ENGLISH MANUAL

CHAPTER 20

HOMOPHONES AND CONFUSING WORDS

HOMOPHONES AND CONFUSING WORDS

360 DEGREES AND 180 DEGREES

When you turn 360 degrees you've completed a circle and are back where you started. So if you want to describe a position that's diametrically opposed to another, the expression you want is not "360 degrees away" but "180 degrees away."

A/AN

If the word following begins with a vowel (a/e/i/o/u) the word you want is "an": "Have an apple." If the word following begins with a consonant, but begins with a vowel sound, you still need "an": "An X-ray."

When the following word definitely begins with a consonant sound, you need "a": "A snake just crawled this way."

A.D.

"A.D." does not mean "after death," as many people suppose. "B.C." stands for the English phrase "Before Christ," but "A.D." stands confusingly for a Latin phrase: *anno domini* ("in the year of the Lord"—the year Jesus was born).

AM/PM

"AM" stands for the Latin phrase *Ante Meridiem* —which means "before noon"—and "PM" stands for *Post Meridiem* : "after noon."

ABLE TO

"Able to" means "can." Many people use them both in a single sentence, which is wrong: "I can able to come"!
The correct form of saying this would be "I can come" or "I will be able to come."

ABSORBTION/ABSORPTION

Although it's "absorbed" and "absorbing," the correct spelling of the noun is "absorption."

ABSTRUSE/OBTUSE

When you mean to criticize something for being needlessly complex or difficult to understand, the word you need is not "obtuse," but "abstruse."

"Obtuse," any child can tell you, is the angle of more than 90 degrees, as in geometry.

ACCENT MARKS

Words adopted from foreign languages sometimes carry their accent marks with them, as in "fiancé," "protégé," and "cliché." As words become more at home in English, they tend to shed the marks: "Café" is often spelled "cafe."

ACCESS/GET ACCESS TO

"Access" is one of many nouns that has been turned into a verb in recent years: "You can access your account online."

ACCEPT/EXCEPT

Though these two words may sound similar, they mean two very different things. "Accept" is to agree to receive an offer. "Except" means to exclude from or leave out. You will better understand the meaning by reading the following sentence:

If you offer me 'Gems' chocolates I will gladly *accept* them—*except* for the violet ones.

ACCIDENTLY/ACCIDENTALLY

You can remember this one by remembering how to spell "accidental." There are quite a few words with *-ally* suffixes (like "incidentally") which are not to be confused with words that have "-ly" suffixes (like "independently"). "Incidental" is a word, but "independental" is not.

ACTUAL FACT/ACTUALLY

"In actual fact" is an unnecessarily complicated way of saying "actually."

ADD/AD

"Advertisement" is abbreviated "ad," not "add."

ADAPT/ADOPT

You can adopt a child or a custom or a law; in all of these cases you are making the object of the adoption your own, accepting it. If you *adapt* something, however, you are changing it.

ADVANCE/ADVANCED

When you hear about something in advance, earlier than other people, you get advance notice or information. "Advanced" means "complex or sophisticated."

ADVICE/ADVISE

"Advice" is the noun, "advise" the verb: "I advised him" and "He received an advice."

ADVISER/ADVISOR

"Adviser" and "advisor" are equally fine spellings. There is no distinction between them.

AFFECT/EFFECT

Affect is a verb which means 'to have influence on' or 'to produce an effect or change'.
Eg: "A cold weather may affect your health."
Effect is a noun which means 'result' or 'consequence'.
Eg: Your fever is an effect of cold weather.

AFFLUENCE/EFFLUENCE

Wealth brings affluence; sewage is effluence.

ALL AND ALL/ALL IN ALL

"The dog got into the fried chicken, we forgot the sunscreen, and the kids starting whining at the end, but all in all the picnic was a success." "All in all" is a traditional phrase which can mean "all things considered," "after all," or "nevertheless." People unfamiliar with the traditional wording often change it to "all and all," but this is nonstandard.

ALL OF THE SUDDEN/ALL OF A SUDDEN

An unexpected event happens not "all of *the* sudden" but "all of *a* sudden."

ALMOST

Like "only," "almost" must come immediately before the word or phrase it modifies: "She almost gave one lakh rupees to the orphanage" means something quite different from "She gave almost one lakh rupees to the orphanage."

ALOUD/ALLOWED

If you think Grandma *allowed* the kids to eat too much ice cream, you'd better not say so *aloud*, or her feelings will be hurt. "Aloud" means "out loud" and refers to sounds (most often speech) that can be heard by others. But this word is often misused when people mean "allowed," which means "permitted."

ALRIGHT/ALL RIGHT

The correct form of this phrase has become so rare in the popular press that many readers have probably never noticed that it is actually two words.

ALTAR/ALTER

An *altar* is that platform at the front of a church or in a temple; to *alter* something is to change it.

ALTERNATE/ALTERNATIVE

Although UK authorities disapprove, in U.S. usage, "alternate" is frequently an adjective, substituted for the older "alternative": "an alternate route." "Alternate" can also be a noun; a substitute delegate is, for instance, called an "alternate." But when you're speaking of "every other" as in "our club meets on alternate Tuesdays," you can't substitute "alternative."

ALTOGETHER/ALL TOGETHER

"Altogether" is an adverb meaning "completely," "entirely." For example: "When he first saw the examination questions, he was altogether baffled." "All together," in contrast, is a phrase meaning "in a group."
For example: "The wedding guests were gathered all together in the garden."

ALUMNUS/ALUMNI

We used to have "alumnus" (male singular), "alumni" (male plural), "alumna" (female singular) and "alumnae" (female plural); but the latter two are now popular only among older female graduates, with the first two terms becoming unisex. However, it is still important to distinguish between one alumnus and a stadium full of alumni.

AMONGST/AMONG

Although "amongst" has not dated nearly as badly as "whilst"; it is still less common to use in speech than "among."

AMORAL/IMMORAL

"Amoral" is a rather technical word meaning "unrelated to morality." When you mean to denounce someone's behaviour, call it "immoral."

AMOUNT/NUMBER

Amount relates to quantities of things that are measured in bulk; *number* to things that can be counted.

AND ALSO/AND, ALSO

"And also" is unnecessary; say just "and" or "also."

AND/OR

The legal phrase "and/or," indicating that you can either choose between two alternatives or choose both of them, has proved irresistible in other contexts and is now widely acceptable though it irritates some readers as jargon. However, you can logically use it only when you are discussing choices which may or may not both be done.

ANOTHER WORDS/IN OTHER WORDS

When you reword a statement, you can preface it by saying "in other words." The phrase is not "another words."

ANYMORE/ANY MORE

In the first place, the traditional (though now uncommon) spelling is as *two* words: "any more" as in "We do not sell bananas any more." In the second place, it should not be used at the beginning of a sentence as a synonym for "nowadays."

ANYTIME/ANY TIME

Though it is often compressed into a single word by analogy with "anywhere" and similar words, "any time" is traditionally a two-word phrase.

ANYWAYS/ANYWAY/ANY WAY

"Anyways" at the beginning of a sentence usually indicates that the speaker has resumed a narrative thread: "Anyways, I had never cared about it." It also occurs at the end of phrases and sentences, meaning "in any case": "He wasn't interested anyways." A slightly less rustic quality can be imparted to these sentences by substituting the more formal

anyway. Neither expression is a good idea in formal written English. The two-word phrase "any way" has many legitimate uses, however: "Is there any way to prevent the impending disaster?"

APART/A PART

Paradoxically, the one-word form implies separation while the two-word form implies union.

APPRAISE/APPRISE

When you estimate the value of something, you *appraise* it. When you inform people of a situation, you *apprise* them of it.

AROUND/ABOUT

Lots of people think it's just nifty to say things like "We're having ongoing discussions around the proposed merger." This strikes some of us as irritating jargon. We feel it should be "discussions about" rather than "around."

AS BEST AS/AS BEST

You can try to be as good as you can be, but it's not standard to say that you do something "as best as you can." You need to eliminate the second "as" when "good" changes to "best." You can try to do something as best you can. You can also do the best that you can (or even better, the best you can).

AS FAR AS/AS FAR AS .... IS CONCERNED

Originally people used to say things like "As far as music is concerned, I especially love Rap." Recently they have begun to drop the "is concerned" part of the phrase. Perhaps this shift was influenced by confusion with a similar phrase, "as for." "As for money, I don't have any," is fine; "As far as money, I don't have any," is clumsy.

AS FOLLOW/AS FOLLOWS

"My birthday requests are as follows." This standard phrase doesn't change with the number of items that follow. It's never correct to say "as follow."

ASPECT/RESPECT

When used to refer to different elements of or perspectives on a thing or idea, these words are closely related, but not interchangeable. It's "in all respects," not "in all aspects." Similarly, one can say "in some respects" but not "in some aspects." One says "in this respect," not "in this aspect." One looks at all "aspects" of an issue, not at all "respects."

ASSURE/ENSURE/INSURE

To "assure" a person of something is to make him or her confident of it. And to "ensure" that something happens is to make certain that it does, and to "insure" is to issue an insurance policy.

AT ALL

"At all" is traditionally used in negative contexts: "Can't you give me any help at all?"

ATTRIBUTE/CONTRIBUTE

When trying to give credit to someone, say that you *attribute* your success to their help, not *contribute*.

AURAL/ORAL

"Aural" has to do with things you hear, "oral" with things you say, or relating to your mouth.

AVENGE/REVENGE

When you try to get vengeance for people who've been wronged, you want to *avenge* them. You can also avenge a wrong itself: "He avenged the murder by taking vengeance on the killer." Substituting "revenge" for "avenge" in such contexts is very common, but frowned on by some people. They feel that if you seek revenge in the pursuit of justice you want to avenge wrongs; not revenge them.

AVOCATION/VOCATION

Your avocation is just your hobby; don't mix it up with your job: your vocation.

A WHILE/AWHILE

When "awhile" is spelled as a single word, it is an adverb meaning "for a time" ("stay awhile"); but when "while" is the object of a prepositional phrase, like "Lend me your pen for a while" the "while" must be separated from the "a." (But if the preposition "for"

were lacking in this sentence, "awhile" could be used in this way: "Lend me your pen awhile."

BACKWARD/BACKWARDS

As an adverb, either word will do: "put the shirt on backward" or "put the shirt on backwards." However, as an adjective, only "backward" will do: "a backward glance." When in doubt, use "backward."

BARE/BEAR

There are actually three words here. Bear has two meanings. The simple one is the big growly creature. Bear:- "Mothers *bear* children." "Perseverant people *bear* with all difficulties." Both mean "carry" (in the case of mothers, the meaning has been extended from carrying the child during pregnancy to actually giving birth). "Sometimes babies are left bare-naked, especially in tropical countries." People often confuse between the former bear and bare. Use right words to convey the right message.

BASICLY / BASICALLY

There are "-ly" words and "-ally" words, and you basically just have to memorize which is which. But "basically" is very much overused and is often better avoided in favor of such expressions as "essentially," "fundamentally," or "at heart."

BEHAVIOURS

"Behaviour" has always referred to patterns of action, including multiple actions, and did not have a separate plural form until social scientists created it. Unless you are writing in psychology, sociology, anthropology, or a related field, it is better to avoid the use of "behaviours" in your writing.

BELIEF/BELIEVE

If you have it, it's a belief; if you do it, you believe. People can't have religious "believes"; they have religious *beliefs*.

BENEFACTOR/BENEFICIARY

Benefactors give benefits; beneficiaries receive them. We expect to hear of generous benefactors and grateful beneficiaries.

BESIDE/BESIDES

"Besides" can mean "in addition to" as in, "Besides this, I have cooked a lot for us." "Beside," in contrast, usually means "next to." "I sat beside Priya all evening." Using "beside" for "besides," won't usually get you in trouble; but using "besides" when you mean "next to" will.

BETTER

When someone says "I better get my assignment started; it's due tomorrow," he means, "I had better," abbreviated in speech to "I'd better." The same pattern is followed for "he'd better," "she'd better" and "they'd better."

BETWEEN

"Between 1939 to 1945" is incorrect —it should be "between 1939 and 1945"—but the error is not so obvious when it is written thus: "between 1939-1949." In this case, the "between" should be dropped altogether. Also incorrect are expressions like "there were between 15 to 20 people at the party." The correct expression is: "between 15 and 20 people."

BETWEEN YOU AND I / BETWEEN YOU AND ME

"Between you and me" is preferred in standard English.

BIAS/BIASED

A person who is influenced by a bias is *biased*. The expression is not "they're bias," but "they're biased." Also, many people say someone is "biased toward something or someone" when they mean "biased *against*." To have a bias toward something is to be biased in its favour.

BIWEEKLY/SEMIWEEKLY

Technically, a biweekly meeting occurs every two weeks and a semiweekly one occurs twice a week. The same is true of "bimonthly" and "semimonthly," and "biennial" and "semi-annual."

BOTH/EACH

There are times when it is important to use "each" instead of "both." People will be confused if you say "I gave both of the boys a cricket glove," meaning "I gave both of the boys cricket gloves." To make the meaning clear you should rather say, "I gave each of the boys a cricket glove."

BOUGHT/BROUGHT

If you pay for something, you've *bought* it; if you bring something you've *brought* it. These two words are probably interchanged most often out of mere carelessness.

BRAKE/BREAK

You brake to slow down. When you drop something that is fragile, you will break it.

BREACH/BREECH

Substitute a K for the CH in "breach" to remind you that the word has to do with breakage: you can breach (break through) a dam or breach (violate the terms of) a contract. "Breech" however, refers to rear ends, as in "breeches." Eg: "breech cloth."

BREATH/BREATHE

When you need to breathe, you take a breath. "Breathe" is the verb, "breath" the noun.

BROKE / BROKEN

When you break something, it's broken, not "broke," though a person or organization which has run out of money can be said in informal speech to be "broke." Otherwise, use "broke" only as the simple past tense of "break."

CANNOT/CAN NOT

These two spellings are largely interchangeable, but by far the most common is "cannot" and you should probably use it except when you want to insist: "No, you can *not* wipe the dog with my towel."

CARRIER/CAREER

Carrier is something that carries; unlike career which means vocation, job, occupation, etc.

CLASSIC/CLASSICAL

"Classical" usually describes things from ancient periods like classical Sanskrit poetry. "Classic" has a much looser meaning, describing things that are outstanding examples of their kind, like a classic car or even a classic blunder.

CLEANUP/CLEAN UP

"Cleanup" is usually a noun: "the cleanup of the toxic waste site will cost hundreds of crores." "Clean" is a verb in the phrase "clean up": "You can go to the mall after you clean up your room."

COLLABORATE/CORROBORATE

People who work together on a project *collaborate* (share their labour); people who support your testimony as a witness *corroborate* (strengthen by confirming) it.

COLLAGE/COLLEGE

You can paste together bits of paper to make a *collage*, but the institution of higher education is a *college*.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST/COMPARE

To compare two things is to note their similarities *and* their differences. There's no need to add "and contrast."

COMPARE TO/COMPARE WITH

These are sometimes interchangeable, but when you are stressing *similarities* between the items compared, the most common word is "*to*": "She compared his home-work to hers." If you are examining *both* similarities and differences, use "*with*": "The teacher compared Ram's answer paper with Ravi's to see whether they had cheated."

COMPLEMENT/COMPLIMENT

Originally these two spellings were used interchangeably, but they have come to be distinguished from each other in modern times. Most of the time the word people intend is "compliment": nice things said about someone.

"Complement," much less common, has a number of meanings associated with matching or completing. Complements supplement each other, each adding something the others lack.

COMPLEMENTARY/COMPLIMENTARY

When paying someone a compliment like, "I love what you've done with the kitchen!" you're being complimentary. A free bonus item is also a complimentary gift. But items or people that go well with each other are complementary.

COMPRISED OF/COMPOSED OF

Although "comprise" is used primarily to mean "to include," it is also often stretched to mean "is made up of." The most cautious route is to avoid using "of" after any form of "comprise" and substitute "is composed of."

CONFLICTED/CONFLICTING FEELINGS

Phrases like "conflicted feelings" or "I feel conflicted" are considered jargon by many, and out of place in formal writing. Use "I have conflicting feelings" instead, or write "I feel ambivalent."

CONGRADULATIONS/CONGRATULATIONS

It is not "congradulations," but "congratulations."

CONSCIENCE, CONSCIOUS, CONSCIOUSNESS

Your conscience makes you feel guilty when you do bad things, but your consciousness is your awareness. And if you are awake, you are conscious.

CONTINUAL/CONTINUOUS

"Continuous" refers to actions which are uninterrupted: "My upstairs neighbour played

his stereo continuously from 6:00 PM to 3:30 AM.” Continual actions, however, need not be uninterrupted, only repeated: “My father continually urges me to get a job.”

CONTRASTS/CONTRASTS WITH

“With” must not be omitted in sentences like this: “Dhanuja’s enthusiasm for cricket contrasts with Bhuvana’s devotion to chess.”

COPYWRITE/COPYRIGHT

You can copyright writing, but you can also copyright a photograph or song. The word has to do with securing *rights*. Thus, there is no such word as “copywritten”; it’s “copyrighted.”

CORE/CORPS/CORPSE

Apples have *cores*. A *corps* is an organization, like the Peace Corps. A *corpse* is a dead body.

COSTUMER/CUSTOMER

When you want a dress to be designed for you, you go to a costumer and thereby become his/her customer.

COUNCIL/COUNSEL/CONSUL

The first two words are pronounced the same but have distinct meanings. An official group that deliberates, like the Council on Foreign Relations, is a “council”; all the rest are “counsels”: your lawyer, advice, etc. A consul is a local representative of a foreign government.

CRITERIA/CRITERION

Criterion is singular; while criteria is plural. There are several words with Latin or Greek roots whose plural forms ending in *A* are constantly mistaken for singular ones

CRITICISM

“Criticism” is only a neutral term meaning simply “evaluating a work of literature or art.” Movie critics write about films they like as well as about films they dislike: writing of both kinds is called “criticism.”

CRITIQUE/CRITICIZE

A critique is a detailed evaluation of something. The formal way to request one is "give me your critique," though people often say informally "critique this"—meaning "evaluate it thoroughly." But "critique" as a verb is not synonymous with "criticize" and should not be routinely substituted for it.

You can write criticism on a subject, but you don't criticize on something, you just criticize it.

CURRANT/CURRENT

"Current" is an adjective having to do with the present time, and can also be a noun naming a thing that, like time, flows: electrical current, currents of public opinion. "Currant" refers only to little fruits.

DEFAMATION/DEFORMATION

Someone who defames you, seeking to destroy your reputation (making you ill-famed), is engaging in *defamation* of character. Only if someone succeeded in actually making you a worse person could you claim that they had *deformed* your character.

DEFUSE/DIFFUSE

You *defuse* a dangerous situation by treating it like a bomb and removing its fuse; to *diffuse*, in contrast, is to spread something out: "Air freshners diffuse a fragrance throughout the room."

DEPRECIATE/DEPRECATE

To depreciate something is to actually make it worse, whereas to deprecate something is simply to speak or think of it in a manner that demonstrates your low opinion of it.

DESERT/DESSERT

Perhaps these two words are confused partly because "dessert" is one of the few words in English with a double "S" pronounced like "Z." That impoverished stretch of sand called a desert can only afford one "S." In contrast, a pudding are an ice cream you have at the end of the meal is called a dessert, which has two "S."

DEVIANT/DEVIATE

The technical term used by professionals to label someone whose behaviour *deviates* (verb) from the norm is *deviant* (noun).

DEVICE/DEVISE

Device is a noun. A can-opener is a device. *Devise* is a verb. You can devise a plan for opening a can with a sharp rock instead.

DIALOGUE/DISCUSS

"Dialogue" as a verb in sentences like "The History Department will dialogue with the Dean about funding" is commonly used jargon in business and education settings, but abhorred by traditionalists. Say "have a dialogue" or "discuss" instead.

DIFFER/VARY

"Vary" can mean "differ," but saying "our opinions vary" makes it sound as if they were changing all the time when what you really mean is "our opinions differ." Pay attention to context when choosing one of these words.

DIFFERENT THAN/DIFFERENT FROM/TO

Americans say "different from," the British often say "different to," and those who don't know any better say "different than." However, you can usually get away with "different than" if a full clause follows: "Your pashmina shawl looks different than it used to since the cat slept on it."

DILEMMA/DIFFICULTY

A dilemma is a difficult choice, not just any difficulty or problem. Cleaning up after a hurricane is just a problem, though a difficult one.

DISBURSE/DISPERSE

You *disburse* money by taking it out of your purse and distributing it. If you refuse to hand out any money, the eager mob of beggars before you may *disperse* (scatter).

DISC/DISK

"Compact disc" is spelled with a "C" because that's how its inventors decided it should be rendered; but a computer hard disk is spelled with a "K."

DISCUSSED/DISGUST

Discussed is the past tense of the verb "discuss." Don't substitute for it the noun *disgust*, which means a strong feeling of dislike or distaste.

DO'S AND DON'TS/DOS AND DON'TS

One unusual use of apostrophes is to mark plurals of words when they are being treated *as* words, as in "pro's and con's," although plain old "pros and cons" without apostrophes is fine. But "don't" already has one apostrophe in it, and adding another looks awkward in the phrase "do's and don't's," so people wind up being inconsistent and writing "do's and don'ts." This makes no logical sense. You can also skip the extra apostrophes and write "dos and don'ts," unless you're afraid that "dos" will remind your readers of MS-DOS!

DOCTORIAL/DOCTORAL

Doctoral is occasionally misspelled—and often mispronounced— *doctorial*.

DOMINATE/DOMINANT

The verb is "dominate" the adjective is "dominant." The *dominant* chimpanzee tends to *dominate* the others.

DONE/DID

The past participle of "do" is "done," so it's not "they have did what they promised not to do" but "they have done. . . ."

But without a helping verb, the word is "did."

Nonstandard: "I done good on the test."

Standard: "I did well on the test."

DOUBLE NEGATIVES

It is not true, as some assert, that double negatives are always wrong; but the pattern in formal speech and writing is that two negatives equal a mild positive: "He is a not untalented guitarist" means he has some talent. In informal speech, however, double negatives are intended as negatives: "he hasn't got no talent" means he is a lousy musician.

One of the funniest uses of the literary double negative is Douglas Adams' description of a machine dispensing "a substance almost, but not quite, entirely unlike tea."

DOUBT THAT/DOUBT WHETHER/DOUBT IF

If you really *doubt that* something is true (suspect that it's false), use "doubt that": "I doubt that Shalini has really lost 5 pounds." If you want to express *uncertainty*, use *whether*: "I doubt whether we'll see the comet if the clouds don't clear soon." *Doubt if* can be substituted for "doubt whether," though it's considered somewhat more casual, but don't use it when you mean "doubt that."

DOUBTLESSLY/DOUBTLESS

Leave off the unnecessary "-ly" in "doubtless."

DOWNFALL/DRAWBACK

A *downfall* is something that causes a person's destruction, either literal or figurative. A *drawback* is not nearly so drastic, just a flaw or problem of some kind, and is normally applied to plans and activities, not to people.

DRANK/DRUNK

Many common verbs in English change form when their past tense is preceded by an auxiliary (helping) verb: "I ran, I have run." The same is true of "drink." Don't say "I've drank the beer" unless you want people to think you are drunk. An even more common error is "I drunk all the milk." It's "I've drunk the beer" and "I drank all the milk."

DUAL/DUEL

"Dual" is an adjective describing the two-ness of something—dual carburetors, for instance. A "duel" is a formal battle intended to settle a dispute.

DYEING/DYING

If you are using dye to change your favourite t-shirt from white to blue you are dyeing it; but if you don't breathe for so long that your face turns blue, you may be dying.

e.g./i.e.

When you mean "for example," use e.g. It is an abbreviation for the Latin phrase *exempli gratia*. When you mean "that is," use "i.e." It is an abbreviation for the Latin phrase *id est*.

ECOLOGY/ENVIRONMENT

"Ecology" is the study of living things in relationship to their environment. The word can also be used to describe the totality of such relationships; but it should not be substituted for "environment" in statements like "improperly discarded lead batteries harm the ecology." It's not the relationships that are being harmed, but nature itself: the batteries are harming the environment.

ECONOMIC/ECONOMICAL

Something is *economical* if it saves you money; but if you're talking about the effect of some measure on the world's economy, it's an *economic* effect.

EITHER ARE/EITHER IS

As a subject, "either" is singular. It's the opposite of "both," and refers to one at a time. But if "either" is modifying a subject in an "either . . . or" phrase, then the number of the verb is determined by the number of the second noun.

EMERGENT/EMERGENCY

The error of considering "emergent" to be the adjectival form of "emergency" is common only in medical writing, but it is becoming widespread. "Emergent" properly means "emerging" and normally refers to events that are just beginning—barely noticeable rather than catastrophic. "Emergency" is an adjective as well as a noun, so rather than writing "emergent care," write "emergency care."

EMIGRATE/IMMIGRATE

To "emigrate" is to *leave* a country. "Immigrate" means to *move* into a new country. The same distinction applies to "emigration" and "immigration." Note the double *'m'* in the second form. A migrant is someone who continually moves about.

EMPATHY/SYMPATHY

If you think you feel just like another person, you are feeling *empathy*. If you just feel sorry for another person, you're feeling *sympathy*.

EMULATE/IMITATE

People generally know what "imitate" means, but they sometimes don't understand that "emulate" is a more specialized word with a purely positive function, meaning to try to equal or match. Thus if you try to climb the same mountain your big brother did, you're *emulating* him; but if you copy his style of growing long hair, you're just *imitating* him.

ENGLISH/BRITISH

Americans tend to use the terms "British" and "English" interchangeably, but Great Britain is made up of England plus Scotland and Wales. If you are referring to this larger entity, the word you want is "British."

ENQUIRE/INQUIRE

These are alternative spellings of the same word.

ENVELOP/ENVELOPE

To wrap something up in a covering is to *envelop* it. The specific wrapping you put around a letter is an *envelope*.

ENVIOUS/JEALOUS

Although these are often treated as synonyms, there is a difference. You are *envious* of what others have that you lack. *Jealousy*, on the other hand, involves wanting to hold on to what you do have.

EPIC/EPOCH

An *epoch* is a long period of time. An *epic* is a poetic account of the heroic deeds of history.

ERROR/ERR

When you commit an *error* you *err.* The expression is "to *err* is human."

ETHICS/MORALS/MORALE

Strictly speaking, ethics are beliefs: if you have poor ethics, you have lax standards; but your morals are your behaviour: if you have poor morals, you behave badly. You can have high standards but still fail to follow them: strong ethics and weak morals. By far, the most common current use of "morale" is to label your state of mind, particularly how contented you are with life. A person with low *morals* is bad; but a person with low *morale* may be merely depressed.

EVERYDAY/EVERY DAY

Everyday is a perfectly good adjective, as in "I'm most comfortable in my everyday clothes." The problem comes when people turn the adverbial phrase "every day" into a single word. It is incorrect to write "I take a shower everyday." It should be "I take a shower *every day*."

EVERYONE/EVERY ONE

"Everyone" means "everybody" and is used when you want to refer to all the people in a group: "Everyone in my family likes fast music."

But if you're referring to the individuals who make up a group, then the phrase is "every one." Examples: "God bless us, every one" (may each individual in the group be blessed). "We wish each and every one of you a Merry Christmas" (every single one of you). In the phrase "each and every one" you should never substitute "everyone").

WHY LEARN ENGLISH?

Around 400,000 books world wide gets published every year in English on various subjects

EVERYTIME/EVERY TIME

"Every time" is always two separate words.

EXCAPE/ESCAPE

The proper spelling is "escape," say it that way too.

EXCEPTIONAL/EXCEPTIONABLE

If you take exception (object) to something, you find it "exceptionable." The more common word is "exceptional," applied to things that are out of the ordinary, usually in a positive way.

FAIR/FARE

When you send your daughter off to camp, you hope she'll fare well. That's why you bid her a fond farewell. "Fair" as a verb is a rare word meaning "to smooth a surface to prepare it for being joined to another."

FATAL/FATEFUL

A "fatal" event is a deadly one; a "fateful" one is determined by fate.

FEARFUL/FEARSOME

To be "fearful" is to be afraid. To be "fearsome" is to cause fear in others. Remember that someone who is *fierce* is *fearsome* rather than *fearful*.

FIANCE/FIANCEE

Your fiance is the *man* you plan to marry; your fiancee (or fiancée) is the *woman* you plan to marry.

FISCAL/PHYSICAL

The middle syllable of "physical" is often omitted in pronunciation, making it sound like the unrelated word "fiscal." Pronounce "I" distinctly to avoid confusion.

FLAIR/FLARE

"Flair" is conspicuous talent: "She has a *flair* for organization." "Flare" is either a noun meaning "flame" or a verb meaning to blaze with light or to burst into anger.

FLIER/FLYER

An aeroplane pilot is a *flier*, but the usual spelling for the word meaning "brochure" is *flyer*.

FOOT/FEET

You can use eight-foot boards to side a house, but "foot" is correct only in this sort of adjectival phrase combined with a number (and usually hyphenated). The boards are eight feet (not foot) long. It's always - feet per second and - feet away.

FOOTNOTES/ENDNOTES

Endnotes are now printed at the ends of chapters or at the end of a book or paper rather than at the 'foot' of the page. So, if you are using endnotes, don't call them "footnotes."

FORE/FOUR

"Fore" always has to do with the front of something; "four" is just the number "4."

FOR SALE/ON SALE

If you're selling something, it's "for sale"; but if you lower the price, it goes "on sale."

FOR SURE/SURE

In casual speech, when you agree with somebody's statement, you may say "for sure." You can also use the phrase to mean "for certain," as in "I couldn't tell for sure that the bench was wet until I sat on it."

But people often substitute this phrase when they should use plain old "sure," as in "I couldn't be for sure." That is wrong. It should be "I couldn't be sure."

FORCEFUL/FORCIBLE/FORCED

These words sometimes overlap, but generally "forceful" means "powerful," while "forcible" must be used instead to describe the use of force. "Forced" is often used for the latter purpose, but some prefer to reserve this word to describe something that is done or decided upon as a result of outside causes without necessarily being violent: "a forced landing," "a forced smile," "forced labour."

FORESEE/FORSEE

Foresee means "to see into the future." There are lots of words with the prefix "fore–" which are future-oriented, including "foresight," "foretell," "forethought," and "foreword," all of which are often misspelled by people who omit the *E*.

FOREVER/FOR EVER

UK writers most often use the two-word phrase "for ever," whereas Americans strongly prefer the one-word form "forever." Each nationality is liable to think the other is making a mistake.

FORMALLY/FORMERLY

These two are often mixed up in speech. If you are doing something in a formal manner, you are behaving *formally*; but if you previously behaved differently, you did so *formerly*.

FORWARD/FORWARDS/FOREWORD

Although some style books prefer "forward" and "toward" to "forwards" and "towards," none of these forms is really incorrect. The same generally applies to "backward" and "backwards." There are a few expressions in which only one of the two forms works: step forward, forward motion, a backward community. The spelling "foreword" applies exclusively to the introductory matter in a book.

FOUL/FOWL

A chicken is a *fowl*. A poke in the eye in a foot ball match is a *foul*.

GONE/WENT

This is one of those cases in which a common word has a past participle which is not formed by the simple addition of *-ED* and which often trip people up. "I should have went to the business meeting" should be "I should have gone to the business meeting." The same problem crops up with the two forms of the verb "to do." Say "I should have done my taxes before the IRS called" rather than "I should have did ..."

GOOD/WELL

"Good" is the adjective; "well" is the adverb. You do something *well*, but you give

someone something *good*. The exception is verbs of sensation in phrases such as "the pie smells good," or "I feel good."

HARDLY NEVER/HARDLY EVER

The expression is "hardly ever" or "almost never."

HARDY/HEARTY

These two words overlap somewhat, but usually the word you want is "hearty." The standard expressions are "a hearty appetite," "a hearty meal," "a hearty handshake," "a hearty welcome," and "a hearty applause." "Hardy" is one of the least used word.

HEAL/HEEL

Heal is what you do when you get better. Your *heel* is the back part of your foot.

HEAR/HERE

"I know I left my wallet *hear*!" is wrong.
"I left my wallet *here*" is the correct expression.

HEAVILY/STRONGLY

"Heavily" is not an all-purpose synonym for "strongly." It should be reserved for expressions in which literal or metaphorical weight or density is implied, like "heavily underlined," "heavily influenced," "heavily armed." Wrong expressions like "heavily admired" or "heavily characteristic of" should be abandoned.

HEROIN/HEROINE

Heroin is a highly addictive opium derivative; the main female character in a narrative is a *heroine*.

HOLE/WHOLE

"Hole" and "whole" have almost opposite meanings. A hole is a lack of something, like the hole in a doughnut. "Whole" means things like entire, complete, and healthy and is

used in expressions like "the whole thing," "whole milk," "whole wheat," and "with a whole heart."

HOW TO/HOW CAN I

You can ask someone how to publish a novel; but when you do, don't write "How to publish a novel?" Instead ask "How can I publish a novel?" or "How does someone publish a novel?" "How to" belongs in statements, not questions.

IDEA/IDEAL

Any thought can be an *idea*, but only the best ideas worth pursuing are *ideals*.

IF/WHETHER

"If" is used frequently in casual speech and writing. Substitute "if" with "whether" when speaking or writing formally.

IF I WAS/IF I WERE

Always say "If I were." The same goes for other pronouns: "you," "she," "he," and "it." Also, in the case of the plural pronouns "we" and "they" the form "was" is definitely nonstandard, of course, because it is a singular form.

IN SPITE OF/ DESPITE

Although "in spite of" is perfectly standard English, some people prefer "despite" because it is shorter. Be careful not to mix the two together by saying "despite of" or "in despite of."

INCIDENCE/INCIDENTS/INSTANCES

"Incidence" refers to the degree or the extent of occurrence of something. "Incidents," which is pronounced identically, is merely the plural of "incident," meaning "occurrences." "Instances" (not "incidences") are examples. Incidents can be used as instances only if someone is using them as examples.

INDEPTH/IN DEPTH

You can make an "in-depth" study of a subject by studying it "in depth," but never "indepth." The first, adjectival, use of the phrase given above is commonly hyphenated. "Indepth" is usually used as an adverb by people of limited vocabulary who would be better off saying "profoundly" or "thoroughly." Some of them go so far as to say that they have studied a subject "indepthly." Learnt to avoid this.

INFLAMMABLE

"Inflammable" means the same thing as "flammable": burnable, capable of being ignited or inflamed. Many people mistake the "in-" prefix as a negative.

INFLUENCIAL/INFLUENTIAL

If you have influence, you are "influential," not "influencial."

INPUT

Some people object to "input" as computer jargon that's proliferated unjustifiably in the business world. Be aware that it's not welcome in all settings; but whatever you do, don't misspell it "imput."

INSTALL/INSTILL

You *install* equipment (used in context with machines), you *instill* feelings or attitudes (used in context with people).

INSTANCES/INSTANTS

Brief moments are "instants," and examples of anything are "instances."

INTERNET/INTRANET

"Internet" is the proper name of the network most people connect to, and the word needs to be capitalized. However "intranet," a network confined to a smaller group, is a generic term which does not require capitalization.

INTERFACE/INTERACT

The use of the computer term "interface" as a verb, substituting for "interact," is widely objected to.

INTERGRATE/INTEGRATE

There are lots of words that begin with "inter-" but this is not one of them. The word is "integrate" with just one R.

INTO/IN TO

"Into" is a preposition which often answers the question, "where?" Eg: Throw it into the fire. In other instances where the words "in" and "to" just happen to find themselves neighbours, they must remain separate words. For instance, "Rahul dived back in to rescue the struggling boy." Here "to" belongs with "rescue" and means "in order to," not "where." (If the phrase had been "dived back into the water," "into" would be required.)

ITCH/SCRATCH

Strictly speaking, you scratch an itch. If you're trying to get rid of a tingly feeling on your back *scratch* it, don't *itch* it.

JOB TITLES

The general rule is to capitalize a title like "President" only when it is prefixed to a particular president's name: "President Abdul Kalam authored Wings of Fire" Similar patterns apply for titles like "principal," "senator," "supervisor," etc.

KICK-START/JUMP-START

You revive a dead battery by jolting it to life with a jumper cable: an extraordinary measure used in an emergency. So if you hope to stimulate a foundering economy, you want to jump-start it. Kick-starting is just the normal way of getting a motorcycle going.

LATE/FORMER

If you want to refer to your former husband, don't call him your "late husband" unless he's dead. ("late" means dead; "former" means previous or before).

LEAST/LEST

American English keeps alive the old word "lest" in phrases like "lest we forget," referring to something to be avoided or prevented. Many people mistakenly substitute the more familiar word "least" in these phrases.

LEAVE/LET

The colloquial use of “leave” to mean “let” in phrases like “leave me be” is not standard. “Leave me alone” is fine, though.

LET ALONE

“I can’t remember the title of the book we were supposed to read, let alone the details of the story.” In sentences like these you give a lesser example of something first, followed by “let alone” and then the greater example. But people often get this backwards, and put the greater example first.

Another common expression which follows the same pattern uses “never mind,” as in “I can’t afford to build an almirah, never mind a new house.”

LIKE/AS IF

“As if” is generally preferred in formal writing over “like,” but in colloquial speech, “like” prevails.

LOSE/LOOSE

This confusion can easily be avoided if you pronounce the word intended aloud. If it has a voiced *Z* sound, then it’s “lose.” If it has a hissy *S* sound, then it’s “loose.” Here are examples of correct usage: “He tends to lose his keys.” “She lets her dog run loose.” Note that when “lose” turns into “losing” it loses its “E.”

MARITAL/MARTIAL

“Marital” refers to marriage, “martial” to war. These two are often swapped, with comical results.

MAY/CAN

Some feel strongly that “may” has to do with permission whereas “can” implies only physical ability. Note: “May I go out to play?” and “Can I go out to play?”

MAY/MIGHT

Most of the time "might" and "may" are almost interchangeable, with "might" suggesting a somewhat lower probability. But "might" is also the past tense of the auxiliary verb "may."

MAYBE/MAY BE

"Maybe" is an adverb meaning "perhaps," so if you are uncertain whether to use this word or the phrase "may be," try substituting "perhaps": "Maybe she forgot I said I'd meet her at six o'clock" becomes "Perhaps she forgot. . . ." When the substitution makes sense, go with one word: "maybe." When you are wondering whether you may be waiting in the wrong cafe, you're dealing with a verb and its auxiliary: "may be." Two words.

MEAN/MEDIAN

To find the mean (or average) of a series of numbers, for example 1,2,3,4,5 & 6, add them all together for a total of 21; then divide by the number of numbers (6) to give the mean (or average) of 3.5.

In contrast, when half the data of a set are above a point and half below, that point is the median. The difference between mean and median can be quite significant, but one often sees the terms used wrongly even in technical contexts.

METHODOLOGY/METHOD

Methodology is *about* the methods of doing something; it is not the methods themselves.

MIGHT/COULD

In some English dialects it is common to say things like "I might could pick up some food on the way." In standard English, "might" or "could" are used by themselves, not together.

NO SOONER WHEN/NO SOONER THAN

The phrase, "No sooner had Kavi stopped patting the cat when it began to yowl" should be instead, "No sooner had Kavi stopped patting the cat than it began to yowl."

ONE IN THE SAME/ONE AND THE SAME

The old expression "they are one and the same" is now often mangled into the roughly phonetic equivalent "one *in* the same." The use of "one" here to mean "identical with each other" is familiar from phrases like "Jane and John act as one." They are one; they are the same.

ONLINE/ON LINE

The common adjective used to label Internet activities is usually written as one word: "online." It can also be used as an adverbial phrase "on line": "When the teacher took her class to the library, most of them used it to go on line."

ORAL/VERBAL

"Verbal" refers to anything expressed in words, whether written or spoken, while "oral" refers exclusively to speech.

ORDINANCE/ORDNANCE

A law is an *ordinance*, but a gun is a piece of *ordnance*.

OVERSEE/OVERLOOK

When you *oversee* the preparation of dinner, you take control and manage the operation closely. But if you *overlook* the preparation of dinner you are careless or busy with some other work.

WHY LEARN ENGLISH?

Of all the world's languages (which now number some 2,700), it is arguably the richest in vocabulary. The compendious *Oxford English Dictionary* lists about 500,000 words; and a further half-million technical and scientific terms remain uncatalogued.

PARALLELLED/PARALLELED

The spelling of the past tense of "parallel" is "paralleled."

PARAMETERS/PERIMETERS

When parameters were spoken of only by mathematicians and scientists, the term caused few problems; but now that it has become widely adopted by other speakers, it is constantly confused with "perimeters." A *parameter* is most commonly a mathematical

constant, a set of physical properties, or a characteristic of something. But the *perimeter* of something is its boundary.

PASSED/PAST

If you are referring to time or distance, use "past": "The team performed well in the *past*," "The police car drove *past* the suspect's house." If you are referring to the action of *passing,* however, you need to use "passed": "When John *passed* the gravy, he spilled it on his lap," "The teacher was astonished that none of the students had *passed* the test."

PATIENCE/PATIENTS

Doctors have *patients*, but while you're waiting to see them you have to have *patience*.

PAYED/PAID

The past tense of "pay" is "paid" except in the special sense that has to do with ropes: "He payed out the line from the row boat."

PEACE/PIECE

It's hard to believe many people really confuse the meaning of these words. *Peace* means quiet, calm, state of freedom from war. *Piece* is a part or a bit of a solid substance.

PENULTIMATE/ANTEPENULTIMATE

"Penultimate" means "next to last" but many people assume the wrong meaning "the very last." "Antepenultimate" means "third from the end."

PEOPLES

In the Middle Ages "peoples" was not an uncommon word, but later writers grew wary of it because "people" has a collective, plural meaning which seemed to make "peoples" superfluous. It is better to avoid "peoples" and use "people."

PEROGATIVE/PREROGATIVE

"Prerogative" is frequently both mispronounced and misspelled as "perogative." (the word means special right or privilege).

PERSONAL/PERSONNEL

Employees are *personnel*, but individuals considered separately from their jobs have *personal* lives.

PERSPECTIVE/PROSPECTIVE

"Perspective" has to do with sight, as in painting, and is usually a noun. "Prospective" generally has to do with the future and is usually an adjective.

PHENOMENA/PHENOMENON

It's "this phenomenon," but "these phenomena."

PLAIN/PLANE

Both of these words have to do with flatness. A flat prairie is a *plain*, and you use a *plane* to smooth flat a piece of wood.

"*Plain*" is also an adjective which can describe things that are ordinary, simple, or unattractive.

PLUS/ADD

Some people continue a pattern picked up in childhood of using "plus" as a verb to mean "add," as in "You plus the 3 and the 4 and you get 7." "Plus" is not a verb; use "add" instead.

POISONOUS/VENOMOUS

Snakes and insects that inject poisonous venom into their victims are *venomous*, but a snake or tarantula is not itself *poisonous* because if you eat one it won't poison you. A blowfish will kill you if you eat it, so it is poisonous; but it is not venomous.

PRACTICE/PRACTISE

In the United Kingdom, "practice" is the noun, "practise" the verb; but in the U.S. the spelling "practice" is commonly used for both, though the distinction is sometimes observed. "Practise" as a noun is, however, always wrong in both places.

PRAY/PREY

If you want a miracle, *pray* to God. If you're a criminal you *prey* on your victims.

PRECEDE/PROCEED

"Precede" means "to go before." "Proceed" means to go on. Let your companion *precede* you through the door, then *proceed* to follow her. Interestingly, the second E is missing in "procedure."

PRECEDENCE/PRECEDENTS

Although these words sound the same, they work differently. "Precedence" means priority and "precedents" is just the plural of "precedent," which means an earlier happening taken as example.

PREMIER/PREMIERE

These words are, respectively, the masculine and feminine forms of the word for "first" in French; but they have become differentiated in English. Only the masculine form is used as an adjective. The confusion arises when these words are used as nouns. The prime minister of a parliamentary government is known as a "premier." The opening night of a film or play is its "premiere."

PREMISE/PREMISES

Some people suppose that since "premises" is a plural form, a single house or other piece of property must be a "premise," but that word is reserved for use as a term in Logic meaning something assumed or taken as given in making an argument.

PREPONE

South Asian speakers have evolved the logical word "prepone" to mean the opposite of "postpone": to move forward in time. it's a handy word, but users of it should be aware that those unfamiliar with their dialect will be baffled by this word.

PRESCRIBE/PROSCRIBE

You recommend something when you *prescribe* it, but you forbid it when you *proscribe* it. The usually positive function of "pro-" confuses many people.

PRINCIPAL/PRINCIPLE

"Principal" is a noun and adjective referring to someone or something which is highest in rank or importance. "Principle" is only a noun, and has to do with law or doctrine.

PRIORITY

It is common to proclaim "in our business, customer service is a priority," but it would be better to say "a high priority," since priorities can also be low.

PROBABLY

The two *Bs* in this word are particularly difficult to pronounce in sequence, so the word often comes out as "probly" and is even occasionally misspelled that way.

RECENT/RESENT

There are actually three words to distinguish here. "Recent" means "not long ago," as in, "I appreciated your *recent* encouragement." "Resent" has two different meanings. In the most common case, "resent" means "feel annoyed at": "I *resent* your opinion about them." In the less common case, the word means "to send again": "The e-mail message bounced, so I *resent* it."

REFRAIN/RESTRAIN

"When I pass the doughnut shop I have to *restrain* myself." (The object is almost always a person or people). "When I feel like throwing something at my boss, I usually *refrain* from doing so." You can't refrain yourself or anyone else.

REIGN/REIN

A king or queen *reigns,* but you *rein* in a horse. The expression "to give rein" means to give in to an impulse as a spirited horse gives in to its impulse to gallop when you slacken the reins. Similarly, the correct expression is "free *rein*," not "free *reign*."

REMUNERATION/RENUMERATION

Although "remuneration" looks as if it might mean "repayment" it usually means simply "payment." In speech it is often confused with "renumeration," which would mean re-counting (counting again).

REPEL/REPULSE

In most of their meanings these are synonyms, but if you are disgusted by someone, you are *repelled,* not *repulsed.*

REPORT INTO/REPORT ON

You can conduct an investigation into a matter; but the result is a report *on* or *of* your findings. You don't make a report *into* anything. You could eliminate "into" altogether by using the simpler *investigate* instead.

REVERT/REPLY

The most common meaning of "revert" is "to return to an earlier condition, time, or subject." But some people have begun to use it mistakenly instead of "reply": "Revert to me at this address" would literally mean they are asking you to *become* them!

REVOLVE/ROTATE

In ordinary speech these two words are often treated as interchangeable, though it's "revolving credit account" and "rotating crops." Scientists make a sharp distinction between the two: the earth *revolves* (orbits) around the sun but *rotates* (spins) around its axis.

ROB/STEAL

When you *rob* a bank, you *steal* its money. You can't rob the money itself. The stuff taken in a robbery is always stolen, not "robbed."

ROLE/ROLL

An actor plays a *role.* Bill Gates is the entrepreneur's *role model.* But you eat a sausage on a *roll* and *roll* out the barrel.

SAIL/SALE/SELL

These simple and familiar words are surprisingly often confused in writing. "You *sail* a boat." "You *sell* your old car in a second-hand *sale*."

SAY/TELL

You *say* "Hello, Mr. Ramesh," and then *tell* him about what you did last summer. You can't "tell *that*" except in expressions like "go tell that to your old girlfriend."

SENSUAL/SENSUOUS

"Sensual" usually relates to physical desires and experiences, and often means "sexy." But "sensuous" is more often used for aesthetic pleasures, like "sensuous music."

SETUP/SET UP

Technical writers sometimes confuse "setup" as a noun ("check the setup") with the phrase "set up" ("set up the experiment").

SHALL/WILL

"Will" has almost entirely replaced "shall" in English except in legal documents and in questions like: "Shall we dance?"

SOCIAL/SOCIETAL

"Societal" as an adjective has been in existence for a couple of centuries, but has become widely used only in the recent past. "Societal" is best used by social scientists and others in referring to the influence of societies may use the simpler - "social."

SOMETIME/SOME TIME

"Let's get together sometime." When you use the one-word form, it suggests some indefinite time in the future. "Some time" is not wrong in this sort of context, but it is required when being more specific: "Choose some time that fits in your schedule." "Some" is an adjective here modifying "time." The same pattern applies to "someday" (vague) and "some day" (specific).

SPECIALLY/ESPECIALLY

In most contexts, "specially" is more common than "especially," but when you mean "particularly" "especially" works better:

STATIONARY/STATIONERY

When something is standing still, it's *stationary.* That piece of paper you write a letter on is *stationery*. Let the "E" in "stationery" remind you of "envelope."

SUMMARY/SUMMERY

When the weather is warm and *summery* and you don't feel like spending a lot of time reading that long report from the restructuring committee, just read the *summary.*

TAKEN BACK/TAKEN ABACK

When you're startled by something, you're *taken aback* by it. When you're reminded of something from your past, you're *taken back* to that time.

TAUGHT/TAUT

Students are *taught*, ropes are pulled *taut*. (taut means tight).

THAN/THEN

When comparing one thing with another you may find that one is more appealing "than" another. "Than" is the word you want when doing comparisons. But if you are talking about time, choose "then": "First you separate the eggs; *then* you beat the whites."

THAT/WHICH

If you are defining something by distinguishing it from a larger class of which it is a member, use "that": "I chose the lettuce *that* had the fewest wilted leaves." When the general class is not being limited or defined in some way, then "which" is appropriate: "He made a salad, *which* didn't taste quite right." Note that "which" is normally preceded by a comma, but "that" is not.

THAT KIND/THAT KIND OF

Although expressions like "that kind thing" are not common, standard English requires "of" in this kind of phrase.

THEIRSELVES/THEMSELVES

There is no such word as "theirselves"; it's "themselves." And there is no correct singular form of this non-word; instead of "theirself" use "himself" or "herself."

THERE'S

People often forget that "there's" is a contraction of "there is" and mistakenly say "there's three mistakes in this page," when they mean "there're" ("there are"). Use "there's" only when referring to one item. "There's" can also be a contraction of "there has," as in "There's been some mistake in this bill, clerk!"

THEIR/THERE

"Their" is a possessive pronoun like "her" or "our": "I went to their house." Everything else is "there." "*There* goes the ball, out of the park!," "See it? Right *there!*" "*There* aren't very many houses like that."

THEREFOR/THEREFORE

The form without a final "E" is an archaic bit of legal terminology meaning "for." The word most people want is "therefore."

THESE KIND/THIS KIND

In a sentence like "I love *this kind* of chocolates," "this" modifies "kind" (singular) and not "chocolates" (plural), so it would be incorrect to change it to "I love these kind of chocolates." Only if "kind" itself is pluralized into "kinds" should "this" shift to "these": "You keep making *these kinds* of mistakes!"

THESE ONES/THESE

By itself, there's nothing wrong with the word "ones" as a plural: "surrounded by her loved ones." However, "this one" should not be pluralized to "these ones." Just say "these."

THREW/THROUGH

"Threw" is the past tense of the verb "throw." "Through" is never a verb. It means in the course of.

TOWARD/TOWARDS

These two words are interchangeable, but "toward" is more common in the U.S. and "towards" in the U.K.

UPTO/UP TO

"Not upto alot lately?" You might use some of your spare time memorizing the fact that "up to" is a two-word phrase, as is "a lot." So you should be saying, "Not up to a lot lately?"

USE TO/USED TO

It is always "used to." Because the *D* and the *T* are blended into a single consonant when this phrase is pronounced, many writers are unaware that the *D* is even present and omit it in writing.

UTILIZE/USE

"Utilize" is used to mean "make use of": "Kani utilized her laptop in the library mainly as a pillow to rest her head on." In most contexts, "use" is simpler and clearer. Many readers consider "utilize" pretentious.

VARY/VERY

"Vary" means "to change." Don't substitute it for "very" in phrases like "very nice" or "very happy."

WARRANTEE/WARRANTY

Confused by the spelling of "guarantee," people often misspell the related word "warrantee" rather than the correct "warranty." "Warrantee" is a rare legal term that means "the person to whom a warrant is made." Although "guarantee" can be a verb ("we guarantee your satisfaction"), "warranty" is not. The rarely used verb form is "to warrant."

WAS/WERE

In phrases beginning with "there" many people overlook the need to choose a plural or singular form of the verb "to be" depending on what follows. "There *were* several apples in the basket" [plural]. "There *was* one rotten apple" [singular].

WEATHER/WHETHER

The climate is made up of *weather*; *whether* it is nice out depends on *whether* it is raining or not.

WE'RE/WERE

"We're" is a contraction of the phrase "we are": the apostrophe stands for the omitted letter A. "Were" is simply a plural past-tense form of the verb "are."

WHENEVER

"Whenever" has two main functions. It can refer to repeated events: "Whenever I put the baby down for a nap the phone rings and wakes her up." Or, it can refer to events of whose date or time you are uncertain: "Whenever it was that I first wore my new cashmere sweater..."

WHEREABOUTS ARE/WHEREABOUTS IS

Despite the deceptive *S* on the end of the word, "whereabouts" is normally singular, not plural. "The whereabouts of the stolen diamond is unknown." Only if you were simultaneously referring to two or more persons having separate whereabouts would the word be plural.

WHETHER/WHETHER OR NOT

"Whether" works fine on its own in most contexts: "I wonder whether I forgot to turn off the stove?" But when you mean "regardless of whether" it has to be followed by "or not" somewhere in the sentence: "We need to leave for the airport in five minutes whether you've found your teddy bear or not."

WHILST/WHILE

Although "whilst" is a perfectly good traditional synonym of "while," in usage it is considered pretentious and old-fashioned.

XMAS/CHRISTMAS

"Xmas" is not originally an attempt to exclude Christ from Christmas, but uses an abbreviation of the Greek spelling of the word "Christ" with the "X" representing the Greek letter *chi*. However, so few people know this that it is probably better not to use this popular abbreviation in religious contexts.

YEA/YEAH

"Yea" is a very old-fashioned formal way of saying "yes." When you want to write the common casual version of "yes," the correct spelling is "yeah" (sounds like "yeh").

YOKE/YOLK

The yellow center of an egg is its *yolk*. The link that holds two oxen together is a *yoke*; they are yoked.

YOUR/YOU'RE

"You're" is always a contraction of "you are." If you've written "you're," try substituting "you are." If it doesn't work, the word you want is "your." Eg: *Your* writing will improve if *you're* careful about this.

If someone thanks you, write back "you're welcome" and not "your welcome."