with us.”
- loosen, loose, lose** *To loosen* means “to untie or unfasten”; *to lose* is “to misplace”; and *loose* as an adjective means “unfastened” or “unattached.” “He *loosened* his necktie.” “His necktie is *loose*.” “Did he *lose* his necktie?”
- maybe, may be** *Maybe* means “perhaps”; *may be* is a verb phrase. “*Maybe* we’ll win tomorrow’s game if we’re lucky.” “It *may be* that we’ll win tomorrow.”
- must of** Nonstandard. Write (and say) “must have,” and in similar constructions use “could have” (not “could of”) or “would have” (not “would of”).
- myself** *Myself* is correct when used as an intensive or reflexive pronoun (“I helped *myself* to the pie,” and “I hurt *myself*”), but it is used incorrectly as a substitute for *I* and *me* in the following: “My brother and *myself* were in the army together in Germany” and “They spoke to George and *myself* about the matter.”

- off of** Wordy; use *off*. “Sean jumped *off* (not *off of*) the diving board.”
- precede, proceed** *To precede* is “to go before or in front of”; *to proceed* is “to continue moving ahead.” “Poverty and hunger often *precede* a revolution.” “They *proceeded* down the aisle as if nothing had happened.”
- principal, principle** *Principal* as an adjective means “main” or “chief”; as a noun it means “a sum of money” or “the head of a school.” *Principle* is a noun meaning “a truth, rule, or code or conduct.”
- quiet, quite, quit** Read the following sentences to note the differences. “I wanted to get away from the noise and find a *quiet* spot.” “They are *quite* upset that their son married without their permission.” “When college starts next fall, he will *quit* his summer job.”
- raise, rise** *Raise* is a verb meaning “to lift or help to rise in a standing position.” Its principal parts are *raised, raised, and raising*. *Rise* means “to assume an upright position” or “to wake up.” Its principal parts are *rose, risen, and rising*.
- roll, role** *Role* is a noun meaning “a part or function.” “The navy’s *role* in the war was unclear.” *Roll* as a verb means “to move forward, as on wheels”; as a noun, it means “bread” or “a list of names.” “The tanks *rolled* down the main street of the town.” “Professor Samuals often forgets to take *roll* in class.”
- set, sit** *Set* means “to place something somewhere,” and its principal parts are *set, set, and setting*. *Sit* means “to occupy a seat”; the principal parts are *sit, sat, and sitting*. See Chapter 5.
- shall, will** Most authorities, writers, and speakers use these interchangeably. Follow the advice of your instructor.
- somewheres** Nonstandard. Use *somewhere*. Similarly, avoid *nowheres*.
- themselves** Nonstandard. Use *themselves*.
- there, their, they’re** *There* is an adverb meaning “in that place.” “Place the packages *there* on the table.” *Their* is the possessive form of *they*. “They were shocked to find *their* house on fire.” *They’re* is a contraction of *they are*. “*They’re* usually late for every party.”
- weather, whether** *Weather* is a noun referring to climatic conditions. “If we have warm *weather* tomorrow, let’s eat outdoors.” *Whether* is a conjunction that introduces alternatives. “It may rain tomorrow *whether* we like it or not.”
- who, whom** Use *who* when the pronoun is a subject; use *whom* when it is an object. “*Who* bought the flowers?” “*To whom* were the flowers given?”
- your, you’re** *Your* is a possessive form of *you*; *you’re* is a contraction for *you are*. “*Your* dinner is ready.” “*You’re* the first person to notice that.”



Visit <http://www.mywritinglab.com> for more resources about common usage errors. Click “Punctuation and Capitalization,” then “Easily Confused Words.” You will find a helpful animation on the topic, an exercise that helps you identify and correct usage errors, and a faulty passage that you can rewrite correctly.