

Commonly Misused Words, Part I

Effect/Affect

- **Effect** is usually a noun meaning “a result or consequence.”
Example: The film had a profound *effect* on me.
- **Affect** is usually a verb meaning “to change or to influence.”
Example: The film *affected* my thoughts about the subject.
- When **effect** is used as a verb, it means “to bring about, or to make happen.”
Example: Global warming has *effected* a rise in the sea level.
- When **affect** is used as a noun, it is a psychological or psychiatric term meaning “the physical manifestation of a feeling or emotion.”
Example: “Restricted, flat, or blunted *affect* may be a symptom of mental illness, especially schizophrenia.”

Except/Accept

- **Except** is a preposition meaning “with the exclusion of, excluding.”
Example: I like all subjects *except* math.
- **Accept** is a verb with multiple meanings. It is usually used with an object and is most commonly used to mean “to receive, to take, to consent to, to respond to, etc.”
Examples:
I *accepted* the gift.
She *accepted* responsibility for her actions.

There/Their/They're

- **There** can be an adverb, a noun, a pronoun, an adjective, or an interjection used in reference to a particular place.
Examples:
She is over *there*.
That man *there*.
There is no way out.
There! I did it.
- **Their** is the possessive form of the pronoun *they* and usually comes before a noun.
Examples:
Their house is huge.
Citizens have *their* rights.
- **They're** is a contraction of *they* and *are*.
Examples:
I can't find my socks; *they're* missing.
Steve and Krissy said that *they're* hosting a dinner party.

Your/You're

- **Your** is the possessive form of the pronoun *you*.

Examples:

I like *your* new haircut.

What is *your* favorite song?

- **You're** is a contraction of *you* and *are*.

Examples:

You're a great student.

I heard that *you're* a Giants fan.

Then/Than

- **Then** is most often used as an adverb with reference to time or sequence; however, it can also be an adjective or a noun.

Examples:

I was thinner back *then*.

The dog sat and *then* rolled over.

If you practice, *then* you will improve.

- **Than** is used most often after a comparative adjective or adverb to introduce the second element in a comparison.

Examples:

She is a better student *than* her sister.

He is taller *than* his father.

I would rather do dishes *than* vacuum.

- **Than** is used to denote difference or choice, often combined with *other*, *else*, or *anywhere*.

Examples:

Although I wasn't feeling well, I had no choice other *than* to go to work.

There is no other restaurant you will find such variety *than* there.

There is nowhere I would rather work *than* the Writing Center.

Lose/Loose

- **Lose** is the present tense of a verb meaning "to come to be without" and has the connotation that the lost object will be impossible or very difficult to recover.

Examples:

Did you *lose* your keys, or did you misplace them?

Try not to *lose* your temper.

I hope you do not *lose* your enthusiasm for writing.

- **Loose** is most often used as an adjective to describe something that is not tightly attached or restrained, but it may also be used as a verb meaning "to let loose."

Examples:

My niece has a *loose* tooth.

His pants were so *loose* that they fell down.

Loose the ropes of the catamaran so we can set sail.

Its/It's

- **Its** is a possessive pronoun indicating that something possesses something else. It does NOT require an apostrophe. Think of it in terms of other possessive pronouns that do not carry apostrophes (e.g., his, hers, theirs, yours).

Examples:

The dog lost *its* bone.

The conference had *its* ups and downs.

The club lost *its* charter.

- **It's** is a contraction meaning “it is.” Think of it in terms of other contractions (e.g., can't, won't, isn't). The apostrophe takes the place of the second “i” so that “it is” becomes “it's.” Think of **it's** as an equation: (it + is) – i = it's.

Examples:

“*It's* not unusual to be loved by anyone.” ~Tom Jones

It's raining outside.

I would love to go dancing all night, but *it's* finals week.

Fewer/Less

- **Fewer** can be used as an adjective meaning “of a smaller number” or as a pronoun meaning “a smaller number” when used with a plural noun. **Fewer** is used as an adjective to describe nouns that can be counted (e.g., shoes, items, dogs, people, dollars)

Examples:

The express lane is for customers purchasing 15 items or *fewer*.

Fewer than 12 people attended the workshop.

- **Less** is most often used as an adjective meaning “smaller in size, amount, degree, etc.” **Less** is used with non-countable nouns (e.g., love, air, food, money). It can also be a noun meaning “something inferior or not as important” or an adverb meaning “in any way different.”

Examples:

I wish there was *less* hatred in this world.

Employees have been fired for *less*.

She is nothing *less* than a genius.

Common Word Choice Errors

- **Irregardless:** Irregardless is NOT a word! The correct word is “regardless,” meaning “without regard.” The prefix “ir” means “not,” so *irregardless* is its own double negative.

- **A lot:** A lot is two words! Thanks to the magic of spellcheck, *alot* is not very common anymore, but watch for it in your handwritten work.
- **Alright:** Like “a lot,” **all right** is two words.

Activity

Choose the correct word in the following sentences.

1. The lecture today had a profound **effect/affect** on me.
2. I like all vegetables **accept/except** broccoli.
3. I talked to Danny and Amanda, and **they’re/their** coming over at 6:00.
4. **Your/You’re** funny!
5. Tonight, I’d rather have sushi **then/than** pasta.
6. I wish I didn’t **loose/lose** my temper so easily.
7. The book had **it’s/its** ups and downs. Overall, **its/it’s** a good read.
8. I did not do well on the test. **Irregardless/Regardless**, my GPA is still good.
9. I have written **alot/a lot** of papers this semester.
10. Is it **alright/all right** if I borrow your pencil?

Answer Key for Activity

1. effect
2. except
3. they’re
4. You’re
5. than
6. lose
7. its; it’s
8. regardless
9. a lot
10. all right

References

"Commonly Misused Words and Phrases." *Commonly Misused Words and Phrases*. Weber State University, n.d. Web. 09 June 2014.