



Style Manual

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This chapter deals briefly with a number of language problems that we as editors seem to encounter again and again. Our suggestions are based on one rule: what we write and edit should be clear and concise.

Misused Words and Expressions

Use words carefully and precisely. The following words and expressions are frequently misused.

Affect, effect. In common usage *affect* is always a verb. It is used as a noun only in fields like psychology and psychotherapy. *Affect* means *to influence* (Enrollment affects tuition) or *to make a show of or pretend* (She affected cheerfulness to hide her concern). *Effect* is most often used as a noun. It means *result* (His warning had no effect). As a verb, *effect* means *to bring about or accomplish* (We can effect change only through compromise).

A lot, a lot of. These expressions are overused and are too informal in most contexts. Try using *often* or *frequently* for *a lot* and using *many*, *a great deal*, or *much* for *a lot of*. There is no such word as *alot*.

Alright. Many critics say it is wrong. Careful writers spell the expression as two words: *all right*. Although used less frequently than *all right*, it is found in journalistic and business publications and is common in fictional dialogue.

Although, though. In most uses these words are interchangeable, but it may be best to begin clauses with *although*, since it is more emphatic, and to use *though* to connect elements within a clause. (Although intelligent, he could not apply himself. She was born of poor though well-educated parents.)

Among. See **Between, among.**

An. Use the article *a* before an initial *h* pronounced even slightly (a historian, a hypothesis, a horse). Use of *an* in such cases is considered affected or archaic in this country.

And. *And* or *but* may be used as the first word of a sentence. Both are useful as transitional words between related sentences.

And/or. Don't use this device; it is appropriate only in legal writing. *And* can sometimes suggest *or*, and generally *or* includes *and*. For the rare sentence that requires such a construction, write *instead item 1, item 2, or both* (*not* transcripts and/or entrance scores, *but* transcripts, entrance scores, or both).

As. See **Like, as** and **Because, since, as.**

Assure, ensure, insure. All three of these verbs mean *to make secure or certain*. *Ensure* and *insure* are interchangeable, except that *insure* is generally used in the sense of guaranteeing life or property against risk. *Assure* is the only one of the three that has the sense of setting a person's mind at rest.

Awhile. *Awhile* is an adverb. *While* is a noun that often appears in the prepositional phrase *for a while* (three words). (I considered awhile, *but* I considered the matter for a while.)

Because, since, as. *Because* is the most specific of the conjunctions used to express reason or cause. It always indicates an unequivocal causal relationship. *Since* is often a weak form of *because*. It also contains a notion of duration over time that *because* does not. Use *since* when the meaning of what follows it is implied by what precedes it. Using *as* to mean *since* or *because* is always feeble. It makes whatever follows sound trivial. Avoid this misuse. Substitute *for*, *since*, or *because*, except in those rare cases in which you want to tone down the reason assigned.

Between, among. *Between* is the only choice when two persons or objects are involved. It is also proper to use *between* when more than two are involved if you want to express relations taken one pair at a time (Exchanges between the five colleges were not uncommon). Use *among* when three or more entities are considered collectively and no close relationship is implied (Funds are divided among the eight divisions).

Borrow, lend. *Borrow* means *to obtain or receive something on loan*. *Lend* means *to give out or allow the use of something temporarily*. You borrow from but lend to. (In formal writing, always use *lend* rather than *loan* as a verb.)

Bring, take. In the sense of conveying, use *bring* to indicate movement toward the speaker. It implies *come (here) with*. Use *take* to indicate movement away from the speaker. It implies *go (there) with*. You take food to a picnic and bring home leftovers.

But. See **And**.

Can, may. Use *can* to indicate ability to do something and *may* to indicate permission to do it. Don't use *can* for *may*.

Cannot. Use *cannot* rather than *can not*.

Compose, comprise. *Comprise* expresses the relation of the larger to the smaller, not the other way around (think of *comprise* as meaning *to embrace or take in*). The whole comprises the parts; the whole is composed of its parts. The parts compose the whole and are comprised in it. Do not use *comprised of*; use instead *compose*, *constitute*, or *make up*. (*Include* is not a synonym for *comprise*, but *comprise* has the sense of inclusion.)

Continual, continuous. Although these words have the same primary meaning, their precise meanings are different. Use *continual* when you mean action that is intermittent or repeated at intervals (the continual reminder of gunfire in the distance). Use *continuous* when you mean uninterrupted action in time or unbroken extent in space (a continuous stream of marchers).

Convince, persuade. Use *convince* with *that* or *of*; use *persuade* with *to*. (You may be convinced *that* or *of* something; you must be persuaded *to* do something.)

Different from, different than. One thing differs from another. *Different than* is incorrect.

Dilemma. A *dilemma* is a situation that requires one to choose between two equally balanced alternatives. If no suggestion of alternatives is involved, use *predicament* or *problem*.

Discover. Do not use *discover* when you mean *develop* or *invent*. Something that was discovered already existed but was unknown.

Effect. See **Affect, effect**.

E.g., i.e. The abbreviation *e.g.* means *for example (exempli gratia)* and introduces an illustrative instance or a short list of names or other items. The abbreviation *i.e.* means *that is (id est)* and introduces a repetition in different words of the ideas just discussed, or an amplification that would be appropriate after an ordinary *that is*. The two expressions are always set off by commas.

Ensure. See **Assure, ensure, insure**.

Enthused, enthusiastic. *Enthuse*, a back-formation from enthusiasm, is not considered acceptable in formal writing. Use *enthusiastic* instead. (A back-formation is a word invented in the erroneous belief that an existing word is derived from it.)

Etc., et al. In strict usage, *et cetera (and the rest)* is neuter and so can refer only to things, and *et alia (and others)* can refer only to persons. Do not end a list of persons with *etc.*; instead, use *and others*. Using *etc.* at the end of a list introduced by *for example, such as*, or a similar expression is also incorrect. (Note: A comma is required after *etc.* unless it ends the sentence. Also note that *et* does not require a period but *al.* does; *et* is a word, *al.* is an abbreviation.)

Fact. Use this word only for matter that can be directly verified, not for matters of judgment.

Farther, further. *Farther* is best used to indicate distance, *further* to indicate degree. (He ran farther than she did. We discussed the issue further.)

Fewer. See **Less, fewer**.

Flammable, inflammable. Both words mean easily ignitable and are interchangeable in their literal sense. Use *nonflammable* or *noncombustible* to describe something that does not burn.

Historic, historical. Use *historic* to describe what is important in or contributes to history (historic walk on the moon; historic meeting of the Allied powers). Use *historical* to refer more broadly to what is concerned with history (historical play; historical artifacts). Use *a*, not *an*, with these words.

Hopefully. It is best used to mean *in a hopeful way* not *it is to be hoped* or *let us hope*. Even though it is common in popular usage and conversation, it is unacceptable to many critics and can be ambiguous. Careful writers avoid this usage.

However. When *however* means *nevertheless*, avoid using it as the first word of a sentence. For this sense, the word serves better within the sentence. (His condition continued to weaken. At last, however, we saw some improvement.)

i.e. See **E.g., i.e.**

Imply, infer. The distinction is as clear as that between give and take. *Imply* is a word for the transmitting end and *infer* a word for the receiving end. When you imply, you deliver; when you infer, you draw from. (He implied that he didn't want to go. From her manner, we inferred that she didn't want to go.)

Inflammable. See **Flammable, inflammable.**

Innovation. The root of the word *innovate* is the Latin *novus*, meaning *new*. Saying *new innovation* is like saying *new new introduction*.

Insure. See **Assure, ensure, insure.**

Irregardless. Should be *regardless*. The negative is expressed by *-less*; adding the prefix *ir-* makes a double negative.

Its, it's. *Its* is a possessive pronoun parallel to *his, hers, yours, theirs*. *It's* is a contraction of *it is* or *it has*, not a possessive.

Latter. *Latter* refers to the second of two things, not to the last of a series of things. Repeat the necessary information or rewrite the sentence to avoid using this expression; don't expect your reader to look back to a previous passage.

Lay. See **Lie, lay.**

Lend. See **Borrow, lend.**

Less, fewer. *Less* refers to quantity (less course work); *fewer* refers to number (fewer courses).

Lie, lay. *Lay* means to *put, place, or prepare*. *Lie* means to *recline or be situated*. In senses involving what people do with their bodies, use the forms *lie* (present), *lay* (past), *lain* (past participle), *lying* (present participle). For what people do with objects, use *lay* (present), *laid* (past), *laid* (past participle), *laying* (present participle).

Like, as. Use *as* to express in what capacity or role a deed is done; use *like* to introduce a comparison. (*She acts as a supervisor* implies that she is a supervisor; *she acts like a supervisor* compares her to one.) Another clue: *like* governs nouns and pronouns; *as* introduces phrases and clauses. Comparisons involving a verb should be introduced with *as* or *as if* (I don't sing as I once did, *not* I don't sing like I once did. He carried on as if he were crazy, *not* He carried on like he was crazy.) See also **Such as**.

May. See **Can, may.**

Orient, orientate. *Orientate* has crept into the language, probably as a back-formation from *orientation*, but it is a superfluous word. Save a syllable and use *orient*.

Persons, people. Use *persons* when you mean individuals with identities; use *people* when you mean a large and anonymous mass. (People can be pushed only so far. She was one of those persons who can cope with pressure.)

Persuade. See **Convince, persuade.**

Presently. In modern usage, *presently* is best used to mean *in a short time*. Use *at present, now, or currently* to mean *at this time*.

Relatively. Use *relatively* only when there is a clearly implied or expressed comparison.

Respective, respectively. These words are meaningless unless they clarify a direct correspondence between one series and another. Use them only when necessary. (The departments are listed under their colleges, *not* The departments are listed under their respective colleges.)

Since. See **Because, since, as.**

Such as. *Such as* and *like* are close in meaning, but there is a distinction worth noting. *Such as* suggests an indefinite group of objects; *like* suggests a closer resemblance among the things compared (significant events in history, such as the fall of the Roman Empire, the Norman Conquest, . . . , but tangible benefits like good pay and sick leave).

Take. See **Bring, take.**

That, which. *That* is a restrictive, or defining, pronoun; it introduces a phrase or clause *that is essential to the meaning of the sentence*. *Which* is a nonrestrictive, or descriptive, pronoun; the phrase or clause it introduces, *which is usually set off by commas*, could be eliminated without changing the meaning of the sentence.

Though. See **Although, though**.

Till. Not an abbreviation of *until*, so never write '*til*'. *Till* is a word in its own right.

Toward, towards. *Toward* is preferred.

Type. Avoid combining *type* with a noun to create a compound adjective (hippie-type students). Use such a compound only when the reference is technical or at least highly specific. (Note: In nontechnical writing, use *type* to refer to specific categories and *kind* or *sort* to refer to more general groupings: that type of therapy; that kind of problem.)

Underway, under way. Always two words as an adverb (meaning *in motion or operation; started*). Spelled as one word as an adjective, but its use as an adjective (underway refueling) is extremely limited.

Unique. Don't use qualifiers (*more, most, less*) with *unique*. It means *without equal or the only one of its kind*.

Utilize. In most cases, *use* is preferable to *utilize*. *Utilize* suggests putting an object or material to a new or expanded use.

Very. Use this word sparingly. Instead, use words that are strong in themselves.

Whether or not. Usually you can omit the *or not* to advantage (or substitute *if* for the whole phrase). If, however, your intention is to give equal stress to the alternative, the *or not* is necessary. (I will finish the project whether he gives his approval or not.)

Which. See **That, which**.

While. Don't use this word to mean *although, whereas, and, or but*, and don't use it where only a semicolon is necessary. *While* means *during the time that* and should be used to link simultaneous occurrences in instances in which simultaneity is part of the point. Be especially careful not to use *while* when times mentioned in the sentence are expressly stated to be different. (Although [*not while*] days were warm, evenings were often chilly. Several of the female graduate students were from other countries, whereas [*not while*] all the males were Americans.)

Who, whom. Use *who* when it functions as the subject or as a predicate after some form of the verb *to be*. Use *whom* as an object of a verb or preposition or as the subject of a complementary infinitive (the woman whom I took to be your sister). When you are unsure about which to use, try substituting a personal pronoun (*he/she* or *her/him*) in the sentence. If *he* or *she* is correct, use *who*; if *him* or *her* is correct, use *whom*. Use *who* and *whom* when referring to persons. Use *that* and *which* when referring to animals and inanimate objects.

-wise. Adding the suffix *-wise* to a word is almost never appropriate (Contentwise the class was interesting). Avoid it.

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Words Pronounced or Spelled Similarly but Different in Meaning

Watch out for words that are the same or similar in pronunciation or spelling but different in meaning.

accept (receive)	except (exclude)
all ready (prepared)	already (previous)
allude (refer to indirectly)	elude (avoid)
allusion (indirect mention)	illusion (erroneous perception)
beside (next to or close to)	besides (in addition to or except)
capital (official seat of government; wealth)	capitol (building)
casual (not planned; informal)	causal (cause)
complement (to complete)	compliment (to praise)

council (assembly of persons)	counsel (advice; lawyer) consul (foreign service officer)
eminent (prominent, conspicuous)	imminent (ready to take place)
flounder (to move clumsily)	founder (to fail utterly; to collapse)
flout (to show contempt for)	flaunt (to show off)
foreword (preface, introductory note)	forward (all other meanings)
loath (unwilling, reluctant)	loathe (to hate)
mitigate (to moderate or soften)	militate (to have effect, for or against)
perpetrate (to be guilty of; to carry out)	perpetuate (to prolong the existence of)
perquisite (benefit expected as one's due)	prerequisite (required as a prior condition)
personal (one's own)	personnel (employees)
practical (useful, not theoretical)	practicable (feasible)
precede (to come before)	proceed (to go forward)
principle (basic truth)	principal (foremost in importance; chief or head)
prophecy (prediction)	prophecy (to predict)
pour (to make flow)	pore (to study carefully)
stationary (fixed)	stationery (paper)
tortuous (winding; twisting)	torturous (related to pain or torture)

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Words with Irregular Plurals

Watch your use and spelling of words with irregular plurals.

<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
agendum (a single thing to be done; an individual agenda item)	agenda (list of things to be done)
alumna	alumnae
alumnus	alumni
appendix	appendixes (appendices in scientific writing)
biennium	bienniums (also biennia)
criterion	criteria
curriculum	curricula (also curriculums)
datum	data (be sure to use plural modifiers: many, these)
erratum (one error)	errata (more than one error)

formula	formulas (also formulae)
index	indexes (also indices)
medium	media (also mediums)
parenthesis	parentheses
phenomenon	phenomena
professor emeritus	professors emeriti
synopsis	synopses
thesis	theses
vita	vitae

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Singular Verbs and Pronouns with Collective Nouns

Use singular verbs and pronouns with collective nouns (class, committee, crowd, faculty, family, group, jury, staff, team, etc.). (The class of '38 is holding its reunion in the Campus Club. The team of 12 regulars was honored Saturday.)

Plurals regarded as a unit become collectives and take singular verbs.

•	A thousand gallons were produced. (individual gallons)
•	A thousand gallons is a good supply. (a unit)
•	Cheese and crackers are popular snack foods. (individual items)
•	Cheese and crackers makes a nutritious snack. (a unit)

Made-up Words and Words in Vogue

Do not create your own words, and try to avoid using words that are currently in vogue. The following are considered inappropriate in formal writing; their use invites criticism.

<i>Unacceptable</i>	<i>Unacceptable as verbs</i>
learnings	office
understandings	impact
conferencing	
sciencing	
finalize	
prioritize	

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Expressing Coordinate Ideas in Parallel Form

Express coordinate ideas in parallel form. The principle of parallel construction requires that expressions that are similar in content and function be expressed similarly. In a series, then, follow the pattern 1, 2, and 3, not 1, 2, and A.

<i>Incorrect</i>	<i>Correct</i>
She enjoys golf, tennis, and finding the time to play volleyball.	She enjoys golf, tennis, and volleyball.
	<i>or</i>
	She enjoys having the time to play golf, tennis, and volleyball.

The same principle applies to phrases or sentences in a series.

<i>Incorrect</i>	<i>Correct</i>
Students who apply should:	Applicants should:

• take the entrance examination before August 15	• take the entrance examination before August 15
• complete an application form	• complete an application form
• three letters of recommendation are required	• submit three letters of recommendation

Express similar ideas within a sentence in the same form.

<i>Incorrect</i> Eric was thinking about the date of his orals and that he must work harder on his dissertation.	<i>Correct</i> Eric was thinking about the date of his orals and the need to work harder on his dissertation.
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Correlative expressions should be followed by parallel phrases or clauses. Rearrange the sentence if necessary.

either... or	both . . . and
neither... nor	not . . . but
not only . . . but also	first, second, third

<i>Incorrect</i> Either you must reapply immediately or wait another year.	<i>Correct</i> You must either reapply immediately or wait another year.
She objected not only to the screening procedures but also because no interviews were given.	She objected not only to the screening procedures but also to the lack of interviews.

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