

Diction

EN101

1. A, AN

The indefinite article *a* is used before words starting with a consonant sound.

Incorrect: *a* elephant, *a* igloo

Correct: *a* desk, *a* house, *a* unicorn

The indefinite article *an* is used before words starting with a vowel sound.

Incorrect: *an* book, *an* ukulele

Correct: *an* umbrella; *an* egg; *an* x-ray

2. ACCEPT, EXCEPT

The word *accept* is a verb and means to receive.

Incorrect: I could not *except* his explanation.

Correct: Jean *accepted* and signed for the large package.

The word *except* is most often used as a conjunction or a preposition. Whatever follows the word is not to be included with the context of the facts preceding it.

Incorrect: I liked all of them *accept* the blue one.

Correct: Nathan read the entire book of Genesis *except* for the last chapter.

3. AIN'T

The contraction *ain't* is the improper form of *am not* or *is not*.

Incorrect: I *ain't* going to the meeting.

Correct: I *am not* going to the meeting.

Incorrect: Frank *ain't* in his office.

Correct: Frank *isn't* in his office.

4. ALL

The word *all* is a perfectly good English word, and it is correctly used in sentences like this:

Correct: Matthew did *all* of his homework.

The word *all* is used incorrectly when it is used to mean 'said' in the popular culture.

Incorrect: Fran was *all*, "Wow, did you see that."

Incorrect: And he was *all*, "It was amazing!"

Incorrect: And she was *all*, "Yeah, I know."

5. A LOT, LOTS

Use these words informally when indicating a considerable sum. In formal writing consider using much or many.

Informal: Joey has a lot of homework.

Formal: Joey has much homework.

6. ALREADY, ALL READY

The words *all ready* indicate that a group of persons is prepared for whatever event follows.

Incorrect: Are you *already* for the trip?

Correct: Are you *all ready* for the trip?

The word *already* refers to time and indicates that an action was completed previously.

Incorrect: We finished the pizza *all ready*!

Correct: We finished the pizza *already*!

7. ALRIGHT, ALL RIGHT

In formal writing, use the two words *all right* rather than the less accepted *alright*.

Avoid: She's doing alright in her sewing class.

Correct: She's doing all right in her sewing class.

8. AMOUNTS UP TO

Do not use the incorrect, redundant phrase *amounts up to* in place of *amounts to*.

Incorrect: Your portion of the bill *amounts up to* \$323.00.

Correct: Your portion of the bill *amounts to* \$323.00.

Only use the phrase *amounts up to* to indicate a number of items up to but not including a given amount.

Correct: We will approve purchase orders for *amounts up to* \$500.

9. ANYWHERE, NOWHERES, SOMEWHERE, EVERYWHERE, ANYWAYS

It is not necessary to add and -s to the words *anywhere*, *nowhere*, *somewhere*, *everywhere*, and *anyway*

Incorrect: I have nowhere's to put this box.

Correct: I have nowhere to put this box.

10. ARE, HOUR, OUR

Don't misspell these words that sound similar but have completely different meanings.

The word *are* is a verb that is used as a helping verb or a linking verb.

Correct: We *are* going to church. (helping verb)

Correct: Your grades *are* awesome! (linking verb)

The word *hour* is a noun that is a unit of time.

Correct: We got home at a late *hour*.

The word *our* is a pronoun that shows possession.

Correct: *Our* salvation is through Jesus alone.

11. AREN'T I

Aren't is a contraction of *are* and *not*. You wouldn't say "I are not," so do not use *aren't* I for *am I not*.

Incorrect: "*Aren't* I the cleverest of all animals?" asked the fox.

Correct: "*Am I not* the cleverest of all animals?" asked the fox.

12. BETWEEN YOU AND I, FOR YOU AND I

The subjective case pronoun *I* is used incorrectly within the prepositional phrases *between you and I* and *for you and I*. The pronoun *I* should be changed to the objective case *me*.

Incorrect: Our neighbors baked this cake for you and I.

Correct: Our neighbors baked this cake for you and me.

13. BRING, TAKE

Bring implies movement towards.

Correct: Please bring me my glasses.

Take implies movement away from.

Correct: Please take the car to the auto shop.

14. BORROW, LEND

Borrow means to **receive** something with the intention of returning it.

Correct: May I *borrow* your dictionary?

Lend means to **give** something with the intention of it being returned.

Incorrect: Let me *borrow* you my dictionary.

Correct: Let me *lend* you my dictionary.

15. CAN, MAY

Can indicates *capability*.

Correct: Can you please check the pie?

May indicates *consent*.

Correct: May I be dismissed from class?

16. CHOOSE, CHOSE

Choose is a verb which means to pick or decide.

Correct: Each person must *choose* to accept or reject Christ.

Chose is the past tense of the verb *choose*.

Correct: Yesterday, I *chose* to visit with my grandmother instead of doing my laundry.

17. COUNSEL, COUNCIL

Counsel refers to *advice*.

Correct: The young man sought *counsel* from his pastor.

Council refers to a *committee*.

Correct: Mr. Smitty is running for City Council.

18. DONE

Avoid using *done* in place of the helping verb *have*.

Incorrect: They *done* finished that job.

Correct: They *have* finished that job.

19. DON'T

Avoid using *don't* (or do not) when its subject is singular; use *doesn't* (or does not) instead.

Incorrect: She *don't* want any breakfast.

Correct: She *doesn't* want any breakfast.

Correct: They *don't* want any breakfast.

20. DOUBLE NEGATIVE

No, not (or *n't*), *none, never, no one, nobody, nothing, hardly, rarely, scarcely, and but* (meaning *only*) are considered negatives. Avoid using two negatives where one is adequate.

Incorrect: They *rarely never* go out of town on the weekends.

Correct: They *rarely* go out of town on the weekends.

Correct: They *never* go out of town on the weekends.

Incorrect: *No one* knew *nothing* about the surprise party.

Correct: *No one* knew *anything* about the surprise party.

Correct: They knew *nothing* about the surprise party.

21. DOUBLE SUBJECT

Avoid using a double subject..

Incorrect: His family *they* went on vacation.

Correct: His family went on vacation.

22. EVERYDAY, EVERY DAY

Everyday is an adjective and should only be used to modify a noun or pronoun.

Incorrect: Going to chapel is an *every day* occurrence.

Correct: Going to chapel is an *everyday* occurrence.

Every day has two words. The first is an adjective, and the second is a noun.

Incorrect: *Everyday* I get up early.

Correct: *Every day* I get up early.

23. EXPECT, SUSPECT

Do not confuse *expect* with *suspect*.

Expect is a verb indicating that one is waiting for or anticipating a future occurrence with a belief that it will happen.

Incorrect: Charlotte *suspected* the storm to subside by dawn.

Correct: Charlotte *expected* the storm to subside by dawn.

Suspect has several different definitions; but the definition that contributes most to the confusion between this word and *expect* is this: “to believe in something to be so.”

Incorrect: Mitchell *expected* that mice were living in his attic when he discovered holes in the boxes he stored there.

Correct: Mitchell *suspected* that mice were living in his attic when he discovered holes in the boxes he stored there.

24. FAZE, PHASE

These two words sound the same but have completely different meanings; don't mix them up.

Faze is a verb which means to disturb or fluster.

Correct: Getting hit in the head by the baseball didn't even *faze* Charlie.

Phase is a noun which generally means a stage in a process.

Correct: Our church is nearly done with the first *phase* of our building project.

25. FEWER, LESS

Use the word *fewer* to indicate the number of things that can be counted individually.

Incorrect: *Less* gifts were given this year than last year.

Correct: *Fewer* gifts were given this year than last year.

Use the word *less* to indicate an amount of things that cannot be counted individually.

Incorrect: Brian put *fewer* helium in the red balloons.

Correct: Brian put *less* helium in the red balloons.

26. FORMALLY, FORMERLY

Do not confuse *formally* with *formerly*.

Formally is an adverb indicating that something was done in an official, formal manner.

Correct: The committee *formally* elected their new treasurer.

Formerly is an adverb too, but it indicates that something was in the past.

Correct: *Formerly* the vice-principal, Mr. Nesbit became the school's guidance counselor.

27. HAD OF

Change *had of* to simply *had*.

Incorrect: I wish I *had of* known of the changes earlier.

Correct: I wish I *had* known of the changes earlier.

28. HAD OUGHT

Change *had ought* to simply *ought*.

Incorrect: She *had ought* to clean the house before the visitors arrive.

Correct: She *ought* to clean the house before the visitors arrive.

29. HAVE, OF

The preposition *of* should not be used in place of the verb *have*.

Incorrect: He must of gotten the wrong address.

Correct: He must have gotten the wrong address.

30. HISSELF, THEIRSELVES

Avoid using the nonstandard pronouns *hissself* and *theirselves*.

Incorrect: The athlete discouraged hissself from eating too late at night.

Correct: The athlete discouraged himself from eating too late at night.

Incorrect: They picked up the table theirselves.

Correct: They picked up the table themselves.

31. IN, INTO, IN TO

Use the word *into* when indicating entrance or movement from outside to inside.

Poor: Janine walked *in* the store.

Better: Janine walked *into* the store.

Use the word *in* when indicating that something or someone is already inside of something else.

Incorrect: Michael was *into* his seat when the bell rang.

Correct: Michael was *in* his seat when the bell rang.

Be careful to use the two separate words *in to* when indicating the giving over of something.

Incorrect: Fred turned his paper *into* Mrs. Bell.

Correct: Fred turned his paper *in to* Mrs. Bell.

32. IRREGARDLESS

Do not *irregardless* in place of *regardless*.

Incorrect: *Irregardless* of the weather, Alexander still ran in the morning as part of his training for the track meet.

Correct: *Regardless* of the weather, Alexander still ran in the morning as part of his training for the track meet.

33. IT'S, ITS

Learn to use the correct spelling.

It's is a contraction that means "it is."

Incorrect: *Its* so wonderful that you're going to Bible college.

Correct: *It's* so wonderful that you're going to Bible college.

Its is a word showing possession. It means something belongs to 'it'.

Incorrect: My book does not have writing on *it's* cover.

Correct: My book does not have writing on *its* cover.

34. LEARN, TEACH

Learn means to acquire knowledge.

Correct: She wants to learn how to grow a garden.

Teach means to impart knowledge.

Correct: The gardener is going to teach her how to plant.

35. LIKE

The word *like* is a perfectly good English word, and it is correctly used in sentences like this:

Correct: The young man does *like* the young lady.

Correct: I want to marry a man *like* dear old dad.

The word *like* is used incorrectly when it is used to mean 'said' in the popular culture.

Incorrect: She was *like*, "I can't believe that."

Incorrect: And he was *like*, "I can't believe that either."

Incorrect: And she was *like*, "It was horrible."

Incorrect: And he was *like*, "Yeah, I know."

36. LOOSE, LOSE

The word *loose* has many uses. It is usually used as an adjective meaning to be unrestricted, or not tightly stretched.

Correct: Because Pierre lost ten pounds, his trousers were *loose*.

Lose is a verb which generally means to misplace something.

Correct: Did you *lose* your car keys again?

37. MRS., MISS, MS.

Mrs. is a title referring to a married woman.

Correct: Mrs. Mason works with her husband at the church.

Miss is a title referring to a girl or an unmarried woman.

Correct: Miss Lang is going to have her wedding reception at the lodge.

Ms. is a title commonly used when the marital status of a woman is unknown or when the distinction between a married and an unmarried woman is purposely avoided.

The title of *Ms.* was put forward by the women's liberation movement in an effort to indicate that marriage and marital status were unimportant; therefore, from the Christian point of view, we avoid this abbreviation. Instead, seek to find the woman's marital status. If you cannot find it, use just her name.

Avoid: Dear Ms. Downey, You have been selected to participate in our survey!

Use: Dear Elaine, You have been selected to participate in our survey!

38. PRECEDE, PROCEED

These two words sound similar but have very different meanings.

Precede is a verb which means to come before.

Correct: Earthquakes often *precede* volcanic eruptions.

Proceed is a verb which means to go on or move forward.

Correct: After a short break, I *proceeded* to work on my term paper.

39. PRETTY

The word *pretty*, when used as an adverb, indicates to some extent. This word can be overused, and it is often better to use a different adverb.

Poor: I am *pretty* nervous about singing in tonight's concert.

Better: I am fairly nervous about singing in tonight's concert.

40. PRINCIPAL, PRINCIPLE

Don't accidentally misspell these two words that have different meanings.

Principal is either an adjective or a noun. It means the main or most important thing.

When referring to a person, it usually means the leader of a school.

Incorrect: My *principle* contribution to the project was money.

Correct: My *principal* contribution to the project was money.

Correct: Larry was called to the *principal's* office during English class.

Principle is always a noun. It means a general or fundamental law or truth.

Incorrect: The young Muslim said he agreed with Hezbollah's *principals* but opposed its tactics.

Correct: The young Muslim said he agreed with Hezbollah's *principles* but opposed its tactics.

41. REASON IS BECAUSE

Change *reason is because* to *reason is that* or simply to the word *because*.

Incorrect: The reason our flight was delayed is because the weather became stormy.

Correct: The reason our flight was delayed is that the weather became stormy.

Correct: Our flight was delayed because the weather became stormy.

42. SHUDDER, SHUTTER

Do not confuse the words shudder and shutter.

The word *shudder* means to quiver or tremble.

Incorrect: Tom *shuttered* when he realized how narrowly he had missed hitting the pedestrian.

Correct: Tom *shuddered* when he realized how narrowly he had missed hitting the pedestrian.

The word *shutter* usually refers to a type of covering for a window or for the device that limits light from reaching a camera lense.

Incorrect: Please open the *shudders* and let in some light.

Correct: Please open the *shutters* and let in some light.

43. SOUL WINNING/ SOUL-WINNING

The words *soul winning* contain the present or past participle form of the two-word verb “soul win.” When used as a gerund, *soul winning* functions, as all gerunds do, as a noun.

Incorrect: I was *soulwinning* this afternoon.

Incorrect: I was *soul-winning* this afternoon.

Correct: I was *soul winning* this afternoon. (*soul winning* is the main verb of the sentence)

Correct: *Soul winning*, simply sharing the gospel with the unsaved, is commanded of all Christians. (*soul winning* is a gerund, the subject of the sentence)

Soul-winning is an adjective.

Incorrect: I attend a great *soulwinning* church.

Incorrect: I attend a great *soul winning* church.

Correct: I attend a great *soul-winning* church.

44. STATIONARY, STATIONERY

The word *stationary* means not moving or fixed in position.

Incorrect: Carla was sore after riding the *stationery* bike for two hours.

Incorrect: Carla was sore after riding the *stationary* bike for two hours.

The word *stationery* refers to the paper and envelopes used for letter writing.

Incorrect: I wrote a letter to my mother on the new *stationary*.

Correct: I wrote a letter to my mother on the new *stationery*.

45. THAN, THEN

Than is used when comparing.

Correct: This year’s baseball team is better than last year’s team.

Then is used when referring to a time or order following.

Correct: First, we practiced our pitching, then our batting.

46. THEIR, THERE, THEY’RE

Their is a word that shows possession. It means something that belongs to them.

Incorrect: I saw *there* car in the parking lot.

Incorrect: I saw *they’re* car in the parking lot.

Correct: I saw *their* car in the parking lot.

There is a word which shows location.

Incorrect: Did you go *their* on vacation?

Incorrect: Did you go *they’re* on vacation?

Correct: Did you go *there* on vacation?

They’re is a contraction which means “they are.”

Incorrect: I invited them, and *their* coming to church tonight!

Incorrect: I invited them, and *there* coming to church tonight!

Correct: I invited them, and *they’re* coming to church tonight!

47. TO, TOO, TWO

The word *to* is a common preposition.

Incorrect: Do not be late *too* class.

Incorrect: Do not be late *two* class.

Correct: Do not be late *to* class.

The word *too* means also.

Incorrect: Would you like some popcorn *to*?

Incorrect: Would you like some popcorn *two*?

Correct: Would you like some popcorn *too*?

The word *two* is a number.

Incorrect: Jessica ate *to* tacos.

Incorrect: Jessica ate *too* tacos.

Correct: Jessica ate *two* tacos.

48. USED TO COULD

Change *used to could* to *used to be able to*.

Incorrect: He *used to could* run very quickly.

Correct: He *used to be able to* run very quickly.

49. WHERE, WHEN

Avoid using *where* or *when* when introducing a definition.

Incorrect: A referee is *where* someone judges the proceedings in a game.

Correct: A referee is someone who judges the proceedings in a game.

50. YOUR, YOU'RE

Your is a word that shows possession. It means something that belongs to you.

Incorrect: You did very well on *you're* test.

Correct: You did very well on *your* test.

You're is a contraction which means "you are."

Incorrect: I know *your* in there!

Correct: I know *you're* in there!