Commonly Misused Words in Academic Writing

A-State Online Writing Center

There are times that all writers have been guilty of misusing certain words in their writing. Some may be hard to catch in the editing/revising process, although others are sometimes easy to find. Using correct word choice in these situations will help ensure that your writing is clear and precise in its communication with your audience. Basic spelling and grammar checks on processors like Word or Google Docs may not always catch these mistakes, so we have included the ones you should look out for below. We have also highlighted commonly misused words in this intro that will be discussed below.

1. **Accept vs Except:**
    a. "Accept" means that you agree with something.
        i. Ex: I accepted an internship at a nearby engineering company.
    b. "Except" shows that you're excluding something.
        i. Ex: Lacy received letters from all the colleges she applied to except for Yale.
2. **Advice vs Advise:**
    a. "Advice" is considered a noun and used to acknowledge a suggestion.

i. Ex: He was quick to take my **advice** on how to best study for the

Chemistry exam.

b. "Advise" is considered a verb and is the act of giving that suggestion.

i. Ex: The professor **advised** her students to visit the writing center before

turning in **their** assignments.

3. **Affect vs Effect:**

a. "Affect" is a verb that shows how different things influence each other.

i. Ex: Did the new COVID-19 vaccine **affect** patients positively or

negatively?

b. "Effect" is a noun refers to the results of these influences.

i. Ex: Use of the improved study guide had a positive **effect** on test scores.

4. **Although vs While:**

a. "Although" is a contraction indicating contrast of fact (despite other previously

presented information).

i. Ex: **Although** Becky hates riding with Uber, parking at the concert venue

was scarce and she had to use them to get to **there** on time.

b. "While" is considered a conjunction and a noun that is used to indicate periods of

time.

i. Ex: Jacob had to listen to recorded lectures **while** doing his homework so

he could study for the upcoming midterm.

5. **Allude vs Elude:**

a. "Allude" indirectly references something.

      i. Ex: She **alluded** that the main character of her crime show was parallel to

         Ted Bundy.

  b. "Elude" shows avoidance of something

      i. Ex: The student was able to **elude** her bad test grade because the teacher

         removes the lowest one at the end of the term and she aced the rest of her

         exams.

6. **Any body vs Anybody and Any one vs Anyone**

  a. "Any body" and "Any one" are considered adjectives that modify nouns.

      i. Ex: He was able to swim in **any body** of water except the Arctic Ocean.

      ii. Ex: If I needed them, **any one** of my friends would be there to support me.

  b. "Anybody" and "Anyone" are used as pronouns.

      i. Ex: Is there **anyone** who would be willing to share their notes with the

         people who missed class last week?

      ii. Ex: **Anybody** can ace this class with a bit of hard work and dedication to

         this discipline.

7. **Assume vs Presume:**

  a. "Assume" is used when no information is present when making a conclusion.

      i. Ex: I would text Paris for the notes, but I **assume** he skipped class too.

  b. "Presume" is used when there is information present in making a conclusion.

      i. Ex: Everyone **presumes** the test will be easy because students from the

         earlier class said it was one of the quickest tests they've ever taken.

8. **Assure vs Ensure vs Insure:**

  a. "Assure" is used when confirming something.

      i. Ex: I **assured** her that the plane departs at 11:00am instead of 9:00am.

  b. "Ensure" is used to make sure someone accomplishes something.

      i. Ex: We can **ensure** that he will leave our house and be at the airport around 9:30 to meet you there for his flight.

  c. "Insure" is used to protect something from harm.

      i. Ex: It's a good thing we **insured** the house, because the wildfire destroyed everything.

9. **Attribute vs Contribute**

  a. "Attribute" is used to refer to characteristics or explain something by revealing its cause.

      i. Ex: The building's best **attribute** is its study rooms.

  b. "Contribute" is used to show someone giving, adding to, or helping something or someone else.

      i. Ex: Ashley **contributed** to the research project by making a PowerPoint.

10. **Complement vs Compliment:**

  a. "Complement" is used to show when one object completes another.

      i. Ex: These two painting **complement** each other the best out of the whole collection.

  b. "Compliment" is used to give praise.

      i. Ex: I **complimented** her writing ability on the last paper she wrote for this class.

11. **Conscience vs Conscious:**

  a. "Conscience" refers to moral choices

   i. Ex: His **conscience** made him feel guilty for cheating on his exam.

 b. "Conscious" refers to spatial awareness.

   i. Ex: She was **conscious** of her surroundings while walking through the abandoned building.

12. **Consequently vs Subsequently:**

 a. "Consequently" assumes it has been caused by something.

   i. Ex: **Consequently**, her excellent research abilities led to a well-written paper.

 b. "Subsequently" refers to something that happens later and not determined by the previous action.

   i. Ex: He made an "A" on the psychology exam and, **subsequently**, his roommate made an "A" on his nursing midterm.

13. **Explicit vs Implicit:**

 a. "Explicit" describes open and apparent information.

   i. Ex: She made it **explicitly** clear we would have a pop quiz tomorrow.

 b. "Implicit" describes something being implied.

   i. Ex: Her comment **implicitly** revealed her political opinion.

14. **Farther vs Further:**

 a. "Farther" implies physical distance.

   i. Ex: Jesse went **farther** than Andre in the 100m dash.

 b. "Further" implies time.

   i. Ex: Until **further** notice, all classes will be online.

15. **Infer vs Imply:**

a. "Infer" deduces something (I.e. something that readers do).

    i. Ex: Since she was walking out of the music class and is almost always in the music building, we **inferred** that was her major.

b. "Imply" hints at something (I.e. something writers do).

    i. Ex: The professor **implied** that he was late because there wasn't any parking on campus.

16. **Its vs It's:**

a. "Its" is the possessive form of it.

    i. Ex: We could tell by **its** results that the study wasn't accurate.

b. "It's" is a contraction for "it is".

    i. Ex: **It's** understandably hard for some to pick a major when they first get to college.

17. **May Be vs Maybe:**

a. "May be" is used as a verb phrase.

    i. Ex: It **may be** hard to reach him because his phone is broken.

b. "Maybe" is used as an adverb

    i. Ex: **Maybe** the survey failed because you didn't ask your participants the right questions.

18. **Precede vs Proceed:**

a. "Precede" is used to show something coming before something else.

    i. Ex: Gen eds typically **precede** classes within a specific discipline.

b. "Proceed" is used as an invitation to continue.

        i. Ex: After the exam, the professor **proceeded** to the next chapter listed in our syllabus.

19. **Principal vs Principle:**

    a. "Principal" is used as a noun or adjective to refer to an individual or show significance.

        i. Ex: A **principal** violinist is also referred to as "first chair".

    b. "Principle" is something grounded in theory.

        i. Ex: Color is one of the seven **principles** of art.

20. **Than vs Then:**

    a. "Than" is a comparison between two or more objects.

        i. Ex: I would prefer to study tonight rather **than** in the morning.

    b. "Then" is used as a transition of time to show what comes next.

        i. Ex: This morning Erica ran some errands **then** she went to work.

21. **Their vs There vs They're:**

    a. "Their" is a pronoun.

        i. Ex: **Their** mom was my kindergarten teacher.

    b. "There" is used to show where something is.

        i. Ex: I told him that he would find out what his surprise was when we got **there**.

    c. "They're" is a contraction of "they are".

        i. Ex: Mitchell and Scott will text us when **they're** closer to the restaurant.

22. **Who's vs Whose:**

    a. "Who's" is a contraction of "who is".

        i. Ex: **Who's** not able to open the assignment on blackboard?

   b. "Whose" is the possessive form of "who".

        i. Ex: I would like to know **whose** paper this is.

23. **Your vs You're:**

   a. "Your" is the possessive form of "you".

        i. Ex: Is this **your** new apartment?

   b. "You're" is the contraction of "you are".

        i. Ex: **You're** at the top of your class!