

READ AND HEED

PLEASE NOTE: If you make any of these mistakes in your written assignments, each mistake will cost you five (5) points.

MAKING THINGS EASIER

Writing term papers often brings out the worst in all of us. Our society is so attuned to the Internet, which is filled with all kinds of errors, that, when we try to write something using correct grammar, we often make the same mistakes. Unfortunately, if we don't learn to do it correctly, it will dog us for the rest of our lives. Here are some hints to help you use words correctly and receive better grades in the process.

A big problem is with the correct use of word pairs (or triplets or quadruplets) that sound about the same, are spelled similarly, but mean something very different. Those that sound alike are called *homonyms* (it's nice to know that they have a name.) Others are just troublesome. There are hundreds of these in the English language but here are some that are most commonly used and misused. Get a grip on these and it will help a lot.

Accept / except

To accept something is to receive it or take it. I accept your invitation to join you for lunch. Except can also be a verb where it means, to leave out, but is more often found as a modifier that also means exclusion. We are all going except for Joe.

Affect / effect

The simplest way to remember this is to say that you affect an effect (a before e). If you are using the word as a verb, the odds are that you will use affect. I affect a change of clothing, or address, or eating habits. The thing affected or changed (clothing, address or food) is the effect. Remember "cause (affect) and effect".

Alternate / alternative

The first can be a verb that means to move from one thing to another. I alternate (change) TV stations to find a program I like. It can also be a noun. My alternate took my place at the meeting. In that case, I was the first choice, my alternate was the second. The second is similar, but not the same. An alternative is a choice. Riding a bicycle is an alternative to walking. We have alternating (changing) electrical current in our home to provide heat for the stove that cooks our food. An alternative to the electric stove would be a gas stove or wood stove or campfire in the back yard.

There / their / they're

There implies a place, "I put it over there." Their represents ownership, "It is their house." They're is a contraction of two words, "they are".

Lead / led

This pair is funny. Lead can be the mineral that we turn into wheel weights, fishing sinkers, and bullets and it can also mean that you will go where someone leads you. Led is the past tense of lead. “I led you yesterday, and I will lead you again today.”

Steak / stake

A steak is what you eat – rare, medium or well-done. A stake is something you stick in the ground, like a tent stake or a surveyor’s stake. Usually, only termites eat stakes.

Sight / site

The gift of sight is what we get from our eyes. We have sights on rifles and cameras because they help us to see something. At the same time, what we see is also a sight. “It was a beautiful sight.” A site is a place, as in, “I visited the site of the battle.” It is easy to get confused. For instance, a site can be a beautiful sight.

To, two and too

Why do folks keep getting these mixed up? To is a direction – “I am going to town.” Two is a number – “While in town, I will buy two kegs of beer.” Too can mean “also” – “You may go with me too.” Or, it means something in addition to what is already there – “There are too many of us for only two kegs of beer.”

Chose and choose

Choose is something you willingly do. You Choose what you will wear, or with whom you dance. Chose is the past tense and reflects what you did in the past. “Yesterday I chose to eat enchiladas. Today I choose to eat fish.”

The point is that spell-check on a computer will tell you if the word is spelled correctly, but it WILL NOT tell you if you chose (not choose) the correct word. This is something you just have to learn on your (not you’re) own and the best way to do it is to read (not reed) well-written literature.