

The Misused Word List

by

Bev Currie

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)

Discover

- to find something already existing

Disinterested

- having no selfish interest

Disorganized

- in disarray

Dumb

- means mute, unable to speak

Emigrate

- leave ones native country

Ensure

- make sure or make certain

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 ones 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

