

## The Misused Word List

by

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This is a list of words that are often misused, misspelled, and/or misunderstood. Some of the words have an alternate spelling (in brackets) and some similar meanings. This list has been compiled as a guide for writing style and it has a bias. The reader is encouraged to look up the meaning of each word and arrive at an independent conclusion.

### Accept

- to take something that is offered

### Adapt

- change to meet new circumstances  
*adapt yourself*

### Adjoin

- next to

### Admission

- used interchangeably with these exceptions
- the price of admission

### Advise

- to advise means to give advice and should not be used (as it so frequently as in business letters) when the purpose is merely to give information

### Affect

- verb
- meaning to act upon, influence

### Aggravate

- to make worse

### Aid

- help, support, assistance

### Allusion

- a hint or indirect reference

### Alternative

- following by turns

### Alumnus

- masculine, singular  
The masculine plural is *Alumni*

### Ambiguous

- these words are usually interchangeable
- the distinction is, ambiguity is always unintentional

### Except

- to leave out

### Adopt

- to take as it is
- to adopt someone else

### Adjourn

- put off for another day

### Admittance

- positively no admittance

### Inform

### Effect

- noun
- verb: to cause, make possible, accomplish, complete  
*to effect a change*

### Exasperate, Irritate

- use aggravate only in the sense of making a situation worse or more severe
- for other meanings use annoy, exasperate, irritate, vex, etc.

### Aide

- confidential assistant

### Delusion

- a false belief

### Illusion

- deceptive appearance

### Alternate

- involves a choice or a replacement

### Alumna

- feminine, singular  
The feminine plural is *Alumnae*

### Equivocal

- equivocation may be purposeful, intending to deceive

**Amend**

- to modify, add to or subtract from

**Among**

- preposition
- if the act is collective  
*conspiracy among 3 criminals*

**Amount**

- things that can't be counted

**Antidote**

- a medicine

**Anyone**

- pronoun  
*He might pick anyone.*

**Appraise**

- to evaluate, usually for a fee

**Appreciate**

- to value properly or highly
- should not be used for understand

**Apt**

- having a tendency
- appropriate or suitable

**Arboreal**

- pertaining to trees

**Around**

- should not be used to mean approximately

**Arrant**

- notoriously bad or unmitigated  
*arrant nonsense*

**Assent**

- agree

**Auger**

- a tool for boring

**Austral**

- pertaining to the south

**Avenge**

- more noble, righteous or altruistic than revenge

**Amends (usually with make)**

- compensation or apology

**Between**

- if several things are acting individually  
*compromises between the 11 first ministers, each negotiating with the other 10*

**Number**

- things that can be counted

**Anecdote**

- amusing incident

**Any One**

- *He might pick any one of us.*

**Apprise**

- to notify or inform

**Understand**

- to comprehend

**Liabile**

- emphasizes only a bad outcome

**Likely**

- tells of probability

**Boreal**

- pertaining to the north

**About**

- approximately

**Errant**

- wandering, itinerant ( a knight errant)  
does not mean error but rather straying from the correct standards or course

**Ascent**

- upward movement

**Augur**

- to conjecture from signs or omens

**Occidental**

- pertaining to the west

**Oriental**

- pertaining to the east

**Revenge**

- to seek retaliation for personal gratification

**Averse**

- Having a reluctance to or a fixed dislike for  
*He is averse to change*

**Bated**

- *restrained or diminished*  
it is a variation of *abated*  
e.g. *bated breath*

**Bazaar**

- a market place

**Beside**

- along side

**Biannual**

- twice a year

**Bloc**

- use only for groups of countries, politicians, parties, provinces, etc. with a common interest or purpose

**Bogey**

- a golf term

**Born**

- brought forth by birth

**Borrow**

- to take or obtain with the promise to return it or equivalence
- when you borrow, I lend

**Both**

- two together

**Callous**

- adverb, meaning hardened, including impervious to feelings

**Canvas**

- a type of cloth

**Capitol**

- building where U.S. Congress meets

**Cariboo**

- the spelling for all uses connected with the Cariboo Mountains of east-central B.C.

**Cause**

- used for non-human events  
*the recession was the cause of his bankruptcy*

**Adverse**

- unfavourable, opposing, hurtful  
*There were adverse winds*

**Baited**

- containing bait (a lure or enticement)

**Bizarre**

- unusual in appearance or character

**Besides**

- in addition to

**Biennial**

- every 2 years or living for 2 years (e.g. a plant)

**Block**

- otherwise use block

**Bogie**

- a railway truck or an extra wheel used to distribute weight

**Bogy**

- a hobgoblin or unidentified aircraft

**Borne**

- carried

**Lend**

- to give the temporary use of
- when I lend, you borrow

**Each**

- separately

**Callus**

- a noun meaning hardened, thickened skin, bone or plant material

**Canvass**

- to seek votes or opinions

**Capital**

- the official seat of government

**Caribou**

- lower case
- the animal in singular and plural

**Reason**

- describes human reasoning, motive, or justification

**Censer**

- a receptacle for incense

**Censure**

- disapprove or criticize

**Censor**

- one who rules on acceptability

**Chastity**

- virginal

**Celibacy**

- state of being unmarried. A celibate is one who vows to be unmarried

**Choice**

- many choices

**Alternative**

- one of two choices
- the choice and the alternative

**Claim**

- a personal claim is put forth
- do not use *claim* when *asserts*, *maintains*, *says* or *thinks* would serve the purpose

**Assert****Maintain****Climactic**

- has to do with a climax

**Climacteric**

- a critical period in life

**Climatic**

- pertains to the climate

**Collate**

- to gather in proper order

**Correlate**

- to establish an orderly connection

**Collusion**

- a secret agreement for a wrongful purpose or deception

**Collaboration**

- use only in reference to artistic pursuits or else it means collusion (collaborating with the enemy)

**Colt**

- male baby horse

**Filly**

- female baby horse

**Foal**

- a baby horse

**Complacent**

- to please oneself
- calm, smug

**Complaisant**

- willing to please others
- obliging, compliant

**Compliment**

- applies to expression of praise

**Complement**

- denotes completeness, fullness
- a firm that is up to its allowable strength has its complement of 300 employees
- also applies to things that complete or supplement another thing
- Her hat complements her scarf*

**Compose**

- means create

**Comprise**

- means include

**Constitute**

- component parts do not comprise the whole - they constitute it

**Compunction**

- a sense of guilt, remorse, regret or pity
- most often used in the negative
- *He felt no compunction about stealing.*

**Compulsion**

- the act of compelling; constrain; coercion

**Connote**

- implies *in addition to the ordinary meaning*

**Denote**

- to distinguish or indicate

**Conscience**

- a small voice within us
- Conscientious* means *according to conscience*

**Conscious**

- aware

**Consciousness**

- awake and aware

**Console**

- verb: to alleviate or lessen the grief

**Console**

- noun: the compartment in a vehicle, keyboard, cabinet, etc.

**Consul**

- a Roman magistrate
- a small town in SW SK

**Constraint**

- to force, compel, or oblige

**Restraint**

- to hold back from action

**Contemptuous**

- one who shows contempt for others

**Contemptible**

- one deserving of our contempt

**Continual**

- periodically recurring

**Continuous**

- without a break

**Co-respondent**

- one of the sides of a triangle in a divorce suit

**Correspondent**

- some one who writes

**Council**

- a body of persons specially designated to act in an advisory capacity

**Counsel**

- to give guidance or advice

**Credible**

- refers to a person or thing that can be believed

**Credulous**

- refers to one who is ready to believe on slight evidence

**Crevice**

- a narrow crack

**Crevasse**

- a deep glacial crack

**Croquette**

- deep fried meat, fish or rice

**Croquet**

- a lawn game

**Coquette**

- a flirtatious young woman

**Cubical**

- cube shaped

**Cubicle**

- a small enclosed area

**Debt**

- what is owed at a particular time

**Deficit**

- a failure of revenues to cover expenses

**Definite**

- specific and concrete

**Definitive**

- final and conclusive

**Defuse**

- to remove the fuse from

**Diffuse**

- to spread in all directions
- dispersed or wordy

**Deprecate**

- to disapprove of

**Depreciate**

- to belittle or lessen in value

**Desert**

- region lacking in precipitation (noun)
- what is deserved (noun)
- uninhabited (adjective)
- to abandon (verb)

**Dessert**

- a sweet as the last course of a meal

**Discover**

- to find something already existing

**Invent**

- to produce something new

**Disinterested**

- having no selfish interest

**Uninterested**

- taking no interest in; unconcerned

**Disorganized**

- in disarray

**Unorganized**

- not officially organized - as a labour union etc.

**Dumb**

- means mute, unable to speak

**Stupid**

- lacking normal intelligence

**Emigrate**

- leave ones native country

**Immigrate**

- enter to live in a country other than your own

**Ensure**

- make sure or make certain

**Insure**

- the buying or selling of insurance

**Equatable**

- capable of being considered equal

**Equable**

- unvarying, steady
- not easily upset

**Equitable**

- just, fair, reasonable

**Explicit**

- something that has been expressed directly; spelled out

**Implicit**

- implies, with the meaning well understood but the actual words are not spoken

**Factious**

- putting one's party first

**Factitious**

- artificial

**Fictitious**

- not true

**Fairy**

- a small imaginary being with magical powers

**Ferry**

- a boat or aircraft for conveying passengers

**Famous**

- well known

**Notorious**

- well known in a bad sense

**Infamous**

- well known in a bad sense

**Farther**

- use when referring to physical distances

**Further**

- use when referring to extensions of degree or time

**Faze**

- to disturb or embarrass

**Phase**

- a stage or an aspect

**Feign**

- to put on the appearance of

**Feint**

- a movement to deceive

**Ferment**

- agitation, unrest

**Fever**

- above normal body temperature

**Figuratively**

- with exaggeration

**Flair**

- an aptitude or talent or a sense of style

**Flamingo**

- a pink bird

**Flaunt**

- to display brazenly

**Flounder**

- to struggle clumsily either physically or in speech, job or enterprise stumble, go lame

**Forceful**

- vigorous, effective, dynamic

**Forego**

- to precede or go before

**Formally**

- refers to manner

**Forte**

- one's strong point (pronounced fort)
- often mispronounced fortay

**Gaff**

- a pole with a hook for landing fish or the hook itself

**Gantlet**

- a punishment in which a man runs between two lines or men being struck by both
- figuratively means caught in the middle

**Gauge (sometimes Gage)**

- a measuring device

**Gild**

- to coat with gold

**Gilt**

- a young female pig

**Foment**

- to promote the development of

**Temperature**

- the amount of heat

**Literally**

- without exaggeration

**Flare**

- having to do with a blaze or sudden burst

**Flamenco**

- a dance

**Flout**

- to defy contemptuously; scoff at

**Founder**

- to sink, cave in, fail completely

**Forcible**

- the use of force

**Forgo**

- to do without

**Formerly**

- refers to time

**Forte**

- a musical term for loud
- pronounced fortay

**Gaffe**

- an embarrassing blunder or faux pas

**Gauntlet**

- a glove that flares over the wrist
- figuratively to throw down or pick up the gauntlet means to accept a challenge

**Gage**

- anything thrown down in a challenge such as a glove

**Guild**

- an association for mutual aid

**Guilt**

- having committed an offence

**Gorilla**

- a large ape

**Gourmet**

- eats with discrimination

**Grisly**

- gruesome

**Hail**

- to call out to or to fall as ice or as hail-like flurry of blows

**Half-Staff**

- refers to flags on land

**Hanged**

- used when someone dies by hanging

**Healthy**

- sound mentally and physically
- used for living things

**Hoard**

- to gather and store

**House**

- a type of building

**Hyper**

- above, high, excess

**I, Me**

- do not use *myself* in place of *I* or *me*

**Idle**

- not working

**Idol**

- an image that is worshiped

**Illegal**

- specifically against the law

**Imminent**

- about to happen; impending

**Incredible**

- unbelievable

**Guerrilla (Guerilla)**

- a small group of independent fighters

**Gourmand**

- eats greedily

**Grizzly**

- greyish

**Hale**

- robustly healthy
- to compel to go as in hale to court

**Half-Mast**

- refers to flags on a ship

**Hung**

- all other uses of the past tenses of hang

**Healthful**

- conducive to health
- aids in one's health

**Horde**

- a multitude

**Home**

- where the heart is, be it a tent, an apartment or etc.

**Hypo**

- below, low, insufficient

**Myself**

- use as *I hurt myself*

**Idyll**

- description of a pastoral scene

**Icon**

- an image or other representation

**Illicit**

- Latin for permit
- applied to activities that are permissible in some circumstances but not in others such as illicit sex, illicit gambling

**Eminent**

- a famous or of exalted standing or rank

**Incredulous**

- unbelieving or skeptical

**Infer**

- to deduce or conclude non verbally

**Insure**

- actual buying and selling of insurance

**Karat**

- use for gold

**Kibbutz**

- an Israeli co-operative settlement

**Kith**

- friends, neighbours, acquaintances

**Lama**

- a priest or monk in a branch of Buddhism  
*The one "I" lama is a priest*

**Laudable**

- refers to people and actions which are deserving of praise

**Lay**

- transitive verb
- describes what hens and masons do to eggs and bricks, and what people do to plans, claims, tables, traps, etc.
- other forms are *laying* and *laid*

**Lea**

- a grassy meadow, usually a clearing in the woods

**Leach**

- has to do with the percolation or filtering of a liquid

**Learn**

- to receive knowledge

**Leer**

- a sly, sideways look usually with a connotation of carnal intent

**Less**

- of size or degrees  
*less money, less grain*

**Loath**

- (adj.) unwilling, adverse

**Luxurious**

- self-indulgent or opulent

**Imply**

- refers to a meaning beyond what is actually said or written

**Ensure**

- to make certain

**Carat**

- use for gems

**Kibitz**

- to meddle in the affairs of others

**Kin**

- relatives

**Llama**

- an animal resembling a small camel  
*The two "I" llama is a beast*

**Laudatory**

- the words used to praise them

**Lie**

- intransitive verb
- in the sense of being recumbent
- other forms are *lying, lay, lain*

**Lee**

- the side sheltered from the wind

**Leech**

- a bloodsucking worm

**Teach**

- to convey knowledge or instruct

**Leery**

- has the connotation of wariness or suspicion

**Fewer**

- things that can be counted  
*fewer dollars, fewer bushels*

**Loathe**

- (verb) to feel disgust

**Luxuriant**

- profuse of growth and richly ornamental

**Majority**

- more than half the votes

**Plurality**

- the difference between the winner and the runner-up

**Mandrel**

- a shaft or spindle or a bar over which various materials are bent or shaped

**Mandrill**

- a large baboon found in West Africa

**Manse**

- the Home of a Presbyterian minister

**Parsonage**

- the word used by Methodists

**Rectory**

- the usual term used by Catholics and Anglicans

**Mantel**

- the shelf above the fireplace

**Mantle**

- a cloak or covering

**Material**

- commercial goods

**Materiel**

- military equipment or supplies

**May**

- present tense to express a possibility

**Might**

- the past tense of *may*

**Meteor**

- meteoroids which enter the earth's atmosphere in a visible way

**Meteorite**

- the fragment that hits earth

**Meteoroid**

- a chunk of matter traveling around in our solar system

**Meter**

- a measuring instrument

**Metre (sometimes Meter)**

- a unit of length

**Military Law**

- laws that govern the military
- not binding on civilians

**Martial Law**

- the exercise of civil law through military authority

**Militate**

- to have an effect or influence

**Mitigate**

- to make less severe or to become so

**Monogyny**

- having only one wife at a time

**Monandry**

- having only one husband at a time

**Moral**

- having to do with right and wrong

**Morale**

- state of mind

**Morel**

- an edible fungus

**Morals**

- personal beliefs in what is right and wrong

**Ethics**

- philosophical reasoning about morals

**Nocturnal**

- in or of the night

**Diurnal**

- in or of the day time

**Objective**

- real actual facts, external to the mind

**Subjective**

- with a personal bias

**Obligate**

- to require by law or command

**Oblige**

- to accommodate
- may be used to mean *obligate*

**Observance**

- attending to or carrying out a duty or custom

**Onto**

- used as a preposition

**Oral**

- to distinguish between written and spoken

**Ordinance**

- a law or regulation

**Outrage**

- an act of shocking violence or cruelty
- to subject somebody to such an act

**Palaeology**

- the study of antiquity

**Palate**

- the roof of the mouth

**Partake**

- partake of refreshments

**Patronage**

- the conferring of a benefit on an individual to reward or secure a political loyalty

**Patronize** (pay-tron-ize)

- to be kind in a haughty way

**Pedal**

- what we do on a bicycle

**Pendant**

- a noun, hanging ornament or metal

**Petition**

- a list of signatures

**Poisonous**

- something that is harmful when eaten or drunk

**Polyandry**

- having more than husband at a time

**Polygamy**

- having two or more marriage partners at the same time

**Observation**

- noticing details, watching

**On To**

- used as an adverb

**Verbal**

- means in words

**Ordnance**

- department of the army or navy that purchases equipment

**Enrage**

- to infuriate
- to put into a rage

**Paleontology**

- the study of ancient life forms

**Palette**

- a board on which an artist lays and mixes paints

**Pallet**

- a platform on which goods are stored; a rough bed

**Participate**

- take part in an activity

**Pork-barrelling**

- the extension of patronage to communities or regions

**Patronize** (pat-ron-ize)

- support or encouragement

**Peddle**

- what an itinerant seller does

**Pendent**

- undecided or pending

**Partition**

- a room divider

**Venomous**

- something that actively injects poisons

**Polygyny**

- having more than one wife at the same time

**Bigamy**

- the crime of marrying a second time while still legally married

**Pommel**

- a knob, especially at the end of a sword or dagger or at the top of a saddle

**Poring**

- studying intently

**Practicable**

- something that can be put into practice
- capable of being carried out

**Practice**

- a noun
- also used as a verb

**Principal**

- a head or leading figure

**Prone**

- lying face down

**Propellant**

- noun
- this gas is a propellant*

**Prosecute**

- to bring court action against

**Prostate**

- a male gland

**Proved**

- past participle

**Purge**

- to clean out

**Purposely**

- on purpose

**Query**

- an inquiry, a question

**Quote**

- verb
- to repeat a phrase

**Raise**

- to elevate

**Ravage**

- destroy

**Pummel**

- to beat

**Pouring**

- to tip a liquid out of something

**Practical**

- something that is suitable not theoretical
- useful, real, or virtual

**Practise**

- used only a verb

**Principle**

- a rule, law or moral guideline

**Supine**

- lying face up

**Propellent**

- adjective
- This a propellent gas*

**Persecute**

- to plague or bring suffering to

**Prostrate**

- lying down

**Proven**

- adjective

**Perjure**

- to lie under oath

**Purposefully**

- motivated by a purpose or goal

**Question**

- same as a query
- proposal for debate
- to dispute something

**Quotation**

- that which is quoted
- never say "quote unquote"
- say "quote...unquote"

**Raze (sometimes spelled Rase)**

- to destroy or diminish

**Ravish**

- fill with strong emotion or to rape

**Recede**

- to cede back; move away; go to a more distant place

**Decline**

- to withhold or deny consent to to drop, decay , fall away

**Recollect**

- to make an effort to call back to mind

**Remember**

- to come back to mind

**Remind**

- to cause someone to remember

**Recommend**

- the expert is recommended (the doctor)

**Refer**

- the person who wishes to consult the expert is referred (the patient)

**Rend**

- to tear or wrench emotional pain

**Render**

- give up pay or return

**Reserve**

- Canadian Indian lands

**Reservation**

- U.S. Indian lands

**Respectably**

- a manner worthy of respect

**Respectfully**

- respect for someone else

**Respectively**

- series of things taken in order

**Restive**

- impatient or rebellious

**Restless**

- not able to rest easily

**Reticent**

- quiet, uncommunicative

**Reluctant**

- Unwilling, disinclined

**Rout**

- a smashing defeat

**Route** (usually pronounced *root*)

- road

**Salvage**

- to save from destruction

**Selvage**

- the edge of a woven cloth

**Scots**

- Scottish people

**Scotch**

- whiskey, tape, etc.

**Seasonable**

- suitable to the season, timely

**Seasonal**

- dependant on the season, periodical

**Silicon**

- a non-metallic element

**Silicone**

- the familiar material, lubricant

**Skeptical**

- questioning the authenticity of a supposed fact

**Cynical**

- distrusting the motives of others

**Sobriquet**

- a nickname

**Cognomen**

- a surname or nickname

**Stanch**

- verb e.g. *stanch the flow*

**Staunch**

- adjective *a staunch ally*

**Stationary**

- not moving

**Stationery**

- materials used in writing

**Statue**

- a figure that is carved or cast

**Substantial**

- a considerable amount

**Straight**

- without a curve or bend

**Sympathy**

- agreement in feeling with others

**Tack**

- a course of action direction or change of course

**Thresh**

- use in reference to grain

**Transpire**

- becoming known gradually

**Troop**

- military

**Venal**

- corrupt, willing to sell out

**Vested**

- held completely and permanently

**Vice**

- bad habit

**Virtual**

- means in effect

**Wether**

- a castrated, male sheep  
Thus *bellwether* refers to a sheep that leads the flock or anything or anybody in the forefront

**Were**

- use for plural nouns

**Stature**

- refers to size

**Substantive**

- real or essential

**Strait**

- narrowness or restriction

**Empathy**

- the identification with the feelings of others

**Tact**

- the right thing to say  
- adroitness

**Thrash**

- to beat soundly in punishment

**Happen**

- avoid using *transpire* for *happen*, *occur* *gone by*, *passed*, *elapsed* etc.

**Troupe**

- theatrical

**Venial**

- readily pardoned or forgiven

**Invested**

- money or effort put to use

**Vise**

- a clamp

**Virtually**

- nearly

**Weather**

- state of the atmosphere with regard to temperature, wind, etc.

**Was**

- use for singular nouns

In statements that are contrary to fact such as "If I were a boy" (present) and "If a bomb were to drop" (indefinite), *were* is used instead of *was*. This is known as the subjunctive mood.

**Wet**

- dampen

**Whet**

- sharpen  
e.g. whet your appetite

**Which**

- use for things

**Yoga**

- a Hindu philosophical meditation

**Who, Whom**

- use for persons

**Yogi**

- a practitioner of yoga





























