

WORD TRIPPERS

The **Ultimate Source** for
Choosing the Perfect Word
When It **Really** Matters

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The answer to that question lies (not lays) on these pages: **WORD TRIPPER** pairings in alphabetical order and searchable online so they're easy to find.

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WORD TRIPPERS

A

Ability, capability – “Ability” refers to skill while “capability” means aptitude. “After years of practice, he has the *ability* to play the piano. He also has the *capability* to learn more instruments.”

Abstruse, obscure – “Abstruse” means difficult to penetrate or comprehend for those with ordinary understanding. “Obscure” means deficient in light; far from centers of human population; out of sight, hidden, inconspicuous; vague or ambiguous. “The professor’s lectures were so *abstruse* that students often felt lost, especially when he used *obscure* terms.”

Accede, secede – Accede means to agree or assent; to give in to a request, to become a party to an agreement, treaty, office, or rank. Secede is to formally withdraw from an organization or alliance. “After much heartache and debate, the president *acceded* to the demands of the members who had threatened to *secede* from the organization.”

Acquiescent, quiescent – “Acquiescent” describes a person who is compliant and goes along without protest while “quiescent” characterizes a temporary state of inactivity. “After his operation, the patient was *acquiescent* in following the doctor’s orders to remain *quiescent* at home.”

Adept, proficient – “Adept” suggests an innate ability combined with a learned skill. “Proficient” describes ability that comes primarily from training and practice. “She encouraged her brother to become *proficient* at playing basketball, but he could never be as *adept* an athlete as she is.”

Ado, adieu – “Ado” means bustle, fuss, trouble, while “adieu” expresses farewell. “There can be much *ado* about saying *adieu* when a loved one goes away.”

Adopt, adapt – “Adopt” means to take as one’s own (e.g., someone else’s child), to choose (e.g., a lifestyle), or to formally accept (e.g., a position or principle). “Adapt” is to adjust to various conditions. “When you *adopt* a young girl, make it easy for her to *adapt* to your living environment.”

Advice, advise – “Advice” is a noun; “advise” is a verb. “The *advice* you receive is only as good as the people who *advise* you.” To remember the difference, think of the word “ice,” which is a thing (a noun) and not an action (a verb).

Affect, effect – “Affect” is a verb meaning to change or influence. “Your quick action *affects* (influences) the outcome.” “Affect” is also a noun to mean feeling, emotion, or emotional response. “During his grief process, my client displayed an uncharacteristically flat *affect*.” “Effect” is a verb meaning to bring about, to cause. “You can *effect* (bring about) a change easily.” “Effect” is also a noun meaning result or outcome. “The story has a desired *effect*.”

Pronunciation: “Affect” as a verb has the accent on the second syllable (uh-FECT); “affect” as a noun places the accent on the first syllable (A-fect) with the “a” sounding like the vowel in “act.” Using “effect” as a verb or noun, the accent is on the second syllable (eh-FECT or ee-FECT).

Affinity, infinity – An “affinity” is a natural attraction to something, a relationship by marriage, or an inherent likeness. “Infinity” refers to space, time, or quantity without bounds; an indefinitely large amount. “The *affinity* between the Air Force and NASA is evidenced by the number of astronauts who used to be pilots before leaving the skies for the *infinity* of space.”

Affirm, confirm – “Affirm” means to declare positively or firmly, to assert as true or factual, while “confirm” means to verify, make firmer, strengthen, to support or establish validity. “Working on the campaign helped *confirm* my intention to go into politics,” he *affirmed* in his announcement speech.

Aisle, isle – An “aisle” is a passageway between rows of seats, or shelving or columns. An “isle” is an island, especially a small one. “She walked the *aisles* of the bookstore until she found a calendar with photos of tropical *isles*.”

Allay, ally – “Allay” means to relieve or reduce the intensity of something. “Ally” (as a verb) means to place in a friendly association or supportive role. “Ally” (as a noun) is a person in that association or role. “She can *allay* your fears by getting the president to *ally* with your cause and become an ally.”

Alley, ally – An “alley” is a narrow passageway, walk, or back street between rows of buildings or in a garden; a lane or building for bowling. To “ally” is to form an alliance, association, or union with someone for a common purpose; an “ally” is the person or group with whom that connection is made. “Captain Heroic prowled the city’s dark *alleys* with his superhero *allies*, saving innocents from evildoers.”

Already, all ready – “Already” is an adverb meaning previously or by this time, and refers to an action. “It’s *already* too late to go.” “All ready” is an adjective phrase meaning completely prepared. “She’s *all ready* to go.”

Alter, altar – “Alter” means to change or modify. “Altar” is a structure at which religious and sacrificial rites are performed. “The new deacon was asked to *alter* the *altar* at the church.”

Alteration, altercation – An “alteration” is a change or modification to something, an adjustment. An “altercation” is a heated or angry dispute; noisy argument or quarrel. “The *altercation* between the two players created the need for an *alteration* in schedules.”

Altogether, all together – The adverb “altogether” means entirely, completely, utterly. “That commute was *altogether* too long and boring.” The adjective phrase “all together”

refers to a combination or group. “Those new factors taken *all together* reveal a different conclusion.”

Allude, elude – To “allude” means to refer to casually or indirectly. To “elude” means to avoid or escape by cleverness or speed, or to escape the comprehension of. “May the force be with you,” the boy said to his friend, *alluding* to Star Wars, as they split up to better their chances of *eluding* the bully chasing them.”

Amiable, amicable – “Amiable” refers to a person’s pleasant, social, agreeable qualities; “amicable” describes something showing goodwill and friendliness. “The mediator’s *amiable* personality helped bring about an *amicable* agreement.”

Amity, amnesty – “Amity” means friendship and peaceful relations, especially among nations. “Amnesty” means a general pardon for offenses, especially political offenses. “Though the presidents of participating nations created an atmosphere of *amity* and trust at their meeting, they wouldn’t all agree to grant *amnesty* to illegal residents.”

Among, amongst – “Among” means surrounded by others (e.g., among friends) or in a group (e.g., among many things to do). Some dictionaries show “amongst” as an alternative to “among”; others don’t even include it. “Among” is recommended because it’s simpler and more up to date than “amongst.”

Among, between – “Among” occurs with MORE THAN two things or people; “between” happens with ONLY two things or people. “*Among* the 128 members, 92 have e-mail access. *Between* AOL and Earthlink, AOL is the more popular choice.”

Anagram, acronym – An “anagram” is a word or sentence formed by rearranging the letters in another word or sentence. An “acronym” is a word formed from the initial letters of a name or series of words. The word “read” is an *anagram* of the word “dear.” USA is an *acronym* for United States of America.

Anecdote, antidote – “Anecdote” is a short account of an incident, a mini-story. “Antidote” is a remedy to counteract the effects of a condition (e.g., poison, disease, etc.). “Telling an *anecdote* that’s funny is an *antidote* for boredom.”

Annuals, perennials – When buying flowers for spring planting, remember that “annuals” last for one growing season (“annual” pertains to one year, like an annual picnic) while “perennials” have a life cycle that lasts more than two years. “I like to plant a variety of *annuals* every spring, but I think more carefully when I choose *perennials* because they last longer.”

Anonymous, unanimous – “Anonymous” means unknown originator. “Unanimous” means everyone sharing the same opinions or views. “The poem written by an *anonymous* contributor received *unanimous* approval from the magazine’s editorial board to feature it next month.”

Antagonist, protagonist – An “antagonist” is an adversary who competes against another; a “protagonist” is a chief proponent of a cause. In literature, the antagonist is the opponent of the protagonist, who is the hero or leading character. “If the *protagonist* has enough supporters on his side, the *antagonist* won’t win the conflict.”

Anyway, any way – The one-word version means “in any case” while the two-word version refers to possibilities. “Is there *any way* we can meet today? I’ll make an appointment for 4 p.m. *anyway*.” Note: never use “anyways.”

Anxious, eager – “Eager” means exciting or enthusiastic; “anxious” means full of anxiety or worry. “I’m *eager* to hear the details of your trip.” “I have been *anxious* to learn about your travels ever since I heard about the airline strike.”

Appear, seem – Use “appear” when it means to come forth and “seem” to indicate how someone probably looks like or feels. “Whenever that singer *appears* on stage, she *seems* happy.”

Appraise, apprise – “Appraise” is to assess or determine the worth of something (e.g., a house, land) while “apprise” means to inform or alert someone to something significant. “The real estate agent *apprised* the owner of his house’s *appraised* value.”

Arcane, archaic – “Arcane” refers to knowledge that is secret, mysterious, and known by few. “Archaic” means characteristic of an earlier time, antiquated. “The ability to use a slide rule is an *arcane* skill; electronic calculators have completely replaced such *archaic* devices.”

Arrant, errant – “Arrant,” meaning without qualification, is synonymous with complete or consummate, as in an arrant fool. “Errant” refers to straying from a proper course or standard. “He can be called an *arrant* fool for taking an *errant* route to spending his inheritance.”

Artful, artistic – “Artful” means slyly crafty or cunning; exhibiting art or skill; skillful in adapting means to ends. “Artistic” means showing imagination and skill; concerning art or artists; exhibiting taste, sensitivity, or appreciation of art and beauty. “Technically skilled but unimaginative, the painter made a living doing *artful* reproductions of Renaissance masters rather than his own *artistic* creations.”

Ascetic, aesthetic – An “ascetic” is a person who renounces the comforts of society to follow a life of self-discipline. “Aesthetic” relates to appreciating beauty in nature and art. “Just because the *ascetic* displayed nothing on the walls of his room doesn’t mean he lacks *aesthetic* sensibility.”

Assess, access – “Assess” is to determine the value, significance, or extent of. “Access” is the ability to approach, communicate with, or make use of. “First assess the damage, then determine if the site is safe enough to allow public *access*.”

Assume, presume – Both imply taking something for granted but “assume” means supposing something is true while “presume” shows a stronger belief, close to

expressing a dare. “I *assume* he’ll arrive when he says he will.” “Please don’t *presume* you’re always right.”

Augur, auger – As a noun, an “augur” is a seer or prophet who foretells events by interpreting signs and omens. As a verb, “augur” means to divine or predict; to serve as an omen or promise of something. An “auger” is a hand tool used for boring holes in wood or ice. “The *augur* warned the ice fishermen about using an poorly made *auger* that wouldn’t cut through the thick ice.”

Autocrat, aristocrat – An “autocrat” is a ruler who has absolute power. An “aristocrat” has been born into the nobility or ruling class. “Although the *autocrat* yearns to be an *aristocrat*, he lacks the bearing that comes from a privileged upbringing.”

Avenge, revenge – “Avenge” is used when there’s a moral intention to right a wrong; “revenge” shows a desire to inflict punishment for an insult or injury. “They want to *avenge* injustice by taking *revenge* on those who hurt them.”

Average, median – “Average” means between the extremes; usual or ordinary. “Median” means toward the middle. In statistics, it’s the middle number of a group, with equal numbers above and below it. “While an *average* is reached by adding all factors and dividing by how many there are, the *median* is a slice through the middle.”

Averse, adverse – “Averse” means having a strong feeling of opposition or repugnance; “adverse” refers to unfavorable or antagonistic circumstances. “I am *averse* to putting myself in *adverse* weather conditions.”

Avert, avoid, evade – “Avert” is to prevent or turn away from, to ward off. “Avoid” means to stay clear of, to keep away from, shun. “She decided to *avert* her eyes when she came close to the car accident to *avoid* seeing people injured.” “Evade” implies escape or elusion, often through trickery. “The contractor built the railing to *avoid* any accidents.” “I stretched the truth to *evade* paying the traffic ticket.”

Awhile, a while – The dictionary says “awhile” means “for a while” (that is, for a period of time). Therefore, it’s redundant to say “for awhile” because it’s like saying “for for a while.” “Let’s get together *awhile*. We can drink and enjoy visiting *for a while*.”

B

Bad, badly – Use “bad” with intransitive verbs (e.g., look, feel, sound, taste) and “badly” with all other verbs. “The soccer team looked *bad* because its members played *badly*.”

Bear, bare – “Bear” as a verb means to carry, support, or hold in one’s mind. “Bare” means to expose or uncover. “Instead of *bearing* a grudge against his neighbor, he cleared the air by *baring* his true feelings about the incident.”

Benevolence, beneficence – “Benevolence” is the desire to do good to others, be kind, charitable. “Beneficence” is active goodness, kindness, or charity. Both words can refer to the kind act or gift itself, but in general, benevolence is *wanting to do good* and beneficence is *actually doing good*. “The employer’s *benevolence* was demonstrated by his *beneficence* in giving all his employees holiday bonuses.”

Bereaved, bereft – “Bereaved” means deprived by death while “bereft” refers to a general deprivation. “The *bereaved* widow also felt *bereft* of the hope she once had.”

Better, best – “Better” is used to compare TWO items while “best” refers to one of MORE THAN TWO items. “It’s *better* to schedule your workshop on a Tuesday than a Wednesday, but Thursday is the *best* day in the week for most people.”

Bi, semi – “Bi” occurs every two intervals; “semi” occurs twice during a time period. “I publish a *bi-monthly* newsletter, sent every other month, rather than a *semi-monthly*, which goes out twice a month.”

Birth, berth – “Birth” is the act of bearing offspring; the event of being born; the time when something begins; origin; lineage. “Berth” means a shelf-like sleeping space, as on a ship, airplane, or railroad car; sufficient space for a ship to maneuver; a space for a ship to dock or anchor; a job or position. “The sailor read a letter announcing the *birth* of his son while lying in his *berth* in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.”

Boarder, border – A “boarder” is a person who pays for lodging and often regular meals, someone who rides a board athletically (snowboard or surfboard), or is a member of a boarding party. A “border” is the outer boundary of a surface or area; the line separating geographic regions; an ornamental design around the edge of a picture, or a garden; to “border” is to form or be one. “Her *boarder* was low on cash, so she let him earn his keep by planting flowers along the *border* of the yard.”

Bolder, boulder – “Bolder” means more bold, i.e., more fearless, daring, courageous or conspicuous. A “boulder” is a large, rounded rock. “The art instructor told her to use *bolder* colors in her paintings, not just pastels.” “The *boulder* rolled down the hill after heavy rains loosened the dirt around it.”

Boom, boon – As a noun, “boom” is a long pole extending from a mast, or a long, movable arm used to maneuver a microphone; it is also a loud noise. As a verb, it means to make a resonant sound or to progress rapidly. “Business is *booming*.” “Boon” refers to a benefit, especially in response to a request. “Lower interest rates are a *boon* to homeowners.”

Born, borne – “Born” means brought forth by birth, or possessing stated qualities from birth. “Borne” is a form of the verb “to bear,” which means to hold up, transport, carry in the mind, yield, exhibit a quality or characteristic. “He was *born* lucky; I have *borne* his good fortune jealously all of my life.”

Breath, breathe – “Breath” (a noun) means the air you inhale and exhale; “breathe” (a verb) is the action of taking breaths. “The jogger had to *breathe* hard until he could catch his *breath*.”

Bridal, bridle – “Bridal” means of, for, or pertaining to a bride or a wedding. A “bridle” is a harness consisting of a headstall, bit, and reins that restrains and guides a horse; it can also mean to curb or restrain. “The *bridal* party waited under the wedding canopy when the groom arrived on a white steed with an ornate *bridle*.”

Browse, peruse – “Browse” means to review something (usually, a written document) in a casual or leisurely way, while “peruse” calls for reading it thoroughly, examining it with care. “When we read the newspaper, we usually *browse* through the display ads but *peruse* the help-wanted section so we don’t miss any job opportunities.”

C

Cache, cachet – A “cache” (sounds like “cash”) is a hiding place, especially one in the ground for ammunition, food, treasures, or anything hidden that way. “She hid her jewels in a *cache* behind the barn for safekeeping.” As a verb, it means to hoard, stockpile, reserve, store. “Cachet” (rhymes with “sashay”) is an official seal on a document, a distinguishing mark or stamp; a sign or expression of approval; superior status; prestige. “Courtesy is the *cachet* of good breeding.”

Caliber (calibre), caliper(s) – “Caliber” refers to the diameter of bullets or other projectiles as well as the inner diameter of a hollow cylinder (e.g., the barrel of a gun). It also means quality or degree of worth. “Parents want to enroll their children in schools of high *caliber*.” “Calipers” is an instrument that measures depth, thickness, or distance between two points. “Fitness trainers use *calipers* to measure body fat.”

Canvas, canvass – “Canvas” is a kind of cloth; “canvass” means to solicit votes or sales. “Red Cross volunteers *canvassed* the spectators to go to the *canvas* tent and donate blood.”

Cavalry, calvary – “Cavalry” refers to mounted soldiers or a highly mobile army unit using vehicular transport such as light armor and helicopters; “calvary” refers to either a sculpture representing the crucifixion or an experience of extreme suffering. “In one battle of the Franco-Prussian War, the French *cavalry* fought German infantry on a height by the *calvary* of Illy.”

Capital, capitol – As an adjective, “capital” means primary or principal. “The subject is of *capital* concern.” As a noun, “capital” refers to wealth, a city where government is located, and an uppercase letter. “Much of my *capital* is in stocks.” “Ottawa is the *capital* of Canada.” “Capitol” refers to the building where people in the government meet. “You will find the *capitol* building in the *capital*.”

Capture, captivate – To “capture” means to take possession of by force or stratagem; to gain control or exert influence over; to record in lasting form (e.g., an event on film). “Captivate” means to get and hold someone’s attention through charm, beauty, or excellence. “Enemy soldiers *captured* the king while the queen *captivated* the crowd with her singing.”

Career, careen – In addition to referring to one’s occupation or profession, “career” as a verb means to go at full speed. “Careen” means to lean or tip to one’s side while in motion. “While careering along the dark country road, the young driver careened into a snow bank and rolled his car.”

Carrot, carat, karat – A “carrot” is an orange-colored vegetable. A “carat” is a unit of weight for precious stones equal to 200 milligrams while a “karat” measures the fineness of gold (e.g., a 12-karat gold piece is 50% pure gold). (Note: sometimes karat is spelled carat.) “On the scale of good nutrition, a *carrot* might be the equivalent of 24-

karat gold.” “The number of *carats* in the ruby exceeded the number of *karats* in its gold setting.”

Censor, censure – A “censor” is an official who examines literature, TV programs, movies, etc., for the purpose of documenting, rating, or deleting objectionable parts. It also means to act as a censor. “Censure” is a strong expression of disapproval, a reprimand. As a verb, it means to criticize in a harsh manner. “The official *censor* not only *censored* the scene in the film but also *censured* its director for including vulgar language.”

Censure, censorious – “Censure” as a verb means to blame, disapprove, officially rebuke. As a noun, it means the expression of blame, disapproval, and rebuke. “Censorious” is an adjective describing a tendency to criticize or find fault. “The *censorious* school board issued yet another *censure* of the high school teacher’s use of expletives in the classroom.”

Cerebration, celebration – “Cerebration” is the act of thinking. “Celebration” is the observation of a day or event with ceremonies of respect, festivity, or rejoicing. “It took a great deal of *cerebration* to plan her husband’s surprise 40th birthday *celebration*.”

Ceremonial, ceremonious – “Ceremonial” describes something characterized by formality or ritual, or used with ceremonies. “Ceremonious” refers to those given to actions marked by ritual, elaborate etiquette, or politeness. “The priest took his *ceremonial* robe and, with a *ceremonious* sweep of his arm, draped it over his shoulders.”

Childish, childlike – When adults are “childish” they behave immaturely or foolishly; when they’re “childlike” they behave with the wonder, creativity, and innocence of a child. “Their complaints about the service sounded *childish* given the overcrowded conditions at the restaurant.” “The team’s *childlike* approach to brainstorming gave us many creative ideas.”

Chute, shoot – They are pronounced the same and their definitions overlap. However, “chute” refers to an inclined channel or vertical passage for conveying material to a lower level, or to move or deposit by means of such a channel. To “shoot” means to discharge a weapon, take a photograph or video, or perform a rapid movement; as a noun, a “shoot” is new plant growth. “The escaping convict hesitated before sliding down the coal *chute*, but he had little choice as the guards were *shooting* at him.”

Clamber, clamor – “Clamber” is a verb meaning to climb something, often awkwardly, as when scrambling over obstacles. “Clamor” as a noun is a loud outcry or hubbub; as a verb, it means to protest, complain, or demand. “The hikers who *clamber* up the boulder-strewn mountain trail decided to *clamor* for better warning signs.”

Climactic, climatic – “Climactic” refers to a climax, which is an intense point or moment leading to an ending, while “climatic” refers to weather conditions. “The weather announcer predicted *climactic* results for people close to the center of the storm in his report on *climatic* changes.”

Clinch, clench – “Clinch” is a variation of the older “clench,” so their meanings partly overlap; both can be used as a noun or verb. “Clinch” means to settle something decisively (e.g., a dispute or contest); to secure or fasten (with or applied to a nail); to constrain by embracing (as combatants in a boxing match). “Clench” refers to closing tightly or grasping firmly (e.g., one’s jaws or fist); to grip tightly with a tool. “After the quarterback made his game-*clinching* touchdown pass, he thrust his *clenched* fists into the air in a victory salute.”

Colonel, kernel – A “colonel” is an officer in the armed forces or an honorary title in some southern states. A “kernel” is the inner, edible part of a seed, nut or fruit; the central part or core of something. “Supplies were running low so the *colonel* told his men to savor every crumb of bread and *kernel* of corn.”

Collegial, congenial – “Collegial” means characterized by having power and authority shared equally among colleagues; resembling or typical of a college or college students. “Congenial” means agreeable, suitable, or pleasing in nature or character; having the same tastes, habits, or temperament. “At his work, the office environment was *collegial* rather than hierarchical; if not for having to wear a necktie and work in a cubicle, he would have called his job *congenial*.”

Comparative, comparable – “Comparative” means pertaining to comparison; using comparison as a method of study, e.g., comparative anatomy. “Comparable” means capable of being compared; similar or equivalent. “Although a *comparative* newcomer to the field, he still believed his achievements were *comparable* to those of the more experienced applicants.”

Compel, impel – “Compel” means to force, drive, or constrain, especially to a course of action. “Impel” means to urge forward or incite; propel. “The servant was *compelled* to explore the dark cave because his master was *impelled* by curiosity to discover its secrets.”

Comment, commentary – A “comment” is a brief statement of fact or opinion. “Commentary” is one or more statements (written or oral) containing opinions, explanations or interpretations. “The announcer’s sarcastic *comment* about the team’s losing streak punctuated his ongoing *commentary* about the players’ poor skills.” Also, “commentary” refers to anything that makes a point or provides a perspective. “The neighborhood’s high crime rate is a sad *commentary* on failed social programs.”

Compliment, complement – “Compliment” means to praise while “complement” means to complete or enhance something. (Note: the words “complete” and “complement” both use the letter “e”) “The wine steward deserves many *compliments*. The wine *complements* the food extremely well.”

Complimentary, complementary – When you use the “i” version, you are giving praise. When you use the “e” version, you are completing or enhancing something. (Memory trick: The word *complete* has an “e.”) “The meeting planner was *complimentary* about my speech because it was *complementary* to other talks at the conference.”

Comprise, compose – “Comprise” refers to the whole that has a number of parts while “compose” refers to the parts making up a whole. It’s correct to say, “The book is composed (made up) of four short stories.” It’s incorrect to say, “The book is *comprised* of 22 chapters.” Instead, say, “The book *comprises* (consists of) 22 chapters.”

Connote, denote – “Connote” means to suggest or imply meanings or ideas in addition to the literal meaning; to have as a related or attendant condition. “Denote” means to be a name or designation for; to mark or indicate. “The phrase ‘amber waves of grain’ is more often used to *connote* America’s abundance than to *denote* an actual field of wheat.”

Conscious, conscientious – “Conscious” is to be aware of something; “conscientious” is to be diligent in performing a task. “After the previous manager didn’t work out, the owner became more *conscious* of hiring someone who was *conscientious*.”

Contemporary, contemporaneous – While both adjectives mean occurring at the same time, “contemporary” usually refers to people and things while “contemporaneous” refers to events and facts. “History shows examples of one person being the *contemporaneous* ruler of two countries, an unlikely occurrence in *contemporary* times.”

Content, context – “Content” means something that’s contained; the subject matter. “Context” is the surrounding words, the atmosphere or background, or a set of facts or circumstances that lend meaning to something. “Although the *content* of the ancient scientific work is interesting, when put in historical *context*, amazing insights emerge.”

Continual, continuous, contiguous – “Continual” means recurring frequently; “continuous” means without interruption. “Contiguous” means bordering, adjoining, abutting, adjacent. “It’s been a *continual* push to keep my business moving.” “The river flows *continuously* in the spring.” “In the U.S., the term ‘contiguous states’ excludes Hawaii and Alaska because their borders don’t touch other states.”

Convince, persuade – You “convince” someone of an idea but “persuade” someone to take action. Therefore, it’s correct to say, “He *convinced* me it would taste good” but incorrect to say, “He convinced me to taste it.” Instead, you would say, “He *persuaded* me to taste it.”

Corroborate, collaborate – “Corroborate” means to strengthen or make more certain with other evidence. “Collaborate” means to work together, especially in a joint intellectual effort. “It’s common for the defense lawyers working on a court case to *collaborate* with each other while they *corroborate* the evidence being gathered.”

Counsel, council – “Counsel” as a verb means to give advice; as a noun, it means a lawyer or professional who gives advice. “Council” is a group of people who acts on stated matters. “The *council* will ask for legal *counsel* to advise the new people coming to town.”

Course, coarse – As a noun, “course” means a direction or route, path, or channel along which anything moves. “He ran on a course that went through the forest.” As a verb, it means to go along a path or channel, to move swiftly. “Anger courses through his veins.” Its homonym “coarse” is an adjective that means rough-textured or characterized by large particles (a coarse, sandy beach) or lacking in fineness or delicacy (a coarse way of speaking). The noun form is coarseness. “The metal file had a high grade of coarseness.”

Criticism, critique, review – A “criticism” is an evaluation or judgment of something, while a “critique” is an elevated term for the same thing. A “review” is used as a

synonym for these but may also imply a more comprehensive study. (Roget's New Millennium™ Thesaurus, First Edition, v 1.3.1)

Current, currant – A “current” is a steady flow or directional movement, especially of air, water, or electric charge, or the rate of such movement; as an adjective, it means of the immediate present, in general circulation, or common knowledge. A “currant” is a small, dried seedless grape from shrubs of the genus *Ribes*. “To test the river’s *current*, she tossed a piece of her *currant* bun into the water.”

Cymbal, symbol – A “cymbal” is a round piece of metal used as a percussion instrument. A “symbol” is something that stands for something, especially a material object that represents something intangible. “A crescendo of *cymbals* from the orchestra signaled the unveiling of the statue of a bald eagle, long recognized as the *symbol* of U.S. strength and independence.”

D

Dabble, dapple – “Dabble” means to do something playfully or superficially, or to splash with liquid. “Dapple” is a mottled or spotted marking. “She *dabbled* at *dappling* the walls with paint.”

Decedent, descendant – A “decedent” is a legal term for dead person while a “descendant” is a blood relative of a later generation. “The estate of the *decedent* has never been probated.” “My neighbor is a *descendant* of a famous general.”

Deference, difference – “Deference” means submission or courteous respect. “Difference” is being unlike or dissimilar. “He discontinued his argument in *deference* to their *difference* of opinion.”

Deification, reification – “In the unlikely event that you’re ever offered the choice between *deification* and *reification*, it’s probably wise to go with the former, which is the

condition of being treated as a god, rather than the latter, which is the condition of being treated as a thing.” - from Visual Thesaurus

Delegate, relegate – “Delegate” means to send another as one's representative; to commit or entrust to another. “She delegates her assistant to represent her at the meeting.” Relegate carries a connotation of status and means to consign to an inferior position, place, or condition. “He *relegates* the less pleasant tasks to his assistant.”

Demure, demur – “Demure” as an adjective means to be modest, shy, or reserved in manner. To “demur” as a verb is to voice opposition, to delay decision or action while, as a noun, “demur” is an objection or delay. “In her *demure* way, the young parent stood up at the meeting and *demurred* at the motion to implement a new school policy. Many others supported her *demur*.”

Deprecate, depreciate – “Deprecate” is to heap with scorn, to belittle; “depreciate” is to lessen in price or value. “To cover his insecurity, he would *deprecate* his coworkers by telling untrue stories about them.” “A new car *depreciates* (loses its value) as soon as a buyer drives it off the dealer’s lot.”

Descent, dissent – “Descent” is a slope; a downward incline or passage, a decline in status or level; the act of going down. “Dissent” as a noun is a difference of opinion or sentiment expressed by an individual or minority. As a verb, “dissent” means to differ. “The helicopter made its *descent* into a crowd of people demonstrating their *dissent* of the government’s new policy.”

Desert, dessert – Though the meaning of these two nouns is distinct – “cactuses grow in the *desert*”; “we eat *dessert* after the main course” – the spelling often gets mixed up. Think of it this way: Having dessert is an extra treat that calls for a second “s.” In a completely different use, “desert” as a verb (emphasis on “ert”) means to leave a person or place without intending to come back. “Don’t *desert* me before the wedding.”

Desirous, desirable – Use “desirous” to mean having desire and “desirable” to describe a desired person or thing. “When having a treat is *desirous*, an ice cream cone is the most *desirable* choice.”

Diffuse, defuse – “Diffuse” means to pour out and spread. “The spilled oil *diffused* over the kitchen counter.” “Defuse” means to make less tense or dangerous. “The tense emotions became *diffused* once the expert *defused* the bomb.”

Disburse, disperse – “Disburse” means to pay out, especially from a fund; to distribute. “Disperse” means to scatter; spread widely; break up and vanish. “As soon as he had *disbursed* all the candy, the crowd of children *dispersed*.”

Discomfit, discomfort – “Discomfit” means to make uneasy or perplexed; to thwart, upset, put into a state of embarrassment. This verb can lead to “discomfort” (a noun), which is an annoyance, an absence of ease; hardship, mild pain. “Even though he was innocent, Jack was *discomfited* by the prosecutor’s relentless questioning, which added to his *discomfort* when confronted later by reporters outside the courtroom.”

Disconsolate, inconsolable – “Disconsolate” means feeling deeply dejected and dispirited; filled with grief; inspiring dejection. “Inconsolable” (also unconsolable) takes the meaning a step further to feeling sad beyond comforting. “The *inconsolable* mother faced a *disconsolate* winter following the sudden death of her son.”

Discreet, discrete – “Discreet” is being self-restrained in speech and behavior. “Discrete” refers to a separation (e.g., a company with three discrete divisions). “The rules are *discrete* (distinct) for the two groups. Be *discreet* (self-restrained) when telling others about these rules.” To remember the difference, think of the “t” separating the two “e”s.

Disinterested, uninterested – “Disinterested” means to be impartial and unbiased; “uninterested” means not interested, bored, indifferent. “She was sufficiently

disinterested in the outcome of the dispute to act as its mediator. Her partner, though, was completely *uninterested* in the case and walked away from it.”

Disparate, desperate – “Disparate” means distinct or different while “desperate” refers to having lost hope or suffering extreme need or anxiety. “With so many refugees having *disparate* dietary customs and only one type of food available, the situation became quite *desperate*.”

Disparity, discrepancy – “Disparity” and “discrepancy” both refer to a difference, but a “disparity” is an inequality of age, rank, condition, or degree, while a “discrepancy” is an inconsistency between facts or claims. “The *disparity* in age of the witnesses largely accounts for the *discrepancy* in their descriptions of the suspect: the adolescent saw an ‘old man’ commit the robbery, while the senior citizen described him as ‘middle-aged.’”

Distinct, dissimilar – Use “distinct” when one thing can be distinguished from other things; use “dissimilar” when comparing things that are unlike or different. “The same *distinct* honor was bestowed on surprisingly *dissimilar* applicants.”

Distinct, distinctive – “Distinct” means separate, dissimilar, not identical. “Silver is *distinct* from gold.” “Distinctive” means having a special quality or characteristic. “The zebra’s *distinctive* stripes make this animal *distinct* from others.”

Distress, duress – “Distress” is acute anxiety, pain, or sorrow. “Duress” refers to coercion or forced restraint. “The *duress* of being put in jail causes *distress* for the lawbreakers and their families.”

Doubtful, in doubt – “Doubtful” is uncertainty about an outcome; “in doubt” is uncertainty of opinion. If the engagement is *doubtful*, that means the event is unlikely to happen. If the entertainer’s engagement is *in doubt*, then no decision to hire him has been made.

Duplicity, duplication – “Duplicity” is intentional deception or deceit in speech or behavior; double-dealing. “Duplication” is the act, state, or product of making an exact copy of, doubling, or repeating something. “The teacher was more upset by the student’s *duplicity* in volunteering to clean the chalkboards than by his subsequent *duplication* of the test answer key while in the classroom.”

E

Eclipse, ellipsis – “Eclipse” is the obscuring of the light of the moon by the earth coming between the moon and the sun (lunar eclipse) or the obscuring of the light of the sun by the moon coming between it and the earth (solar eclipse). As a verb, it means to surpass. “Ellipsis” is punctuation that designates a pause or missing words in a sentence. “The second-place cyclist in the Tour de France race eclipsed the leader in the last stage ... (ellipsis) what an exciting finish.”

e.g., i.e., – Use “e.g.,” (in Latin *exempli gratia*) when you want to say “for example” or “such as.” “For the book tour, we will travel to many cities, e.g., Santa Fe, Tucson, and others.” “i.e.,” (in Latin *id est*) means to clarify a point. It substitutes for “that is” or “namely.” “The book tour includes two states, i.e., New Mexico and Arizona.”

Elicit, illicit, solicit – To “elicit” (a verb) is to draw something out or bring it forth while “illicit” (an adjective) means something illegal or forbidden. To “solicit” is to try obtain by entreaty or application; to persistently petition. “The police want to *elicit* a confession from the robber for his *illicit* behavior.” “In fundraising, telling a personal story to *elicit* sympathy works better than coldly trying to *solicit* money.”

Emigrate, immigrate – To remember the difference, think of “e” meaning “exit” (going out of a country) and “i” meaning “into” (coming into a country). This also applies to emigrants and immigrants. “She *emigrated* from Canada and *immigrated* into the United States. Therefore, she is a Canadian *emigrant* and a U.S. *immigrant*.”

Eminent, imminent – “Eminent” refers to a distinguished person; “imminent” means something is about to happen. “The *eminent* scholar’s arrival is *imminent*.”

Endangered, extinct – “Endangered” means at risk of extinction; “extinct” means no longer in existence. “An *endangered* species of plants or animals becomes *extinct* when no members of the species are left on earth.”

Envy, jealous – “Envy” is a longing to do or possess something that someone has done or achieved; as a verb it means to feel envy; as a noun it can also refer to the object of envy. To be “jealous” is to resent what someone has, does or is because you want or feel you deserve it. “I *envy* my coworker’s youth and beauty, and I am *jealous* that she was promoted ahead of me.”

Endemic, epidemic, pandemic – “Endemic” means prevalent in or peculiar to a locality, region, or people; a disease that occurs regularly in a particular area. “Epidemic” means spreading extensively by infection, affecting many individuals in an area or population at the same time; a rapid spread in any occurrence. “Pandemic” refers to an epidemic in a wide geographical area affecting a large proportion of the population. “Malaria is *endemic* to the tropics.” An *epidemic* of cholera tends to occur after a natural disaster causes sanitation to break down.” “At the time the H1N1 virus was declared a *pandemic*, infections had been reported in more than 70 countries.”

Enervate, energize – To “enervate” is to weaken or destroy the strength or vitality of something; to deprive of nerve, force, moral strength, or courage; medically, to remove a nerve. To “energize” is to give energy, strength, or force to something; to rouse into activity; to supply with an electric current. “*Enervated* by the 100-degree heat, I resisted mowing the lawn, but drinking a glass of lemonade *energized* me to tackle the job.”

Enormousness, enormity – “Enormousness” describes something great in size or extent. “Enormity” means a monstrous offense or evil. “The *enormousness* of the cleanup required after the storm wasn’t yet known.” “Not until journalists were able to

enter Cambodia did the world become aware of the *enormity* of Pol Pot's oppression.”

Note: Some sources advise limiting the use of “enormity” to situations demanding a negative moral judgment although not all sources agree.

Ensure, assure, insure

Ensure – To make sure something happens. “I will research your audience thoroughly to *ensure* a customized presentation.”

Assure – To make someone feel sure about something. “I want to *assure* you I will customize the presentation so it fits your audience.”

Insure – To buy an insurance policy for financial protection in case something happens. “I *insure* my business against liability and theft.”

Entropy, atrophy – “Entropy” is a measure of the disorder or randomness of a system; the steady deterioration of a society or system. As a noun, “atrophy” is the wasting away of a body organ or tissue; deterioration from disuse. As a verb, “atrophy” means to waste away or deteriorate. “I dislike housework and exercising, but without them, neatness will give way to *entropy* and my muscles will start to *atrophy*.”

Evasive, invasive – “Evasive” means intentionally avoiding something or being vague or ambiguous, while “invasive” refers to intruding or encroaching (upon privacy or in armed aggression), or spreading into healthy tissue (e.g., invasive surgery). “The doctor’s curt answers were *evasive* because he was reluctant to tell his patient about her *invasive* carcinoma.”

Every day, everyday – In the two-word adverbial phrase, “day” refers to the time between sunrise and sunset; “every” describes the word day. “*Every day* we call our customers.” Everyday (without a space) is an adjective that precedes the noun it describes. “It’s an *everyday* occurrence.”

Evoke, provoke – “Evoke” means to call up or produce memories, feelings, etc. or to elicit or draw forth. “Provoke” is more assertive. It means to anger, enrage, stir up,

arouse, induce feelings, desires, or actions. “His shocking comment *evoked* protests from students who *provoked* a riot in the street.”

Evoke, invoke – “Evoke” means to summon, call up, produce memories, feelings or to elicit or draw forth. “Invoke” has a religious connotation, to call in (e.g., a deity), also to declare binding (e.g., invoke a law). “*Invoking* God’s help during tough times can *evoke* feelings of peace.”

Exacerbate, exasperate – To “exacerbate” is to increase the severity, bitterness, or violence of something. To “exasperate” is to irritate, annoy someone, or provoke to a high degree. “By trying to fix the sink himself, he only *exacerbated* the problem and *exasperated* his wife into calling the plumber herself.”

Exaggerate, exacerbate – To “exaggerate” is to make overstatements or to increase to an abnormal degree. To “exacerbate” is to aggravate an already difficult or severe situation. “If you *exaggerate*, people may stop believing you.” “Drought and high winds *exacerbate* the wildfire in the mountains.”

Except, accept – “Except” means leaving something or someone out while “accept” means agreeing to something. “*Except* for Tom, I can *accept* all the other candidates on the slate.”

Expedient, expeditious – “Expedient” (adj.) refers to something that’s done for short-term gain suiting one’s self-interest; “expedient/expediency” (noun) means action used to meet an urgent need. “Expedient” is acting with speed and efficiency. “In today’s political climate, radio stations find it *expedient* to play patriotic songs.” “Urgent situations require *expeditious* handling of supplies.”

Extort, exhort – To “extort” is to use intimidation to obtain something while to “exhort” is to use strong argument or appeal to prompt someone to take action. “I *exhort* you to tell me the truth so I won’t have to *extort* it from you by resorting to blackmail.”

Exult, exalt – “Exult” means to rejoice greatly, be jubilant or triumphant. “Exalt” means to raise in rank, character, or status; to elevate. “The locals *exulted* when their candidate won the national election, hoping the added exposure would finally *exalt* their town in the nation’s eyes.”

F

Fail, flail – “Fail” is to fall short of achievement in something expected, attempted, desired, or approved. “The experiment will *fail* if you don’t plan.” It also means to receive less than the passing mark in an exam, class, or course of study. The verb “flail” means to beat or strike as if with a “flail” (a tool for threshing grain). “We *flailed* our horses with the reins.” It also means to thrash about, moving vigorously or erratically. “The boxers *flailed* at each other in the ring.”

Farther, further – “Farther” refers to a geographic distance; “further” reflects reasoning and is used with intangibles like time, quantity, etc. “Thinking about this *further*, I know I can drive *farther* today than yesterday.” Use “farther” when referring to a physical distance. Use “further” to refer to abstract ideas or indicate a greater extent or degree.

Famous, notorious – “Famous” means known widely and favorably, while “notorious” means known widely and unfavorably. “The young actress became *famous* for her Oscar-nominated role, and then became *notorious* for her drug use and underage drinking.”

Fatal, fateful – “Fatal” means capable of causing death, disaster, or destruction. “Fateful” refers to being controlled by fate, predetermined, portentous. “The vivid nightmare proved to be *fateful* for the driver who died in a *fatal* car crash a day later.”

Fewer, less – “Fewer” is used when units or individuals can be counted; less is used with quantities of mass, bulk, or volume. “There are *fewer* letters to be written today than yesterday.” “The mail takes up *less* space than I thought it would.” Generally if the

word has an “s” at the end, use “fewer” – fewer dollars but less money; fewer muffins but less food.

Figurative, literal – “Figurative” refers to the metaphoric nature of an object while its opposite “literal” refers to its strict definition. Use “figurative” as a fancy figure of speech and “literal” as a straight interpretation. “Be *literal* in your feedback about his use of *figurative* language.”

Flaunt, flout – “Flaunt” means to show off; “flout” means to defy or ignore. “When he *flaunted* his fast new sports car, he *flouted* the highway speed limit.”

Foment, ferment – “Foment” is a verb that means to instigate or foster (e.g., discord, rebellion); to promote the growth or development of; to apply warm water, medicated liquid, or ointments to the skin. As a verb, “ferment” means to cause to undergo fermentation (e.g., conversion of grape sugar to alcohol by yeast); to be in or cause an agitated or excited state; as a noun, it means agitation or unrest; something that causes fermentation. “The charismatic speaker was so successful at *fomenting* rebellion that the ensuing political *ferment* quickly led to the collapse of the regime.”

Forbid, prohibit – Use “forbid” with “to” and “prohibit” with “from.” It’s correct to say, “She was *prohibited* from attending” but it’s incorrect to say, “She was prohibited to attend.” Instead, say, “She was *forbidden* to attend.”

Formally, formerly – “Formally” means to follow accepted forms, conventions, or regulations. “Formerly” means having occurred at an earlier time. “She *formally* invited us to the party with embossed linen invitations. While unusual in modern times, such invitations were *formerly* the norm.”

Forward, foreword – “Forward” can be an adverb, adjective, noun or verb, all related to movement toward a front; “foreword” (only a noun) is the section found at the front of a

book. To remember the correct spelling, separate “foreword” into “fore” (to go before) and “word” (the words/ideas that follow).

Fortunate, fortuitous – “Fortunate” means lucky while “fortuitous” means happening by chance. “I needed to talk with Mary so seeing her in the store was *fortuitous*. Since she gave me good news, our meeting was also *fortunate*.”

Foundering, floundering – “Floundering” describes something struggling clumsily, confusedly, or helplessly. “Foundering” describes a boat filling with water and sinking, ground or a building sinking down, or a horse stumbling and going lame. “We tried to save both the man *floundering* in the river and his horse *foundering* in deep mud along the bank.”

Frightful, frightened – “Frightful” refers to causing disgust, fright, shock; horrifying. “Frightened” means to be alarmed, filled with fear. “News of a *frightful* tornado about to sweep into the town *frightened* the residents into evacuating.”

G

Gate, gait – A “gate” is a movable barrier, often on hinges, a means of access or egress. “Gait” is a manner of walking, stepping or running, especially the way a horse moves; to “gait” is to teach a horse a specific way of walking. “Rather than dismount to open the *gate*, the rider changed the horse’s *gait* from a trot to a gallop and they jumped the fence.”

Gauge, gouge – As a noun, a “gauge” is a unit or instrument of measure. As a verb, it means to measure precisely, evaluate or judge. “My gauge for losing weight is the bathroom scale so I can gauge the number of pounds I’ve dropped.” A “gouge” is a chisel used to scoop out a hole. It’s also the action of using a gouge. Metaphorically, it means to scoop out too much. “He used a *gauge* designed for woodworking to *gouge*

holes in the ground for irrigation.” “The homeowner thought the repairman *gouged* him by overcharging.”

Gambol, gamble – “Gambol” as a verb is to frolic, skip about playfully; as a noun, it means skipping or leaping about happily. “Gamble” means to play at any game of chance for money or other stakes, to stake or risk anything of value on the outcome of something involving chance. “By opening a new store, they *gamble* that it will be a success, and when it is, they’ll *gambol* with delight.”

Genial, congenial – “Genial” describes a gracious manner contributing to a pleasant experience while “congenial” refers to an agreeable disposition, someone’s nature. “The host created a *genial* atmosphere for the *congenial* friends who gathered at the party.”

Glimpse, glance – “Glance” (a verb) refers to taking a fast look at something while a “glimpse” (a noun) is the act of seeing something quickly. “I *glance* over my shoulder to catch a *glimpse* of traffic behind me.”

Gorilla, guerilla – A “gorilla” is a species of large ape, or a brutish person or thug. A “guerilla” is a member of a group of irregular soldiers who usually operate in small bands to harass the enemy with surprise raids or sabotage; as an adjective it describes their style of warfare. “Peacefully foraging *gorillas* may get caught in the crossfire when *guerillas* wage war in the animals’ habitat.”

Gourmand, gourmet – Both love food, but a “gourmand” tends to be a greedy or ravenous eater while a “gourmet” is devoted to refined, sensuous enjoyment, especially of food and drink. “Charles, who sees himself as a *gourmet*, savored every bite of his meal while his *gourmand* companion devoured everything on his plate and asked for more.”

Gratuity, gratuitous – A “gratuity” is a favor or gift, usually money, given for service; a tip. “Gratuitous” means unnecessary, unwarranted, or unjustified; less commonly it

means given or obtained without charge or payment. “The waiter’s excellent service was rewarded with a generous *gratuity*.” “I prefer movies that aren’t filled with *gratuitous* sex and violence.”

Grudge, grunge – A “grudge” refers to resentment or harboring ill feelings. “Grunge” is the state of being covered with dirt or unclean things. It’s also a type of rock music or style of dress that incorporates elements of punk rock and heavy metal, often to express disaffection or apathy. “Cindy’s mother held a *grudge* toward her for years because Cindy wore *grunge* clothing as a teenager.”

H

Hanged, hung – Use “hanged” when referring to people; use “hung” for everything else. “The prisoner was *hanged* for his crime.” “The wet clothes were *hung* outside to dry.”

Harangue, harass – “Harangue” (noun or verb) refers to a tirade or rant, such as a long, pompous speech delivered to an assembly or directed at an individual. “Harass” means to disturb, torment, bother continually, pester; persecute. “Unable to *harangue* the citizenry by giving speeches openly, the rebellious leader chose to *harass* people on the street.”

Hardy, hearty – “Hardy” describes being bold, sturdy, courageous, or capable of enduring hardship. “Hearty” means warm-hearted, genuine, sincere. “The *hardy* athletes received *hearty* congratulations after winning the grueling game.” “Hearty” can also mean forceful (a hearty push), substantial (a hearty meal), vigorous (a hearty workout).

Healthful, wholesome – “Healthful” implies a positive contribution to a healthy condition (get involved in healthful exercise) while “wholesome” applies to something that benefits you, builds you up, or sustains you. “Louisa May Alcott wrote: ‘Work is *wholesome* ... It keeps us from ennui and mischief. Work, however, is not always *healthful!*’”

Hone, home in – To “hone” is to sharpen, to make clear or precise. To “home in” is to aim or direct onto a point or target. You can hone a point but you home in on a target. “It’s important to *hone* your message so readers can *home in* on exactly what you mean.”

Hope, hopefully – “Hopefully” is an adverb that means “full of hope.” But “hopefully” is commonly misused, as in: “Hopefully, Jack will help me study.” Note: Jack is the not the hopeful one, nor is his helping full of hope, as this usage implies. Here’s the correct way to convey this idea: “I *hope* Jack will help me study.” The correct way to use hopefully is this: “‘Will you help me study, Jack?’ she asked *hopefully*.”

Note: When you're unsure, assess what “hopefully” modifies or who is “full of hope.” Remember, as an adverb, “hopefully” needs to modify a verb, adjective, or other adverb.

Hope, wish – “Hope” is a noun or verb concerning a feeling that what you desire is possible or that events will turn out for the best; “wish” is a noun or verb pertaining to wanting, desiring, or longing for something. “We *hope* you have a wonderful career; we *wish* you good luck.” “I ignored my mother’s *wish*, and now I have no *hope* of becoming a doctor.”

Hurdle, hurtle, hurl – “Hurdle” as a noun is a barrier, wall, fence over which a runner or animal leaps; a difficult problem to be overcome. As a verb, it means to leap over, master. “Hurtle” means to rush violently, move with great speed, go noisily with violent or rapid motion. “Hurl” is to throw something forcefully. “After *hurdl*ing the net to offer his opponent a consoling embrace, the new singles tennis champ *hurled* his wrist bands into the crowd and *hurtled* through the throng of court-side photographers to hug his coach.”

I

Illustrious, illustrative – "Illustrious" refers to someone who is highly distinguished, renowned, or famous; "illustrative" refers to clarifying a point by example or demonstration. "*Illustrious* presenters rise above the others because they use *illustrative* stories to make their ideas come alive."

Immolate, emulate – "Immolate" means to kill as a sacrificial victim; to kill (oneself) by fire. "Emulate" means to strive to equal or excel, especially through imitation; to rival with some degree of success. "The Buddhist monks who *immolated* themselves in 1963 to protest the persecution of Buddhists in South Vietnam were later *emulated* by protestors of the Vietnam War."

Impassible, impassable – "Impassible" means showing no emotion; "impassable" means not being able to pass (e.g., on a road) or not being able to overcome (e.g., an obstacle). "As we waited for the *impassable* road to be cleared of snow, George remained *impassible*, refusing to get upset about the long delay."

Implode, explode – "Implode" means to collapse inward in a violent way. "Explode" is to release energy or burst or break up violently and noisily. "When demolishing a building, engineers use dynamite in a particular way to make it *implode* while not letting it *explode* and causing damage nearby."

Imply, infer – The one who initiates a communication "implies" while a receiver or observer "infers." "The reader *inferred* the politician's actions were immoral. The editorial writer intended to *imply* that."

Incisive, insightful – "Incisive" means penetrating, clear, or sharp; sometimes that sharpness verges on being "biting" or sarcastic. "Insightful" means being perceptive, understanding the true or inner nature of a situation, thing, or person. "His *incisive*

review of the documentary was more than *insightful*; its sarcasm revealed the reviewer's political bias."

Incongruity, incongruency (not a real word) – "Incongruity" is a noun meaning the quality of disagreeing, being unsuitable or inappropriate. "Incongruency" is not correct.

Incredulous, incredible – "Incredulous" means skeptical, disbelieving." "Incredible" means so implausible as to elicit disbelief; often used simply to express amazement. "They were incredulous after hearing about the incredible tidal wave of destruction."

Inevitable, invariable – "Inevitable" means can't be avoided or escaped from; "invariable" refers to being constant and unchangeable. "Her style of playing tennis was steady and invariable but her inevitable mistakes still cost her the victory."

Infallible, fallible – "Infallible" means incapable of erring or failing, while "fallible" means just the opposite—capable of making an error. "It's impossible to create an infallible system because systems are designed by humans who are fallible."

Infringe, impinge – "Infringe" means to transgress, exceed a limit, or violate; "impinge" means to collide, strike, encroach, or trespass. "I was legally wronged when they infringed on my patent rights. I felt endangered when they impinged on my privacy."

Insight, incite – "Insight" is the result of seeing into the inner meaning of a situation or a person's motives or behavior. "Incite" is a verb meaning to stir up action. "Seeing the rebel leaders incite a riot gave the reporter insight into the frustration they felt."

Intense, intensive – Both adjectives refer to an extreme in degree, strength, or intensity but "intense" arises from within while "intensive" is imposed from without. "Because of her intense feelings for her daughter, the mother lavishes intensive attention on her."

Interment, internment – “Interment” is the act or ceremony of burial. “Internment” is confinement, especially of enemy citizens in wartime. “Having witnessed the *interment* of those shot while attempting to escape, he resolved to tolerate life in the Japanese *internment* camp.”

Interpolate, extrapolate – To “interpolate” is to introduce something new between existing parts, especially in the sense of inserting foreign material to falsify a text. To “extrapolate” is to infer or estimate by extending or projecting known information. “The corrupt accountant interpolated fabricated records into the yearly earnings report so positive growth would be extrapolated for the next quarter.”

Intimate, intimidate – “Intimate” (adj., short a) means interconnected or very personal and private. “We have an intimate friendship.” “Intimate” (verb, long a) means to hint at or suggest. “He intimated resigning his job.” “Intimidate” means to threaten. “The bully intimidated everyone in the class.”

Intimation, imitation – An “intimation” is a subtle hint or suggestion. An “imitation” is a counterfeit or inferior copy of a genuine item. “She thought her friend’s *intimation* would be about boys, but it turned out to be an admission that her handbag was an *imitation*.”

Into, in to – “Into” refers to entering something (go *into* the legal profession); changing a form (turn lemons *into* lemonade); making contact (run *into* a doorjamb). “In to” are two prepositions that come together, as in: “Let’s go *in to* have breakfast.” Remember, if your sentence still makes sense when you drop the “in,” use two separate words. “Let’s go (in) to have breakfast.”

Innovation, invention – “Innovation” refers to something that has not been thought of or created before, while “invention” is something developed through process and experimentation. “The *invention* of the washing machine was touted as a great *innovation* of its time.”

Irregardless, regardless – Most references do not consider “irregardless” a word at all, even though it’s often heard in speech. Some include it, but state that “irregardless” is not generally accepted. Always use “regardless,” which means in spite of. “He will go on the trip *regardless* of the dangers.”

Irritate, aggravate – “Irritate” means to annoy; “aggravate” means to make worse. “I *aggravated* the situation when I *irritated* the leaders by asking irrelevant questions.”

It’s, its – Use an apostrophe when you can logically substitute “it’s” for “it is” in the sentence. Otherwise, use “its.” “*It’s* easy to remember to put the book in *its* place.”

J

Jocular, jugular – “Jocular” means characterized by joking. “Jugular” refers to the region around the neck or throat and is used metaphorically to mean going for a quick kill or strike. “Though his comments were meant to sound *jocular*, he aimed his criticism at the *jugular*.”

Junction, juncture – A “junction” is a place where two things (especially roads or tracks) meet, come together, or join. A “juncture” is a critical point in time; the line or point where two objects or forces intersect. “The old station building near the railway *junction* has become a safety hazard; we have come to a critical *juncture* and must either preserve it as a historic site or tear it down.”

L

Lay, lie – The verb “lay” always has an object, just like the verb “put” always has an object. “Please *lay* (put) the plate on the table.” The verb “lie” doesn’t take an object. “*Lie* down if you feel tired.” Confusion happens because the past tense of “lie” is “lay.” “Today, I *lie* down; yesterday I *lay* down.” The past tense of “lay” (put) is “laid” and it still

requires an object (the plate). “Yesterday, I *laid* (put) the plate beside his bed after he *lay* down.”

Lead, led – The verb “lead” (with a long “e”) means to show the way. “The guides *lead* a hiking group every Saturday.” The past tense of this verb “led” (with a short “e”) is spelled with three letters, not four. “They *led* the hike yesterday.” Confusion occurs because the noun “lead” (a pencil lead) is pronounced the same as “led.”

Learn, teach – “Learn” indicates knowledge or behavior is being acquired; “teach” indicates knowledge is being provided by someone. “Students are wise to *learn* the lessons their instructors *teach*.”

Leech, leach – A “leech” is a blood-sucking worm used in medicine for bloodletting or a person who clings to another person and uses up their resources; as a verb it describes such behavior. To “leach” (verb) is to dissolve out the soluble components of something by percolating liquid, to empty or drain; the noun refers to the process, material being leached, or vessel used. “Although she had considered her stepmother a gold-digging *leech* and was glad to see her leave, their divorce seemed to *leach* all the joy out of her father’s life.”

Less, small, fewer – When size is involved, use “small”; when importance is involved, use “less”; when quantity is involved, use “few” or “fewer.” Also, if you can count the number of items, use “fewer.” “The *small* dog picked the less painful of two options. He faced fewer obstacles by retreating than by attacking the porcupine.”

Lightning, lightening – The electrical bolts in the sky refer to “lightning” (without an “e”). When the dark skies are “lightening” after a storm, put the “e” in the word. It comes from the verb “lighten,” meaning to be less heavy, less dark, less burdensome, etc. “After the *lightning* storm passes, we see the sky *lightening* up.”

Loath, loathe – “Loath” is an adjective that means unwilling; “loathe” is a verb that means to abhor or hate. “I felt *loath* to admit the accident was my fault because I *loathe* feeling I lost control.”

Lose, loose – The verb “lose” is the opposite of the verb “win.” “Do you win or *lose* when you gamble?” The adjective “loose” means not fastened tightly while the verb “lose” means to free something. “This *loose* blouse looks comfortable.” “*Loose* (or loosen) your tie and relax!” Confusion occurs because the pronunciation differs from what’s expected: “lose” with one “o” has a longer “ooh” sound than “loose” with two “o”s.

Lurking, lurching – “Lurking” means to lie in wait; be sneaky. “Lurching” is a staggering or tottering movement. “At first, she thought the noise came from her dog *lurking* around the corner. She quickly realized it came from her cat, *lurching* to free itself from being tangled in a trash bag.”

Lurking, luring – “Lurking” means lying in wait for someone, hiding for a sinister purpose; existing unobserved or unsuspected. “Luring” means attracting, enticing, or tempting someone into a wrong or foolish course, especially by using something desirable as bait. “Hansel and Gretel didn’t know there was a witch *lurking* inside the gingerbread house, *luring* children to her home to eat them.”

Luxurious, luxuriant – “Luxurious” means pertaining to luxury. “They live in a luxurious home.” “The furnishings of many modern offices are luxurious.” “Luxuriant” means profuse growth or display. “Tropical vegetation is luxuriant.” “She has luxuriant brown hair.” These two words are given as synonyms in the dictionary, but current usage distinguishes quite sharply between them.

M

Manner, manor – "Manner" is the way in which a thing is done or happens. "Manor" means the district over which a lord had domain in medieval times. "I learned the right *manner* of using a battering ram at Lord Byron's *manor* this fortnight."

Martial, marital, marshal – "Martial" relates to being aggressive and warlike; or associated with armed forces. "Marital" refers to marriage. "Marshal" is a noun referring to certain military, judicial, and police or fire officers; as a verb it means to arrange in order, assemble and organize, or to lead ceremoniously. "Although he acted like a *martial* warrior at work, his *marital* demeanor at home was loving and docile." "After Pearl Harbor was bombed and Hawaii was put under *martial* law, the commander had authority to *marshal* all available resources."

Meat, mete – "Meat" is the edible part of anything (animal, fruit, nut); it also refers to the essential point made in speaking or writing. The verb "mete" is to distribute or apportion by measure; allot; dole out. In its noun form, it means a limiting mark. "The person who *metes* out the *meat* at the holiday meal often delivers the *meat* of the day's message."

Meddlesome, nettlesome – "Meddlesome" means being inclined to interfere. "Nettlesome" means causing annoyance. "Her *meddlesome* mother-in-law was a *nettlesome* thorn in her marriage."

Mischievous, mischievious (not a real word) – "Mischievous" means causing mischief, or being playful in a teasing way. "Mischievious" is not a word but rather a wrong pronunciation of mischievous. "The *mischievous* father enjoyed instigating spats among family members at Sunday dinner."

Militate, mitigate – "Militate" means to have a substantial effect or influence on. "Mitigate" means to lessen or make less severe; to moderate a quality or condition. "He

knew his weak grades would *militate* against him, but he hoped to *mitigate* their effect with a brilliant college application essay and strong SAT scores.”

Miscreant, recreant – “Miscreant” is an adjective meaning depraved, villainous, and base; a noun meaning a vicious or depraved person. “Recreant” is an adjective meaning cowardly, unfaithful, disloyal, and traitorous; a noun meaning a coward or renegade. “Today’s horror movies feature *miscreants* who like to torture and dismember people.” “The *recreant* deserter fled before the battle and joined the other side after it won.”

Memento, memento – While “memento” is not a word, it’s commonly misused in place of “memento”—a reminder of the past, a keepsake. To avoid tripping up, remember the word “memory”; the first vowel is “e” (not “o” as in “moment”). “Buy a *memento* of San Francisco so you’ll remember your trip.”

Moral, morale – “Moral” is concerned with the principles or rules of right conduct, ethics, distinction between right and wrong. “Morale” is the emotional or mental state of a group indicating high spirits, confidence, zeal, especially in the face of opposition or hardship. “The *morale* of the troops went down when they witnessed low *moral* behavior from their leaders.” “The *moral* of the story encourages team members to keep their *morale* high.”

Moribund, morbid – “Moribund” describes approaching death, or on the verge of becoming obsolete. “Morbid” means relating to or caused by disease, or characterized by gloominess. “Buying stock in *moribund* businesses is likely to have a *morbid* effect on one’s portfolio.”

N

National, nationwide – "National" means pertaining or belonging to a nation, or relating to one's nationality. "Nationwide" describes something existing throughout a whole nation (synonymous with "across the country"). "The downturn of the *national* economy concerned wage earners *nationwide*."

Navel, naval – "Navel" refers to the umbilicus (belly button) or the central or middle portion of something. "Naval" means having to or pertaining to ships, warships, or a navy. "The toddler was too fascinated by his own *navel* to notice the epic *naval* battle his brother was staging with toy ships."

Number, amount – You've likely heard people say, "Consider the amount of dollars it takes..." or "the amount of stores we have is less than our competitors' stores." In both phrases, the word "number" should be used instead of "amount" and "fewer" should be used instead of "less." Here's the rule for both Word Trippers: If you can quantify the noun (that means count the objects), use "number" or "fewer." Therefore, the correct phrases are "Consider the *number* of dollars it takes ..." and "the *number* of stores we have is *fewer* than our competitors' stores."

O

Obstinate, stubborn – "Obstinate" connotes rigid thinking or persistent behavior and is often used negatively. "Stubborn" indicates a resistance to change that may or may not be admirable. "Contrary to the evidence, he was *obstinate* in his belief that the suspect was guilty. This time, his *stubbornness* didn't pay off."

Officious, official – Officious means being excessively eager in offering services or advice where not requested or needed; meddlesome. Official is a person appointed or elected to an office; as an adjective, it pertains to an office or position of authority. "In the guise of making an *official* call to the shop, the thief posed as a cop and kept asking *officious* questions."

Oneiric, onerous – “Oneiric” relates to dreams while “onerous” means troublesome, oppressive, burdensome. “The *oneiric* writing revealed the poet’s *onerous* inner life.”

Over, more than – “Over” implies a geographic position; “more than” means an increased number. “The lamp hangs *over* the table.” “There are *more than* 400 audience members.” (As our language changes, though, “over” has become commonly accepted for both uses.)

P

Palate, palette, pallet – “Palate” refers to the roof of the mouth and one’s sense of taste. “Palette” is a board used by painters for holding and mixing colors; it also refers to the range of colors used by artists. “Viewing a painting created from the *palette* of a fine artist enhances the appeal of gourmet food on one’s *palate*.” “Pallet” is a small, low platform on which goods are stored or moved. “Cartons of canned goods are delivered to the store on a *pallet*.”

Passed, past – “Passed” is a form of the verb “pass” meaning to go by. “I *pass* the mailbox on my way to work every day. Yesterday, I *passed* it more times than usual.” “Past” is an adjective, noun, preposition, or adverb that shows something has gone by. Adj.: “We celebrate *past* glories.” Noun: “We enjoy thinking about the *past*.” Preposition: “It’s the house just *past* the corner.” Adverb: “The troops marched *past*.”

Peak, pique, peek – “Peak” refers to the top of something (e.g., a mountain, chart); “pique” is to attract someone’s interest; “peek” means to take a quick look at something. “I want to *pique* your interest in climbing to the *peak* of that mountain so we can *peek* at the valley on the other side.”

Pedal, peddle – The verb “pedal” refers to riding a bicycle while “peddle” means selling wares. “The salesman *peddles* new products every week as he *pedals* his bike through the neighborhood.”

Personnel, personal – "Personnel" is a noun referring to people employed at an organization. "Personal," an adjective, means private matters relating to a particular person. "The political candidate said the *personnel* at the newspaper focused more on her *personal* characteristics than on his policy stance."

Perspective, prospective – "Perspective" (noun) refers to spatial relationships, and a mental view of facts, ideas, etc. "Prospective" (adjective) addresses future or expected outcomes. "From his boss's *perspective*, Sam's *prospective* promotion looks doubtful."

Persuasive, pervasive – "Persuasive" means having the ability to influence or convince. "Pervasive" means widespread or diffused throughout. "A used car salesman's ability to be *persuasive* doesn't work with customers who have experienced deceptions that are *pervasive* in the industry."

Pitcher, picture – A "pitcher" throws the ball during a baseball game; a "pitcher" is a container holding liquid; a "picture" is a visual image. "The team's ace *pitcher* is the *picture* of good sportsmanship. Let's celebrate with a *pitcher* of lemonade."

Plod, plot – "Plod" means to move or walk heavily or laboriously. As a noun, "plot" is a small piece of ground, or story told in a novel, play, or movie, or a chart or map showing the movements or progress of an object; as a verb, "plot" means to plan for or scheme, or make a diagram of. "We watched her *plod* through her snow-covered *plot* and wondered about her *plot* for making plants grow in the middle of winter."

Populous, populace – "Populous" is an adjective meaning full of inhabitants, densely populated. "Populace" is a noun referring to those inhabitants, the general public, especially the common people as opposed to higher classes. "As the city grew more *populous* but no additional housing was built, the *populace* grew discontent."

Pour, pore – "Pour" means to send a substance falling into a container (they *pour* some drinks) and to proceed in great numbers (spectators *pour* out of the stadium). "Pore" as

a verb refers to reading with steady attention and is usually followed by the word “over.”
“She *pored* over old manuscripts to find the answer.”

Precede, proceed – To “precede” is to go before; to “proceed” is to go forward. “When good planning *precedes* any trip, you can *proceed* to have a wonderful time.”

Premier, premiere – “Premier” (adjective) means first in status or importance, first to occur or exist. As a noun, it refers to a chief administrative officer, as of a province. “Premiere” (noun) is the first public performance, as of a movie or play. As a verb, it means to present that first public performance. “The *premier* cast members *premiered* in a special performance of the striking new play, which was attended by the *premier* of the province.”

Prescribe, proscribe – “Prescribe” is to establish a rule or guideline; in a medical sense, to order medicine or treatment. “Proscribe” is to banish, condemn, or prohibit. “The judge decided to *prescribe* an alcohol treatment program for the offender rather than *proscribe* his ability to drive by taking his license away.”

Presume, assume – Both imply taking something for granted but “assume” means supposing something is true while “presume” shows a stronger belief implying unwarranted boldness. “I *assume* he’ll arrive when he says he will.” “Well, don’t *presume* you’re always right.”

Presumptive, presumptuous – “Presumptive” means to provide a reasonable basis for belief or acceptance. “Presumptuous” means going beyond what is proper; impertinent, audacious, arrogant. “The *presumptuous* teenager asked to stay out all night, but his argument wasn’t *presumptive* enough for his parents to say yes.”

Preventive, preventative – Both of these words mean serving to prevent or hinder but, for simplicity, “preventive” is preferred over “preventative.” “We work with doctors who use a *preventive* approach to treating their patients.”

Principal, principle – “Principal” as a noun means head of a school, a main participant, or a sum of money. As an adjective, it means highest in value or rank. “Principle” is a fundamental law or basic truth. “The school *principal* lives by her values and *principles*.” “The *principal* issue is calculating the *principal* plus interest correctly.”

Probability, possibility – “Probability” is the chance that something may occur, often expressed statistically. “Possibility” refers to the fact that something can happen. “The *probability* that humans will inhabit the moon in significant numbers is low, but it’s still a theoretical *possibility*.”

Prognosis, prognostication – While “prognosis” and “prognostication” both mean a forecast or prediction, “prognosis” specifically refers to the probable course or outcome of a disease, especially the likelihood of recovery. “The *prognosis* for many cancers is good if they are detected early.” “Before daily weather forecasts, the Farmers’ Almanac was often used for *prognostication*.”

Prone, supine – “Prone” means lying face down or having the palm down; having an inclination or tendency to something. “Supine” means lying face up or having the palm up; inactive due to indifference. “Patients are positioned *prone* for back surgery and *supine* for abdominal surgery.”

Proportional, proportionate – Use “proportionate” when referring to two things in relationship to each other. “The output is *proportionate* to the energy expended.” Use “proportional” to indicate there is a balance or correlation among a number of things. “The number of electoral districts is *proportional* to the area’s population.”

Protégé, prodigy – A “protégé” is a person whose career or welfare is promoted by a patron, usually an influential person. A “prodigy” is a person, especially a child or young person, with extraordinary talent or ability. “The opera conductor designed a new production to feature his *protégé*, a 14-year-old *prodigy* with a beautiful voice he intended to mold into a star soprano.”

Prudent, cautious – Exercising good judgment or discretion is being “prudent” while specifically taking care to avoid risk or danger is being “cautious.” “*Prudent* drivers obey all traffic laws.” “*Cautious* joggers avoid Central Park after sunset.”

Purposely, purposefully – “Purposely” means acting with a purpose in mind, deliberately. “Purposefully” describes a demeanor that exhibits a strong intention. “She *purposely* wore that dress to give an impression of confidence, and *purposefully* marched into the room to declare her candidacy.”

Q

Qualify, quantify – To “qualify” means to show some ability to perform in a particular capacity while to “quantify” refers to processing or calculating amounts. “I will *qualify* the candidate after I *quantify* the sales he has made.”

Quixotic, chaotic – “Quixotic” means impulsive, unpredictable, caught up in the romance of noble deeds or pursuit of unreachable goals. “Chaotic” refers to a condition or place of disorder or confusion, a jumble. “The *chaotic* pile of articles strewn across her desk reflected a *quixotic* pursuit of her next crazy adventure.”

Quite, quiet – “Quite” is an adverb meaning completely or very; “quiet” means to be still, calm, silent. “The crowd became *quite quiet* after singing the national anthem.”

Quotation, quote – A “quotation” is a set of words that is copied or repeated, such as a passage from a book, speech, etc.; in commerce, it is also a statement of market price of a commodity or security. A “quote” is a cost estimate from a vendor or service provider. Thus, you wouldn’t write, “Here is a quote from Shakespeare...”; it should read “Here is a quotation from Shakespeare...” instead.

However, some dictionaries and language experts state that “quote” as a noun is interchangeable with the first “quotation” definition above. The stricter usage that differentiates them is preferred but optional.

R

Rack, wrack – “Rack” is a framework with bars or shelves, also a medieval torture device; as a verb it means to strain or torment. “Wrack” refers to a wreck, damage, or destruction. “The stock market has been *wracked* by the recession as money managers *rack* their brains to make sense of it.”

Raise, raze – “Raise” means to put up (e.g., raise a building); “raze” means to level to the ground. “Years of toil went into *raising* the house that the tornado *razed* in moments.”

Randy, raunchy – “Randy” means feeling great sexual desire, characterized by frank, uninhibited sexuality. “Raunchy” refers to vulgar or smutty, crude, earthy; also dirty, grimy, grubby. “The behavior of the novel’s lead character changed from playfully *randy* to disgustingly *raunchy* when he moved into the mining town.”

Rate, rank – “Rate” (as a verb) means to calculate the value of; to appraise. “Rank” (as a verb) means to take precedence over; to give a particular order or position to. “I’d *rate* that hotel ‘five-star’; at least, it *ranks* at the top of the list of hotels I’ve ever stayed in.”

Rational, rationale – “Rational” means having or exercising reason; based on reasoning or logic. “Rationale” means the fundamental reasons serving to account for something; explanation of reasons. “You are not being *rational*; your *rationale* for buying a car you can’t afford is your passion for its red color.”

Rationalize, justify – To “rationalize” is to ascribe actions to causes that seem reasonable but do not reflect the truth; to “justify” means to prove to be just, right, or reasonable. “I *rationalize* my desire to travel by finding a good business reason to *justify* the cost.”

Ravage, ravish – “Ravage” means to devastate; cause heavy damage. “Ravish” means to seize and carry away by force, physically or emotionally. “After the soldiers *ravaged*

the town, they picked through the rubble looking for women to *ravish*.” Or “The tornado *ravaged* the countryside, leaving farmers *ravished* by the loss of the season’s crops.”

Reasoned, reasonable – “Reasoned” means to think logically while “reasonable” refers to sound thinking, being fair and within the bounds of common sense. “She *reasoned* that paying full price was a *reasonable* deal at this store.”

Redress, address – “Redress” means to set right an unjust situation; to remedy or relieve; to adjust (a balance) evenly. “Address” means to speak to or give a speech to; to direct one’s efforts towards; to deal with; to direct (a message) to the attention of; to mark with a destination. “In 1976 President Ford *addressed* the wrongful internment of Japanese during World War II; nearly 12 years later, President Reagan *redressed* the injustice through a Congressional act that awarded payments to surviving detainees.”

Refuse, refuge, refuse – “Refuse” (pronounced re-FUSE, a verb) indicates an unwillingness to do, accept, give, or allow something. A “refuge” (REF-uge, a noun) is protection or shelter from danger or hardship. “Refuse” (REF-use, a noun) refers to items discarded as worthless; trash or rubbish. “Don’t *refuse* him a place of *refuge*. Eating *refuse* from a dumpster is highly undesirable, but it's better than going hungry.”

Regime, regimen – “Regime” refers to a period of rule and/or a governing body while “regimen” means a system of behavior or treatment. “Following a strict dietary *regimen* can feel like you’re living in a military *regime*.”

Rein, reign – A “rein” is a leather strap used by a rider or driver to control a horse or other animal; a means of restraint or guidance. “Reign” refers to the period during which a sovereign occupies a throne; rule or authority. “The police aim to *rein* in the insurgents so terror doesn’t *reign* in the streets.”

Renounce, denounce – “Renounce” means to give up, especially by formal declaration; to disown. “Denounce” means to condemn or censure openly or publicly; to

accuse formally; to formally announce the ending of (a treaty). “The young aristocrat *renounced* his title and *denounced* his family for their refusal to sanction his relationship with a commoner.”

Repel, repulse – “Repel” means to ward off, resist, reject, fight against. “Repulse” means to drive away, spurn, reject brusquely, cause feelings of disgust. These words can be used interchangeably, though “repulse” carries more emotion. “I *repel* your efforts to show me affection. You *repulse* me with your crude way of talking.”

Repel, rappel – To “repel” is to drive back, resist, reject, produce a feeling of aversion. To “rappel” is to descend a steep incline by paying out a double rope that is attached at the top and wrapped around the body. “It’s wise to wear clothes that *repel* water if you plan to *rappel* off that cliff near the waterfall.”

Respectfully, respectfully – “Respectfully” means to show politeness or deference; “respectively” pertains to each of a number of persons. “The family members at the memorial service *respectfully* honored their dead father as they *respectively* (one-by-one) said a few words.”

Restless, restive – “Restless” is being uneasy, agitated, in motion, while “restive” adds an element of stubbornness to an action or situation. “Under normal circumstances, the *restless* crowd would have dispersed but the insensitive politician elicited a *restive* response. The people wouldn’t budge until he addressed their concerns.”

Reticent, reluctant – “Reticent” means disposed to be silent or reserved while “reluctant” means hesitant or slow because of unwillingness. “She felt *reticent* (quiet) about sharing her opinions in front of others, while he felt *reluctant* (unwilling) to speak up because his ideas were unclear.”

Retribution, retaliation – “Retribution” is something given or demanded in repayment, especially punishment. “Retaliation” is to return like for like, especially evil for evil. “The

court ordered payment as *retribution*, but that didn't satisfy those in the victim's family who wanted *retaliation* for the crime."

Revelation, revolution – "Revelation" refers to something realized or uncovered, especially a dramatic disclosure of something not previously understood. "Revolution" refers to the overthrow of one government and its replacement with another as well as a momentous change in a situation. It's also an orbital motion about a point (distinguished from axial rotation) as in planetary revolution about the sun. "It's been a *revelation* of the genius of humankind to witness today's *revolution* in computer technology."

Revere, revile – "Revere" means to regard with honor and respect tinged with awe. "Revile" means to speak of or to abusively or with contempt. "George Washington is one of the most *revered* figures of the American Revolution while Benedict Arnold is one of the most *reviled*."

Revolve, rotate – Both mean turn on or around an axis or a center. "Revolve" refers to recurring in cycles while "rotate" indicates alternating or taking turns. "A farmer's way of working *revolves* around the seasons." "Wise farmers *rotate* their crops periodically."

Right, rite – A "right" is a just claim, something that is due to a person or governmental body by law, tradition, or nature; the interest possessed by law or custom in some intangible thing, i.e. movie rights. A "rite" is a prescribed or customary form for conducting a religious or other solemn ceremony; any customary observance or practice. "The First Amendment grants people the *right* to conduct *rites* in the religion of their choice."

Rigid, rigorous – "Rigid" implies uncompromising inflexibility, as in rigid rules of conduct. "Rigorous" suggests hardship and difficulty as in rigorous training to become an Olympic athlete. "The team's *rigorous* goals required its members to follow a *rigid* practice schedule."

Ring, wring – A “ring” is a circular band of metal worn on the finger, a circular path or arrangement of things, or an enclosure for certain sports and animal shows; to “ring” is to encircle, also to emit a sound like a bell being struck. To “wring” is to forcibly twist or compress, to extract by forceful effort, to clasp and twist (one’s hands) in anguish. “As she attempted to *wring* out the wet towel, she noticed that her wedding *ring* was gone.”

Rise, raise – “Rise” means to get up or move from a lower to a higher position; “raise” means to lift an object or bring up something (e.g., raise children). “If you want your taxes to *rise*, please *raise* your hand.”

Root, rout, route – As a verb, “root” means to pull, tear, or dig up by the roots, to remove completely (often followed by *up* or *out*). “We need a program to *root* out crime in our neighborhood.” “Rout” (pronounced like shout) is an overwhelming victory or defeat; it also means to rummage or dig up (e.g., rout through the laundry). “Route” (pronounced either root or rout) refers to a course, way, or road. “The *route* to being in a championship is arduous while the event itself can either be a close game or a *rout*.”

S

Sadistic, seditious – “Sadistic” means deriving pleasure from cruelty, especially sexual gratification from inflicting pain. “Seditious” means relating to or guilty of engaging in treason (sedition), i.e., stirring up treasonous resistance to a government. “When it became evident the dictator was not merely harsh, but was *sadistic*, the people became *seditious*.”

Sallow, shallow – As an adjective “sallow” refers to a sickly yellowish hue or complexion; the verb means to make that fallow color; the noun is a type of willow. As an adjective “shallow” means lacking physical depth, lacking depth of intellect, emotion, or knowledge; taking in a small amount of air in each inhalation. The verb means to make shallow. “To portray a character suffering from consumption, the actress used yellow makeup to appear *sallow* and she took rapid, *shallow* breaths.”

Sardonic, sarcastic – While both refer to bitter, cutting, or derisive expression, “sardonic” goes beyond content to describe the manner of expression. “His *sarcastic* comment was delivered with a *sardonic* smile.”

Secession, succession – “Secession” is the act of formally withdrawing from an alliance or association; when capitalized it may refer to the withdrawal of 11 Southern states from the Union in 1860-61. “Succession” is the process of following in order or sequence; can refer to the sequence in which one person succeeds another in office, estate, rank, or title. “The Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the *secession* of Quebec from Canada could not be brought about by popular vote.” “The ailing monarch felt pressure to produce an heir and forestall fights that would erupt over *succession*.”

Seize, cease – “Seize” means to grasp suddenly and forcibly; take or grab. “Cease” is to discontinue, put an end to something. “Before you *seize* a new opportunity, you may have to *cease* doing certain activities so you can plan your time.”

Sensuous, sensual – “Sensuous” and “sensual” both mean perceived by, appealing to or gratifying the senses, but “sensuous” implies pure and aesthetic enjoyment (music, art), while “sensual” refers to satisfying bodily (especially sexual) appetites. “I enjoy the *sensuous* qualities of symphonies and Impressionist paintings; she prefers the *sensual* pleasures of scented oils and silk sheets.”

Sentient, sentiment – “Sentient” is an adjective meaning to have sense perception, to be conscious. “Sentiment” is a noun referring to a thought, view, or attitude based on emotion rather than reason. “Some people believe *sentient* beings exist on other planets, while others consider that idea to be speculative *sentiment*.”

Separate, disparate – As an adjective, “separate” means set or kept apart, disunited. “Disparate” means existing independently; fundamentally distinct in quality or kind. “Libraries usually have a *separate* section for reference books that cover a variety of *disparate* topics.”

Setup, set up – The noun “setup” deals with a plan or arrangement. “The *setup* for the party includes entertainment and gourmet food.” The two-word verb phrase “set up” means to arrange something. “We *set up* the entertainment for the party.”

Sever, severe – To “sever” is to keep apart, cut, divide, or separate. “Severe” means unsparing, harsh, or strict. “Although she decided to *sever* their relationship, she didn’t need to be so *severe* in her criticism of him.”

Sheer, shear – As a verb, “sheer” means to swerve from a course; as an adjective, it means transparently thin; unmixed with anything else; utter; steep or almost vertical. To “shear” is to cut through something with a sharp instrument, especially to cut or clip hair, fleece or wool; to travel through (air, water) as if by cutting. “There was a look of *sheer* terror in the eyes of the young sheep as the rancher approached, clippers in hand, to *shear* it.”

Shutter, shudder – “Shutter” is either a cover for a window or the mechanism in a camera that controls the amount of light. To “shudder” is to vibrate, shake, or shiver. “I *shudder* to think the *shutter* on my camera might freeze at a crucial moment when taking photos.”

Site, sight, cite – “Site” refers to a location (e.g., home *site*, web *site*) while “sight” refers to vision, seeing (e.g., he was a *sight* for sore eyes) and “cite” means to quote or refer to a source (e.g., to *cite* the creator of the original work).

Skilled, skillful – Both words show possession of a skill (a skillful athlete) but “skilled” is used in relation to a craftsman or technician (a skilled electrician). “To be a *skilled* contractor, he must be a *skillful* framer.”

Small, less, fewer – When size is involved, use “small”; when importance is involved, use “less”; when quantity is involved, use “few” or “fewer.” If you can count the number of items, use “fewer.” “The *small* dog picked the *less* painful of two options. He faced *fewer* problems by running away than by attacking the porcupine.”

Soar, sore – To “soar” means to fly upward like a bird or glide at a high altitude; to rise or ascend to a great height. “Sore” is an adjective that refers to something that either suffers from or causes physical or mental suffering; the noun refers to the cause of the pain, especially a painful spot on the body. “Although her legs were so *sore* that she wanted to collapse, her spirits *soared* with the thrill of accomplishment as she completed her first marathon.”

Social, sociable – The adjective “social” describes a connection with a society, like a social club or a social ranking; “sociable” means affable or friendly, as in sociable behavior. “Every *social* occasion requires people to be *sociable*.”

Solve, resolve – “Solve” means to find a solution to a problem or puzzle. As a noun, “resolve” means to make a firm decision about or bring something to a successful

conclusion. “Claire’s teacher was encouraged by her pupil’s *resolve* to stay after class and *solve* the puzzle.”

Spectacle, spectacles – A “spectacle” is a large-scale public show or display. “Spectacles” are eyeglasses. “I attended the Hollywood premiere, but I couldn’t fully appreciate the lavish *spectacle* because I forgot to bring my *spectacles*.”

Spectacle, speculate – A “spectacle” is something, usually remarkable or impressive, that can be seen or viewed. “Speculate” means to reflect on a subject, often without conclusive evidence. “The *spectacle* at the collapsing circus tent led people to *speculate* about its cause.”

Spurn, spur – To “spurn” means to reject with disdain or treat with contempt. To “spur” is to urge one’s horse on with spurs, proceed hurriedly, incite. “Being *spurned* by a girl who said she only dated athletes *spurred* him to lift weights and play football.”

Stationary, stationery – “Stationery” is material for writing letters; “stationary” is a fixed position. “I left my *stationery* (letter) in a car that wasn’t *stationary* long enough to retrieve it.” To help remember, the words “letter” and “stationery” both have an ‘e’; the words “stay” and “stationary” both have an ‘a.’

Strident, stringent – “Strident” means loud, harsh, or shrill in sound or quality. “Stringent” means strict or severe (as in rules); compelling or convincing (e.g., an argument), or tight (e.g., a money market). “The *stringent* library rules kept human voices to a whisper but couldn’t stop the *strident* screeching of crows outside.”

Stylus, stylist – A “stylus” is a sharp, pointed instrument used for writing, marking, or engraving. A “stylist” is a worker, designer or consultant in a field subject to changes in style, especially hairdressing, clothing, or interior decoration; a writer or speaker who cultivates an artful literary style. “The aide used the PDA’s *stylus* to enter information about the executive’s appointment with a design *stylist*.”

Suspicious, circumspect – To be “suspicious” is tending toward distrust. To be “circumspect” is to heed circumstances or consequences, to be prudent. “The more trusting of the two actors was *circumspect* about being in the audition, while the other was *suspicious* about how the final selection would be handled.”

Swam, swum – To talk about the verb “swim” in the past tense, remember these examples: “Yesterday, I *swam* 20 laps (one time). I *have swum* that distance consistently (many times).” “Have” and “swum” belong together. It’s incorrect to say, “I swum at the pool last week.”

Sympathy, empathy – “Sympathy” is having pity or compassion for another’s troubles without necessarily sharing their feelings; “empathy” is putting yourself in another’s place emotionally. “My *sympathy* goes out to those injured in the hurricane. I feel much *empathy* for those people I know personally.”

T

Tack, tact – “Tack” as a verb or noun refers to taking a zig-zag course or abruptly changing direction or position. “Tact” refers to having a keen sense of what to say to avoid offending someone. “Don’t take the wrong *tack*—use *tact* when talking to your prospective in-laws.”

Tactful, tactical – “Tactful” means being or acting considerate or discreet. “Tactical” pertains to a plan or strategy for attaining a particular goal. “She was *tactful* enough to explain what was happening without giving away key *tactical* information.”

Take, bring – Is the item you’re talking about coming or going? If it is coming to a place, then someone “brings” it; if it’s going somewhere, then someone “takes” it. “Will you *bring* me a glass of water, please?” “Yes I will, after I *take* the dirty glasses away.”

Team, teem – “Teem” means to abound or swarm with activity; “team” or “team up” means to bring people together to form a team. “The playing fields *teem* with excitement every time the players *team* up to play soccer.”

Tenet, tenant – “Tenet” refers to an opinion, principle, dogma, belief, or doctrine that a person holds true (sometimes spelled tenent). “Tenant” is a person or group who occupies property owned by another for a period of time; a lessee. “The central *tenet* of being a squatter is never to pay rent as a *tenant*.”

Tepid, torpid – “Tepid” is moderately warm or lukewarm (as in a liquid); lacking in emotional warmth or enthusiasm; halfhearted. “Torpid” means having lost the power of exertion and feeling; numb; dormant; dull or sluggish. “His *tepid* mood didn’t endear him to his co-workers, but his *torpid* attitude made him especially difficult to work with.”

Testimony, testimonial – A “testimony” is a declaration or affirmation of fact, such as given before a court. A “testimonial” is a formal or written statement affirming a truth. “The strong *testimony* he gave in court could be regarded as a *testimonial* to her strong character.”

That, which – Use “that” when the phrase that follows is essential to the meaning of the sentence. “We provide guides *that* serve as an alternative to our programs.” Use “which” when the phrase gives information but isn’t critical to understanding the sentence. “The self-teaching guides, *which* complement services we offer, provide an alternative to our programs.” You can also say, “The guides provide an alternative to our programs.”

That, who – “That” relates to things while “who” relates to people. “I have a friend *who* did me a favor, one *that* I greatly appreciated.”

Their, there, they’re – “Their” (possessive pronoun) indicates possession. “It is *their* wish.” “There” (adverb) refers to a location or place. “*There* is a place for us.” “They’re”

(contraction) means “they are” – the apostrophe takes the place of the missing letter. “*They’re* coming over for a drink.”

Then, than – “Then” means soon after or at that time while “than” sets up a comparison. “Let’s eat, *then* go shopping.” “He’s shorter *than* his brother.”

Toe the line, tow the line – The idiom “toe the line” comes from a foot-racing rule requiring competitors to keep their feet behind a “line” or on a “mark” at the start of a race. Spelling “toe” as “tow” is incorrect given this meaning.

Tolerant, tolerable – “Tolerant” means inclined to tolerate, particularly the beliefs or behavior of others; able to endure adverse environmental conditions (e.g., a drought-tolerant plant). “Tolerable” means capable of being tolerated; moderately good; passable. “She was *tolerant* of her toddler’s picky eating habits, but still hoped he would outgrow his belief that no food was *tolerable* without adding ketchup.”

Tortuous, torturous – Although both words come from the Latin “torquere” (to twist, wind, wrench), “tortuous” refers to something that’s winding or crooked while “torturous” means painfully unpleasant. “The *tortuous* mountain road can be *torturous* if you have to ride up that road on a bicycle.”

Transparent, translucent – When an object is “transparent,” it is completely see-through. With a “translucent” object, light goes through it but you can’t see to the other side. “We can see the view clearly through the *transparent* window in the kitchen but not through the *translucent* glass in the bathroom.”

Treaty, treatise – “Treaty” means a formal agreement between states or governments. “Treatise” is a formal exposition in writing about a subject, longer and more detailed than an essay. “Researchers have written *treatise* after *treatise* examining events that led to signing the peace *treaty*.”

Tremulous, tremendous – “Tremulous” means characterized by trembling, as from fear, nervousness, or weakness; timid or fearful. “Tremendous” means extraordinarily great in size, amount, or intensity; exciting fear or trembling through its terrifying magnitude. “The shy child began to recite her lines in a *tremulous* voice, but when the first act of the school play received *tremendous* applause, she became more confident.”

Trooper, trouper – A “trooper” is a police officer, a cavalry soldier or horse. A “trouper” is a loyal, uncomplaining, hardworking person; a member of a theatrical company, or a veteran actor. “The *trooper* was parked just over the hill with a radar gun.” “He’s been with the company through thick and thin, a real *trouper*.”

Turbid, torpid – “Turbid” means containing stirred up sediment or particles, dense (such as smoke or fog), or muddled. “Torpid” means sluggish, lethargic, apathetic, or dormant (such as a hibernating animal). “The turbid water where waves crashed against the reef hid the torpid sea turtle until it surfaced to breathe.”

U

Unconscious, subconscious – “Unconscious” means without awareness, sensation, or cognition; not perceived at the level of awareness; without conscious volition or intent. “Subconscious” means imperfectly or not wholly conscious; occurring just below the level of consciousness. “To a psychoanalyst, an *unconscious* gesture can help reveal *subconscious* motivations.”

Undo, undue – To “undo” is to reverse the doing of, to open or unfasten, or to bring to ruin. “Undue” means excessive, unjustifiable, improper; not yet payable. “If you *undo* my buttons with *undue* haste, they will pop off!”

Urban, urbane – “Urban” means relating to, characteristic of, or located in a city. “Urbane” means elegant, refined, and sophisticated in manner. “She moved from a

small, *urban* apartment to an estate in the countryside after marrying the handsome, *urbane* aristocrat.”

V

Verbiage, verbage – These are often confused, yet only “verbiage” is a legitimate word in proper English. “Verbiage” means the manner in which something is expressed verbally; an excess of words. “The editor’s job is to prune *verbiage* from a fledgling writer’s overwritten text.” In contrast, “verbage” has value only as a kind of jargon that is more derogatory than “verbiage.”

Vial, vile – A “vial” is a small container, while “vile” is a term used for something unpleasant, disgusting, morally reprehensible. “A spilled *vial* of blood is regarded as interesting by some and completely *vile* by others.”

Voluble, volatile – “Voluble” is characterized by a ready flow of speech. “Volatile” means tending to break out into violence, liable to sharp or sudden changes. “Two glasses of wine made him *voluble* and three made him downright nasty and *volatile*.”

Voracious, vicious – “Voracious” means having an insatiable appetite. “Vicious” means characterized by violent or destructive behavior. “*Voracious* viewers of action movies are more likely to mimic the *vicious* behavior they see on screen than those who don’t.”

W

Waver, waiver – “Waver” (verb) means to move unsteadily back and forth, to show indecision, to falter; to tremble or quaver in sound; to flicker or glimmer in light. “Waiver” is an intentional relinquishment of a right, claim, or privilege (also the document that evidences such relinquishment). “The officials didn’t *waver* in their decision about accepting any liability for injuries. They made the athlete sign a *waiver* of responsibility before allowing her to compete.”

Weary, wary – “Weary” means to be physically or mentally tired due to hard work, exertion, strain; it also means to be impatient or dissatisfied with something (e.g., weary of excuses). “Wary” is being watchful or on guard against danger. “Even if you become *weary* while driving, being *wary* of the traffic around you is your first priority.”

Whale, wail – A “whale” is a marine mammal of the order Cetacea, with a fishlike body, flippers, horizontal tail flukes, and a blowhole. “Wail” means to utter a prolonged, usually high-pitched, inarticulate, mournful cry; to grieve or protest loudly and bitterly. As a noun, it’s a long, loud, high-pitched sound. “In the excitement of seeing a *whale* breach, the child dropped his favorite toy overboard and began to *wail*.”

Wheedle, whittle – “Wheedle” means to entice by soft words or flattery; to coax; to gain by flattery or guile. “Whittle” means to cut small bits or pare shavings (e.g., from a piece of wood). It also refers to reducing gradually, as if by whittling with a knife. “The unknown pair *wheeled* their way into a holiday party and *whittled* away at every dessert on the table.”

Where, when, in which – Think carefully about the exact meaning of your sentence when selecting the right bridge words. Use “where” for place or location; “when” for time; “in which” for things. “They decided *when* (not where) the teenager had to start paying rent to his parents.” “I examined a case *in which* (not where) opportunities for improvement exist.” “He’s not sure *where* he put his glasses.”

Who, whom – Use “who” as the subject of a sentence or clause; use “whom” as an object. Think of “who” as an equivalent for the personal pronouns he, she, or they, while “whom” is similar to him, her, or them. “*Whom* did you select for the presentation?” (You selected him/her/them.) “*Who* will be selected?” (He/she/they will be selected.)

Who’s, whose – “Who’s” is a contraction for “who is” or “who has”; “whose” shows ownership. “*Who’s* responsible for correcting this error? *Whose* mistake is it anyway?”

Wiggle, wriggle – “Wiggle” as a verb means to move or go with short, quick, irregular movements from side to side; as a noun, it’s a wiggling movement. “Wriggle” means to twist to and fro; writhe; squirm like a snake; to make one’s way by shifts or expedients (often followed by out). “To *wriggle* out of washing the dishes, he *wiggled* a candy in front of his sister as an enticement to clean them.”

Winery, vineyard – “Winery” is a place for making wine. “Vineyard” is a farm of grapevines where wine grapes are produced. “Often, a *winery* is built right next to the *vineyard* where the grapes for making wine are grown.”

Worthy, worthwhile – “Worthy” means having adequate or great merit, character, or value; deserving. “Worthwhile” refers to an activity that repays one’s time, attention, interest, work, trouble. “To make your time *worthwhile*, it’s best to commit to a cause that’s *worthy* and deserving of the effort required.” (“Worthwhile” is sometimes used as a synonym for “worthy.”)

Wreck, wreak – “Wreck” means to cause the ruin or destruction of something; a vessel, structure, or person in a state of ruin or dilapidation. “Wreak” means to inflict, execute, or bring about (vengeance, punishment, havoc); to express anger, malevolence, or resentment. “Many boats were *wrecked* as the hurricane *wreaked* havoc along the coast.”

Y

Your, you’re – “Your” shows possession; “you’re” is a contraction that means “you are.” “When *your* ship comes in, *you’re* a wealthy person.”

ABOUT THE CREATOR OF WORD TRIPPERS

BARBARA MCNICHOL

As an editor of nonfiction books and articles, Barbara absolutely loves what she does because of the fabulous people she works with: successful professionals who share their passion through speaking, writing, and marketing. In particular, she enjoys collaborating with inspired, giving people who deliver powerful messages that make a difference in our world. Barbara adds power to their pens through her editorial services.

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BARBARA MCNICHOL EDITORIAL

EDITS NONFICTION BOOKS, PROPOSALS, ARTICLES, AND MARKETING MATERIALS

FOR AUTHORS, SPEAKERS, AND ENTREPRENEURS.

10 TOP TECHNIQUES TO IMPROVE YOUR WRITING

As a writer with a message to share and a story to tell, you want to communicate clearly so your readers will do, think, or remember exactly what you want.

By consistently applying these 10 Top Techniques to your writing, you'll add persuasion and quickly see your results improve. Take them to heart, and you'll also save time and money in the editing process.

#1. Ignite Your Verbs

Ignite your sentences with active verbs like achieve, adopt, align, boost, bridge, capture, clarify, connect, create, define, design, ensure, find, focus, gain, grasp, ignite, improve, inspire, learn, master, overcome, persuade, prevent, realize, reduce, scan, sharpen, simplify, stretch, unleash, use (not utilize).

Also use active (not passive) construction. That's when someone does something to someone else rather than action being done to someone. Compare these sentences. Which is more effective?

Passive—**"The juicy watermelon was eaten by the boy."**

Active—**"The boy chomped into the watermelon's red belly."**

#2. Get Agreements

When you put a singular subject with the plural form of the verb, you weaken your writing, confuse your reader, and make grammarians groan. Example:
"A group of writers were in town."

The subject of the sentence "group" is singular while the verb "were" belongs with a plural subject. Instead, write this: **"A group of writers was in town"** or **"Several writers were in town."**

Better yet, liven up the sentence with an active verb: **“A group of writers landed in town.”**

#3. Nix Mixed Modifiers (aka Dangling Participles)

Check out this sentence: **“When thinking about a good place to eat, many choices are available.”** Are the “many choices” doing the thinking? I don't think so! This mixed modifier or dangling participle gets in the way of crisp, intentional writing. Correct version: **“When thinking about a good place to eat, the meeting planner had many choices.”** Now who's doing the thinking? The meeting planner.

#4. Pursue a Parallel Path

Don't let a mixed bag of parts of speech wriggle into your writing. Here's what I mean: **“His attitude makes a difference in changing, succeeding, and when he wants to move on.”** Throwing in a non-parallel phrase at the end forces the reader's mind to shift gears too abruptly because it breaks an expected pattern. Instead, strengthen the sentence by saying this: **“His attitude makes a difference in changing, succeeding, and moving on.”**

In the process, tap into the **power of three**, which adds a rhythm and cadence that just feels right. E.g., **earth, rain, and fire.**

#5. Show, Don't Tell

To be more persuasive, describe what happens without using adjectives. e.g., Don't say “sad” when you can say something like, **“Tears rolled down her cheek.”**

#6. Establish Your Objective

You might think sitting down to write simply requires letting the words flow like water out of a faucet. Not so. They're more likely to dribble and spurt

than bubble up like a fountain. Using this outline can help you get clear on your purpose.

Once you determine why you're writing the piece—your objective—answer these questions organized under the following headings:

Target Audience—Who will read this? What do you know about them?

Purpose—What succinct message do you want to send?

Benefits—What's in it for the readers?

Call to action—What do you want the reader to do, think, or remember as a result of reading your message? E.g., Attend this meeting. Contact me.

Logistics—What logistics need to be spelled out? E.g., June 22 at 3 pm ET.

#7. Draw in Your Readers

Because you write *for* other human beings, you have to speak directly to them. That's why, in most cases for nonfiction writing, use a "you" orientation, not "I" or "we."

Using the second person "you" directs your communication to an individual. (Because reading is solitary, never say "many of you.") Writing with a "you" orientation allows you to use commands that cut to the quick. E.g., **Stop. Look. Listen.**

Note: At times, using a "we" orientation feels more inclusive and perhaps less bossy. You may want to use a generally accepted statement that calls for "we." As a rule of thumb, though, don't mix "you" and "we" in the same paragraph. Why? Because you abruptly shift the point of view and require your reader to skip around. Using a new paragraph signals your desired shift in the point of view.

#8. Add Alliteration (and Other Figures of Speech)

These figures of speech add fun and persuasion to your writing.

- **Alliteration:** Words that repeat the first letter. e.g., **“It will dazzle and delight you.”**
- **Simile:** Includes the word “like” as a comparative. e.g., **“It creeps up on you like a thick fog.”** **“Think like an editor.”**
- **Metaphor:** Saying something IS something else. e.g., **“Keep the train of thought on track.”**
- **Chiasmus:** A sentence that mirrors itself. e.g., **“Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.”**

#9. Whack Wordiness

As you write, proofread, rewrite, and finalize what you’ve written, whack all the extra words you can to sharpen your message. Please refer to the second BONUS that reveals lots of ways you can whack extraneous phrases and words in your writing.

#10. Match the Word to the Meaning by Using Word Trippers

Do you write **“imply”** when you mean **“infer”** or **“accept”** instead of **“except”**? Selecting the correct word from similar-but-different options saves confusion for the reader and embarrassment for you as the writer.

WHACK WORDINESS: HERE'S HOW

Take away the bumps along the road to good writing so your ideas move forward smoothly like riding on the freeway.

- Aim to eliminate extraneous phrases such as:
 - **“there is”** and **“there will be”** e.g., There will be many candidates who are already planning to move. *Better:* Many candidates may be already planning to move.
 - **“It is all about”**; **“the fact of the matter is”**; **“the fact that”** e.g., The fact of the matter is that it’s unwise to go out carousing. *Better:* It’s unwise to go out carousing.
 - **“in regards to”** e.g., There may be additional sites you should seek out in regards to your industry. *Better:* Seek additional sites in your industry.
 - **“is going to”** e.g., He **is going to** be a key asset. *Better:* He **will** be a key asset.
 - **“in order to”** e.g., Add key words **in order** to describe the new position. *Better:* Add key words to describe the new position.
 - **“is intended to, meant to, designed to”** e.g., Prescreening **is intended to** focus on key aspects of the position. *Better:* Prescreening focuses on key aspects of the position.
 - **“the reason why is that . . .”** (a simple “because” will suffice)
 - **“quite a few”** and **“rather”** (in some cases)

Strunk and White, in their classic *The Elements of Style*, call such clutter “the leeches that infest the pond of prose, sucking the blood of words.”

- Take out these wobbly words whenever practical (a lot of the time!):
 - **some** “We rely on **some** long-standing methods.”
 - **much** “Jobs posted on the internet reach a **much** larger audience.”
 - **very** “Get ready to do a **very** good job.”

- **quite a few** "It's been ~~quite a few~~ days since we spoke." Be specific; use a number.
- **that** "Find information ~~that~~-you can apply easily."

Important Note: The word **that** doesn't substitute for **who** when referring to a human being. E.g., "... a person **that** plays the piano" should be "... a person **who** plays the piano."

"Think of these extra words as layers of onion skin before you get to the usable part. Peel them from your writing." - Diana Booher, *Booher's Rules of Business Grammar*

- Replace phrases with single words where appropriate:
 - "a great number of" with "many"
 - "ahead of schedule" with "early"
 - "during the time that" with "while"
 - "give consideration to" with "consider"
 - "in spite of the fact that" with "although" or "despite"
- Change nouns to verbs:
 - "the examination of" becomes "examine"
 - "reach a decision" becomes "decide"
 - "the transformation of" becomes "transform"
 - "the reorganization of" becomes "reorganize"
- Revise long-winded sentences:
 - Combine ideas where appropriate.
 - Chop a long sentence in two, making sure *both* sentences sound correct.
 - Question every single word, especially adverbs and adjectives, and delete the ones that aren't essential.
- Root out repeated words:
 - E.g., "**Following** a process for hiring, we **followed** the techniques in this book." *Better:* "Following a process for hiring, we adopted the techniques in this book."

- E.g., “**Hoping** for warm weather, we **hoped** to book our vacation in the south.” *Better*: “Hoping for warm weather, we decided to book our vacation in the south.”

➤ Let absolutes be absolute:

Ever heard someone say “his bucket is emptier (or more empty) than mine”? How can something be emptier than empty? Be sure to omit qualifiers such as “less,” “more,” or “very” in front of absolute words that include:

- perfect
- unique
- equal
- final
- first
- last
- total
- complete
- universal
- destroyed
- impossible
- invisible
- ultimate
- pregnant

➤ Get rid of tag-ons to verbs:

- continue (not continue on)
- refer (not refer back to)
- ramble (not ramble on)
- open (not open up)
- cancel (not cancel out)
- add (not add together)

Exercise

Pay attention when you come across redundancies, absolutes, and tag-ons. Add them to these lists as a reminder.

“I try to leave out the parts that people skip.” - Elmore Leonard

Don't Let Your Writing Idle in Neutral

Avoid Writing a Run-On Sentence

What is a run-on sentence? One that contains too many subjects and predicates ... like running two independent clauses together without the benefit of a punctuation mark, a bridge word, or another type of "glue" that connects logically connects them.

E.g., "We received the package yesterday it arrived in the mail."

Look around. You'll find lots of examples of sentences that run together and make you go "huh?"

Use Your Breath

When is it time to start a new sentence so you don't have a run-on collision? Here's a suggestion: *Use your breathing.*

Yes, that's right. Allow one inhalation and one exhalation per sentence as you read it, either aloud or silently. If you run out of breath before you reach the period in the sentence, you know it's simply too long! Take time to shorten them.

Shorten Lengthy Sentences

Does wordiness imply writing only short sentences? No. The length of your sentence depends on conveying exactly what you want to say. Naturally, some ideas take more words to express than others.

Still, head in the direction of "concise" rather than "verbose." Just like you don't spend time with people who talk on and on, your readers won't hang out with verbosity in your writing.

Why? Too-long sentences can drag readers into complacency while requiring they keep track of the initial concept until the end of the sentence. *Good Rule of Thumb:*

Keep your word count under 21—fewer if possible. Why? It’s challenging to keep track of the **core idea** when a sentence exceeds 21 words.

Whack Wordiness Example: The following sentence #1 was edited into sentence #2, thus reducing wordiness by 50 percent without changing its meaning:

#1 - The subsequent chapters then will focus in great detail on each of the steps to make sure you know how to accomplish each step before proceeding to the next step and how to measure whether or not you are ready to move to the next step.
(46 words)

#2 - The subsequent chapters detail all 13 steps and show how to accomplish each one while measuring whether you are ready to move on.
(23 words)

“Make every word work like a galley slave.” - William Zinsser

Exercise

Dig out a page of your own writing and select the longest paragraph. Count the number of words and rewrite it, finding ways to:

- Eliminate extraneous phrases
- Take out wobbly words
- Knock out redundancies
- Replace phrases with single words
- Change nouns to verbs
- Revise long-winded sentences
- Root out repeated words
- Let absolutes be absolute
- Get rid of tag-ons to verbs

You want your writing to move forward in drive, not idle in neutral or meander off its course. So don’t stop until you’ve ruthlessly reduced your word count. Go for 33 percent or more—and keep your sentences from rambling.

How to Stop Rambling On

Rambling often stems from muddy thinking—that is, not having a clear idea of what you want to say.

When analyzing a piece of your writing that rambles, ask, “Exactly what do I want to say?” Challenge yourself to state its purpose in one simple sentence. Then with your intended point in mind, ask:

- Did I put in unnecessary facts on the road to making my point?
- Did I add any phrases that were irrelevant to this point?
- Did I keep in mind what readers might be asking as I made my point?
- Do my sentences lack rhythm or cause jarring like a bumpy road?
- Did I create a direct path to my point or did I take unnecessary detours?

Consider using the following formula* to help keep your writing concise. Use no more than:

- 5 paragraphs per page
- 10 sentences per paragraph
- 15 words per sentence (21 is absolute max)
- 3 syllables per word

*Recommended in *Don't Let Your Participles Dangle in Public!*

Exercise

Step 1: Take one page of your writing, 300-400 words, and count the number of paragraphs. Fewer than 5?

Step 2: In an average paragraph, count the number of sentences you have. Fewer than 10?

Step 3: Choose one paragraph and count the number of words in each sentence. What's the average? Fewer than 15?

Step 4: Now circle all the words on the page that have 4 syllables or more.

Following these steps, you now have lots of clues where you can smooth out the bumps on the road.

“Writings are useless unless they are read, and they cannot be read unless they are readable.” - Theodore Roosevelt

Keep Your Writing Motor Running

One Thought, One Sentence

Unless you're a novelist, it's best to express one thought in one sentence and end it. Then spend another sentence on the next thought (and so on) to keep your message moving forward in a compelling way.

Steer on the Sunny Side

It's hard for readers to track what's being written when it's stated in a negative way. Most of the time, you'll find that negative statements require a lot more words than positive statements to make a point. Avoid using "no" and "not" except when you want to strongly emphasize or contrast something.

Negative: The answer does not lie with their carelessness or incompetence.

Better: The answer lies in having careful, competent people to do the job.

Negative: We can't incorporate all the design features without increasing the unit size.

Better: To provide all the design features, we must increase the unit size.

Build Bridges to Guide Your Reader

Since your goal is to whack wordiness, you may be tempted to assume bridge words and phrases are extraneous. Yet the transitional words that logically link one sentence to the next guide your readers and keep your writing motor running. They smooth the road like a well-maintained highway.

Examples of bridge words that . . .

- connect two similar ideas (*and, plus, as well as*)
- show results (*as a result, consequently, thus, hence*)
- reinforce an idea (*indeed, in fact, of course, by all means*)
- add a thought (*besides, also, what's more, then, again, secondly, etc.*)
- compare or contrast ideas (*but, still, however, yet, nevertheless, rather, likewise, in contrast, etc.*)

Your Most Prominent Idea Goes at the End

Whenever possible and appropriate, place your **most prominent idea** at the end of a sentence. Doing so provides emphasis and helps push your writing from one new idea to the next. E.g., With your new ability to whack wordiness, you'll drive smoothly toward your goal of **delivering a compelling message**.

PRAISE FOR WORD TRIPPERS

FROM SUBSCRIBERS OF “WORD TRIPPER OF THE WEEK”

“Word Trippers are concise and down to earth: nothing snobby about Barbara McNichol's approach to clear thinking and lively writing. Whether you write for a living or just want to write correctly, Word Trippers is a handy resource.”

- George Mason, faithful subscriber

“I highly recommend Word Trippers—a delightful and quite useful reference with great information from a world class book editor, Barbara McNichol.”

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“Word Trippers! As a writer and speaker, words are right up there with chocolate for me! There's something scintillating in capturing the precise expression to convey my message. And there's nothing more pedestrian than seeing the wrong use of a common word. For those who worship words like I do, you'll fall in love with Barbara McNichol's Word Trippers book. An avid student of language, she will make sure you never have foot-in-mouth disease again!”

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"Your Word Trippers have been very helpful for my work and I appreciate getting the updates."

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- Hazel Harris, faithful subscriber

"I thoroughly enjoy your weekly Word Tripper tips. They are informative and beneficial for those who are interested in mastering the English language."

- Nathanael Mayhew, faithful subscriber

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- Agnes Paulsen, choir director

“I love to see our language used properly. Your notes give me hope that lots of other people love to see that, too.”

- Chas Ridley, writer

“Thank you so much for your work in keeping our language clear! The ‘usage-based’ changes in our grammar (not grammer) lead to some interesting turns of phrase.”

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“I love your trippers.”

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“Barbara, I thought of you when I was trying to figure out whether to use ‘passed’ or ‘past’. The MS Bookshelf definition still wasn’t clear enough – your Word Trippers guide was easier to understand.”

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- Mona Scott James (aka Mrs. Bluezette)

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“Your wonderful Word Trippers booklet is safely parked in my easily accessible reference shelf next to my desk. What a sweet and useful gift.”

- Marsha D. Egan, author, speaker

"I love your WordTrippers. Helps me greatly in my effort not to trip over my own words."

- Raleigh Pinskey, author, speaker

"I just wanted to tell you how much I appreciate being on your mailing list. I get so much out of your Word Trippers."

- Tom Dearth, speaker, seminar leader

"Your Word Trippers piece is always my favorite. Thanks."

- George R. Walther, CSP, CPAE, author, speaker

"Once again I want to say how much I enjoy your newsletter. Just the right length, and always meaty. I am convinced that this is important, and I am persuaded to do my part to respect the English language." :-)

- Sheila Feigelson, author, speaker

"I just love your Word Trippers. Your excellent tips and gentle reminders to use our language appropriately is such good mental gymnastics."

- Susanne Jalbert, businesswoman

"... all the nuns who tried to teach me rally around above me singing alleluia . . . Keep up the good work. So many English teachers will have you recognized as a saint."

- a Catholic fan, Joni Seivert, consultant

"When I switched jobs, yours was one of the few writing newsletters I kept due to the useful tips I can immediately employ."

- Charlotte Pack, subscriber

"Great ezine/tips this month. Thanks."

- Dan Poynter, author, speaker, self-publishing guru

(Thanks to Dan who features Word Trippers in his excellent ezine for self-published authors, Publishing Poynters, at www.parapub.com)

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to the love of my life—first always—my husband, Byron.

Thanks for everything we share past, present, and future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I once edited a book for an author/expert who revised her acknowledgment pages so often by adding colleagues she cared about that her book never got published for fear of missing someone!

Because this ebook deserves to be in your electronic hands sooner rather than later, I apologize if I've missed thanking important people who've traveled on this Word Tripper road with me.

Sincere thanks to these dedicated Word Tripper supporters: George Mason, Patrice Rhoades-Baum, Rhonda Scharf, Patricia Katz, Anita Paul, Faye Quam Heimerl, Karen Saunders, Dan Poynter, Claire O'Leary, Karen Reddick, Ronda Taylor, Rebecca Morgan, Ken Braly, Lynn VanLeeuwen, Lynn Grasberg, Peggy Henrikson, Bob Kelly, Jeff Rubin, Lou Panesi, and Melanie Hong Grogger.

Overwhelming thanks to all subscribers of my Word Tripper of the Week ezine and the appreciative users of its variations along the way.

I'm honored by your praise and appreciation for my attempts to "right" these pesky trippers that keep showing up in our language. A never-ending mission!