

Diction

EN102

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. ACCESS, EXCESS

The word (and transitive verb) *access* means "to get into."

Incorrect: *I could not excess the door through the garage.*

Correct: *To access the mainframe, you must first enter the password.*

The word (and adjective) *excess* means "an abundance of."

Incorrect: *He had an access of Christmas presents to open.*

Correct: *His portfolio was in excess of \$20 million.*

4. AD, ED, EXAM, LAB, MATH, PHONE

These words are colloquial (pertaining to conversation) and should not to be used in formal writing. In formal writing, use the full form: **advertisement, education, examination, laboratory, mathematics, and telephone.**

5. ADOPTED, ADOPTIVE

The correct use of these words has been summarized this way by usage commentators: "adopted children, adoptive parents."

Correct: David was *adopted* when he was two months old.

Correct: His *adoptive* parents are Frank and Hilda Von Steed.

6. ADVISE, ADVICE

Do not confuse the word *advise* with *advice*. *Advise* is a verb. *Advice* is a noun.

Incorrect: Pastor Jones *adviced* Frank about his spiritual condition.

Correct: It was Jane's job to *advise* Paul about his new assignment.

Incorrect: Did you give him the *advise* he was wanting?

Correct: You asked for my *advice*, so I gave it.

7. 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.

8. 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."

9. ALL, ALL OF

Though either may be used in a sentence, *all* of should be used before personal pronouns, indefinite pronouns, and possessive nouns.

Correct: *All* the utensils have been washed and dried.

Correct: *All of* Jim's pencils are gone.

10. 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.

11. 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*!

12. 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.

13. A.M., P.M.

When using time abbreviations, remember that you do not need to use A.M. or P.M. if you have already indicated somewhere in the sentence the hour of the day.

Incorrect: I wake up at 5:00 *a.m.* in the morning.

Correct: I wake up at 5:00 in the morning.

Correct: I wake up at 5:00 *a.m.*

14. AMOUNT, NUMBER

Use the word *number* to indicate an amount that can be counted individually and *amount* to refer to an innumerable mass.

Correct: A vast *amount* of space is needed for all the furniture.

Correct: The *number* of computers in his office is quite unbelievable!

15. 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.

16. ANXIOUS, EAGER

Do not use the word *anxious* for *eager*. To be *anxious* is to be uneasy or fearful; to be *eager* is to have an enthusiastic desire.

Example: Christian was *eager* to graduate from high school but *anxious* about deciding what to do with his life afterward.

17. ANYONE, ANY ONE

The correct use of this set of words is based on how you form them. By forming *anyone* as one word, you indicate its usage as a pronoun. By separating the word into *any* and *one*, the set becomes a pronoun with a modifier.

Correct: *Anyone* would be proud to have John as their son.

Correct: *Any one* of those men would make a great senator.

18. ANYWHERE, NOWHERE, SOMEWHERE, EVERYWHERE, ANYWAYS

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

Incorrect: I have *nowheres* to put this box.

Correct: I have *nowhere* to put this box.

19. ARE, OUR, HOUR

These words are similar in sound but completely different in usage. The word *are* is a verb, *our* is an adjective, and *hour* is a noun and relates to time.

Example: *We are* very eager to meet *our* new teacher in the next *hour* or so.

20. 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.

21. BEING AS, BEING THAT

If *being as* and *being that*—used as conjunctions—are part of your dialect, you may use them; but usage commentators warn that those unfamiliar with your style of language may note the odd use of them. Do not use in formal writing as Standard English. Also, *being as* or *being that* should not be used for *because* or *since*.

Incorrect: *Being that* his testimony was damaging to their case, the defense called for a recess.

Correct: *Because* his testimony was damaging to their case, the defense called for a recess.

22. 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.

23. 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.

24. 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* my dictionary.

Correct: Let me *lend* you my dictionary.

25. CAN, MAY

Can indicates *capability*.

Correct: Can you please check the pie?

May indicates *consent*.

Correct: May I be dismissed from class?

26. CAN'T HARDLY, CAN HARDLY

Can't hardly isn't Standard English.

Incorrect: I *can't hardly* wait to see what the surprise is!

Correct: I *can hardly* wait to see what the surprise is!

27. 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.

28. 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.

29. DONE

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

Incorrect: They *done* finished that job.

Correct: They *have* finished that job.

30. 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.

31. 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.

32. DOUBLE SUBJECT

Avoid using a double subject..

Incorrect: His family they went on vacation.

Correct: His family went on vacation.

33. EQUALLY AS

Do not follow the word *equally* with *as*.

Correct: He is as entertaining as his brother.

Correct: He is *equally* entertaining.

34. 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: I read my Bible *everyday*.

Correct: I read my Bible *every day*.

35. EXCITED, EXITED

Do not misspell *excited* or *exited*.

Excited is the past tense of the verb *excite* which means to be energized.

Correct: The Grants were *excited* to hear the news that a new grandchild was expected.

Exited is the past tense of the verb *exit* which means to depart.

Correct: The class calmly *exited* the room when the fire alarm sounded.

36. 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.

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 trust in something to be so."

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

37. FAZE, PHASE

The word (and transitive verb) *faze* means "to disturb the composure of."

Correct: Nothing *fazes* her.

Phase has several different definitions; but the definition we use the most is probably this: "a distinguishable part in a course, development or cycle."

Correct: The early *phases* of her career were filled with hardships.

38. 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.

39. 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.

40. 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.

41. 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.

42. 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.

43. HISSELF, THEIRSELVES

Avoid using the nonstandard pronouns *hisself* 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.

44. IMPLY, INFER

To imply means "to indicate in ways other than direct statement" or "to suggest."

Example: During her conversation with her coworkers, Mary *implied* that she was ready to retire.

To infer means "to draw conclusions from facts."

Example: Are you implying, Greg, that I am not working as hard as you? I *inferred* such an idea from your tone!

45. 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.

46. INFERIOR THAN

The word *inferior* should be followed by the word *to* instead of *than*.

Example: Doug, the youngest in his family, could not help but feel *inferior to* his five older brothers.

47. 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.

48. ITS, IT'S

The word *its* is an adjective relating to it or itself, especially as possessor, agent or object of an action:

Example: The dog is going to *its* kennel for the night.

It's is a contraction for it is or it has:

Example: *It's* such a beautiful day!

49. KIND OF, SORT OF

Kind of and *sort of* should be preceded by *that* or *this* when referring to a singular object. *Kinds of* and *sorts of* should be preceded by *these* or *those* when referring to plural objects.

Incorrect: These *kind of* berries are my least favorite.

Correct: These *kinds of* berries are my least favorite—I'm allergic to them!

50. LAY, LIE

Lay means "to put down."

Correct: Now I *lay* me down to sleep.

Lie means "to be at rest."

Correct: She *lies* down for a nap every day.

51. LET, LEAVE

Do not use *let* for *leave*. *Let* means to allow or permit; *leave* means to depart or to cause to stay.

Incorrect: *Let* me alone!

Correct: *Leave* me alone!

Correct: *Let* the little children come unto me.

Correct: *Leave* the basket of food on the front porch.

52. 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.

53. 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."

54. LOOSE, LOSE

Errors concerning this particular set of words can be attributed to the misspellings of them rather than to the confusion of their meanings. The word *loose* is often used as an adjective and indicates freeness from strict attachments, and the word *lose* is a verb and indicates loss.

Example: The new jerseys fit *loosely* on the soccer team.

Example: They have yet to *lose* a game.

55. MAYBE, MAY BE

The correct use of this set of words is based on how you form them. By forming *maybe* as one word, you indicate its usage as an adverb. By separating the word into *may* and *be*, the set becomes a verb phrase.

Example: There *may be* a way out of this traffic jam.

Example: *Maybe* he could help us with our project.

56. MEDIA, PHENOMENA

These are plural forms and should be used with plural verbs. The singular is *medium* and *phenomenon*.

Incorrect: The *media is* going to cover the press conference.

Correct: The *media are* going to cover the press conference.

57. MYSELF

Myself has two correct uses:

It is a reflexive pronoun that should only be used as an object referring back to the subject *I*.

Incorrect: Mr. Johnson gave a scolding to Liam and *myself*.

Correct: I treated *myself* to a latte from Starbucks.

It is an intensive pronoun that can be used to show emphasis.

Correct: I will take the garbage out *myself*.

58. 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!

59. 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.

60. 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.

61. PRINCIPAL, PRINCIPLE

These words sound alike but are completely different in usage. *Principal* can be used as a noun (a person in a leading position, or a matter of importance) or an adjective (chief or most important):

Example: The *principal* of our school is Nathan Strong.

Example: The *principal* goal of our church is to save souls.

Principle is only a noun and means a rule, code of conduct or a devotion to right.

Example: She wants us to follow the *principle* that set forth by the previous administrator.

Correct: He is a man of *principle*.

62. RAISE, RISE

Raise means "to lift," and *rise* means "to get up."

Example: *Rise* to the challenge, and *raise* your personal standards to reflect your dedication to Jesus Christ!

63. 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.

64. SET, SIT

Set means "to place," and *sit* means "to be seated."

Example: When did you *set* your apple pie to cool on the windowsill?

Example: We always *sit* in the balcony at our church.

65. SHUDDER, SHUTTER

Do not confuse the words shudder and shutter.

The word *shudder* means to quiver or tremble.

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 lens.

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

66. SOUL WINNING, SOUL-WINNING

The two-word form *soul winning* is a noun; the hyphenated form *soul-winning* is an adjective.

Example: *Soul winning* is a weekly activity at our church.

Example: We attended a *soul-winning* clinic in Napa last month.

67. 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*.

68. TERRIBLE, TERRIBLY

The adjective *terrible* is often used to express distaste.

Example: Your actions at the school picnic were *terrible*!

Do not use the word *terribly* when more formal words like *very* or *extremely* can be used.

Incorrect: Adam was *terribly* excited about his writings being published in the local editorial.

Correct: Adam was *extremely* excited about his writings being published in the local editorial.

69. 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.

70. THEIR, THEY'RE, THERE

Their is an adjective, *they're* is a contraction for they are, and *there* can be used as an adverb, noun, pronoun or adjective.

Example: *They're* very happy with *their* decision to honeymoon *there*.

71. TO, TOO, TWO

These three words sound the same but have very different meanings. The preposition *to* is a "function" word; *too* is an adverb and means also or excessive; *two* refers to the number and can be used as a noun, pronoun or adjective.

Example: The secretary was *too* busy *to* answer the *two* telephone lines that were ringing.

72. 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.

73. WANT IN, WANT ON, WANT OUT, WANT THROUGH

These four sets of *informal* words indicate one's desire to be in the expressed direction. Do not use them in formal writing.

Incorrect: She *wants in* the car.

Correct: She *wants to get in* the car.

74. WEATHER, WHETHER

These two words sound the same but have very different meanings. The word *weather* can be a noun referring to atmospheric conditions or a verb meaning to withstand adverse conditions. The conjunction *whether* is a "function" word usually used with the word *or*.

Correct: What is the *weather* supposed to be like tomorrow?

Correct: I don't know *whether* he is coming or not.

75. WHERE, THAT

Remember that *where* is an adverb and indicates location. Do not use *where* when you should use *that*.

Incorrect: Did you read in the bulletin *where* \$250,000 was given to the auditorium project?

Correct: That is the chapel *where* Edward and Jessica exchanged wedding vows.

76. 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.

77. WHICH, WHO, THAT

Remember that pronouns must agree with their antecedents. Use *who* for persons and *which* and *that* for other nouns.

Correct: Bryan is a studious young boy *who* reads in between class periods. Presently, he is reading *Bloopers in History*, *which* was recommended to him by his history teacher.

78. WOULD OF, WOULD HAVE

Do not use *would of* for *would have*.

Correct: Stanley *would have* auditioned for the school play if he weren't so preoccupied with other extracurricular activities.

79. YOUR, YOU'RE

The word *your* is an adjective relating to you, yourself or yourselves, especially as possessor(s), agent(s) or object(s):

Correct: We are very pleased with *your* contributions to this college.

You're is a contraction for you are:

Correct: *You're* a wonderful wife, mother, Christian, and friend.